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# TRAV TALK

Staying apart to stand together

Published from : ★ India ★ Middle East

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# DDP launches 'CovidSMART' e-training

DDP Group has taken another big step towards empowering the tourism industry of India, and has launched CovidSMART — a training and certification programme which will ensure that the tourism industry is ready to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and effectively deal with its impact on the sector.

**TT Bureau**

CovidSMART is DDP Group's latest initiative, a programme designed by World Health Organisation-certified professionals and ISO-trained individuals to promote safe travel and help build in tour operators & travel agents the confidence to succeed in this industry, once again. The idea behind the programme is to restore confidence and embrace innovation to reassure the global travel fraternity that

the Indian travel industry has taken all possible precautions to negate the spread of COVID-19. The programme will thus help rebuild consumer trust and help the industry abide by the latest protocols as it reopens the travel and tourism sector. The online training programme can be used as a weapon to fight the spread of COVID-19 and go beyond the standard precautions to reassure travellers of India being a safe country to travel to and within.

Every travel professional should accept this fast-paced change, be prepared and be ready to drive tourism in the future

Sanjeet, Director, DDP Group, says, "All our initiatives during this pandemic have been our way of looking after our tourism industry and this is



Sanjeet Director, DDP Group

sional should accept this fast-paced change, be prepared and be ready to drive tourism in the future. By introducing CovidSMART, we hope to put India in the driver's seat. Now, it is up to the travel industry to encash this opportunity. I encourage the industry to convey to their partners as well as the Indian travellers that they will now be dealing with a COVID-19 certified specialist who understands and will guide them through this jungle." Under

the programme, key learnings would include protecting your business during COVID-19, dealing with emergencies and anxiety related to the pandemic and its impact, and the importance of a PPE kit.

**Get online today!**

To access the programme, log on to [www.covidElearn.com](http://www.covidElearn.com). Whether you are in India or abroad, you can access it anytime, anywhere.

## 'Jahaan hai to Jaan hai'

RH Khwaja, former Tourism Secretary (2010-2012), reminisces how this phrase used by him, on the cover of TRAVTALK June 2011, is relevant to today's COVID-19 times.

**TT Bureau**

In the June 2011 edition of TRAVTALK, RH Khwaja, the then Tourism Secretary, while underlining the importance of safe, honourable and sustainable tourism, had said in the interview, "I firmly believe that the age-old adage of 'Jaan hai to Jahaan hai' should be 'Jahaan hai to Jaan hai', which means that if there is a world for all to live happily, then there is room for life and good health."

This phrase is so relevant today, it seems. Hence, speaking to us again on the subject, he



reminisces, "I have a number of old TravTalk editions in my house with me, which I brought to my Hyderabad home when I retired. Recently, I came across them and this

edition was at the top of the pile. When I read the headline, I remembered that Prime Minister Modi used the same line when he announced the first lockdown."

According to Khwaja, what makes the phrase so apt is that it basically lays stress on taking care of oneself, something that we all know too well now. "One has to be human, caring and considerate, and we have to think that if there is a 'Jahaan' (world), only then there will be Jaan (life)," he concludes.

## Rework the strategy?

TRAVTALK spoke to former secretaries of tourism on the sector not finding a mention in the stimulus package by the government, and the subsequent displeasure. This is what they had to say...

**Nisha Verma & Manas Dwivedi**

Could a change in strategy be the answer to the industry's woes? While all the former secretaries that TRAVTALK spoke to believe that a tourism-specific package is needed, they also suggest the industry identify

immediate needs and put those across to the government in order to convince them.

**Shortlist immediate needs**

It's a grim situation for the industry, says MP Bezbaruah, Former Secretary (2002-2004), Ministry of Tourism; Permanent Representative (Hony.), UNWTO and

Former Chairman, PATA. "As far as I can see the current scenario and tourism, the situation looks grim, particularly for the small and medium enterprises that make up about 80 per cent of the Indian tourism industry. I would have been happier if tourism, being such a big industry, had

Contd on page 5



MP Bezbaruah Former Secretary (2002-2004) Ministry of Tourism



RH Khwaja Former Secretary (2010-2012) Ministry of Tourism



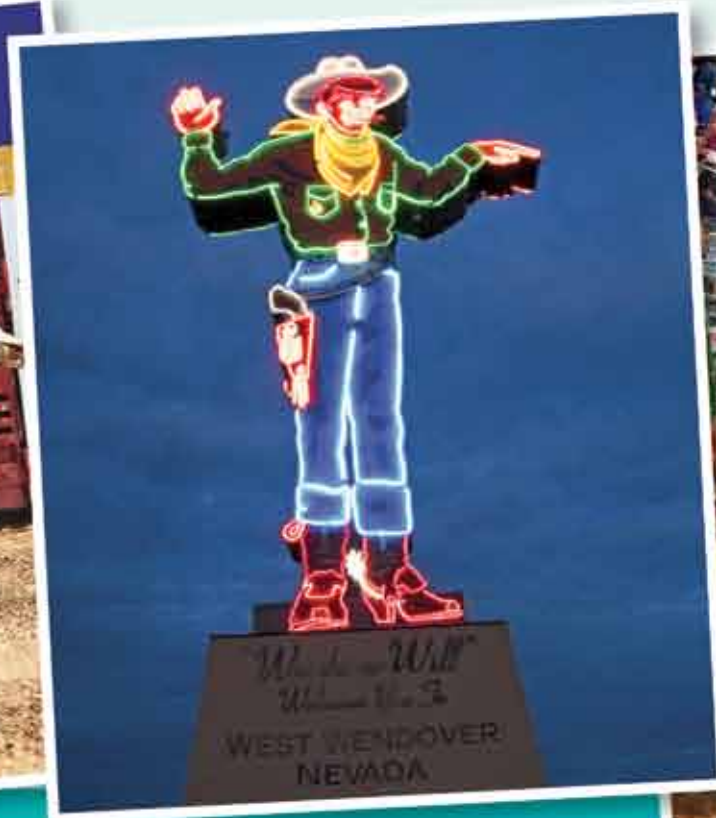
Parvez Dewan Former Secretary (2012-2014) Ministry of Tourism



Rashmi Verma Former Secretary (2017-2019) Ministry of Tourism



# Cowboy Corridor in Nevada



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# GPS goes virtual for 2020

Harmandeep Singh Anand, Managing Director, Global Panorama Showcase (GPS), has announced that the event will be held virtually for the trade and that they will hold it between July & September this year.



Nisha Verma

Sharing details about GPS 2020, Harmandeep Singh Anand said, "We have been preparing for it during the entire lockdown period and we are planning to hold it between July-September, 2020, as destinations and markets will not



Harmandeep Singh Anand  
Managing Director  
Global Panorama Showcase

do the event for any industry now. However, our focus will be travel industry to start off with and that is what we have worked on."

The event will be called GPS Virtual, and Anand is expecting it to be attended by around 10,000 people. "We were

already a paperless and e-event. In 2018, when floods happened in Kochi, we were about to do a virtual event at that time and had the tools in place. With 75-80 per cent of the attendees already using the GPS App, for us to go digital was only a matter of time," he shared.

ers, will be showcasing their products. The event will be competitive in terms of pricing and the purpose of the event will be to get the industry back on its feet. He insisted that the virtual will become the 'new normal' soon. "We may even have it twice a year along with the physical events, which would further be fine-tuned. We will have a new format in 2021. However, it depends on what sort of policies come into place and how receptive the markets are and how we want to take it forward," shared Anand.

The USP of the event, according to him, is that one just needs to download the App. "We are opening our 10x membership to all in the travel industry, free of cost. Those in different categories, namely Gold, Silver and Elite, can get validity till March 31, 2022 if they renew it now. Also, we'll open the base membership for everyone related to the travel industry," he added.

**We are opening our 10x membership to all in the travel industry, free of cost**

Anand also added that at least about 200 exhibitors, including global and local suppliers,



open by then. We have prepared our tool and this time, unlike previous GPS events that were restricted to Tier-II and III

cities, this will be held not only on a national level, but even on a global scale in times to come, with participants from around the world. We have created a platform through which we can

## Format of GPS Virtual

While the physical events will be held 2021 onwards, the virtual event this year will be similar to the former. There may also be one-on-one meetings that participants can take right from their desk and these can be scheduled for anywhere between 15-40 minutes, depending on the requirement. At one go, an exhibitor will be able to address 8-10 buyers. KIT Talks will also be held through one-hour presentations. This will be done on Day 1, and then there will be a B2B event followed by another one-day event, but if need be, this will be extended further.



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# TRAVELTALK

## VIEWPOINT

### Living with COVID-19

Many of us have been talking of life beyond a lockdown as 'post-COVID-19', when in fact there will be a long period living with it before we can usher in a post-COVID world. Preparing to live with this pandemic is our industry's best hope.

How does that translate into the world of travel?

The best way forward is to take one step at a time as we continue to learn more about this virus every day.

This means we are bound to witness a gradual but definite behavioural change – among tour operators, airlines, airport, hotels and most of all, among travellers. A journey starts from taking a flight / surface transport. Airlines and airport the world over are already putting in place health measures as we speak. For travellers though, this would mean planning their entire trip much in advance, which could be a difficult proposition for many Indian travellers. Passengers will also need to reach airports much ahead of time to clear safety checks. Expect longer travel time both before and after reaching the destination.

### Biosecurity a challenge

The 9/11 attacks brought into focus a greater need for physical security at airports and hotels. This pandemic will similarly bring to fore an urgent need for biosecurity and health safety, which unfortunately is harder to track and trace.

Like airports and airlines, we see hotels stepping up to the challenge the best they can. Safety measures are being put into place and all staff is being hastily trained. This also means that costs are being rejigged with more budgets channelled into upping sanitation and hygiene standards. Such additional costs are also putting a huge strain on the already exerted hotel and airline companies. Will these be passed on to the consumer is something we need to wait and watch? This regrettably also means that we may see some airlines and hotels crumble or hopefully consolidate. But like the proverbial learning curve, each day brings with it a new understanding for us and as we go along and understand this virus better, we are a step closer to toppling it. In the end, what does not kill us will only make us stronger.

# Holiday-readiness in India

Thomas Cook India and SOTC Travel have jointly released a survey report that measures customer perceptions and preferences for holiday travel post the COVID-19 pandemic. They surveyed over 2,500 consumers across India's metros and Tier-I & II cities.

### Travel is set to rebound - Indians will continue to travel

The survey reveals that 14% respondents were likely to travel in 2020 once restrictions were lifted. While 45% respondents plan to defer their holiday to 2021, 41% are undecided. The festive seasons were preferred in 2020 - either November (29%) or December (50%).



### Key travel drivers

As many as 72% of the respondents preferred reputed brands across their journey - including tour operators, hotel chains, etc. Health & Safety ranks as the primary concern for 75% respondents; with 35% willing to increase their spend to ensure the same. Also, 40% wish to opt for online channels (website/App) when booking their next holiday.



### Domestic tourism is set to take centre stage

A domestic holiday was the first choice of 64% respondents. Destinations selected were Ladakh (20%), Goa (17%), North East (15%), Kerala (11%); Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir followed closely; Bhutan (17%) in the Indian subcontinent. Destinations at a driveable distance were also preferred, including Coorg, Ooty, Mussoorie, Shimla, Amritsar, Munnar, etc.



### Size of group

Respondents displayed a noticeable preference towards travelling in smaller groups, primarily due to health/hygiene. The report shows that 63% respondents were inclined to travel solo, with their immediate/extended family or friends/colleagues; 25% respondents preferred to travel in small groups of below 20 co-travellers and 12% opted for a group size of approximately 35+.



### Shift in holiday spending patterns: Value-centric & pocket-friendly holidays

The survey reveals that 67% of respondents stated that they would spend less than ₹1 lakh per person on their next holiday, while 11% said that they would spend up to ₹2 lakh per person.



### Booking channels

Consumers continued to express interest in a personal touch/reassurance to their travel booking experience, with 58% opting to purchase holidays through retail outlets or home service (38% retail and 20% home visits).



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# Shortlist demands and then present

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been mentioned in some way during the Finance Minister's announcement on how it can benefit the economic recovery plan. But, this omission itself need not be taken as serious neglect. The government has been saying that focus is on rejuvenation of MSMEs," Bezbaruah shares.

According to him, the industry needs to first identify which measures announced by the government are not helping and what is needed urgently for survival. "Such issues must immediately be taken up with the government and I am sure they will listen. These relief measures are not one-time measures; the whole recovery programme must go on. The Prime Minister has been a great supporter of the tourism industry as part of economic recovery. Hence, I don't think it is the intention to ignore tourism, but if something is missing, it is the responsibility of both the industry and MOT to reflect on it and present it to the government," he says.

## Cooperate, don't compete

**RH Khwaja**, Former Secretary (2010-2012), MOT, feels that this is perhaps the most serious crisis the industry has seen in living memory and so, a tourism-specific stimulus package is the need of the hour. "I must categorically say that if the government does not give a pragmatic package to the tourism industry, it will be doing the country great harm. We should not single out Government of India, as we have federalism, which should work in practice. It is what we commonly called cooperative federalism. Hence, things like taxes and relief packages have to be dealt with both at the macro level and at the micro level. The Central Government should give what it can, so should the state governments," he says.

"Hotels, travel agents, aviation and transport employ people directly or indirectly. All of them will get affected when tourists and travellers don't visit. Hence, everybody in the trade should be prepared for a hard time. I would tell the people in the trade that

they should cooperate with each other instead of competing. One should take a share of the pie and not act selfishly," Khwaja says.

## Industry to re-orient itself

"Other parts of tourism are going to be affected correspondingly. Since civil aviation and tourism are going to be hurt the worst, they should be given some consideration as these sectors will have to re-orient themselves for at least the next one and a half years. Until a vaccine is invented and popularised amongst 7.5 billion people, everyone has to live on their savings for a while. It's going to be a new game altogether as people are going to fear travelling," says **Parvez Dewan**, Former Secretary (2012-2014), MOT.

He believes that the different segments of tourism must be treated differently.

"The tourism industry has many segments, including hotels, restaurants, tourist

guides, taxis, etc. Each segment has a different problem and a different solution to that problem. For instance, I will not travel in an air-conditioned railway coach anymore but would prefer a non-AC one. Since an aircraft cannot be non-AC, I am recommending them to go for flexi glass between the seats. I might be the first in the world to recommend it, but I believe that it's going to happen. Hotels have to switch from central AC to window AC. Restaurants will have to re-orient themselves and many will have to become outdoor joints or go for rooftop settings if they can't have a lawn. Human contact in the travel agent segment will have to be reduced and be replaced with online interaction. There are a lot of things which each sector and segment of

tourism will have to work on," Dewan advises.

## First prioritise, then lobby

Tourism has come to a standstill and it is unlikely that people will travel for pleasure anytime soon, claims **Rashmi Verma**, Former Secretary (2017-2019), MOT. "The hospitality industry will be affected because hotels won't have much occupancy; with fewer people travelling, the travel trade will also be affected. Restaurants and other related sectors will get affected. It will take some time for the tourism sector to revive," she opines.

Verma also feels that while some parts of tourism can utilise the existing schemes, not all under the stimulus package can help the industry. "A lot of concessions have been

offered to MSMEs and most of the tourism units fall within the MSME criteria. However, for revival of tourism, it is necessary to take focused steps, and a focused package needs to be carved out of the main package. For that, the tourism industry should clearly list out what exactly they would need urgently or within the next six months. Then, they can lobby for things within the main package that should be clearly earmarked for tourism," she suggests. MSME is again a huge spectrum and not only tourism, but many other sectors fall within its definition. Hence, unless some money is earmarked for the tourism sector, it will be very difficult for tourism units to get any benefit out of it, Verma feels. 📌



*UNWTO has released a set of guidelines that highlight the need to act decisively, to restore confidence, and to embrace innovation & the digital transformation of global tourism, to help the tourism sector emerge more sustainably from COVID-19.*

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# Where does the industry truly stand?

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the course of tourism and we feel its pulse! While the world talks about the impact of the virus on industries, we delve deeper into the business of tourism in India and understand how it has impacted the very building blocks of the sector – its people!



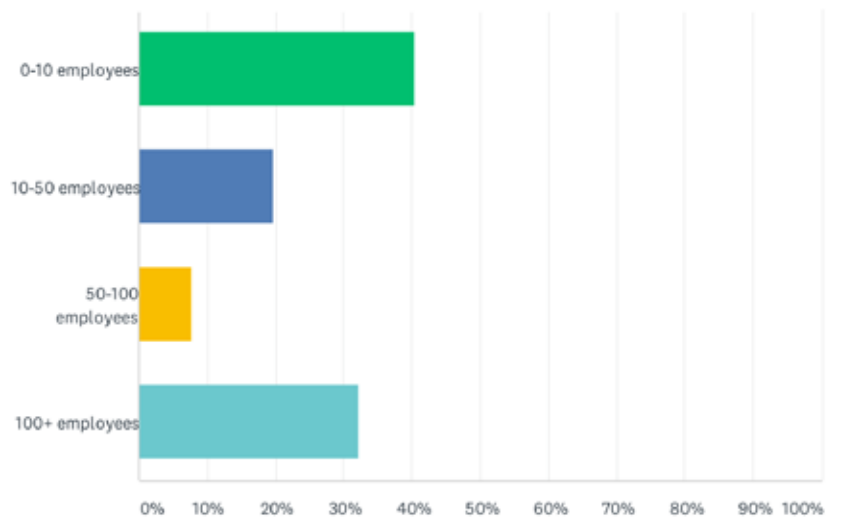
**TRAVTALK** Salary Survey explores the implications that COVID-19 has had in terms of job losses and salary deductions, while gauging how optimistic (or not) the industry is about the future of tourism. In our endeavour to offer a more concerted look at the Indian travel trade's situation at present and its expectations from the future, we surveyed more than 800 respondents that included airlines, travel agencies (domestic, inbound and outbound), GSAs, marketing and representation compa-

nies, B2B agents and DMCs, online travel agencies, as well as allied sectors & services. Here, we share with you some key revelations.

We divided the survey respondents on the basis of the number of people they employed. While more than 40% employed up to 10 people, at a close second (32.32%) were companies that had more than 100 people employed. With no previously-set standards to measure against and lack of experience in having dealt with a pandemic of this scope and extent, it is not easy to

predict when the industry will bounce back, when tourism will resume, or even know when a vaccine will be out. All that one can do presently in a hope to survive and fight the menacing virus' impact is to determine where we stand today, what resources are available to us to deal with the pandemic and its financial impact (and for how long), and what else we can do to ensure our physical safety and financial security, and that of our employees as well. A key finding of the survey has been the resilience of the industry in this difficult time.

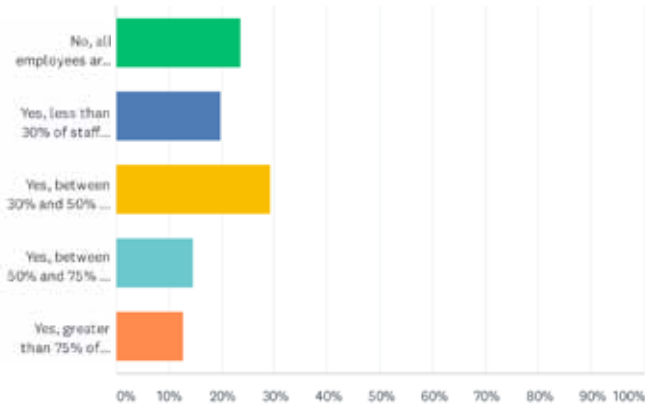
What is the size of your company?



## Salary Deductions

Most of the respondents, almost 30%, have said that due to the COVID-19 crisis they have had to deduct staff salaries between 30% and 50%. However, what comes as a positive sign is that close to 24% said that they had made absolutely no deductions in staff salaries and employees were being paid in full.

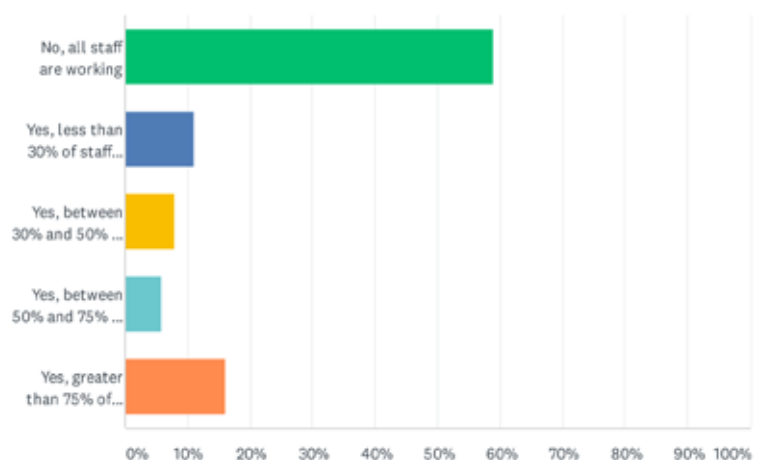
Due to Coronavirus has your company made any changes to salaries?



## Leave without pay

More than half the respondents (59.07%) have said that all their employees are still working and nobody has been laid off or asked to take leave without pay. The findings, however, reveal that at least 16% have had to ask more than 75% of their employees to take leave without pay.

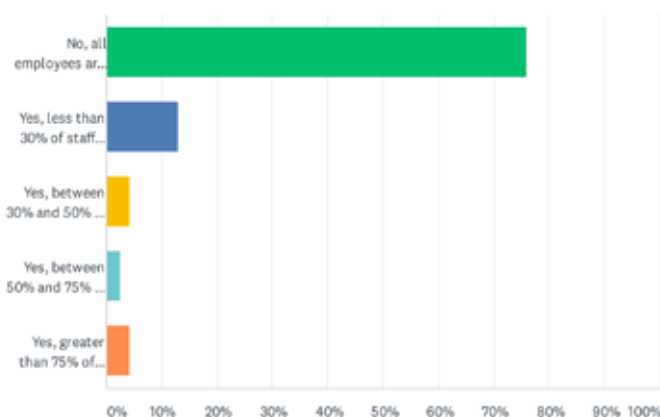
Has your company put any staff on 'leave without pay'?



## Employment termination

Our findings show that almost 76% of those surveyed say that all their employees are still working. While 4% have said that more than 75% of staff has been asked to leave, less than 3% have somewhere between 50-75% staff whose employment has been terminated.

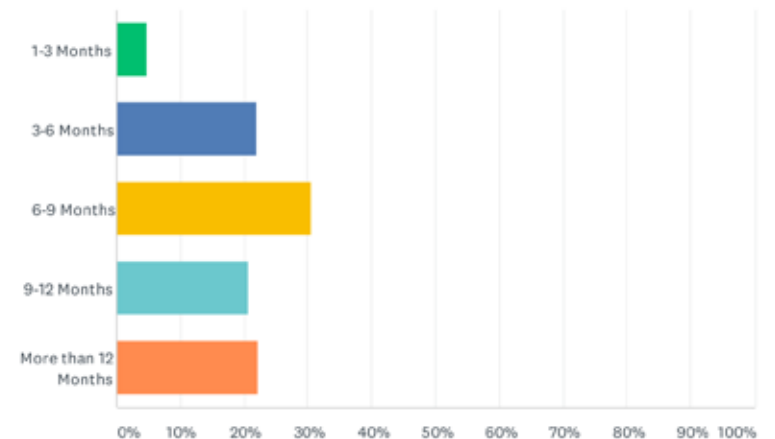
Have any employees been terminated permanently (maybe due to division or business unit closing)?



## Expectations ahead...

More than 55% of respondents feel that it will take up to nine months for the industry to recover, a close second is expectation of recovery only after 12 months (more than 22% of respondents believe it will be so). That said, almost 27% feel that the industry will be on a path to recovery within the next six months.

When do you think the industry will bounce back by?



# A united front from tourism

A united delegation of four travel trade associations - IATO, ADTOI, ATOAI and OTOAI - met the Tourism Minister, **Prahlad Singh Patel**, in Delhi to discuss various grievances faced by tour operators amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Minister heard out the delegation and also addressed issues individually faced by the associations.

**Manas Dwivedi**

The Tourism Minister has assured all possible support and said that the ministry has already reached out to the Finance Minister for industry-specific relief. Association representatives felt content after the meeting and have expressed gratitude to the

Under the united delegation, IATO was represented by **Pronab Sarkar** (President) and **Rajiv Mehra** (Vice President), while ATOAI, ADTOI and OTOAI were represented by **Captain Swadesh Kumar** (President), **PP Khanna** (President) and **Riaz Munshi** (President), respectively. From the tourism ministry,

## Collateral & interest-free long-term loans

The IATO delegation met the Minister to impress upon him the need for direct stimulus for the sector. This was the first meeting post the lockdown with the Minister, and the delegation apprised him about the



**Rajiv Mehra**  
Vice President, IATO

learn other skills and join other industries, which will be a great loss of skilled tourism professionals and service providers," said Sarkar.

They also requested that special collateral-free and interest-free

**If no financial support is provided, all these young tourism professionals will have no other option but to be without a job**

- Pronab Sarkar



Minister for giving them a patient ear. The Minister has called out for a united stand of the industry to fight the pandemic and overcome all the challenges.

**Rakesh Sharma**, Joint Secretary, MOT and **Meenakshi Sharma**, DG, Tourism, were also present. We share individual takes from each association at the meeting.



**Pronab Sarkar**  
President, IATO

acute distress that the tourism industry is undergoing. The delegation impressed upon the

Minister that tour operators are not in a position to pay salaries to their staff since there is no business and they are under acute financial crisis, and requested financial support to tour operators so that they do not close down their business. "If no financial support is provided, all these young tourism professionals will have no other option but to be without a job and wait for tourism to revive or to leave the tourism industry and wait to



long-term loans (5-10 years) be provided to tour operators for revival of business and aggressive marketing once tourism is back to business. The delegation also apprised the Minister to support tour operators on request made to the Ministry of

Commerce regarding enhancing the SEIS for 2019-20 and recommending their case to the Ministry of Finance.

Sarkar assured the Minister that once the situation improves, tourism will be back on track and within a period of 6-12 months, business will grow fast and efforts will be made to retain all jobs. Issue of revision in Marketing Development Assistance (MDA) guidelines was taken up.

Contd on page 8



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# Benefits be extended still

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President of the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI), **Captain Swadesh Kumar**, in discussion with the Tourism Minister, briefed about various issues the industry is currently facing. He said that the meeting was really good and positive. "We are really happy after meeting the Tourism Minister



**Captain Swadesh Kumar**  
President  
ATOAI

ister are for those who have a relationship with the banks. "We made a request that benefits should be extended to those, too, who do not have any relationship with banks. This was one of several positive aspects of the meeting," he added.

Another point which the association discussed was clarity on when the destinations were going to open for tourism, to which the Minister said that he cannot predict when borders and connectivity are going to open, since this decision lies under discretion of individual states. The Minister's view was that Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh will open

up for tourism shortly, and asked the association to be ready for the same.

"During the meeting, we neither asked about tourism task force or anything else, we went to meet the Minister specifically for financial help. We also asked to make MDA norms more liberal and easier. The Minister said they will work on it. The ministry also apprised us about doing a huge marketing campaign in India and abroad," Kumar said.

✦ We also asked to make MDA norms more liberal and easier ✦

The Minister also put focus on promoting SOPs and guidelines which they are making for convenience of tourism stakeholders in the post-COVID-19 era. "We have been asked to follow the guidelines and protocols of the SOP and promote the same among our members and others," Kumar added. ✦



who was very receptive to our requests. It was very clear that the only financial benefit we can get is the measures announced for MSMEs by the finance minister during her relief package announcement. The Minister said he can assist if any issue arises related to that," Kumar said.

One of the strong points which was made during the meeting was that all the relief measures announced by the finance min-

# 'Year of Domestic Tourism'

Sharing his view with the Minister, **PP Khanna**, President, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI), said that his primary concern is the cash flow issue for the small and medium tour operators. Responding to the concern, the Minister said detailed recommendations have already been sent to the Ministry of Finance. Khanna added, "We are trying our best if we can get relief package from the ministry."



**PP Khanna**  
President  
ADTOI

Taking up the issue of licensing in the tourism industry and terming it as a need, Khanna said that by and large, the industry is



organised and such a move will regulate the industry in the right direction. "This is where tourism lacks in getting an industry status from the government. There is a need to have a national tourism database, which can give everybody an idea about how many people are working in the industry and what kind of impact

domestic tourism in the country. This is the right time to push domestic tourism in the right way required," the ADTOI President said.

He also asked for a national policy on guiding people on how to promote domestic tourism, which can also comprise a national task force for domestic tourism, to work together with states, Centre, travel trade, hotels and other stakeholders. The Minister agreed on having a comprehensive study

✦ This is the right time to push domestic tourism in the right way required ✦

tourism has. Licensing should be taken seriously now and relevant data should be put on the website with the details of registered tour operators," he said.

Emphasising on domestic tourism and its need, demand and popularity in the post-COVID-19 era, Khanna said that the government should take concrete steps to promote domestic tourism aggressively in the country. "I believe, from now and till 2021, the year should be declared as the year of domestic tourism. Even our Prime Minister is asking to focus on domestic tourism so the ministry should also think about this and take steps to push

on patterns and behaviour of tourists, and collecting data from state governments. Apart from this, Khanna also demanded revision in MDA norms and funds for domestic tour operators. According to him, the current given funds are not enough to set up booths and stalls at travel and trade fairs. ✦

Contd on page 9 ►

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## 'Expand working capital'

► Contd from page 8

In continuation with its effort to highlight the issues and concerns of the outbound industry to those in office of power, **Riaz Munshi**, President, OTOAI, met the Minister to discuss the woes of the tourism sector. During a detailed meeting, he enumerated the relief the association is seeking from the government to help sail the travel fraternity through this tough time. OTOAI, since long, has been advocating a five-point agenda,



**Riaz Munshi**  
President  
OTOAI

and understanding regarding all the issues. He has assured us that roll-back of TCS, not making PAN card necessary for foreign remittances for foreign nationals and NRIs will be taken up with the government on priority. The honourable Minister is hopeful that all these discussions will have a positive outcome and that relief on these fronts will be announced soon. We are also keeping our fingers crossed for the same," said Munshi.

Some additional points which were discussed during the meeting were the possibility of introducing licensing requirements for operating travel and tourism

businesses and about capital inducement for MSME agents, which is currently only available for existing customers who are availing overdraft or loan facilities. The Minister assured that he will look into these points as well. Meanwhile, OTOAI, through various social media updates and press support, is working judiciously to highlight the concerns of the outbound tour operators at various forums. In the wake of an abundance of webinars taking place in the industry, the OTOAI President said

✧ The Minister assured us that roll-back of TCS will be taken up with the government on priority ✧

there won't be any association-specific webinars for OTOAI members. "I do not think there is a need. Even if we plan, we would like to do it sometime in June or when the situation is normal and people are back to their business," he said. ✧



comprising roll-back of the TCS, not make PAN card mandatory for foreign remittances for foreign nationals and non-resident Indians, grant relief from GST, allow outbound tour operators to take interest-free loans and expansion of working capital.

"The Tourism Minister listened patiently to all that we had to say and was extremely sympathetic

## Minar is open for business



With the government having eased lockdown restrictions across the country and the capital, Minar Travels has begun working with permissible staff strength, and sanitising and social distancing norms. The Delhi office has been completed sanitised, and is ready for operation, under the supervision of **HS Duggal**, Managing Director, Minar Group.



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**Breaking News**

- Uttarakhand extends financial support of ₹75 cr to tourism & hospitality sector
- NIMA tying up with local trade associations in states, will not create own state chapters
- Mumbai to be Lufthansa's first Indian long-haul destination when travel resumes
- In 2021, global passenger demand to be 24% below 2019 levels: IATA
- DGFT to devise standard list of documents on filing SEIS claims
- Govt reduces institutional quarantine to 7 days; hotels asked to refund payments
- We must renegotiate terms with IATA by July 1: Sunil Satywakta

# Domestic flights start, int'l awaited

Ministry of Civil Aviation, which allowed the resumption of domestic flights in a calibrated manner from May 25, has said that international operations are still not on the cards, at least till July 2020. The Ministry is also in discussion with airlines on the matter of refunds and will speak to travel agents as well.

 Nisha Verma

**H**ardeep Singh Puri, Union Minister for Civil Aviation, has shared that they have begun operations on one-third of the routes approved in the summer schedule by DGCA, and this will continue till August 24. The decision came a day after Puri said that they were waiting for an approval from the states to start domestic operations. However, Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) could not operate flights to Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal on the same day, which later began on May 26 and May 28, respectively.

In addition, all the flights were put in different bands based on duration, according to which fares were capped to make them feasible for both passengers and the airline. In fact, the fare between Mumbai and



**Hardeep Singh Puri**  
Minister of State (I/C)  
Ministry of Civil Aviation

Delhi has been capped between ₹3500 and ₹10,000.

However, speaking on the bailout package for aviation, Puri said, "The government is having discussions with the airlines on a regular basis. We have already taken some steps to mitigate the long-pending demands of airlines and the aviation sector. In January 2020, fuel throughput charges were rationalised. The central


excise duty on Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) was reduced to 11% in October 2018. The GST rate on MRO has been reduced from 18% to 5% with full input tax credit from April 1, 2020. The proposal to bring ATF under the ambit of GST is before the GST Council, which has

 We have already taken some steps to mitigate the long-pending demands of airlines and the aviation sector 

representation from the states as well. Further measures will certainly be considered."

When asked about refunds, he said that they are in discussion with airlines for this



and will also be talking to the travel agents. The minister further shared that resumption of international flights is not on the cards till July, and they will do the same when the situation permits. That being said, he claimed that they have been successful in bringing back stranded Indians from across the world through a series of flights under the Vande Bharat Mission. 

### Vande Bharat Mission

Under this mission, Ministry of Civil Aviation is coordinating with Ministry of External Affairs and state governments for bringing Indians back to their homeland. In the first week since its commencement on May 7, 8503 passengers were flown back to India.



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# Goa expects tourists from September

**Nikhil Desai**, Managing Director, Goa Tourism Development Corporation, believes that tourism in the state would re-start by September this year. In the meantime, the tourism board is putting protocols in place for service providers, and also working on its tourism policy to make Goa an investment-friendly state.



Nisha Verma

## Q When is Goa expected to open for tourism?

I am optimistic that we would have put the worst behind us by end of August and we will be ready to welcome our visitors from September. I am also very happy to see an increased level of interest among international inbound tour and charter operators for Goa in the coming season. However, in case we are able to overcome the crisis earlier, Goa would not delay

opening its doors to tourists, with due emphasis on health and safety measures for both tourists and locals. Currently, Goa has focused its energies on defeating this pandemic with active cooperation from people of the state.

My take is that business travel will be the first to pick up, followed by leisure, adventure and then MICE. We can hope for normalisation of large events and gatherings that Goa is famous for, by September 2020.



**Nikhil Desai**  
Managing Director, Goa Tourism Development Corporation

## Q What would be the protocols for the 'new normal'?

We are already working on a set of protocols that must be followed by the hospitality industry and the tourists. The situation is evolving rapidly and every 7-10 days, there is a new set of protocols being issued. We will wait for instructions from Government of India and accordingly formulate our own protocols in the best interest of the tourism industry and after

consulting various stakeholders in Goa. The focus will be on ensuring effectiveness of these measures and at the same time, we will have to be pragmatic for the measures to be implemented without any unreasonable escalation in travel cost.

Travel agents will play a vital role in disseminating information as far as new tourism activities and popularising new destinations are concerned

## Q How will GTDC now work to boost tourism?

We will focus on domestic markets and further consolidate our presence in weddings, MICE, adventure and leisure

tourism. We are also using this time to ramp up our tourism infrastructure to world-class standards and focusing on introduction of new services and products. Mopa International Airport is all set to become a reality and functional within the next 18 months, which will be a game changer for Goa's tourism industry.

We are also focusing on completion of Swadesh Darshan projects sanctioned by the MOT, especially the construction of a convention centre at Panjim and completion of Fort Aguada project for promotion of cultural and heritage tourism.

Similarly, we will be launching heritage walking tours, sky dining and completion of all state-funded infrastructure projects in important tourist places.

We are looking forward for sanction of financial assistance by MOT for development of UNESCO World Heritage Site in Old Goa under PRASHAD scheme.

We are also undertaking work for development of hinterland circuit in North Goa under Swadesh Darshan scheme.

## Q Will your dynamics with travel agents change for the better?

Travel agents will play a vital role in disseminating information to the tourists, as far as new tourism activities and popularising new destinations within Goa are concerned. We are looking forward to their cooperation for popularising various services and activities that GTDC will be launching in Goa in the coming months.

## Investors will be welcome

"Goa Tourism will be adopting the new tourism master plan and tourism policy which will be overseen by Goa Tourism Board, headed by the Chief Minister and comprising experts from government and the hospitality industry. We will be looking forward to pitching Goa as an investor-friendly destination in the hospitality space"

– Nikhil Desai

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# What is TARP & what does it entail?

FAITH has proposed the Tourism Aid & Restructuring Package (TARP) to the Tourism Minister to seek specific measures for Indian tourism from the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister. The association states that TARP is a comprehensive six-step plan that will address both supply and demand measures.

## Step 1: Tourism Fund

Set up a 'Tourism COVID-19' fund of a minimum ₹50,000 crore for enabling the tourism industry to meet its salary and working capital requirements, similar to the ₹90,000 crore fund that has been set up for Discoms as was announced in the stimulus package. Considering the punishing conditions for Indian tourism which have arisen from this pandemic, this fund is proposed to be an interest and collateral-free fund with principal payable over 10 years, including a moratorium period of 2 years. To fast track disbursement, this is to be disbursed directly from Ministry of Finance (MOF) against the PAN Card/GST number of tourism, travel & hospitality enterprises. This won't be a grant as the principal amount will come back to the government and will help tourism enterprises stay viable.

## Step 2: Option of a drawdown against Income Tax & GST

Extend the option of a 7-year loan equivalent to the cumulative Income tax and GST of the past two years (FY 18-19 & 19-20) paid by the respective tourism, travel and hospitality enterprises. This can be paid back over 7 years including a moratorium of 2 years on both principal and interest.

To fast track disbursement, this is to be disbursed directly from Ministry of Finance (MOF) against the PAN Card / GST number of the tourism enterprises. MOF has all the data of each tourism company vested with CBDT and CBIC to facilitate the same. Also, interest should be capped at repo rate as it exists currently and the interest to be spread out and funded as a term loan over the period of seven years post a two-year moratorium.

## Step 3: Tourism Tax & Statutory Holiday for FY 2020-21

Due to significantly reduced travel in FY 2021, there will hardly be any tourism business and thus there is not going to be significant tax collection either through income tax or GST.



Thus, declare FY 20-21 as tourism tax-free year both for income tax and GST. For GST, input tax credit should be continued to release cash flow for tourism enterprises.

Also, there be no additional tax levies or cesses on the tourism sector of the likes of a 'Corona Cess'.

## Step 4: RBI Support

❖ A sector-specific impetus for tourism as unlike other businesses, tourism will not demonstrate any cash credible cash flows post lockdown or during FY 20-21.

The moratorium from current six months should be extended to 12 months. The interest component is currently being provided for payment at the end of FY 21 as FITL. It is requested that for tourism sector, this FITL be payable over seven years.

❖ A one-time restructuring of all tourism outstanding(s) that may be permitted for those enterprises which may wish to avail.

❖ Banks and FIs may be requested to adopt a lenient stance and outlook on the tourism, travel and hospitality industry.

## Step 5: Specific stimulus to different segments of tourism

❖ Demand for domestic tourism to be incentivised through both private and corporate travel.

❖ Boost foreign exchange earnings from tourism, increase the value of SEIS to 10% across all companies for a consistent policy period of 5 years.

❖ Abolish implementation of TCS as proposed for October 1.

❖ Money refunded to agents & tour operators to be secured from possible default of airlines.

❖ Exemption from payment of insurance premium for tourist transport vehicles for 12 months without any penal interest.

❖ Create global bidding fund to enable Indian companies to bid for MICE.

## Step 6: Agenda for National Tourism Task Force

❖ Complete waiver of a number of expenses for FY 2020-21 without any penalties at the level of state or local governments.

❖ Refund of cancellations from state government-owned institutions without cancellation charges.

❖ Enable leveraging open spaces in metro cities such as terraces and adjacent areas for F&B to enable compliance with social distancing norms.

❖ Create a tourism consumer demand promotion plan synchronised across all states and Central Government and coordinated by the Ministry of Tourism.

❖ Immediate 'industry' status for tourism travel and hospitality across all states.

## SKY MIRROR

KUALA SELANGOR, MALAYSIA

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### What is the Sky Mirror?

Kuala Selangor Beach is a unique tourist attraction that is only accessible to tourists twice a month, during the New moon and full moon periods.

Most of the time, it is submerged underneath the sea, which make it uncharted on the world map. It is when the tide is ideal that this sand bar emerges, Malaysia's own "Salar de Uyuni".



# Northeast India has its own demands

By virtue of its location in India, the Northeast region has a different set of demands from the rest of the country. **Arijit Purkayastha**, Chapter Chairman (Northeast), Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India, lists down some of them, both for the short term as well as the long term.



Hazel Jain

The lockdown has hit the tourism industry in the Northeast region of India extremely hard. It suffered greatly in December 2019 and January 2020 due to CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) protests, followed by unrest in Meghalaya, and then COVID-19. "These back-to-back setbacks have jolted our tourism and hospitality industries in the Northeast. We have been continuously discussing with the Department of Tourism, Government of Assam, regarding our survival and revival plans as well as our demands," says **Arijit Purkayastha**.

**Non-monetary demands**

Purkayastha says that his team has made demands for the short term as well as for the long term. "For the short term, we ask the government to pro-

vide collateral-free loans for longer duration. The repayment terms should be eight to 10 years. The EMI of loans already secured by operators must be deferred up to March 2021. We also want them to defer collection of any fee for any upcoming trade licence for renewals for at least one year," he says.

The wish list for the long term however is non-monetary in nature and specific to the region due to its geographical location in the country.

"We demand extending the Leave Travel Concession (LTC). As per the Seventh Pay Commission, a Central Government official can avail LTC to travel in Northeast India, Andaman, and Jammu & Kashmir by travelling in any private airline, unlike other destinations in India where they have to travel by Air India



**Arijit Purkayastha**  
Chapter Chairman (Northeast)  
ADTOI

only. As of now, LTC is valid till September 2020. If extended further, at least two more years, we can look forward to a sizeable number of visitors and revenues to the Northeastern states," Purkayastha adds.

**Capping fares under UDAN-RCS**

The Chapter Chairman adds that the UDAN-RCS (Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik) can facilitate and stimulate the region's revival by

making airfares affordable. "The state government should also consider extending additional incentives like underwriting passenger seats to increase the airlines' undertaking operations under this scheme or through Viability Gap Funding (VGF) support. We have some condi-

For the short term, we ask the government to provide collateral-free loans for longer

tions in this scheme that need to be looked into for Assam and the Northeast region. The fare for one-hour journey of approx. 500 km or for a 30-minute journey on a helicopter is capped at ₹2,500 with proportionate pricing for routes of different states and flight duration. Since our destinations are remote



from mainland India – 500 km or one-hour capping should be waived off so that the scheme is available from all destinations in India to the Northeast, thereby making our region competitive and affordable when travelling by air. Also, under the scheme, the airline operator should not impose any landing and parking charges. This is very important," he says, adding that the state government should also lower the VAT on ATF besides providing security and other services free of cost.

**What is VGF?**

Viability Gap Funding (VGF) means a grant, one-time or deferred, provided to support infrastructure projects that are economically justified but fall short of financial viability. The lack of financial viability usually arises from long gestation periods and the inability to increase user charges to commercial levels.

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# Inbound to recover in 18 months

At the first session of 3<sup>rd</sup> TRAVTALK Digital Conclave, which focused on inbound tourism through the topic 'The Reality of No Tourism', panellists discussed the present scenario where the inbound sector is witnessing zero billings and income, and faces threat to its survival.

 Manas Dwivedi

This first session had panellists deliberating on the extent of damage done to the inbound tourism industry and how the government could

would help the industry a great way.

For **Rajiv Mehra**, Vice President, IATO, no one can clearly predict when travel and tourism will truly resume. "For tourism to start, we



"Now, however, my question is: Is tourism going to sustain with the virus? If yes, it is going to be a big challenge for all of us. People will be travelling for sure, but they will be 'travellers' and not 'tourists'. There is a difference!

gic survival package, how much of the available resources will we require to start again or how much will be left in the industry to start with?" Considering the grass-roots segment of tourism stakeholders, he says, "It is a

## IATO takes on the responsibility

"As an association, we have been following up with hotels and airlines for refunds. I would like to mention that IATO has been successful in getting refunds from various agencies. Ever since the lockdown got more extreme, things have slowed down. Hotels are not giving refunds; airlines are not giving refunds. We have written to the PMO, finance minister, NITI Aayog and every other place, and we are still quite hopeful that some relief will be given to us by the government. Now, as far as survival of our members is concerned, we have arranged a special session for them with lawyers and HR experts, to understand salary disbursements. As far as monetary relief is concerned, it will only come from the government. We, as an association, cannot give any monetary benefits to members, but we are definitely there for all our members for any other kind of support. We have also successful in getting a letter issued by Ministry of Tourism for refunds related to ITB Berlin, which are now under process. We have recommended that tourists from select countries be given visas to come to India."

- Rajiv Mehra

Company, adds that inbound travel is not going to bounce back anytime soon. "I think, there will be a complete stop on inbound tourism with zero travelling allowed. It does not really depend on travel planners or operators anymore; it all depends on the policies of the government (both Indian and foreign) on how and when international borders will open. Another major concern is the potential loss of jobs in the country. It will be difficult to find a place for those dismissed from jobs. Being specialists in the travel industry, it will be difficult for many to find



provide relief. The panellists also largely believe that a major shift in the marketing and destination selling approach

need to look for those tourists who have survived this pandemic and those who are ready to travel when the vaccine is available. The government and Ministry of Tourism should come out with SOPs and a list of dos and don'ts. The draft of the document is out, and we expect the official document to be out soon. Then, we will see how we can work and get tourism back on track," he says.

To that, **Bharat Bhushan Atree**, Managing Director, Caper Travel

 We should accelerate overseas promotions with our campaigns, so that people start coming to our country 

- Rajiv Mehra

jobs in the other sectors. So, it is essential to take care of these people," he believes.

Atree adds that the next six-eight months will be critical for business, for many it will be 'make or break'. "A liquidity-rich support for the industry, anywhere between Rs3-4 lakh crore, will be required to fill the gap created in the industry by COVID-19. But, I really do not see that happening looking at current policies of the government. There should be no hesitation in saying that the COVID-19 pandemic is the new form of terrorism since it is the biggest crisis the travel industry has ever faced. Going forward, I would say adapting to the situation and keeping costs & liquidity in check will be the key. People should

## Importance of technology

"As far as travel is concerned, the industry is going to be driven by technology. It is going to play a major role. Firstly, we need to understand that we need to use technology to encourage tourists to come to India. How do we do this? With travel technology, one should start curating virtual reality products on cities, monuments and destinations that are less explored. Virtual reality can help garner the attention of tourists, increase customer experience and help develop new products. With the support of technology, travel companies can start live streaming of tourism-related shows on their websites, to boost tourism consumption. One can showcase tourism attractions, the culture, food products and even offer discounts."

- Bharat Atree

look at consolidation; mergers, joint ventures and working with right people who understand and

 People should look at consolidation and working with right people who understand & grow your business 

- Bharat Atree

grow your business and support each other's company will be important," he says.

Since the lockdown was announced, the tourism industry of the country has only been thinking about three things- impact, survival and revival, says **Debjit Dutta**, Director & CEO, Impression Tourism Services (India).

very serious challenge. Right now, the biggest crisis is about survival and, of course, it is a big opportunity for the industry to learn and reset everything for a better world. We do not get a reset button in life and sometimes we wish something could re-set

 The only mantra to go forward is to save and spend wisely. Inbound tourism will start limping back from January 2021 

- Bharat Atree

things for us. Maybe, this is an opportunity for the industry to learn. In the last 15 years, due to technological development, the way we do business has transformed. Again, we are going through a transformation and this is a big opportunity to change, learn and press the reset button."



Rajiv Mehra  
Vice President, IATO



HVS ANAROCK's monthly newsletter titled 'Hotels & Hospitality Overview' reveals that among key Asian markets, India now has the second highest y-o-y decline in hotel room occupancy for April 2020 at 81.8%, second only to Thailand.

## Are charter flights an opportunity?

Atree doesn't think that charter flights will begin anytime soon, not even from UK or Scandinavian countries. "The only hope here is Russia. Russians, I believe, are more or less like Indians in quickly adapting to a new normal as far as COVID-19 is concerned and that market is going to be resilient. So, I think that this sector can open up. I am monitoring the

**I would recommend companies to have their auditing done and spend money wisely. Do not expect from the government alone**

- Rajiv Mehra

market very closely. At this point, Goa is COVID-19-free, but Russia is not and a number of cases are coming up every day. So, if



tant role in lobbying for relief measures for the industry, claims Mehra. "At the same times, associations are working to give knowledge and support to members on running their organisations, on HR-related issues, legal issues, etc., because these are the main factors that are bothering all members and

given a lot of advice to people. Going forward, IATO will definitely promote domestic tourism as well," he shares.

Mehra also feels that companies have to, with whatever reserves they have, pay salaries. "It is not a matter of six months. I would say we are looking at it continuing to March 31, 2021. I would recommend companies to have their auditing done and spend money wisely. Do not expect from the

**Is tourism going to sustain with the virus? If yes, it is going to be a big challenge for all of us**

- Debjit Dutta

government alone; loans are not a good way of paying salaries, it is a double trap for us," he says.

## Price change post COVID-19

"In my opinion," says Atree, "hotels and airlines will come up with good attractive packages and I think, if this thing does not work, they are going to spike prices. The demand for 5-star hotels is going to shoot up since travellers will be more concerned about health and hygiene."

To this, Dutta adds, "The market runs on demand and supply. The need of the hour is flexibility in terms of cancellations, and luxury has to be pocket-friendly. There is a concern regarding an additional cost due to various SOPs and safety measures, which have to be followed by everyone. This might increase prices. People will certainly be looking at stand-alone properties such as small, private and boutique hotels, since travellers would like to avoid places with huge crowds."

Mehra feels that if airlines leave the middle seat empty, prices will definitely go up. "But, if we are allowed to sell all the

seats, then I don't think airfares will go up that high. Foreign tourists will prefer more hygiene and would prefer five-star hotels that are affordable. Hotel prices might not go up, neither should the transport cost go up," he feels.

## Closing remarks

"We have to monitor every month, be it an organisation or the country or the association, as to what is happening. It also has to be seen which country is safe and which is not. Once this happens, Ministry of Tourism should also start promotions. Do not expect things will change overnight. It will take some time, at least one month for the change to be effective. That is the time we should accelerate overseas promotions with our campaigns, so that people start coming to our country. I request everyone to save resources and use them wisely. I think that inbound tourism will revive only by April 2021," says Mehra.

Dutta believes that the most important thing right now is to get the vaccine as soon as possible. "This is the only hope for the growth of tourism. Without

**I do not see any recovery in inbound tourism before the next 18 months unless and until we get a vaccine for COVID-19**

- Debjit Dutta

it, it will be a very different world to live in, which is certainly not good for the industry. Meanwhile, the priority should be survival. Whatever planning needs to be done, we need to do it now to save the industry in the days to come. We must understand the transformation and adapt to it

as soon as possible. I do not see any recovery in inbound tourism before the next 18 months unless and until we get a vaccine for COVID-19," he says.

For Atree, as far as marketing is concerned, it depends on what the government and Ministry of Tourism are going to do. "In my view, people should monitor every month in which way and where they are heading, and take necessary corrective steps. The market



Bharat Bhushan Atree  
Managing Director  
Capex Travel Company

investment scenario, as far as inbound is concerned, is going to shrink by 60-70 per cent. The only mantra to go forward is to save and spend wisely. Inbound tourism will start limping back from January 2021, with book-

ings only trickling in. In the next 18 months, inbound tourism is going to bounce back and that too with a bang. Whosoever is able to survive till then, will be the winner," he concludes.

## What would be an ideal plan B?

"The only plan B I can see is to depend on oneself. Do not wait for anyone. If the government support does not come, you have to do it on your own. One suggestion I would give is that the government should tell the public somehow to only work with government-recognised travel agents. If I am a government-approved tour operator, then I could service a government employee or domestic tourist. We are talking about inbound tour operators going into domestic tourism. Let LTC be available to these approved tour operators."

- Rajiv Mehra

"Frankly, I only expect a GST waiver for two years, practically. To survive, one should not hesitate to take any decisions in the best interest of the company. The most important thing can be closing all the loss-making departments. The only mantra which will work at this time to move forward is to save and spend wisely. If the government comes up with some sort of a plan, fine, but otherwise, one has to take steps oneself. Do not wait for anybody."

- Bharat Atree

"I think, support can be of two ways- direct support (like financial support and hand holding) and indirect support (to survive and then revive). We have to work this out. Whatever we do today will impact our future. So, we need to act first because it is essentially survival of the fittest. We need to know whether we are getting any indirect support or not so that we can plan accordingly. Indirect support can be in terms of tax benefits or other benefits to be given to tour operators, including promotional support in the days to come. This has to be planned, designed and announced right now."

- Debjit Dutta

the rising number of cases does not go down, Russia's prospect also looks quite grim to me. We need to prepare and wait for the situation to get better and then we can look at charter flights from Russia swinging back to the country," he adds.

need to be addressed by experts in the field. We are doing very well at the moment and have

## Associations and business

Apart from coordinating with industry stakeholders, members and the government, travel trade associations are also playing an important



Debjit Dutta  
Director & CEO, Impression Tourism  
Services (India)



WTTC has launched a global safety & hygiene stamp that will allow travellers to recognise governments & businesses that have adopted health and hygiene global standardised protocols, so consumers can experience 'Safe Travels'.

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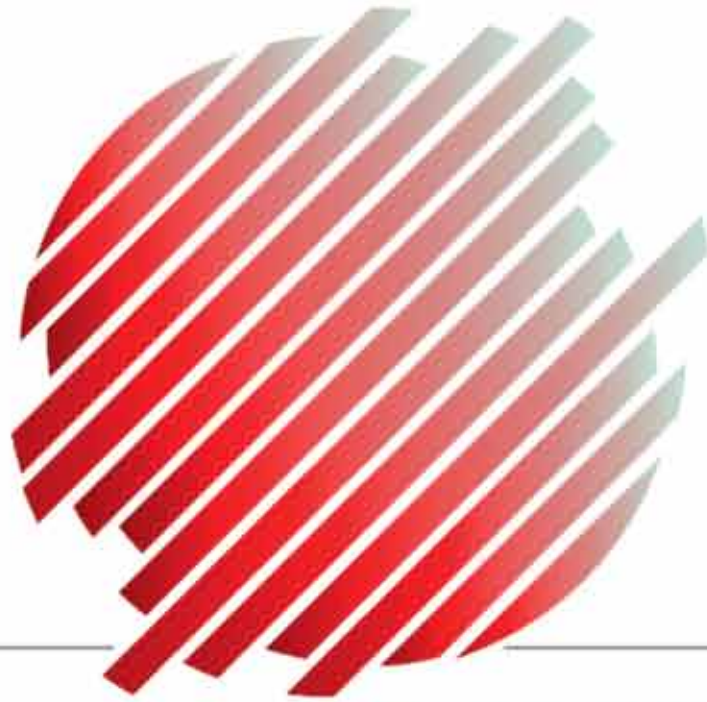
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# Tech-driven 'new normal' in hotels



'Hotels in the age of social distancing: Where are the robots?' was the topic of discussion for the second session of TRAVTALK Digital Conclave, which saw industry experts discuss the changes in the post-COVID era in hospitality and the best way forward for them.

 Nisha Verma

The digital era is here to stay! In India, it came to the masses slightly earlier, when the government announced demonetisation and most Indians had to resort to e-payments. Such is also the belief of Dilip Puri, Founder & CEO, Indian School of Hospitality (ISH), who claims that demonetisation changed the way Indians spent money, now digitised to a great extent, and now is the time for e-learning. "The trend is creating a new social habit in Indians—consuming online learning. In terms of industry perspective, there is going to be a massive shift towards mandatory branded online learning for the workforce in hotels. If there is anything the industry can do to support its people, it's to encourage them to build upon this habit and upskill themselves. The new normal is going to be different. Technology will continue to change our world in different ways. In hotels, we were used to saying, 'high-tech leads to high touch', but now we are trying to imagine how high-tech would lead to low touch or no touch. I would urge hotels to encourage and invest in their people, to up-skill them to meet the challenges of the new normal," he says.

For Mandeep Singh Lamba, President – South Asia, HVS AN-

AROCK, this pandemic has impacted us like nothing else before. He claims that social distancing is absolutely alien to Indians, and it is now going to become the new normal. "Customer behaviour is going to change and hotels will have to adopt to the new positioning that we need to have inside our hotels. The hospitality industry is very resilient and almost cyclical. We've had disruptions every few

 If there is anything the industry can do to support its people, it's to encourage them to build upon the habit of online learning and upskill themselves 



- Dilip Puri

years, but this time the difference is in the way demand has plummeted. In earlier disruptions, the supply was coming, and it became very difficult for the industry to come back quickly. However, this time, I estimate that the industry would bounce back much quicker, as soon as there is a reduction in the cases and we see a treatment or vaccine available. However, there are going to be some permanent changes in the industry, both in terms of operations and design. This is perhaps not the last time that we are seeing a disruption of this kind. We all need to be better prepared next time around," he says.

**Jatin Khanna**, Market Vice President - North India, Bhutan and Nepal at Marriott Hotels India, on the other hand, believes that there is still not a definitive new normal. "Today, one of the biggest prob-



lems for our industry is that we need to bring confidence back in our customers. Whenever demand bounces back, we need to ensure that our customers have complete confidence and faith in our hotels and brand in terms of safety. Today, it's a work in progress for everyone. When it comes to technology, we couldn't have been at a better stage than today and it is the only positive which is coming out of this phase of our lives. The next wave of hotels' renovation will have too much of technology and design embedded in it.

 The revenue managers today must understand how to package rates. The smarter they bundle and package the rates to put out the offering, the better they can make the customer see value 

- Dilip Puri

I believe that social distancing and technology will have a huge positive impact on our industry. We are a people-first industry, and technology is going to cut down on the mundane or low-level jobs, which will bring more efficiency to our people and help them create better guest experiences. Future leaders of the industry should work towards creating a balance between robots and human guest interaction," he shares.

#### High on technology

With technology making headway in hotels, people now would be careful in handing out credit cards at the recep-

tion of the hotel. Lamba says, "The payments will continue to happen through credit cards, but we are going to have a contactless check-in and check-out over the phone. The guest will have the bill sent on the phone and he won't have to present the credit card to anyone on entering the hotel. There are going to be permanent disruptors and I believe that it is now the death of the front office, as it will not be required any more. One can do all these things online very safely. Guests would have all the RFID stuff on their phones, and everything can be done from smartphones. The front desk, including concierge, will get converted into perhaps a contact centre, which can work from anywhere. You can dial a number if you need assistance in something you want to do, but certainly these are some of the long-term changes at least I see will happen going forward," he believes.

However, putting all these systems would require investment. Khanna explains, "Operational expenses would certainly go up. Depending on the facilities, anywhere between 175 and 250 touchpoints are there in the guest's journey while staying in a hotel. To sanitise all those points and to keep the guests safe, hotels are going to invest, and there

 Future leaders of the industry should work towards creating a balance between robots and human guest interaction 

- Jatin Khanna

will be a lot of other operational expenses which will be there. I am sure that with time, these expenses would probably become a part of the P&L. Hence, there is all the more need to drive efficiency and invest in the future, which will make sure that we keep on bringing down our running cost, and as

#### Domestic weddings on the cards

"We conducted a sentiment survey and realised that one of the businesses that is on everybody's books is weddings. Those bookings are still there and a lot of them continue to come. There are many international weddings which have been cancelled because of COVID, but those weddings need to take place and they will now take place in hotels. However, the numbers will be far reduced. Hence, weddings which were supposed to have 300-500 people, will now have 100 people. There will be guidelines for the banquets. Indian hotels are going to be equally competitive on weddings because that's the business they want. Lastly, instead of inviting 500 people together, people might have 4-5 functions of 100 people each. That could be a nice corollary to that, and more functions could mean more business,"

- Mandeep Lamba

"The reduction of wedding size might become a strain on friendships and relationships, as there will be some people not being invited. We are going to see big social changes in terms of relationship dynamics. One of the concerns with the industry is the amount of capex that will be deployed now to meet the new norms. Whether one is installing thermo-scanners or doing things with technology, I hope that firstly the industry is making sure that such a capex becomes part of the P&L. I think the final new normal would be that weddings will come back in full swing and distances will become smaller again between people, and it will again become a habit,"

- Dilip Puri



"I don't think weddings are moving out of India as of now. Today, having 10 weddings coming out of Delhi or North India and going to Thailand is very difficult because the consumer behaviour has still not evolved or finalised as to where they want to go. The sooner our industry starts taking steps in the right direction, the more confidence it will give our consumers to stay within India. The biggest fear today is not just about travelling, but what if one is travelling and gets stuck at the destination because of a lockdown over there or the requirement of quarantine in a location with 500 people. This is going to evolve with time,"

- Jatin Khanna

and when we all settle down, our P&L look similar to what it was pre-COVID. And, if not, there is not a huge debt."

Puri shares that many hotels have already started working with technology or proximity software. "With our loyalty programme, we wanted to recognise our platinum guests in and around the lobby, allowing us to go ahead and personalise their stay more. In terms of policing in hotels, they need to understand the health condition of a customer and see if social distancing is being maintained. Technology would begin to take this over as well. Not only will the guests be thermally scanned and checked while entering a hotel, but there would be technology that would also allow hotels to recognise a guest's health condition, like what the Aarogya Setu App is doing. How technology is going to play out in this new normal is

going to be a very significant factor in how hotels operate in the future, whether they are new

 At some point, hotels will get patients who could be COVID-positive and have stayed and checked out of the hotel. It will happen despite hotels being on a standstill during lockdown 

- Jatin Khanna

hotels, existing hotels or hotels under renovation," he adds.

**Impact of low inbound numbers** Lamba claims that they have around 11-12 million inbound travellers and around 26 million outbound, which is almost 2.5 times the former. Hence, he says, "We should look at converting



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

these 26 million outbound travellers into our guests, as they will be looking at alternate destinations within the country. I think the industry would look at domestic business, which is going to be a saviour. It is going to be a slow process and would wake up people to a new category in hotels. The first 12-18 months are going to be difficult. It's going to take the industry three years to reach the numbers we had towards the end of 2019 and beginning of 2020. Hence, domestic business is key. We have 180 billion domestic visits taking place through bus tickets, train tickets or airline tickets. Even if a miniscule 0.5% can be converted for our hotels, that's a significant number of people who can come to our hotels. It is going to happen, and we are going to target domestic travel especially for the upper upscale or luxury hotels, where international travellers are over 50% of their target."

Sharing the corporate business perspective, Khanna says, "Today, corporate hotels have around 65-70% Indian nationals. I think that while it will take

## Education should be a priority

"There is no better time than now to get your education, because there are no jobs in this industry as experts are predicting that recovery might take 1-3 years. This is the best time for young people to start their education and spend time in college. There could be no better opportunity for people to experience the changes while getting educated, so that they are far better prepared and skilled to meet the new normal, which will come post the recovery. If there is ever an opportunity to start attracting good talent into our industry, it is now because we can now educate them for really what is going to be the new normal in the industry. Also, There is no better time than now to encourage your people to go and get themselves upskilled and relevant to the future world,"

– Dilip Puri

pening. Along with that, hotels will have to do a lot more product improvement and process improvement. In terms of pricing, we need to be patient. Let the machine rule the pricing instead of getting pricing run by emotions, so that we probably will not have such a huge debt where it will take us years to come back to the same price as before COVID."

## Homestays and other guests

In this scenario, smaller enterprises, including homestays, might be jeopardised. Lamba says, "In the short term, home-

same protocol as in-house guests. They will be thermally scanned at the entry and follow the same norms as everybody else. There might be pre-registration for those who book in advance. There will be very little contact. Guests would walk into the hotel, go straight to the front desk to pick up their envelope for the key card, which will be lying ready, and go straight to your room. We might be seeing self-check-in kiosks in hotels very soon. Ultimately, even walk-in guests will be able to use their mobile phones to check-in."

It is now the death of the front office, as it will not be required any more. One can do all these things online very safely

– Mandeep Singh Lamba

However, would the safety procedures allow leisure guests to roam around the hotel, pool and spa freely? Khanna answers, saying, "If you have proper safe-

COVID-positive and have stayed and checked out of the hotel. It will happen despite hotels being on a standstill during lockdown. Hence, we need to look at all the safety and hygiene procedures.

We should look at converting these 26 million outbound travellers into our guests, as they will be looking at alternate destinations within the country

– Mandeep Singh Lamba

Also, hotels need to decide if they want to open everything or they want to contain or manage the crowd. They have to manage business, manage crowd and still create good experiences."

## Rates and legal liabilities

According to Puri, those with a longer runway of cash flow and working capital will survive this crisis. However, he says, "India has already tasted the big institutional private equity players,

see value. Those are the rates which are going to work. There is owner pressure to fill the rooms and lower the rate, but no machine is going to tell you that. Today, hotels can force a guest to take transport, claiming it to be a part of their safety and health requirement. One can immediately start packaging things like that. Whether it is branded or unbranded hotels, if one



Mandeep Singh Lamba  
President – South Asia,  
HVS ANAROCK

## Supporting travel agents

"Both travel agents and hotels have existed for decades. As much as any hotel wants to have customers dealing with them, we are going to co-exist in the space. We will always work with the travel agents. They cannot be pulled out of the guest's journey,"

– Jatin Khanna

around 2-3 years for us to reach pre-COVID occupancy, the domestic consumption would really play out. However, there will be more changes hap-

stays are going to take a beating as everyone's concern is going to be safety norms, which will be a little challenging for homestays and they are going to be stressed. However, once the vaccine is out and this will be behind us, they will come back because people do want to get the local experience. It is not the end of this industry, but it will be a pause."

Talking about the processes required for walk-in guests, he says, "I don't think we are testing enough in India for everybody to have a test certificate saying they are COVID-negative. Hence, walk-in guests would follow the

ty procedures in place and you are following guidelines, whether it's in the spa or pool, there is no harm. It's very important to note that at some point, hotels will get patients who could be

## Repurposing of hotels?

"There will be stress, and there will be owners with a fair amount of debt on their books, who are going to feel the heat in paying back their EMIs and principals. We might see some hotels being repurposed. I think hotels would start looking at every other real estate asset class. There are talks about looking at hotels to be converted to hospitals, because we realised that we have a fairly poor infrastructure in hospitals with COVID pandemic that has struck us, and there is merit perhaps in getting some of these converted into hospitals. There could be other repurposing also on the cards, and they can be made into office blocks, co-living spaces or student housing, etc. All of this is going to be a reality going forward,"

– Mandeep Lamba



insure their executives when they travel. There is going to be some rebooting of insurance and liabilities, which now hotels will start looking at carefully. Based on learnings from across the globe, there would be a change in how hotel assets are going to be insured in the future, but I think there is going to be a whole new focus on disruption of business, what qualifies as disruption of business when you are getting your insurance done; public liabilities; what happens if something happens inside your hotel to a COVID patient or when somebody contracts an illness."

## Survival mode

Claiming that revisiting SOPs is one of the positives of COVID, Puri says, "The moment these new SOPs can be institutionalised permanently, hotels would begin to see more efficiency coming in. There is a need to keep the survival mode on."

Khanna claims, "We need to be smart as to how we need to calibrate operations and hotels for future."

Forecasting trends, Lamba shares, "Hotels are going to see some big pain this year because occupancies are going to drop by almost 30-35% for the year and RevPAR is going to drop by almost 60%. The optimistic view is that it will take us 2 years to recover, while the pessimistic view is that it would take us four."



Jatin Khanna  
Market Vice President - North India,  
Bhutan and Nepal  
Marriott Hotels India

# Bringing home MICE & weddings

The third session of TRAVTALK Digital Conclave presented an opportunity for India to shine as a MICE and wedding destination. The next step is for the stakeholders and the government agencies to ensure that the infrastructure is at the ready. The conclave received a total of 7,244 registrations and more than 1,800 individuals were part of this session.



Hazel Jain

The third edition of TravTalk Digital Conclave brought together three experts who deliberated on the topic titled 'Big-ticket business: When do we start looking at weddings, corporate and MICE travel?' There can

planners and wedding management companies have made their money until February 2020, after which we saw lockdowns. The last wedding we did was in Udaipur on February 29, 2020. We are now in the off-season, so there would have been no weddings in June anyway.



way, nothing happens before November and December. My request to the industry at large is please control your mental and emotional health as well apart

✦ The wedding size will get smaller with 100-200 guests, but from February 2021, business will be rocking as usual ✦

- Rajeev Jain

No! It is going to be a completely different business going forward. I recommend everyone to invest in technology systems, knowledge-building and sharing, and building relationships. Talking to each and every partner will be key because communication will be vital during these times," Kale says.

He feels that the recovery will be in phases. "If we are thinking that MICE will bounce back by July 2020, the answer is no. It will take time because today, the concern is about safety. There is fear in the minds of travellers. First, this

### 5 skills a travel professional should learn

- ✦ Coding
- ✦ Digital marketing
- ✦ Closing a sale over phone
- ✦ Project management
- ✦ Content writing

fear needs to settle down and a vaccine needs to be in place. All dealer-based industries today are looking for credit notes against their international incentive travels because they want to maintain their cash flow. Similarly, the employees are unsure about their jobs. So, we will have to wait for

the dust to settle down before things can improve, and they will. Travel is a huge aspirational product and experiencing new places and cultures is a definite urge that cannot be replaced by digital means. One must ask this question: at such times, what is

✦ Experiencing new places and cultures is a definite urge that cannot be replaced by digital means ✦

- Rajeev Kale

and stronger. We must work with our circle of influence. The rest is not in our hands," he says.

### Weddings must take place in India

While weddings cannot stop taking place, Jain says that as an event planner, he wants to con-

### Availing benefit as MSME

"It is important for all Event and Entertainment Management Association (EEMA) members to get themselves registered under MSME to avail various benefits from the government, which is ready to provide any kind of help that the association is seeking"

- Nitin Gadkari

Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways Shipping & MSME

be no simple answer to this, of course. The readiness of not only the corporates but also the service providers such as hotels and event planners is a process.

Opening the session on an energetic and powerful note was **Rajeev Jain**, Director, Rashi Entertainment. He said, "I don't know why there is such a hue and cry about this pandemic. Those companies that have cash reserves shouldn't have any problem right now. Let me tell you that hoteliers, wedding

Rooms that were being sold for Rs12,000 are available at half the rate during off-season."

Jain added that while the world is facing a huge problem, we should not lose our mental/emotional equilibrium because of it. "If we do, we will not be able to survive

✦ As far as buyouts are concerned, they will continue for weddings. Weddings cannot take place without buyouts ✦

- Rajeev Jain

this. This is a pandemic that we need to fight medically and the entire world is working on it. This is a time to spend time with family and relax. Let me tell you, by next year, the wedding industry will be up by 15-20 per cent.

Any-

from the physical health. Business is bound to return," he said.

As per Jain's forecast, the wedding industry will bounce back between December 2020 and January 2021. He adds, "It will return to normal by this time. Yes, I agree that the wedding size will get smaller with 100-200 guests as against the usual 1,000 guests. But from February 2021 things will be alright and business will be rocking as usual."

### Incentive market is cautious

Sharing his perspective from a tour operator's point of view keeping MICE in mind, **Rajeev Kale**, President and Country Head - Holidays, MICE, Visa - Thomas Cook (India), says he would like to differ with Jain as far as this segment is concerned. "These are unprecedented times. But, whenever there is a disruption, there is also an opportunity. Those travel companies that can actually invest this interim time in re-imagining and re-inventing their business model will be able to survive this. Year 2020 is the time for companies to look at how their business will be in a post-COVID-19 scenario. If we are hoping that things will go back to being as they were until March 2020, the answer is a big

making us happier - our fancy cars or our memories and photos of travels with our loved ones?" Kale asks rhetorically.

### What do corporates say?

With 26 years of experience in the travel and corporate sector, **Rajdev Bhat-tacharya**, General Manager, Global Travel & Hospitality Services and Way2go, Digital Operations & Platforms for Wipro, feels that starting today, the industry needs to change the n a r - rative of the crisis.

"The mindset is important. We are going to look at 2020 and say that it made us more resilient

✦ I recommend everyone to invest in technology systems, knowledge-building and sharing, and building relationships ✦

- Rajeev Kale

duct every wedding in India this coming season. "As Indians, we have to ensure that all the revenue stays in India. I love all international destinations - whether it is Ras Al Khaimah or Thailand - but first we will promote our own country as a wedding destination. We have to support our own hotels and destinations first. We need to support the Indian economy

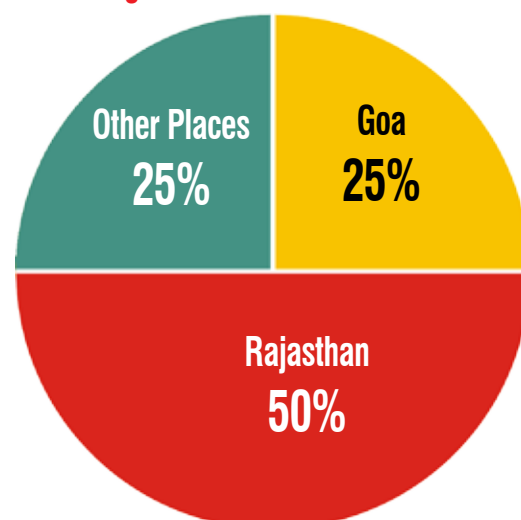


Rajeev Kale  
President and Country Head - Holidays, MICE, Visa - Thomas Cook (India)



Rajeev Jain  
Director  
Rashi Entertainment

### Most Sought - After Destinations



first! The expense is not a hurdle as people have money to spend on weddings. They start saving for this one event 20 years in advance. So they have enough savings for this. The wedding industry is here to stay! First we need to fill Indian hotels. Anyway, right now we are scared to travel and are afraid to get on airplanes. Yes, there will be new norms for weddings. Masks and gloves will be-

✂ The entire travel industry is going to move to IT. They will also have to learn how to close deals on the phone ✂

- Rajdev Bhattacharya

come a way of life and hand sanitisers will be a fixture at weddings. But we will adapt. I am very optimistic about this. In fact, I'm sold out for November 2020!" claims Jain.

### Domestic MICE will pick up

Taking this thought forward, Kale believes that domestic luxury MICE will bounce back first. "It will be affordable luxury as the hotels will be hungry for business due to low occupancies. The big chains such as Marriott will open first. And, by end of the year, short-distance MICE destinations in India will be in

### Government incentives through ICPB

Ministry of Tourism will provide incentives under the CSSS Scheme for promoting MICE in India. It has made India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB) as the nodal agency for steering and promoting this, which in turn will motivate travel planners and associations in publicising the scheme.

demand. India will definitely be our focus and why not – it has everything to offer so why look elsewhere," he says. Currently, Thomas Cook India is looking at how it can use technology to do its Rewards and Recognitions (R&R) events. "We need to continue recognising our people's efforts. As we speak, we are

### A word from MOT

"We want travel to take centre-stage with MICE tourism as its component. For this to happen, protocols and SOPs have to be in place and every stakeholder has to be informed about it. We have to position ourselves as a country that is safe for MICE"

– Rupinder Brar

Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism

doing our Rewards and Recognitions Programme on a digital platform instead of a banquet hall," Kale reveals.

### Virtual meetings might be the norm

Meanwhile, in the corporate sector, Bhattacharya feels that virtual meetings are here to stay. "What has not happened in decades has happened in the last two months. Companies now feel

✂ Virtual meetings are here to stay. Corporates will cut down on international travel in the short term, at least till April 2021 ✂

- Rajdev Bhattacharya

that the 'work from home' option can also be productive. Another thing that I have seen happen in the last two months is large deals closing via video calls. I want to believe this is temporary as it is not good for business travel.

To this, Jain quipped, "Before I say anything, I have a message to the corporate world – please don't encourage virtual meetings. It is all about personal experiences and face-to-face interactions. We must be ready

### Guidelines for MoT's incentives for MICE

- ❖ Conferences will require minimum of 500 participants and must comprise at least 20% foreign participants to be eligible for the incentive.
- ❖ Financial incentive will be extended to international conference/convention organisers in the form of reimbursing 50% of GST on hotel rooms for international/foreign participants/NRIs on actual basis subject to GST being paid to be not more than 18%.
- ❖ Incentive of GST incurred on hotel stay up to a maximum charge of ₹8,000 per day per room will be made for one night only.
- ❖ Incentive will be available for three years.

to start doing business in India in the next few months. As far as buyouts are concerned, they will continue for weddings. Weddings cannot take place without buyouts. I completely believe that this segment is going to save the hotel industry and domestic travel in India." Jain added this is only the second webinar he has opted to be part of.

His message to the hotel industry in India: please don't undersell yourself! Hold your bookings and sell them at your own rate. "I am projecting a 15 per cent growth in the wedding market by February 2021," he said.

### Managing corporate expectations

Technology is here to stay, and stressing on this point was Bhattacharya, who said, "It is going to change the behaviour of people. Corporates will not buy travel the same way as before, that's for sure. That means the

travel agencies will also have to become digital. When that happens, the mix of people that travel companies employ is going to change. It will depend on the kind of skillsets they possess. This is apart from the domain knowledge they have. The travel counsellors can easily pick these skills up during the lockdown period. By the end of it, they will be thanking 2020 for giving them the opportunity to arm themselves with new skills. The entire travel industry is going to move to IT. They will also have to learn how to close deals on the phone." He recommends five

ing SARS," he said, adding that speed and errorless transactions will be some of the client expectations going forward.

### Top Indian destinations for weddings

For Jain, India offers many options for destination weddings. "Rajasthan has always been a popular destination for weddings. Jaipur takes the biggest share of the pie, followed by Udaipur. We are also trying to develop new spots in Rajasthan such as Pushkar, apart from Jodhpur which has huge potential. We are also looking at newer destinations in other states such as Mahabalipuram in Tamil Nadu. It promises to have a huge share in the wedding market. And, of course, Goa that has always been very popular," he says.

In terms of MICE travel though, Kale feels that cities like Hyderabad, Jaipur, Kolkata and Mahabalipuram will be great destinations that have good infrastructure. "In terms of exhibitions, our 'Make in India' programme and the 'Atma Nirbhar'

quarter of 2020, we will see a lot of RFPs for exhibitions coming up and those who are armed to handle it well amidst COVID-19 will stand to win," he says.

In the end though, whichever city it is, the hotel brands that show huge emphasis on hygiene and sanitation will come back strongly as customers will choose them



**Rajdev Bhattacharya**  
General Manager, Global Travel & Hospitality Services and Way2go, Digital Operations & Platforms for Wipro



are going to adapt to this amidst COVID-19. We are going to get ourselves equipped to do this entire end-to-end process digitally. Companies that can digitise every stage of travel bookings and reduce touchpoints will survive and re-define the travel business. This happened in a small way dur-

scheme will give the sector a lot of opportunities for exhibitions within India. The government has also come up with certain policies for MICE, one of them being extending monetary benefits to any exhibition organiser that has 20 per cent of foreign delegates. My view is that in the last

over others. Bhattacharya says, "There will be a willingness on the part of all corporates to pay a premium for brands which will showcase their high hygiene standards. This is the primary shift from the price point of view of corporates." ✂



Going by a recent announcement by the government of Spain, foreign tourists visiting the European country will not be required to undergo the two-week quarantine from July 1. Spain usually attracts 80 million tourists a year.

# 7 stages to the 'new normal'

There is an expectation that the current global lockdown is temporary and that we will emerge on the other side stronger, better and, well, normal. **Timothy O'Neil-Dunne**, Principal at 777 Partners, brings to light the seven stages that the industry will go through before things become routine once again.

That is not the case. I hope that somehow, I will end up eating these words, but I don't believe so. We will have to go through a cycle of pain.

**Stage 1: December 2019 to January 2020**

When first reports of the Wuhan virus emerged, there was a clear expectation that it would be contained just like SARS and H1N1. The mechanisms worked well then – it's a Chinese problem they must deal with it. No cancellations or refunds permitted – it's flu for heaven sake.

**Stage 2: February to late-March 2020**

When bookings start to fall off and the cancellations start flooding in, panic starts. Slash schedules and costs. Borders close, cases mount – death toll soars. Airlines start pulling in credit lines and setting up new ones.



Appeals for massive immediate bailouts are appearing every day. Mass layoffs start. Airlines go full-speed to stop.

**Stage 3: End of March 2020**

Layoffs are universal. Airlines are too big to fail. The mission

is now – get people home. Acting as an instrument of government, the airlines are now in the business of repatriation. Country borders get locked down tight.

**Stage 4: April and May 2020**

With the airlines in

shutdown, what started as a creeping delay is moved to more permanent mothballing of the fleets. Aircraft orders come to a crashing halt. Airlines are permitted to fly only essential routes. Traffic will be approximately 10 to 20% of normal with many airlines not emerging from the shutdown.

✂ Certified safe hotels will become popular and home rentals without safe ratings will fall away ✂

**Stage 5: June–September 2020**

There will need to be a complete rethink of security and protocols for flying. Government and the traveling public will demand a 'Safe Flight Protocol'.

Universal testing of all workers and passengers will be mandatory, and introducing it will be problematic and costly. Vaccinations on a mass scale will start. Traffic will drop again in late-September.

**Stage 6: October 2020 to June 2021**

Major projects for airports will be abandoned. Capacity will be freed up that was previously constrained. Governments will be required to ration out flights and/or encourage route swapping. Cooperation becomes the new normal. Interlining – inter-carrier connections become popular again. Legacy infrastructure will fall away.

**Stage 7: July 2021 onwards**

Within three years we will be only about 75% of capacity of 2019. This will depend on the success of the testing regimes

and how effective the airport safe buffer zones are. Webinar growth will reduce convention/meetings travel. Certified safe hotels will become popular and home rentals without safe ratings will fall away. Airbnb will struggle. Staying with family will become popular as will shorter business trips.



Timothy O'Neil-Dunne  
Principal  
777 Partners

*(This article was first published on WebInTravel. Views expressed are the author's own. The publication may or may not subscribe to the same.)*

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## GENTING CRUISE LINES

# 'Business will be knowledge-driven'

In a candid conversation with TRAVTALK, Riaz Munshi, President, Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI), says that the important tip for outbound tour operators is to keep a positive outlook and not let pessimism dominate. He says business should now be knowledge-driven and not based on price.

Manas Dwivedi

Being extremely optimistic that this rough patch will pass soon and a bright new day will come for the travel trade, Riaz Munshi feels that all OTOAI members, outbound travel agents and other stakeholders should keep a positive outlook and not lose hope. "The crisis is not going to get over soon for outbound tour operators. The little hope for some is a slow start to operations, expected between August and September. Only 10-20 per cent of business will be there then; travellers are not going to opt for long-haul destinations anytime soon. Out of this, essential travel, business trips and VFR is going to see a rise, leisure travel will have a slow start," he says.

#### Explore different verticals

Munshi feels that business-wise, tour operators should utilise this



Riaz Munshi  
President  
OTOAI

time and enhance their knowledge and think how they can grow their business. There are a lot of verticals in travel itself, which agents can explore. "An outbound operator can explore domestic business, MICE or other kinds of tourism. There are different avenues which people can explore, they just need to expand their horizon and think. They can also work on specialising on selling a particular destination and

become an expert. All short-haul destinations will be the first ones to pick up and show demand, such as Dubai, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and all South-east Asian countries," he shares.

#### Knowledge-driven business

Munshi feels that in times to come, the dynamics of doing business are going to change. He says, "The market will see a paradigm shift in business, from

Right now, everyone should protect themselves from COVID-19; survival should be the agenda in 2020

being price-driven to being knowledge-driven. Dependency on tour operators will increase now. Run-of-the-mill itineraries will not work now. Tour operators will have to



tively for the industry. We have been requesting the government to consider licensing and regulations in tourism, or at least put some basic rules and regulations in place," Munshi says about the pressing issue.

#### Focus on health

The OTOAI President also feels that tour operators should focus on their mental and physical health during the pandemic. "Right now, everyone should protect themselves from COVID-19. Survival should be the agenda in 2020. Everyone should remain positive because the moment you resort to negativity, you activate your un-resourceful mind. It will only create doubts about the future. It can also lead to stress, depression and ill health. Right now, everyone should protect themselves from COVID-19. Survival should be the agenda in 2020," he concludes.

tailor itineraries according to travellers' requirements and the new way people will visit sites. In my opinion, momentum in business and outbound travel will be back by April 2021."

**Regulating tourism businesses**  
Munshi believes that the govern-

ment should have a regulation in place for businesses in the travel & tourism sector. "They may have to be certified by the government. This is very important, since a majority of the tourism industry is an unorganised sector. This is the reason we are not able to take any decision collec-

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# Eight reasons to take a river cruise

Avalon Waterways has led the river cruise trend, unveiling for travellers an unforgettable fusion of distinctive sights, colourful cultures and enduring traditions while sailing aboard innovative Suite Ships. In this article, the company lays out eight reasons this travel style has become a preferred way to see, experience and explore the world.



TT Bureau

In the last 10 years, river cruising has grown by 250 per cent, making waves in the travel industry and proving that when it comes to bodies of water and

an average of 150 guests, although some are much smaller. Suite Ships on the Mekong River, for instance, have just 18 staterooms, accommodating 36 cruisers. And, while fellow passenger numbers are low,

itineraries also sail off-the-beat-en-path, visiting small fairy-tale villages, quaint village squares, as well as family-owned wineries, bakeries and restaurants, along the way. Further, queues are not news on the world's rivers. Avalon Waterways' excursions typically accommodate no more than 30 guests at a time, providing every traveller an immersive and authentic experience.

#### 4) Fresh air and perspectives

On board Avalon's innovative Suite Ships, guests on two full decks are welcomed with 200-square-foot Panorama Suites, each featuring a wall of floor-to-ceiling windows that open 7-foot wide (the widest-opening windows in cruising).

ships, bigger is not necessarily better. "Our guests know that it's possible to cruise without a crowd, explore new cultures with ease and sail in intimate settings. Aboard our spacious, state-of-the-art Suite Ships, trav-

Avalon's on-board crew ratio is high. In fact, on every ship, the average guest-to-crew ratio is 3:1, which means travellers are privy to copious amounts of attention to detail with crew members easily and happily catering



to move and views galore. And, Avalon's Suite Ship Sky Decks run the length and width of each vessel (approximately 20 metres longer and 2 metres wider than a football field) with wide-open spaces, fresh air, and lounge chairs aplenty.

#### 5) Warm 'welcomes' along the way

Avalon works tirelessly to engage with communities visited by hiring local drivers, guides and operators for land activities. This "give back" mentality extends to the purchase of local produce, wines, beers and even bread, further connecting our guests to people, places and cultures. As a result of our partnership-approach to tourism, Avalon Waterways has been actively pursued by new towns along the world's rivers – always promising our passengers an authentic experience.

#### 6) Charting a new course in sustainability

The vibrant and beautiful natural surroundings of the world's rivers are a benefit of river cruising. And, it is up to river cruise companies to preserve the precious environment and limit our footprint. As a result, Avalon Waterways has taken great strides to improve monitoring and measurement to reduce its environmental impact, to save water, to limit waste and to foster a culture of sustainability among crew and guests.

This work includes supporting 'The Ocean Cleanup' in its unprecedented efforts to clean up the world's river and oceans.

#### 7) Ship-shape Suite Ships

The world has changed but what remains certain is Avalon Waterways' steadfast commitment to guest safety, comfort and peace of mind. To that end, the company has developed a new Avalon Assurance programme, with help from its Global Health & Safety team, dedicated to ensuring that the cleanliness of all operations exceeds today's standards from start to finish. The river cruise operator's new Avalon Assurance programme currently features seven major categories and protocols that span across guest experience touchpoints – all of which are being shared, explored, reviewed and renewed, accordingly.

#### 8) Not everything goes as planned

That's why Avalon Waterways is prepared to offer the highest standards in the lowest situations. "Avalon Waterways understands that our value and our service is measured by what we do when things go wrong even more than when everything runs as planned. We are there for our guests, offering refunds for missed services, alternative sightseeing or the opportunity to rebook and try again another time. We are a long-term business prepared to tackle short-term obstacles. Our hope is that travellers choose to explore the world with time and time again," says **Varesh Chopra**, Regional Director, Globus family of brands (including Avalon Waterways).



ellers enjoy the company of an expert Cruise Director, appealing crew-to-passenger ratios, the personalised attention they deserve, and seamless dock-and-go sightseeing with insider tips and experiences only the locals can provide. River cruising is the perfect way to see and explore the world," says **Pam Hoffee**, Managing Director, Avalon Waterways. So, what makes river cruising so special? Avalon Waterways lays out eight main reasons:

#### 1) Size is seismic - It matters!

River cruise vessels are built to slowly ply the world's weaving and meandering rivers, to port in storybook settings, or to sail under centuries-old bridges and squeeze between 12-meter-wide locks. Avalon Waterways' floating 'boatique' hotels hold

to guests' needs, every moment of every day.

#### 2) See, not sea - There's a (big) difference!

On a river cruise, travellers are not at sea. Instead, river cruises wind and bend through the heart of fascinating countries providing a panoramic view of the Old World. Always within a few feet of shore, on a river vessel, travellers pass cliff-top castles, hillside vineyards, ancient villages and capital cities. Every day, and night, travellers have quick and easy access to ports-of-call.

#### 3) Focus on to-dos, not crowds and queues

River cruise itineraries are destination-focused, with local guides who help travellers experience, and connect, with the world around them. Most river cruise

This wall of glass converts into an open-air balcony, but that's not all. No Avalon Waterways ship has interior-only cabins. Instead, every Deluxe Stateroom and Panorama Suite offer guests natural light and most feature beds facing the views for which river cruising is famous. Public spaces also provide guests room

#### AvalonGO App

Avalon Waterways' complimentary AvalonGO App is designed to put a world of pre and on-trip information at your fingertips. Approximately 30 days prior to departure, and for the duration of their vacation, guests can log in to check flight and transfer information, review their itinerary, and customise their trip.



**Varesh Chopra**  
Regional Director  
Globus family of brands  
(including Avalon Waterways)



# Lords gears up for travel boom

Lords Hotels and Resorts has enforced quality and safety standards across all its properties, both in India and Nepal. Now, each property receives scores to meet cleaning quality requirements and completes a COVID-19 safety checklist.

TT Bureau

Lords Hotels and Resorts is one of the fastest growing hospitality chains in the mid-market segment. Since the company's inception in 2008, it has grown to be a chain of hotels spread across 11 states in India and also has presence in Nepal. Today, to ensure that all their properties follow



**Pushpendra Bansal**  
Chief Operating Officer  
Lords Hotels and Resorts

potential threat for guests and staff alike, and eliminate it at the earliest. They are also in touch with local public health authorities to receive latest updates on rules and regulations. The hotel manager and another team member designated as the 'COVID Warrior', along with the rest of the team and other employees at all levels, are trained to work remotely as it is the best way

to prevent the risk of spreading the disease. The Warrior oversees that all systems set are in place and no staff or guest takes a short-cut to the same.

**Pushpendra Bansal**, Chief Operating Officer, Lords Hotels and Resorts, says, "Domestic tourism would be good during the upcoming season. Every-



one is eager to travel, but in a safe and secure manner. The government's health and

safety guidelines are being followed by all our hotels in India and abroad." ↴

↴ The government's health and safety guidelines are being followed by all our hotels in India and abroad ↴

COVID-19 safety protocols for the well-being of both guests and staff, the leaders at Lords Hotels and Resorts regularly conduct online meetings with the hotel team to identify the

## Suhana Safar initiative

Lords Hotels and Resorts has unveiled the new safe-stay initiative - Suhana Safar - to give travellers peace of mind. This initiative will seek to change the hotel norms, behaviour and standards to ensure hotel guests are confident in the safety of hotel once travel resumes. The group is adhering to guidelines set by WHO and FSSAI to protect not only guests but also employees. It is following expansive range of preventive actions like social distancing, temperature checks, frequent sanitisation, in-room dining, personal protection equipment for staff, contactless check-in and appointment of COVID officers, to mention a few. Timely cleaning of air filters and inspection of indoor unit coils of air conditioners is followed to prevent the transmission of virus through central systems.



# Riverfront living in Thailand

If you've been picturing yourself relaxing beside a calm river, the warm sunshine on your face as the fresh breeze ruffles your hair, you're in luck! Situated beside an idyllic stretch of Kwai Noi River in Kanchanaburi, Thailand, is X2 River Kwai Resort – your dream holiday destination by Cross Hotels & Resorts.

TT Bureau

A two-hour drive from Bangkok, the town of Kanchanaburi is also known for its temples, villages, rice paddy fields, sugarcane plantations, forests, mountains, caves and waterfalls. X2 River Kwai Resort, inspired by the architecture of Kanchanaburi's most infamous attraction – The Bridge over the River Kwai – ensures guests at

the resort have a getaway that promises a bit of adventure, culture and wildlife.

## Accommodation

Located on an expanse of two acres, each room at X2 River Kwai Resort provides an unforgettable panoramic view of the river. Each of the three 'PoolXide Cabin' rooms provides a private balcony with pool access, a state-of-the-art entertainment

system and world-class amenities. The three 'LuXe Cabins' take luxury a notch higher with 73 sqm of luxury living space, artful décor and premium amenities. X2 River Kwai Resort also offers six 'XFloat Cabins' that float on the river and feature a private rooftop deck with a 180-degree view of the river, a walk-in closet, and in-room spa and breakfast services. Doesn't that make for a relaxing holiday already?

If you're travelling with a loved one on a romantic getaway or have a streak for adventure and some partying, then the resort's 'XFloat LuXe Cabin' is just the room for you to book. These eight floating cabins feature an outdoor mesh nest bed, a dock with a two-seater kayak as well as a private rooftop deck among other amenities – just what you need to boast about



## Facilities

X2 River Kwai Resort has an expansive infinity pool that features sun loungers, sunbeds and pristine sparkling water. Guests are invited to take an invigorating swim or simply lounge by the poolside, enjoying the balmy tropical weather and some fresh breeze.

The Bridge Bar & Bistro provides a communal living room for all guests, who are encouraged to casually hang out in the bistro, any time of the day. Unpretentiously luxurious, the delicious fare on offer evokes hearty home cooking. The resort also offers some riverside excitement, including swimming, kayaking and paddle boating. ↴

when you post those pictures on your social media handles. Apart from this, the resort also offers a 'PoolXide Cabin Suite' and a 'LuXe Cabin Suite', with plush furnishings and modern amenities. The pinnacle of modern

resort living, the PoolXide Cabin Suite offers a private balcony with pool access. LuXe Cabin Suite, on the other hand, features not just a private balcony with a view of the river, but also a private terrace with living area.



An analysis by the World Committee on Tourism Ethics (a subsidiary of the UNWTO) across 25 nations reveals that in spite of staff furloughs, employers across the sector are stepping up their support for workers and communities.

# Drive through the 'Wild, Wild West'

With museums, art galleries and guest ranches, few routes brim with as much Western heritage as the one called the 'Cowboy Corridor' in Nevada, USA. We bring to you the first in a series on the much-revered road trip, divided into three legs, so you don't miss a single item on your things-to-do list!

The first leg we cover is Reno to Winnemucca (driving distance: 267 km/166 miles). While many Nevada destinations are currently closed, in the meantime, we urge you to bucket-list your way around the state! With a population of around 250,000, Reno is Nevada's second-largest metropolitan area. Despite being one of the western USA's increasingly hippest, artsiest cities, its Wild West legacy still lives on. The first leg of the Cowboy Corridor begins in Reno, which has an impressive Riverwalk District, downtown white-water kayak park, unmatched line-up of annual events and the gateway to unlimited outdoor activity. Rodeos are a big part of the cowboy culture, and Nevada does them right. The Reno Rodeo is known as the wildest, richest rodeo in the West. The Reno Rodeo Cattle Drive is another opportunity for those with an interest in living the cowboy life. Your reservation buys you a seat in a saddle, a spot around the nightly campfire, traiside dinner,

and an unforgettable experience in the American West.

#### Drive east to Fernley

From Reno, it's off to Fernley, about a 30-minute drive east, where stunning views of the picturesque Truckee River Canyon meandering below Interstate 80 Nevada are offered. Refresh yourself with a variety of tasty

for the Main Street Art Park, a sculpture garden that houses some of the artwork from the annual Burning Man gathering, which takes place just north of Fernley in the Black Rock Desert.

#### Off to Lovelock

Continue east about an hour to reach Lovelock, which has a population of just 1,900. Love-



milkshakes at Mary and Moe's Wigwam (you can't go wrong with butterscotch) and check out its collection of American Indian artefacts. Keep your eyes peeled

along the highway decades ago. Watch for the Imlay exit, then follow your camera lens around this special addition to the Nevada State Register of Historic Places.



an eye out for Mark Twain's original cabin and consider an overnight at the lovely Old Pioneer Garden B&B Guest Ranch, where many historical buildings (like the town's original blacksmith shop) have been repurposed into guest rooms. From the turnoff to Unionville, it's less than 30 minutes to Winnemucca. However, if you're still in the "living ghost town" mood, shoot the extra 40 miles north on US-95 and then east on SR-190 to Paradise Valley. About 100 or so people still live in the area which was aptly named by settlers who were under the impression they'd actually found Heaven on Earth.

#### Welcome to Winnemucca

Less than an hour north of Thunder Mountain Monument

Trail, which followed the path of the Humboldt River, the longest river in the state. Lovelock is anchored by Lovers Lock Plaza, where couples help Lovelock live up to its name by "locking their love" to a never-ending chain, symbolizing (you guessed it) eternal love. Standing here, you can't miss the nation's last circular courthouse, designed by locally renowned architect, Frederic DeLongchamps. When in town, check out Nanny Jo's for some amazing antique shopping.

22-mile-long reservoir with hiking trails and campsites. Ready for something on the more unique side? About 20 minutes past that is a delightfully offbeat roadside attraction called Thunder Mountain, a colorful, imaginative folk-art array of sculptures and buildings constructed almost entirely from items found



#### Into the Cave

From here, an 11-site Backcountry Byway carries you to Lovelock Cave, an ancient Shoshone shelter that housed nearly 10,000 artefacts, including the world's oldest tule duck decoys (circa 400 BC) — named Nevada's Official State Artefact. You may visit the BLM office in Reno, Winnemucca, or Elko for a copy of the "Lovelock Cave Backcountry Byway" brochure, which includes a map and more information about the area.

#### Thunder Mountain Monument

Look left about 24 miles down Interstate 80 and you'll spot Rye Patch State Recreation Area, a

along the highway decades ago. Watch for the Imlay exit, then follow your camera lens around this special addition to the Nevada State Register of Historic Places.

#### Fancy a detour?

Opt for a short jaunt to Unionville ghost town, a 19th-century mining community where Mark Twain once tried (and miserably failed at) mining. It is just a half hour south of Interstate 80 on Nevada State Route 400. Keep

is Winnemucca, one of the state's oldest settlements due to its location near the Humboldt River.

Named after the famous Paiute Indian chief, Winnemucca is home to the artefact-packed Humboldt Museum, as well as the Buckaroo Hall of Fame & Heritage Museum—equal parts museum and shrine—honoring the Great Basin's "Legendary Buckaroos." ↘



# Fear & perception should be addressed

**Prateek Hira**, Founding President & CEO, Tornos and Gastroutes, and Chairman - IATO Uttar Pradesh & Uttarakhand chapters, feels that COVID-19 has come as a further dampener to the already dampened inbound tourism sector of India, adding to its woes and putting the sector in a comatose-like situation.

 Manas Dwivedi

Sharing his view on the current pandemic crippling the tourism industry in the country, especially the inbound sector, the Lucknow-based tourism entrepreneur, **Prateek Hira**, believes that business was already not passing through a good phase and COVID-19 pandemic has further added to the woes of tour operators. "I am particularly worried about its ripple effects that will only pop-up after this situation has ended. Tourism largely stands on the foundation of a good economy and in this case, the global economy is shaken to the core. Of course, the industry stands with the government and is supporting each step that our government has taken or intends to take further to come out of this threat, but at the same time, I have seen that governments in India often fail our industry's expectations after such crisis have ebbed," he said.




**Prateek Hira**  
Founding President & CEO  
Tornos & Gastroutes

"It is imperative that our government simultaneously and seriously start planning the revival of inbound tourism in India, else it will be too little too late to revive inbound tourism anytime soon. 'Fear' and 'perception' will be the two key words that will have to be addressed immediately after this health emergency is dealt with, and a robust marketing campaign has to be in place to address the after-effects of COVID-19 on tourism," Hira further said.

According to the Tornos CEO, it is indeed encouraging that India, by and large, has done very well to contain the virus and it is time to publicise this feat well internationally to gain some interest. "If not dealt with in time and

 **A robust marketing campaign has to be in place to address the after effects of COVID-19 on tourism** 

efficiently, it will only complicate the matter further and not only will it prolong recovery of lost ground, but also a large chunk of market will be lost to our aggressive neighbours who are consistent and will come up with attractive opportunities," he commented. 

## 'Even domestic tourism looks tough before next April'

"Looking at this global pandemic, it is unlikely that it can be completely controlled before any wide-ranging tested vaccine is established in the market. Even if in India we are able to control to the maximum by end-September as is projected globally, inbound tourism seems seriously and completely hit at least for this winter, as foreign tourists will be petrified to travel to India or other countries, firstly with the virus phobia and secondly, due to the monetary crunch. Even the domestic tourist will not move within the country before next April. We are all being positive for tourism to return at least by April 2021.



**Nasir Shah**  
Chairman  
IATO - JK and Ladakh Chapter.

Due to the present financial crunch, which has shattered the complete tourism and hospitality industry, Government of India must come out with some sort of package where the industry can support their staff and other allied expenses."



According to UNWTO, sentiment regarding the recovery of international travel is more positive in Africa and the Middle East with most experts foreseeing recovery in 2020, while in Europe and Asia the outlook is mixed.



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**Statue of unity**

# Simple steps to restarting operations

Though airlines have begun operations subject to government clearance, the fact of the matter remains that they may not get enough travellers to viably operate flights as the fear of COVID-19 and a COVID-like pandemic will continue to haunt travellers for some time, says **Manoj Srivastava**, Director – Aviation Technology, Lorhan IT.

Though COVID-19 may go in the next couple of months, the fear of it will take a few years to vanish or until everyone is vaccinated. But, this doesn't mean that people will stop travelling. It only means that extra care will have to be taken when travelling. The government has already announced that it will infuse ₹20 lakh crore in the MSME sector and while an additional relief

fund may be announced for the aviation/ hospitality industry, the most important decisions are to be taken by industry stakeholders, those directly/ indirectly involved, when preparing business processes, policies, and technical interfaces among all systems across airlines, airports, AAI, MRO, DGCA, BCAS, MoCA and other associates. The COVID-19 situation has given

stakeholders and policymakers an opportunity to think differently and discuss closely the development of an industry framework for seamless connections and operations across airlines and airports.

Wearing a PPE and sanitising hands, baggage, aircraft seats, trolleys, check-in kiosks could be a normal practice for a few years, but fast and touchless traffic processing and seamless boarding will be the ultimate customer experience.

## Operational readiness - Airlines

In the entire aviation business, only airlines can bring business back. While they may have already harped on questions of seat price, load factor, break-even, etc., for better and faster recovery, the following should be considered.

- ❖ Initially, start flying between metropolitan and business-oriented cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune and Ahmedabad

- ❖ Keep smaller aircraft in rotation – ATR-72, Q400 or CRJ550/700

- ❖ Keep airfare high but don't charge cancellation fee; date change and sector change should be allowed

- ❖ Disposable medicated face mask, gloves, sanitiser pouch to be distributed free of cost

- ❖ Sanitiser towel to be given in-flight

- ❖ Ground staff, cabin crew should wear disposable airlines brand/logo-printed PPE

- ❖ Aircraft should be sanitised in each landing and fully disinfected at night

- ❖ Promote branding as 'safe, secure and hygienic' airline

- ❖ Keep operating cost as low as possible; outsource all non-airline functions and focus on core airline functions

## Operational readiness - Airports

Technically, the airport's IT application and the airline's application should have a common interface and exchange data whenever required in real time. Procedures should include:

- ❖ Sanitised baggage trolley should be available

- ❖ Face recognition device to be installed at departure/entry gates

- ❖ Sufficient number of check-in kiosk machines to be placed inside the terminal building

- ❖ Sanitiser dispensers to be installed at each touchpoint

- ❖ UV disinfection gate to be installed at security gate

- ❖ Proper social distancing to be maintained



**Manoj Srivastava**  
Director – Aviation Technology  
Lorhan IT

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

## Recommendations for seamless operations

- ❖ Try to take less time to check-in, frisking, boarding, de-boarding, etc.
- ❖ Face recognition devices to be installed at entry gate; real-time traveller data to be retrieved from NIC (National Information Centre) server
- ❖ Every touchpoint should be accessible and service-authenticated through smartphone
- ❖ RFID-enabled baggage tag on each check-in luggage, so that airlines and travellers may track the bag across its journey
- ❖ Instant taxi booking facility on arrival



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# Keep the Bravo and Echo seats open?

While IATA's guidelines for restarting passenger flights amid the COVID-19 pandemic through a layered approach for bio-security measures has been received well by airlines and airports, the point pertaining to keeping the middle seat open is viewed with trepidation by passengers and with caution by airlines, and with reason, say aviation experts.

Airlines that have started operations within India are not flying full load as per the new guidelines. While this certainly is a welcome gesture for passengers, it remains to be seen how demand in the coming days will change the situation. For now,



**Saleem Amanulla**  
Senior Vice President, Airport Operations, Oman Air

**Saleem Amanulla**, Senior Vice President, Airport Operations, Oman Air (that flies to eleven Indian destinations from its hub in Muscat), says that IATA and airlines have expressed their concern regarding "empty mid-

can come back, perhaps by this year-end, but passengers will remain alert and for all good reason, says **Captain Nandkumar**, Airbus Fleet Training Manager. "Leaving the middle seat vacant may psychologically instil more confidence in a passenger. However, a seat with an approximate width of 18 inches does not really comply with the mandated physical distancing. Screening passengers before boarding, use of face masks combined with the downward airflow in the cabin along with High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters on all modern aircraft may reduce the chances of spread of COVID-19 in an aircraft. This fact needs to be brought to the attention of the passengers convincingly." Nandkumar says.



**Girish Shah**  
Executive Director  
Knight Frank India, Mumbai

ity of leaving the middle seat open, the passengers do beg to differ. **Girish Shah**, Executive Director of Knight Frank India, Mumbai, feels that middle seats must be left free. "The Airlines should not compromise customer safety for short-term gains. Airlines that keep middle seat empty may lose short-term revenue, but will gain customer loyalty and a lifetime value. Personally, though I travel a lot, under the current

scenario, I will not travel till a vaccine is found and its efficacy is proven. The risk is too high to take a vacation till then. Add to it the fact that the risk of catching the COVID-19 virus is high in a closed environment like airports. Unless there is no other choice but to travel, not many would venture out," he shares.



**Raajeshwari Ashok**

(Author is Raajeshwari Ashok, a communications expert with more than a decade of airline experience. The publication may or may not subscribe to the views expressed herein.)



**Kurt Hofman**  
Aviation Expert

with the low load, the middle seat may well be kept open, and this is exactly what **Kurt Hofman**, an Austria-based industry expert, says. "Even if airlines resume

passenger flight operations, the load will be so low that the middle seat question may not even arise. The airline industry and the allied industries that cater to airlines are so badly affected that out of the 16,000 aircraft parked around the world today at 700 different airports, 2800 will never come back to the skies. It's no surprise that airlines argue against keeping the middle seat free even as passengers are left feeling unsafe due to the close proximity with another person."



**Captain Nandkumar**  
Airbus Fleet  
Training Manager

dle seat" that will seriously impact airline survivability and it's not a long-term solution. However, in the interim, Oman Air will follow the guidelines. If the situation continues to improve, the fun

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# Accor launches its ALLSAFE label

Accor has launched its new protection protocol, ALLSAFE, to establish confidence among its guests regarding the safety and hygiene standards at its properties. In addition, it has tied up with AXA insurance provider to offer to provide medical support to guests at Accor properties.

 Nisha Verma

With a view to help deal with the impact of COVID-19 and to ensure the safety of its clients and employees as hotels reopen, Accor has taken its most stringent cleaning standards and operational protocols a notch higher, and has launched its unique cleanliness and prevention label- ALLSAFE.



Sébastien Bazin  
CEO, Accor

A statement released by the brand says, "Welcoming, safeguarding and taking care of others is at the very heart of what we do and who we are. The health, safety and well-being of our staff, guests, owners and partners remains our top priority as the world goes through this unprecedented crisis. Accor has been prioritising the safety of its guests on a daily basis for more than 50 years, thanks to our high standards of hygiene and cleanli-

ness applied by all our brands around the world."

Reviewing key initiatives under ALLSAFE and the announcement of the strategic partnership with AXA as part of the Group's recovery plan, Sébastien Bazin, CEO, Accor, says, "We have just launched a new rigorous protection protocol under the name of ALLSAFE which includes a lot of different measures, one of them,

of course, being contactless check-in, check-out and payments. It includes sanitisation kits for guests, hospital-grade room disinfection, and so many other measures that guests will be discovering in the field."

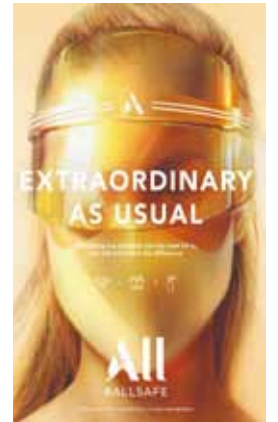
 It includes sanitisation kits for guests, hospital-grade room disinfection and other measures 


Apart from that, Accor has signed an innovative strategic partnership with insurance provider AXA to provide medical support to guests across the 5,000 Accor hotels worldwide.

Bazin adds, "We've been working on it for several months, to go one step further, which is to



provide medical care and assistance for our guests wherever they are in the Accor network, in the 5,000 hotels, in the 40 Accor brands, all over the 110 countries, if they need any special care or any medical assis-



The ALLSAFE global cleanliness and prevention standards have been developed with and vetted by Bureau Veritas, a world leader in testing, inspections and certification. All the Group's hotels must apply these standards and will be audited either by Accor operational experts or by third-party auditors such as Bureau Veritas to receive this label. 



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# 'Safe Stays at Fortune Hotels'

Fortune Hotels, a member of the ITC hotel group, has announced the launch of 'Safe Stays at Fortune Hotels', a complete safety and hygiene programme for guests and associates from pre-arrival to check-out. The programme has been set in line with ISO standards.



Nisha Verma

The 'Safe Stays at Fortune Hotels' programme is set on 10 pillars of safety and hygiene that will be diligently implemented across its hotels as they re-open/commence operations. The hotel chain has tied up with TQS Global Management System, a leading Food Safety and Research Firm, to embark on a journey to acquiring CORE 19 (COVID-secure) Safe Practices Protocol blended with Deming Cycle certified under ISO Standards, for its properties pan India. Under this programme, all Fortune hotels will undergo a phase-wise

implementation, training and certification exercise over the next few months. TQS Global has been associated with Fortune Hotels for over seven years now and has effectively trained over 350 associates for OFQUAL British certification and implemented food safety and hygiene protocols across the chain in various capacities.

**Samir MC**, Managing Director, Fortune Park Hotels, says, "The world is undergoing a vast change in the way we travel, stay and socialise. We realised that the COVID-19 outbreak will change the nature of holidaying and do-



**Samir MC**  
Managing Director  
Fortune Park Hotels

ing business altogether. The hygiene programme and certification are thus important steps towards re-defining our spaces and experiences, thereby creating a very safe, hygienic and stress-free environment for our guests."

Aimed to provide a comfortable and positive experience to guests, this end-to-end programme will comprehensively cover all the departments and sub-departments of hotels, including the heart of the house and guest-facing areas. It will also go beyond soft actionables and basic norms like

*The programme and certification are important steps towards creating a safe and stress-free environment*

wearing masks and social distancing, and help in creation of robust safety and hygiene processes and practices across all its hotels.

The process shall include implementation and certification

towards COVID safety protocols and ISO 9001, which is a standard developed for the certification of Quality Management Systems (QMS) to enable effective system integration. During the project, comprehensive implementation of CORE 19 (COVID Secure) Health & Safety Management System will be accomplished with the aid of manifold tools,

both online and on ground. The programme will consist of QMS principles blended with occupational health and Safety Analysis Systems (OH-SAS) guidelines and the 'Safe Stays at Fortune Hotels' protocol along with the stringent guidelines from Indian and international bodies such as Ministry of Tourism, FSSAI, Codex, WHO, FAO and CDC.

## The 10 key pillars

- ❖ Deep cleaned & sanitised rooms
- ❖ Safe public spaces
- ❖ Social distancing for hospitality
- ❖ F&B hygiene and safe handling procedures
- ❖ Safe meetings
- ❖ Hygiene check stations
- ❖ Trained and sensitised staff members
- ❖ Hygiene code of conduct
- ❖ Emergency response protocol
- ❖ No-contact payments & bill settlements



*The French Prime Minister and stakeholders in the French tourism industry have drawn up a list of steps the government will undertake to support the industry, focusing on health measures, support for businesses and preparing for recovery.*



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# Dealing with guests in 'new normal'

The Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) has released a set of guidelines for post-COVID-19 handling of guests by tour operators and keeping them safe and secure during the trip. The document also includes hotels in its ambit, suggesting measures that can be followed to keep guests safe.

 Manas Dwivedi

Sharing information about the launch of the guidelines, in a tweet ATOAI stated that these will serve as recommendations for the safe handling of guests in a post-COVID-19 world. The intended audience for these guidelines is tour operators and accommodation providers, including hotels, resorts and homestays. This document is not intended to serve as the definitive mandate for these operations, nor is it intended to cover every aspect of accommodation and tour operator businesses. These guidelines are only a collection of data assimilated from various sources and are not a statutory or compliance document for any approvals, recommendations, certifications, proof or reference.

ATOAI has focussed on the most common guest touchpoints, col-

lating publicly-available information from a variety of sources. One should also not expect that following these guidelines guarantees no infection. The guidelines talk about receiving guests



by following certain protocols laid out as safe practices in the post-COVID-19 world. The tour operators should follow all the guidelines and safety measures, as prescribed in the document. Focus has also been laid on the transport of guests and norms to be followed.

From the hotel perspective, the guidelines talk about things to be followed at the reception area,



and during check-in and check-out. It also focuses on the use of public services like restrooms, elevators, gyms, spas, pools and business centres. At all such areas, the guidelines focus on routine cleaning and sanitising frequently-visited areas regularly. Apart from these, it also car-

ries point of instructions which can be followed at restaurants. While taking guests on a trip, it is advised to brief them on the place to be visited and expected crowds. Suggestions should be offered as emphasis should be given on guests take personal responsibility of their own safety.

While talking about adventure activities, the guidelines ask to maintain proper social distancing during most outdoor excursions. Small groups should be promoted in place of large groups. Visitor numbers should be tightly controlled in activities where there is physical proximity such as a wild-

life safari in a vehicle or rafting, so as to maintain adequate distancing between guests.

Apart from this, the guidelines also recommend products which can be used as disinfection solutions at various touchpoints and locations. At last, suggested templates are shared which can be used to communicate with guests on their arrival.

**Good to know!**  
In March this year, ATOAI conducted its first online members' meet, which was attended by close to 100 members from across the country, including Kerala, Assam, Ladakh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

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# 'A lot more can be done with less'

Anuraag Bhatnagar, COO, Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, believes that the Indian hospitality industry is not going to be the same post the ongoing disruption. He discusses how hotels can provide experience with 'minimal' touch, in a recently-conducted webinar.



TT Bureau

## Q How will the overall experience change in Indian hotels?

In an environment which is now averse to physical contact, social distancing has become the new 'buzz' word. From high-touch and high-tech, we probably now will be low-touch but high-tech, or no-touch but high-tech. We are working on how a guest experience remains low-touch, exclusive and yet meaningful. These unprecedented times have also made us realise a lot can be done with less and how fragile our business models are. On the other hand, it has opened avenues in the terms of e-learning, technology, upscaling our resources and thinking the way F&B has been operating all these years. For example, do we really need a menu card in hotels? You don't know who has touched that card before you.



Anuraag Bhatnagar  
COO, Leela Palaces  
Hotels and Resorts

We are very lucky to be working in a country like India where we have an extremely robust domestic economy. People in India fundamentally like to travel, experience new destinations and go to new resorts. They probably would want to 'unlock' themselves after this lockdown. They will explore the destination when they will travel by road. We see opportunity in domestic travel. The other thing that will pick

up is the wedding business. We already see queries coming to our hotels and of course, instead of having the 'big fat Indian wedding', we will have mid-sized, semi-slim Indian

♥ We will have a U-shape recovery, we will see some business coming in July and August. We see a sense of normalcy coming in Q4 ♥

weddings. Most of this trend is in Q4. So, I really think these two sectors will sustain us.

## Q What are your estimates about the recovery period?

I don't think we will have a V-shape recovery. In the best-case scenario, we will have a U-shape recovery, we will see some business coming in July



and August. We see a sense of normalcy coming in Q4 (October-December).

## Q Which segment of hotels will bounce back the fastest?

Both luxury and budget hotels would recover at the same pace. We are counting on affluent luxury travellers who may not travel to Bali, New York or somewhere exotic right now, but would come to one of our resorts. I don't think luxury ho-

tels will miss this path to recovery. Resorts within a 4-5-hour drive from key cities would benefit a lot.

## Q What are some of immediate changes that hotels will see?

We are working on what a new normal experience should be like. We are rebooting our experiences, starting from the airport arrival experience. We would need declaration of travel history from our guests.

I believe, in general we have to make sure that what we are doing in terms of safety and hygiene has to be tangible. Hypothetically, there could be a tunnel, where walking through it will sanitise the guest and his clothes. This can become normal in the future.

The seating in the restaurant is going to be reprogrammed, the capacity of the ballroom has to be relooked at. How the banquet buffets are laid out needs to be re-structured. So, we are working on all these aspects. Our laundry, housekeeping services, will be revisited. Also, how we place our rooms is going to get changed. I am sure every guest would want to know who stayed in that room before them. If possible, we will rotate rooms in a strategic way, to make commercial sense as well. ♥

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## Akshar offers digital support



Gujarat-based Akshar Travels has come ahead in this time of need by providing manpower to organise the movement of migrants from and within the state, through toll-free lines, WhatsApp and a user-friendly online system in Hindi to register migrants. On a daily basis, it provides a database of migrants to help the government and authorities arrange trains and transportation.

## On board a roller coaster



Announced last October as the world's longest roller coaster at sea, on board the Global Dream, the test setup for Space Cruiser by Dream Cruises has begun. This will be the highlight of 'Dream Park at the Pier', the very first theme park at sea. The first photos of the construction process show the scope and scale of the offshore roller coaster.

## 'Stay safe, travel later'

Tourism Malaysia urges travellers to stay safe and travel later, while the tourism board works at promoting various offerings of the destination, allowing future travellers to dream and plan their visit to the country.

Nisha Verma

Tourism Malaysia is asking travellers to dream today and travel later. The tourism board recently released a video as part of its 'Stay safe, travel later' theme. Addressing the travellers in the video, **Datuk Musa Yusof**, Director General of Tourism Malaysia (Ministry of Tourism, Arts & Culture),



**Datuk Musa Yusof**  
Director General, Tourism Malaysia  
Ministry of Tourism, Arts & Culture



laysia, Truly Asia' brand, we want to promote Malaysia's authenticity and uniqueness to the global market while featuring our diversity in cultures, festivals and traditions," added Yusof. Urging travellers to dream about

We want to promote Malaysia's authenticity and uniqueness to the global market while featuring our diversity



says, "I would like to express my utmost gratitude to all the front-liners for your bravery and sacrifices. The COVID-19 pandemic will not discour-

age us to dream and travel later when time permits." He claimed that they will be focusing on promoting Malaysia and its various offerings throughout this period. "Through the 'Ma-

travelling and take the plunge later, he said, "In this digital age, we would like to show you 'Malaysia, Truly Asia'. For now, continue to stay positive and look forward to your future travel to Malaysia."

Be safe, healthy and strong.

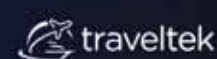
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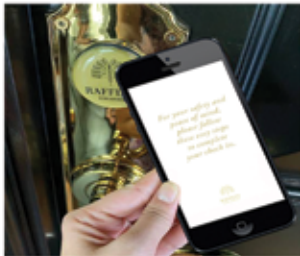
We have introduced intensified hygiene & prevention measures to ensure your safety. The ALLSAFE label, developed with and vetted by Bureau Veritas, represents our new elevated cleanliness protocols and standards, and provides assurance that these standards have been met in our hotels.



Guests provided with individual sanitiser, wipes and mask.



Social distancing enforced in all common areas.



Contactless check-in, check-out and payments carried out whenever possible.



Sanitiser provided in key public areas. (front desk, elevators, restaurants, etc.)



Strengthened room cleaning protocols including extra disinfection of all high touch room and bathroom areas.



Reinforced cleaning program in public areas with frequent disinfection of all high touch areas.



Employees given comprehensive safety and hygiene training.



Guest access to medical professionals and tele-medical support.



Reinforced food safety standards and new buffet protocols.



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Dedicated guest hotline to answer questions and to best prepare their stay.



ALLSAFE Officer appointed across all Accor hotels, responsible for guest health and wellbeing.

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4 <sup>th</sup> TravTalk Digital Conclave	10 am	9
IATA Webinar	6: 30 pm	10
CTC Online Masterclass	8:30 am	10
E Hotelier Summit India	Pan India	11
International Day of Yoga	Worldwide	21

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# ETAA's 2020-21 National Committee

**Jagat Mehta** will continue as the President and Board Member, while Dharmesh Advani is the new National General Secretary and Board Member of Enterprising Travel Agent's Association (ETAA).



The Enterprising Travel Agents Association (ETAA) has announced its new National Committee for the term 2020-2021. **Jagat Mehta** will continue to be the President and Board Member, and Dharmesh Advani is the new National General Secretary and Board Member of ETAA. Meghana Gautam is now Joint General Secretary while Carl Dantas remains Chairman Emeritus and Founder President of ETAA.

During the lockdown, the association conducted 15 webinars for its members on various topics such as CRM, unexplored destinations, insurance, legal compliance, social media, etc. It will continue to organise webinars for its members to impart knowledge and to assist them in growing business. Mehta says, "The association is disappointed with the government as it has not considered any relief packages for the



Jagat Mehta  
President  
ETAA

Tourism Industry even after our constant efforts to highlight the problems faced by our industry due to Covid-19. However we are still pursuing the matter, since this effect may last for a significant period in the near future."

The various Chapter Chairpersons are Sangeeta Manocha (North India), Santosh Khawale (Western India), Koushik Banerjee (East India), Jagadeesh Hanumanthai (South India) and Nikhil Pargaonkar (Mumbai Region). Abhijit Khadiilkar has decided to move on from

## National Committee

### Western Committee:

Prasad Shett (Vice Chairman), Shripad Deshpande (Advisor Committee), Amol Chilwant (Secretary), Ajeet Deghwekar (Treasurer), Ajinkya Karkande (Sub-committee), Dushyant Desai (Sub-committee), Hlteshkumar Taylor (Sub-committee), Ranjeet Shrivastav (Sub-committee), Ashish Mohataa (Sub-committee)

### South Committee:

Joyson (Vice Chairman), Aarvind Kumar (Secretary), Rajendra (Joint Secretary), Princy K D (Joint Secretary), Nandisha (Treasurer), M P Joy (Advisor South India Committee & Head of Membership Committee), Dinesh (Membership Head), Kamal Mehta (Tamil Nadu Incharge), Ishwar Anand (Telengana Incharge).

### North Committee:

Saurabh Tuteja (General Secretary), Arush Mittal (Alliance Head), Gaurav Arora (Events Head), Punit Bhasin (Membership Head-Joint Secretary), Dineshkumar (Treasurer), Praveen Ghai (Joint Secretary)

### East Committee:

Saurav Agarwal (Secretary), Dibyendu Banerjee (Treasurer), Debojit Banerjee (Membership Development Head), Kunal Guha (Events Head), Chandan Mukherjee (Media & Co-ordinator Head)

### Mumbai Committee:

Rohan Shah (Vice Chairman), Gaurang Nayak (Events Head Mumbai), Rajendra Joshi (Sub-committee), Manisha Khemani (Sub-committee)

his post of National General Secretary for ETAA and will now concentrate on growing his business. ↴

# Tourism industry will emerge stronger

**Manmeet Singh**, Chairman, ADTOI - Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh & Northern India and Chairman, IATO - Punjab & Northern India, believes that the travel agent and tour operator community would emerge stronger after the crisis, as he pegs them as a resilient lot that has already built its business from scratch.



The tourism sector, according to the travel fraternity, was snubbed by the government when allocating stimulus packages to deal with the impact of COVID-19. **Manmeet Singh** believes that be that as it may, the travel agent/ tour operator fraternity is very resilient.

"Most of the agents have started from scratch, worked hard and built their businesses, and if they could do it initially, they now have the experience and knowledge to revive. I have a gut feeling that a medicine to cure COVID-19 will come very



Manmeet Singh  
Chairman, ADTOI - Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh & Northern India and Chairman, IATO - Punjab & Northern India

soon and basically, all Indians are resilient by nature and can tackle any situation without fear. Their propensity to travel will help in growth of domestic tourism," he says.

Singh also feels that while the world has been affected by the pandemic, fortunately, northern India has been able to control its spread to a great extent. "At a time when residents of the region returned, there was some spur in cases, but very soon, the situation started returning towards normalcy," he shares, insisting that the most important thing is safety of life. "Once everybody starts feeling confident of safety and security measures, people will automatically start travelling. This unusual self-imprisonment-like phenomenon will lead to an urge to travel with family. However, the industry would only be benefited if people start hiring

services of travel professionals and start opting for more than day tours," he says.

### At an association level...

Claiming that they have been in constant touch with their clients and FTOs, he adds, "Messages of health concerns have been our priority as a company

↴ If a medicine is brought out, you will see that Indians will start availing holidays in large numbers ↴

ideology, followed by some initiatives of sharing product knowledge. Another most important thing is to sort out the financial obligations at the earliest, either way which was pending because of lockdown.

Obviously, discussions with foreign partners with regard to aggressive business is not on cards, as everybody is waiting for countries to open and understand what kind of new norms will be laid down by different countries, etc."

Apart from that they have also been in regular touch with their members on online platforms. While Singh also believes, like everyone else, that domestic tourism will be the first to revive, how much of a saviour it would be for the huge tourism and hospitality industry is still undetermined. "If a medicine is brought out, you will see that Indians will start availing holidays in large numbers," he shares, adding that initially, Indians would prefer to travel to destinations that can be reached by their own vehicles. ↴

## MEMORIAM



Jeevan Savio Crasta  
(1971-2020)

**Jeevan Savio Crasta**, who was heading the airline liaison department at Akbar Travels, has left for heavenly abode. A pillar of strength for Akbar Group, Crasta's positive and jovial attitude had touched the lives of many he had met in his lifetime. Today, the Akbar Group, where Crasta spent 26 years of his life, is left with a void that cannot be filled. In this hour of grief, his colleagues at Akbar Group, who considered him family, pray for the departed soul to rest in peace. Their thoughts and prayers go out to his wife and child, to have the strength to bear the unparalleled loss. Though words fail to express the pain and sorrow, Crasta, a true hero, will be missed.



Department of Tourism, Philippines, is re-imagining food tourism in light of COVID-19 and preparing health & safety guidelines for dining establishments. In the Philippines, close to 30% of a foreign tourist's expenditure is spent on F&B.

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## MINISTRY OF TOURISM

### Israel

**Asaf Zamir** has been appointed as the new Tourism Minister of Israel. He will succeed Yariv Levin. The newly-appointed minister hopes to rebuild Israel's tourism industry during such uncertain times. He hopes to be able to open hotels and tourism attractions as soon as it is safe to operate them, and also help all industries that support tourism, including restaurants and cafes. Zamir will also work towards encouraging domestic tourism, open skies and minimise damage so the industry can grow once again.



## SAROVAR HOTELS

### Gurugram

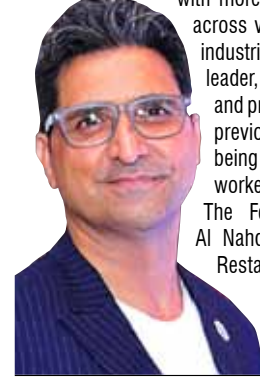
**Sanjay Rai** has been appointed as Senior Vice President – Sales & Marketing at Sarovar Hotels. Armed with a rich and extensive experience in the hospitality industry, Rai, in his new role, will be responsible for overseeing the planning and implementation of sales, marketing and product development programmes for each of the Sarovar brands, targeted towards existing and new markets. Prior to this, he was the Executive Vice President – Global Sales at Oberoi Hotels, where we headed all sales responsibilities.



## SAYAJI HOTELS

### Mumbai

Sayaji Hotels has appointed **Dinesh Dahiya** as the new Vice President Sales. He is an accomplished sales & marketing leader with more than 20 years of work experience across verticals in the hospitality and travel industries. A dynamic and entrepreneurial leader, Dahiya has forward-thinking ideas and proven accomplishments in exceeding previously-unsurpassed revenues. Before being appointed to the new role, he has worked with reputed brands such as The Fern Hotels & Resorts, Mumbai; Al Nahda Resort & Spa and The Jungle Restaurant, Oman.



## THE LODHI

### New Delhi

The Lodhi, New Delhi has appointed **Rajesh Namby** as the General Manager of the hotel. He has a rich experience spanning over two decades, during which he was associated with renowned hotel chains like The Leela, Hyatt, Hilton and Taj Group. His last assignment was as General Manager of The Leela Palace, Udaipur, and prior to that he was the Resident Manager of The Leela Palace, Chanakyapuri. During his 17 years of association with the Leela Group, he was an integral part of their culinary operations and played an instrumental role in transforming their F&B.



## CROWNE PLAZA ADYAR PARK

### Chennai

**Vinoth Kumar** has been appointed as Director of Sales at Crowne Plaza Chennai Adyar Park. Kumar brings with him an extensive track record of sales experience managing rooms for well-known establishments. Across his hospitality career, he has been instrumental in the launch of strategic campaigns and maximising revenue generation. In the new role, he will be managing room sales, overseeing a team of proactive and reactive sales managers, and implement sales strategies for the property.



**Athitha Kumaran Pandiarajan** has been appointed as Assistant Manager Marketing & PR at Crowne Plaza Chennai Adyar Park. He brings with him an extensive track record of restaurant and bar marketing strategies, managing campaigns for several fine-dining establishments. Across his hospitality career, Pandiarajan has been instrumental in the launch of many campaigns and outlet openings. In the new role, he will be handling all aspects of online/offline marketing, partnership management and public relations management.



# Countries slowly re-open for tourism

After months of inactivity, countries across the globe are readying themselves to re-open their borders to tourists to ensure they get a good kick-start to the summer season. Here are six countries that have opted for a measured and gradual opening of sites and bookings.

### Sri Lanka: Airports to open for tourists from August 1

The island nation may re-open airports from August 1, 2020 for foreign tourists as the country gradually returns to normal. Hotels and restaurants registered with the state tourism agency will also be allowed to operate. International and local guidelines will be followed during the re-opening.

### Las Vegas: Casinos to reopen from June 4

Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak has said he will allow casinos in Las Vegas to reopen from June

4. By allowing them to reopen with new rules on physical distancing and sanitising, Nevada will again welcome visitors but is prepared to close down again if there is a spike in cases.

### Croatia: Tourists welcome from July

High tourist traffic from foreign markets is expected from July onwards when more international airlines resume operations. Regular updates of travel information, as well as links to prescribed protection and health measures can be found on the website of the Croatian National Tourist Board.



### Dubai: Transit flights to be allowed

Dubai Airports is ready to resume scheduled flights and

transits with new safety measures. Restaurants and shops will also be available for travellers. Facilities have been

equipped with protective glass at arrival and passport controls, body-heat detectors, signs for social distancing and increased disinfection.

### Philippines: Reopening on the cards

The Department of Tourism (DOT), Philippines is preparing for the revival and re-opening of its tourism once places are

and protocols for travellers and tourism enterprises for the new normal.

### Spain: International tourism to reopen from July 1

Spain is ready to receive international tourists from July 1, 2020 without being quarantined. This will save part of the tourist season while guaranteeing maximum sanitary security



classified under the modified GQC (MGCQ). In its Tourism Response and Recovery Plan, the DOT has prepared safety plans

conditions. Work is being done at a European level so there are common protocols/checks for tourists. ↴



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# ‘With you, shoulder to shoulder’

**Aaditya Uddhav Thackeray**, Cabinet Minister of Tourism and Environment, Government of Maharashtra, talks to Hotel & Restaurant Association (Western India) members in a freewheeling digital interview.

 Hazel Jain

The young and dynamic minister who is pro-tourism and a friend of the hospitality industry, discussed plans for the state with Gurbaxish Singh Kohli, President, HRAWI and Vice President of FHRAI, along with other key members of the association. The association is looking to him to address three points: Need for liquidity and working capital, how to exit lockdown, and how to survive post lockdown. The webinar saw around 800 participants.

**Aaditya Uddhav Thackeray** emphasised on the need for a collaborative approach from all the stakeholders for revival and growth of the hospitality industry. “We recently had a meeting with the Ministry of Tourism in Rajasthan and the Government of Maharashtra to figure how we can collaborate in terms of tourism and hospitality,” he said.

In the wake of the industry being virtually abandoned by the Central Government, the industry’s eyes are set on state for help. To this, Thackeray said, “The reason why we have not announced any package for this industry is because we are fighting a battle at the forefront. As the state of Maharashtra, our every digit, every effort is accountable. This is a long-drawn battle and to fight it we need to look at economic

sustenance as well. Having said that, I am extremely keen that Maharashtra be the first state to declare something promising and deliver on that promise for everyone.”

#### State’s focus on tourism

“My aim is to make the entire state of Maharashtra run on tourism. The state government wants to develop Maharashtra as a tourism-positive state. Probably the single-largest budget allocation for tourism was done this year where Mumbai alone got ₹1,500 crore and the rest of

 I am going to write to the Centre for including some sort of package for the industry; Maharashtra has huge potential 

Maharashtra got a good budget, too. Then this pandemic happened,” said Thackeray. He also thanked the hotel industry that has helped the government of Maharashtra house healthcare professionals and police force for quarantine. “That is a very generous and brave act, and the frontline workers are grateful to you for this,” he added.

#### Exit strategy

In terms of getting out from the lockdown, Thackeray revealed that some five lakh workers have

already started coming back to the 50,000 industries located in some of the green zones of Maharashtra. But, these zones keep fluctuating because of the number of cases that keep rising or falling. “Our tourism and hospitality industry will take some time to get back on its feet. I am going to write to the Centre for including some sort of package for the industry. Maharashtra has huge potential as a tourist destination. I want to pitch our state to the world. However, international travel will probably not start before December 2020,” he stated.

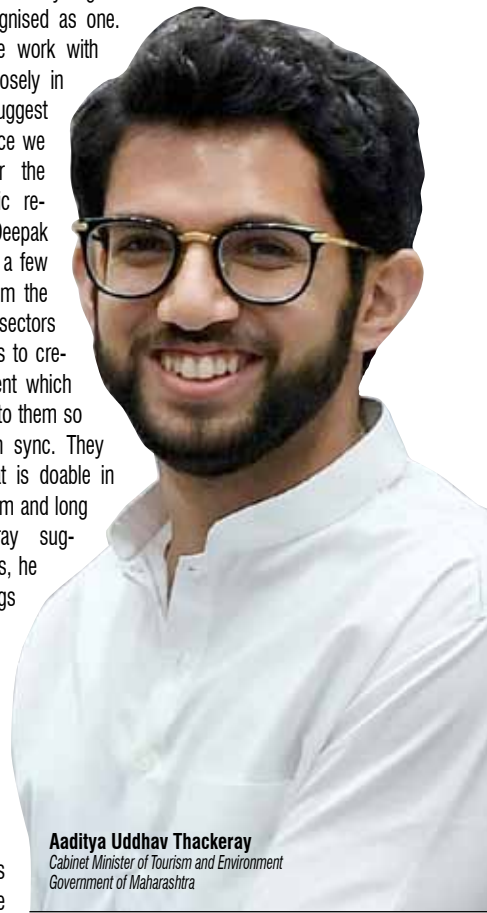
#### Task force for state

“I want to establish a task force for Maharashtra and I want you – the industry – to have an equal voice in that. As you said, hospitality has the industry tag to it but isn’t recognised as one. So, how do we work with other sectors closely in that? I would suggest that the task force we have made for the state’s economic revival – we have Deepak Parekh in it and a few more people from the finance and PE sectors – I would like us to create one document which we can present to them so we can work in sync. They can tell us what is doable in the short, medium and long term,” Thackeray suggested. From this, he said, some things might be where the government can give a sustenance package. But first, he added, we will need to ensure safety to all visitors to the state

because that is going to be a major concern.

#### Business travel, a focus area

With Mumbai the financial capital of India, the industry urged him to help promote business travel in the city. “Business travel is our core competency so we cannot ignore that. We cannot leave that out. We already have a plan to make Mumbai, Pune and Thane more vibrant in terms of using F&B and hotel space innovatively. That was the initial plan, but we will have to execute this now. Let us work on two clear agendas: one is how to sustain this lockdown period and come out of it safely, and how do we use open space keeping in mind physical distancing norms,” Thackeray summed up. 



**Aaditya Uddhav Thackeray**  
Cabinet Minister of Tourism and Environment  
Government of Maharashtra

### Issues put forth

- ❖ Need for liquidity and working capital and facilitating working capital requirements
- ❖ Exemption in electricity duty, which is charged at 21 per cent
- ❖ Property tax waiver for 6-9 months with the caveat that landlords should pass it on to the establishments
- ❖ Waiver of increased excise licence fees that are payable upfront
- ❖ Subsidies available to the manufacturing sector should be extended to hotels and restaurants

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