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# Is tourism really an MSME?

Ministry of Tourism has claimed that with the inclusion of the service sector in the MSME definition, the tourism industry can avail the benefits that have been announced in the Atmanirbhar Bharat package. However, the industry's reactions are quite varied on this. Here's how...



**EM Najeeb**  
Senior Vice President  
IATO

“ Those who are already registered under the MSME sector have approached the banks to avail the facilities of the new scheme, but the things were not very positive. While the banks already have people approaching for loans under the MSME sector, they are not considering the new registrations from the tourism sector. Ideally, there has to be a specific mention for the tourism sector and instructions could be given to the banks, and it should be made public and available on websites. This is the way to solve this problem. Otherwise, tourism industry is always considered the last priority for the financial institutions.”



**Jatinder Taneja**  
Vice Chairman  
PATA India Chapter

“ There is a confusion about 'real' and other benefits under the proposed guidelines. For instance, when banks are approached, they are unable to provide us with any help. Either understanding of the guidelines is absent on their part as well, or they are not coming forward. In both cases, the situation is not helping anyone. Also, for every loan being offered by the government, the high interest is being borne by the industry only. The conditions are such that the payment of interests would not prove to be a big help for anyone. What would have helped lift the industry at present would have been interest-free loans for a certain period or highly subsidised ones.”



**Homa Mistry**  
CEO  
Trail Blazer Tours

“ Personally, since the upper limit for service sector being included is ₹250 crore, we cannot be registered as we have business much beyond that. Hence, we didn't pursue it further. We had forex earnings and the government has to take out a circular saying if it is going to be 5% or 7%, and then only we can apply for it for FY 2019-20. That would be the key for every operator, because everybody gets it. Normally, every year by March it is out, and the government has not done that yet. Once applied, usually in 60 days we would get it, That's the only thing we want and request the government to clear it.”

Contd on page 13 ►

# Sri Lanka ready for Indian visitors

Sri Lanka Tourism's first Virtual Summit that was conducted in association with Spiceland Holidays and supported by OneWorld on 22 June, 2020 received more than 7,000 registrations. Though its plans for the India market this year couldn't quite pick up pace amid the COVID-19 pandemic, it hopes to now resume bilateral tourism relations.



Hazel Jain

**S**ri Lanka Tourism's first Virtual Summit that it conducted in association with Spiceland Holidays on June 22, 2020, received more than 7,000 registrations. The chief speaker of this webinar was **Arundika Fernando**, State Minister of Tourism and Aviation, Sri Lanka, who announced that the destination is now ready to receive interna-



**Arundika Fernando**  
State Minister of Tourism and Aviation,  
Sri Lanka

tional tourists. "The plan is to open our two international air-

✦ The plan is to open two international airports in Sri Lanka, Bandaranaike and Mattala Rajapaksa Hambantota. We also want to promote our Ramayana Trail ✦

- Arundika Fernando

ports in Sri Lanka – Bandaranaike International Airport and

the Mattala Rajapaksa Hambantota Airport from August 1, 2020. They will follow all health regulations including conducting PCR tests. We also want to promote our Ramayana Trail in India," he said.

The Ramayana Trail, that has a total of 55 sites, is a cultural and a spiritual product. To promote it, Sri Lanka Tourism has planned TV and cinema advertising in India as it has generated a lot of interest from the India market. In order to support



**Kimarli Fernando**  
Chairperson  
Sri Lanka Tourism

the travel agents in selling this product, the tourism board is

ready to offer customised promotional packages as well as promotional material.

**Sri Lanka issues detailed guideline**

Joining in as a panellist was **Kimarli Fernando**, Chairperson, Sri Lanka Tourism, who is also part of a COVID-19 Task Force in Sri Lanka. Explaining the on-ground situation, she said, "We had a gradual opening of the country. Like India, Sri Lanka also loves big weddings. So we allowed

Contd on page 17 ►



Watch the  
**crystal clear water**  
of lake Tahoe from the sky



## Why not tourism, asks FAITH

After not being able to get a specific stimulus package for tourism, FAITH and its member associations have reached out to parliamentarians, asking them why tourism was not part of the government's relief package.

 Nisha Verma

**F**ederation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality (FAITH), along with the its member associations which include ADTOI, ATOAI, FHRAI, HAI, IATO, ICPCB, IHHA, ITTA, TAAI, TAFI

*All those tourism jobs supporting crores of families across all constituencies of India whether in rural or in urban India are being lost*

and Cause Partner - AIRDA, has now started reaching out to parliamentarians. The apex association has released a statement saying that despite more than 100 days of unprecedented col-



lective requests for survival and revival relief, there has been no sector-specific stimulus package for tourism. "On the contrary, in many sub-sectors of tourism, the situation is becoming increasingly unfavourable. FAITH is requesting parliamentarians to ask the question 'Why Not Tourism?' rather than the tourism industry constantly justifying 'Why Tourism' despite tourism's pan-India impact on job creation, GDP and forex growth," read the statement.

In the document released by FAITH, the association has requested the parliamentarians for their support for the

Indian tourism, travel & hospitality industry. "The Indian tourism industry is estimated to impact almost 10% of Indian GDP and almost 5 crores jobs directly and indirectly. India is probably one of the unique countries in the world where each constituency is blessed with either natural assets (mountains, seas, forests, rivers, deserts) or with cultural and historic assets going back up to over 5000 years. These tourism advantages of India are packaged and served by India's frontline tourism assets - India's travel agents, hotels, tour operators, tourist transporters, restaurants, guides and many tourism helpers. Together they have made India's domestic tourism the third largest in the world with over 1.7 billion domestic tourism visits and have taken India's share of international travel market to over

1%, earning over \$ 29 billion in forex," read the statement. Yet, FAITH says that unfortunately, tourism, travel and hospitality have to constantly justify 'Why Tourism' to get economic and policy support. "FAITH has requested parliamentarians to raise the question on behalf of their constituency 'Why Not Tourism'. COVID-19 has threatened the very core existence of humanity, and tourism will be the very last industry to recover when people will travel for tourism purposes only when they 'feel safe to travel'. Till then, all those tourism jobs supporting crores of families across all constituencies of India whether in rural or in urban India are being lost, which can lead to a huge economic disaster. On behalf of all those crores of families whose economic livelihood is being threatened, FAITH has requested parliamentarians to ask the question 'Why Not Tourism' and seek from the Central and state governments a 'Tourism Sector Specific Relief Package'," the statement urges.

*Les Roches has joined hands with RAHI (Rise Against Hunger India) to provide 35,000 meals to the migrant groups of Mumbai that are suffering due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.*

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# TRAVTALK

## VIEWPOINT

### Choppy waters

The world may slowly be recovering from the tumultuous few months of the recent past, but the future continues to be uncertain and erratic. With domestic flight operations having begun and states in India slowly opening up for tourism after months of dormancy, domestic travel could well be tottering towards a revival of sorts. But, international travel has a different story to tell altogether!

In fact, where does one even begin thinking about its recovery?

Consider visas, for instance, if a health certificate is to be submitted by a traveller, what is the guarantee that between the date of submission and the actual travel date, things would be the same? Doesn't this negate the entire purpose of a health certificate? Ever-changing travel advisories will, also make the visa application process more complex. Even if these processes become manageable, India's present battle with the rapid spread of COVID-19 makes travel to and from the country debatable.

Perhaps the path to international tourism's recovery lies in an individual's necessity to commute, as is for business travellers and VFR traffic. This then brings us to the most daunting of tasks in the current scenario – checking into an airport, taking a flight and arriving at a destination, while ensuring one's safety and that of others along the way. A passenger's journey through the airport can be made absolutely touch-less after investing significantly in technology and infrastructure; could an aircraft ensure in-cabin safety by having a doctor on board, sanitising regularly, distributing pre-packaged meals [or not] and providing passengers with safety kits; the port of arrival could have quarantine measures in place, but at who's cost, where, and for how long? It's a complex matrix with no uniform answer. Each step is an unusual challenge for the passenger and the travel industry, the governments and all the stakeholders.

Cruising is no stranger to the danger either! Ships would need regular fumigation and sanitisation, passengers would still need PPE kits and food & dining would have to be a different ballgame altogether.

A lot needs to be considered before we make the mistake of prematurely opening up for international travel and tourism and suffer once again in recovering from its aftermath. We pray this experience isn't a bigger challenge than travel itself.

# IATA's alternatives to quarantine

IATA is promoting a layered approach of measures to reduce the risk of countries importing COVID-19 via air travel and to mitigate the possibility of transmission in cases where people may travel while unknowingly being infected.



**Alexandre de Juniac**  
Director General and CEO  
IATA

IATA has urged governments to avoid quarantine measures when re-opening their economies. "Imposing quarantine measures on arriving travellers keeps countries in isolation and the travel sector in lockdown. We are proposing a framework to keep sick people from travelling and to mitigate the risk of transmission should a traveller discover they were infected after arrival," says **Alexandre de Juniac**, IATA's Director General and CEO.

less electronic declarations via government web portals or government mobile applications are recommended.

#### Reducing the risk of imported cases via travellers

❖ **Discouraging symptomatic passengers from traveling:** It is important that passengers do not travel when ill. To encourage passengers to do the right thing and stay home if

Health screening using measures such as non-intrusive temperature checks can also play an important role. Although temperature checks are not the most effective screening method for COVID-19 symptoms, they can act as a deterrent to travel-

countries where the rate of new infections is significantly higher, the arrival authority could consider COVID-19 testing. It is recommended that tests are undertaken prior to arrival at the departure airport (so as not to add to airport congestion and avoid the potential for

universal implementation of the 'Take-Off' guidelines published by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Take-Off is a temporary risk-based and multi-layered approach to mitigate the risks of transmitting COVID-19 during air travel. The comprehensive Take-Off



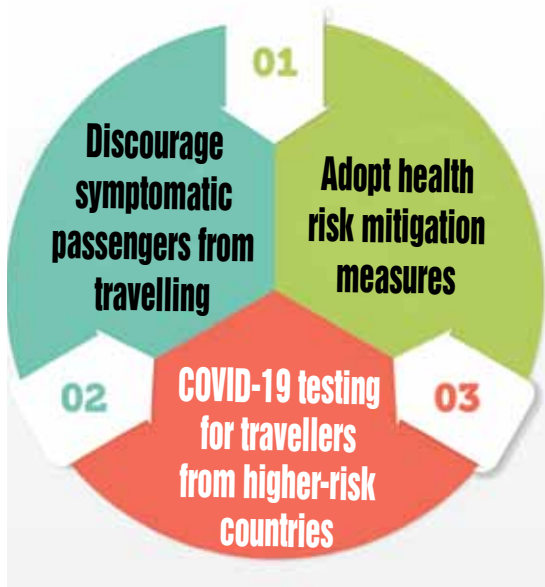
#### Quarantine discourages, insurance encourages

“Quarantine is very discouraging for air travel. It is useless to implement quarantine if you systematically implement the measures given by International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). So we are advocating serious and strong procedures to avoid quarantine. We are also working with insurance companies to put together insurance policies that are can be available for passengers to help them in case of infections.”

guidelines are closely aligned with the recommendations of the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). These include mask wearing throughout the travel process, sanitisation, health declarations and social distancing where possible.

❖ **Contact tracing:** This is the back-up measure, should someone be detected as infected after arrival. Rapid identification and isolation of contacts contains the risk without large-scale economic or social disruption. New mobile technology has the potential to automate part of the contact-tracing process, provided privacy concerns can be addressed.

❖ **Reducing risk of transmission at destination:** Governments are taking measures to limit the spread of the virus in their territory that will also mitigate the risk from travellers. In addition, the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTTC) Safe Travel protocols provide a pragmatic approach for the hospitality sector to enable safe tourism and restore traveller confidence. Areas covered include hospitality, attractions, retail, tour operators and meeting planners. ↓



they are unwell or potentially exposed, airlines are offering travellers flexibility in adjusting their bookings.

❖ **Public health risk mitigation measures:** IATA supports health screening by governments in the form of health declarations. To avoid privacy issues and cut the risk of infection with paper documents, standardised contact-

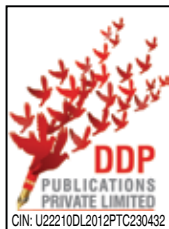
ling while unwell. Temperature checks can also shore-up passenger confidence: in a recent IATA survey of travellers, 80% indicated that temperature checks make them feel safer when travelling.

❖ **COVID-19 testing for travellers from countries perceived to be higher-risk:** When accepting travellers from

contagion in the travel process) with documentation to prove a negative result. Tests would need to be widely available and highly accurate, with results delivered quickly. Test data would need to be independently validated so as to be mutually recognised by governments and securely transmitted to the relevant authorities. Testing should be for active virus rather than for antibodies or antigens.

#### Mitigating risk if an infected person does travel

❖ **Reducing the risk of transmission during the air travel journey:** IATA encourages the



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# Who will protect the travel agent?

Time and again agents in India are left unprotected with no insurance against financial liabilities in situations where airlines go kaput or refuse to give cash refunds when flights are cancelled. This pandemic has brought this issue into sharper focus. Some trade associations share their point of view...

## Mumbai

“ Agents insurance against airlines default in the IATA agreement is not possible, as it is the airlines agreement to protect their interests. However, we have spoken to MoCA to include in the airline fare as insurance charges which in the current situation is probable. We have also spoken to insurance companies but the re-insurer will give a quote for the business of the industry. ”



**Hemendra Singh Jadon**  
Chapter Chairman  
MP & CG, TAAI

## Mumbai

“ One of the root causes of this problem is the fact that this sector is largely unorganised. There is no mandate by the MOT to ensure that agents are registered under them. This leads to no accountability and lack of professionalism. Only once we bring ourselves under an organised sector can we have a policy to protect us. ”



**Vishal Jain**  
President, North East India  
Tour Operators Association

## Lucknow

“ It is time we set up an international body to safeguard the interest of agents. While airlines get due payments from agents promptly, whether the agent has been paid by the passenger or not, their seeking passengers’ undertaking to refund ticket amount to agents does not make sense. ”



**Shahul Hameed**  
Chairman  
Southern Chapter, TAAI

## Bhopal

“ Travel agents are doing more than 80% of airline ticket sales and supporting them, but when we need their support they are not helping us in giving our refunds. We want our money the same way they wanted it when we booked tickets – no credit shells accepted. We will support those airlines that are supporting us right now. Agents will have to plan their strategy. ”



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



**Jitul Mehta**  
Chairman  
Western India, TAFI

## Guwahati

“ IATA renews our membership by July 1 every year and this is the time to have a dialogue with them. All national and regional associations should come together and represent to the government for taking this up with IATA. We should also take legal opinions, since airlines are bound by the law of the country they operate in. ”



**Sunil Satyawakta**  
Founder Chairman, UP  
& Uttarakhand Chapter  
(2014-2019), TAAI

## Chennai

“ Agents must get security deposits from the airlines or IATA has to obtain financial security from the airlines or it has to get the sovereign guarantee from the government of the respective country of the airline. Having an insurance product for agents will be a welcome move. It's the way forward. ”

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**Tourism**  
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- PATA Travel Mart 2020 will be virtual and be held late September
- Shillong to push tourism with a new product – 'isolated cottages'
- MEA requests all missions in India to resume visa services
- Chip-enabled Indian e-passports to boost travel document security
- 7 MTDC properties to be developed by private sector

# 'Allow us to open as hotels, not hospitals'

FHRAI claims that hotels in Delhi-NCR have been requisitioned for treatment of COVID-19 patients and attached with hospitals without any contract. It seems the government has not paid heed to the revenue, staff and infrastructure of hotels before taking the decision.

Nisha Verma

**Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**, Vice President, FHRAI (Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India) claims that hotels, if attached to



**Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**  
Vice President  
FHRAI

hospitals, would not only be compromising on their businesses now, but also in the future. "There will be a stigma

attached in the tourists' mind regarding these properties," he says, adding, "Tourists are going to be apprehensive about booking rooms in a property that was used for quarantining COVID-19 patients. This will

It is quite surprising that government-owned hotels are not being requisitioned. Ideally, these should have been the first to be taken over

impact the bookings of such hotels that were requisitioned, and these hotels will have to work hard on an entire process of reputation management. Also, the hotels that are being requisitioned for the purpose are being requisitioned only

partially and not completely. We have no idea why that is. This means that hotels cannot utilise the rest of their property with COVID-19 patients on the premises. This then raises the question of whether there is a need to requisition so many hotels rampantly. Meanwhile, it is also quite surprising that government-owned hotels like Ashoka, Samrat and Centaur are not being requisitioned. Ideally, these should have been the first to be taken over rather than requisitioning privately-owned hotels."

Overall maintenance being compromised

Kohli says that hotels are being taken over without any information or SOPs on certification of disinfection or cleansing. "There is nothing concrete and at present, it is entirely up to the hotels to

look out for themselves. Hotels do have their own SOPs for COVID-19, but that is for staff training and guest management. Our properties are not hospitals. Hotels do not have the infrastructure required to provide critical and specialised care that is avail-



able in healthcare facilities. Our staff is neither skilled nor equipped to handle or treat patients. We are as fearful as the common man and without providing us training or even health insurance, we are being expected to accommodate COVID-19 patients," he says

**Not a word on revenue**

Since nothing is outlined with regards to how hotels will coordinate with hospitals, there is no talk of how the revenue for hotels would be decided, says Kohli. "All that we have been given to understand is that a hotel property will be attached to a hospital and that is about it. Even with regards to revenue sharing or payments, there is no clarity. Our industry, which is severely cash-strapped, has not received any stimulus or help and to add to our woes, no payments have been received till date for the hotels that have already been requisitioned. It is a normal and accepted practice in hospitals to take large advances and not treat patients until there is a sizeable deposit tendered first. We hope that the government realises that

Contd on page 13 ▶

# This is the right time for aviation

Ajay Singh, Chairman & Managing Director, SpiceJet, speaking at the GMR group webinar titled 'Reposing the Faith in Flying', said that it was time India's key cities for passenger traffic became hubs for global aviation. According to him, a review of policies would be the first step in achieving this goal.

Nisha Verma

Aviation has been one of the most impacted sectors during the COVID crisis, says **Ajay Singh**, adding that the revenue for airlines and airports almost came to zero and it's been a really difficult time not only in India, but also globally. "At SpiceJet, we tried to take a different path. When there was no passenger traffic, we decided early on to use our aircraft for the cargo business, which was our most significant reaction to this COVID crisis," he shares.

Singh adds that even before May 25, when flights had resumed partially, SpiceJet was actively involved in planning its return to service. "We had several conversations with GMR and other airlines as well as the government. We believe that it was a wonderful collaborative exercise, where we globally took the lead in setting



**Ajay Singh**  
Chairman & Managing Director  
SpiceJet

up a protocol which seems to be amongst the most advanced anywhere in the world - the whole design of contactless travel, where we start with 100 per cent e-check-in and one doesn't have to stand in queues at airports. It's working so well between the airlines and airports that today, more than 99 per cent of check-ins are happening electronically. One can take the electronic pass and travel just with that alone. Even bag drop has become contactless, as passengers get a baggage tag

electronically through their mobile phones. After clearing security, once the passenger gets into the aircraft, they are provided face masks, face shields and disinfectant fluid," he elaborates. In fact,

This is our moment to ensure we make India-centric policies and at least those policies are reciprocal in terms of passenger numbers

the CMD claims that with around 35 per cent of flights operational by the carrier, the load factor has been somewhere between 60-70 per cent. The cargo business carries on.

**Emerging from COVID-19**  
According to Singh, it is time that airports like Delhi, Mumbai and



## Wide-body aircraft for all

"We, as Indian carriers, need to look at the wide-body option now. But, it must be supported strongly by government policy. If you are going to allow the network carriers, people who are in the Gulf and in the Far East, to just keep getting billions of dollars from their government and keep undercutting us, then it is very difficult to operate the wide-body aircraft."

— Ajay Singh

Hyderabad became global aviation hubs. "We need to make it happen, but it needs both intent and strategy. Airlines and coun-

tries across the world have used aviation as a strategic resource to increase the size and value of their hubs, to in turn increase

tourism and business in their countries. Unfortunately, we have gone the other way. We have promoted foreign airlines in our country. Hence, this is our moment to make sure that we make India-centric policies and at least those policies are reciprocal in terms of passenger numbers. We have a miniscule share of traffic into the US and Europe," he says, adding that India has a very liberal policy compared to China or the Middle East. ▶

# 'Conversion is spreading panic'

**Mandeep S Lamba**, President (South Asia), HVS ANAROCK, says that the Delhi government's move to attach hotels to hospitals as medical facilities in the Delhi-NCR region was uncalled for. He points out that the lack of industry involvement in the decision and unmindful planning would further affect the struggling hospitality sector.



Nisha Verma

Several hotels in the Delhi-NCR region have been attached by the government to private hospitals in order to make infrastructure readily available to fight the fast-spreading COVID-19 virus. The news has naturally led to questions being raised with regard to the business prospects of these star hotels and how getting converted to medical facilities would influence/change the course of business for the hotels in terms of operations, maintenance and image. Sharing his view on the matter, **Mandeep Lamba** says, "The move of the Delhi government to take over hotels and convert them into extensions of hospitals is a misplaced one, and done without any prior discussion with the stakeholders involved. Neither hotels nor the staff working in these hotels are geared in any way to deal with this sudden



**Mandeep Lamba**  
President (South Asia)  
HVS ANAROCK

conversion, which goes much beyond the 'quarantine facility' that hotels were so far being used for. Even though the sector has extended complete support in every manner during these trying times despite severe monetary losses, this requisitioning of hotels for use as hospitals has led to widespread dismay in the industry."

Lamba feels that this doesn't seem to be a well-thought-out plan, and that hotels should have had equal

representation and opinion in the matter. "The forced conversion of leading hotels into COVID hospital extensions is spreading further panic in the beleaguered hospitality sector. The move to use hotels,

✦ **The move to use hotels, if at all, should have been done in consultation with the sector's representative bodies and with a fully agreed plan** ✦

if at all, should have been done in consultation with the sector's representative bodies and with a fully agreed and thought-through plan on how the facility would be put to use along with staffing of the same through qualified health workers and not regular hotel staff

who may, out of fear, choose not to report on duty. The government should have, through dialogue, requested for one hotel and worked on the plan to make it function as a hospital extension, understanding fully the challenges that would be faced and whether these could be adequately addressed before issuing the order to attach hotels under the Disaster Management Act," he asserts.

✦ **No consideration for staff and cost**

According to Lamba, no intimation or agreement was initiated with hotels before taking such a drastic step and "without necessary paperwork and agree-

ments in place, how will hotels handle liability issues should any patient die in the hotel regrettably or if any of their staff members contract the disease?" He questions how these very hotels will get compensated for the many changes that may need to be done to facilitate treatment or related medical infrastructure?

Lamba says, "How will these hotels deal with the loss of business that is likely to take place once they revert back to normal operations and customers are reluctant to use them for fear of infection, since they were being used as hospitals and the perceived stigma attached to the same? How will these ho-

tels bring back their lost staff who have left due to fear? How have the commercial arrangements been decided without understanding the nature of hotels' operating costs and without any minimum guarantee being paid to hotels even though the entire hotel has been requisitioned by the government? While hotels continue to provide support across the country for quarantine facilities without even recovering their costs for the services being rendered, there are no simple or comforting answers to the questions raised above and it is really disappointing that our sector is being treated in this manner, without any participative and meaningful consultation." ✦



*The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) are joining forces to boost the recovery of the tourism sector across the 38 economies where the Bank invests.*



For more details contact: Nupoor Desai  
Tel: +91 8291914036 | Email: [palladium@globaldestinations.in](mailto:palladium@globaldestinations.in)

# Adjusting to seismic changes

Global industry leaders representing different sectors share insights on how the industry should respond, and the trends to expect as people begin travelling again in the post-pandemic period. Pre-sale offers and deep discounting may rule the roost.

“ Traveller confidence is still low, and the recovery slow. But travel has been the single strongest consumer trend over the last 50 years. And we do see that trend continue even post Covid. Domestic will lead international travel by six months plus. For some, domestic will be an opportunity. For others, they will need to be quick in opening up and persuading international tourists that they are safe. ”



**Hermione Joye**  
Sector Lead, Travel & Vertical Search APAC, Google

“ We’re offering flexible, safe, and discounted options for our clients to help them and the industry ‘travel on’. We have already seen a recovery of 50-80%. Risk-free travel booking will be a new norm as free cancellations become a number one priority. Pre-sale offers and deep discounting on perishable inventory will also become popular. Another trend is insurance coverage for travellers. ”



**Gloria Guevara**  
President & CEO  
WTTG

“ For every trade show that is not taking place, tens of thousands of deals are not signed. This crisis will lead us to new procedures and standards. It is accelerating trends that were already shaping up around the marriage of on-site event with online services before, during, and after the event. Business events will become more digital, but the main element that will drive success is face-to-face meetings. ”



**Peter C Borer**  
COO, The Hong Kong and Shanghai Hotels



**Steve Saxton**  
Partner  
McKinsey & Company

“ There is no longer a predictable ‘normal’ in terms of consumer behaviour. Our survey in 17 markets in APAC shows that top concerns were exposure to the virus and economic cost of a holiday. APAC customers, especially in India and Indonesia, were more optimistic about international travel than the rest of the world. Companies need to invest in Machine Learning to personalise and save time. ”



**Jane Sun**  
CEO  
Trip.com Group

“ It is very important to have a co-ordinated approach between countries to open borders. We also believe in having corridors rather than quarantine. We suggest governments that it’s better to create corridors than to have quarantine and allow the flow of people between those countries. In order to encourage international travel before a vaccine is developed, we need to add the component of testing contact tracing of travellers. ”



**Kai Hattendorf**  
MD & CEO  
UFI

“ Quarantine is detrimental to our industry. We urge governments to implement alternative public health preventative measures including testing and contract tracing which may be more effective. Travel bubbles are a good idea but we must be prepared for a second wave of infections. We must regain the confidence of guests but the fundamentals of hospitality will not change. ”

Inputs by Hazel Jain

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# PM reviews Varanasi tourism projects

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently chaired a review meeting on the development projects undertaken in Varanasi. During the meeting, he directed that certain projects be expedited without compromising on quality, and that the expansion and modernisation of Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport be prioritised.



Nisha Verma

The presentation made to Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the review meeting highlighted, among other project developments, the progress made at the Kashi Vishwanath Mandir complex, using a drone video of the layout. The PM directed the Kashi Vishwanath Trust to prepare a route map with appropriate tourist guides to help pilgrims who visit the complex. He also said that all old temples that were unearthed during the development of the Kashi Vishwanath Parisar should be protected and preserved, and the help of experts should be taken to maintain their historical and architectural legacy.

During the meeting, Prime Minister Modi was also apprised of all projects being undertaken in Varanasi. According to a statement, it was in-



formed that "more than 100 major projects within the financial outflow of around ₹8,000 crore are currently being undertaken in Varanasi and pertain to the creation of social and physical infrastructure like hospital buildings, national waterways, roads, as well as international convention centre 'Rudraksh' built with Indo-Japan collaboration."

The PM asked the officials to accelerate the completion of all the development work and also maintain highest standards of quality. In addition, he said that in order to boost the footfall of tourists in the city, works of cruise tourism, light & sound shows, rejuvenation of Khidkiya and Dashaswamedh Ghats, and the

display of Ganga Aarti through audio-video screens should be fast-tracked. He insisted that all efforts be taken to promote Kashi as one of the key repositories of world heritage. He also directed officials to complete the expansion and modernisation works of Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport on priority. ↴

## Need to go beyond religious tourism

Pradeep Rai, Managing Director, Skyline India Travels, speaking about the development at Kashi Vishwanath Mandir complex, says that it is a mega project and the construction there has been going on in full swing. "Recently, a new head for the project has been appointed to expedite the development," he says. In fact, he adds that the Chief Minister has been monitoring the development of the Kashi Vishwanath Mandir complex since the PM is closely involved. "The Chief Minister regularly visits the project and takes stock of the situation," Rai says.

He adds that apart from this, nothing big is happening in the holy city. "There are discussions, but nothing much is happening as the entire country



**Pradeep Rai**  
Managing Director  
Skyline India Travels

was in lockdown," Rai says. He also feels that there is a need to create and promote new products. "We only get pilgrims and spiritual tourists in Varanasi. The local tourism organisations have taken initiatives to bring new things and promote them, but nothing concrete has happened. The development is only limited to ghats."



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# A single e-platform for Goa trade

Data is going to be the main focus for Goa Tourism Development Corporation as it not only aims to bring all its tourism stakeholders on to a single online platform but also set up AI-run chat-bots for tourists. GTDC has also come up with Registration Facilitation Centres for those who want to set up any tourism business.



Hazel Jain

The Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC), Government of Goa, has started work on getting all its tourism stakeholders under the organised sector. It has outsourced this to Goa Electronics that will do data collection of all tourism stakeholders. Goa Electronics is associated with GTDC for developing and maintaining its website, App and the state-owned online hotel bookings.

Explaining the thought process behind this, **Revati Mujumdar**, CEO and Executive Director, Goa Electronics, says, "COVID-19 has taught all of us a lesson or two, especially those in the technology domain. An important thing we realised in Goa is that data forms a major basis and a non-negotiable requirement of



**Revati Mujumdar**  
CEO and Executive Director  
Goa Electronics

the entire planning system. So the entire focus of the state and the tourism industry has now shifted to creating a good warehouse or a database of each and every tourism stakeholder in the state. Whether it is the taxi driver, hotels, adventure sports, travel agents, or tourist guides – we want to bring them on a single platform. This is our prime requirement right now." In terms of timelines, she adds that part of the framework or data structure

of collation is already happening and will be in place in the next three months by September 2020. "The department has also come up with Registration Facilitation Centres (RFCs) for anyone who wants to set up any business in the tourism sector in

✦ The RFCs are set up to help businesses to register with the tourism department, whether it's an activity, a service or a hotel. They can track their applications online ✦

the state. This is being done to bring transparency in the system and to ensure that the services are delivered in a time-bound way. The RFCs are set up to help businesses to register with the



tourism department, whether it's an activity, a service or a hotel. They can track their applications online. Very soon, we will come up with all of these registration facilities on an online platform," Mujumdar reveals, adding that the RFCs are in place and they are the inlet points for this information. "A majority of the stakeholders have been brought onto the database. We are now more focused on areas like F&B outlets, etc," she says.

## Data harvesting


Another thing that GTDC is working towards is collection of tourist data entering Goa. "We have already started working on this. In fact, we are creating a policy of how we can get




this information on to a single framework. Of course, we will have to tie up with everybody, including the airlines, railways, etc, who are getting these tourists in," Mujumdar shares.





The second phase for this will specifically be about the personal touch. "Once we have the complete data in place, the AI-based chat-bots will be a ma-

major area that we will be working on very soon. It won't just be about airlines or hotels, but very personalised information such as NLPs (Natural Language Processing). For instance, if a tourist is landing from Andhra and is looking for some place to eat, the bot should be able to tell them that there is a restaurant serving Andhra food close by," she adds. ✦





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# TAAI to focus on protecting members

The association has already made its recommendations to Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) to ensure that travel agents are protected during times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. But first, it aims to clearly specify the definition of a travel agent, so that dubious businesses can be kept at bay.

Hazel Jain

While travel agents have always been a vulnerable group in terms of financial liabilities whether due to flight cancellations or airlines going kaput, this vulnerability has come into sharper focus during a crisis such as the lockdown due to the pandemic. To ensure that its members are out of harm's way, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) has been rallying for them since some time. Sharing some details is Jay Bhatia, Vice President, TAAI, who says, "The Passenger Charter of MoCA already includes that refund credits should be the sole prerogative of the passenger/customer and all credits and refunds should be through the travel agent only. With some airlines being suspended from BSP and impacting the agents in a big way, we have demanded that going forward all airlines must

submit a financial security to the government/ IATA who wish to fly in/to India."

What about having some kind of an insurance product specifically for agents? "Yes, the TAAI team has already worked on the options as to how an insurance cover/deposit/ financial security to protect agents/customers from airline defaults, suspension, bankruptcy, non-depositing of statutory taxes like TDS, etc., can be charged on the ticket or submitted by the airlines/IATA or otherwise. An insurance charge/



levy on the ticket, if worked on, shall be a win-win for the airlines and agents, whereby agents' financial security will also not be required and their working capital shall also be enhanced," he says, adding that this will create a better working environment and a level-playing field.



Jay Bhatia  
Vice President, TAAI

levy on the ticket, if worked on, shall be a win-win for the airlines and agents, whereby agents' financial security will also not be required and their working capital shall also be enhanced," he says, adding that this will create a better working environment and a level-playing field.

## Renegotiating IATA terms

The TAAI team has also been working since January on changes for the betterment of

its Active IATA-accredited members. Unfortunately, the process to make recommended changes is too lengthy. Bhatia adds, "Certain positive changes were approved for implementation effective June 1. But, due to the

An insurance charge/levy on the ticket shall be a win-win for the airlines and agents; agents' financial security will not be required and their working capital will also be enhanced

lockdown since March, the same has been deferred. The scenario now has changed completely. We have already submitted few recommendations at APJC for consideration. This includes obtaining financial security from

the airlines, abolishing of RAF charges, the Remittance Holding Capacity (RHC) be same as Local Financial Criteria (LFC), neutral capping by all airlines, ensuring all airlines permit use of travel agent credit cards across all booking classes, etc."

Bhatia adds that post lockdown, TAAI has added a few more recommendations to MoCA as well wherein Law of the Land should prevail and supersede all generic 'Global Resolutions' followed by the airlines/IATA. "Airlines must be mandated to follow the Passenger Charter of MoCA and it should be the sole prerogative of the passenger to decide if they desire refunds in cash or credit vouchers," he says. Further, TAAI has suggested reverting to weekly settlements on BSP, without impacting the financial security, due to the pandemic situation so as to enable agent members to

have sustainable working capital. "We have also asked MoCA to direct the airlines operating to/from and in India to ensure remuneration is given to accredited agents and also maintain parity across all booking channels," Bhatia explains.

But he comes to the core of the issue – who is a travel agent? "Most importantly, the definition of a travel agent must be well articulated. We need appropriate recognition for TAAI members by the government so that fly-by-night operators who operate without knowledge and with the purpose of maligning the trade and cheating the customers not be permitted to be established without appropriate registrations. We are ensuring through APJC-India that India-specific resolutions must be improved so as to create a win-win situation for all stakeholders," Bhatia adds.

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# 'Entry fee is already nominal'

Even as tiger reserves and safaris stand closed from July to September every year due to rains, Madhya Pradesh is uncertain about discounting entry fee at its monuments to attract tourists.

Hazel Jain

The 'Heart of India', Madhya Pradesh, has re-opened many tourist spots such as its state-run and private hotels and resorts, as well as monuments, and is allowing in tourists from within the country. The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department also re-opened its national parks with effect from



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

the Ministry of Tourism and the state administration. Entry fee to the monuments is already nominal and further discounting is not yet decided."

She adds that the state is also training tourist guides on safety precautions. "Not just guides but also staff at the Tourist Reception Centre (TRC), vehicle drivers – all have been given guidelines and necessary trainings," she says.

dia celebrates 'Wildlife Week' every year from October 2-8.

Sonia Meena, IAS, Additional Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, says, "Opening up tourist attractions gives a sense of 'returning to normalcy'. Hotels at tourist destinations are opening up gradually and are offering attractive discounts to tourists coming to visit. Of course, all hotels and restaurants in the state are following social distancing and hygiene guidelines issued by

Opening up tourist attractions gives a sense of returning to normalcy

June 15, 2020. However, they will stand closed from July 1 up until September 30 as they do every year due to the rains. But the national parks' buffer zone will remain open even during the monsoon. The expectation is that tourists will actually start arriving from October when In-

Meena expects tourists from neighbouring states travelling to nearby destinations in Madhya Pradesh by road. "Madhya Pradesh is surrounded by five states and we have designed short itineraries for various travel circuits. Hotels at these destinations have opened up and offering attractive discounts also," she adds. The tourism board has also introduced luxury caravans for travellers who wish to explore the state while minimising physical contact.

# KTC helps those stranded

KTC India played a crucial role in the movement of around 50,000 stranded foreign nationals across India to the respective international airports to return home.

Nisha Verma

KTC India was appointed by many embassies and high commissions, including the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Singapore, Brazil, South Korea, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Canada, Sri Lanka and Kazakhstan, as the sole transport provider for transferring about 50,000 stranded foreign nation-



**Sarab Jit Singh**  
Managing Director  
KTC India

to the concerned authorities. KTC would like to thank all government officials for helping us for the safe passage of tourists across states even during odd hours," revealed the statement.

KTC offices picked up passengers from villages, towns and cities across states. Transporting excess baggage was an issue, but the KTC team handled it very well and ensured all passengers connected to their flights with baggage. "KTC is happy to be able to perform the responsibilities given to us during the tough times of lockdown, serving stranded passengers and helping them to return home safely. In line with our efforts to have no exposure to COVID-19, all our vehicles are cleaned and disinfected before and after every assignment," concluded the statement. KTC has also received an appreciation letter from the British High Commission for their services at this time.

KTC is happy to be able to perform the responsibilities given to us during the lockdown, serving stranded passengers

ers. KTC took relevant government approvals for travel and ensured that every passenger reached airport in time to board their flight."

In order to accomplish this mission, all KTC offices across India worked 24x7 to ensure smooth travel of passengers. "We faced a lot of challenges at inter-state borders despite all permissions. Vehicles were stopped by the police as there was lack of clarity of protocol. KTC team got all hurdles removed by connecting

als across India to their respective international airports for taking their return flights home. A statement by KTC India reads, "Drivers were also provided with masks, gloves and hand sanitis-



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# Approval of loan is difficult

► Contd from page 1

## MOT's statement

“ We clarified to the industry that the biggest announcements are there for them as well. The fact is that the differentiation of definition between the manufacturing and the services sector MSMEs, which has been removed and caps have been changed for the services sector MSMEs (like tourism sector MSMEs), shall bring benefits. It's not just the benefits which have been given, but it also further expands the scope of the tourism industry, to be part of the MSME definition and to take the benefits. ”



**Yogendra Tripathi**  
Secretary  
Ministry of Tourism

“ It is good that the government has included the services sector in MSME, and with tourism coming under it, there are few advantages. Firstly, we will be able to get bank loans on a priority basis, but the rate of interest will be charged, although for MSMEs the interest rate is 1 per cent lower than the market rate. Secondly, they have increased the upper limit for MSME to Rs250 crore, which is another advantage. It's beneficial to small operators who already have bank limits. However, if one doesn't have any bank payments and wants an additional loan, then the bank follows the same procedure. ”



**Subhash Goyal**  
Secretary General  
FAITH

“ Moratorium means that people have to pay the interest at a later date, but the interest has to be paid. One can download and can register as an MSME without any charge, provided the criteria is fulfilled as per their terms. Another good part is that if you are a corporate and if anyone extends your credit over 45 days, you can take action against them and inform the government. However, as per new loans, the banks have their own norms for people to give loans, and if you are eligible, the interest is in the range of 9.5-10 per cent. However, the banks somehow consider the travel industry as a risk factor. ”



**Pradeep Lulla**  
Vice President and Acting President  
TAFI



**Jyoti Mayal**  
President  
TAAI

“ We had a webinar with BM Gupta, Whole Time Director, Tourism Finance Corporation of India (TFCI), who guided members on it. We discussed with him issues like banks not honouring the inclusion of tourism in MSME. However, he says that they are being streamlined and are even being advised by the Ministry of Finance as well as RBI on how to go about it. Since the minimum and maximum bar for MSMEs has been raised, nearly everyone from our industry will come under it. They can get the loans at a very low interest rate and use the money. If they are existing members, they won't need any collaterals. ”

“ Those who don't have a relation with the bank, won't get a loan. And whatever is my loan, they will give me 20 per cent of it. Secondly, why would I take a loan on 9.25 per cent interest, just for giving salaries, especially when there is no work. If the work was starting and I was going out to get business, then I would take a loan and bring business. However, I cannot take a loan just to give salaries. We are all registered as services sector under MSME, and it has been a long time. The benefits of the manufacturing sector are not applicable to our industry, as we don't have to buy materials to start production. ”



**Rajiv Mehra**  
Vice President  
IATO



**Riaz Munshi**  
President  
OTOAI

“ What Ministry of Tourism is trying to say through the new definition is that those who are not registered can get registered as MSME to avail the facilities and take a loan. When we spoke to the Minister, he told us that they are giving a moratorium right now and when things come back to normal, at least the agents can work hard and pay back. Meanwhile, the money can help their companies survive and pay for expenses and salaries. I think it's a good decision. However, the banks are going to have a tough time as they are supposed to give loans without collaterals, and there is always a fear of defaults. Private banks are not very inclined. ”

“ We have done a webinar on MSME for our members. Many were not aware of the benefits being offered under MSME. Even when one registers, there is not much information on the website on how to go about it. People don't know whether they shall contact the MSME department, the Ministry or the bank directly for a loan. Many people have said that they have applied for a loan and it has been rejected, without citing clear grounds for the same. MOT has said that if one is a tour operator, travel agent or stakeholder from the industry, they can apply for a loan. While applying is one thing, getting it approved is another. ”



**PP Khanna**  
President  
ADTOI

“ We have always been registered as an MSME. By announcing it now, it doesn't change much for any of us. It's only an eyewash. And it's only available to those who have already taken an advance on the bank. If I haven't taken a loan already, bank will not give us any money. Also, only 20% of the outstanding till February 29 is what is being given by banks. Anybody in the business can get it, provided you are already dealing with the bank. So, I don't think this particular system is still effective, useful. Few agents, hotels and small hotels will take advantage of it, and medium sized companies will take the loans. It's just a name, and there is no benefit for industry. ”



**Swadesh Kumar**  
President, ATOAI

“ As the business environment is completely shaken and it is extremely difficult to predict how the market will behave, not many enterprises would like to increase their liabilities. Government can extend help that will surely be of great assistance to bring MSMEs back on track. Payments due to MSMEs from Centre & State governments as well as PSUs should always be cleared within a stipulated period of not more than 45 days for all government tenders & contracts. This one action will prove to be a big financial stimulus to Indian economy. RBI has reduced interest rates for banks but banks are not passing on the benefit. ”



**Sarab Jit Singh**  
Managing Director  
Travelite India

Inputs by Nisha Verma

## Who will be liable in a mishap?

► Contd from page 6

we are not equipped to handle patients,” he opines.

### Staff security

To top it all, there is nothing mentioned for the welfare of staff. “The government has neither provided staff, skilled or otherwise, nor health insurance, which is most important in a case like this. It has not given transport solutions either for our staff to travel to work and back home. We are of the opinion that hotel staff should not and cannot be forced or coerced to attending patients. As it is, hotels are facing an acute shortage of staff. Moreover, the government has not indicated that it will take any liability or eventuality after the requisitioning of the hotel property, which makes us worried,” adds Kohli.

### Feasibility and compliance

The arbitrariness with which the order has been issued, keeps them from complying with it. “FHRAI has advised that the state must ordinarily also requisition nursing homes, medi-

## Grievances

- ❖ Hotels being requisitioned partially leaves rest of the space unutilised due to the scare of COVID spreading
- ❖ No information or SOPs on certification of disinfection or cleansing
- ❖ No clarity in revenue sharing or payments
- ❖ Hotel staff, already scarce, neither trained nor skilled to handle patients
- ❖ Lack of infrastructure to provide critical or specialised care
- ❖ No indication that government will take liability of eventuality after requisitioning the hotel

cal facilities and other hospitals and polyclinics, which have the required infrastructure, before requisitioning hotels. There are many spaces such as auditoriums and spaces in clubs and governmental facilities in every state. In Delhi, the Vigyan Bhavan with its plenary hall has a seating capacity of over 1200. It also has six smaller halls with capacities of up to 375 and a huge exhibition hall as well. With its proximity to facilities and its huge capacities, it is the right facility to turn into a

hospital rather than private hotels,” he suggests.

### Future strategy

Asserting that the government needs to realise that hotels are ready to start operations but not as hospitals, he says,

“We request that the government allow us to start operations immediately. The airline industry is operating with zero social distancing, with travellers sitting in close proximity for prolonged hours. We once again request the government to act immediately and allow us to start operations.”

# UNWTO sets the ball rolling

Three UNWTO leaders speak about how the global organisation is preparing to help plan the sector's recovery for its member states, culling out country-specific plans from of a generic set of guidelines.

“ Commitment to international cooperation will be important as we move forward and rebuild confidence and trust in the customer to travel again. Restarting our sector must be done in a timely and responsible manner, but not at the expense of fair and equal treatment of tourists. The World Committee on Tourism Ethics, an independent body convened by World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), has stressed on the importance of safeguarding the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism as travel restrictions are eased. ”



**Suman Billa**  
Director, Technical  
Co-operation and Silk Road  
Development UNWTO

“ Everyone wants travel to resume as safely as possible. But the glut of guidelines currently available on how to do so may be creating more confusion than guidance. Prior to the crisis, the global travel industry experienced one of the strongest expansion cycles in its history. For travel and tourism companies, success will likely be determined by the ability to respond to the health, safety and financial uncertainty ahead. ”



**Donald Hawkins**  
Professor Emeritus, George  
Washington University &  
First Vice Chair, UNWTO  
Affiliate Members Program

Inputs by Hazel Jain



**Zurab Pololikashvili**  
Secretary-General  
UNWTO

“ In order to support its member states, UNWTO has unveiled its COVID-19 Tourism Recovery package. Under economic recovery, we cover measurement of impact of this pandemic and develop country-specific tourism recovery plans. We also help develop support programmes for MSMEs, and re-orient value chains towards sustainability. For marketing and promotion, we identify priority markets and develop tailor-made marketing and product diversification strategies. We also help prepare a plan to offer incentives to stimulate travel. ”

# Return of corporate travel?

The sixth edition of CAPA Masterclass Series discussed the challenges that airlines will face to bring back their cash cow – the corporate travellers.

“ Just how safe is it for an employer to ask an employee to travel internationally whether by air or any other mode? Moreover, once the bean counters have seen that they don't have to spend this much money in the short term, you're going to have to justify why you need to travel starting from zero budget rather than last year's budget, particularly when budgets are diverted to online. Corporate travel is a critical part of airline business; it's the honey and the cake for them. ”



**Peter Harbison**  
Chairman Emeritus  
CAPA - Centre for Aviation



**Richard Maslen**  
Analyst & Content Editor  
The Blue Swan Daily  
CAPA - Centre for Aviation

“ We have global recession now which will affect business travel significantly. And while a lot of routes are being re-introduced, frequencies are not there and that doesn't work for business travellers. With quarantine rules, it's harder. A big part of business travel is the conferences and events, and we haven't seen a lot of that taking place. Corporate travel will be more about ROI, going forward. It's going to be difficult for airlines to re-assess where demand is. They base everything on data, and historical data is irrelevant now. ”

“ What airlines are saying about capacity and what eventually happens is not always the same. Capacity may come back, but will demand? Consumer confidence will be driven to some extent by aviation hygiene standards. We've seen no significant airlines go out of business so far. But in the recovery phases, it could be a lot more challenging as costs come back into the equation. The extent to which revenue comes back is unknown. If they don't generate more revenue, their cash will burn. ”



**Jonathan Wober**  
Chief Financial Analyst  
CAPA - Centre for Aviation

Inputs by Hazel Jain

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# Travel ecosystem will now e-evolve

Even though the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the expected growth in the tourism and travel industry, one cannot deny the indispensable role travel still plays in our lives and in the economy of many countries, says **Vinay Malhotra**, Regional Group COO – South Asia, Middle East & North Africa, Americas, VFS Global.

**T**ravel will bounce back as borders start opening up again, but the way one travels henceforth is set to differ from any of the earlier changes we experienced. The world is looking at a recovery roadmap and simultaneously implementing key efforts. We are exploring ways to go back to our daily routines, albeit with changes from a health perspective that are imperative for our safety. Just like we are doing today, we could well also be altering our usual travel behaviour to make the next journey safer for ourselves and those around us. To keep up with this evolving traveller behaviour, it is important for the travel industry to transform along with its customers, and build a travel ecosystem that is more sustainable and one they feel safe in. Here's what we could see change:



**Smart travel - the best new way to travel**

The fear of COVID-19 has embedded an added layer of caution around human touch, and people across platforms are doing their best to minimise the amount of human interface. The safest and most utilised alternative currently is the digitisation of systems and processes. By taking travel planning online, we enable remote applications and processing

from home, avoiding crowded public spaces, and cut down on human touchpoints and process turnaround timelines significantly. With varied digital solutions such as e-visas and e-passport gates, essential travel documents can be processed digitally in a smooth transition. Upgrading technology at every juncture of travel will now be imperative, to make it an overall safe and 'smart' experience.

**Customised experiences and services**

Consumers are likely to have a higher preference for services that are tailored to their needs. Be it ordering food, booking a vacation or applying for a visa, consumers will be looking for

of a luxury. Doorstep delivery services, courier services for return of documents, and Premium Lounge access for less crowded and more personal application submission, etc., will surely gain more acceptance in the new normal.

reassure the traveller of the surroundings they choose and necessary safety precautions, keeping them at ease.

Bearing in mind the unstable nature of the situation we are in, there is still a lack of visibility for the industry to manoeuvre in the new normal. However, sustainable change is inevitable.

✦ Consumers will look at options that give them a better understanding of destinations or products in order to make well-informed decisions ✦

**AR and VR redefining the planning process**

Securing the trust of the consumer is now a priority for both destinations and travel companies. In the post-COVID-19 world, consumers are bound to look at options that give them a better understanding of destinations or products in order to make well-informed decisions while planning. Hence, technologies such as Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) could gain rapid acceptance and play a significant role in the travel inspiration and planning process. It will help

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



**Vinay Malhotra**  
Regional Group COO – South Asia, Middle East & North Africa, Americas, VFS Global

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# Why did India plunge in ATDI 2020?

The Adventure Tourism Development Index (ATDI) 2020 has pushed India's ranking even lower than what it was in 2018, under the developing country index. **Tejbir Singh Anand**, VP, ATOAI; Founder & MD, Holiday Moods Adventures; Founding Member, FAITH and an adventure travel strategic advisor, speaks...

Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) and George Washington University International Institute of Tourism Studies conduct this ranking across 191 countries and 10 pillars. Few observations that are glaring in the face are our 'Safety Pillar', which has been a burning issue always and this is where we lose out completely. But what surprises is that in the 'Cultural Pillar', we are far behind Bhutan and Nepal, which

seems so untrue as in India we take great pride in being a culturally rich country.

Adventure travellers value the opportunity to interact with local culture in a meaningful way. India needs to encourage local people to preserve their culture knowing well that modern influences continue to make inroads and challenge the native cultures and customs.

We are way behind trailing in the 'Adventure Activity Resource Pillar', hence, we need to extend more support towards our endangered species, and also keep our large percentage of forests, grasslands and drylands intact. Under the 'Health Pillar', this comes as no surprise that India is at the bottom end after gauging the level of healthcare available in a country. Avail-

ability of good healthcare is very important to not only adventure, but any traveller. We are almost last in this heat lap of 'Sustainable Development Pillar'.

What Indian adventure tourism needs is committed government policies that support and foster sustainable and rural tourism development. It is crucial to develop adventure tourism market competitiveness so as to safeguard India's natural heritage and offer an encouraging investment environment for the private sector.

The private sector can only flourish, and destinations attract investment and development to a region, when public and private sector actions go hand in hand. The backbone of any adventure industry are the

small businesses and their passionate entrepreneurs.

But, there are also few happy scores. In the 'Image Pillar', India is at a high position although behind our neighbour Nepal. Our learnings are clear that we can

It is crucial to develop the adventure tourism market competitiveness so as to safeguard the natural heritage and offer an encouraging investment environment

easily scale this up and attract the attention of the world to India. Under the 'Tourism Infrastructure Pillar', adventure travellers are less sensitive to deficiencies

in tourism infrastructure, but are definitely more sensitive to soft infrastructure such as trail maps, accessible information on heritage and culture, ground operators and outfitters, training programmes for adventure tourism providers such as guides, interpreters, and eco-lodges, and India is not doing too bad in this. The 'Humanitarian Pillar' links adventure travellers to authentic, immersive and engaging native experiences. India is decently high up and better than our neighbours Nepal and Bhutan. 'The Entrepreneurship Pillar' comprises economic freedom, and India is somewhere in the middle, which is a low hanging fruit that can be easily harnessed.

Perhaps, by slipping down 10 positions, as a silver lining in the cloud, it is also an opportunity to look more inwards, exploring the sustainability

dimension of adventure tourism competitiveness in India. It can help India understand our adventure tourism competitiveness as well as specific strengths and weaknesses. It can push our policymakers to develop better plans and strategies, align and collaborate more closely with partners and stakeholders in both the public and private sector.

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



Tejbir Singh Anand  
Vice President  
ATOAI

Top 5 countries in South Asia		
Rank	2018	2020
1	Bhutan	Bhutan
2	Nepal	Nepal
3	India	Maldives
4	Sri Lanka	India
5	Maldives	Sri Lanka



My Dearest Guest,

May I have the absolute pleasure of welcoming you all back to the Jakson Inns - your residence in Phaltan.

I feel so fortunate to announce that our facilities and all my associates and their families have successfully weathered the Covid 19 lockdowns and are now completely sanitized and ready to welcome you.

We have used this lockdown time to re-educate ourselves on all the new procedures recommended by the W.H.O, our Government, FSSAI, CII and the various Hotel and Restaurant Associations.

We have incorporated all the new 'Good Practices' into our cultural DNA. We have invested in everything that will keep you safe from arrival through departure. We are sure you will experience our love, protection and the positive change.

The 'Hospitality' industry may go through countless changes, however what will never change is our focus on our Guests.  
Welcome back!!! Atithi Devo Bhava!!!!

Love  
Sandeep Talaulicar-Managing Director



**JAKSON INNS**  
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The USP of this hotel is its Service Standards & great Cuisine. Apart from this, it is a comfortable place away from the hustle bustle of the city, where one can breathe in fresh air & witness starry skies every night.

We look forward to welcoming all our guests back with the same energy & warmth & have taken all the necessary measures to ensure that you have a safe & happy stay.



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Web : www.jaksonhospitality.com



# Apply online for visa to Sri Lanka

► Contd from page 1

banquets to be held but only with 100 people. As we speak, we are totally open for domestic tourism. Regarding international tourists, we have a detailed guideline for them on our website which covers everything that they need to know. The auditing process to receive international tourists is currently on. Our Civil Aviation, Health Ministry, Tourism Board and the Immigration Department are working very closely with each other for this." All attractions will also have time slots to ensure physical distancing. She explained that Indian travellers to Sri Lanka now need to apply for visas online and visa-on-arrival has been halted for now. Visa fee for all SAARC countries including India is US\$20 for tourists and US\$30 for business travellers. "There is going to be a minimum requirement of seven days stay for now. I think this might kill our MICE business temporarily. But, we have no choice since the health ministry is keen on this. Tourists will have to choose one of the health-certified accommodations," Kimarli Fernando added.

Also, all visitors have to get their PCR test done 72 hours prior to departure. "I know this will be a challenge for India. We are discussing this with the health ministry to remove this condition and it may be removed. When they arrive in Sri Lanka, they will have to do two PCR tests – one at the airport and one within five to seven days after arrival at a total cost of US\$65. However, we are still negotiating with our health ministry to ease this. The travel agent or the OTA will be responsible for the hotel trans-

fer from the airport. It is a tough guideline, I have to be honest. But, we don't want to let go of our hard-earned win on COVID," she shared. Sri Lanka Tourism is also busy creating a travel



**Riyaz UC**  
Managing Director  
Spiceland Holidays

mobile App with the assistance of UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) as an emergency situation. This will be included in the process of the visa application form.

### Key segments

Outlining the key segments that Sri Lanka wants to focus on going forward, Kimarli Fernando said, "We had so many plans for the India market this year. So it's really frustrating that everything we had planned has been held up now. But, believe you me, it will be done the moment India opens up. The India market is exceptionally important for us."

According to **Madhubani Pereira**, Acting Managing Director and Director, Public Relations Department, Sri Lankan Tourism Promotion Board, the destination reportedly received half a million Indian tourists in the first three months of 2020 before the travel ban came into effect. "The peak however was in 2018 when we received

5,00,000 Indians making India our number one source market. This is also one of the reasons why Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Board wants to explore regional tourism going forward."

On priority are a few segments that it will aggressively target. The wedding segment is one them and it plans to do a special familiarisation tour just for wedding planners later this year or early next year. The other important segment is

✦ **Achieving a target of one million tourists from India is not difficult if you work on the demands of the Indian travel industry** ✦

- Riyaz UC

MICE. It has one of the biggest MICE venues in the region called Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH) in Colombo, which can cater to



**Ravindran V**  
Regional Manager (India and Bangladesh), SriLankan Airlines

1,500 pax given the present condition. The third segment it wants to focus on is the Indian film industry for film shoots and is looking to offer speedy approvals to shoot



### Guidelines for Indian visitors

- ❖ Apply for visa online
- ❖ Visa fee is \$20 for tourists and \$30 for business travellers
- ❖ Minimum 7 days' stay for now
- ❖ Choose a health-certified accommodation
- ❖ Get PCR test done 72 hours prior to departure
- ❖ 2 PCR tests in Sri Lanka, one on arrival at airport and one within 5-7 days at total cost of \$65
- ❖ Travel agent or OTA responsible for hotel transfer from airport

for movies. "This is a very under-developed segment and a huge opportunity for us. In addition, niche segments like golf tourism and hosting cricket club matches, shopping and nightlife are key. We are looking at offering VAT refunds to help attract these segments," Kimarli Fernando added.

Moreover, Sri Lanka Tourism and Sri Lankan Airlines will also start working together now to promote the destination in India. **Ravindran V**, Regional Manager (India & Bangladesh), SriLankan Airlines, said, "Looking at the current situation, the airline has made some drastic changes in its cancellation policy. It has liberalised it to a great extent, as well as extended the validity for cancelled tickets. We are also open to doing charter flights from India."

### Why choose Sri Lanka?

Kimarli Fernando said, "I think we have all changed due to the pandemic. We have changed emotionally and the experiences we seek have changed. We are all looking to being amidst nature and wildlife. As you know, Sri Lanka has im-

the travel agents and the OTAs – the entire B2B segment is important for us," she added.

Supporting the entire summit was **Riyaz UC**, Managing Director of Spiceland Holidays, and Member of the Advisory Committee at Department of Tourism, Kerala.

He said, "Tourism is the first one to get affected and the last one to recover. This is the time when India and Sri Lanka need to work together to overcome the setbacks to the tourism industry. One of the most beautiful island nations, Sri Lanka is getting ready to receive tourists and the Indian travel trade is always excited to promote it. I request the Tourism Minister to further ease the travel formalities to Sri Lanka for Indian tourists. Achieving a target of one million tourists from India is not difficult if you work on the demands of the Indian travel industry. On behalf of the Indian travel trade, I would request Sri Lanka Tourism to give priority to two points: new strategies to attract tourists from India and safe travel with proper measures for protection against the virus." ✦

## CleanStay with Hilton



Hilton has rolled out a new programme to deliver an industry-defining standard of cleanliness and disinfection to Hilton properties. Hilton CleanStay includes new procedures to help Hilton guests enjoy an even cleaner and safer stay starting this summer, from check-in to check-out.

## Akbar Travels ferries expats



Akbar Travels, after tying up with various cultural organisations and corporate houses, has ferried over 6,000 expatriates to Kerala since June 6 on charter flights, including those from Qatar (six flights), Oman (four flights), Saudi Arabia (two flights) and Kuwait (six flights).

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# Charter flights in demand now?

With the current ban on international flights and limited domestic operations, charter flights have seen an instant boost in both interest and demand. Private aviation expert **Kanika Tekriwal**, CEO & Founder, JetSetGo Aviation, helps decode the changing dynamics of the industry and where it is headed.

 Manas Dwivedi

**Q** What has made the charter flight demand surge?

Due to the pandemic, people today are more mindful and cautious when choosing their travel option. Whether it's health concerns or just getting where they need to be, people and companies that have the means to fly privately, but had previously eschewed it, will now be looking at the option due to its safety, hygiene and convenience. Furthermore, whilst flying private, the



**Kanika Tekriwal**  
CEO & Founder  
JetSetGo Aviation

various touchpoints throughout the journey also reduce, making this mode favourable.

**Q** What are some of the requests you've received?

For the first time, we are seeing requests coming from people like never before, from people who weren't necessarily wealthy or would not necessarily travel on Business or First Class. Mainly, new customers are reaching out to us. We are getting close to 20 enquires a day with 70 per cent of it from new customers.

We are also seeing a lot of requests coming from parents whose children are stuck in colleges or

schools in different countries or within India, as well as from families stuck elsewhere, not in their homeland. A lot of requests from Singapore, London and Australia were observed as many Indians send their kids to study in these countries. Looking at the current circumstances, our guests pre-

 Our team is connected with various agents all over the country to fulfil any query that comes to us via various mediums 

fer six or seven-seater flights, as they attract lower risk due to lower capacity.

**Q** What do you think the future holds for this segment?

People will now be using it out


**Some aircraft used and their tentative cost**

Aircraft	Capacity	Hourly Rate
Hawker 750	08 Pax	2,50,000
Hawker 850 XP	08 Pax	2,50,000
Falcon 2000	09 Pax	3,50,000
Learjet 45 XP	08 Pax	2,40,000
Hawker 400	07 Pax	2,15,000
King Air B200	06 Pax	1,25,000
Citation XLS	08 Pax	2,50,000


of necessity and there will be more customers considering it. We also anticipate that both leisure and business travel will decrease, considering the rise in usage of video calls and conferencing in the last two months, because of which the number of trips people take will reduce. So, existing customers may not travel as much as they used to. However, business travel will rebound ahead of leisure travel.

**Q** Do you get customers through travel agents?

Yes, we do receive requests from the agents. Usually, they engage with us by taking a quote from us and sharing it with the guest after adding their percentage.


Our team is connected with various agents all over the country to fulfil any query that comes to us via various mediums. 






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# GST on tours during lockdown

CA Manish Gadia, Partner, GMJ & Co, summarises the benefits introduced by the finance ministry under GST that could offer this industry some relief. He also takes into account GST on cancelled tickets in cases where the agent is refunded the money or provided a credit shell, as well as GST in case of rent agreements.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has affected not only India but the world at large. Looking at the larger picture it seems the global economy is heading towards a recession. It is an undisputable fact that the travel and tourism industry has been the most affected industry due to the spread of the novel coronavirus. It is

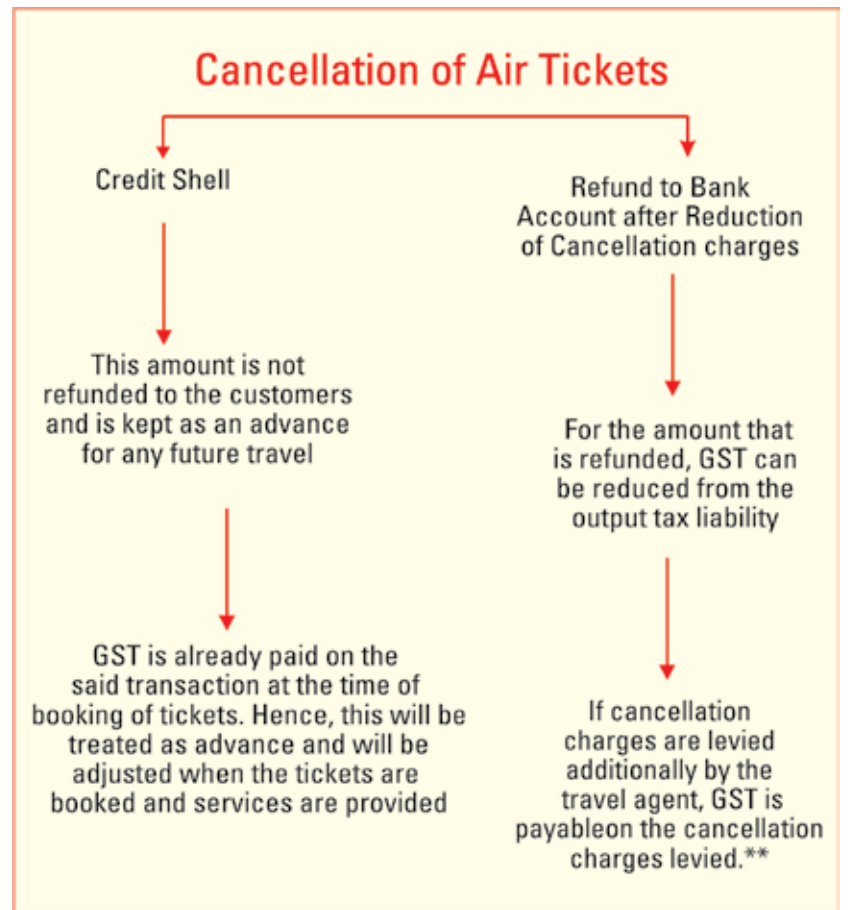
also likely that it would take longer than usual for the industry to bounce back to normal. Hence, in order to provide some reliefs to trade and industry, Ministry of Finance, under the leadership of Nirmala Sitharaman, has introduced various relief measures.

In this article, we have tried to summarise the benefits under

GST that we consider would be of much relief and value addition to the tours and travel industry.

### GST for tickets cancelled

Due to the nationwide lockdown and travel restrictions imposed by the government, cancellation of air tickets booked by travellers in advance was amongst the hot topics of discussion. As travel agents, many tick-



\*\*If cancellation charges are levied by the travel agent, if the original booking of tickets was made on the basis of Basic Fare Model, then no additional GST is payable, however, if the original booking of the ticket was made on the basis of commission model, GST@18% will be payable on the cancellation charges charged by the travel agent.

ets may have been booked which would have been automatically cancelled by the airlines due to travel ban. With regard to the cancellation of air tickets and the GST paid on them, you can refer to the chart herein.

### GST on rent

Due to the lockdown, offices, malls, shops, schools, hotels, etc., everything is shut. However, the rent metre for the same stays on. In such times, there is a question regarding the GST liability on the rent amount.

In some cases, the landlord and tenant have agreed mutually for lower lease rents during the lockdown period, and in some cases the landlords have waived off the lease rentals for the lockdown period. However, as per the agreement, the lease rent is fixed and payable at specified intervals (e.g. monthly, quarterly) hence, the question arises whether GST would be payable on the actual amount of rent recovered (i.e. lower rent or nil rent) or at the amount as specified in the

agreement? GST shall be payable on the amount as specified in the agreement.

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



CA Manish Gadia  
Partner, GMJ & Co

Relief for return filing, interest and late fee		
Forms	Due date	Comments
GSTR 3B for taxpayers having turnover more than Rs5 cr in preceding Financial year (For the month of February, March and April 2020)	20th of the month following tax period	No Penalty and late fees will be charged if the returns are filed by June 24, 2020 but Interest shall be levied from 15 days after due date at the reduced rate of 9% p.a. but if not filed till June 24, 2020 than interest @18% and late fees shall be applicable from original due date.
GSTR 3B for Taxpayers having turnover of more than Rs1.5 cr but less than Rs5 cr in preceding Financial year (For the month of February, March and April 2020)	22nd/24th of the month following tax period	No Interest and late fees will be charged if the returns for the month of February and March are filed on or before June 29, 2020 and return for the month of April is filed on before June 30, 2020. However if the return is filed beyond the specified dates reduced rate of Interest 9% p.a. will be charged if filed till September 30, 2020.
GSTR-3B for Taxpayers having aggregate turnover up to Rs1.5 cr in preceding FY (For the month of February, March and April 2020)	22nd/24th of the month following tax period	No Interest and late fees will be charged if the returns of February are filed up to June 30, 2020 and March are filed up to July 3, 2020 and April are filed up to July 6, 2020. However if the return is filed beyond the specified dates reduced rate of Interest 9% p.a. will be charged if filed till September 30, 2020.
GSTR-1 (Monthly)	11th of the succeeding month	No late fees will be charged if the returns for the month of March, April and May 2020 are filed on or before 30th June.
GSTR-1 (Quarterly)	30th of the month succeeding the quarter	No late fees will be charged if the return for the Quarter ending March 31 is filed on or before June 30.

\* Late fee for the returns of July '17 to January 2020 has been waived off for nil tax liability and reduced to Rs500 per return in case of tax liability.

# B2B to e-showcase their products



Jagat Mehta  
President, ETAA

The Enterprising Travel Agents Association (ETAA) has planned a series of webinars to help its B2B agent members showcase their product offerings to B2C agents, including non-members.

Hazel Jain

The Enterprising Travel Agents Association (ETAA) will conduct a series of webinars to help all its B2B members showcase

their products to the industry pan India. Jagat Mehta, President, ETAA, says, "We want to create a platform for our B2B members to enable them to showcase their products to B2C travel agents. Our first webinar will be held

on Wednesday, July 1, 2020 at 12pm. It will be open for non-ETAA travel agencies as well." ETAA has B2B members that specialise in various segments of tourism such as transport, forex, visa, MICE, wildlife, photogra-

phy tours, history and culture, agro tours, sports, adventure, medical tours, destination weddings, weekend getaways, DMCs, etc. In fact, cruises and hotels are also part of the ETAA members' list.

Conceived in 1996, Enterprising Travel Agents Association has been growing in numbers ever since. Headquartered in Mumbai, it has regional chapters and conveners all over India.

# Issue of credit shells needs redressal

Travel agents, unlike airlines, neither have regulatory safeguards nor any control on refunds in situations like the present. **Dheeraj Nair**, Partner at J Sagar Associates and Co-Chair of the Disputes practice of the firm, defines the need to put forth the travel agent's case against credit shells before the Supreme Court.

The legality of airlines creating credit shells has been taken up by the Supreme Court of India in a public interest litigation seeking a full refund of passengers' airline tickets for travels during the lockdown. However, the petition before the Supreme Court only analyses this issue from a passenger's perspective. These pending litigation poses an opportunity for the travel agents. In the absence of any regulatory authority, travel agents must put forth their case before the Supreme Court of India.

## Insufficient knowledge of the operations of travel agents

Every individual, including the Supreme Court judges, are consumers to airlines. Thus, they understand the transaction between a consumer and an airline and relate to the impact of cancellations and refunds. However, non-members of the

travel industry are not aware of the transaction between an airline and a travel agent and thus, cannot relate to the impact of cancellations and refunds on travel agents. Only by placing this information on record will the Supreme Court be compelled to consider, and consequently grant any reliefs to travel agents.

## Direct loss to travel agents

Similarly, Supreme Court judges may be unaware of how travel agents suffer a direct loss if complete refund of airline tickets isn't given. It must be explained that travel agents make advance payments to airlines for tickets booked by customers, on credit. Therefore, if a refund on cancellation is not granted, the travel agent suffers the entire loss of the ticket cost since passengers (whose flights have got cancelled) have not yet, and may not at all, deposit the cost of a



cancelled ticket. Therefore, to recover its costs, the travel agents needs a refund from the airline.

## Distinction between date of 'booking' and 'travel'

The difference between the two is very difficult for a layman to understand. The Ministry of

Civil Aviation vide notification dated April 16, 2020 has also conveniently directed the refund of tickets booked during lockdown, notwithstanding the need for refunding tickets, booked in advance, for travels during the dates of the lockdown. This is particularly relevant since many

travels during lockdown were for specific purposes such as summer vacations, weddings, corporate events, etc., which have now been cancelled, and no purpose will be served by crediting a credit shell for that sector.

## Contravention of the 'Civil Aviation Requirement of May 2008'

As submitted before the Supreme Court, the unilateral decision to create credit shells by the airlines is in direct violation of the DGCA Civil Aviation Requirement of May 2008 which expressly indicates that the "the option of holding the refund amount in credit shell by the airlines shall be the prerogative of the passenger and not a default practice of the airline". The lack of water-tight contractual relationships within members of the industry (between airlines and travel agents, amongst travel agents and of travel agents with passengers),

deprives travel agents of any contractually enforceable legal right against the airline or the passenger for recovery of their monies. Moreover, there is an absence of sectoral statutory or regulatory safeguards available to travel agents.

Fortunately, the Supreme Court of India is sympathetic to all stakeholders effected by a court proceeding, like travel agents in the present case. Moreover, decisions of the Supreme Court of India become the law of the country, thus, by being the apex judicial authority in India, the airlines and ministries are duty-bound to follow any directions issued to it. To take advantage of this situation, it is extremely important that travel agents bring to the fore their version of the story to make the Supreme Court conscious of the plight of the travel agents while deciding the matter.

# Commercial contracts post COVID-19

Times like the present are an opportunity to revisit existing contracts and educate oneself to ensure that future contracts are watertight and anticipate such unforeseen situations. Therefore, it is important to be apprised of a prominent contractual phenomenon relevant during and post the manifestation of COVID-19.

The hospitality industry thrives on business and leisure travellers, who may not avail hospitality services for some more time because of the continuing restrictions imposed by COVID-19. Despite the best efforts of the industry, the slow movement of travellers has impacted, and will continue to impact, the hospitality sector at least for a few more months till the scare around COVID-19 diminishes.

## The 'Force Majeure' clause

A force majeure clause typically is a clause to save the performing party from consequences of breach arising due to supervening impossibility. Under Indian law, a force majeure clause derives its validity from the agreement and excuses a party from its obligations under the contract. The enforceability of a force majeure clause depends on the provisions of the contract, terms of

the force majeure clause, nature of default/breach, etc. Moreover, the party claiming force majeure needs to establish a causal link between the force majeure event on the performance of the obligation. It is imperative for industry to understand the scope of a 'force majeure' event and its relevance in contracts.

## An inclusive force majeure clause

Assuming that existing contracts have a force majeure clause, one needs to examine whether such clause includes a pandemic such as COVID-19. Lockdown or business suspension orders caused by the pandemic would typically fall under government actions. Traditionally, force majeure clauses include the component of 'act of god'. Many have tried to contend that COVID-19 falls within the purview of 'act of god' – the determination of which is due,

and perhaps unlikely since 'act of god' are events arising out of natural forces free from human intervention. Therefore, each case will have to be determined on the basis of the contractual terms contained therein to examine as to whether it includes a pandemic or a lockdown for suspension or total waiver of the respective obligations of the parties.

In the absence of an inclusive force majeure clause, parties will be better advised to renegotiate their contracts for suspension of obligations due to unforeseen eventualities and ensure that such clauses are incorporated for future performance of contract. The chances of non-defaulting party being unreasonable are mostly likely, thereby leading to either a stalemate or breach of the contract. Recourse to court is an option available to a defaulting party

considering that the pandemic is a global phenomenon. Though courts are required to interpret the terms of the contract strictly, lately they have been taking a lenient view by providing partial relief to a defaulting party that can demonstrate how its business was effected by COVID-19. The courts may, however, not be able to keep doling out such reliefs as it may open a floodgate of cases. Without appropriate clauses in place, such cases would amount to filing mercy petitions for sympathetic considerations on equitable grounds. Therefore, a prolonged legal battle engaging time, money and resources may not be the best available option.

## Absence of force majeure clause

Contracts without a force majeure clause are governed by Section 56 of the Indian Contract Act, 1872. Section 56

deals with situations where either the contract, or a part of it, becomes impossible or unlawful on account of a subsequent event, beyond the control of the parties. However, a party seeking to be excused from performance of obligation under Section 56 must establish that it is practically impossible to perform the contract. Therefore, merely the contract becoming burdensome or commercially unviable are not good enough reasons to excuse parties from their obligations.

## The way forward

The way forward is to revisit and renegotiate contracts with adequately secure clauses. Realigning the focus from standard breach clauses to event and performance-based clauses are well-suited for any contractual relationship in a service industry. Force majeure is only one key aspect which has come to

the attention of all stakeholders. However, there is still no foresight on curtailment of lockdown or COVID-19. Therefore, industry members must utilise this time to revisit all existing and future contractual arrangements. Such an exercise should not be limited to commercial contracts, rather, it is advisable to seek legal counsel on revisiting contracts relating to employment, infrastructure, outsourcing, financial borrowing, insurances, etc.

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



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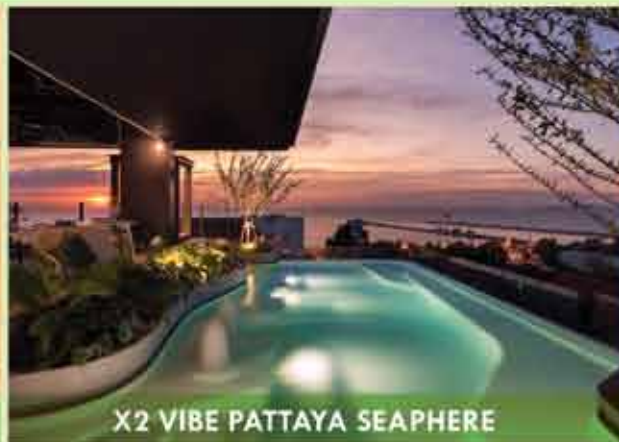


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# Etihad invests in passenger wellness

Etihad Airways is the first airline to trial an innovative airport technology that will help identify medically at-risk travellers and this technology is currently being tested at the Abu Dhabi airport. Neerja Bhatia, Etihad Airways' Vice President, Indian Sub-continent, shares more details.

Hazel Jain

**Q** How is Etihad ensuring safety for its passengers once international flights resume?

We continue to follow directives given by the UAE and international governments, as well as regulatory and health authorities. On arrival at each destination, our aircraft undergo detailed cleaning, a practice that was already in place prior to the outbreak. On flights deemed low-risk, a general clean and disinfection process will be conducted in Abu Dhabi. For any aircraft arriving from a territory deemed medium or high-risk, or if a suspected case has travelled on the aircraft, Etihad will deep-clean and disinfect the aircraft.

**Q** What technology is the airline looking to put in place to facilitate touchless travel?

Etihad Airways is the first air-

line to trial an innovative airport technology that will help identify medically at-risk travellers and this has been undertaken with an Australian company, Elenium Automation. These contactless devices will monitor the temperature, heart rate and respiratory rate of any person using an airport touchpoint such as a check-in or information kiosk, a

These contactless devices will monitor the temperature, heart rate and respiratory rate of any person using an airport touchpoint

bag drop facility, security point or the immigration gate. The system will screen every individual, including multiple people on the same booking. This innovative



technology is currently being tested at the Abu Dhabi airport.

**Q** When do you plan to resume India operations?

We are ready to resume operations to key Indian gateways as soon as current travel restric-

tions are lifted. Currently, Etihad is offering special transfer flights, connecting key cities on its global network. Easy transfer connections via Abu Dhabi are available from Jakarta, Karachi, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Melbourne, Seoul, Singapore,

Sydney and Tokyo to major cities across Europe.

**Q** Will wellness now be a focus for the airline?

Absolutely! In fact, earlier this month, we launched 'Etihad Wellness', a health and hy-

giene programme and customer guide. As an industry-first initiative, we have introduced specially trained 'Wellness Ambassadors' who will provide essential travel health information and care to guests. They will undergo thorough training at the airline's training facilities in Abu Dhabi and will be able to assist guests by sharing advice on travel well-being, detailing out all the health and safety measures that will be implemented during their journey. Etihad's Wellness Ambassadors are currently available 24x7 on e-mail, and soon this service will be available as a web-chat option. In the coming weeks, Etihad will also introduce these Wellness Ambassadors at Abu Dhabi International Airport. Once the airline resumes an expanded network of international flights, they will also be available on-board.

# For a picture-perfect staycation

Eclectic and vibrant, The H Dubai is a gateway to UAE's most dynamic city - Dubai. The 5-star hotel boasts a world-class collection of 236 spacious rooms and suites, a residential tower, an office tower and a dynamic events centre. What's more? It is just a short distance from all of the city's main attractions and business districts.

TT Bureau

The H Dubai, situated on the iconic Sheikh Zayed Road, offers a luxurious gateway to the Middle East's most dynamic city. Located 10 minutes from the Dubai International



Airport and only a five-minute walk from the nearest metro station, this contemporary hotel provides seamless access to the city's main attractions and business districts, including Burj Khalifa, The Dubai Mall, Dubai World Trade Centre, Dubai Frame, La Mer Beach,

Gold and Spice Souks, and Deira Creek.

The 5-star hotel boasts a world-class collection of 236 spacious rooms, suites and serviced apartments. Home to 10 vibrantly diverse selection of restaurants and bars, including Eat & Meat, Moombai & Co and H Bar, The H Dubai leaves guests spoiled for choice and kids under 12 years of age dine for free.

Those looking to find holistic wellness can take advantage of Mandara Spa, but in line with the ongoing efforts to safeguard public health and in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Dubai Government, the Mandara Spa is temporarily closed until further notice. Guests can however make the best use of Quantum Health Club, Peloton Bike Studio and an outdoor swimming pool, with strict compliance



to social distancing and safety guidelines.

A dedicated floor is available for modern meeting, conference and banqueting facilities. The second mezzanine level of the hotel is dedicated entirely to a selection of 16 dynamic meeting rooms of various sizes, most of which enjoy ample daylight. Each

of these dynamic spaces can accommodate anything from an intimate gathering of two right up to 250 people, and offers the latest in audio-visual technology. The H Dubai is truly a destination of life and style, and provides a perfect blend of amenities and location for both business and leisure travellers. The H Dubai has implemented best-in-

class cleaning and hygiene solutions with reinforced protocols in collaboration with a global hygiene and disinfection solutions provider, Diversey. It is also one of the worldwide specialist in developing cleaning and hygiene technologies in hospitality industry, with a strong commitment in sustainable development.



# JTB decodes the 'new normal'

The last few months have been tough on the society, battling with rising levels of infection and fatalities due to COVID-19. During these times, JTB understood that learning and development knows no boundaries and technology in today's day and age provides opportunities to share and learn, says **Tomoyuki Okagawa**, Managing Director, JTB India.

Human interaction is not limited to physical presence. At JTB, we pride ourselves in the business of generating value through human interaction. We are heading towards a 'new normal'. Many business models including that for tourism must be re-written. But, before that, we must step back, introspect and prepare. To prepare for this new normal, we at JTB had a five-step process— Tools (IT Infrastructure), Rules (clear expectation from employees), Norms (revisiting the existing travel and work norms), Culture (to support one another and keep communication channels active) and Resilience (smiling through adversity and continuing the learning process). And, I thank my team for rising to the occasion and creating multiple learning opportunities, from participating in destination

webinars, certification courses and virtual team building activities to ideating alternate revenue models. Life at JTB has been enriching and busy during the lockdown and I am certain that we as a team are ready to bounce back to business.



In future, tourism will totally change. People will value experience more and safety will be a priority. We may see a change in the method for destination selection from a previous herd behaviour to search for unique uncharted and safe territories that have clear guidelines.

I believe domestic travel will take a bold lead to beat down

the 'lockdown fatigues', as short-breaks and weekend travel is believed to be the antidote to 'stress'. Sensing a long-term lull in overseas travel, the Ministry of Tourism launched 'Dekho Apna Desh', which I feel is a phenomenal step. Even veterans in travel and trade are yet to explore the magnificent offerings in

Nothing in life can ever replace face-to-face interaction, but virtual events come a close second

India with destinations in Northeast, Kerala, Thar Desert, etc. We still need a lot of work on MICE infrastructure in the country and I hope the government will soon look towards this direction.



Lastly, I would like to talk about virtual tourism, which is going to be the futuristic trend in the travel and tourism industry. Nothing in life can ever replace face-to-face interaction and the joy of touching the sea waves or climbing up a mountain. But, in today's times, virtual events

come a close second providing us a much-needed platform to connect and experience. Virtual events have evolved and become very engaging with 3D-Avatars, virtual reality, 360-degree views and a lot more. They certainly are here to stay.

Even post the lifting of the long lockdowns and reopening of borders, travel will have its own new protocols where hygiene and safety will be a priority along with a contactless journey. Travel in the coming days will have facets of responsible consumption and tourism. We will have to reinvent and innovate ourselves not only in the way we work but also what we do and how we work.

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



Tomoyuki Okagawa  
Managing Director  
JTB India



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# IndiGo's flight to revival & charters

Sanjay Kumar, Chief Strategy & Revenue Officer, IndiGo, shares insights on the airline's activities, plans for revival and future strategies, along with benefits that travel agents can avail via IndiGo's newly-launched charter services. He also shares details on the cash refunds initiated by IndiGo.

 Manas Dwivedi

**Q** How has demand been post resumption of operations?

We were pleasantly surprised, with the booking trends showcasing a consistent demand even after the first few days of flying. Even though aircraft occupancy is not the same as the pre-lockdown level, it is encouraging that the demand is sustaining even a month after resuming scheduled flights; the travel trend keeps going up in terms of unit revenue and future bookings. Where we stand now, we think 30 per cent of capacity is too low; we feel bullish about going to 50 per cent.



Sanjay Kumar  
Chief Strategy & Revenue Officer  
IndiGo

**Q** Tell us about the charter service and how can agents or tour operators participate?

Charter flights are certainly an emerging trend and we foresee demand for a customised flying experience, with people prioritising safety and social distancing during air travel. So far we

have seen demand for charter services from organisations for their employees, and individuals for safe travel with their families. We are also seeing a sustained demand for international charters for repatriation of Indians

*Agents need to book domestic charters at least 10 days in advance, while at least 3 weeks are required for international charters*

stranded abroad. We are flying around 60-70 charters a week including all cargo missions, both international and domes-

tic. Travel agents can apply for domestic trips for individuals, families, corporates or leisure groups via our website or directly call our sales team. For international charters, which are mainly repatriation flights at this point, these have to be approved by the relevant Indian Embassy and, again, initial application with IndiGo can be submitted on our website. Agents need to book domestic charters at least 10 days in advance, while at least three weeks are required for international charters, to arrange the requisite approvals. A number of travel agents are exploring this opportunity for their clients, and our sales team is always at service to meet such requirements in a seamless and efficient way.

structure problems, but we are making steady progress. The number of flights are increasing, some of the markets are showing business improvements as well. Therefore, we believe that the global aviation market will rebuild itself from this halt. So, we may have a challenging situation currently in the short term, but we are optimistic that India will continue to deliver growth of passengers in years to come.

We have undertaken measures like negotiating better prices and terms with our partners, staggering pay cuts, placing our discretionary expenses on hold, and deferring certain capital expenditure projects to reduce costs.

16, 2020, to customers and our travel partners. We have also started adjusting the credit shell amount prior to March 25, for travel agents. In addition, we are also following the normal cancellation and refund policy for the booking/travel getting affected due to the limitations put by various state governments. After the skies opened up and bookings grew, we extended the benefit of cash refunds to our travel agents and customers by revising our cancellation policy. To make it hassle-free, we have empowered our customers to make a choice digitally, to be able to either claim a full refund or rebook alternate flights at no extra charge. This refund is over and above the directive issued by DGCA to refund ticket amount for flights booked and scheduled to travel during lockdown period from March 24, 2020 to May 03, 2020.

**Q** Has COVID-19 considerably altered your future plans?

There are, undoubtedly, infra-

**Q** How are you addressing customer grievance of refunds?

IndiGo has offered refunds against the DGCA order of April

 The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTC) has laid out its new guidelines - Safe & Seamless Travel - including testing and tracing, following medical evidence, to ensure people can enjoy 'Safe Travels' in the new normal.

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# Singapore stands with the travel trade

As the world adjusts to the new normal of managing with COVID-19, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) organized a webinar titled “Singapore Tourism Connects – Panel Discussion and Product Update” on 29 May 2020 to share the various initiatives and engagement efforts in Singapore.



Hazel Jain

Attracting 1,200 participants, the webinar provided an update on the COVID-19 situation in Singapore, the measures taken, upcoming tourism developments and the support schemes for the tourism industry. As part of its “Growing Connections, Achieving Together” trade engagement theme, the webinar also featured panelists from STB India, Wildlife Reserves Singapore and Sentosa Development Corporation.

To support tourism businesses and partners during these challenging times, ‘The Tourism Recovery Action Task Force’ (TRAC) was started to develop and implement strategies to aid the tourism industry and position Singapore for recovery.

In addition, the STB rolled out the “SG Clean” campaign, which provides reassurance that the local businesses maintain high standards of cleanliness and sanitisation. More than 13,000 SG Clean certificates have been issued so far.

Opening the panel discussion was **GB Srithar**, STB’s Regional Director for India, Middle East & South Asia, who said, “India continues to be the third largest source market for Singapore, having crossed the one millionth mark for Visitor Arrivals into Singapore for the fifth consecutive year in 2019. Since January 2020, STB India has undertaken the #UnitedWeStand trade engagement initiative and ramped up our trade outreach efforts through a series of communications, update sessions to raise product knowledge of Singapore’s offerings for both leisure and business travellers. This webinar, conducted in partnership with TravTalk was an effective way of reaching out to travel agents across India.”

## On-ground realities

The COVID-19 situation is an evolving one. Singapore is gradually reopening its borders in a progressive and calibrated manner for Singaporeans and residents to conduct essential activities overseas while



**GB Srithar**  
Regional Director  
STB

✦ This webinar, conducted in partnership with TRAVTALK, was an effective way of reaching out to travel agents across India ✦

- GB Srithar

allowing foreigners to enter Singapore in limited numbers, with the necessary safeguards in place to ensure public health considerations are addressed.

As part of the plans to reopen the economy in a safe and gradual manner, tourism businesses in Singapore will be permitted to resume operations in stages from 1 July, beginning with 13 attractions. As a precautionary measure, most attractions will be restricted to no more than 25% of their operating capacity at any one time, for a start. STB will also allow domestic tour operators to begin submitting their applications to resume operations.

GB Srithar says, “Tourism is re-opening in a safe and gradual manner, in tandem with the rest of the economy. We are not rushing to re-open, as we want our visitors to have peace of mind when they are here. Our businesses have to adhere to rigorous standards of safe management. Many are also being certified under SG Clean, our national mark of excellence for safety and hygiene.”

The STB India has also ramped up consumer engagement efforts through various interesting initiatives. An online six-part edutainment series “Try this at home, Tips from Singapore” which features Singaporean personalities from

sneaker artist Mark Ong to cook, food writer and television host Sarah Huang Benjamin, was launched on STB’s social media platforms. Through these videos, STB hopes to inspire viewers to explore and develop their passions.

“While our international friends cannot travel to Singapore just yet, we will continue to bring Singapore to them. STB embarked on a digital initiative with Zomato for “Zomaland@home during the first two weekends of June, featuring Singapore artistes and their collaborations with Indian talents, showcasing their passions across food, music, stand-up comedy and more. STB also partnered popular nightclub Zouk, to bring three virtual parties to our international audiences in May 2020.”

## Sentosa prepares for the restart of Tourism

Health and safety is high on the priority list for Sentosa Development Corporation (Sentosa) because it receives so many visitors. **Jacqueline Low**, Director of Sales, Business and Channel Development, Sentosa

to physically visit us. In the current and subsequent stages, we begin to welcome guests to the island with good programs and campaigns.”

She explains that Sentosa has been very strict about safety measures to ensure the wellbeing of guests, such as cleanliness and regular maintenance of common areas. The island is easily accessible



**Jacqueline Low**  
Director of Sales, Business and  
Channel Development, Sentosa  
Development Corporation

to the general public and hence there are temperature checks at entry points to all establishments within Sentosa. “All premises on Sentosa have also implemented SafeEntry, a nation-wide check-in system that facilitates contact tracing. This is apart from the safe-distancing measures in queues, restaurants, intra-island transport, attractions,

resuming some of our operations and welcoming guests back to the island.

SDC has also continuously engaged its partners in India. “India has been our top source market for more than 10 years now. We have also updated our Preferred Partners scheme in light of the current situation. We had earlier announced our Sentosa-Brani Masterplan and we are also looking at the Smart Sentosa project,” Low says. The first milestone of the Sentosa-Brani Masterplan is the Sentosa Sensoryscape, a 30,000sqm multi-sensory walkway. The S\$90 million walkway is expected to be completed in 2022, which is Sentosa’s jubilee year celebration.

## WRS’s promise

Meanwhile, Wildlife Reserves Singapore (WRS) is ready to re-open its three day parks – Jurong Bird Park, River Safari and Singapore Zoo - in Phase 2 of the country’s gradual transition from the lockdown. To allow the organisation to focus on its day-time operations first, Night Safari will be re-opened at a later date, subject to approval.

A key aspect of WRS’ re-opening strategy is to maintain high standards of hygiene and cleanliness. All its wildlife parks are SG Clean certified, and anti-microbial coating is being used to enhance safety across high-touch points. This will be supported by hourly cleaning protocols.

**Jean Choi**, Vice President of Sales, Wildlife Reserves Singapore says, “The wellbeing of our guests, staff and animals remains our priority. In order to operate responsibly and to respect safe distancing, we are taking a number of steps to manage the flow of guests in and around our parks. These include operating at reduced park capacity and asking our guests to pre-book their tickets and arrival times online. We will use technology to help us monitor in-park numbers and spacing within our parks and also step up use of contactless payment solutions. All visits will be logged for contact tracing and guests will be reminded to

wear a mask at all times while practising safe distancing, so that everyone can enjoy a safe day out together.”

WRS constantly innovates and experiments with new ways to reach people confined at home and engage with them. Through the #GreatIndoorsWRS, updates were shared very regularly with the public on social media, where action from our wildlife



**Jean Choi**  
Vice President of Sales  
Wildlife Reserves Singapore

parks also reached people during the lockdown. Bookings for virtual hang-outs with WRS’ animal family and their care teams were also launched with the ‘Hello from the Wild Side’ programme. Choi adds, “India is special to us and we have nurtured relationships in this market for many years, so we continue to work with STB and the authorities to reopen our nocturnal park, Night Safari too, and look forward to the day when international travel can resume safely.”

## A calibrated approach

“When we are ready, we will clearly communicate with our partners in India so they know what is expected when travelling from India to Singapore”.

Concluding the session, Srithar had a message to the travel trade. “I want everyone to know that the STB stands with you. We have ramped up our trade outreach program and are in constant touch with our trade partners across India. We are working on some joint marketing initiatives which might help in reaching out to the consumer client base in a more meaningful manner. We are also devising ways in which we can help you reach out virtually to Singapore tourism stakeholders and DMCs who are interested in the India market.”

## Singapore Clean (SG Clean) Campaign

The SG Clean campaign aims to raise the hygiene standards and transform the cleanliness level of public spaces, and rally operators to take ownership by adopting the SG Clean Quality Mark. Under the campaign, the SG Clean quality mark is rolled out to various sectors, covering premises with high human footfalls including hotels, tourist attractions, shopping malls and F&B outlets. To obtain this mark, operators will have to pass audits that certify that their premises have adhered to sector-specific sanitisation and hygiene checklists and advisories. SG Clean certified tourism establishments can be identified by the certificate, posters, decals and badges.

Development Corporation, says, “We like to think that in every crisis there are always new opportunities to be discovered. We are now thinking about how business can be done differently. At Sentosa we align our recovery with Singapore’s phased recovery too. In the early stages, we actively engage our trade partners and guests with interesting and differentiated virtual content as they are unable

hotels, among other diverse offerings. For our guests’ peace of mind, the majority of our Island Partners, including Resorts World Sentosa and Madame Tussauds Singapore, have already been awarded the SG Clean quality mark, as with all SDC-owned premises,” Low adds.

With the gradual re-opening of the economy, we look forward to

# 'Grand' stand against COVID

As part of its contribution to the local community and frontline workers in the fight against COVID-19, The Grand Dragon Hotel Ladakh has been serving meals and distributing protective equipment such as face masks.

 Nisha Verma

The Grand Dragon Hotel Ladakh has been helping the community and frontline workers through various initiatives, contributing in the fight against COVID-19 in the newly carved Union Territory of Ladakh.


Sharing details of initiatives being taken is **Danish Din**, Director, The Grand Dragon Hotel Ladakh, who says, "Our kitchen team has been preparing fresh, wholesome and healthy lunch and dinner since March 24,

2020 for the doctors, nurses and staff of the isolation ward of SNM Hospital, Leh. We continue to provide these meals and will do that till it is required."

Another step was to provide meals in the village of Chuchot. "These are difficult times in which we need to stand together and help each other in the fight against COVID-19. In the village of Chuchot, 50 families were facing shortage of essential household supplies and approached The Grand Dragon family for assistance. The entire family got together and packed 15 items per



box and delivered it to the families of Chuchot on March 28, 2020," shares Din. In fact, they have also been providing masks made in-house for frontline workers in the

UT. "Our in-house tailor and his team have made 5,000 double-layer washable face masks. These masks have been handed over to UT Ladakh Administration to be distributed to the frontline workers like healthcare professionals, police personnel and government staff who are engaged in the fight against COVID-19," said Din and added that on April 23, as a token of appreciation for their work, Hotel Grand Dragon provided lunch to the 800 frontline warriors of District Police Leh and Traffic Police Leh. 



## Travel agents and their protection are vital

► Contd from page 5

### Kochi

"A small company like ours lost Rs5 lakh of one particular client who stopped dealing with us when Jet Airways defaulted. But if an agency comes up short of even Rs1000, his ticket stock is withdrawn even if he has given a bank guarantee covering these amounts. Accordingly, if any airline is to operate to a particular country, there should be some form of insurance cover for agencies in case of default by this concerned airline. This should be one of the conditions for any airline to operate in any country."



**Shравan Bhalla**  
CEO, Highflyer & General Secretary, OTOAI

### Delhi

"Travel agents are vital for airlines but are always left behind. We hardly get credit when we buy tickets from airlines, but when it comes to refunds, especially during these challenging times, most airlines are not willing to refund the amount or are taking more and more time without realising that our clients expect their refund from us the same way they pay us. I am sure IATA is working closely on taking this issue up with airlines."

Inputs by Hazel Jain



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# E-learning will be the way forward

**Dilip Puri**, Founder & CEO, Indian School of Hospitality (ISH), says that for educational institutes, delivering effective high-quality learning online is going to be the new normal. The CEO also explains that one needs to await the feedback on hotel SOPs from customers to help improve them further.



Nisha Verma

Claiming that institutes like ISH are well-prepared for the new normal, **Dilip Puri** said, "In the last three months, all our curriculum, barring the practical side, is being delivered online and is providing more effective learning. By doing that, we have also been able to look at our curriculum from a different perspective and see how much of that can be digitised to create a blended learning op-



**Dilip Puri**  
Founder & CEO, Indian School of Hospitality (ISH)

portunity. We are already delivering the new semester online full time, five days a week, and

## Staff is at risk with hotels doubling up as hospitals

"It can be a mandate for hotels, as getting attached to hospitals is a government decision. While it may not be a bad business decision, if hotels are being paid a decent amount for mild or asymptomatic patients, the challenge is risking the employees. The hotel staff is simply not trained to be COVID-19 workers. Owners and operators of hotels must do everything possible to protect the safety of their employees."

— Dilip Puri

students have moved on to the new semesters. While we had a challenge as one batch was meant to go for internships, we could flexibly bring the later curriculum to these six months and push their internships to January. In education, if you are able to adapt and use technology to effectively deliver high quality learning online, it's going to be the new normal. I'd

✦ This is the time when students can get a ring-side view of monumental changes towards what we describe as the new normal ✦

like to believe that institutions like ISH are very well prepared for it, and the same goes for other academic institutions, as



they are getting prepared for it, too." However, he thinks that it is the best time for students entering education to get trained for the new normal. "This is the time when they can actually get a ring-side view of some monumental changes towards what we describe as the new normal, including the way they consume education and learn," Puri explained. ISH has also made adjustments to its fee and scholarship structure as well as curriculum.

Explaining the same, Puri said, "We have very interesting flexible options for students in terms of ensuring that the meritorious students do not lack the opportunity to study in an institution like ours. We have different categories of scholarships—for women students, for military personnel's children, for special circumstances, as well as on merit. Beyond that, a student support agreement is when a student cannot afford to

pay whatever gaps in the fee they cannot afford to pay today, they can pay that as a deferred payment only when they graduate and get a job."

Commenting on the hospital-ity scenario today, he said that the SOPs that hotels have come up with clearly serve the purpose of giving confidence to consumers to travel.

"However, there has been no consumer feedback on these SOPs because there are no consumers today. Nobody is staying in hotels to tell them what is expected. I believe that when the industry finally reopens and consumers start using the hotel, we will get early stage data as to how these SOPs and programmes have to evolved and improved," he concluded. ✦



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# ‘Everything must have a story’

A shopaholic who loves to travel and be adventurous, **Nagsri Prasad Sashidhar**, Chief Happiness Officer, NAGSRI - Creating Special Memories, says that while FIT business makes her fulfil people’s dreams, it also allows her to explore the world and satiate her creative side. Here’s her fascinating story...

It was always academics for Nagsri. “My father is a nuclear scientist, while my mother has a doctorate in agricultural sciences, which took her to teaching and after Class 10, made science a natural option for me. I took on microbiology and biochemistry as my majors and was planning to do my doctorate in oncology,” she shares.

However, there was something new in store when Nagsri got married. “In the first year of my Masters, I got married. My husband Sashi was a banker and was working at Deutsche Bank at the time. He was settled and doing well, and hence it did not make sense for me to take off to the US to do my research. At that time, we were deciding what to do next,” she adds.

That’s when it all began. While Nagsri was looking for



Nagsri Prasad Sashidhar  
Chief Happiness Officer,  
NAGSRI - Creating Special Memories

an internship in an advertising agency, a sector that interested her, something else was on the cards. “We happened to have a very casual meeting with a friend of my husband, whose wife was a trainer and had just finished training at Thomas Cook. She suggested that as a good option and I gradually realised that my calling was in leisure travel, though at Thomas Cook, we were trained in all departments,” she says. In

2007, she joined Mercury Travels, where she worked for 12 years. Later, Nagsri floated her own company: NAGSRI - Creating Special Memories. “People wonder how I shifted to travel from being a microbiologist. I say that from looking under a microscope, I am now looking at things macroscopically. I realised that FIT has a lot more where I can pitch in, both in terms of creativity and satisfaction. It is important

that our passion translates into our profession. Hence, I have called it NAGSRI- Creating Special Memories,” she says. Nagsri is also a self-confessed shopaholic! “If someone asked me what would be the two things I could survive

✂ Don't try and undercut each other; the pie is big enough for everyone ✂

on, it would be shopping and travel. I am also adventurous, and have done everything from white-water rafting and sky diving to Gorilla trekking in Rwanda. Writing is another thing I like, and I write about my experiences and places. In fact, even when I shop, I like things which have a story to

them. I believe that everything you own must have a story,” she says. Optimistic and enterprising, Nagsri believes that COVID-19 wouldn’t kill travel and considers it a second opportunity for the trade. “Travel is in every human being’s DNA and that’s not going to go away. I believe in the Triple B theory—firstly, you need to have the ‘belief’ that things are going to be alright. That automatically converts into your ‘behaviour’, which is the second B. The third B is ‘business’, which will automatically generate,” she claims.

“Let’s not lose this opportunity and work together as one single team towards doing the right thing. When we go on a game drive, then the game ranger asks us to be seated when they see a rhinoceros. This is

because the rhino has poor vision and can only see the vehicle as one form. The moment you stand up, the picture gets distorted and it knows there is something. Similarly, the client needs to see all of us as one unit. Hence, don’t stand out and try and undercut each other; the pie is big enough for everyone. Just be one unit so that we all are saying the same thing.

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



Guldeep Singh Sahni  
Managing Director  
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# VOIT offers collaborative training

More than 2,300 tourism and hospitality students and academicians from 77 universities around the country have been registered with the training programme by Voice of India Tourism (VOIT), a CSR initiative that aims to educate and enlighten young minds of the industry through daily live learning sessions.



Manas Dwivedi

Industry leaders from different sectors and fields are sharing their experience on video calls, which is complementary and free of cost for students. Lucknow University is the partner for the online virtual training programme for students, which will act as summer internship for them. The month-long programme offered via live Zoom calls and through a closed Facebook group, Travel & Hospitality Skill Development by VOIT, was inaugurated by Prahlad Singh Patel, Minister of State (I/C) for Tourism & Culture, Government of India, on June 10. The programme will conclude on July 11.

Sharing more details, **Vishal Yadav**, Managing Director, IDMS Group and who, as the founding member of VOIT, conceptualised



**Vishal Yadav**  
Managing Director  
IDMS Group

the whole programme, says that the primary objective is holistic development of the knowledge of students through comprehensive training and education. All students, after the successful completion of the internship programme and certain tasks given as projects during the training, will also receive a certificate of a six-week industry training, which will be useful for them professionally. Besides Yadav, the team behind the initiative, work-

ing to make coordination smooth, includes Dharmendra Kumar, Managing Director, Geanis World, who is also an alumni of Lucknow University and played a key role in connecting all the necessary links; and Sunil Mishra, Managing Director, Cosmos Global. Dr Anupama Srivastava, Coordinator, Institute of

*The response from students has been encouraging since they are getting hands-on insights on all forms and aspects of tourism*

Tourism Studies, Lucknow University, is also part of the core team. More than 35 travel agencies and companies are supporting it.

Yadav says that the initiative has received support and par-



icipation from students across the country. "From Kashmir to Thiruvananthapuram and from Gujarat to the north-east states, we have students from all regions. From Jammu & Kashmir and Leh-Ladakh, we have around 170 students, and 75 students from a hospitality college in Puducherry. Similarly, we also have students from Bihar, Vizag, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh," he shares.

Over 1,700 students attended the inaugural session which was presided over by Alok Kumar Rai, Vice Chancellor, University of Lucknow, while SP Bansal, Vice Chancellor, Himachal Pradesh Techni-

cal University and President, Indian Hospitality of Tourism Congress, was the special guest. EM Najeed, Senior Vice President, IATO and Rajesh Mudgill, Honorary Secretary, IATO, also graced the occasion with their presence. Having realised that not everyone



**Dharmendra Kumar**  
Managing Director  
Geanis World

could access live Zoom calls or even good internet connectivity, the VOIT sessions have been linked to Facebook

and made accessible to a closed group, so that students can replay the sessions at their convenience. Till now, VOIT has organised sessions on domestic tourism; hospitality & hotel operations; rural, sustainable and slow tourism; experiential tourism; Buddhist tourism; photography tours; tourism post-COVID; luxury trains as well as culinary tours.

Yadav adds, "So far, we have had a good journey with a number of prominent industry leaders and tourism stakeholders from different sectors of the industry joining us and sharing their knowledge and experience of working in the industry, which in turn acts as the best form of guidance for nurturing young minds. The response and feedback from students and academicians has also been encouraging."

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# 'Honour the Citizen's Charter'

Pradip Lulla, Vice President and Acting President, Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI), says that by not refunding customers' money, airlines and the government are going against the Citizen's Charter that clearly defines the refund policy.



Nisha Verma

Sharing updates on the petition filed in Supreme Court regarding air ticket refunds, Pradip Lulla said, "We have two cases in Supreme Court, in which we have given a writ petition for the refunds and the first hearing was on June 12, where the Attorney General had instructed that we, along with the petitioner, should speak to certain airlines and the Minis-



try of Civil Aviation and DGCA to intervene and inquire. We are still sticking to the fact that refunds must be given to the travel agents the way it should be. One of the airline intervenors also said that refunds are not being paid anywhere else in the world as well, which we objected. We have said that even in India, there are



Pradip Lulla  
Vice President and Acting President  
TAFI

airlines that are paying refunds, though they are taking time. Here, we mean refunds in cash and not credit shells."

He added that since refunds were not coming through, they are facing operational problems and this puts in question the credibility of airlines as well. "Our clients are calling us for refunds and the airlines are delaying them. They have not paid refunds on bookings as old as three months. This is an issue because DGCA did not help out by giving a strong verdict

to airlines. While refunds have not been paid by airlines in India, in other countries where regulators have given a strict verdict, the refunds have been paid," he asserted.

If the government gives a strong directive to airlines, it would help them in doing business in future, believes Lulla. "Airlines are con-

Through our writ petition, we are only wanting the rights that are already there, to be enforced

they are given a credit shell, which according to me is nothing but unsecured credit to the airline without even earning any interest, because one doesn't even know when he/she will travel next. There are airlines like Air Mauritius and Thai Airways that have gone under administration, and there is no guarantee if they will fly again. A credit shell in such a case makes the passenger an unsecured creditor, which is not fair. The Indian aviation industry was the fastest growing market pre-COVID and now when things have gone sour, the least we can do is to maintain credibility," he insisted.

tinuing the policy of no refunds even post unlock. It's a loss of credibility for the industry, not only agents but airlines as well. People will be wary of travelling when we don't treat our passengers properly by not giving them an option of at least getting their money back. Instead of getting their money back,

Lulla added that the government honour the Citizen's Charter they released. "By not refunding the money, they are going against the Charter. Through our writ petition, we are only wanting the rights that are already there, to be enforced. We are not asking for anything more than that," he opined.



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# Scan and fly at Delhi Airport

Videh Kumar Jaipuria, CEO, Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL), says that through technology and updated processes, including suspension of stamping of boarding passes, the airport now ensures a higher level of sanitisation and touchless travel to boost passengers' confidence and their airport experience.

 Nisha Verma

**T**he preparations at Delhi Airport can be divided into four Ps of protection against COVID-19 — People, Place, Processes and Passengers, says Videh Kumar Jaipuria.

**People**  
"By 'People', we refer to those working at the airport who are going to service passengers when they arrive. Hence, we have put in place a safe-working SOP. Aarogya Setu App is also mandatory because it helps in contact tracing. There is also regular thermal screening and nobody is allowed inside the offices without undergoing the same. We've made norms for PPE depending on risk profiles of different roles, which is in line with the recommendations of Ministry of Health. We also have a 24x7 emergency helpline

in case any support is required, and there are regular trainings for implementing these safety measures," he explains.

**Place**  
This refers to deep cleaning of the airport. While the two-month shutdown of commercial operations was effectively utilised to sanitise and deep clean the air-

*There is e-boarding, which doesn't require any stamping, and one can order on the App if they want an F&B product and then go and pick it up*

port premises, a few additions have now been included in the way the place is maintained. Jaipuria says, "In terms of air conditioning, we introduced



Videh Kumar Jaipuria  
CEO, Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL)

more fresh air into the system. In fact, we are changing the air inside the terminal every 10 minutes. We have six rotations of air in an hour, which means that the temperature inside the terminal may not be as comfortable as it was in the past, but is much safer. Even when the air comes inside the terminal, we have handling units fitted with UV-light and the air gets disinfected and goes through HEPA filters to make sure that people

get the safest air possible inside a public building."

**Processes**  
While Delhi Airport is already following the SOPs and processes circulated by Ministry of Civil Aviation, it has gone a notch higher in ensuring passenger safety, claims Jaipuria. In fact, he says that Delhi Airport now has something called 'Scan and Fly', where on scanning a barcode, the system generates a boarding pass. "There is e-boarding, which doesn't require any stamping, and one can order on the App if they want an F&B product and then go and pick it up," he adds. "Whether it is for check-in baggage or security,

## Key findings of survey at Delhi Airport

90% passengers are confident that aviation sector is well-prepared to handle the crisis

Business travel and VFR traffic is back at pre-COVID level at Delhi Airport

Holiday travel, once a major chunk of traffic at Delhi Airport, has been replaced by 'distress travel'

BCAS (Bureau of Civil Aviation Security) has done away with frisking for some time. We have put in technology so that there is no stamping of boarding pass.

**Passengers**  
The CEO says that while the airport is doing everything it can, passengers, too, will now

have to be more mindful of how they travel or conduct themselves at an airport. "I call it MDH - Masks Distancing Hands. Passengers need to wear masks and ensure they are maintaining social distance and sanitising their hands regularly. Inside the airport, we have 400 points for hand sanitisation," he shares.



An RCI India survey reveals that at least 47% families surveyed are ready to travel in 2021, while 42% have said that they are ready to travel in the next 6-9 months itself.

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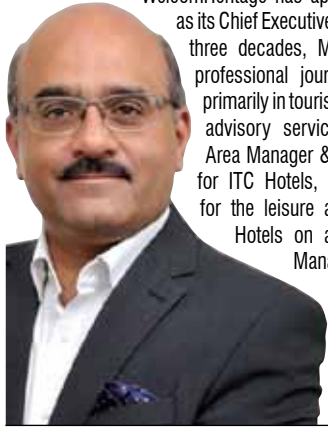
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## WELCOMHERITAGE New Delhi



WelcomHeritage has appointed **Abinash Manghani** as its Chief Executive Officer. In a career spanning three decades, Manghani has traversed his professional journey wearing several hats, primarily in tourism, hospitality and real estate advisory services. His last position was Area Manager & Head Travel Industry Sales for ITC Hotels, where he was responsible for the leisure and luxury verticals of ITC Hotels on a national basis, and Area Manager for the group's hotels in North India. Manghani began his career with ITC after joining the Welcomgroup Maurya Sheraton, New Delhi.

## THE LEELA PALACE Udaipur



The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts has appointed **Vikram Aditya Singh** as the General Manager of The Leela Palace Udaipur. He comes with a rich experience of over two decades wherein he has been associated with some of the most iconic domestic and international hotels. Singh started his career with Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts in Seattle, Vancouver and Chicago, and then moved on to The Oberoi Udaivilas as Head of Food & Beverage. He helmed various roles and responsibilities with several properties under the Taj Group and Alila Hotels. His last assignment was with The Lodhi, New Delhi as Vice President and General Manager.

## COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT Nashik



**Sudhanshu Kumar Singh** joins as General Manager at Courtyard by Marriott Nashik, Maharashtra. He comes equipped with decades of experience and expertise in all departments of hospitality. During his entire career span, he has played diverse roles in different operations. Earlier to the assignment, Singh was General Manager at Fairfield by Marriott Visakhapatnam, Marriott Hotel & Convention Center – Hyderabad, Marriott Courtyard – Hyderabad, Fairfield by Marriott – Indore.

# Agents to alter modus operandi

Travel Consul has released the results of its survey that reveal the impact of COVID-19 on travel agents and tour operators in India, and the future recovery of the sector. Most trade stakeholders say that they have had to adjust their business model to changing times by focusing on training programmes and investing in technology.



Travel Consul, a leading international travel marketing alliance, has revealed some fascinating insights through its recent survey. Conducted across the country,

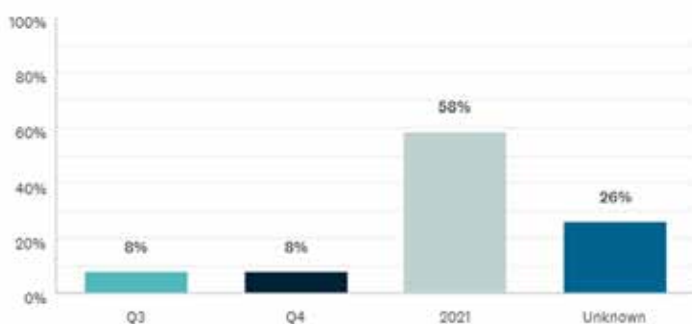


the survey had agents and operators disclose their apprehensions about the current scenario, when they think business will come back to normal levels, and even reveal the course of action they are most likely to take to ensure their business survives the pandemic. Travel agents say that they are now likely to consider hotels, resorts and even destinations they have never sold before, while also mulling the possibility of collaborating with suppliers they have never worked with before.

While the tourism industry battles the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak and the resultant lockdowns and flight suspensions, it seems the Indian travel agent/ tour operator is still hopeful of a better future, but in 2021. While 58 per cent believe this to be an appropriate timeline, 26 per cent feel that one cannot be sure when things would get back to normal.

## When do you expect your business to go back to normal levels?

Answered: 65 Skipped: 0

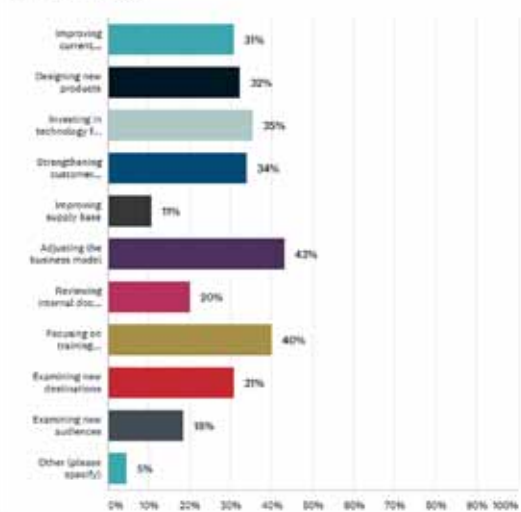


## In the arms of crisis

To ensure their survival amid the COVID-19 pandemic, most travel trade stakeholders in India (43%) have had to adjust their business model to changing times by focusing more on training programmes (40%) and investing in technology for enhancing both product and customer service (35%). Stakeholders have resorted to improving their current products, designing new products, examining new destinations as well as audiences, and strengthened customer service while even improving the supply base.

## What TOP THREE measures is your company implementing or planning to during this crisis?

Answered: 85 Skipped: 0



## What % of destinations (i.e. Tourism Australia, Visit Dubai, Tourspain) you work with actively offered/are offering learning opportunities to your company during the lockdown?

Answered: 85 Skipped: 0



A whopping 82 per cent respondents have said that the international destinations that they deal with have kept them engaged and informed during the lockdown by offering learning opportunities. The remaining 18 per cent, however, were unable to provide a clear-cut response.

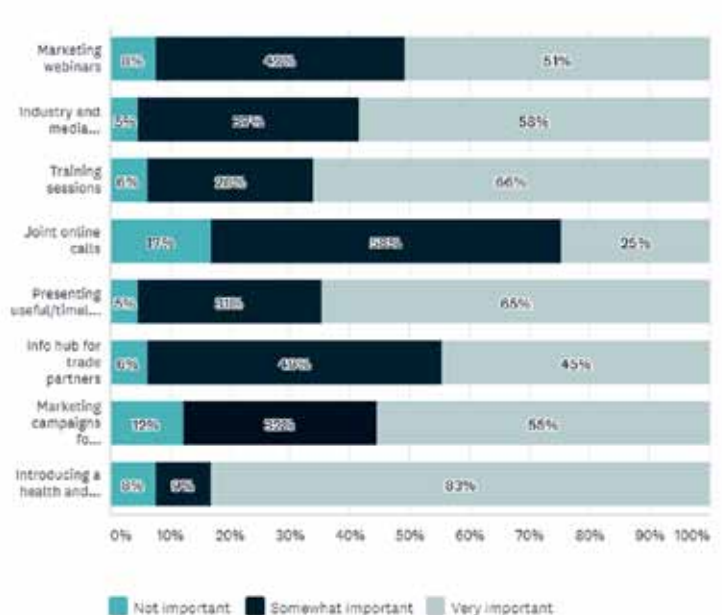
Travel agents also say that while they will have to diversify their source markets even more, two things that they will considerably refrain from are increasing their marketing & advertising spend and offering price reductions.

## What does the future hold?

When asked what it is that destination management organisations can do to facilitate business growth for their partner travel agents and tour operators, most respondents (83%) cited introduction of a health and safety certification as the most important criteria.

## How important are the following actions that destination organizations can do to help you once recovery commences?

Answered: 65 Skipped: 0



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# Handholding travel agents

During IATO's virtual members' meet, **Meenakshi Sharma**, Director General (DG), Ministry of Tourism (MOT), reassured travel agents that the ministry will support them, and announced two major relief measures for the travel trade community.



Manas Dwivedi

**A**s the keynote speaker of the meeting, Meenakshi Sharma, regarded amongst the trade as the go-to person in the ministry for any kind of support from the government or for resolving the issues of tour operators, didn't disappoint IATO members. In fact, she also assured each and every stakeholder of the industry support from the ministry. In her words, "tour operators should rediscover themselves."

Addressing the virtual gathering, she also shared her view on the current situation of the industry, steps that tour operators and the travel agent community could take to better their situation and steps that the Ministry is taking to provide relief to all stakeholders. She said, "The reality is that nobody can predict how the COVID-19 situation will behave, what will be the peak for the cases, when the rate of infection will slow down or when a vaccine will be invented. It will all take time; we all have to be ready to face any situation that comes our way and at the same time, remain ready to adapt. In my opinion, the earliest that tourism will take to come back will be two months after the rate of infection stabilises in the country and we can control the amount of daily cases coming in."

### MOT's initiatives

Announcing some key measures to be taken by the Ministry in due course of time, the Director General said that one major scheme provided by the Ministry will be modified, and certain norms for the approval of tour operators by MOT will

### International promotions

Ministry officials recently held a meeting with key industry stakeholders and associations to discuss overseas promotions and future strategies. "International promotions will now be very different from the earlier campaigns. A different message about India should go out in the market where wellness and yoga tourism will also play a key role. MOT will also work on developing small promotional video clips and social media campaigns to attract tourists to India. We have received various suggestions on how to proceed and which countries to target first."

— Meenakshi Sharma

also be relaxed. She said that MOT is already "working on relaxing certain guidelines."

The Ministry is deliberating on increasing the limit and amount of assistance in the Market-

*We will immediately relax the norms for approval of tour operators so that there is no need of compulsory acquisition of office space*

ing Development Assistance (MDA) scheme, which helps tour operators to promote tourism. MOT provides financial assistance to tourism service providers approved by it for participation in travel marts, annual conventions of various travel trade associations or any other national-level travel/tour association approved, sponsored or recognised by MOT. The plan is to liberalise the MDA scheme for both domestic and international travel and ease the norms. Changes will soon be announced officially after approval from competent authorities. "I think, with changing times, schemes should also change for the

benefit of all stakeholders," Sharma commented.

Another big relief measure that the DG announced concerned the approval/authorisation of tour operators by Ministry of Tourism. Some tour operators during the meeting asked the DG to allow travel companies to shift their office premises to their respective homes and be done with the necessary requirement of having in possession an 'office space'. To this, Sharma said, "Take my assurance, we will immediately relax the norms for approval of tour operators so that there is no need of compulsory acquisition of 'office space' by tour operators during a crisis situation. We will review the proposal and decide the new norms soon."

She also talked about utilising the Champion Sector Scheme for the travel trade. Further, she affirmed that no new scheme will be announced by the Ministry this year due to the limitation of resources and prevailing conditions in the market.

### Inbound is not being ignored

Boosting the morale of inbound travel agents during the meeting, Sharma said although the Ministry is currently looking to promote domestic tourism seeing the present situation, it does not mean that inbound tourism is being sidelined. "For the time being, we will give priority to domestic tourism, but inbound tourism has always been our prime focus. We are in constant touch with the Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Home Affairs for resumption of visa services. We will always consider the interests of all our stakeholders whenever inbound tourism restarts," she said. In her concluding remark, she also suggested that IATO look at increasing its membership from its existing base of around 1600 members.



Meenakshi Sharma  
Director General (DG),  
Ministry of Tourism (MOT)

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