

# 1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY

**TRAV TALK**

Staying apart to stand together

Published from : ★ India ★ Middle East

Can price rebuild traveller confidence? .... 05

Northeast repackages itself ..... 07

Goa shifts focus on infrastructure ..... 09

What does reopening look like? ..... 13

'Overhaul India's built heritage' ..... 24

C-commerce, the new way to engage .... 34

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# MOT identifies green airports

Ministry of Tourism is taking many initiatives towards re-starting tourism businesses across the country, shares **Prahlad Singh Patel**, Minister of State (I/C), Tourism & Culture. He also elaborates on the recently launched detailed operational advisories for industry stakeholders.

Nisha Verma

**Prahlad Singh Patel** said that from June 8, 2020, hotels, restaurants and tour & travel companies across the country have been directed to open. "Apart from that, 821 ASI monuments have also been opened," he said, speaking at the launch of on-line summer training by The Institute of Tourism Studies, University of Lucknow, in association with Voice of India Tourism (VOIT).

However, there are protocols in place and MOT has also released its own advisories. "In line with the SOPs that MHA and MoHFW have released, MOT has also come out with operational advisories for industry stakeholders, as we believe that we need to have separate advisories for different products and service providers in the industry, including monuments, hotels, restaurants, as well as tour & travel operators, and other related services. We all must abide by



**Prahlad Singh Patel**  
Minister of State (I/C)  
Tourism & Culture

these advisories and take them as a pledge. Then only we can

move forward from this threat," he added. He believes that domestic tourism will kickstart the tourism business. "I have

*I have proposed int'l airports in Imphal, Uttarakhand, Himachal, Leh and Bagdogra*

suggested that MOT would identify green airports across the country. When I talk about

international airports, I have proposed Imphal in Manipur, which has become a COVID-free state, and Khajuraho in MP, that has been a big hub for international tourism. Smaller airports across the country can give strength to this idea. I have proposed airports in Leh, Uttarakhand, Himachal, Bagdogra, and many other airports in the country," Patel shared.

MOT has also decided that they will be working on a social platform with state tourism

ministries, where authentic and factually correct information is put, that can further be shared with agencies, online aggregators, hotels, tour & travel operators, as well as tourists. "The information on this platform by MOT would convey that we have taken consent from states and stakeholders for the same, and then we have allowed any traveller there. Otherwise, if someone travels anywhere, and gets stuck, it will be a dent in our trust," added Patel.

# A reason to cheer for MSMEs

Putting the industry disappointment to rest, **Yogendra Tripathi**, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, in an exclusive interaction with **TRAVTALK**, claims that the new MSME definition gives similar benefits to the services sector as it does to manufacturing. He also elaborates on the soon-to-be-launched detailed operational advisories for industry stakeholders.

TT Bureau

The tourism industry was visibly and vocally disappointed when it found no mention in the stimulus package announced by the finance minister last month. However, Ministry of Tourism (MOT) claims that the stimulus package does benefit the tourism industry through the new definition of MSME, and that they will be handholding the industry as it moves towards revival.

Addressing industry concerns, **Yogendra Tripathi** said, "The initial feeling of the industry that tour-



**Yogendra Tripathi**  
Secretary  
Ministry of Tourism

ism did not find a mention in the stimulus package was in some ways misplaced. Throughout my tenure, I have been hearing from the industry that 75-80 per cent

of the stakeholders in the tourism sector fall under the MSME category. The biggest announcements under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan package are pertaining to

*We are bringing up some of the industry's difficulties to appropriate authorities to see if we can resolve them*

MSMEs. In fact, we clarified with the industry that the biggest announcements are there for them

as well." Explaining further, he shared, "The fact that the differentiation of definition between the manufacturing and the services sector MSME, which has been removed and the cap that has been changed for the services sector MSMEs (like tourism sector MSMEs) shall bring benefits. It's not just the benefits which have been given, but it also further expands the scope of the tourism industry, to be part of the MSME definition and to take the benefits, which are due under the MSME category of Atmanirbhar Bharat announcements. We are bringing

up some of the industry's difficulties to appropriate authorities to see if we can resolve them, so that more benefits reach out to the MSME tourism industry."

Talking about SOPs that were released on June 8, 2020 for tourism stakeholders, including hotels and restaurants, Tripathi said, "The tourism industry has welcomed this move. The document with detailed SOPs by MoHFW is a good document. On one side it enables industry stakeholders to start their operations and on the other, it gives confidence to consumers

that the stakeholders are going to take precautions. Hence, two major steps have already been taken by the government, giving a platform to all stakeholders in the industry to move forward and start operations."

MOT has now come up with more detailed operational advisories for tourism stakeholders and states, to ensure that operations happen smoothly and consumers are confident of using their services. "We have been in discussion with stakeholders and have been taking

Contd on page 8 ▶



# Wondering where this is?



Crystal-clear Lake Tahoe is the jewel of Nevada and a water-sports paradise all through the year.

A large scenic photograph of Lake Tahoe. In the foreground, two people are paddleboarding on the calm, crystal-clear blue water. The water is so clear that large rocks are visible beneath the surface. In the background, there is a dense forest of evergreen trees along the shoreline, and distant mountains are visible under a clear blue sky.

## Lake Tahoe



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# No or little compensation by states

Hotels are being used by states for housing health workers with little or no compensation, pushing these unsung heroes further into debt. **Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**, President, HRAWI and Vice President, FHRAI, explains...

**Hazel Jain**

Speaking about the need for transparency with regards to hotels being used as quarantine centres and accommodation for health workers, Gurbaxish Singh Kohli says, "Nothing has been laid down on paper as of now. For more than two months, our services are being used and our costs are increasing due to being operational, but nothing is being said about the compensation due to us."

Not one but all hotels are affected adversely; the government needs to think if they are willing to push this sector into oblivion

He says that hotels and restaurants are the unsung COVID-19 warriors for serving the country by offering their rooms and their kitchens. Unfortunately, they are not being recognised for this. "Hotels are being used by



**Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**  
President, HRAWI and  
Vice President, FHRAI

all states for housing the health workers. For almost two months now, hotels are being used for the purpose without any compensation or payment. Also, the compensation marked for this requisition is next to nothing. It is tantamount to further burdening a sector which is already on the verge of extinction. None of the hotels have been paid for the occupation since more than two months and although we have approached the authorities several times verbally and expressed to fix a reasonable compensation and make payment immediately, there is no revert from them till date. They

have to understand that this occupation without any payment whatsoever will be the last straw that will break the camel's back. As it is we are burdened with liabilities, there is no stimulus from the government and now they have forced us to keep our premises open to house medical workers among other essential healthcare personnel and take care of them. We incur operational expenses and



yet we aren't getting paid. Due to this, not one but all hotels are affected adversely, and the government seriously needs to think if they are willing to push this sector into oblivion and take responsibility for killing the sector," Kohli says.

**Need for co-ordination between Centre and states**  
Meanwhile, certain states like Rajasthan have been allowed

to open their hotels and restaurants, those in Mumbai and certain parts of Maharashtra have still not been permitted to open for guests. Commenting on this, Kohli says, "Hotels and restaurants have been ready to serve customers for quite some time and are fully prepared to open up. But, there needs to be proper coordination between the Centre and state governments. There is no clarity because every day there is a new circular by various departments and then there is a correctional additional circular issued."

He also highlights certain unnecessary hurdles that they are facing right now. "Putting deadlines of shutting after 9pm and not allowing liquor to be sold are some of the other impediments which will not allow many restaurants to open even after lockdown on them is lifted," Kohli says, adding, "Hotels and restaurants are safer than shops. There is automatically physical distancing in hotel rooms and in restaurants, unlike shops, everyone cannot walk in."

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Staying apart to stand together

MOT focus on intangible heritage

Prohibited Single Point, Minister of State (PWS) for Tourism & Culture, launched the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICLH) of India on April 16, World Heritage Day. Ministry of Tourism (MOT) celebrated the special occasion by organising a series of activities under 'Shree Aapka Desh'.

Tourism Task Force for revival

Ministry of Tourism has constituted a National Tourism Task Force in a bid to revive the industry from the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, which has taken a toll on travel and tourism sector in an unprecedented way. The task force, headed by the Minister of Tourism, will submit its report to the Prime Minister.

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# TRAVTALK

## VIEWPOINT

### On board or off board?

A National Tourism Board as a solution to many of the industry's woes is a view that has been contested time and again. But, the COVID-19 pandemic has made us realise one thing – that no one can be completely self-dependent. The Ministry of Tourism needs the industry and vice versa, so a National Tourism Board that has the actual tourism stakeholders playing a key role may be the way to go, delivering the right message to the world about India and her tourism offerings. When the real stakeholders, brimming with bright ideas for the sector, are provided a platform to share with the Ministry their expertise, they will definitely put in their all to ensure sustenance and real progress. If we turn the clock back a few months, could the existence of a National Tourism Board have effectively delivered the industry's requests for relief and aid at the right time? That said, first things first and like all other successful partnerships, the parameters of the board need to be crystal clear to ensure that responsibilities are well-defined. For the tourism sector to tap its underutilised potential, it is essential that its people be given more than an attentive ear.

### More is not merrier

Is the ground reality the same as what is being talked about? Today, after months of lockdown when people are still wary of stepping out even to get to work, what is the guarantee that they will travel for pleasure, aka revenge tourism? Indians have often been pegged as a resilient lot of travellers, but could COVID-19 have changed that mindset of a people dealing with the harsh realities of the day? What adds to the woes is the lack of a unified protocol system or authority over safety measures for tourism.

Could one country's or state's stringent protocol be a loss for another's flexible policy or vice versa? Is the traveller even looking at safety measures over convenience? It may not be wrong to say that given a chance, an individual would rather visit a country that does not require a 14-day self-quarantine on arrival than one that does. Time alone can tell how things will pan out for tourism. Are we prepared?

## 'The toughest time we've seen'

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the world. Every business is affected, but the most affected ones are those that deal with people face-to-face. 'Ours is one of them,' says **Rajeev Jain**, Director, Rashi Entertainment.

COVID-19 has shaken every business, but the most affected are those that deal with people face-to-face. 'Ours is one of them,' says **Rajeev Jain**, Director, Rashi Entertainment.

We are in the 'experiential' and 'bringing people together' business. Ours is the 'live' events business. Obviously, this has been impacted most grievously. The fallout of this is evident all around – a few lakh have been rendered jobless, companies are facing shutdowns thanks to the liquidity crunch, the entire support system and supply chain is facing crisis. The size, scope, viability and economic contribution of our industry before the COVID-19 crisis hit the organised corporate events sector was Rs10,000 crore as per a report. The wedding industry, exhibitions and sports sectors combined with the corporate events sector placed the industry clearly at Rs40,000 crore. While there is no immediate solution, I believe that the events sector with 'touch and feel' at the heart of the human experience will bounce back. I

can safely say that by February 2021, the tide will have turned.

#### Government support

This industry comprises some very dynamic and enterprising minds, and placing the industry in the right context vis-à-vis the government – positioning it in the corridors of power – would work wonders for it. Unfortun-

Profit margins will be reduced, but celebrations and weddings will sustain our industry till the corporate spenders are back

nately, we are neither a recognised nor an organised sector, and do not currently have the visibility, voice and heft that we should have in front of the government. I have a wish list for the finance minister:

Not only should event projects below Rs200 crore be given to Indian companies, but all

government events should also be done by Indian agencies only.

The Central government should allocate resources to state governments annually to conduct events for public awareness and welfare – and these should be executed locally.

#### The future?

I have spent more than two decades in this industry and what I have learnt is that 'the show must go on'. There is no denying that the Indian experiential and wedding industries are currently suffering the impact, and agencies are struggling to stay afloat, but I believe our industry will enjoy a revival soon. New SOPs will emerge and with creativity, innovation and technology, our industry will create new engagement models which will help us brave our way through the pandemic and come out winning.

Domestic destinations will be the most sought-after for large weddings as international markets will be shunned – this will provide event companies more opportunities and several corporate event companies will also begin to use their expertise for wedding design, planning and

management. Of course, the profit margins will be reduced, but celebrations and weddings will sustain our industry in the interim.

#### Virtual events a feasible option?

Everything helps! Technology, like it does everywhere else, will help here, too. However, humans like meeting other humans. They like the physical 'experience' and that's why our business is called 'experiential'. Consider 10,000 fans in a stadium cheering on the music of a popular artist – will you get the same experience in front of a screen with a fizzy drink and popcorn? Technology has its own place, it is a great value addition, but it can never substitute the real thing.

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



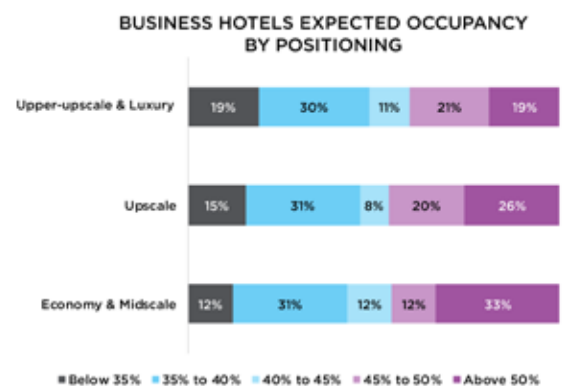
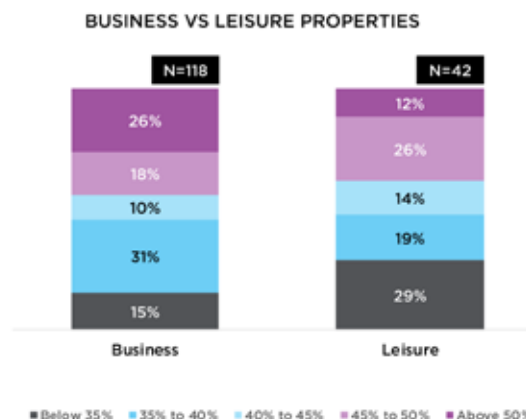
**Rajeev Jain**  
Director  
Rashi Entertainment

## Business hotels are optimistic

HVS ANAROCK's 'General Manager's Sentiment Survey', conducted across branded hotels pan India, reveals that upscale business properties are expected to open sooner than others, including leisure hotels.

Business hotels are likely to see quicker recovery. Economy and midscale hotels, on the other hand, are also confident of achieving 50 per cent (or more) occupancy in the fourth quarter of 2020.

The report also reveals that going by property type and positioning, 33 per cent of business economy and midscale hotels are expected to exceed 50 per cent occupancy by Q4 2020.





# Can price rebuild traveller confidence?

During the CAPA Masterclass on restoring traveller confidence, **Alexandre de Juniac**, Director General & CEO, IATA and **Gloria Guevara**, WTTC President & CEO, said that a pressing issue is to first ensure passengers feel safe to travel.



Manas Dwivedi

According to both industry leaders, it is the entire travel journey from door to door which requires wider collaboration and coordination. More than ever, all stakeholders now need to take collaboration and coordina-

✂ This is the time for governments to borrow and invest in infrastructure projects relevant to tourism ✂

- Gloria Guevara

tion seriously. Echoing the dire need for such an alliance, **Gloria Guevara** stated that pricing will not be the main factor for everyone, to improve demand. The most crucial factor, she said,



**Gloria Guevara**  
President & CEO, WTTC

would be rebuilding passenger confidence as quickly as possible through a coordinated industry and government approach to safety standards and removal of inconsistencies. But, according to IATA chief **Alexandre de Juniac**, airlines in particular are initially using price to stimulate demand with low fares. "IATA's research shows fares for travel on domestic markets in May 2020 were down almost a quarter year-on-year, falling 23 per cent. International airfares for the lim-

ited international services active in May 2020 were also down, but at single-digit levels. Price is an emerging pattern in the recovery process," he said.



**Alexandre de Juniac**  
Director General & CEO, IATA

A point on which both leaders agreed was that there is currently very limited co-ordination between countries. Quarantine requirements could add 14-day lockdowns at each end of any journey, and even where travellers are freely permitted to access a

country within a so-called bubble, their previous travel could ultimately force them to comply with entry restrictions.

Emphasising on the vital role for government multilateralism, the WTTC chief said that making the right decisions on recovery will ultimately define its path. "We need to learn

✂ Having faced lockdowns and travel restrictions, this is generating a situation where fear transcends desire ✂

- Alexandre de Juniac

from what happened after 9/11. The reason it took so many years to recover was because governments did not

work in a coordinated approach. We implemented some safety standards that for every country in the world were different, which led to uncertainty, fear and impacted recovery," she noted.

"This is the time for governments to borrow and invest in infrastructure projects relevant to tourism so that we can get the economy moving again. Right now is not the time for them to save their money and do nothing," urged Guevara.

De Juniac acknowledged that many companies will be looking to reduce travel budgets in light of COVID-19, while others will turn towards technology for meetings and business dealings instead of travel. "Having faced lockdowns and travel restrictions, this is generating a situation where fear transcends desire," he commented. ✂

## Tourism Breaking News

- ACI and IATA jointly issue paper on restarting aviation safely
- Hoteliers should not drop room rates but adapt to new normal: RAKTDA
- Government relaxes visa and travel restrictions for foreigners
- IndiGo to add new Airbus jets to fleet despite COVID-19 uncertainty
- Andhra Pradesh to soon come out with a new tourism policy
- Jalesh Cruises partners with travel companies for first API integration
- Genting Cruise Lines launches new B2B mobile App in India
- Maharashtra allots 54.40-hectare land to IHCL for tourism centre



Social Distancing Works (1 m)



Dear Trade colleagues,

In light of the developments regarding COVID-19, we would like to first say that our thoughts are with those affected by the virus in India and around the globe. The well-being and safety of our teams, clients and communities should be our top priority. As we closely monitor the evolving impact, we are constantly in touch with hotel chains about the measures taken by them to ensure the health and safety of our mutual guests, while also maintaining the highest level of service.

We have taken measures to create social distance to minimize the spread of COVID-19, we have asked our staff to work remotely in the near term. As we have robust technology and a culture of flexibility that enables our staff to efficiently and effectively perform their work remotely. We will continue to tailor our approach to meet your specific needs, and we will adjust and communicate with you as circumstances change. In the meantime, we want to assure you that we will continue to provide uninterrupted service.

As we navigate through these challenging times, we are reminded of how fortunate we are to be part of this strong community that supports each other to accomplish great things. It is the power of this community that will propel us through this to better times.

On behalf of all our colleagues at GRNconnect.com,  
We wish you, your teams and your loved ones good health and safety.



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# Time to adopt sustainable practices

A global health crisis is not the answer to improve sustainable tourism, but it has given us a cause to reflect on the impact of human activity on the planet – including how we travel. Just as COVID-19 has forced our lives to a standstill, it is time for us to consider the future of travel, says **Kingshuk Biswas**, In Charge CEO, Gujtour Development Company.

The immediate reaction to COVID-19 has been lockdown, which in turn means reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. There are innumerable videos/pictures floating around which show a cleaner world. When it comes to sustainability, there are actually three ‘pillars’ to consider: environmental, economic and socio-cultural. Anyone can easily comprehend that one of the pillars of sustainability – environmental – has been immediately impacted by this global health issue. Thus, sustainable tourism should:

❖ Make optimal use of environ-



Sustainable Tourism Parameters Matrix				
	Accommodation Sector	Airlines	Destinations/ Tour Operators	OTAs
Local satisfaction with tourism	Utilize images/ artefacts / handicrafts/ local items , cuisine etc in the property predominantly	Introduce carbon credit pricing for eco fragile destinations specifically	Tie up with restaurants/shops/ etc who are promoting local culture/ cuisine	Offer cultural, wild-life, environmental conservation tours, educational ,research oriented tours
Destination economic benefits	Usage of eco-friendly and local construction materials, equipment, etc for hotels/ lodges  Usage of green bonds or other financial instruments which promote green practices	Invest in engineering/ management systems which reduces carbon emission  Usage of green bonds or other financial instruments which promote green practices	Promote small group toursWork with local NGOs/ SHGs Curate & promote cultural, animal ,environmental conservation tours, educational ,research oriented tours	Offer separate category of eco-friendly/green hotels and highlight airlines with sustainable practices/ sustainable aviation fuel
Employment	Employ 70%-80% local employment (direct)  Develop local tourist guides	—	Employ 70%-80% local employment(direct) Develop local tourist guides and volunteering	Tie up with tourism boards/ agencies to offer listing of local tour guides for hire
Tourism seasonality	Create off-season packages to reduce over-tourism  Discounts if hotels from same chain booked at different destinations	Introduce carbon credit pricing during heavy tourist season alternatively to restrict over-tourism	Offer off-season packages to reduce over-tourism or link such discounts to packages during peak seasons	Offer off-season package rates for airlines/ hotels  During season, offer combined package of green hotels and flights to reduce carbon emission
Energy and water management	Energy solutions or green buildings concept in design.  Introduce water conservation systems	Fuel alternatives deployment of sustainable low-carbon fuels	Invest in electric vehicle for tourism install water bottling plants at camping sites/etc	—
Sewage management	Sewage Treatment Plant(STP) mandatory  Additional systems to be awarded	—	Destinations to Incentives tourism units with modern sewage management	—
Solid waste management	No plastic use policy Opting for reusable utensils/materials over disposable items  Waste audit compulsory	Remove common single-use items from operations and swap for more sustainable options	Ask tourists to carry back their waste/ rubbish by giving them cloth bags/etc options	—
Governance	Introduce electronic check-ins/management systems  Financial/tax incentives by Government for above facilities  Regulation/mandatory as feasible	Offset emission projects or CO2 compensation from energy projects linked to renewable energy conversions Introduce carbon offsetting functionality into its booking flow system	Creation of category of tour operators following sustainable tourism/green practices  Financial/tax incentives by Government for above facilities	OTAs offering sustainable tourism offerings of hotels, airlines, etc can be supported by Authorities in terms of promotion/ financial incentives

mental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.

- ❖ Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
- ❖ Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.



Travel and tourism has the potential to make the world a better place – by bringing economic benefits to poorer destinations, through cultural exchange and understanding, and through self-growth. By definition, sustainable tourism is good to the local people, their culture, and their environment. Tourism has to be sustainable in all three areas to truly be considered sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism actually benefits everyone involved. Unsustainable tourism might be fine from the point of view of the tourist, but it's unlikely to benefit or gain support from the host community.

The sustainable matrix (a brief picture provided herein) is an

attempt to summarise the approaches towards policy framing. It matrix attempts to give direction to the major tourism entities of the sector, namely accommodation, airlines, destinations/tour operators and online travel agencies (OTAs). Based on the matrix, tourism policy makers should attempt to make these actionable points either through regulation or through incentives, whichever is feasible in their economies. This policy guideline has purposely left out the list of incentives which the destinations can offer, because incentives, tax reliefs, etc., will differ from nation to nation.

The idea is to take these ready-to-use actionable points and frame the sustainable tourism policy accordingly.

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



**Kingshuk Biswas**  
In Charge CEO  
Gujtour Development Company

# Northeast repackages itself

This tourism-dependent region plans to give a spin to its offerings to cater to a demand that will be dictated by COVID-19 safety measures. Stakeholders in India's Northeast region aim to bring their rural tourism product into mainstream tourism, to support the fragile economy here.

“We have been in discussion amongst tourism stakeholders to form a travel bubble with all the seven sister states and Sikkim even before COVID-19 hit us. However, that hasn't materialised so far. This needs a concerted effort from all eight states. Our request to the government is also to incentivise the first few travellers by maybe offering them a few free activities in the region. Just facilitating travel is not going to be enough.”



**E Banlumiang Blah**  
President, North East India  
Tourism Confederation (NEITC)



**Arijit Purkayastha**  
Chapter Chairman  
ADTOI - Northeast Chapter

“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 only. As of now, LTC is valid till September 2020. If extended, we can look forward to a sizeable number of visitors.”

“Nature-based tourism will work well for us once travel resumes as it sees smaller crowds of people. Given our per square kilometre population, Northeast India is the destination that the rest of the country will be looking at. However, we should veer away from any kind of tourism that floods us. We have a unique ecosystem and are not geared to receive large numbers. Our aim must be to attract high-value, low-volume tourists.”



**Nirmalya Choudhary**  
Chapter Chairman  
IATO - Northeast Chapter



**Ranjeet Das**  
President  
TOAA

“There is bound to be some behavioural shift among travellers once travel resumes. They will prefer to choose nature, wildlife, and rural settings. This is where our region's lesser-known destinations and community-based tourism will fit in. We must develop these destinations as products and market them well. Local communities must also be integrated into the supply chain and trained about the benefits of tourism.”

“A major challenge for hotels in this region is the fact that 60-70% of business happens between mid-March to mid-June. And a significant section of our economy relies on this tourist season. It has a massive ripple effect on restaurants, real estate, local transportation, artisans, cultural artists and overall employment. So, it's a fragile economy that definitely needs support.”



**Bjorn DeNiese**  
Director - Mayfair Spa  
Resort & Casino and  
Vice President, MHRL



**Amit Agarwal**  
Joint Secretary  
India Tour Operators  
Association - North East

“We have seen a lot of changes in the sector here. Northeast has become very popular among Indians from other states like Maharashtra, Gujarat and some southern states. This is mainly due to better connectivity. Lots of young adults are looking at us for adventure. We don't have too many operators who offer this. So adventure tourism can be a very promising area where tour operators can specialise.”

Contd on page 12 ►

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## VOIT - Voice of India Tourism launched by MOT



VOIT - Voice of India Tourism is an online training programme launched as a CSR activity. Its launch was virtually graced by minister Prahlad Singh Patel.

## Madhya Pradesh re-opens its tourist destinations

Madhya Pradesh has re-opened its State Tourism Development Corporation hotels, resorts and many private hotels at tourist destinations for tourists and hoteliers, promoting domestic tourism, allowing in tourists from within the country. Madhya Pradesh Forest department has also issued a circular regarding re-opening of National Parks from June 15, 2020. National Park's buffer zone will remain open during the monsoon season. Speaking on the same, **Sonia Meena**, Additional Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, said, "Madhya Pradesh being into inbound tourism promotion is very strong with its domestic tourism products, wildlife is one of them."

# States have been optimistic

▶ Contd from page 1

inputs regarding what they feel is the right way of starting operations. We shared our inputs when the SOPs were being finalised by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. As the next step, to further give confidence to state governments and industry stakeholders, we have come up with more detailed operational advisories to help stakeholders in ensuring that their operations happen smoothly on one side, and this would also give more confidence to the consumers that our stakeholders would be operating, not only as per SOPs, but would be following very detailed functional operational advisories. Therefore, it should help in building confidence not only among the people who are going to do business, but also among the people who are going to use the services," he revealed.

In addition, Tripathi said that he is in constant discussion with tourism secretaries of states. "I must say that even in difficult times, the kind of

positivity I feel by talking to them is amazing. Once we come out of COVID-19, travel will start and naturally, it would be to places that people haven't seen in their states, as protocols within states will be uniform. Hence, a visitor or consumer would feel more confident. All the state governments are active towards identifying the areas which could be safer to visit

✦ Detailed operational advisories should help in building confidence among those doing business and those using the service ✦

in these times, so that they can give an idea to people within the state and neighbouring states as to what would be better to visit."

This, according to him, indicates that the next stage will be to open domestic tourism areas based on how the situation evolves.

### International plans?

Tripathi says that talking about international marketing plans would be premature as of now.

"Keeping in view our traditional markets as well as emerging markets, we will strategise and have our plan worked out to promote international tourism. However, I must say that though we may not be on the television publicising internationally for tourism, we are present on social media with soft messages, instead of aggressively inviting tourists, to ensure that we are remembered and continue to be remembered as a destination," he shared.

Applauding the attitude of the industry while claiming that the tourism industry was and is one of the hardest hit sectors, he added, "Even in these difficult times, all the stakeholders have been very optimistic, although they may have their disappointments. I am sure each one of them has his own difficulties, but despite that they have come forward and retained their positivity, their enthusiasm for what is required of their professional roles, which is reflected through the level of interaction that industry associations have had with the government. They have also been organising webinars, and an exchange of ideas is happening in the industry as they try to gauge the impact of COVID-19, how the spectrum would change, how they would need to modify and change, and how the new normal would be." ✦



*Global Himalayan Expedition has partnered with the European Space Agency for developing innovative space utilisation applications & services to support empowerment of rural communities and uplift them through sustainable tourism.*

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# Goa shifts focus on infrastructure

While tourism takes its own time to recover, the state has decided to focus on upgrading and strengthening its infrastructure – both physical as well as in terms of policy. The state will soon launch a crackdown on illegal accommodation operators and encourage them to register, for more transparency.



Hazel Jain

According to **J Ashok Kumar**, Secretary (Tourism), Government of Goa, there has been a revenue loss of around Rs2,000 crore in just the last two months of lockdown. However, he adds that there are opportunities available to Goa at this stage. "We are now focusing on simplifying and easing rules of doing business for existing businesses as well as start-ups in this sector. Our Chief Minister recently had a meeting with the tourism stakeholders and it has been decided that some relief will be granted to them. The immediate relief they are looking forward to is that they can automatically renew or extend whatever licences and registrations have been extended to them. This was a major request by them. There was also a request to waive off the licensing or renewal fee and it is being considered. We are



**J Ashok Kumar**  
Secretary (Tourism)  
Government of Goa

also looking at extending validity period of the licences from renewing it every year to making it once in five years."

He added that parallelly, his department is also looking at clamping down unregistered accommodation in the state. "There are a large number of unregistered properties in Goa in various categories. We aim to bring them under the gamut of the tourism

department for sake of registration to ensure we have proper accounting of the number of beds and properties available in state. We are even modifying our rules to make it easy for them so they don't have to get any NOCs or licences, etc. They just need a simple ownership document and register," he reveals.

✦ **Tourism stakeholders can automatically renew or extend registrations and licences that have been extended to them** ✦

- J Ashok Kumar

**Nikhil Desai**, Managing Director, Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC), says, "There is a need for Goa to focus on its infrastructure and regulate its tourism trade. A lot

of hospitality establishments are operating without registering themselves. These illegal operators are going to face the heat in the coming days.



**Nikhil Desai**  
Managing Director, Goa Tourism  
Development Corporation (GTDC)

At one point, we saw a lot of these OTAs on-board many of these unregistered properties, but those days are now over."

**Completing infrastructure projects** Meanwhile, tourists entering the state will need to get a COVID-19

✦ **A lot of hospitality establishments are operating without registering themselves; they will face the heat in the coming days** ✦

- Nikhil Desai

test done 48 hours before their departure or undergo a test in Goa and stay in quarantine until results are out. Kumar adds, "We are looking at diversifying our products from just entertainment and beach tourism to emphasise on eco, nature and wellness tourism. We want high-spending, low volume tourists."

Desai has also been focusing on completing the state's infrastructure projects. "The Mopa airport for which the work is un-

derway will be completed soon and will be a game changer for Goa's tourism industry. A lot of these projects have been in the pipeline and will see the light of day soon. One of them is the Fort Aguada jail complex which is being renovated at a cost of Rs28 crore and will be completed by October 2020. Once that happens, there we will be a paradigm shift in our heritage tourism circuit. It will also have a sound & light show. I am also happy to share that the Rs100 crore convention centre in Panjim will be ready in the next 15-18 months. Once that happens, we are going to focus very strongly on MICE," he shares.

Desai also adds that his department is also going to approach the ministry for developing hinterland tourism in Goa which is one of the lesser-known products of the state. ✦

A hidden gem in the northern most part of the UAE, Ras Al Khaimah is a dream destination for all types of holiday seekers. The Emirate boasts of magnificent landscapes featuring breath taking coastlines, terracotta desert planes, and the towering Hajar mountain range with the UAE's highest peak – Jebel Jais.

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RAKTDA is the first tourism board to partner with Bureau Veritas, a global leader in testing, inspection and certification. This initiative is part of the Authority's Stay Safe Hotel Certification Program which is aimed at boosting confidence and rebuilding trust in the destination's tourism.

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# Small businesses shall be supported

**Suresh Prabhu**, Member of Parliament and former Union Minister of Civil Aviation, recently spoke about the challenges faced by the tourism, aviation, hospitality and transport segments, owing to COVID-19. He even pointed out the importance of smaller travel agents in tourism's recovery.



Nisha Verma

Speaking at the webinar by Bird Group Leadership Initiative, in collaboration with PHD Chamber of Commerce & Industry and WTTC, **Suresh Prabhu** said that every segment has seen a downturn because of this unprecedented situation and that they will revive accordingly. "The travel and tourism industry falls under the services sector, which contributes over 60 per cent of the GDP and creates the most number of jobs. Tourism is a highly job-intensive industry. It also drives demand in manufacturing, automobile industry for vehicles, as well as



**Suresh Prabhu**  
Member of Parliament and former  
Union Minister of Civil Aviation

construction (for hotels). Right from farms that provide food materials, poultry and dairy products, tourism is responsible in helping manufacturing on one side, agriculture on the other.

Apart from this, it is critical for serving an important social purpose—it fulfils the ultimate desire of a person to go for a pilgrimage, before he bids adieu to the world, and that goes for every religion," Prabhu said.

✦ When the so-called normalcy returns and airlines can take-off, the new normal could be equally devastating ✦

What makes the situation today different from previous pandemics and financial crises, according to Prabhu, is that even at the

time of the Great Depression, there were vehicles on the road, people could go out, and trains, ships & airlines (even less at the time) were operating. "Today, the situation is very different, as travel is not restricted because of economic reasons, but we are forced against moving out. We don't have a vaccine and protocol to deal with it, and we have already seen the kind of phenomenal rise around the world of COVID-19, because of which there is an economic loss," he shared.

## Tourism is worst affected

Claiming that some countries have 90 per cent of their GDP coming from tourism, he said, "They draw their incomes only from this sector. Imagine the havoc it has caused in those parts of the world. In any case, we can't travel anywhere at this time even if we want to. Airlines

are going to suffer a huge loss, which could be anything to the tune of \$350 billion or upwards, according to industry estimates. They could lose more depending on when ultimately normalcy will be restored."

The near future also, according to him, is not that rosy. "When the so-called normalcy returns and airlines can take-off, the new normal could be equally devastating. For instance, we may have to keep the middle seat vacant, no serving of food and amenities to even the high-paying classes, the Business Class lounge might not be there, etc. In addition, one might be asked to produce a certificate to ensure that one is fit enough to travel. All this might create a hassle for the people. More importantly, even when the new normal emerges, the psychology of people is also important," he explained.

## Business from MICE and weddings

While most of the businesses are being managed with video conferencing, companies might not feel the need for physical meetings in the future, claimed Prabhu. "MICE and weddings were one of the big segments of travel and are more than a 3-4 trillion dollar industry globally. The new normal will also be driven by psychology and past experiences, which would eventually guide future actions. Hence, it is going to be a challenge. Having said that, according to my objective analysis, I can say that tourism is bound to grow because it is an inherent part of our system and it's the human urge to travel and we, as a species, cannot be stationary," Prabhu said.

Contd on page 25 ►



A survey by RCI India reveals that of the 71% respondents who prefer a take a domestic holiday over an international one, a whopping 90% would like to travel to a beachside destination or a hill station.

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# 'We need to renegotiate IATA terms'

As domestic flights slowly resume, there is an urgent need for agents to get complete clarity on credit shell redemption as well as renegotiate terms with IATA keeping in mind a slackening demand for international travel. Fair and appropriate cancellation policies of airlines would help build passenger confidence.



Hazel Jain

Lucknow-based travel agent and former Chapter Chairman (UP & Uttarakhand), Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), **Sunil B Satyawakta** is urging outbound travel agents across the country to rethink their terms with IATA. The Director of Civica Travels says, "It is good that 'Unlock 1' has started and domestic flights are gradually taking off. But these are unusual circumstances, especially for international travel and I don't see bookings happening before October or even November 2020. This is why I feel that all IATA agents should re-negotiate the terms with IATA."

He explains, "I am expecting that our ticket sales will be down at least 50 per cent in the next financial year. Keeping this in mind, we must ask IATA to bring



**Sunil B Satyawakta**  
Former Chapter Chairman  
(UP & Uttarakhand), TAAI

down our bank guarantee and our targets by a minimum of 50 per cent. Normally, the amount of financial security is based on the agency's 20 days' average turnover in the last 12 months." The submission deadline for Bank Guarantees is June 24, 2020 for the period beginning July 1, 2020 and ending June 30, 2021.

"As circumstances would not change much in the coming

12 months, we must voice this concern to them before the deadline. It will give agents a little solace and comfort, and their liabilities will be a little less," Satyawakta adds.

✂ I am expecting ticket sales to be down at least 50%; we must ask IATA to bring down bank guarantee and our targets by a minimum of 50% ✂

## Suggestions for redeeming credit shells

Satyawakta also feels strongly that agents need to get complete clarity on the credit shells that lie with the airlines. "It is high time that the airlines spell out if there is any change in their cancella-



tion policies since resuming operations from May 25. It is important for us to know about this quickly so that our clients are briefed of the same while issuing tickets, especially the fate of refunds in case of cancellation of flights," he says.

He brings up many questions that don't have clear answers yet. Will credit shells remain? Will the agent be allowed to withdraw money from their airline ID account to refund to passengers if the money is refunded to the agents' ID? "We all know that credit shells were issued against refunds to passengers because airlines did not have ready money to refund. While we agents were working from home with very limited staff, it was difficult for us to explain and convince our clients about these credit shells against their refunds for the flights cancelled due to COVID-19. It is difficult for us to convince them as to how it is going to work if we ourselves don't have complete clarity," he says.

Satyawakta also has suggestions for airlines with regards to the credit shells. "Airlines should also allow refund of difference of fares in cases of down-sell. In case credit shell is used by passenger 6-12 months later, he should be given at least 10% extra value of the amount of credit shell since airlines have enjoyed interest-free money from passengers," he says. ✂



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## Communities to be protected still

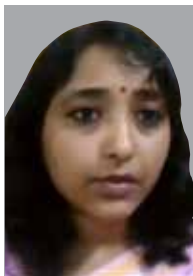
► Contd from page 7



**Dr Abhijit Sharma**  
Director, IIE (Indian Institute of Entrepreneurs), Guwahati

“ Since the past one year, we have been trying to look at and encourage a new group of entrepreneurs – the start-ups – people who disrupt and create solutions. NERES (North East Regional Entrepreneurship Summit) was germinated in order to help such individuals from the Northeast region. We have a filtration process and by the end of it, we award Rs5 lakh seed money to 20 start-ups each, many of whom are in the tourism space. This is to help them translate innovative ideas into commercial ventures. ”

“ Post-COVID-19, we can expect a more informed traveller because they have had the time to do their research. Moreover, while promoting community-based tourism, we must ensure that these communities are protected as they will be the ones coming in contact with the guests. It is our responsibility to bring them into the mainstream. This is not easy for the industry as it requires some intense groundwork, but to counter these challenges, we can collaborate. ”



**Shapna Medhi**  
Assistant Professor, Dept. of Travel & Tourism Management (B.Voc) Sonapur College

Inputs by Hazel Jain

## Let's find a common ground

Many travel leaders are urging countries to have standardised protocols in place that will support smooth movement of people – whether it is hotels, immigration or airlines.

“ We don't want to put up patchworks of different standards and requirements. One country has certain standards on health checks than another country. Health authorities in different countries will have different risk perceptions. Some may be higher, with lower risk tolerance; others may have less stringent checks. How do we reconcile with that? We are trying to do this at a bilateral level with countries we feel we can move together. ”



**Keith Tan**  
CEO  
Singapore Tourism Board



**Fahd Hamidaddin**  
Chief of Investment, Strategy and Tourism Marketing, Saudi Arabia Ministry of Tourism

“ We work with UNWTO and WTTC to make sure we get the best global thinking in terms of collaborating because the fastest way to come out of this pandemic is for us to unify our measures. But, when we take our WTTC 'safety stamp' to other countries, governments are challenged by the level of trust and co-operation they are getting from institutions and individuals. The more we can unify practices between countries, the more we can give clear guidance. ”

“ International coordination will be vital to rehabilitating travel in the post-COVID-19 world. Lack of global management is slowing a return for the aviation sector. The uncoordinated nature of managing the crisis, a failure to manage it on a global scale in a unified way, is clearly an issue which makes things worse and more costly. It is difficult to cut through the jungle – it is a mess. The whole process has become incredibly political. ”



**Jozsef Varadi**  
CEO  
Wizz Air



**Haitham Mattar**  
Senior Advisor  
Saudi Arabia Ministry of Tourism

“ Travellers want to book and live data from Google and Amadeus shows this. But we need governments to rigorously enforce safety measures to rebuild confidence. This is a great opportunity for countries to get back into the market. Destinations must have a plan, a recovery strategy and must start negotiations with online travel agencies. We need to take action today to get people arriving in three months. ”

Inputs by Hazel Jain



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# What does reopening look like?

With the government slowly easing restrictions on the lockdown and opening up the country in a calibrated manner, some travel business have also commenced operations. As we enter the 'new normal' with an increased focus on hygiene and sanitation, here is what industry stakeholders have to say about it...

“ We used this as an opportunity and made changes at all levels – we made a new global sales strategy and made changes to how we reward our people. This new normal is a temporary phase and once the vaccine is in place, this will be taken as just another virus. There is already movement in the global hotel booking business and I think that after four months, business will get a boost. ”



**Naresh Arora**  
Managing Director  
Trulyy India Hotels

“ Travel in this scenario is radically and unrecognisably different. Travellers need more personal assistance and guidance before travelling. We, as our endeavour, are gearing up to provide customer a safe, secure and seamless journeys. The industry is expected to reboot in the new normal. We do not even expect the previous level of business in the next financial year. The industry has to reinvent. ”



**Suresh Periwal**  
Managing Director  
Clubsides Tours and Travels

“ Our bet is on the domestic traveller this season, given that international travel will take time to resume and pick up pace. Domestic gems like Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Andaman & Nicobar, Meghalaya and Sikkim have done a commendable job dealing with the pandemic; their COVID-19 cases are amongst the lowest in the country. These places could see a controlled influx of domestic travellers. ”



**Pankaj Nagpal**  
Managing Director  
Travstarz Global Group

“ Taking all necessary steps in accordance with WHO and government guidelines, Trulyy India hotels are opening up their doors for visitors in a phased manner from July 15, 2020. People will be more mindful of their responsibility towards the environment and fellow travellers. Communication will play a lead role in reaching out to guests, and needs to be done subtly. ”



**Deepak Narula**  
Managing Director  
GRN Connect



**Chandni Patnaik**  
Owner  
Travel at Blue

“ We have not started opening on a regular basis at the moment and we don't intend to do that for another month, maybe more. July to September is conventionally the better period of the year for us, so any business that we can expect could only be sometime beginning October or then onwards. There will be a greater emphasis on hygiene and adherence to SOPs. We have an opportunity to try and attract tourists to smaller destinations. ”



**Ruhani Duggal**  
Director  
Minar Group

“ We plan to restart from July 1, subject to any further government update. We do have some plans in place, since COVID-19 gave us some opportunities to tap new areas in the near future. I think, right now it is more of a panic situation and fear psychosis prevails. We need to overcome this and come to terms with the reality and start leading a normal life with necessary precautions. ”

Inputs by Manas Dwivedi

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# To begin, unlearn then learn afresh

**Rajdev Bhattacharya**, General Manager, Global Travel & Hospitality Services and Way2go, Digital Operations & Platforms for Wipro Limited, feels that now may be the time for the industry to think of new ways to function under the new normal. There is a need to unlearn and learn again, he asserts.

Sitting in an Emirates flight to US not so long ago, I slowly slipped away. I was dreaming of the not so distant past. I suddenly saw dark clouds approaching and beneath lay a ghost town of aircraft parked quietly in the bay as if an enchantress had cast her spell. Having spent 26 years in travel and aviation, I can't help but feel the pain. It is now a part of my existence and what I know and love. Can't imagine a world with no flights, no hotels no conferences, and no meeting clients. The old maxim 'Change happens by choice or crisis' has indeed come true.

I tried to wake up, but the dream just got deeper and more uncomfortable. The clouds kept darkening till I was suffocated with frustration and fear. I acknowledged

that there is a crisis. In my dreams, I saw the mist clearing and in a distance I saw a familiar face, much like someone I have seen in the mirror, but wiser and older, looking

✂ Get ready to change everything. The model has been reset; this is wonderful news. I see the industry digitalise ✂

straight in my eyes smiling, yet firm. "What is it that you are scared of?" he asked in a calm, confident voice. "Remember how you conquered the mighty Keng Yaste, you were at the top of 22,000 feet few days back? Wasn't that dangerous?" he continued,

"Why do you keep wanting to go back? Aren't you afraid then?" Suddenly the answers were staring at me. Passion to keep going conquers all fear.

I was born in Kolkata (then Calcutta) and all I loved was playing the blues on the guitar till one day my first job happened in Jet Airways. I was posted in the small town of Bagdogra. Being an Air Force base, the entrance of the airport had a large sign which I would stop and see every day. It read, 'When the going gets tough, the tough get going'.

Yes! I told myself, I have to change the narrative of this crisis! This isn't the first one that I am facing and perhaps not the last. I have survived. Suddenly it did not look so bad and the clouds slowly cleared. "So



what did I do in my last crisis?" I asked the old man. "Unlearn and learn again," he smiled. "You have to play within the rule of the game and win," as he paused and added, "Never fall in love with your old way of working."

"That's it!" I told to myself, oh dear industry of passionate people, it's time to innovate. Get ready to change everything.

The model has been reset; this is wonderful news. I see the industry digitalise. Doesn't that mean the business we so passionately built 'Way2go' will now come of age? I see boundary-less opportunities opening up with work from home. I see the travel industry trying to take cost out and outsource. I see my industry becoming more modern and willing to invest in technology.

I woke up. The fear was gone. I was more energised with the opportunities I now saw. The fear from the minds of passengers will go away soon. Soon, the mighty birds will take on to the skies. I know I shall look back at 2020 and realise it made me more resilient and stronger!

What's your passion that kills the fear in you? Keep flying!

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



**Rajdev Bhattacharya**  
General Manager, Global  
Travel & Hospitality Services  
and Way2go

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# Time to embark on the green path

**Tejbir Singh Anand** dons many a hat in the tourism industry, as VP, ATOAI; Founder & MD, Holiday Moods Adventures; Founding Member, FAITH and as an adventure travel strategic advisor. In this article authored by him, he talks about responsible and sustainable tourism in the 'new' world and where adventure travel stands.

It is well said that every dark cloud has a silver lining and we should never waste a good crisis. Responsible tourism has come as a blessing in disguise, as travellers will certainly show interest in responsible, conscious and transformative ways of travel. Companies that talk about and can show that they are practising offsetting of the carbon footprint; waste minimisation; increasing their conservation and efficiency efforts; promoting local recruitment, hence empowering regional economies involving communities and benefiting them, will become popular and sought after. Mass tourism will be replaced by responsible tourism.

## Why green is in

Revived nature is an attraction now. The clean, potable water

of River Ganga in Haridwar; the bright blue sky and stars at night; view of Dhauladhar Himalayas from Jalandhar, Uttarakhand Himalayas from Saharanpur and Nepal Himalayas from Bihar; rhinos and

elephants walking freely in the buffer zone roads in Northeast, all these are great inspirations for a traveller and mankind. Corporate clients are avoiding high-end cars as they feel they are not needed anymore.

Schools are now clear that only camps and treks to remote areas will be promoted. These are the radical and sustainable changes that are happening everywhere. People are already talking about less being more.

Now is the time to adopt safety guidelines industry-wide, and be ready and empowered for when clients arrive. Your clients will need to be educated about guidelines pertaining to air travel, accommodation and all activity-related measures being put in place. There must be a clear line of communication set for all on how to live, travel and sustain oneself responsibly. There will be demand for destinations that are least affected, like the Himalayan states, Northeast India, Western Ghats and all national parks. I think that people will prefer self-driving road trips. From mid-July, the lesser-known regions of Spiti, Kinnaur, Ladakh and Kashmir can start, hopefully. From mid-September, Kumaon and Garhwal, Sikkim and the Northeast can be taken on.

**Recover through sustainability**  
If we are talking about the recovery of the farthest flung regions of this country, then this is the only segment of the industry that will act as a stepping ladder for reviving the economy. At present, only 15 states and three UTs have declared tourism as an 'industry', and I really wish that tourism is given that status at the Centre.

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



**Tejbir Singh Anand**  
VP, ATOAI; Founder & MD, Holiday Moods Adventures; Founding Member, FAITH



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# Re-engineering tourism

**TRAVTALK** Digital Conclave that entered its fourth edition focused once again on the burning topic of the day - Revenge Tourism. The world over, tourism industries are hoping that people will start travelling with a vengeance, and among the first ones to possibly do that will be the resilient Indian traveller. Industry experts share their individual perspectives.



Hazel Jain

The first session of the 4<sup>th</sup> **TRAVTALK** Digital Conclave was titled 'Re-engineering Tourism: Reducing fears and establishing confidence' where experts from three sectors – tour operator, airline and destination – shared their views on how they think the road to recovery will look like.

Opening the discussion was **Ritu Sharma**, Deputy Director, Marketing Head – India, Switzerland Tourism, and she said, "These are tough times for all of us. We as a tourism board are there to help you. We understand that it is going to take some time for people to get back on their feet and for business to come back. We have a team dedicated to the trade and they have been doing a lot of trainings and webinars for the operators."

Sharing a key update from the aviation sector was **Sunil VA**, Regional Vice President – APAC, Oman Air Regional Office, who said, "IATA will have an operational plan on international travel that will be released soon and this will ensure that we will be able to provide the safety required for our guests to feel confident enough to travel. As Oman Air, our prime objective is to understand the SOPs of the different countries we fly to as well as the airports, and then build a plan around it so that we can ensure our

p a s -

sengers are safe. We have implemented certain measures in our offices, the check-in counters, on-board the aircraft and, of course, the international airports. Things have been made easier with a lot of travel advisories which are available for our guests and our trade partners

✂ I think, after COVID-19, more people are going to come back to travel agents and tour operators. The trade becomes even more important now ✂

- Ritu Sharma

in terms of what's happening in other countries."

**Riaz Munshi**, President, Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI), drew on his expertise and added that people have been dreaming about travel since the lockdown. "They now want to go on holidays and be pampered. They are willing to take short breaks and go to nearby places. A few hotels have already opened doors and have assured us that they are taking all precautions. Let's now look at how we can change our scenario and grow from here. We need to work together. Tourism boards have always been very supportive to tour operators. Hotels have now realised that it is time to build relationships. Let's get back to basics. India works on relationships, so let's invest in nurturing relationships with our partners. Let's go the traditional way and



turn this situation around faster than we thought by doing it together. Airlines and hotels should not see us as competition but as collaborators. Do not try and cut our revenue. You will have to increase your marketing budgets. We must start afresh," he opined.

**Building traveller trust will be key** Sharma shares her perspective on this and says, "We as Indians aren't very patient people. After being made to sit at home for three months, I am sure people will want to travel with a vengeance. Of course, that will be

✂ We are also in discussion with the airline manufacturers and talking about how we can implement more safety measures in cabin ✂

- Sunil VA

weighed against other key factors like the safety of the destination. What travellers will look for is a lot of reassurance on their safety and security and the biggest issue is going to be trust. They are going to choose destinations where they can have faith in the cleaning procedures. And I think all of us here need to build that faith in the consumer's mind. Switzerland is now completely open, whether it is public transport or hotels and restaurants and even health spas – of course with a very strict protocol that needs to be followed. We as Switzerland have a huge advantage because it is a completely safe and secure country."

Sharma also shared a new development from Switzerland which recently did a survey – a Global COVID-19 Assessment Survey – which had a lot of factors and wasn't limited to tourism. "It stated that Switzerland is the safest country to travel to right now. Yes, we are looking for people to

be able to travel soon but this 'soon' is some time away. We can't say when India will open its borders. But Switzerland is open. And Switzerland has launched a 'Clean & Safe' campaign along with Switzerland Tourism Board. For this, we have tied up with six local associations that will award this 'Clean & Safe' label to companies which will indicate they are following protocols. That is something that all of us will have to look at – as an airline, hotel, or as a tour operator," she added.

**Standardised SOPs across borders**

Sunil shared a much-needed requirement for airlines at this moment – a standard operating

## A word from MoCA

Due to increasing demand for resumption of scheduled international flights by people who want to travel abroad due to compelling reasons, I reviewed the state of international flight operations around the world. Globally, the situation is far from normal

— Hardeep Singh Puri, Minister of Civil Aviation of India

educates their customers about how they must travel to each country. So there will definitely be a standard plan which will make life for airlines easier," he said.

Sunil also clarifies a doubt that a lot of agents have about flying safely. "I understand that all airlines are talking to aircraft manufacturers to discuss how more safety measures can be implemented in the cabins. We have learned that the inside cabin protection is higher than being outdoors. Also, the mandated attire will help protect passengers. But we are still learning. We will have

start with short-haul destinations that are safe, preferably wellness retreats or remotely-located resorts and isolated islands. Places that can assure people that they have been following strict measures. Slowly, when people start gaining confidence once they start travelling, they will look at long-haul destinations. They are not going to wait for a vaccination but will adapt to the situation."

Munshi shares an example to back his theory. "One of my clients who recently flew Delhi-Mumbai said that after flying once, his fear of flying has



Travel bubbles pop up across the world

protocol. "Countries do have SOPs in place, but there is an SOP which is now released by

✂ India works on relations, so let's invest in nurturing relationships with our partners. Let's go the traditional way and turn this situation around faster than we thought by doing it together ✂

- Riaz Munshi

ICAO for airlines as well as one that will come from IATA. These will be advocated by global tourism bodies such as UNWTO and WTTC. This is so that everybody

more norms coming in going forward. There are plans to change the seating on the aircraft but airlines will have to spend more money to do that. We are also in discussion with the airline manufacturers and talking about how we can implement more safety measures in cabin. We also have guidelines from manufacturers on the sanitisation process after each rotation, which will have to be followed very strictly by all airlines," he shares.

**Will people travel?**

Munshi echoed industry-wide sentiments when he said, "The situation is very hard to predict right now. But travel will start very gradually. Outbound can start only once international flights commence. People will

gone after seeing how the airlines and airports are taking care of the passengers. Domestic flights have started and domestic hotels are also slowly opening up. Let's cross our fingers and hope that long-haul will also start soon. As soon as a vaccination is found, Indian outbound will grow at high speed," he said.

**Will outbound become more expensive?**

There has been a lot of conversation around cost of travel going north due to COVID-19. Sharing his views is Munshi who says, "I don't think so. Cost is always a product of demand and supply. Right now, the demand is less so there is no way the cost can go up. People are thinking that



Ritu Sharma  
Deputy Director, Marketing Head –  
India, Switzerland Tourism



airlines will add some costs, but it is not possible because airlines have to look at the price versus inventory. And once demand increases, prices are going to go up as well. And why not? Everybody is here to make money."

Speaking as a destination, Sharma adds, "I don't see any reason why travelling to Switzerland should get more expensive. Unlike an airline, it is not about selling limited seats. Switzerland is probably going to cost the same. In any case, Switzerland is not an expensive destination; it is a value-for-money destination."

In terms of airline tickets which are possibly a major chunk of an international travel budget, Sunil adds, "Ideally, the cost of flying could be on the higher side due to certain factors. We may see low demand or lower capacity, and even limited destinations when airlines start flying. Many of them will have restrictions on travel. Initially, we are looking at more of the individual traveller rather than groups. Interestingly, we still have group bookings that are travelling in the months of August and September and they haven't cancelled. This shows the confi-

## What countries are doing to attract travellers

- ❖ Over 200 private businesses in the city of Cancún in Mexico, known for its beautiful beaches, have launched an initiative to offer travellers money off.
- ❖ Spain is ready to receive international tourists in safe conditions from July 1, 2020 without the need to be quarantined. This will save part of the tourist season while guaranteeing maximum sanitary security conditions. Work is being done at a European level so that there are common protocols/checks to guarantee security.

structure added due to third-party costs, such as extra sanitisation measures on-board as well as at the airports. "All these will be external factors over which we will not have control. We have already operated 11 charters in the last few weeks to bring Indians back to the country," he adds.

### Health certificates a reality?

Health certificates are also something that people are talking about. Sharma says, "We are all in this boat for the first time so nobody can tell for certain the right way of doing things. As Switzerland Tourism Board, we haven't been informed about any health certificate requirements. What I can

cable car, or a restaurant, with a two-metre distance around them. In restaurants, all tables are two metres apart and they need to record contact details of all patrons for trace-backs. But in places where physical distancing isn't possible, like for instance in a tram, there people are expected to wear masks," she reveals.

### In-flight safety procedures

Giving a lowdown about the safety procedures that airlines are following right now, Sunil says, "Passengers are being asked to wear masks and gloves to the airport and hand sanitizers are provided by the airlines. There has been a dispute about the alcohol content in these sanitizers that are being carried by passengers. These discussions are ongoing and hopefully, we will have clarity on this soon, hopefully before international operations begin. Currently, these are testing times for infrastructure and all the regulations that are being put in place. Luckily, we don't have a large number of people flying so we are able to identify the loopholes and make corrections in time. And by the time we have all flights resuming, everything should be under control."

He says that Oman Air does have health checks conducted at different airports. "Hopefully, we will have a standardised protocol at every airport. Countries that have low or no cases might impose stricter regulations though. Things will get clearer in the days to come. If you are able to contain it, then you've made it," Sunil adds. He also says that Oman Air will continue to transit passengers apart from point-to-point fliers. "For any airline to succeed, travelling beyond their hub and catering to transit passengers is very important. We are ready at the Muscat International Airport

to facilitate transit passengers and that will continue to be a good size of our business," Sunil adds.

### Switzerland strategy

How is Switzerland planning to attract Indians once international travel resumes? "Right now we are still in a state of lockdown in India so we are talking to people about dreaming now, travelling later where we are going out with these fantastic images and videos of Switzerland made specifically for this.

The next stage will be more about the need to visit Switzerland. So the whole cleanliness protocol will be very much a part of our messaging. Yes, we are going to put money behind our messaging. Eventually, we are going to do a very big promotional push for Switzerland and for outbound travel because we need to support all our tour operators with this so

now. She says, "Innovation is something that we cannot live without. So yes, innovation will be required to convince people to travel. We must put more thought into marketing, do more research. Innovation is important for destinations for sure; we need to put in place products which will entice them.

It will be important for tour operators as well because they are the ones to actually sell them. This is a good time for us to think and tweak our

efficient operations. We will all have to bear up at least three times more when we start working again to make up for lost time," he adds.



Sunil VA  
Regional Vice President - APAC,  
Oman Air Regional Office

## Handbook for civil aviation

International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has issued a handbook for Civil Aviation Authorities (CAAs) to help countries address the aviation safety risks. Produced specifically for national aviation regulators and civil aviation authorities, the handbook is on the Management of Aviation Safety Risks related to COVID-19. It has been developed with help from aviation experts serving on the ICAO Safety Management Panel.

dence they have in us. I'm sure that once travel resumes, it's going to be madness again."

However, adding a caveat, Sunil adds that a possible increase in costs could also be due to the c o s t

tell you is that at least in the EU and Schengen zones there are no restrictions. People don't need a health certificate or go into quarantine for travel between these countries. What will happen for countries that are more affected by the virus is anybody's guess at this point. We will have to wait and watch what happens there. We also spoke to our visa section and they said they really have no idea about what's going to be the procedure."

Sharma also shares an on-ground update of Switzerland. "In Switzerland, we have protocols in place, for example, there can be a limited number of people that can travel in a



that more and more people will look to Switzerland. And yes, we will try and support the travel trade wherever possible with new products. I think, after COVID-19, more people are going to come back to the travel agents and tour operators. I think the trade becomes even more important now. So yes, we are definitely going to be here for them and put money behind them," Sharma shares. But when can Indians travel to Switzerland? "Right now, Switzerland is open only to the Schengen Zone and we will keep opening up to more countries bit by bit. We are expecting transcontinental travel from India to start by September-October 2020 provided things don't get worse. We expect Asia to start travelling by then and we sincerely hope India will be one of them," Sharma says.

### Parting shots

Sharma underlines the need to be innovative to succeed right

## IATA speaks...

We aim at reopening domestic market by end of second quarter, and opening the regional or continental markets — such as Europe, North America or Asia-Pacific — by third quarter, and intercontinental by fall  
— Alexandre de Juniac, Director General and CEO, IATA

strategy. We have time to learn right now to be able to give our clients more. We should also think more about sustainability because more and more people are beginning to think about it. Last year, the buzz word for destinations was over-crowding. Unfortunately, that's already been taken care of now."

For Sunil, co-ordination between all stakeholders whether it be government or private will become important. "There should also be absolute transparency in information flow, regular updates along with dynamic sales team and super-

Munshi, on the other hand, is of the opinion that knowledge will become crucial in the times to come. "There is going to be a shift from a price-driven market to a knowledge-driven market. I request my friends in the industry to focus on enhancing their knowledge. Create your own product and expertise as per your market segment and your target audience. Do not go for a copy-paste job. So the price is not going to be a factor, but knowledge, expertise and assurance to the customer that you are available 24x7 will be the differentiating factor," he adds. ↴



Riaz Munshi  
President, Outbound Tour Operators  
Association of India (OTOAI)



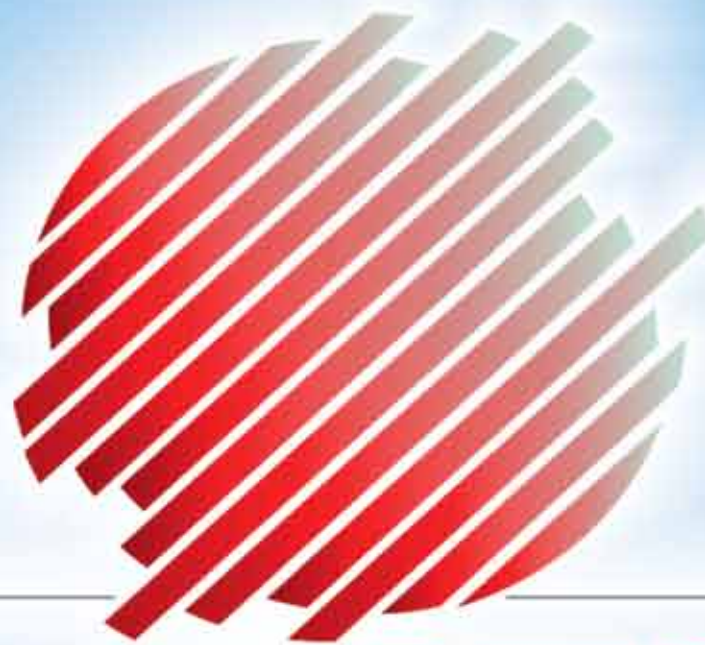
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# Harmonised approach for revival

The second session of the 4<sup>th</sup> TRAVTALK Digital Conclave, titled 'What will the travel restart look like? Managing Customer Experience', had experts from across the board - NTO, airline and the tour operator - to work on revival in a calibrated manner, how working together is important and most important of all, bringing back the confidence of consumers in travel.



Manas Dwivedi

Echoing a common agenda of joining hands and working together for revival and the future of the travel industry, panellists at the session, **Mohamed Khater**, Director - Destination Tourism Development, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA); **Kamal Hingorani**, Chief Customer Officer, SpiceJet and **Guldeep Singh Sahni**, Managing Director, Weldon Tours & Travels, also shared prominently that working towards restoring the consumer confidence to restart travel should be the prime focus apart from the use of Artificial Intelligence in varied segments of the industry.

Sharing his view, Khater said, "Tourism will be always a reality and there is an appetite for travel with a cautious, positive and confident approach from travellers to drive it back. So, we do expect things will be better in the short-term and the long. From our end, Ras Al Khaimah is ready to welcome travellers and ready to implement several campaigns, packages and actions to be ready to work with our travellers either domestically, regionally or internationally."

Hingorani, on the other hand, said that the perspective of the industry of tackling crisis is in the past. "When

9/11 happened, it impacted the customer confidence across the globe, but prominently impacted the US and Europe. Business was not impacted, but what was hit the most was passenger confidence, which went down across the globe because everybody thought that a machine like an airplane can become a missile anywhere in the world. If it could happen in the US, it can happen anywhere. After

✂ Domestic business usually consists of 40% of our visitors in a year, and rest 60% per cent are international tourists. Therefore, there is a room to improve domestic business ✂

- Mohamed Khater

the tragedy, security protocols were rewritten as fear gripped all travellers across the world. The whole world came together, and governments set up a security protocol that has held us in good direction. With a pandemic like COVID-19, the health and safety protocols are again being rewritten. Innovation is undoubtedly the way forward. My fervent request to all my colleagues in the industry is - let us restore public confidence," he said.

Pitching the thought to work for a better future, Sahni said that we need to look beyond the pandemic now. "It is time to now look at the future. As soon as international flights begin,



we would start looking at travellers. Front liners out of that would be VFR and business travellers. We will start looking at people who have a necessity to travel. Once they start, front liners will

products and there is revival in a faster manner," he said.

**Air travel is safe and secure**

Asserting that air travel is the safest mode of transport cur-



✂ Innovation is undoubtedly the way forward. My fervent request to all my colleagues in the industry - let us restore public confidence ✂

- Kamal Hingorani

start and then the rest will come along. During such crisis, airlines and hotels had started reaching out to customers directly because they needed to cut costs. With time, they will start looking at more business arms and devising new strategies. They would again want to reach out to tour operators to boost their business, so that more people start selling their

rently, Hingorani said that building consumer confidence is one of the most important things to

✂ We are all looking at a collective effort from all stakeholders; it cannot be done alone, and tour operators, hotels, NTOs and airlines also have to pitch in ✂

- Guldeep Singh Sahni

revive tourism. "This is something that we, as airlines, cannot do alone. It must come from the entire ecosystem, from the entire tours and travel community, from hotels, from

## RAK's action plan

We have reached out to our partners, stakeholders and business entities, and we have planned with them. We have spoken directly to industry partners, General Managers and owners. We have been doing regular weekly meetings with the Ministry of Economy to leverage a federal support to our sector. Secondly, we created a stimulus package and the highlights of this package was relief measures. We have waived off the tourist licensing fee and provided additional specialised support for the SMEs. We have also formed a steering committee and the main role for this committee is to provide a seamless facilitation of the whole tourism incentive package

- Mohamed Khater

the airports, from everybody. People are saying that you cannot maintain adequate social distancing in an aircraft. WHO has certified that the air circulation in an aircraft flows from top to bottom, like a vertical curtain. The entire air in every aircraft gets recirculated every 2-3 minutes and because it moves like a curtain from top to bottom, it does not move backward or forward. Irrespective of where you are sitting, even if you have three passengers sitting adjacent to each other in Economy

travel. In fact, it has been proven that an aircraft, from a health perspective or from a contagion perspective, is far more sanitised than any other public transport today. We do not charge the customers anything for the safety kit because we actually want the customers to come back, gain that confidence and get more people to start flying. IATA projects that 2020 will have 47 per cent of 2019's revenue passenger kilometres which, in the current environment, should be a wonderful thing to talk about."

## MICE & Weddings in RAK

"There is still an appetite for doing business in the current situation. We are still receiving a lot of requests for business in Q4 and even Q1 of 2021. We need to keep them updated on all measures we are taking for safety and security. Ras Al Khaimah is flexible in terms of doing business with the weddings and MICE sector. We have done a lot with that segment and we need to continue maintaining this for moving forward. By July, UAE will announce several guidelines for travelling of tourists in the country. The amendments and new regulations will depend on each country and each event."

- Mohamed Khater

## Right time to restart business?

The way people travel will change and new strategies should be framed keeping in mind consumer confidence, is an opinion shared by many in the industry. "People will prefer nature tourism or wildlife tourism or maybe going to a resort to relax. Airports will be less crowded; it may be good news for many people, but travellers will avoid going to a train or bus stand. They will prefer to travel by themselves in their car. When more and more people get to know that air travel is the safest means of transport, they will travel more.

The hotels might get cheaper or they might come with better options since the market is going to be sluggish for some time. Even on overseas trips, people would like to choose a road trip. Lockdown has certainly slowed demand, but some people have already started looking at cycling vacations or activities like walking, sailing, hiking, fishing, etc. All these things are going to be in trend and a tour operator has to be ready with it. Airlines and hotels should start giving certain benefits to tour operators on postponements, cancel-

Class, there is no way that air droplets can move from one passenger to the other, unless somebody actually sneezes into the face of another passenger, which is highly unlikely. In fact, WHO has confirmed that the sanitised air in the aircraft is of a higher level of sanitisation than even hospital operation theatres. There is not even a single case of evidence till now that any contagion has happened in the aircraft from one passenger to the other, because of the closed environment or the air," he said.

Hingorani added, "In the Indian skies, you wear a mask and a shield so that your eyes also get covered. I think these are adequate measures for air



**Mohamed Khater**  
Director - Destination Tourism Development,  
Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development  
Authority (RAKTDA)



lations, or early check-ins. We are all looking at a collective effort from all stakeholders; it cannot be done alone, and tour operators, hotels, NTOs and airlines also have to pitch in. Time has come now to work together. There is a long list of demands we have, maybe we can create a document out of it.

✧ When international flights resume, things will slowly start to normalise. Airlines and hotels will start realigning their strategies ✧

- Guldeep Singh Sahni

It is disappointing that the industry has not received any direct support from the government, but I am hopeful that a united industry can overcome this challenge. I also wanted to look at the future, which is bright. Let us just work together," he said.

#### SOPs for beach and pools

During the webinar, Khater informed that Ras Al Khaimah has also put in place SOPs for going to public beaches and accessing pool areas in hotels. "We wanted to maintain the same guidelines, which we have implemented within the hotel territory, to the public beaches as well in Ras Al Khaimah," he said.

#### Future of students in aviation

Regarding students in the aviation sector, Hingorani feels that we have been pushed back by about two years in India. "That is purely my personal take. I strongly believe that aviation will come back with a bang by

### No meals the new normal?

"It is just a matter of time. As soon as the fear of COVID-19 goes away and people start travelling a little bit more normally, am sure that the F&B service will come back, even on long-haul flights. For example, on the Vande Bharat repatriation flights operational between India and the US, there is a pre-pack meal box being given. So, it is not that food is not there. It is just a matter of unavailability of a hot meal service at the moment, and beverages. We only have to wait until normalcy returns"

- Kamal Hingorani

October-November this year. But, from a student's perspective who is talking of jobs in the industry, I think we have gone behind by two years, unfortunately. There is very little that we can do about it. We have to all work together towards it," asserted Hingorani.

#### COVID-19 test before boarding a flight?

Hingorani feels that such norms will not be required for domestic travel since we already have a very stringent protocol in place by DGCA and various state governments. "Quarantine measures are already in place. For international travel, like the state governments, it will all depend on what other countries really want. When the borders actually open, let's assume in July, we will get to know. I believe that whichever country opens up will not have a standard protocol for

✧ From a student's perspective who is talking of jobs in the industry, I think we have gone behind by 2 years, unfortunately ✧

- Kamal Hingorani

every nationality. It will be which country you are coming from and that is the basis of what protocol you will have to follow. For example, Singapore's Changi Airport already has a green lane in place for passengers going to China from other parts of the world where they are operating. So, they do not mix them with any other passenger. Every airport will have to design a protocol, depending on whether they are a transit airport, a hub airport, or an origin destination area basis where the passenger is coming from," he said.

#### The 'short-cation' campaign

Khater shared that RAK has launched a 'short-cation' campaign. "It's a very new concept, where basically people tend to say staycation, but we are calling it a short-cation and with this, we want to make sure to leverage the length of stay of travellers and at the same time think about ADR. With this campaign, guests can

✧ RAK is ready to welcome travellers and ready to implement various measures to welcome guests to our country ✧

- Mohamed Khater

stay for three nights at participating hotels and they will be able to get a destination activity and also get a weekly raffle and a grand raffle. Currently for domestic tourists, once international flights come to the UAE, we will be glad to welcome international tourists as well," he said.

#### Robots in cabin crew?

According to Hingorani, the cabin crew in the aircraft currently is like a robot only. "Dressed in a

services. It is all about personal service and being hospitable to passengers," he said.

#### How will AI change tourism?

In his closing remark, Khater said that in the whole industry,

### Top 3 countries to sell in 2020

- ✧ New Zealand
- ✧ Australia
- ✧ Ras Al Khaimah

- Guldeep Singh Sahni

we need to focus on restarting business and going on the path of recovery; the government and the travel industry need to work together. "World organisations like WTTC, UNWTO and other are creating global protocols. Being a member of these associations, we have been able to shape a global travel policy, the priority focus area in which is tourism recovery. I would like to mention four main points here: we

### When is MICE tourism expected to restart?

"MICE tourism within India will start very soon, I think by end of this year. Overall, once leisure travel starts, VFR will follow and then, business travel. Then, maybe MICE tourism may start by next year. We will be really lucky if it begins by end of this year. While I cannot predict what may happen, the way things are going (I have heard that the virus is weakening), if it is true, then definitely it is on our side."

- Guldeep Singh Sahni

we need to look at reopening the borders responsibly because it is crucial to make sure we have a proper and responsible restart for the tourist, which I feel very positive will happen soon. Artificial Intelligence will be part of the industry. This is something we cannot hide, but how strongly it will impact our industry and the business, it must be

Guldeep Singh Sahni  
Managing Director  
Weldon Tours & Travels

seen and will take some time. I think, we still need to work on our relation, our communication and our interaction in order to

organization (ICAO) is taking the lead on this. Artificial Intelligence will be part of it. ICAO has formed a Council Aviation Recovery Taskforce (CART), which includes IATA and WHO and various stakeholders from the industry. It also has UNWTO and WTTC part of it, working together towards mitigating the risks of what we are facing and how we can have a very clear exit strategy very soon. We are already working on an exit strategy. So, we may be in the midst of a crisis, but what it needs and what I would like to emphasise is that there has to be a huge industry collaboration, a harmonised approach has to be there. IATA has talked about outcome-based measures towards risk mitigation, supported by scientific evidence, and that's where AI comes in and they are using AI already. Now, all this maybe temporary to handle this crisis, but all this will be very handy, god forbid, if there is another pandemic in the future so that we are better prepared. It is currently multi-layered bio-safety measures and things like that," he said.

Sahni feels that Artificial Intelligence is going to be part of our life. "It is going to be used somewhere or the other in our lives, but certainly it is going to be there. As I said earlier, it is time now for partnering together. It is time to come together and partner for the future of the industry. One good thing that COVID-19 has done is that we all have started thinking together. Let us look at the future," he said. ✧



white PPE suit from head to toe, not serving much to the flyers and only attending with water requests. They have become impersonal as far as possible because of the present condition and I do not really like it. So, I would not want ever in my lifetime to see robots on board because of the hospitality

need to provide liquidity in the industry and protect jobs; we need to build confidence for the safety and security, starting from transportation, airport, airline, hotels, destination activities; we need to work on public and private collaboration for reopening and reassuring visitors and travellers coming to the destination;

build the confidence and trust with the business, and then gradually see how Artificial Intelligence will help and support us," he said.

In his closing remark, Hingorani agreed that we must build consumer confidence first. "The International Civil Aviation Or-



Kamal Hingorani  
Chief Customer Officer  
SpiceJet



# India needs an empowered board

As the country struggles to control the pandemic, the tourism industry believes that the best way to promote India now to the rest of the world is to have an autonomous body in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism. This way, it can play an active role in the decision-making process and assist with the right messaging and actions required in marketing India.



Nisha Verma

The tourism industry is special in its own way, claims **Meenakshi Sharma**, Director General, Ministry of Tourism (MOT). "It's not an industry in the traditional sense, where one can define its constituents clearly. It has an ever-expanding definition. But, where there are challenges, there are opportunities and that's where the need for innovation and inventiveness comes in," she said.

## Challenges to having a tourism board

The first thing we need to do is clearly define this industry, Sharma says. "In fact, the one challenge that we as government face very strongly while pushing this industry is with the unorganised workforce—those who are not part of any regulation nor structure. This is something that needs to be sorted and this pandemic has shown us that the way things are being done right now is not the best. We need to have more cross collection of data, and a structure to deal with the problems without making it regulatory. One thing we want, and the industry agrees, is to be able to offer support without having to regulate. In any industry, a lot of engagement with the government comes with regulation.



**Meenakshi Sharma**  
Director General  
Ministry of Tourism

This is not good for a sector which is ever-changing."

She added, "We now have a clean slate to work on and we can come up with new ideas. There has been some thought about having a national tourism board, and we have ideas where we can work together on promoting India. We need to think about the proper messaging that needs to go out to the world once we

✦ This pandemic has shown us that the way things are being done right now is not the best ✦

- Meenakshi Sharma

open inbound tourism because India has a variety of products to offer. We'll have to expand the definition of the tourism board and tourism stakeholders. We must keep regulations out, but facilitation in. There is a need to bring the combined forces of MOT, state tourism boards, and the industry together."

## Taking a cue from Kerala

Claiming that Kerala has been one of the best models for the promotion of tourism in India, **EM Najeed**, Senior Vice President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), says, "The government and the industry came together 20 years ago and formed the Kerala Tourism Society to market the state. We have done 11 marts so far and the MOT followed the same model successfully two years ago with India Tourism Mart



(ITM). MOT and the industry are working together very well, but we must think about the future. Does tourism need to be at the same level as it is now, or at a different level? I believe that Indian tourism needs to be re-engineered for greater effectiveness in the future and it should be a greater commercial mode than

✦ I believe that Indian tourism needs to be re-engineered for greater effectiveness in the future ✦

- EM Najeed

a bureaucratic and commercial mode. Government monitoring has advantages but at the same time the government also has limitations. We have several examples in the world and within the country where the industry and the government have been working together successfully."

Affirming the idea of a tourism board, he shares, "The question is whether we need to have a different mode of promotion in India and if we need a tourism promotion board that should be working with MoT. We need to figure if the board will advise the government and have statutory powers so that many things can be decided by it. It needs to be constituted with industry stakeholders, professionals, academicians and trade representations to see if they can work together more effectively. This way the government policies will be implemented effectively and quickly. Several good things have happened in the last few years while working with the ministry. However, during this COVID-19 lockdown period, despite having MOT and NITI Aayog and the

government agencies, the industry couldn't get a financial-package for tourism. Had there been a board, something could have happened, as it would understand the grievances of the industry. I believe that we should have a board with the constitution of a professional organisation, so that it works as a corporate entity and can look after the entire functioning of Indian tourism under MOT's guidance and policies."

## All for the board

**Arjun Sharma**, Chairman, Select Group, claims that he has

## Medical tourism

Medical tourism has huge potential in India. Under the Ministry of Commerce, the State Tourism Promotion Council (STPC) conducts the Medical Tourism Conclave every year, in at least 4 or 5 places in India, inviting Indian hospitals, suppliers, and approved agents from all over the world to participate. India has a lot of experienced medical professionals and support staff like nurses and paramedical. India can be a medical tourism hub. Today, Singapore and Thailand are known for that. India has so many hospitals accredited by national boards as well as international boards. Around 10-15 years back, people were going from here to London or the US for treatment. However today, people from the entire Middle East, African and European countries come to India. And they will continue to come, as the way we handled our foreign tourists who were stranded in India during the lockdown and sent them back home safely has created a lot of goodwill for us. The Ministry of Commerce and MoHFW shall join hands to promote medical value travel to India at a higher level, along with hospitals and other bodies, which will be India's strength.

- EM Najeed

supported the need for a board since a decade. "I first touched upon it about 15 years ago when I read my father, Inder Sharma's

could facilitate infrastructure for creating hotels and tourism products. Another strong recommendation was the creation of a



## The right messaging for FTAs

We are working on our international messaging and we are going to discuss that with the industry soon. While domestic tourism is important, international tourism is more so as that brings us foreign exchange. There is so much that India has to offer. Right now, the issue is not just messaging, but also border rigidity and visa regulations. We are working with the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Health & Family Welfare so that the moment other countries are ready to send their people, we are ready to welcome them. The other part is dealing with the policy-level issues. We cannot be open to all countries at the same time. The messaging must be about the experiences and about longer duration travel.

- Meenakshi Sharma

old notes. Around 45 years ago, roughly when the Mohammad Yunus Committee was set up, some important suggestions were made at that stage, one of which actually fructified—creation of the Tourism Finance Corporation of India because the then leaders of our industry felt the need for a nodal body that

national tourism board. It's been roughly over 40 years and we are still talking about it. However, it's never too late," he insists.

Praising the MOT, he said, "The Ministry has also evolved the way it functions over the years. The good part is that over the last decade, we have seen some very good interactions with them. There is a transformation in the way the MOT used to run earlier and the way it runs now—it's very participative. While the participation is good, there is a lot of feedback with regards to the process of getting consultations, reviews, etc. However, a lot of this does not get into what is called an empowered group of people who work together. It can be called a board, a council, or something else. For example, Invest India is one of the initiatives of the current government, which is an autonomous body looking at investments in India,

✦ The time has come for the industry to work together with the MOT and see it as an opportunity to reset tourism in India ✦

- Arjun Sharma

both domestic and international, and opens the right doors. It is headed by someone who doesn't come from the Government, is fairly empowered, has regular audience with the powers that be, and has a set of professionals working with him."

Agreeing with Meenakshi Sharma, he adds, "The problem is that we don't know what constitutes the industry and how big



it is. Before we get into finding solutions, we need to identify who and what we are. These are some issues that we need to work with the government for and create a platform to figure that. I think every problem can be solved if we have a structure. The time has come for the industry to work together with the MOT and see it as an opportunity to reset tourism in India. Every other government and tourism board across the world is doing that, and they are looking at our 24 million tourists."

However, he adds that it doesn't mean we only have to focus on domestic tourism. "We have to get international tourists as well. We don't want the message to imply that India doesn't want global tourists, owing to the emphasis on domestic tourism. Hence, we must be very careful and it all comes down to the messaging we give out," says Arjun Sharma.

Sharing his opinion on the workings of the board, he adds, "We need to bring in experienced people from the private sector and work in an empowered structure, where it doesn't mean visiting the ministry once in two weeks and having a one-hour meeting, but to actually sit there and work for the industry. It is not just about

advise anymore, it's about rolling up our sleeves because we also need to understand the challenges with which MOT works. It is a federal structure. While KTM is a good example, it is difficult to implement it at a national level. At the last CII conference, the talk of a board and a fund came up, and I offered the first cheque of ₹1 crore from Inder Sharma Foundation. The MOT should create such a corpus, as it has the funds. But the board should not just have an advisory role; this group of selected individuals should work 24x7 on this project. Otherwise, it's not going to work."



## Not a one-way street

Talking about a partnership with the industry, Meenakshi Sharma says, "Today, what we lack is a structure and commitment that we must work together. Current-

## Tap the new, nurture the old

I don't believe that our traditional markets will disappear. We don't have to put money into them but we still need to nurture them. While China was considered a potential new market, the situation has changed. But Asia is our new source market with Vietnam, Thailand, and Australia as these countries have wealth and we need to bring in tourists from there. The Middle East is going to get affected badly because of a crash in oil prices. But please continue to nurture your existing markets. There may be a short-term dip, but they are the ones we should support more because they have supported us. However, with new markets, I think what people refer to is new messaging, new products and experiences like the great Indian ayurveda story, the Indian Himalaya story, or the Indian spiritual story. There is going to be a change in what people will travel for. Hence, experiences have to be repackaged and repositioned.

— Arjun Sharma

be a keyword going forward. "How will it be defined and what will attract the tourists will be part of the messaging by the various service providers. Everybody is going to be a little wary of travel in future, while thinking of physical distancing and hygiene protocols. We have already released the operational requirements, in addition to the SOPs by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare that is mandatory for all service providers to follow. We are also working on a kind of certification for facilities, destinations, service providers to indicate that they are

## Revamp monuments

I believe that most of our monuments are unfortunately dead monuments. We don't really animate our monuments the way the western world does. Today, one can pay and hold events, and celebrate special moments at historical monuments across the world and pay for it. However, that cannot happen in India. I think we need to open up our monuments with a fresh set of eyes. Not all, but some monuments in each state can be selected and animated, activated to have more life and soul into them to create an experience.

— Arjun Sharma

safe and hygienic in order to create confidence among tourists. Hence, sustainable tourism will be encouraged by the industry. I

## PPP model and technology

We are all looking at how to digitise our businesses because that's how the new customer lives. One has to tech-enable their businesses but that doesn't mean that people will be redundant. One will still need people behind that technology and today technology is available to everybody at very affordable prices. I think with technology, you will have to create new jobs and new service providers. It's going to be part of our job culture and you must adapt to it.

— Arjun Sharma

mid and how do we keep them. They are our workforce and we need them."

## Focus on sustainability

Meenakshi Sharma believes that sustainable tourism is going to

I will be happy if the industry takes that initiative and brings everyone together so that we can talk. Regulations create limitations for the industry to grow. The ministry is not interested in any kind of regulation anymore. The industry should recommend that it should be one of the jobs of the tourism board," she suggests.

To this, Arjun Sharma adds, "I



EM Najeeb  
Senior Vice President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO)

think the time has come that the associations take up self-regulation. We need to collect our data better and make sure

stepping on each other's toes, and deliberations. But we must start somewhere."

Asserting the point further Najeeb, says, "We need a complete change from the past and look at a new way of conducting these processes. We have excellent examples in Dubai and Singapore, who have made radical changes in conducting tourism activities in their respective countries. We need to reach that level. The ministry should be formulating policies and the board should be conducting and running the show for the country and that is the only way we can change and grow. Instead of 20 million tourists, we can reach 40-50 million tourists!"

## Start a dialogue with the MOT

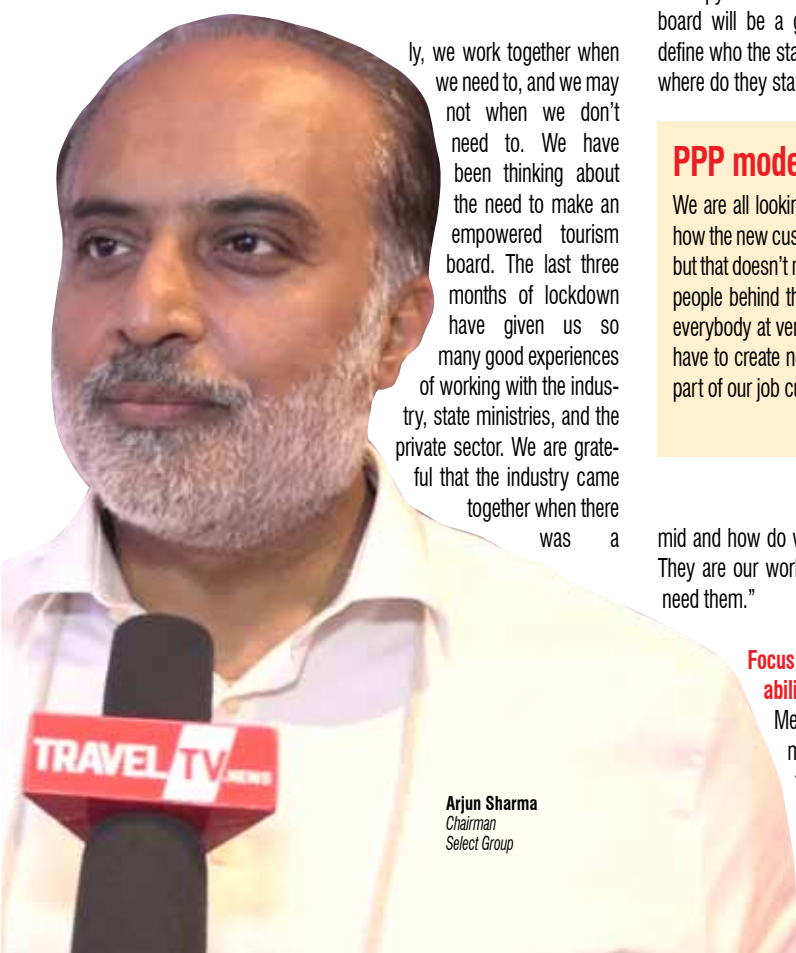
Commenting on the way forward, Meenakshi Sharma advises, "We need to list down our expectations from the tourism board. Having a tourism board without a target in mind is not a fruitful exercise. Hence, we need an outcome, so that we can propose it to the government. Once we have an outcome, we can look at how it will function, work towards empowerment, funding, its structure and how everybody in the pyramid can get involved. It's a great idea to have partnerships and collaboration, but it's not a good idea to have more regulation. We are open to ideas, but we need a structure. The MOT is a very open ministry. We may not be able to do many things but we listen to everyone." 📌

## Tour operators or brokers?

Tour operators work hard but they get only 25% of the package as the rest goes to hotels and others in the channel. Tour operators work closely with international operators to promote India well and highlight all her destinations which ultimately trickles down to the end travellers. Broker is an unfair word. Today the entire industry – be it hotels, service providers and the ministry – should not only play their own roles, but work as a team to promote the destinations while competing with each other.

— EM Najeeb

ly, we work together when we need to, and we may not need to. We have been thinking about the need to make an empowered tourism board. The last three months of lockdown have given us so many good experiences of working with the industry, state ministries, and the private sector. We are grateful that the industry came together when there was a



Arjun Sharma  
Chairman  
Select Group



# 'Overhaul India's built heritage'

A NITI Aayog working group under the chairmanship of **Amitabh Kant** has presented an action plan for improving management of heritage monuments of the country. In the recommendations, key action points for separate sections have been outlined.



Manas Dwivedi

The NITI Aayog report is an effort to understand current challenges for heritage management in India and to provide a future roadmap along with an appropriate branding of India's invaluable archaeological and built heritage. The implementation strategy broadly covers following key points specified for PMO Working Committee mandate: Restructuring of ASI; creating a national database; connecting with people; defining byelaws for prohibited and regulated areas around monuments; support to state government and other organisations such as temple trust, Waqf boards and others; heritage as a tool for development and employment generation, and capacity building for heritage management at all levels in partnership with national and international institutions.



**Niti Aayog**  
नीति आयोग  
National Institution for Transforming India

## ❖Develop site museums:

Budget 2020-21 has proposed five archaeological sites to be developed as iconic sites with on-site museums. These should be completed in the next three years. ASI should finalise world-class projects for two site museums - Hampi and Sarnath - within the next three months. A model site museum should also be set up at Ahichchhatra archaeological site in UP.

❖**World Heritage:** A World Heritage Project Management Unit (PMU) involving World Heritage experts, ASI and other stake-

holders needs to be set up to ensure following specific actions for World Heritage in India. There is also a need to strengthen conservation and management of 38 World Heritage Sites.

❖**Institutional collaboration and skill development:** Create an Indian Institute of Culture (IIC) and establish institutional collaborations with various national and international institutions and universities for training and capacity building.

❖**Hunar se Rozgaar:** The programme is under MOT and

## Heritage tourism, revenue generation & marketing

- ❖ Adopt Revenue Generation Model through PPP Schemes
- ❖ Professional and focused marketing effort with Information Technology and Promotion
- ❖ Each ASI site to be treated as separate profit centre
- ❖ ASI revenues to be ploughed back to the site
- ❖ National Culture Fund to be made autonomous
- ❖ Processing of pending MoUs under Adopt a Heritage to be accelerated
- ❖ Crowdfunding/ community funding/ CSR to be targeted along with Complete Tourist Experience to cater to all segments of Society and Officials
- ❖ A Domestic Tourists Marketing Strategy needs to be developed and implemented for capitalising each heritage site to its optimum, interlinking both tangible and intangible benefits, events, programmes and performances beside the built heritage experience of the site

the Skill Development ministry. Attempts should be made to engage local persons and craft-people in their home states

and, also to support MNREGA Schemes for such employment. Considering the extended framework and mandate of ASI, the

working group feels that the nomenclature should reflect more than 'Archaeological Survey of India' in its name. A number of new names have been presented but the most preferred one is ASHMI (Archaeological Survey and Heritage Management of India) with the acronym 'ASHMI'.

## Thematic heritage circuits

MOT's initiative of Heritage Circuits does not cover the expanse of heritage variations that exist in India. So, ASI needs to consider packaging the iconic centrally protected sites in specialised circuits that link thematically in specific historic-cultural groups attracting not only the general tourist but also specialised academic tours, international visitors who selectively visit connected world heritage sites, historic architectural tours. A National Archaeological Database is also to be made. ➔



**AUTHORED BY DR TRUST HJ LIN**  
Taiwan Tourism Bureau,  
Director of India, New Zealand, Australia,  
Singapore and the Middle East

Taiwan has won widespread recognition for its impressive performance in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis, in spite of recording cases as early as December itself. According to the Taiwan Centres for Disease Control, Taiwan has reported no new additional cases for the past two months. Current inbound and outbound travel restrictions in Taiwan are scheduled to be lifted before June 30, 2020, but strictly subject to reviews according to global conditions.

## Safe travel for families, high-end consumers

To curb the impact of COVID-19 in the travel industry, the Taiwan government implemented multiple anti-epidemic measures in the first phase. These include

distribution of domestic relief funds, defining itineraries that encourage travel without necessarily causing congestion of popular sites and cities and training of the guiding teams to improve the quality of international travel.

Moving onto the second phase, Taiwan is now actively encouraging domestic incentive travel (Local FAM Trips) among enterprises. We see a trend among financial corporations changing their policy by extending to bringing family members to travel, which helped multiply the number of tourist trips by three to four times. Originally, the company's subsidised incentive travel could only be availed by one employee.

The Tourism Bureau emphasises that at the present stage, the environment is safe for tourism (Holiday for Healing). The financial sector, offering 'domestic peace of mind' travel, also achieves the purpose of stimulating high-end consumer and family travel. It is ready to welcome international tourists soon. According to

statistics, 600,000 High Net Worth Individuals (HNIs) in the financial industry alone have already invested in domestic incentive travel.

## Holiday for Healing

Taiwan is ready to embrace India travellers by creating exuberating experiences that help one rejuvenate and relax during the pandemic via our new marketing campaign - 'Holiday for Healing'. Hope creates healing, and true healing can be achieved via soaking in mother nature which Taiwan has to offer.

As part of our campaign efforts, we have online contest and new content lined up to help everyone cope with the present scenario. Do visit our Facebook page at TaiwanTourism.in or scan the QR code.



Till then, stay home, stay safe and start planning... Taiwan is waiting for you!



# Looking beyond COVID-19

Three stalwarts of aviation share their views on what they think the road to recovery for the industry will be like during a Centre for Aviation - CAPA Masterclass series.

“It is going to be a long road back. We are not going to see the industry that was last year, come back before perhaps five years. On the supply side, we are inevitably going to have fewer airlines. On the demand side, arriving at airports will be a challenge when you are side by side with a couple of thousand other people, all now waiting to be checked medically before you can get through. In the short term, border controls are going to restrict any short-stay travel or any discretionary travel.”



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



**Christoph Mueller**  
Ex-Airline Executive

“Government aids come in different forms. We have seen a very successful model with LOT in the last couple of years. It is highly regulated in Europe and very highly scrutinised to ensure that it is not the wrong government support or state aid. If state aids can be used as a proxy to simulate Chapter 11-type of procedure over the next couple of months, in order to restructure the size and the network which is sustainable in the long run, I would have a positive sentiment about government engagement in carriers.”

“We have not seen domestic market pick up in Europe, especially because there is sufficient surface access across Europe. What we are seeing is that individual European countries talk about opening up Schengen and starting to reduce restrictions in the bubble of Europe. That will be interesting to see if and when it starts to happen, and then we will see demand start to pick up quickly.”



**Hugh Aitken**  
VP Commercial  
Skyscanner

Inputs by Hazel Jain

# 'Small business are lifelines'

► Contd from page 10

## No airlines without tour operators

Stressing that airlines will be the worst affected, Prabhu added, “Airlines do business in billions of dollars, but there are other segments, like travel agents, without whom airlines cannot fly despite having electronic bookings. There cannot be tourism without tour operators. Their size of business may be varying in terms of volume, but still, relative to other players in tourism, hospitality and the transport sector, they are very small in nature due to smaller capital. Hence, if they lose that capital because of absorption of fixed expenses, there may not be the possibility of expanding that capital. It is going to be a very challenging situation and therefore we have to take note and try to find out how to help small businesses because these small businesses are the life-

lines of the overall ecosystem of the tourism sector. Small businesses in this sector are crucial for sustaining larger businesses and even the economy.”

Further, he added, “Another thing that the world must recognise is that the government

Small businesses in this sector are crucial for sustaining larger businesses and even the economy

also gets huge revenue from this sector. In India, for example, when the high-end tourists come and stay in a five-star hotel, they pay a tax to the government that is significant. Thus, in the interest of the larger economy, it is important that tourism, hospitality and MICE

expand as quickly as possible and hence, I feel that we really need to work on it.”

## Other challenges

Talking about the transport sector, he asserted, “Another sector badly affected are cruises, and that too is a very capital-intensive sector. Hence, they are also going to take a long time to come out of the impact. For trains, it would be a little better since they are owned by the government in most parts of the world and therefore, can be absorbed through general budgets. Even road transport is a capital-intensive sector, but they can come out better than airlines and cruises. Then there is the hospitality segment, which is facing a lot of challenges and is a capital-intensive segment. A lot of sunk-in capital has gone in that segment and they will also take some time to recover.”



UNWTO, in its 'One Planet Vision for a Responsible Recovery of the Tourism Sector', reveals that channelling long-term support to small and medium enterprises would help repurpose tourism as a supporter of the community.

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# A Grand, safe welcome



Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway is now ready to welcome guests. With safety measures and precautions in place, the hotel is fully equipped with all the necessary resources for its guests. It has also introduced the safety deck in order to communicate the safety steps undertaken by stakeholders and to build confidence amongst guests.

# ‘Namaste’, says ITC



ITC hotels in Bengaluru, comprising ITC Gardenia, ITC Windsor and WelcomHotel Bengaluru, have opened doors to guests, showcasing excellence in health, hygiene and safety. These three pillars have been the bedrock of the ethos of ITC Hotels, since inception.

# Luxury in the new world

The COVID-19 outbreak has triggered an unprecedented crisis and since this fight is far from over, Mayfair has come up with the concept of ‘The New Normal - Redefining Luxury During Pandemic’.



COVID-19 will continue for some more time in the near future and as a country, we have to learn to live with, albeit with precautions. Given this fact, Mayfair Hotels & Resorts has sought to redefine luxury and has completely revamped its



Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that the safety and well-being of its guests, partners and associates remains at the heart of everything they do. From disinfection of cars pre and post transfer, thermal screening of everyone entering the premises, contact-

less check-in and check-out, sanitised key cards and pens, allotment of room after 24-hour cooling period, mandatory use of PPG (personal protective gear) by team members, hand sanitisation stations at strategic intersections and sanitisation of all supplies entering the premises to ensuring social distancing norms across all its resorts, including at its restaurants, banquet halls and meeting rooms, Mayfair has enforced stringent precautionary measures of the highest standards to ensure complete safety of its guests, partners and associates. Emphasis has been laid on cleanliness of public areas, which are being disinfected thrice a day using recommended chemicals. Mayfair has also constituted a Hygiene Task Force which has been mandated to ensure the effective implementation of precautionary measures, monitor COVID-19 updates by health authorities, and accordingly ensure compliance to the directives issued from time to time.

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# A training and certification programme to ensure that the tourism industry is ready to fight Covid-19

# Covid SMART

A coronavirus online course that aim to restore confidence and embrace innovation to reassure the global travel fraternity that the Indian travel industry has taken full precautions to negate the spread of coronavirus amongst travelers.

[www.covidElearn.com](http://www.covidElearn.com)

This certification programme is designed by WHO certified professionals



# 'Refund tickets issued & not used'

**Biji Eapen**, President, IATA Agents Association of India (IAAI), talks about issues at hand for travel agents as airlines restart operations. He also explains what the association is doing to solve these problems for the industry at large, and provides a step-by-step account of all that has transpired.

During March 2020, complaints regarding airline ticket cancellations/refunds started pouring to IAAI's innovative initiative - 'IAAI Passenger Rights Forum', and we noticed that many of the passenger grievances were about bookings done through Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) or airline websites, as tickets fall under 'non-refundable' category. Since the 'Force Majeure' clause executed in the contract of the carriage is conveniently interpreted by airlines to evade refunding and retain ticketed amount as a stream of revenue, IAAI wrote to Minister of Civil Aviation on March 26 with the request to allow full refund for all tickets or allow the convenience of rescheduling without any additional charge, considering the current COVID-19 pandemic.

MoCA's order of April 16 directing airlines to make a full refund of



tickets issued after March 24 was only an eyewash and discriminatory, and did not mention anything about refund of tickets issued before the lockdown or not availed due to flight cancellations, travel bans, or lockdown in India and other countries. Understanding the gravity of the situation, IAAI called the attention of government authorities to the U.S. Department of Transportation's enforcement notices directing that all US and foreign carriers remain obligated for a prompt refund on flights that

were not operated due to COVID-19 public health emergency. The EU Law (European Union) on reimbursements is crystal-clear. The media reported that India's airline companies are estimated to be holding about Rs6,000 crore from refund payments to passengers.

On behalf of the IAAI and Air Passenger Rights Forum, we approached Minister of Civil Aviation on April 18 to safeguard the consumer rights of air pas-

sengers and to secure their hard-earned money paid for air tickets.

IAAI submitted an appeal on April 4, 2020 to the Hon. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, on behalf of the stakeholders of travel and tourism sector, with a request to support the sector, which is the backbone of Indian economy, by way of assigning resources

✂ We are optimistic and waiting for a positive outcome in this legal battle ✂

and coordinated efforts to rescue major travel and tourism businesses such as travel agents, tour operators, GDS and technology companies, travel & tourism training institutes, tourist guides and entire supply chain to save the jobs of millions of people

and their families who depend on travel & tourism sector for their livelihoods. Accordingly, we submitted a follow-up appeal to the Hon. Prime Minister on May 14, 2020, containing thousands of e-signatures obtained as a conclusion of IAAI's online Email Signature Campaign for the travel and tourism stakeholders across the country. IAAI also wrote to the Central government and state governments to form tourism task forces at national and state levels, with proper representation of the travel, tourism, aviation and hospitality segments. In India, we lack a united organisational setup.

Post COVID-19, travel will be an age of sanitised travel with stringent regulatory formalities and regulations. IAAI is working on a unique initiative to getting the travelling public in India comfortable with travelling

again when the industry opens up for business, by launching a public awareness mission with the message, 'Consult your travel advisor, not internet'. IAAI has formed a working group to spearhead this task and currently is in the process of soliciting patronage from international organisations like ASTA/PATA/ECTTA as well as national and international media for this novel mission.

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



**Biji Eapen**  
President, IATA Agents Association of India (IAAI)



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# Operations resume at Crowne Plaza

Crowne Plaza Greater Noida has resumed operations and reopened to guests on June 8, 2020, following a temporary closure due to COVID-19 guidance from authorities. The 398-room hotel has the mandated safety and hygiene guidelines diligently being followed by its staff to ensure safety of guests and others at the property.



TT Bureau

In line with guidelines issued by Government of India and Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Crowne Plaza Greater Noida resumed operations on June 8. The hotel will operate all guest rooms, Mosaic – the multi-cuisine restaurant, Mosaic Pastry Lounge, Hibiscus spa and salon as well as the meeting and banquet venues. The

hotel will also continue to offer food home delivery services in Noida and Greater Noida.

**Ashwani Nayar**, General Manager, Crowne Plaza Greater Noida, says, "We are excited to welcome our guests and colleagues back, and are deeply appreciative of their understanding during the unprecedented COVID-19 global emergency. We are also grate-



**Ashwani Nayar**  
General Manager  
Crowne Plaza Greater Noida

is committed to enhanced cleaning and disinfection procedures, as mentioned below:

❖ The hotel has long embedded the IHG Way of Clean programme – which was developed in partnership with Ecolab and Diversey in

❖ As we re-open, the health and safety of our guests and colleagues remains our highest priority



ful to local health authorities, medical personnel and frontline responders for their continued efforts to safeguard the health and well-being of our community. As we re-open, the health and safety of our guests and colleagues remains our highest priority."

In addition to continuing to follow the guidance of relevant health authorities, the hotel

includes deep cleaning with hospital-grade disinfectants across the hotel.

ing of high-touch surfaces in public areas.

❖ Guests may see hotel colleagues taking a variety of additional steps to protect health and safety such as maintaining social distancing, using personal protective equipment such as masks and gloves, conducting visible and more frequent deep clean-

❖ The hotel is also providing individual guest amenity cleaning kits; visible sanitizer stations in public spaces; removal of high-touch items from guest rooms; replacing in-room collateral with digital communication as well as digitising dining menus and payments.

2015. This programme is now being expanded with additional COVID-19 protocols and best practices to reflect the advice of the World Health Organization and Center for Disease Control & Prevention. IHG Way of Clean already



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# PATA India begins virtual engagement

**Jatinder Singh Taneja**, Vice Chairman, PATA India Chapter, says that while India is slowly opening up for business and ensuing safety guidelines are adhered to as it does, recovery will be at no different a pace than that of the rest of the world. In other news, the Chapter is going to get working on webinars and its Update & Outlook Meeting with MOT.



Nisha Verma

Calling the COVID-19 crisis an unprecedented challenge that has brought the world and the tourism industry to a standstill, **Jatinder Singh Taneja** echoes the sentiments of many.



"It is an unreal, unimaginable and an unprecedented situation. COVID-19 has impacted the tourism industry like no other event in history, bringing it to a point where the business is nil. In simple words, the industry

is going through its worst time. Even as countries slowly open, they are preparing themselves, adjusting to the new normal of living with the virus and taking all precautions and preventive measures. The world is still fighting the pandemic, and only time will tell when we'll be able to recover from it entirely. An ideal situation would be to have the vaccine as soon as possible," he says.

Taneja also believes that the comeback for India from this crisis will not be any different from that of the rest of the world. "Operations are being driven by focusing on preparation, precaution and prevention. However, with cases still on



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

the rise, the process and path to semblance for travel and tourism businesses is going to be slow," he adds, and pegs domestic tourism as the first segment of travel to resume, followed by business travel and finally, international tourism. "However, I feel that the world

would open in stages and not in one go. It would most likely be a slow process where countries would open one by one, based on mutual agreements. Also, travellers should expect travel restrictions in certain countries, including COVID-19 tests for

**PATA India Chapter has already planned and is starting with the EC meeting**

visa approvals. I believe that inbound business may start trickling in after October/November 2020, but it depends on India's situation in the coming months," he shares.

To make India a safe and secure destination, and to win the trust of the tourist again, we need to open up our tourist attractions,

destinations and monuments with clear guidelines and rules, the Vice Chairman opines. "These guidelines would help us ensure our tourists' safety and help us control the spread of COVID-19. Business and strategy will inevitably be focused on safety, security and hygiene. Airports, railways, surface transport and hotels will have to provide a safe environment for visitors and win back the trust of tourists," Taneja claims.

## A helping hand awaited?

Though he is expecting some relief from the government, Taneja says, "Unfortunately, and for reasons unknown, the travel and tourism industry didn't get any support from the government at all. It was extremely disappointing for all stakeholders. Now, all involved are trying their best first to survive, and then recover from these difficult times."

## Tiny steps but a big leap

Commenting on the way forward and the steps they are taking to empower members, Taneja says, "I believe that in the last few months, along with the pandemic, an 'infodemic' was also going on where there was a flood of information floating around. Yet, there was a lack of clarity and certainty about anything. Though far from normal, things are now getting a little better - airports have opened again, domestic flights are operational, hotels and restaurants are opening their doors again. These are the small steps that would help the industry recover. PATA India Chapter has already planned and is starting with the EC meeting. We will also hold webinars and an Update & Outlook Meeting with Ministry of Tourism from this month onwards."



*The 'General Manager's Sentiment Survey' by HVS ANAROCK reveals that even with such drastic dips in room occupancy, it is comforting that over 71% of the General Managers surveyed won't discount their rates by more than 20%.*





# Cygnett assures health and safety

Cygnett Hotels & Resorts has initiated a wide-ranging safety and hygiene programme, Health & Safety Assured, for all its guests and team members. The programme covers the entire guest cycle from reservation to check-out, simultaneously providing a safe and clean environment for customers and Cygnett team members.



TT Bureau

The programme – Health & Safety Assured – is designed around all the key guest touchpoints and comprises all essential protocols and guidelines from World Health Organization (WHO) as well as central and local health-care agencies. Emphasis has been laid on providing a deep-cleaned and sanitised environment across all areas. Key foundations of the programme are laid upon spotless rooms, safe public spaces, social distancing, F&B hygiene, and safe handling procedures, technological changes and enhancements, safety meetings, hygiene kiosks, trained and sensitised staff, and no-contact payments.

Cygnett Hotels and Resorts is a technologically savvy com-



**Sarbendra Sarkar**  
Managing Director & Founder  
Cygnett Hotels & Resorts

pany that has 35 hotels across 33 locations in two countries. Its multi-brand portfolio and a multidirectional approach give it the edge to cater to the rapidly changing hotel industry on the founding tenets of hospitality: quality, comfort and 'Cygnetture' service.

Cygnett Hotels is developing and has developed various technological and Artificial Intelligence-

based programmes for its front office and F&B teams, which will assist them in performing their functions while maintaining social distance from the guest.

This will also help guests coming to Cygnett hotels to enjoy the

same services, albeit in a touchless manner. At present, the group has updated its Property Management Solution (PMS) to provide contactless check-in and check-out using mobile Apps, and has even introduced QR code-based menus.



As a society, we need to respect each other and work collectively to restore balance

Addressing the gathering at the launch of this special programme, **Sarbendra Sarkar**, Managing Director & Founder, Cygnett Hotels & Resorts, said, "This was a jolt back to reality. As a society, we need to respect

each other and work collectively to restore the balance that has been offset. We will be resilient in our approach. The hospitality group will work towards encouraging travel, and will adhere to paramount safety and hygiene protocols – even more so today."

The group's vision continues to be creating value for its guests who have, year after year, invested their time, expectations and faith in the group.



We believe that the key to delivering a perfect experience lies in an uncompromising stand to ensure that the tiniest of details are given the same undivided attention as the larger ones. This has been the guiding principle in all that we do.

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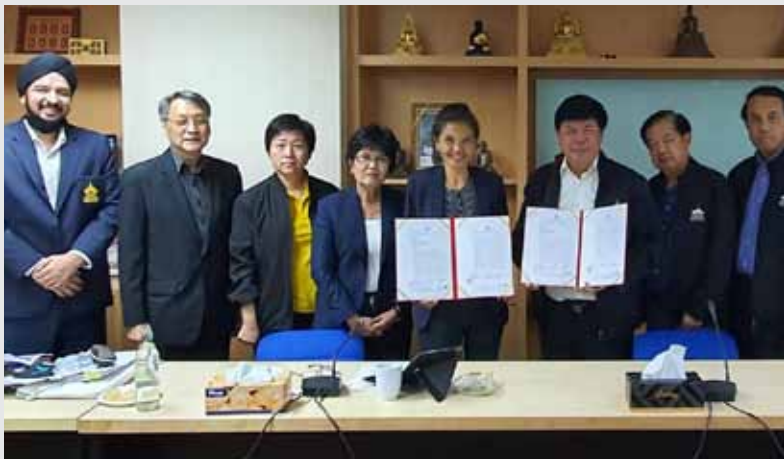
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## ABTO & ATTA join hands



Association of Buddhist Tour Operators (ABTO) and Association of Thai Travel Agents (ATTA) have signed an MoU for the promotion of tourism throughout the world, especially in Asian countries. The alliance was made possible through the efforts of **Bangon Jansanthia**, Committee Member, ATTA & Advisor, ABTO - Asia Pacific and **Vichit Prakobgosol**, President, ATTA.

## 'Hygiene is the new service'

Hygiene - the new buzzword for a post-pandemic world and for business looking to re-open, the only parameter that matters! For **Aditi Balbir**, Founder & CEO, V Resorts, hygiene has always been important for hotels.

As it turns out, hygiene has traditionally been, well, just a basic hygiene for hospitality. For if you think about it, do you bother about hygiene when stepping into a hotel chain? It's definitely not top of the mind as it forms a very basic expecta-

Hygiene is the new parameter and pretty soon, it will be the norm

tion that we have from hotels. In fact, we would rate hotels on a lot more than just hygiene, service being the top-most of them.

How is this changing in a post-pandemic world? For one, social distancing is the only way to mitigate COVID-19. Then how do we suppose guests will feel comfortable being in the vicinity of several other



people in close quarters? Let us look at the 2008 terrorist attack incident that forced hotels to have security screenings. While guests may have cribbed initially, it became a norm everywhere. COVID-19 is no different, though this incident will require us to rethink hospitality from a hygiene point of view.

Let me take an example to drive home the point. To check into a hotel, one would walk in and go to the counter where an agent would help with the details, take the credit card, get a sign and hand over the key. A bell boy would bring the luggage up to the room. Pretty simple! Now,

let us look at how this would work in a COVID-19 world. The bell boy would be in a PPE suit because he comes in contact with so many people in the day. He would take your temperature to ensure you are healthy. He would offer you sanitisers before you enter, and then proceed to sanitise the bags. The front desk agent would maintain two-metre distance, probably be in a mask and proceed with a keyless check-in so that there is zero touch during the process.

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



Aditi Balbir  
Founder & CEO  
V Resorts

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# Yatra calls it off, Ebix responds

In a major stand-off over their pending merger agreement, Yatra Online has announced the termination of its merger agreement with Ebix Inc. and filed litigation, while the latter has denied any breach of agreement in its part and expressed plans to file a countersuit against the second largest online travel company of the country.



## Yatra's move

Online travel company Yatra has announced that it has provided notice of termination of its pending merger agreement with Ebix, Inc. and filed litigation in the Court of Chancery of the State of Delaware over Ebix's breaches of the merger agreement.

The online travel company has also sought substantial damages from the latter over "breaches of representations, warranties and covenants in the merger agreement and an ancillary extension agreement".

As detailed in the complaint, Ebix's conduct breached material terms of the agreements and frustrated Yatra's ability to close the transaction and obtain the

benefit of Yatra's bargain for Yatra's stockholders. Providing a business update, the company has said that on a stand-alone basis, Yatra has the strategic and financial resources required to continue its strategy to consolidate the corporate travel services sector in India, where it is currently the largest provider.

Yatra believes it has a strong fi-

nancial position to support the company over the coming quarters. As of June 4, 2020, the company had US\$32.5 million in total available liquidity and its current monthly run-rate operating fixed cost was approximately US\$1.2



million (excluding any litigation related expenses).

## Ebix's response

A day after Yatra Online announced termination of the said merger agreement, Ebix Inc., which was supposed to acquire the online travel company, issued a statement where it expressed strong disagreement to the allegations set forth by Yatra. Ebix intends to enforce all of its rights under the said merger agreement and is currently considering all options, including a countersuit against Yatra, on account of multiple breaches of the merger agreement. In its statement, Ebix said, "On May 14, 2020, Yatra Online, Inc., a

Cayman Islands exempted company limited by shares ("Yatra"), entered into an agreement (the "Fourth Extension Agreement") with Ebix, Inc. ("Ebix") extending the outside date of the Merger Agreement (the "Merger Agreement"), dated July 16, 2019, by and between Yatra, Ebix and EbixCash Travels Inc., a direct, wholly-owned subsidiary of Ebix ("Merger Sub") to June 4, 2020 (the "Outside Date"). The Merger Agreement contained certain termination rights for Ebix and Yatra, including, among others, the right of either party to terminate the Merger Agreement if the Merger has not been consummated on or prior to the



Outside Date. The Outside Date was extended to June 4, 2020, in order to provide the parties with time to determine whether they could reach mutual agreement on an amendment of certain terms of the Merger Agreement. After the expiration of the Outside Date and the failure of the two parties to agree on the terms of an amended Merger Agreement by the Outside Date, Yatra terminated the Merger

Agreement on June 5, 2020, and filed suit against Ebix in the Delaware Court of Chancery for breach of contract. Ebix worked diligently to fulfil its obligations under the Merger Agreement and thus strongly disagrees with the allegations set forth in the complaint. Ebix intends to enforce all of its rights under the Merger Agreement and is currently considering all options, including a countersuit against Yatra, on account of multiple breaches of the Merger Agreement." Ebix had offered to acquire Yatra at an enterprise value of US\$336 million and a net equity value of US\$239 million to boost its portfolio of Indian travel ventures. ↴



A travel sentiment study of the US & Canada reveals that while almost a third of Americans will wait till 2021 to travel again, 37% don't expect their next air trip to be until sometime after May 2021.

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# C-commerce, the new way to engage

During ATM Virtual's session 'Conversational Commerce for Travel Brands', experts from Facebook provided insights on what travel technology will have to offer beyond 2020, stressing on the potential of 'c-commerce' in helping travel and hospitality brands connect and transact with consumers.



Manas Dwivedi

Amidst a huge crisis like the COVID-19 when interaction and communication with travel brands is gaining importance, especially with evolving technology, people have increasingly turned to messaging

Discounts, helpful tips and live updates will be the top three engagements travellers will seek from aviation and hospitality brands

- Sara Gentile

platforms to stay connected and get reliable information as well as transact with travel brands, from airlines to hotels and OTAs. In fact, supporting



**Sara Gentile**  
Head, Destinations & Events  
MENA, Facebook

data from Facebook says that over 20 billion messages are currently being exchanged with businesses every month on their platform, Messenger. The Facebook-led session focused on unlocking the potential of conversational commerce, or c-commerce, where people and businesses connect through a chat window with the intent to drive purchase of goods or services. This behaviour has

rapidly become mainstream across the globe and helping brands to engage with customers in powerful and fresh ways, as communities around the world come together to deal with the pandemic.



**Ameen Malhas**  
Head, Aviation & Hospitality  
MENA, Facebook

For Sara Gentile, Head, Destinations & Events, MENA, Facebook, travellers' value personalisation from different brands will rise in a post-COVID-19 world, with an estimated

54 per cent travellers who choose to book with online travel agents (OTAs), choosing to seek on-location recognition

A messaging system anticipates what consumers want to talk about with the help of innovative technologies such as AI

- Ameen Malhas

from these brands. "Discounts, helpful tips and live updates will be the top three engagements travellers will seek from

aviation and hospitality brands. With the amalgamation of chat support with automated and Artificial Intelligence-driven systems, companies and brands can target offers and information to relevant travellers. This will increase relevance, which is exactly what people want, with an overwhelming majority more likely to buy from brands that remember who they are and that provide choice-based recommendations," she says.

Ameen Malhas, Head, Aviation & Hospitality, MENA, Facebook, believes that messaging and social media chats must be sophisticated and re-

sponsive to meet needs of the consumers – especially during such challenging times of crisis when travellers want interactions to be fast and efficient with brands and companies they prefer.

"A messaging system which is executed correctly with a clear strategic role, anticipates what consumers want to talk about with the help of innovative technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and is built around a strong ecosystem which can be a powerful and convenient tool for engaging consumers and driving purchase intent."



*New Zealand has declared itself COVID-free, after health officials there revealed that the last known infected person had recovered. The country had no new cases reported for 17 days before the announcement was made.*



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## A new revenue model

Kochi-based Spiceland Holidays has created a virtual wellness product that can offer B2B agents a new source of revenue in these challenging times. The company is aiming for 10,000 customers in the first phase.



Hazel Jain

Virtual products may soon become a new reality for the travel industry. **Riyaz UC**, Managing Director of Spiceland Holidays, has found an innovative way to survive in the COVID-19 struck industry. He has launched a seven-day virtual wellness package that is a blend of authentic Kerala



**Riyaz UC**  
Managing Director  
Spiceland Holidays

travel agents can earn a commission of up to US\$ 40 per package. This is a new source for earning revenue for them," he says.

Spiceland Holidays is a Kochi-based destination management company and one of the largest in South India and Sri Lanka. It has partnered with Mumbai-based yoga expert Shikha Mehta, and a renowned Ayurvedic doctor, Dr Anvar, to launch this virtual wellness retreat called 'Revitalise' and will offer tailor-made programmes.

Riyaz adds, "We will promote the product through our business partners across India as well the rest of the world through social media. Our initial target is 10,000 people and we hope that at least 40 per cent of them will come back for a physical wellness retreat once the pandemic is under control."

to Kerala or any of the wellness destinations. I have created a seven-day wellness retreat that has a panel of experts who will guide people on various things such as meditation, yoga asanas, and the right diet with live cooking demonstrations. It has guaranteed results."

Riyaz adds that this is also an opportunity for agents to earn some commission. "This product is for the global market. We are selling this package at Rs10,000 (or US\$ 150) and

We are selling this package at ₹10,000 (or US\$150) and travel agents can earn a commission of up to US\$40 per package

Ayurvedic concepts and yoga. Riyaz explains, "People around the world are mentally and emotionally depressed right now. They want to get rejuvenated but there is no way they can travel

## Stay with Pride at Delhi & B'lore



Pride Hotels is ready to welcome guests with sanitisation measures in place at its Delhi and Bengaluru properties. The group has been following a rigorous cleaning and hygiene protocol, while its associates have been receiving enhanced training on health & safety measures relevant to the current situation.

## Lords Inn Jammu is all set



Staff at the Grand Plaza Lords Inn Jammu, situated in the heart of the city, has been busy preparing to welcome guests. The reception staff has been provided with protective gear and housekeeping staff has been trained on disinfecting guest rooms and public places.

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## Guideline offers cash refunds

Just when credit shells looked like they were becoming a norm in the tourism industry, Mumbai-based tour operator Guideline Travels is offering the option of cash refunds with a minor charge.



Hazel Jain

In a show of extreme goodwill, Guideline Travels is offering its trade partners and clients cash refunds for cancelled bookings with a minor charge. **Pradeep Saboo**, Partner, Guideline Travels, reveals, "We are offering the option of cash refund to our agents and clients in lieu of cancelled bookings with a minor charge which is minimal. This move will help people in their time of need and hope that it will create goodwill for us. I'm sure that my clients will return once it's safe to travel. We have



**Pradeep Saboo**  
Partner  
Guideline Travels

invested lakhs in the business to ensure we have a steady cash flow." He adds that instead of hosting parties and doing mar-

keting campaigns later, he would rather opt to do this right now.

Guideline Travels re-opened their head office in Mumbai on June 10, 2020 with minimal staff. "We started mainly with our accounting team as well as one team

✦ This move will help people in their time of need and hope that it will create goodwill for us ✦

member each for our cruise, outbound and MICE departments. We expect domestic travel to start off from September 2020, and short-haul international travel to close-by destinations such as Dubai and Singapore by Diwali," Saboo adds.

In terms of cruising, he shares that Jalesh Cruises will start their sailings from September 18, 2020. ✦



## Travelport gets more funds

Travelport has received new investment from affiliates of Siris Capital and Evergreen Coast Capital, which would allow it to pump a handsome sum into technology and its next-gen platform.



Nisha Verma

Travelport Worldwide has received commitments for \$500 million in financing from affiliates of existing owners Siris Capital Group and Evergreen Coast Capital, the private equity affiliate of Elliott Management Corporation, and an additional \$500 million of available financing capacity. According to a release by Travelport, the investment provides it with the liquidity needed to continue to exceed the expectations of its customers



**Greg Webb**  
CEO  
Travelport

as travel returns. **Greg Webb**, CEO, Travelport, says, "COVID-19 and the governmental re-

challenging time. Their unwavering commitment and new capital ensure that we can continue to meet the needs of our customers, support our employees and take steps to emerge from this global health crisis in a strong position. With the support of

✦ New capital ensures that we continue to meet the needs of customers, support employees and emerge from this global health crisis ✦



despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also allows Travelport to continue to invest in its industry-leading technology and next-generation platform to ensure it is positioned for growth

sponse to the pandemic has had a negative impact on the travel industry, including our business, and we appreciate the increased support from Siris and Evergreen as we work to get through this

our investment partners, we are confident in the long-term viability of our business and we remain committed to continued technology investments and our transition to a next-generation platform." Frank Baker, Co-Founder & Managing Partner of Siris Capital, has said that Siris is committed to Travelport's future success and growth. ✦

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From the delightful ambience in the lobby lounge to the exquisite serenity of Yan Spa, X2 Vibe Bangkok Sukhumvit offers guests a unique experience unlike any other hotel in Bangkok. A saltwater pool and sundeck & bar complement

the fitness and spa facilities. Casual dining is available in the signature 4K Café, where scrumptious Thai fusion as well as Western dishes are served.

The hotel is perfectly located in the On Nut residential area of Bangkok – away from the



chaos but close to the action. Shopping malls, supermarkets, bars, restaurants, coffee shops, markets and the full vibrancy of Bangkok is right at its doorstep. The vibrant nightlife scenes of Ekkamai and Thong Lo lend another

amenity to life in this eclectic, up and coming corner of

Bangkok. Just a few minutes from BTS On Nut, the hotel offers guests the very essence of a true design hotel experience with the youthful and chic ambience of the X2 Vibe brand.

With a focus on design, the trendy 7-storey hotel features 145 uniquely designed rooms as well as 121 luxury residences. These residences, available for short and long-term rental include studios, one and two-bedroom residences, as well as an ultra-luxurious three-bedroom duplex.

The hotel offers 123 Standard rooms, 10 Superior rooms,

12 Suites, 85 Studios, 28 one-bedroom residences, 7 two-bedroom residences and 1 three-bedroom residence. Each room is equipped with individually-controlled air conditioning, cable and satellite TV, Wi-Fi, electronic safe, coffee and tea making facilities, working desk and minibar.

## What's nearby

Endless discoveries can be made within 20km of X2 Vibe Bangkok Sukhumvit, including the Hof Art Space Sukhumvit, the Em Shopping District, Terminal 21 and local markets. Guests can also wander around and enjoy the city's fine art and architecture. 



*Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary General, has said that "Tourism can be a platform for overcoming the pandemic. By bringing people together, tourism can promote solidarity and trust."*



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## Safety at every step...



Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Scoot has implemented several measures to safeguard the health of its customers and crew. It is further enhancing its operational procedures and introducing additional precautionary measures to allow customers to travel with even greater confidence.

## August opening for tourists

Sri Lanka Tourism has announced that it will open for international tourists from August 1, 2020, and has put in place protocols, safety measures and visa regulations for incoming tourists.

 Nisha Verma

Sri Lanka will welcome travellers from across the world starting August 1, 2020, as the country has successfully contained COVID-19. Announcing the same, **Kimarli Fernando**, Chairperson, Sri Lanka Tourism, said, "Sri Lanka Tourism will provide international visitors with the highest standards of safety as we embrace tourists from across the world to experience the beauty of our paradise island once more. The Sri Lanka Tourism




**Kimarli Fernando**  
Chairperson  
Sri Lanka Tourism

Development Authority (SLTDA) has put in place all precautions recommended by global health

and travel authorities to re-open the country to tourists."

Colombo's Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA) and Ratmalana International Airport (RIA) as well as Hambantota's Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport (MRIA) will be opened from August 1, 2020, for international travellers from all nations. The issuing of visas will be only online and must be applied for prior to travel.

Tourists will not have to undergo quarantine procedures. A mandatory health screening and sanitising process including a PCR test will be conducted at the arrival airports free of charge for tourists, and all travellers will be transferred through pre-booked transportation to designated hotels in close proximity to the airport, to await their PCR test results which would be expected within 24 hours. First night pending the test result could be in a selected certified hotel, depending on arrival airport. 

### Online visa procedure and requirements for tourists

- ❖ A negative PCR test report from an accredited laboratory taken within 72 hours prior to landing in Sri Lanka
- ❖ A confirmed travel itinerary covering at least 5 nights at certified accommodations.
- ❖ A valid return air ticket
- ❖ Travel insurance with health and hospitalisation cover
- ❖ A visa fee of US\$100 will be applicable

*Tourists will not have to undergo quarantine procedures.*

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# Hotels keep clients apprised

Hotels and hospitality brands across the country are constantly engaging with clients, and guests, as they prepare to open for business. From answering queries regarding opening of hotels to their preparedness in combating COVID-19, hotels are making sure that clients and guests feel safe and are confident, before they begin business.

“We are speaking to our clients across all segments via tele calls and mails, assuring them on security and safety. At present, the utmost priority is to gain confidence of travellers with implication of stringent health and safety measures across all departments at our hotels. We have refreshed our service standards across the globe. Some of the most frequent queries are related to contactless check-in and check-out.”



**Davinder Juj**  
General Manager, Eros Hotel  
New Delhi Nehru Place

“We connect with clients on calls, send them personalised messages asking about their health and well-being, share emailers about our readiness towards guest safety and hygiene, and engage them with us through fun activities from home. It is our responsibility to be transparent with our guests and clients, and it's their right to know the minutest detail when it comes to their safety.”



**Rohit Chopra**  
Regional Director - Sales & Distribution, Accor - India & South Asia

“We have been connecting with our guests virtually, to ensure they stay motivated and strong. We have extensively used our direct connect with our guests and also utilised social media to inform them about new safety measures, which are being undertaken at our hotels. From organising online culinary demos to sharing recipes and engaging them in fun activities, our team has been in touch with guests.”



**Vikas Suri**  
Senior Associate VP  
Lords Hotels and Resorts



**Akash Kalra**  
Commercial Director  
DoubleTree Suites by Hilton  
Hotel Bangalore

“There are two things we are focusing on to provide to anyone who is preparing to get back to business - awareness and confidence. We are using this time to develop emotional connections through regular interactions over phone, email and video calls with our clients. We aim to build a community of closely-knit business partnerships through regular communications on various hotel initiatives.”

“Though everything had come to a standstill during the lockdown, we as a team were dedicated towards touching base with our clients through mails, texts and calls. We were concerned about their well-being and health. Clients were equally concerned and are confident of our readiness at our properties with regard to COVID-19. Our team is reverting appropriately, while ensuring to build confidence in them.”



**Sandeep Singh**  
Managing Director  
Goldstone Hotels and Resorts



**Vikram Lalvani**  
Chief Officer - Revenue  
Management & Sales  
Sterling Holiday Resorts

“We worked on an extensive outreach programme and connected with close to 100,000 members. Furthermore, a unique offering complimentary to our guests is the 'holiday insurance' product that covers the guest from home-to-resort-to-home and encapsulates features like trip cancellation, emergency treatments, etc. loss with a value up to Rs3 lakh per person.”

Inputs by Nisha Verma



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IATA passenger experience webinar series	6:30 pm	18 -July 15
International Day of Yoga	Worldwide	21
CTC Online Masterclass	8:30 am	24
Hong Kong Tourism Global Online Forum	12:30 pm	24
ASEANTA Webinar	3:30 pm	25
Happy Tours-Slovenia Tourism Webinar	3 pm	25
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## We expect business from Diwali

If the situation becomes normal, Rajasthan expects to see some tourist movement from Diwali, says Chapter Chairman of Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI), **Mahendra Singh**.



Hazel Jain

Raising the hopes of the industry high, Mahendra Singh, Chapter Chairman – Rajasthan, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI), says that his members have already started receiving queries from domestic clients. “We expect domestic movement to start from Dussehra and Diwali vacations if the situation becomes normal. The queries we are receiving are from clients from West Bengal,



**Mahendra Singh**  
Chapter Chairman – Rajasthan  
ADTOI

Punjab and Gujarat and they are looking for short Rajasthan tours,” he reveals.



## Rajasthan waives entry fee for two weeks

The state government has decided not to charge any entry fee for the first 15 days after the reopening. Rajasthan has 342 protected monuments and 32 of them are ticketed. From the third week, the monuments will open daily and 50% discount will be offered on the ticket amount till October 31. Monuments, except those falling in curfew areas, will be open four days a week: Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday for the first two weeks.

✂ The queries we are receiving are from clients from West Bengal, Punjab and Gujarat ✂

Monuments have already been opened since June 1, 2020. “Regarding hotels and restaurants, the Central and State ministry has already decided to open them. The hotels and restaurants will have to follow a strict safety guideline which has already been shared by the ministry. We are also training our tourist guides and they will be available once the tourist movement starts. Since Rajasthan is a popular tourist destination of India, we are

making sure that every tour operator follows strict safety guidelines so that every tourist visiting us is safe,” Singh adds. The Chapter recently created a video that featured all its members inviting viewers to visit their state. Speaking on behalf of his members, Singh also said that they will be looking to renegotiate contracted rates with their suppliers and vendors as it will be helpful to offer some good discounts on tour packages and attract tourists. Meanwhile, as per Central government guidelines, tour operators in Rajasthan have been offered financial support through banks to MSMEs based on turnover. ↓

## ‘Must keep our faith in the government’

**Rikant Pittie**, Co-Founder, EaseMyTrip.com, along with other OTAs, met tourism minister Prahlad Singh Patel and discussed revival measures, including safety & security at hotels and destinations, homestays and guest houses as alternative stay options, reducing the GST, waiving off TCS, and virtual tours to engage out-of-work guides.



Nisha Verma

**Rikant Pittie**, along with other OTAs, apprised the minister on why hotels in the country should be opened, and the need for hygiene & safety provisions for people who’d want to resume travel.

“A lot of discussion happened. We requested that the entire industry wants hotels to be opened, because that’s one thing where tourism will really start. The minister is also quite focused on doing that and has been getting similar requests from other industry members,” Pittie informed.

The delegation discussed other issues as well and elaborating on them, Pittie said, “We deliberated on how we can actually help in getting a safe and secure atmosphere for the people who would want to get into the domestic tourism market, especially for pilgrimage or religious tourism, which was one of the major domestic travel segments even before the pandemic. We suggested that there should be certain norms that could be followed when people visited such places, including set timings, bar-code system for identifying who is entering, proper sanitisation before entering



**Rikant Pittie**  
Co-Founder  
EaseMyTrip.com

the facility, and the use of mask and gloves to be made mandatory.”

He added, “We have also requested opening of government guest houses, where sanitising can be done every

day, as today people would be more interested in living in a homestay facility, a small hotel or even a guest house, as they are considered secure. People

✂ We deliberated on how we can help in getting a safe atmosphere for those who’d want to get into the domestic market ✂

can be asked to maintain social distancing at such properties, by the government as well.”

## Scope for tour guides

One important issue the delegation brought up was of tour guides and the possibility of having virtual tours.

Pittie shared, “We talked about tour guides because many

## Other suggestions

The delegation also spoke to the government about deferring of TCS entirely, which is a long-standing demand of the entire industry. It also delved on the topic of reduction of GST, especially for hotels, as customers travelling now may not necessarily be as economically sound as they were earlier, owing to the crisis, but would be looking to travel in a safe environment.

of these guides are sitting at home as they don’t have anything to do; they are freelancers and are not employed by any tour company. Hence, we have requested the government to consider the possibility of virtual tours, wherein the tour guide can go to tourist places or monuments and guide people around virtually, instead of having them physically travel to these places. They can take a group live in small batches, on any one of the digital platforms available.”

When asked about the minister’s response on the suggestions, Pittie said, “The Ministry is already working on suggestions given by us and other stakeholders. We must keep our faith in the government that they would do something good. The focus is on domestic tourism currently. In fact, we were called by the MOT to have a meeting with the Minister, and this is one of their own initiatives to understand the real pain of the end user. We should appreciate this.” ↓



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INDIGO Gurugram

**Venkataramani Sumantran** has been appointed as an Independent Director on the Board of IndiGo, for a period of five years. He is currently Chairman and Managing Director of Celeris Technologies and has held this position since 2014. Sumantran has earlier served as Executive Vice-Chairman of Hinduja Automotive, UK; Executive Director of Tata Motors; and Director, Advanced Engineering in GM-Europe, among other roles. He is a strategic advisor engaged in multiple domains, including automotive, mobility, digital transformation, aerospace and technology. He serves on several statutory boards.



OYO HOTELS & HOMES Gurugram

OYO Hotels & Homes has announced the appointment of **W Steve Albrecht** as Non-executive Director on the company's Board of Directors. Albrecht will play a supervisory role and guide the Founder and the management on key business decisions. His academic pursuits as a lifelong learner and educator are also a goldmine of insights on the hospitality industry for the company. His experience in audit and setting high standards of corporate governance as a board member of companies, is highly acclaimed in the corporate governance field. Albrecht is a former president of the American Accounting Association and the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners.



TRAVEL AND TOURISM ASSOCIATION OF GOA Goa

**Nilesh Shah**, a veteran in the travel trade, has been appointed as the new President of the Travel and Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG) as the tenure of the incumbent president Savio Messias ended May 2020. The election of the apex tourism body was held in the capital city of Panjim, when the new Travel and Tourism Association of Goa president was unanimously elected unopposed. Shah is also a partner and founder of Purshottham Bhagwan and Associates a 28-year-old travel and tour company. He will hold office from 2020 to 2022.



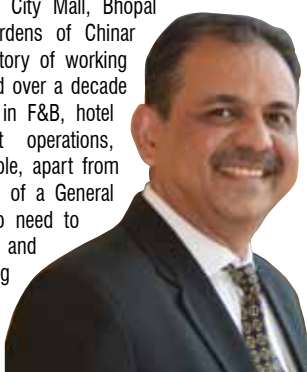
NOVOTEL HOTELS AND THE BHEEMILI RESORT Visakhapatnam

**Ravi Rai** has been appointed as Cluster General Manager – Novotel Visakhapatnam, Vijaywada and The Bheemili Resort. A resourceful professional with over 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Rai has a history of providing effective leadership with focus on total organisational coordination to effectively manage operations. Prior to moving the new position, he was General Manager at Hilton Mumbai International Airport. Through his career, he has played strategic roles at senior positions entailing driving strong business performance and developing financial governance strategies.



COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT Bhopal

**Rakesh Upadhyay** has been appointed as General Manager at Courtyard by Marriott Bhopal, which is situated a short walk from top city attractions, the DB City Mall, Bhopal Junction and the green gardens of Chinar Park. With demonstrated history of working in the hospitality industry and over a decade of experience, he is skilled in F&B, hotel management and banquet operations, among others. In the new role, apart from the traditional responsibilities of a General Manager, Upadhyay will also need to ensure that the new safety and health guidelines are being diligently adhered to.



ONE REP GLOBAL New Delhi

One Rep Global has appointed **Mayank Tuteja** as Director of Sales in Delhi. He comes with over 12 years of rich experience across global luxury hospitality brands, notable amongst them are IHG, The Imperial, Hyatt and till most recently, Tuteja was also a pivotal member of the Leading Hotels of the World office in India. At One Rep Global, he will expand the customer base while fostering relationships with existing partners across luxury travel agents, tour operators, MICE companies, event planners and high-end luxury operators, and forge new tie-ups.



Quick guide to airport checks

SAFE TRAVEL BAROMETER: AIRPORTS									
Company	Traveler Temperature Checks	Traveler Face Masks	Traveler Hand Sanitizer	Traveler Health Declaration Form	Contact Tracing App	Employee Temperature Checks	Employee Face Masks	Employee Hand Sanitizer	Employee PPE Kits
<b>BENGALURU INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT</b> INDIA	✓	BYO	BYO	✗	MANDATORY	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>CHHATRAPATI SHIVAJI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT</b> INDIA	✓	BYO	BYO	✗	MANDATORY	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>GMR HYDERABAD INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT</b> INDIA	✓	BYO	PROVIDED	✗	⚠	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>INDIRA GANDHI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT</b> INDIA	✓	BYO	PROVIDED	✗	MANDATORY	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>PUNE AIRPORT</b> INDIA	✓	BYO	BYO	✗	MANDATORY	✓	✓	✓	✓

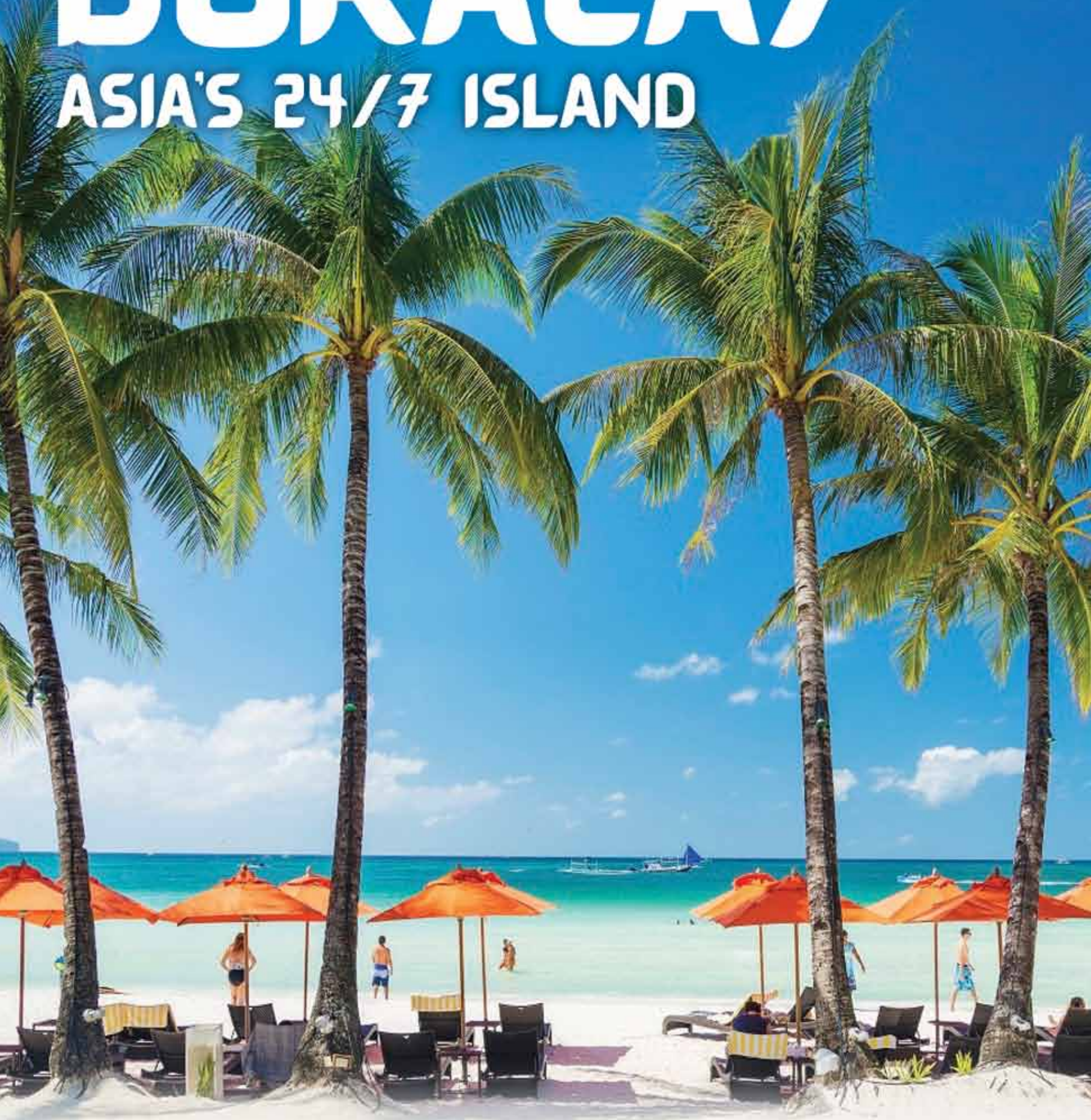
As the world recovers from the impact of COVID-19, travel companies are incorporating several measures to ensure the traveller's health and safety. The Safe Travel Barometer by videc, a boutique advisory and analytics firm focusing on the travel, tourism and hospitality industry, provides a ready guide on checks and protocols in place at airports, both domestic and international. Needless to say, these guidelines are updated as and when possible, given the dynamic nature of COVID-19 and its affect.

The Safe Travel Barometer also provides similar data on airlines, hotels and amusement parks, and the company has recently updated its website (in some categories it is in the process of updating) to include destinations, museums and cruises.



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# Empty middle seat pointless

In a no-holds-barred interview, **Sir Tim Clark**, President of 35-year-old Emirates Airlines, shares an update on the airline and his views on the industry. He also talks about the burning topic of the day for aviation - keeping the middle seat empty.



Hazel Jain

## **Q** How is Emirates coping with the current situation?

The airline is currently in suspense. Although a lot of aircraft have been deployed as freighters, passenger operations have been stopped since March 25, 2020. I don't think I have seen anything like this in my career. We are now faced with big structural problems in the airline industry. Change is afoot and my belief is that there is sufficient resilience in the global economy to take this as long as it doesn't go on for too long. We were hoping that things might start easing up a bit by second half of May but clearly, they haven't. We have had some casualties of operations at the moment. It is a step we had to take; we just can't keep our employees doing nothing for so long and will have to let some of them go, unfortunately.

## **Q** Which airlines do you think will survive this pandemic?

Those airlines that have a lot of domestic operations will be at an advantage. For airlines that are in the medium to long-haul category, it is obviously going to be more difficult. The country-access conditionality and the on-board protocols are all the large unknowns at the moment. So, it makes planning for a resumption quite complicated. We have a 24x7 watch on it as countries start to re-

lax their access requirements. But I see some difficulties as I don't believe they will open at the pace we would like. I think there will be a degree of what they call the bubble effect, i.e. countries selecting other countries that are relatively COVID-free and therefore allowing services between those countries to resume. But we are still in early days.

## **Q** How will the empty middle-seat affect airline economics?

If we start leaving seats in the economy inventory open or un-

✂ If we can get a massive inoculation global programme (much like polio) going by Q1 of 2021, we have a fighting chance ✂

sold because of physical distancing, we have to be consistent about it. There is no point just leaving the seats empty next to you because the seat behind you will have someone sneezing or coughing. So what it basically means is that you would have to take 50 per cent of your economy inventory out. But the math doesn't stack up for anybody to do that. The airline business models, whether they are LCC or long-haul, require high volumes at low margins, unfortunately. If you start interdicting this business model then the math starts to become adverse and it becomes more difficult.

## **Q** What is your prediction on the aviation industry recovery?

Eventually we will get over this. But the next six to nine



months are going to be tough. My instinct is telling me that if we can get a massive inoculation global programme (much like polio) going by Q1 of 2021, we have a fighting chance. Then we will see things start to come back to normal. Then we will see by summer of next year quite a large uptick in travel both in short-haul and long. And we are ready for that. We can activate our fleet probably within 48 hours if we have to. We are always in the state of readiness. Going into 2023-24, demand will start to come back to normal and Emirates will be able to operate its network as it was and hopefully successfully as it was.

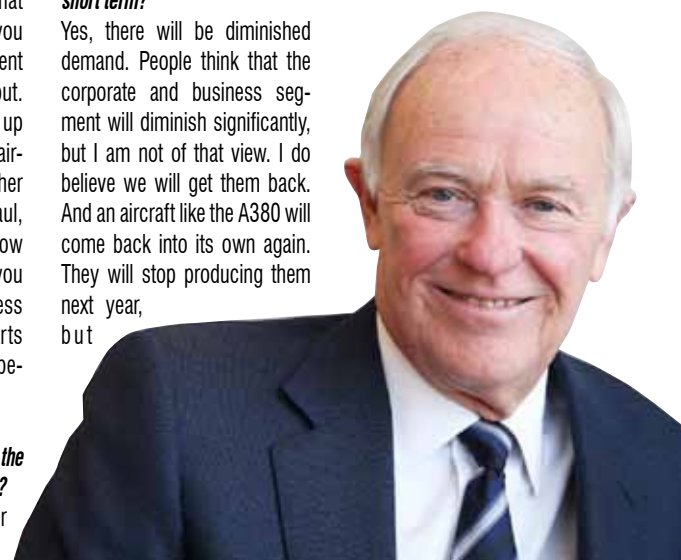
## **Q** How will airlines fill the seats on the A380 in the short term?

Yes, there will be diminished demand. People think that the corporate and business segment will diminish significantly, but I am not of that view. I do believe we will get them back. And an aircraft like the A380 will come back into its own again. They will stop producing them next year, but

we will continue to use our fleet meaningfully.

## **Q** What do you think of government bailouts?

Private enterprises that never had any subsidies are now receiving large amounts after the government has realised that they will not survive unless they are bailed out. When that money runs out is anybody's guess. If you do not get this industry operating quickly, all the money that has gone into those companies is absorbing all the cash obligations. But, it presupposes that you will start to fly profitably, generating positive cash flows in the next few months. I don't see the scale of these companies meet their cash obligations. ✂



## Did you know?

Emirates Airlines is the largest customer for Airbus' A380 superjumbo jet with a total order of 123 units. The airline is planning to replace the aging giant jetliner with the 777X series.

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