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'Not at risk when in India'

Rakesh Kumar Verma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism (MOT), reveals the ministry's plan to tackle the COVID-19 crisis. He also talks about MOT's initiatives to attract and motivate tourists to travel to India.

Nisha Verma
Rakesh Kumar Verma assumed office in January this year and within a month of doing so, he has got down to business in his new role. "We are trying to project India as an experiential and transformational destination for travellers, which is one of the key messages that we are putting across," he shares.

While the outbreak of COVID-19 in China and its spread to other parts of the world has made tourists wary of travelling across borders, India might have to go the extra mile in convincing foreigners to visit. Addressing the issue at hand, Verma says, "Our country has taken all possible measures in terms of screening people and monitoring the situation. Ministry of Health is leading

Ministry of Health is leading the initiative to ensure that tourists are given full public health protection

the initiative to ensure we don't lose out because of the impact of the virus and that the tourists

who come here are given full public health protection. Preventive measures are in place, hence, the situation is under control so far. We will be highlighting these initiatives and other precautionary measures to give confidence to foreign travellers that they won't be at risk when travelling to India." Apart from this, the Joint Secretary informs, they will highlight everything from

infrastructure being upgraded, more tourist amenities being created, safety and security of travellers, visa being granted to many countries, reduction of visa fee, as well as the number of airports being upgraded. MOT is also appointing tourism management agencies and two such appointments have already been made, to be applicable from April 1.



Rakesh Kumar Verma
Joint Secretary, MOT

Trade is optimistic on inbound

Inbound tour operators share how they see COVID-19 affecting the global tourism industry, as India continues taking precautionary measures. They also explain how Germany, hosting ITB Berlin, is a key market for them.

Naveen Kundu
MD, EbixCash - Travel & Holidays

"COVID-19 could have a damaging impact on the global tourism sector. I believe that quick, accurate and transparent communication is crucial to mitigating losses. Containing the spread of unnecessary panic is as important as stopping the virus itself. The German market is important to us and we have developed close partnerships with many tour operators."

Kapil Goswamy
MD, Trans India Holidays

"With the cloud of COVID-19 looming large over the industry, 2020 is going to be a very challenging year, globally. We can only hope that the virus can successfully be contained. Till a few months ago, with the reduction in GST rates and further easing of the visa regime, our expectations from the German market were high, but we are all cautious and watchful now."

Ravi Gosain
MD, Erco Travels

"The only ray of hope I see is that the tour operators who were selling China and Southeast Asian countries might look at India as a probable destination to sell. Also, we can tell FTOs that the government is restricting entry of visitors into India by sealing the borders. We promote smaller cities in India more than the bigger ones, and Germany is a key market for us."

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'Creating travel synergies'

The association's convention that is being held in March at the luxurious Titanic Mardan Palace in Antalya, Turkey, will focus on how to capture and cater to the segment of millennial travellers that places travel as a priority experience.

 Hazel Jain

The fifth convention of the Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) that will take place in Antalya, Turkey, from March 15-18, 2020, will have a clear focus on the growing segment of millennials. Sharing more details

the industry. They travel a lot and we need to figure ways in which we can attract them. The discussions during the event will focus on how they are using technology to book



Solutions'; and Ankush Nijhawan, Managing Director, Nijhawan Group and Co-founder, TBO Group, who will speak on 'Digital Technology and Tourism: Way Forward'.

The pre-convention tour is from March 12-15, while the post-tour will take place from

Riaz Munshi, President, OTOAI, says, "Apart from the pre and post-tours, we are also in the midst of finalising flight travel arrangements and sessions of the convention. Other than

 There will be knowledge sessions and we have invited a lot of Indian as well as international speakers to attend and deliver keynote speeches 

that, we are focusing on increasing our membership. We believe that without diluting our norms, we will continue to increase our numbers on a pan-India basis."

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



Himanshu Patil
VP, OTOAI & Convention Chairman

their travel. There will also be knowledge sessions and we have invited a lot of Indian as well as international speakers to attend and deliver keynote speeches."

The speakers from India that have been confirmed so far include Dr Ranjit Nair, CEO of Germin8, who will speak on 'Is AI changing the face of travel industry'; Sumit Rajwade, Founder, Digital Innovation Specialist, Edawjar Consultancy Services, who will speak on 'Millennial Travellers and their Expectations'; Naveen Kundu, Managing Director, EbixCash Travel & Holidays, who will speak on 'Challenges of Outbound Tourism and their



Riaz Munshi
President, OTOAI

March 18-21. "We have finalised Istanbul, Izmir and Cappadocia for these tours. We are getting very good response for this. We already have 200 registrations so far. Turkish Airlines is our travel partner, and Turkey Tourism is involved with us as well," Patil adds.

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TRAVTALK brings to you news and events that made headlines 25 years ago with relevance even today. From the archives, we present the **Vol. IV; No. 7; April 1st 1995 Issue**

The aftermath of a virus

In December last year, when news of the COVID-19 (then coronavirus) outbreak first made headlines, little did we know how and to what extent its affect will be felt. We considered all permutations and combinations, calculated the risk involved to a certain degree and were even hopeful of a quick recovery. Today, months after its announcement and with exhibition season around the corner, its after-effects continue to be felt. Organisers are wary amid cancellations they have already received and the drop in attendee numbers they predict. Those who have resolved to take the bull by the horns have set precautionary and safety measures in place for delegates. While the industry does expect a mixed bag at this year's events, beginning with ITB Berlin, it largely believes that business will continue as usual. While attending delegates aim to exercise utmost caution, they are of the opinion that a transparent communication system that delivers only facts is an effective tool in mitigating impact.

A steady hand on the tiller

In recent months, Ministry of Tourism (MOT) undertook a number of initiatives to position itself better among the world's most welcoming countries for tourists, and significant steps in the direction were applauded by the trade. Now, it is all geared up to tell the world about its tourist-friendly policy amendments. Of these measures, infrastructure upgrade, development of facilities and sites across the length and breadth of the country, and reduction in the visa fee are sure to bring in tourists that the country was earlier losing out on. Meanwhile, MOT is also taking its own measures to ensure that tourists in India and those wishing to travel to the country in the near future are safe. Among these measures are screening of inbound passengers and a public health protection scheme for tourists. MOT is going the extra mile to ensure that inbound tourists have nothing to fear and can safely travel to and within the country.

Then (1995)

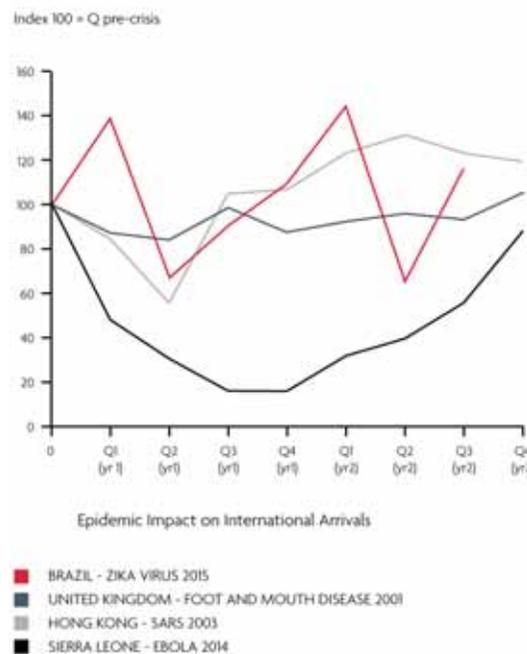
India makes its presence felt in ITB Berlin 1995

Held between March 4-8, 1995, ITB Berlin attracted 5237 exhibitors and 295 additionally represented firms and tourism organisations from 173 countries. India participated with the biggest ever contingent, led by Ghulam Nabi Azad, Union Minister of Tourism, alongside Sukhbans Kaur, Minister of State for tourism, Jayanta Sanyal, Additional Director General and a host of government officials from the state and department of tourism. The tour operators and hotels participated in big numbers too.



Partnerships can tackle crisis

World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTTC) and Global Rescue have come together to equip the travel sector with a better understanding of the risks landscape and provide recommendations on how the sector can better prepare itself.



The graph compares the recovery rates experienced by a selection of countries following an outbreak. It uses an index where 100 equals the level of international visitor arrivals in the quarter before the crisis occurred.

Preparedness to mitigate the impact of crises

The increasing intricacy and interconnectedness of global events requires governments to work with the private sector so as to improve their preparedness to mitigate the impact of crises, their management to effectively address the crisis as well as enhance their responsiveness to ensure a speedy recovery.

Build trust-based coalitions

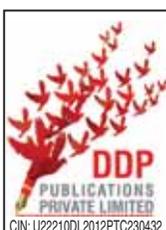
Establishing and maintaining key relationships based on trust, shared values and common goals takes time. It is thus necessary to bring together and create these trust-based coalitions between key stakeholders ahead of crisis to respond in a coordinated and effective way when needed, and ultimately improve resilience.

Assess readiness & maintain emergency action plans

Scenario-based planning, which can begin by simply discussing how different stakeholders would respond in different scenarios, is needed. Governments and private sector organisations should also individually assess their own level of preparedness and have an operational all-hazards emergency action plan in place.

Educate to reduce fear

Access to information is the antidote to fear. Developing a security culture at individual and sectoral levels will help raise awareness and improve understanding of risk, promote capacity building and ultimately change attitudes and behaviours concerning security.



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TRAVTALK is printed, published and edited by Sanjeet on behalf of DDP Publications Pvt. Ltd., printed at Modest Print Pack Pvt. Ltd., C-52, DDA Sheds Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-I, New Delhi-110020 and published at 72, Todarmal Road, New Delhi - 110 001
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New properties and packages

WelcomHeritage will soon open its new property in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, as it focuses on both the inbound and domestic traveller segments. It also hopes to brace the coronavirus impact on business by offering guests attractive packages and experiences.



Nisha Verma

WelcomHeritage is all set to launch a property in Prayagraj (formerly Allahabad), named Badi Kothi. **Sanjeev Nayar**, General Manager, WelcomHeritage, says that the group is hopeful the property will be flagged in the coming months. "We are quite upbeat about it. Last year, we flagged our first property in the state of Maharashtra - Tadoba Vanya Villas Resort & Spa - and three in Rajasthan - Inderpura Resort, Mount Valley Resort and Mohangarh Fort near Jaisalmer. While both Inderpura and Mount Valley are nature resorts, Mohangarh is a heritage hotel in what is regarded the youngest fort in India," he shares.

The previous year was rewarding for WelcomHeritage, which not only signed new properties under the aegis of the brand, but also registered a reasonable growth over 2018. "Another

We have curated special packages that give the guest a chance to book our hotels at special tariffs. We also run special promotions

interesting thing we noticed at our properties was the growth of family holidays and reunions besides conventional MICE and inbound. Our expectations are higher for 2020. We are also looking forward to tap the burgeoning segment of small and intimate weddings at our properties. We will be adding new hotels to our portfolio as part of our strategic expansion plan.



According to a recent study that identified how much, on average, Indians spend on flights per person based on their five favourite travel destinations, it was found that they splash close to ` 38,000 when travelling to a desired destination.

We aim to expand our horizon in the southern and northeastern regions of the country and as of now, we have few properties for evaluation. These properties will help the brand expand its footprint across the length and breadth of India," Nayar shares.



Global events impact business

The impact of COVID-19 is being felt everywhere. Nayar says, "The COVID-19 outbreak has, to some

extent, curtailed international travel entirely. We, too, have seen some cancellations at some of our properties." However, with its spread of properties and the experiences on offer, WelcomHeritage is looking to brace the impact and serve its clientele well, giving them a number of locations to choose

from, Nayar claims. Domestic tourism will also be a key focus for the group. "We have curated special packages that give the guest a chance to book our hotels at special tariffs. We run special monthly promotions through social media and email marketing for offers at a property or desti-



Sanjeev Nayar
General Manager, WelcomHeritage

nation. Our loyalty programme provides discounts to members," he shares. ↴

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Sustainable growth for Ladakh

The newly-formed Union Territory of Ladakh has been given a new lease of life with its tourism budget increasing from a mere `55 lakh to the present `200 crore. The All Ladakh Tour Operators Association (ALTOA), along with Ladakh's Department of Tourism, recently shared their plan to promote and develop the destination.

 Nisha Verma

At the recently-organised 'Ladakh Night' organised by Ladakh's tourism department and All Ladakh Tour Operators Association, **Rigzin Samphel**, Commercial Secretary, Department of Tourism, Ladakh, claimed that its tourism potential, since the day it became a Union Territory (UT), is yet to reach a high. He said, "We need budgetary support and at the same time, we need proper planning to achieve the vision. Hence, there has been a substantial increase in the budget for promotion of tourism in Ladakh. Our vision is that tourism in the UT should be both equitable and sustainable, because Ladakh has a fragile ecosystem. We should ensure that in the haste of achieving this so-called development, we do not compromise on that. Efforts taken also need to ensure that the achievements

and benefits that come from tourism should spread around and not be confined to a few places. There is a huge potential in places like Suru Valley, Dras and Nubra. That is the vision, principal and philosophy we will be working on."



Rigzin Samphel
Commercial Secretary
Department of Tourism, Ladakh

To this, **Tsetan Angchuk**, President, ALTOA, added that the idea behind showcasing the products to the trade in New Delhi was to update them on what Ladakh had

to offer. "A travel meet like this happened for the first time after Ladakh was made a UT. We have



Tsetan Angchuk
President
ALTOA

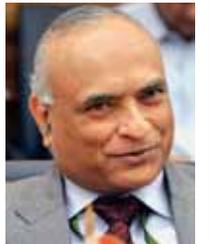
a lot of expectations and things are really changing fast on the ground. We need to look ahead while keeping technology and sensitivity of the environment in focus," he shared.

New projects and promotions, and a new marketing strategy are on the anvil, for which ALTOA

New regions to be developed

Tourism products would be developed by the government and everything around it will be done by private operators. We will be focusing on home-stays in a big way. Dras and Zaskar can be developed very well. Every nook and corner of Ladakh has products that would fascinate people. We will use this budget for development of infrastructure, roads, tourism products and connectivity to the destination. We may also think in terms of a PPP model.

RK Mathur, Lieutenant Governor, Ladakh



While the new UT status would change the face of tourism in Ladakh, we are also concerned about sensible tourism. We are looking at quality rather than quantity, because we have a very fragile ecosystem. We have opportunities as well as threats in terms of environment. That said, we must have a visionary plan for which a good team of young and professional members of our own travel fraternity is needed, which we have. Also, we have a very effective and efficient team of officers in our administration.

Jamyang Tsering Nagyal, Member of Parliament, Ladakh

will work in synergy with the local administration, tourism board and local stakeholders. Kargil, as a tourism destination, was a key focus at the event. "Kargil, in people's mind, was once just

a junction. It has a lot of potential for tourism, be it adventure, culture, or 18th century arts and monuments. Infrastructure-wise as well, Kargil has new properties coming up, be it in the luxury seg-

ment or three-star hotels. Road infrastructure is getting better and under the UDAN scheme, the new airport is coming up, which will promote Kargil in a big way," Angchuk claimed. 




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■ Golden Chariot to make a comeback on 22nd March after being discontinued in 2018

■ Air India resumes operations on Kozhikode-Jeddah route after 5 years

■ Accor to open hotels under Grand Mercure, Raffles, ibis, Novotel brands in India this year

■ India to displace UK to be the 3rd largest aviation market by 2026: IATA

■ SriLankan Airlines plans to start flights to Ahmedabad and Calicut in 2020

'Kudos to women in travel'

Rupinder Brar, Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism, shares how women are not only making their presence felt in the travel industry, but are also taking up leadership roles.

 Nisha Verma

Rupinder Brar says that while statistics point to only 12 per cent of women in the travel and tourism industry being appointed directly, the good thing is that the government is aware that it can leverage on the strengths of women and create the right environment for them. "Clearly, there is a lot of work to be done in empowering them and creating employment for them in a sector that one would intuitively think is one where women would do very well. It's a sector that needs a lot of soft skills and women, naturally, would fit into so many roles," she adds.

The ministry has taken up several steps to empower women in the industry, she claims, such as including women candidates in the 'Hunar Se Rozgar Tak' programme and in other skill-building schemes. "A recent initiative is the Incredible India Tourist



Rupinder Brar
Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

Facilitator Certification (IITFC) programme. For many of the workshops, we have been asking our regional directors to focus on women participation, because this programme has huge potential in creating an environment for women to join the workforce and offer equitable development," explains Brar.

Heartened by the varied fields women are working in these days, she shares, "They are guides in the oddest of terrains, they run homestays all by them-

selves, and are also forest guides and adventure specialists. In the hotel industry, there are many women in leadership positions, not only in housekeeping, F&B and front office, but in all fields."

Working towards the creation of the right perception about India as a safe destination for

 It's a sector that needs a lot of soft skills and women, naturally, would fit into so many roles 

women, Brar feels that looking at statistics, India cannot be called 'more unsafe' than other countries. While certain areas are still perceived as unsafe, MOT, through its campaigns and promotions, aims to subtly send across the message that "India is a safe country where women can travel anywhere." 

Cross Hotels now has India GSA

Cross Hotels & Resorts has a portfolio of brands in Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam, with 2,000 more rooms soon.

 Manas Dwivedi

With strong focus on the Indian outbound market, Cross Hotels & Resorts has announced strategic alliance by appointing Buzz Travel Marketing India as the exclusive General Sales Agent (GSA) for India. The GSA agreement facili-

 We shall be incisive, focused and uncompromising in our approach, and I am confident the partnership will be a very exciting venture 



tates Cross Hotels & Resorts' move into the fastest growing travel market in APAC at a challenging period in the global travel industry.

Commenting on the development, **Paul Wilson**, Executive Vice President - Commercial, Cross Hotels & Resorts said,

"Indian business and leisure travellers contribute to a diversity of segments that include weddings, MICE, leisure and FITs and group travel. As a team, we shall be incisive, focused and uncompromising in our approach, and I am confident the partnership will be a very exciting venture." The Cross Hotels portfolio includes three brands - X2, 5-star hotels & resorts; X2 Vibe, lifestyle hotels & resorts; and Away, casual resorts and retreats. 

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10 new sites on radar for Rajasthan

Sharing details on the latest developments, **Dr Bhanwar Lal**, Director, Department of Tourism, Government of Rajasthan, speaks on a range of subjects, including giving prime attention to development of 10 new destinations in the western parts of the state in partnership with UNESCO.

Manas Dwivedi

According to **Dr Bhanwar Lal**, Rajasthan received as many as five million tourists in 2018, foreign and domestic included. Between January and November 2019, the state witnessed a four per cent growth in tourist arrivals in comparison to the same period in 2018. This growth was led by a significant increase in domestic arrivals, while growth in foreign tourist arrivals remained on a par with what was received every year.



Dr Bhanwar Lal
Director, Department of Tourism,
Government of Rajasthan

Jaipur now a World Heritage Site
Known for its built heritage, Jaipur was officially certified as a

World Heritage Site by UNESCO. It is now the second Indian city, after Ahmedabad, to feature on the list. Lal added that the state's tourism department is now try-

Rajasthan has the maximum heritage hotels in the country and concessions are being extended by the state to heritage properties that have contributed to tourism

ing to capitalise on Jaipur making it to the list, to further promote heritage tourism in the state. "We are working on developing some heritage walkways within Jaipur city, so that we can showcase the culture, both tangible and



intangible, to visitors. We have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNESCO to develop 10 new destinations in four western districts of Rajasthan. We are focusing on increasing the number to tourist arrivals to the western part of the state, and increase the average length of stay in those districts. Rajasthan has the maximum heritage hotels in the country and special concessions are being extended by the state to heritage

properties that have contributed to tourism," he shared.

The primary focus, Lal claimed, would be on showcasing and promoting the intangible culture of the state, especially art forms and the craft of dyeing, which is unique to western Rajasthan. "We are also promoting rural homestays in the region so that the benefits of increased arrivals can be encashed by locals as well," he added.

Emphasis on film tourism
This year, Rajasthan's tourism department will be laying emphasis on film tourism. "Rajasthan has been a popular destination among filmmakers. We are trying to come up with a new platform so that the film-shooting permissions issued by the government are simplified. Apart from this, Rajasthan Tourism is also eyeing the wedding segment," he shared.

Developing Sambhar Lake
With the support received from Central government and efforts of the state government, Rajasthan Tourism has developed infrastructure at Sambhar, India's largest inland salt lake, near Jaipur. The department is planning to promote Sambhar as a new destination to tourists coming to Jaipur. A 'Sambhar Festival' is also on the cards.

New tourism policy

The government of Rajasthan is in the process of formulating a new tourism policy for the state and the proposed draft aims to maximise, socialise and economise benefits to the local communities, conserve natural resources, protect heritage and initiate awareness campaigns. Meanwhile, the Rajasthan government has allocated ₹100 crore for tourism promotion in the state Budget to further strengthen the sector. The new policy, it is claimed, will give impetus to new products that young travellers seek.

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Hazel Jain

The Indian fintech start-up NiYO, with its NiYO Global Card, is the most talked-about payments card amongst the outbound traveller. The reason behind its growing success is the fact that it is the singular travel card that takes care of all international transactions for Indians busy flying abroad. Firstly, travellers do not have to pay any forex mark-up fee with the NiYO Global Card and secondly, they get state-of-the-art security features on the card and App-like instant lock/unlock and block facility.

Vineet Sethi, Chief Marketing Officer, NiYO Solutions, says, "A forex card can eliminate the lack of any transparency on foreign exchange charges vis-à-vis a credit or debit card transaction."

✦ A forex card can eliminate the lack of any transparency on foreign exchange charges vis-à-vis a credit or debit card transaction ✦

But with the NiYO Global Card, the traveller not only enjoys transparency but also incurs no additional cost on the forex mark-up against any transaction. He continues, "In case of a forex card, you purchase it and then load foreign currency for international purchases. As you might know that against these purchases, you are charged a mark-up that you have to pay. In addition, upon return to India, you have to go to a bank to convert the unutilised forex into INR, and against this process, you are again charged a mark-up. Hence, you actually pay mark-up fee twice." The NiYO card is a rupee-denominated prepaid debit card to make international transactions cost-efficient.

The NiYO Global Card and App are, in fact, the safest ones. The card has been designed with cutting-edge technology with features that ensure the highest standards of security. The cardholder can use it as and when the need arises, but otherwise can keep it locked so long as desired. Also, the card owner may choose to lock card for

card-not-present transactions. Hence, the card cannot be used to carry out any online transaction unless the PIN is entered. Therefore, the cardholder is the only one in charge of controlling its usage.

Moreover, the company has designed a NiYO Global application to augment the sense of

security. The NiYO Global App can be used while abroad to find out existing exchange rate during time of transaction, find out the nearest ATM and so much more. Post-return, one can continue using the card. Apart from this, the cardholder can avail attractive discounts from various e-commerce players for shopping, dining and lifestyle. ✦



Vineet Sethi
Chief Marketing Officer, NiYO Solutions

Spearheading tourism in Varanasi



An interactive session on the development of tourism in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, was organised by Tourism Welfare Association of Varanasi. The event was graced by Neelkanth Tiwari, Minister of State (I/C) for Tourism, Govt of UP, along with RK Choudhary, National VP, Indian Industries Association.

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Growth coming from smaller cities

Chee Pey Chang, Assistant Chief Executive (International Group), Singapore Tourism, sheds light on the tourism board's plan to step up diversification efforts in markets like India where there is definitely a lot more potential for growth. He also informs that Singapore is open to business and measures are in place to tackle COVID-19.



Peden Doma Bhutia

QThe year 2019 finished with a slight drop from India to Singapore. This may have been largely due to the Jet Airways flight suspension. How would you look back at last year?

Year 2019 was a record year for Singapore tourism; we had four years of continuous soft growth hitting a new visitor-arrivals high, from 2016 to 2019. That is the combination of investments that we have made to refresh tourism attraction offerings as well as the whole marketing work done by STB officers, both in the headquarters as well as around the world and, of course, our very strong relations with our trade partners and media. India, last year, didn't perform the way we had expected it to, largely due to the pulling out of Jet Airways. But, considering the fact that we

lost out on quite a lot of capacity with Jet, the results were still heartening. With about 1.4 million arrivals, India was still number three, while Indonesia, with close



Chee Pey Chang
Assistant Chief Executive (International Group), Singapore Tourism

to three million arrivals, was second and China that was number one with more than 3.4 million arrivals.

India still a distant third...
That's where the opportunity lies

for us to really grow the Indian market. One of the key things arising from the COVID-19 scare is that we need to see how we step up our diversification efforts and how we do more in markets such as India where there is definitely a lot more potential for growth.

QIn India, your partnership with events like St+art India Foundation and Zomaland seem to focus on millennials. Are they your new target market?

A lot of people know and have been to Singapore, but we don't want to make Singapore just a one-stop family visit that they've done many years ago, which is why we are very keen to tap the millennials and to find new ways to reach out to them. We want to inject some more hip and happening activities to connect with the younger generation, and music, art and culture is a good way to go about it.

QYou acknowledge that Singapore is a popular destination among Indians. How then do you intend to reach out to a larger audience in India?

Many trade partners that we have spoken to say that the growth in India is coming from Tier-II and III cities. So, we need to now see

↳ We want to inject some more hip and happening activities to connect with the younger generation, and music, art and culture is a good way to go about it ↳

how, with our limited resources, we can stretch ourselves and engage with the travel trade in sec-

ondary cities to promote Singapore in new and interesting ways.

QIndia's already No. 1 in cruise arrivals for Singapore. How are you working to increase this potential?

We have embarked on a two-pronged approach for cruise. On the supply side, we want to make sure that we have enough cruise terminal capacity to meet the growing demand for new-generation cruise ships calling into Singapore and Southeast Asia. We are also working very hard to generate demand for ships. Nowadays, with the new generation of ships, you can easily get around 5,000 passengers per sailing and if the ship has a three or two-time departure from Singapore, which means that you need to fill it with 9,000-10,000 passengers every week. This is no mean feat. So, we are also talking to the travel agents here to see how we can

take cruise numbers to the next level. Right now, India is the number one cruise market, but we need to work really hard to penetrate the market deeper.

Tackling COVID-19

Singapore remains open for business; we take cognisance of the anxiety that people feel over the whole situation and have taken very strong steps to secure our borders to stop the inflow of new cases into Singapore. We have also stepped up the sanitisation and cleaning of our tourism businesses beyond hotels, which includes retail shops, cruise terminals and attractions. Our overseas offices are continuing with the marketing activities. There's interest to push more conversions for packages before the new tax regime is introduced.

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Against the tide of challenges

Women have always led by example. Whether it is braving the society's clichés or balancing the several roles they play, they have always ensured that their actions speak louder than words. While they do not doubt the calibre of men in the travel industry today, they do not hold back their strengths either and continue to prove their mettle.



Jyoti Mayal
President, TAAI

“ There are a lot of women in this industry, but few at the forefront. Hospitality and travel are very close to the heart of women. At TAAI, I have already initiated the process of bringing women to the forefront, and we have already brought quite a few women together. We have spoken to at least 50-60 of them already and they want to contribute to society in whatever way they can. In this case, the society is our industry. ”

“ Women in the travel industry have come a long way. They have been taking initiatives which are exceedingly relevant to the present day, and have also contributed in more ways than one in bringing credibility to the industry. They definitely add value and can create history by achieving a lot in terms of running the show and promoting destinations. Today, there is hardly a challenge for them. ”



Chitra Bhatia
Director, Easy Connect Holidays

“ From where I stand, the inbound tour operator segment is largely male dominated. As leaders, innovators, designers and guides, women are challenging the status quo every day. While the working conditions in the industry for women are of satisfactory standards, the scope is abundant. Organisations can benefit from improved gender equality and women can break through pre-existing barriers. ”



Ruhani Duggal
Director, Minar Group

“ I am a believer of meritocracy. However, social demographics of any industry are reflective of the society at large and I don't see it any different in the travel and tourism industry. When you see the corporate structure in airlines, large TMCs or OTAs, including MNCs, almost all key management positions are held by men. I would like to believe that this is a mere coincidence and that the best person for the job is selected. ”



Seema Luthra
Founder, Travelmetrics



Huzan Frazer
Director, Beautiful Planet

“ Primarily because of our intuitive service delivery standards, dedication and a deep understanding of client's needs, we are able to succeed in this sector. With the role of the traditional Indian woman changing from a housewife to one that seeks a career, women have been able to drive the travel industry to new and better heights. The main challenge that women face is balancing their professional and personal life. ”

“ The travel industry is one which has nurtured its women leaders over the years, empowering and encouraging them to spread their wings. The industry has been defined by some of the most commendable and inspirational female personalities who have gone against the tide of challenges through sheer dedication and determination. As with any role in life, women will continue forging ahead. ”



Neliswa Nkani
Hub Head - MEISEA
South African Tourism

Contd on page 18 ▶

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► Contd from page 16



Taruna Soni
Head - Marketing, ITQ

“ In the industry today, prominent women are holding key leadership positions in leading travel agencies, travel management companies, airlines and other segments. Women are also breaking socio-economic and cultural barriers, and stigmas by building their own travel business from scratch as entrepreneurs and founders. The key is to identify the challenges faced by women in the industry and overcome them, as much as possible, with company-wide policies and programmes, such as adopting family-friendly policies and increasing their representation. ”

“ Let me start by stating that leadership has no gender. Women with qualifications and qualities have risen in various industries over the last decade. Their leadership has taken their companies places. As leaders, the most significant aspect about women is that they take their workforce forward along with them. In India, the trend of working women is on the rise and women are going all out to achieve greater heights. While there still are several challenges that women face while climbing the ladder, it is the self-belief which is significant. ”



Tasneem Udaipurwala
Director, Wingspan



Sheetal Munshaw
Director - India, Atout France

“ Our industry is powered predominantly by women who have found their rightful place of pride. In today's day and age, our focus should be more on making room for new talent instead of creating gender-specific roles. Talent should be one of the main selection criteria. Women make good leaders, and multi-tasking and problem solving comes naturally to them. One must also factor in the EQ quotient when it comes to women. A challenge that is specific to women is finding the right balance between the various roles they plan in their everyday lives. ”

“ Over the years, the tourism industry has seen the influx of women. Many of the top positions are led by women and there is no gender bias. All-women groups are being formed, which not only work for the empowerment of women, but also work for social welfare. In the tourism and hospitality business, we can see various examples where women have led from the front in creating big brands and have shaped their entrepreneurial journey. Now, more women are active participants of the industry. ”



Sucheta Nagpal
Director & CEO,
Travstarz Global Group



Beena Menon
Director, Beautiful Planet

“ The travel industry is one that offers women the perfect opportunity to break the glass ceiling. Today, so many travel agencies, hotels and airlines have women at senior positions. They are extremely competent and are able to take on leadership roles with ease. Today, there is an emergence of women travelling on business trips as well as group and solo holidays, and women understand the needs of women travellers best. There are hardly any challenges for women in our industry, only opportunities to prove themselves. This industry is growing rapidly. ”

“ Women in the travel industry are doing brilliantly well. I think, women have always been a part of the travel industry as much as the men. I have always had women bosses, and I've been one as well. We try our best and take initiatives to empower our women staff to grow, right from allowing them to work from home or granting extended maternity leaves. We are very happy to accommodate all their requests. We do what we can to offer an understanding work environment. ”



Shalini KJ
Chief Travel Curator, Click2Travel

Inputs by Hazel Jain,
Nisha Verma and Manas Dwivedi



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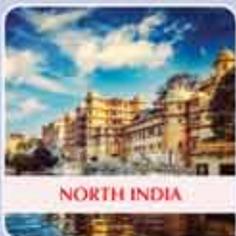
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'Namaste Orchha' from March 6-8

Madhya Pradesh is all set to host 'Namaste Orchha', a three-day festival celebrating the cultural landscape of the state. Several activities have been planned for guests during the event, along with business sessions for the different stakeholders. This year, the state's tourism department is also going all out with attractive investment policies.

 Nisha Verma

Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation (MPSTDC) announced the event at a curtain-raiser event in New Delhi, in the presence of **Sonia Meena**, Additional Managing Director, MPSTDC. Speaking about the event, she said, "Orchha is a city located around 500 kms from Delhi and is only half an hour from Jhansi. It was awarded 'Best Heritage City' by Ministry of Tourism at the National Tourism Awards ceremony this year and is on the list of tentative UNESCO World Heritage sites."

At the inaugural function on the first day of the festival, visitors will be welcomed to a cultural programme and a 3D projection of Jahangir Mahal, the main citadel in Orchha. This will be followed by business meetings. "There will also be several



Sonia Meena
Additional Managing Director, MPSTDC

activities related to nature, photography, food, etc., which will continue every day over the next two days. There will be cultural evenings at Orchha's landmarks. On the third day, we will have a brunch in order to promote organic farming and highlight the organic farming practices in Orchha," Meena added.

Comprehensive growth

MP Tourism is carrying out sustained activities and efforts in the field of promotion and publicity,

as well as investor facilitation for better infrastructure, she claimed. "Infrastructure development is high on the priority list of the government. We are also committed to the task of restoration of our heritage sites,

 Those who want to set up tourism infrastructure will get a 15% subsidy from the government; we also auction land banks from time to time 

protection of our nature reserves and conservation of wildlife," Meena said, adding that sustainable tourism is also something the corporation is working on. "Another aspect is rural tourism, which is very popular among inbound tourists in particular, or

Setting the stage for film tourism

"In 2018, Madhya Pradesh received more than eight crore domestic tourists and about 3.6 lakh FTAs. We are focusing more on the states from where we don't get tourists, such as the South Indian states. Internationally, we are focusing on Western Europe and Southeast Asia. We will be getting influencers and bloggers from these countries, and use their social media platforms to showcase our destination. We are even hosting the IIFA awards in March, which would give a boost to tourism in the state. We are also going to review our water tourism policy and adventure tourism policy. With infrastructure development for heritage tourism along with land banks and water tourism, we are trying to get some good players to invest under the PPP model."



Faiz Ahmed Kidwai, Secretary - Tourism, Government of Madhya Pradesh and MD, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board

young tourists who come from urban areas and would like a flavour and experience of rural lifestyle. Hence, rural tourism, homestays and gram-stays are something that we are working on," she shared.

Policy amendments and subsidies
In terms of policy changes, MP has a tourism facilitation sub-

sidy policy in place, revealed Meena. "This means that those who want to set up tourism infrastructure such as hotels and resorts, amusement parks and other kinds of properties, will get a 15 per cent subsidy from the government. We also have land banks that we auction from time to time so that interested bidders can participate in the process.

One objective we are trying to achieve this year is to have a single-window clearance system instead of investors having to approach different authorities. Under this system we will set in place a single-window mechanism wherein all the permissions and required facilitation will be extended to the investor," she said. 

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Kesari strengthens in south

With eight offices in Bengaluru alone and consistently promoting its domestic itineraries, Kesari Tours is looking to strengthen its presence in the South India market with an office in Chennai.

 Hazel Jain

One of the oldest tour operators in the western India market, Kesari Tours is now growing in the rest of India – both in terms of volume of sales as well as presence. With a solid presence in the south of India as well now, the company has opened eight offices in Bengaluru alone in the last few years. It now plans to further strengthen its presence there with another office in Chennai.

Himanshu Patil, Director, Kesari Tours, says, "Our plan is to open an office in Chennai. We are also looking at Kolkata. At Kesari, we started with domestic tourism and we have been promoting those routes consistently pan India. The largest consumer base for us is the domestic market. We are happy that PM Narendra



Himanshu Patil
Director, Kesari Tours

 The largest consumer base for us is the domestic market. We are happy that PM Narendra Modi has urged people to travel to at least 15 destinations within India 

Modi has urged people to travel to at least 15 tourist destinations within India by 2022."

Patil adds that the company is promoting all regions in India with a variety of tour packages. "It is not just about being safe from COVID-19, but as an Indian, we must know our country first and then explore the rest of the world. Our customers are like that – they first travel within

India with us and then move to our international tours," he says. The company hasn't changed much of the domestic itineraries that are well-loved, however, the Northeast tour is one product that is still developing. "Unless there are proper arrangements made for tourists, we cannot experiment much with that region and we have to work with whatever is available right now," Patil adds. 



According to Mastercard Global Destination Cities Index 2019, the top three destinations for travellers from India are Dubai (2,032 million arrivals), Singapore (1,250 million arrivals), and Makkah (982 million arrivals).

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VFS Global ready for the big rush

In an exclusive interaction with TRAVTALK, Sanjeet Joher, Head – South Asia, VFS Global, shared details on initiatives taken by them to stay fully-prepared ahead of the peak travel season. While its visa application centres will serve agents through counters meant exclusively for them, timings have also been extended for both trade and consumers.

Manas Dwivedi

According to Sanjeet Joher, VFS Global is fully prepared for the upcoming peak season. "We are ready to look after our customers. In fact, we are anxiously waiting for them to come over for visa processing in the upcoming season for different destinations that they would like to travel to. We have taken certain measures that can enhance the customer service for everyone who comes to VFS in 2020," he said.

Among many different measures, VFS Global has enhanced capacity by 40 per cent across the South Asia for all the missions and deployed around 70 customer relationship managers across the region. "We have taken this step to make the customers' journey seamless. We have trained the new



Sanjeet Joher
Head - South Asia, VFS Global

workforce very well. They have gone through a one-month training both with regard to grooming, process and on the job training. We have also done a certification for them across all the board and only the qualified candidates have been appointed at the visa centres," said Joher.

VFS Global has also increased the working hours. "We will now open from 8 am to 6 pm.

These are the normal timings and especially for customers who can't make it in the daytime and if they want to come in the evening hours, we have prime time slots for them from 6pm – 10 pm at a nominal cost. On Saturdays, we will be operational from 9 am- 4 pm. Further,

VFS has separate dedicated counters for travel agents so that they don't have to queue up with normal customers

we are going to be more flexible this year. If there is an important customer and if they need any help, we are willing to open on Sundays as well. This way,

Exceptional service will be the mantra

Being with VFS Global from last 14 years, Amit Kumar Sharma, Regional Head- North & East India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Israel, Nepal & Palestine has moved to Delhi office effective January 1 from Ukraine. He will look after VFS Global's business in North and East India and other certain South Asian markets. Sharing his goals and targets during his tenure, Sharma said, "The year 2020 is very important for us from a 'customer first' perspective. We have launched this campaign within the organisation. Our focus will be on providing exceptional service to customers in India and other markets in South Asia. We are taking various steps to ensure that customer first campaign is successful.



we are becoming customer centric, service oriented in 2020," Joher informed.

Sharing information on VFS' key focus, Joher said that travel agents are the main customer for them. "Travel agent's cus-

tomers are our customer and our customers are the customers who are going to the destination of the mission. In this direction, we have introduced travel agent workshops all across South Asia. We have trained them on different missions on what are

the things they need to consider when sending their respective team members or customers to VFS for biometrics or for submitting applications. We are very proud to say that the team is fully prepared, and I think, all the travel agents are much better prepared knowledge-wise going forward in season 2020," he said.

"We have also ensured that in all the major cities, VFS has separate dedicated counters for travel agents so that they don't have to queue up with normal customers at the counters. We are trying to do it wherever we can do according to our best possible availability. Further, we are also coming up with a separate Visa Application Centre (VAC) dedicated for travel agents at Thapar House at Connaught Place in Delhi, which will start functioning in March 2020."

Jewar airport to ease traffic

As Delhi's international airport strives to cater to the growing traffic, a second airport in the region, in Jewar, will be a relief. It will accommodate both passenger and cargo operations.

Anil Mathur

The upcoming Jewar International Airport in Greater Noida (a city in Uttar Pradesh that shares its border with the national capital) will be connected to Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport for better air connectivity to the National Capital Region. Under a 40-year concession, the Flughafen Zurich AG will build and manage the new Greenfield airport in Jewar, which will be located around 80 kms south of Delhi and will be fundamental to accommodating the expected flight traffic growth rate in the region, catering to both passenger and cargo traffic.

Development Authority. To facilitate transport of goods for the operations of industries located in the region, a warehousing and logistical hub will be built. Under the masterplan, sectors 21 and

ing to the overall growth of the economy. The construction of five-star and budget hotels around Greater Noida implies that efforts are also being made to push the cause of develop-



Image for representation only

Situated next to the upcoming airport, in Sector-23C, will be a 700 acre transport hub that is slated to be developed by Yamuna Expressway Industrial

28 will be developed as 'electronic clusters'. These initiatives will give a boost to schemes for employment generation and tourism, thereby contribut-

ment and progress in the well-planned region. The first phase will be able to accommodate around 12 million passengers a year.



Cruise Lines International Association predicts that 82% of cruisers are likely to book another cruise as their next vacation and that 65% of cruise passengers spend a few extra days at embarkation or debarkation ports.

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Egypt goes beyond pyramids

Egyptian Tourism Promotion Board is focused on the India market with more marketing campaigns and newer products, including the Grand Egyptian Museum to be opened later this year.

 Hazel Jain

After experiencing a lull in Indian arrivals in 2019, the Egyptian Tourism Promotion Board is now tightening its belt and looking at aggressively promoting the destination in this market. **Mohamed Medhat Aziz**, Vice Director of Australia & Asia Markets Unit, Egyptian Tourism Promotion Board, who was in Mumbai recently, said, "We have increased our focus on the India market. We believe it is one of the most important markets for us. We are working on this and are planning to increase our campaigns and our advertising in India."

Speaking about the new products that the tourism board will look to push here, he added, "We know that Indians like cultural tourism, but we also have on offer diving, golfing as well as MICE. We will start to focus on these special interest groups in India. Our aim is also to tell the travel agents



Mohamed Medhat Aziz
Vice Director of Australia & Asia Markets Unit, ETPB

and tour operators here that the political situation in Egypt is now completely stable and a good indication of this is the huge amount of investments we see coming in. We will also open our Grand Egyptian Museum later this year."

The much-anticipated Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) is part of Egypt's new masterplan. It is reported to cost US\$ 1 billion and has managed to create global excitement. The massive museum is set to accommodate nearly 100,000 objects, including a large repertoire of around 5,000 belongings of King

Tutankhamen – 2,000 of which are being showcased for the first time ever. Hotels around the museum, located near the Giza pyramids, are currently undergoing a comprehensive renovation process in preparation to accommodate waves of tourists coming to the museum. The GEM will also feature several entertainment hubs, including restaurants

 **Indians like cultural tourism, but we also have on offer diving, golfing and MICE; we will also open Grand Egyptian Museum this year** 

and theatres alongside the main hall, as well as a reception area for VIP visitors, conference hall, and a playground. "It is my first visit, but not my last. India feels just like home – the people are warm and always smiling," Aziz added. 

Agents to get full picture

The western India chapter of TAFI wants to create a complete training session for its members where maximum stakeholders are present – the destination, visas, airlines, DMCs and hotels.

 Hazel Jain

Jitul Mehta, Chairman, Western India, Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI), has said that the aim of the new team is to provide a holistic learning experience to its members during training and educational sessions they conduct. "We don't want to bring just the destination or the DMC, but all of them together under one roof so that the agents get a complete picture of the destination and can network with all stakeholders at the same time and resolve queries of every kind," he explains.

This initiative began in December last year. The team recently did an event for Dubai as a destination involving not just the tourism



Jitul Mehta
Chairman - Western India, TAFI

board but also airlines – five in all – as well as Dubai Visa Processing Centre. "We plan to conduct many such events soon. We also conducted a Chapter meeting recently where we mullied over a key issue that is plaguing our members – deep discounting by OTAs. We discussed how members can develop a more sustainable business model for

 **We want to bring all of them together under one roof so that agents get a complete picture of the destination and resolve queries of every kind** 

themselves in such a scenario. For this, we will also need to talk to the airlines as well as government agencies, and make a formal presentation. This will be done by our national body," Mehta adds.

Meanwhile, the chapter is also talking to VFS for a training session in Mumbai. 



A recent study indicates that by 2029, India's tourism sector is expected to reach `35 trillion, with a growth of 6.7 per cent and accounting for 9.2 per cent of the total economy.



International DMC with India office



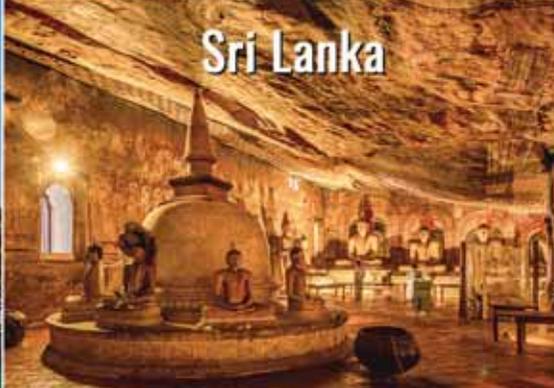
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'Prepare for wave of Chinese tourists'

Professor Dr. Wolfgang Georg Arlt, CEO, COTRI, explains how recovery from COVID-19 is possible April onwards.

Professor Dr. Wolfgang Georg Arlt provides a different perspective on the recovery and growth of outbound tourism from China post the COVID-19 outbreak in December last year. He says that past numbers are proof that as far as previous epidemics such as SARS and MERS are concerned, demand came back stronger, and



Professor Dr. Wolfgang Georg Arlt
CEO, COTRI

Total outbound trips from China

Year	Number of trips
2002	1,66,02,300
2003	2,02,21,900
2004	2,88,50,000
2005	3,10,26,300
2006	3,45,23,600
2007	4,09,54,000
2008	4,38,44,400
2009	4,76,56,000
2010	5,73,84,500

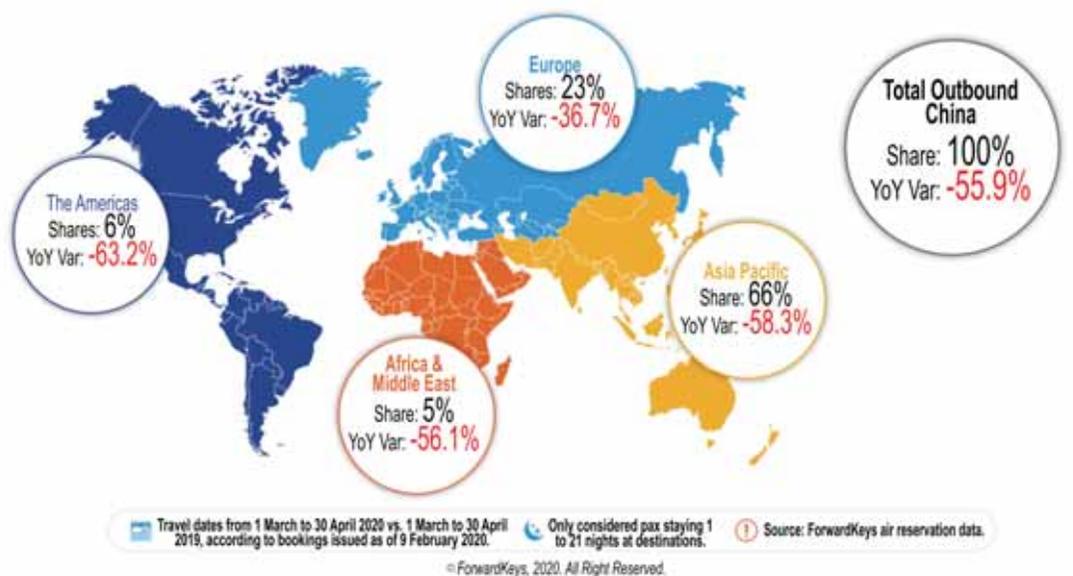
a recovery from COVID-19's impact on tourism should be no different. Looking at the total number of trips from China between 2002 and 2010, he says, "Even in 2003, which saw no Chinese travelling outside of China, the number of trips was 3.5 million higher for the whole year." COTRI is forecasting a 7% growth rate for 2020. "Hence, now is a good time to prepare for next wave of Chinese travellers," he claims. 🇨🇳

World affected by COVID-19

The travel setback caused by COVID-19 outbreak has now spread beyond China, with other parts of Asia Pacific experiencing a 10.5 per cent drop in outbound travel bookings for March and April, reveals ForwardKeys.

The Chinese outbound market has been severely affected by COVID-19 and resultantly, the global tourism industry has taken a hit. According to data released by ForwardKeys, currently, bookings for March and April from China are set to be just 55.9 per cent of what they were during the corresponding period in 2019. The following diagram depicts Chinese forward-looking air departures to worldwide regions, taking into account booking made (as of February 9, 2020) for the period March 1-April 30, and depicts market share by region and year-on-year variation. The Americas, which account for only six per cent of total outbound numbers from China have suffered the maximum year-on-year drop in numbers at 63.2 per cent, followed by Asia Pacific at a 58.3 per cent variation.

Chinese forward-looking air departures to worldwide regions



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Vietnam eVisa on arrival

On the occasion of Vietnam's Vice President's, **Dang Thi Ngoc Thinh**, visit to India, VFS Global and the Embassy of Vietnam in India signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation for tourism promotion and facilitation of human mobility.



Manas Dwivedi

VFS Global, in an exclusive partnership with the Embassy of Vietnam in India has launched the first official digital Vietnam eVisa on Arrival (eVoA) solution for the convenience and comfort of travellers to Vietnam. Travellers can easily apply on <https://vietnam.vfsevisa.com> before departure.

in India) will offer eVOA applicants a digital wallet/locker (which ensures high levels of data protection). This includes scanned copies of their passport, live facial biometric capture and finally, the receipt of their eVOA approval letters once approved. Customers can also make online payments using the portal. 



(L-R): Chris Dix, Head of Business Development, VFS Global and Pham Sanh Chau, Ambassador of Vietnam to India

Aurangabad honours Rajiv Mehra



Rajiv Mehra, Vice President, IATO, was felicitated by MECC Aurangabad FIRST along with Aurangabad Tourism Development Foundation (ATDF), for his and the tireless efforts of those involved in bringing Aurangabad on the itineraries of all major flight operators of India, connecting the western India city to multiple destinations.

Expressing his thoughts, **Chris Dix**, Head of Business Development, VFS Global, said, "It is a privilege for VFS Global to extend our relationship with the Vietnam authorities through the launch of this new eVisa on Arrival solution for those who seek to visit such a beautiful and culturally-rich nation. The digital eVisa on Arrival is an exclusive, approved solution developed by VFS Global. By leveraging our expertise as the global leaders in visa application services, this new user-friendly and highly-secure digital service will considerably enhance the ease and convenience of the visa process for those seeking to travel to Vietnam."

Priority eVOA service for Vietnam also available
For those who seek a visa urgently to travel to Vietnam, the option of special priority services on the same day (as well as next day approvals) is now available on this officially-recognised online solution. The cost of priority services is slightly higher than the cost of the normal visa processing service. The advanced and digitally integrated solution developed by VFS Global (as an exclusive service provider to the Embassy of Vietnam



Directorate General of Civil Aviation reveals that 127.83 lakh passengers were carried by domestic airlines during January 2020 as against 125.08 lakh during the corresponding period last year, registering a growth of 2.20%.



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Biggest in passenger volume

Genting Cruise Lines has unveiled its largest cruise ship yet – Global Dream – which is part of the Dream Cruises fleet. The new ship, earmarked for a 2021 launch in Asia, will offer technologically advanced cabins as well as the world's longest rollercoaster at sea — Space Cruiser.



Nisha Verma

Genting Cruise Lines has unveiled its latest offering — Global Dream — Dream Cruises' first global-class ship that will arrive in Asia next year. Aimed at India's growing multi-generation travellers who are seeking new travel options, the 20-deck Global Dream will be the largest cruise ship in the world in terms of passenger capacity, accommodating over 9,000 passengers across 2,350 cabins.

Naresh Rawal, Vice President – Sales & Marketing, India & South Asia, Genting Cruise Lines, says that the ship has been built in their own shipbuilding yard in Germany. "The cabins of Global Dream are technologically advanced and have been designed in a way that is user-friendly and comfortable for a family of three or four members. Even

the restroom setup has been split in such a way that two people can use it at the same time. We are calling the rooms 'smart cabins', because they are packed with cutting-edge technology and smart systems. Guests can open the cabin using



Naresh Rawal
Vice President – Sales & Marketing,
India & South Asia, Genting Cruise Lines

their mobiles and going forward, they may not even need a cabin card. Even within the cabin, one can control the lighting by voice commands."

For the ultimate indulgence, Dream Cruises' signature concept and Asia's largest luxury 'ship-within-a-ship', The Palace, will take pride of place on-board



Michael Goh
President, Dream Cruises and Head,
International Sales, Genting Cruise Lines

Global Dream with 151 lavish suites, exclusive amenities and services. Other than that, the ship boasts of the world's longest rollercoaster at sea. Rawal reveals, "The top deck will have the rollercoaster, called Space Cruiser, which is about 300 me-



tres in length. The 'Spike' car of the rollercoaster can seat two people together and can go up to a maximum speed of 60 km/h. What's also interesting is that one can control the speed on this Space Cruiser."

Talking more about Global Dream and other ships in Dream Cruises' fleet is **Michael Goh**, President, Dream Cruises and Head, International Sales, Genting Cruise Lines, who says, "With India traditionally having larger extended families

and the increasing trend of multi-generation travel, Dream Cruises' fleet of cruise ships offers convenient travel solutions for different generations through its current roster of Genting Dream, World Dream and Explorer Dream. Especially exciting will be the debut of Global Dream in 2021, our next-generation cruise ship that will enhance the modern travellers' cruise voyage with exciting offerings, including our Space Cruiser rollercoaster and family-friendly smart cabins."

Bookings for Global Dream will commence soon. The port from which it will sail is yet to be announced, however, Rawal adds that Global Dream would sail from multiple ports initially and is sure to come to Asian destinations like Singapore and Hong Kong.

With 2019 being a good year for business at Genting Cruise Lines, in spite of some hiccups, he says that the current year also looks good and that they are hopeful of generating good business. ↪

15 years of Etihad in India



As part of the ongoing activities that mark 15 years of its operations in India, beginning September 2004, Etihad Airways hosted an event for its frequent flyers as well as key trade, government and media partners in New Delhi. Those attending included **Neeraj Bhatia**, Etihad Airways' Vice President, Indian subcontinent; **Danny Barranger**, Senior Vice President Global Sales at Etihad Airways and **Lindsay White**, Vice President, Asia Pacific and Indian subcontinent, Etihad Airways.

Destination-in-waiting

Oceanside paradise in SA

In the Western Cape province of South Africa lies Hermanus, a seaside town popular for whale watching, true farm-to-fork nourishment and some much-loved sporty indulgence.



Inder Raj Ahluwalia

It promises a 'whale of a time', literally! Ranked as the best land-based whale-sighting spot in the world, Hermanus is a quiet, scenic retreat for holidaymakers seeking total peace and quiet by the sea. Till the whales come, that is. A 120 kms east of Cape Town, hugging the coast in the Overberg region of South Africa's Southern Cape and forming a gentle loop along the huge bay, Hermanus has become known

as the 'Riviera of the South', attracting overseas travellers and local city slickers.

There is plenty to do here! One can explore the lush valley of Heaven & Earth and treat oneself to tastings at world-renowned wineries, or sim-

Hermanus area from Fisherhaven to Klein River. Sporting facilities from golf and bowls, to paragliding and diving, canoeing, cycling, kayaking and riding are also available for those who wish to indulge in a bit of adventure. The Old Harbour is the focal point of village activi-



Travel tip

Hermanus has the world's only whale crier, who patrols the streets blowing his kelp horn to alert everyone to the whereabouts of the whales, and is happy to answer questions and be photographed. The best time for whale-watching is from June through September, but the town itself is a year-round destination.

ply feast al fresco on the rich bounty of farm - fresh fruit, succulent seafood, salads, and home-baked breads. Travellers can also soar up high and enjoy a superb view of Walker's Bay. One can even soak up the sun at a dozen beaches, lagoons and tidal pools in the Greater

ties, the cliff-top entrance offering a panoramic view of Walker Bay and with a bit of luck, whales in the water below. The Whale House caters to the huge interest in whale watching, while the Old Harbour Museum depicts the history of fishing and whaling. ↪



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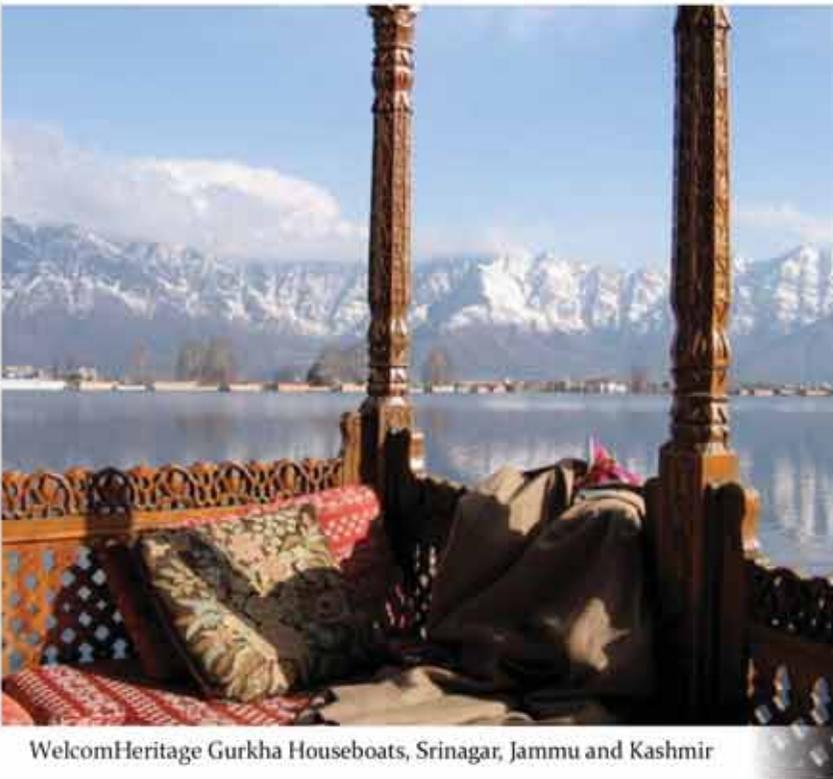
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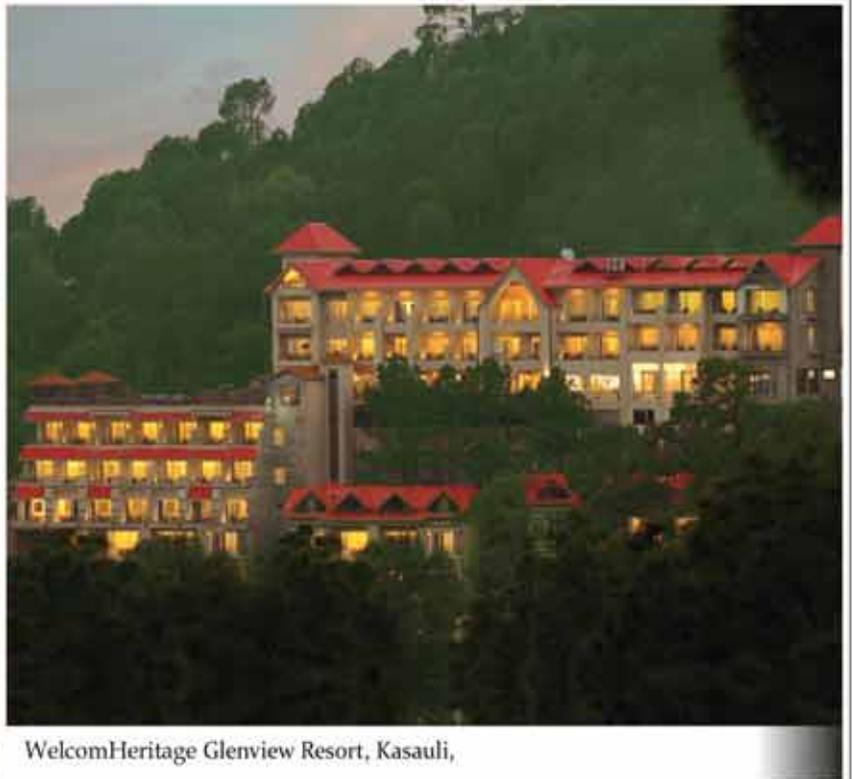
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Rail Europe's ERA a hit

Its most intensive recent investment, Easy Rail Access (ERA) has halved the booking process for travel agents and is expected to be Rail Europe's winning ticket to hit 500 mn euro in sales.

 Hazel Jain

Dâu-Khôi NGUYEN, President and CEO, Rail Europe, was in Mumbai recently for a brief visit to meet some key trade partners. On top of his mind was the new Easy Rail Access or ERA that Rail Europe introduced in 2019.



Dâu-Khôi NGUYEN
President and CEO, Rail Europe

"India is an important market for us and also one in which we have been investing significantly in terms of servicing operations. We have close to 200 people now, working out of our global shared service centre in Mumbai. However, ERA has been our main investment that we have done for our travel trade partners," he said.

double digits. We believe ERA will help us grow our B2B business further as we slowly phase out our old system - Euronet. It has simplified the booking process for agents by reducing the steps from 13 to just six. Moreover, ERA issues e-tickets that are instantaneously received by the agent," Dâu-Khôi added.

Speaking about the products that have been introduced on ERA, he said, "One of the first products we introduced on this was the Swiss Travel Pass and

we have received very good response from our trade partners. This is a very important product of our portfolio worldwide, and the introduction of ERA has really accelerated the global and Indian sale of this product in 2019. We now have carriers like

 ERA has simplified the booking process for agents by reducing the steps from 13 to just 6; it issues e-tickets that are instantly received by the agent 

Spain, high-speed rail of France, and Euro Star, Thalys and TGV Lyria on ERA. We are going to introduce Italy and Deutsche Bahn in the coming months. We will also introduce passes like Eurail this year." 

Globus' schemes for 2020

The Globus family of brands has launched a new version of its online specialist programme for 2020. It also assures its travellers of safety measures amid the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic.

 Hazel Jain

The Globus family of brands – Globus, Cosmos, Monograms and Avalon Waterways – has launched a completely new online travel specialist programme for 2020. "If an agent or agency is serious about increasing their revenue, specialising in selling the Globus family of brands increases their knowledge of our vacations manifold and makes them extremely profitable," says **Varesh Chopra**, Globus family of brands' Regional Director, South Asia & Middle East.



Varesh Chopra
Globus family of brands' Regional Director, South Asia & Middle East

Titled Globus Family of Brands University, the specialist programme offers three different courses for Avalon Waterways, Globus & Cosmos, and Mono-

grams. Upon successfully finishing the programme, travel agent partners will receive a host of benefits. Another deal that Avalon Waterways has launched for its agent partners in India for 2020 is a discount of 50 per cent per couple on its most popular European river cruises for bookings till March 31, 2020. With this exclusive offer valid only for India, cruisers can take their companion for free on select departures. On other select departures, clients can save up to \$3,000 per couple.

This is applicable on:

- ❖ Danube Dreams, 8 days, Budapest to Deggendorf
- ❖ Romantic Rhine, 8 days, Amsterdam to Basel
- ❖ Active & Discovery on the Rhine, 8 days, Amsterdam to Mainz
- ❖ Burgundy & Provence, 10 days from Port Saint Louis to St. Jean De Losne
- ❖ Tulip Time Cruise, 8 days from Amsterdam to Amsterdam

Travel amid COVID-19 scare

"While the Globus family of brands has instituted a travel policy relating to travel to and through China, all our vacations to Europe and the rest of the world are being conducted regularly. There have been no changes to them, nor have any of our travellers cancelled their travel plans. On its part, the Globus family of brands is attuned to the needs of our travellers. We have detailed operation protocols in place to assure that a stringent list of preventative health, safety and cleanliness processes are followed with utmost diligence. These protocols include daily cleaning of vehicles and making sanitisers readily available for all guests." - **Varesh Chopra**

Hilton's 'Namaste' to ME & Africa

Through its new tailored offering called Namaste, Hilton Hotels plans to cater to Indians travelling to ME and Africa.

 Tripti Mehta

Hilton has launched tailored offerings for Indians travelling to the Middle East and Africa, and has aptly named it 'Namaste'. Through this, Hilton aims to offer the Indian guest a truly tailored experience that caters to destination weddings, offbeat vacation spots, Bollywood shoots as well as meetings and events. Indians, especially millennials, have a piqued



curiosity that is leading them to explore offbeat destinations and therefore, Hilton is looking to cater to Indian guests opting to travel to destinations like Doha, Ras Al Khaimah and Cairo besides destinations like Mauritius, Cape Town, Dubai and Istanbul. 

 Tripti Mehta

Country Inn Hotels & Resorts India will soon launch four brand new properties in Tier-II cities of North India. While one of the four properties will be situated in the state of Uttarakhand, in Haridwar, the other three will be located in Uttar Pradesh, one each in Varanasi, Kasganj and Sitapur. These will be in addition to the nine properties that are already operational and cater to a



wide array of traveller segments, including leisure, MICE, weddings and domestic corporate travel.

Commenting on the new projects, **Manoj Gupta**, CEO, Country Inn Hotels & Resorts India, says, "Tier-

II destinations are rapidly growing and have immense potential for Country Inn. With experience of over 20 years, we have acquired expertise in this segment. All our hotels are full-service, equipped with modern amenities and market leaders in their location." The group currently operates three and four-star properties in Bhimtal, Mussoorie, Naukuchiatal, Sattal, Corbett Park, Amritsar, Vrindavan, Varanasi and Budaun. 

What Namaste entails

For groups

- Two complimentary bottles of water per room per night
- Indian breakfast items
- Twin rooms and free Wi-Fi
- Indian food, Indian caterer or the permission to bring a cook
- Flexible cancellation policy

For destination weddings

- A complimentary suite for the bride and groom for the wedding night
- Day-use hotel room for the family for the day of the wedding
- Discounted laundry service

New Country Inn hotels soon

Looking to tap the growing demand for travel to Tier-II cities of India, Country Inn Hotels & Resorts is set to soon open new properties, one each in the North Indian cities of Haridwar, Varanasi, Kasganj and Sitapur.

 Tripti Mehta

Country Inn Hotels & Resorts India will soon launch four brand new properties in Tier-II cities of North India. While one of the four properties will be situated in the state of Uttarakhand, in Haridwar, the other three will be located in Uttar Pradesh, one each in Varanasi, Kasganj and Sitapur. These will be in addition to the nine properties that are already operational and cater to a

wide array of traveller segments, including leisure, MICE, weddings and domestic corporate travel.

Commenting on the new projects, **Manoj Gupta**, CEO, Country Inn Hotels & Resorts India, says, "Tier-

II destinations are rapidly growing and have immense potential for Country Inn. With experience of over 20 years, we have acquired expertise in this segment. All our hotels are full-service, equipped with modern amenities and market leaders in their location." The group currently operates three and four-star properties in Bhimtal, Mussoorie, Naukuchiatal, Sattal, Corbett Park, Amritsar, Vrindavan, Varanasi and Budaun. 

7-city roadshow by Assam Tourism



Assam Tourism Development Corporation, with tour operators from Assam in tow, recently concluded a seven-city roadshow which included Ahmedabad, Pune, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and the state of Goa. With an aim to strengthen the 'Awesome Assam' campaign among the travel fraternity in the domestic market, the roadshow served as an interactive platform for trade partners to network and learn more about the diverse product offerings and experiences of Assam.

A spiritual tourism boost

The 12th World Confluence of Humanity, Power and Spirituality, held at The Westin Kolkata, Rajarhat, was a highly innovative, path-breaking meet that set standards and raised the bar in the world of spirituality and spiritual tourism.



Inder Raj Ahluwalia

Humanity, Power and Spirituality! Need one say more? Focused on universal spirituality, the 12th World Confluence of Humanity, Power and Spirituality, was driven by the main topic, 'Spirituality for the growth of the nation', which struck the right chords, gave the right signals and provided an insight into the characteristics, norms and dynamics of the spiritual world. Attending the Confluence were a host of guests that included distinguished speakers who had converged and gathered here from international locations and different walks of life. Each got a

The Confluence's wide participation level and considerable global publicity will provide a boost to India's spiritual tourism efforts

chance to share his thoughts and perspectives. The universality of the event was manifest from the fact that all religions of the world were represented, and all were gracefully showcased and highlighted by the speakers. The speakers and audience participants contributed to strengthen the organisers' resolve in their mission to spread the message of 'Humanity and Enlightenment- a journey within through service'.

The Confluence is the brain-child of HP Kanoria, a man with a multi-faceted personality and a true visionary, who has worked tirelessly for many

years to create this event. Thanks to his efforts, the annual Confluence has become a flagship event, generating great synergy and goodwill.

Dr Rahul Varma, Director of the Confluence, felt such meets assumed great importance because they increased awareness, generated goodwill and built bridges

between different religions, communities and countries. Owing to the Confluence's wide participation level and considerable global publicity, he felt that the event will also provide a boost to India's spiritual tourism efforts.

Subhash Sinha, General Manager, The Westin Kolkata, Rajarhat, a brand focused

on wellness, felt the Confluence provided a major input in Kolkata's business and convention efforts.

With its large banqueting space of 50,000 sqft along with the Westin lawns, the hotel was the perfect venue for such a prestigious and impactful event. ↴

'Another year in travel'



The NIYOZEN travel meetup was recently organised in Mumbai, Maharashtra, to deliberate on the subject- Another Year in Travel: Bucket List, Budget & Reality Checks. The event welcomed celebrity speakers Anita Hassanandani Reddy and Rohit Reddy, along with seasoned travellers and bloggers Roxanne Bamboat and Hoshner & Ambika.



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According to Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in January 2020 were 11,18,150 as compared to 11,03,380 in January 2019, registering a growth of 1.3 per cent.



Tunisia reiterates visa-free entry

Tunisia has reiterated its policy of visa-free entry for Indians, as it aims to tap the latter's burgeoning potential.

 Tripti Mehta

In an effort to reinstate the interest of Indians in the historically rich North African country of Tunisia, HE **Nejmeddine Lakhal**, Ambassador of the Republic of Tunisia to India (in New Delhi), has sought to reiterate their commitment to the market

port that has at least six months' validity, a confirmed hotel booking and a confirmed round-trip airline ticket.

Modern Tunisia has a lot on offer for the experience-seeking Indian traveller, including sandy beaches, fascinating oasis, Sahara's dunes, valleys, moun-



through visa-free entry for Indian travellers. Since October 2017, Indian tourists have not needed a visa to visit Tunisia. It's not a visa on arrival, but a visa-free entry for Indian tourists with a pass-

tains, a pleasant Mediterranean climate, a rich cultural heritage, varied gastronomy, as well as an impressive set of ancient ruins and sites. Tunisia also has good accommodation facilities. 

ATM to decode preferences

Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2020 will bring together tourism experts to deliberate on how different traveller generations can be tapped. While they are united in the kind of experience they seek, their preferences differ greatly, often leaving marketers perplexed.

 Tripti Mehta

The burgeoning global tours and activities market is estimated to be worth \$183 billion this year. Travellers from across the globe, representing all generations, now have a common interest in activities and experiences



Danielle Curtis
Exhibition Director ME, ATM 2020

that are influencing and, in many cases, driving their travel decisions. While all generations are in sync when it comes to the type of activities or experiences they

seek, what makes the process complex are their individual preferences. This is a challenge that marketers face in trying to engage with them. At this year's edition, Arabian Travel Market will host a series of seminars identifying the



latest in hospitality concepts as well as the most recent trends in cultural tourism, to future developments in the wellness economy and responsible tourism. **Danielle Curtis**, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market 2020, says, "ATM seminars will also be examining how hotels, destinations, attractions, tours and other activities are created, packaged and priced to meet demand. We will also be launching the Middle East's first-ever edition of Arrival Dubai @ ATM

showcasing the next generation of in-destination trends and innovation, as well as exploring the various opportunities that the sec-

tor presents." She adds that one emerging trend that experts will be watching is Generation Alpha - children of the millennials. 

Decoding traveller generations

Boomers (aged between 57-74 years)

- Least concerned about budget
- Especially interested in sightseeing
- Seek safety, security, service and relaxation
- Generally avoid long-haul trips

Gen X (aged between 40-56 years)

- Travel the least
- Prefer relaxing holidays to de-stress
- Especially drawn towards cultural experiences

Gen Y (aged between 25-39 years)

- Frequent travellers
- Technologically adept
- Crave adventure and experiential travel
- Careful with budget

Gen Z (aged between 10-24 years)

- Spend more than a tenth of their travel budget on activities and tours
- Open-minded and interactive
- Inspired by peers on social networks
- Adept with researching or booking on mobile phones
- Yearn for new, unique and authentic experiences

5th Bengal Travel Mart concludes in Siliguri



The fifth edition of Bengal Travel Mart, organised by Eastern Himalaya Travel & Tour Operators Association and aimed at showcasing tourism destinations in the state, had representatives from several countries, both B2B and B2C, present to witness its bouquet of tourism offerings.

Roaring's Latin Trails

Roaring Representations has announced its newest client, Latin Trails, from South America. It offers DMC services in Ecuador and Peru, and small-ship luxury cruises to Galápagos Islands.

 Manas Dwivedi

Sharing details about the latest additions, **Vishal Mehra**, Managing Partner-Acquisitions Roaring Representations, says, "These islands, a province of Ecuador, are considered the



Vishal Mehra
Managing Partner-Acquisitions
Roaring Representations

world's foremost destination for wildlife viewing. They are inspired from Charles Darwin's 'Origin of Species'. The fact that these islands are so isolated has created a perfect environment for wildlife and birds to thrive. Seals, sea lions, penguins, iguanas, sea turtles, dolphins,

whales and many other species can be spotted in and around the islands. Latin Trails has cruise-only and land-cum-cruise offers for visitors, allowing them to experience these islands in comfort and luxury. They also

 Our aim is visibility for our clients in a voice that resonates with their target audience 

offer multi-destination itineraries for adventure and wildlife lovers. At Roaring Representations, we are responsible partners offering real-time advice to our clients and our market to enhance business for both. Our aim is visibility for our clients in a voice that resonates with their target audience, leading to measurable and tangible results." Mehra also talks about the role of a responsible representative company.

"The role of a representative company is one that bridges the gap between agent and product. The product can differ from destination to hotel, cruise to airline, or attraction to experience. A successful representation company is the one that takes the responsibility to demystify the local area by informing its clients about buying patterns, main markets and key stakeholders in their region."

He further adds, "The role of the representative company is now changing from just being someone who opens the door for introduction to those who teach, influence and create demand. The changing face of representation has been motivated by the ease with which a buyer can now connect with a seller. So, the role becomes more complex with more investment in time and effort being made to ensure that there are quality tie-ups, conversations and conversions." 

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2HUB is the market leader in designing bespoke travel packages for leisure and corporate travel, within India and outbound. Whether it's a spiritual and wellness tour, one that's related to photography, a romantic getaway or business travel related- the seasoned team at 2HUB will infuse its trademark personalisation into every experience it curates.

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The Heart of INDIA

Madhya Pradesh is fondly called the Heart of India, and rightly so! This Central Indian state has everything that travellers seek, from culture and history to adventure, leisure and a unique cuisine that is both enjoyable and Instagrammable.



Vani Sunder

With its rich cultural heritage, magnificent temples and a history of constant evolution towards betterment, Madhya Pradesh is one of the most visit-worthy destinations in India and its numerous hidden gems are worth every traveller's while!

Stunning Indore

One of the cleanest cities in India, Indore, once a princely state, has a powerful system of recycling waste products from industries, temples and households. A dedicated citizenry and rehabilitation programmes for the city's many

cleanliness workers have helped achieve this honour. Safety of women is another focus area for the administration here.

Some key attractions that travellers can visit in the city are the three-storeyed Lal Bagh Palace built by Maharaj Shivaji Rao Holkar and the Central Museum that is home to artefacts dating back to anywhere between the 8th and 13th centuries. Visitors can also pay their respects at some of the city's most magnificent temples, including Bada Ganpati Temple, Khajarana Ganpati Temple, Annapurna Temple and Kaanch Mandir. Even the foodie has much to explore and

experience in Indore. Some lip-smacking 'Garadu', one of the most relished street snacks in the Sarafa Bazaar area, or the simple tandoori chai at Chappan Dukaan can be the perfect end to the day.

Omkareshwar

Less than 100 kilometres from Indore by road and further south, Omkareshwar is adorned by lofty hills among which flows River Narmada. Considered a sacred island, the serene town is also home to one of 12 Jyotirlinga shrines in India. The most visited here is the Omkareshwar Temple that is dedicated to Lord Shiva. Other significant religious spots

are Kedareshwar and Sidhanath temples, which can be reached via motorboats that operate on Narmada River.

Jal Mahotsav

For those seeking a vacation full of fun and adventure, Hanuwantiya is just the place! From Omkareshwar, visitors can hit the road to travel further south in the state of Madhya Pradesh to Hanuwantiya, which hosts the famous Jal Mahotsav each year. Nestled in the lap of the largest reservoir in India – Indira Sagar Dam – Jal Mahotsav unfolds the natural beauty of the heart of India – Madhya Pradesh. The month-long festival, held this year from January 3 to February 3, is the perfect ode to the food, arts & crafts, culture and nature of Madhya Pradesh.

Here, power-packed performances, including Ganesh Vandana, Panihari Nritya, Shiv Tandav Strotam, Gangaur Nritya, Kathak and Bundelkhandi Nritya dance forms, keep visitors entertained through the day and night. A horde of water sports and water-based activities, including para-motoring, jet-skiing, water sofa rides and motorboat rides, also keep the adventurous spirit alive, while evenings are often dedicated to hot-air ballooning and relaxed dinners. Accommodation options vary from normal to luxury tents equipped with the best of amenities.

Saurabh Pandey, Assistant Manager – Events & Marketing, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, says, "Luxury tents are constructed to ensure a comfortable stay for our visitors. We are soon to introduce an open-air café at the centre of the Jal Mahotsav area. Though we have been more focused on domestic travellers, Madhya Pradesh Tourism is all geared up to introduce festivals like this to attract foreign tourists as well. Adventure sports and cultural performances are equally enjoyed by Indian and foreign tourists. We will soon be promoting MP for destination weddings as well." ↴



More from MP...

From Hanuwantiya, travellers can take a road trip to Maheshwar, another destination full of picturesque spots. Here, they can visit Holkar Fort, Mandleshwar, Jaleshwar Temple and Pandharinath Temple, or simply watch the sun set on the banks of River Narmada. Another tourist attraction in the state is the small town of Mandu, which is home to breathtaking monuments such as the Jahaz Mahal, Rani Roopmati Palace, Baz Bahadur Palace, Hindola Mahal and Hoshang's Tomb.



Skill development aids survival

Realising the need for skill development in the travel industry today, senior members of IATO share their view on the importance of new-age skills in the use of technology to pave the way for survival of travel companies. Technology alone cannot guarantee success, they feel.



Zia Siddiqui
EC Liaison, Skill Development Committee, IATO

“The future would be challenging for small and medium-sized tour operators when the business module transforms from traditional to digital. Switching to the latest electronic gadgets, designing new websites, or emailing will not be enough; re-engineering the thought process and approach, along with a smart workplace will prove helpful. Therefore, training and skill development may not be an activity of associations, but IATO plans to take it ahead as ‘IATO Mission of Skill Development’. IATO wants to reach to all its members on a pan-India level.”

“Today, visitors’ satisfaction level is enhanced by making information available to them, making their travel easier. Integration of technology will lead to ‘Smart Tourism’ effectiveness. Unlike OTAs, regular travel companies offer to customers human support and guidance. Industry players should also develop outstanding travel consultants and counsellors who can take care of the needs and concerns of the passengers. Technology alone may not fully be able to address all the concerns of travellers as much as effective human interaction can.”



EM Najeeb
Senior VP, IATO



Rajiv Mehra
VP, IATO

“The different tools of skill development for industry leaders and stakeholders are advanced research skills, strong communication skills, flexible organisation skills and enthusiasm for lifelong learning. Some of the other more specific tools for skill development that one can use to simplify workloads are content authoring, video editing and engaging visitors on social media. With technology, e-learning and online assessment tools can help develop skill to automate key aspects of teaching and knowledge sharing. Technology has always been the cause of innovation and invention.”

“The biggest challenge being faced by the travel industry today is lack of skilled or trained manpower, especially in Tier-II and III cities, and religious places. With an increased purchasing power, demand has increased and the requirement for trained manpower has grown correspondingly. Therefore, a skill development programme is needed to train staff to cater to both computer-savvy and App-savvy travellers. The absence of practical training has hit the industry hard. There should be compulsory on-the-job training to increase the staff’s aptitude for taking decisions.”



Pronab Sarkar
President, IATO



Kuku Kumar
Skill Development Committee, IATO

“A competitive and skilled staff member is an asset to the company and is better equipped to handle the numerous challenges faced daily. Having realised this, IATO has taken it as its priority to help enhance the skill of the current workforce engaged in service of its members. Some very useful training programmes were designed and conducted for every level, with an effort to increase the efficiency of the staff. Trainings included marketing techniques, digital marketing and its tools, grooming, cost saving, customer handling, team building, communication skills, etc.”

“You can conquer Mount Everest or anything else in the world if you have the right skill, and to develop a skill you must have the right teacher who has the knowledge and the passion to teach you. Besides that, you must also possess the will to learn. IATO is lucky to have a person like Zia Siddiqui, who is very passionate and is selflessly spearheading IATO’s Skill Development programme. Now it depends on the will and desire of the members to take full advantage of the various programs being organised by IATO all over India.”



Subhash Goyal
Past President, IATO



Randhirsingh Vaghela
Chapter Chairman – Gujarat, IATO

“For every leader and expert, addressing skill development is critical. Some key competencies that need to be developed are leadership, communication, planning and time management, along with specific skills related to the job. It is equally crucial to identify and use the correct tools to address these points, the most important ones being organising and planning tools, team building tools, communication and distribution tools, as well as a risk identification and response tool. Technology will play a significant role in this; it will not only aid the development of key competencies, but also help identify areas where skill needs to be developed.”

“The travel trade is one business that has always been at the forefront of the technological evolution. Business processes, servicing clients, sourcing and generating business, as well as networking with clients and partners are all impossible without the right skill. Skill development in the travel industry, not only for the people at the helm of businesses but also for all levels of the workforce, is essential to remain relevant, productive and future-ready. The digital marketing workshop organised by IATO in Guwahati, Assam, was one of the most engaging experiences for all participants. It is necessary that such workshops be held at regular intervals.”



Nirmalya Choudhury
Chapter Chairman – Northeast, IATO



Pandian K
Chapter Chairman – Tamil Nadu & Puducherry, IATO

“Stakeholders need to have good exposure to all industry advancements and developments taking place not only within the country, but also outside it. They need to successfully and continuously adapt themselves to those changes. For instance, we need to be aware of digital marketing and its importance, how it helps our industry, etc. Stakeholders in the industry need to at least be Google-friendly, which offers a number of tools that help gauge digital services and their effectiveness. Technology is ruling our industry. If stakeholders do not adapt to it, they will not be able to survive in the business for long.”

“Tourism is one industry that has been most affected by the digital revolution. Today, information technology is transforming the travel industry every day, and it is very important for all of us to understand these changes and adapt to them, while also ensuring that those working with us are adept in catering to a changing market. We, at IATO, understand the importance of empowering members with the required skill and knowledge to sustain their business. In this regard, the IATO digital marketing workshop in Kolkata focused on how small and micro travel companies could use the internet to market their products and services better.”



Debjit Dutta
Chapter Chairman – West Bengal, IATO



Vasuki K Sundaram
Chapter Chairman – Maharashtra, IATO

“As every industry adapts to a rapidly changing world driven by advancements in technology, tourism, too, is getting ever more technologically advanced. With a large portion of the youth in India comprising millennials who are eager to travel, it has become imperative for travel companies and service providers to cater to their demand of a smooth booking and travel process. This is only possible by adopting technology to suit their needs. The digital marketing workshop conducted by IATO in this regard was quite informative and gave an insight into how companies can strategise and market by making the most of the various digital platforms that are available today.”

“Skill development is the need of the hour in the travel industry. Basic knowledge about a destination is the primary aspect that the staff must learn. Others would be language, how to talk and how to dress. That said, with facilitator programmes, skills like teaching different languages or sharing important destination knowledge would help in a big way. IATO’s skill development programme is one the best initiatives of the association. The training programme has helped in creating awareness and understanding new trends, while highlighting the importance of digital marketing.”



Sejo Jose
Chapter Chairman – Kerala, IATO

travelbullz
destination management company

Great India Road Show

TravelBullz recently wrapped the two-city 'Great India Road Show' in Delhi and Mumbai, and brought together more than 36 hotels and attractions from Thailand to meet over 200 travel agents from each of the two cities. The event was a roaring success and paved the way for many a fruitful partnership between the trade of both countries.



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Members & families enjoy IATO Day

Around 400 IATO members and their families enjoyed a day out at Delta 105, a theme park near Manesar, Haryana, on February 23. Members spent the annual picnic event engaging in fun-filled activities. On the occasion, prizes were also distributed to the winners of different competitions.



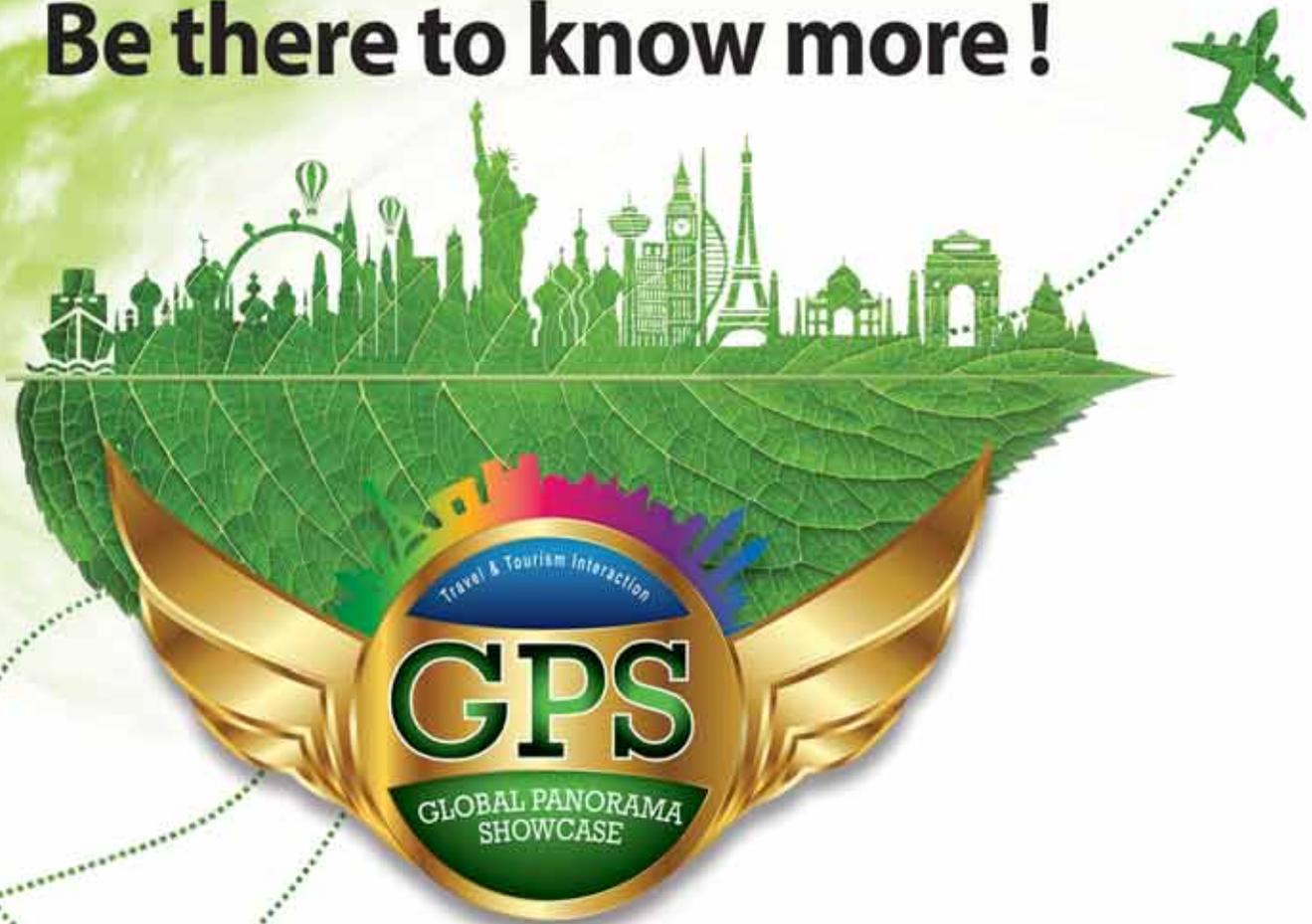
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meets Kochi travel trade

With an aim to bring together travel trade partners in Tier-II cities of India, Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) organised the Nepal Sales Mission 2020 in Kochi, Kerala. NTB and tourism stakeholders from Nepal updated tour operators about various destinations of the Himalayan nation and educated them on recent developments and tourism facilities.



TBO expresses gratitude to trade

TBO Group recently hosted an evening get-together for its trade partners in New Delhi, welcoming more than 2,400 partners from the fraternity, including hotels, airlines, tourism boards, media and government bodies. **Ankush Nijhawan**, Co-founder, TBO Group and Managing Director, Nijhawan Group, thanked the fraternity for its continued support and contribution at the sundowner party.



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EVENT TALK

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ITB	Berlin	4-8
Switzerland Destination Training	Nagpur	6
Namaste Orchha Festival	Orchha, MP	6-8
World Wedding Forum	Mumbai	11-12
Switzerland Destination Training	Kochi	12
NIMA Brainstorming Session	Greater Noida	14-15
World Wedding Forum	Delhi- NCR	14-15
OTOAI Convention	Antalya, Turkey	15-18
MITT	Moscow	17-19
Switzerland Destination Training	Raipur	17
Switzerland Destination Training	Bhopal	18
Switzerland Destination Training	Indore	19
Global Aerospace Summit	Abu Dhabi	17-19
Global Hospitality and Tourism Conference on Experiential Management and Marketing	Shillong	18-20
Rendez Vous En France- Atout France	Nantes, France	19-29
IITE	Bhubaneshwar	20-22
British Travel & Tourism Show	Birmingham	25-26
India Tourism Conclave by CEPR	Delhi	27
UITT 2020	Kyiv, Ukraine	25-27
Thailand Tourism Luxury Roadshow	Bengaluru	30
WTM Latin America	Sao Paulo	31-April 2
PATA Annual Summit 2020	Ras Al Khaimah	31- April 3

APRIL 2020

Thailand Tourism Luxury Roadshow	Ahmedabad	1
Iceland Tourism Roadshow	Delhi	1
Iceland Tourism Roadshow	Ahmedabad	2
Iceland Tourism Roadshow	Mumbai	3
HICSA 2020	Mumbai	1-2
Thailand Tourism Luxury Roadshow	Mumbai	3
WTM Africa	Cape Town	6-8
KITF	Almaty	14-16
ITB India	Mumbai	15-17
GITB	Jaipur	19-21
Arabian Travel Market (ATM)	Dubai	19-22
Digital Travel Summit APAC 2020	Sentosa	20-22
International Conference on Sustainable Tourism	Kolkata	24-25
International Conference	Dehradun	24-27

MAY 2020

ILTM Latin America	Sao Paulo	5-8
Africa's Travel Indaba	Durban	12-14
IMEX	Frankfurt	12-14
ILTM Asia Pacific	Singapore	31-June 3

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

ASSOCIATION TALK

Convention in April at Bhopal

Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI) has announced its 10th annual convention in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, from April 10-12, 2020, themed 'Dekho Apna Desh'. It also recently launched its Tamil Nadu chapter that will be chaired by Kalaimamani VKT Balan.



Nisha Verma

To be held at Minto Hall, Bhopal, the 10th convention of ADTOI will see the association organise circuit-based pre-Fam tours. Speaking at the curtain-raiser of the event, **PP Khanna**, President, ADTOI, revealed that the convention will be inaugurated by **Kamal Nath**, Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh and guest of honour **Surendra Singh Baghel**, Tourism Minister, Mad-



Chetan Gupta
General Secretary, ADTOI

hya Pradesh, in the presence of **Faiz Ahmed Kidwai**, Secretary - Tourism, Government of Madhya Pradesh. **Chetan Gupta**, General Secretary, ADTOI, is Convention Chairman, while there are three Co-Chairmen — **Rajesh Arya**, Vice President, ADTOI; and EC



members **Ved Khanna** and **Rajeev Sobti**. The theme of the convention will be 'Dekho Apna Desh'.

model. "We are also curating a session on digitalisation of business in the travel industry, and one on skill development for the frontline and managerial staff as well as the owners," he added.

We are curating a session on digitalisation of business in the travel industry and one on skill development

– Chetan Gupta

Gupta shared that this time, the pre-Fam tours will not be like a normal convention tour. "We are trying to develop a circuit. We want to educate our members to join the convention tours and learn more about these destinations, so that they can sell them better," he shared. Among the various sessions slated to be held, there will be one on the PPP

ADTOI also recently launched its Tamil Nadu chapter, at Hotel Ambassador Pallava in Chennai. This is the 11th chapter of the association and will aim to bring more tourist traffic to the state, while also promoting neighbouring destinations like Andaman & Nicobar, Puducherry and Karnataka. Around 150 delegates were

present at the launch that was graced by **K Pandia Rajan**, Minister of Tamil Development, Culture, Archaeology, Government of Tamil Nadu, as chief guest and **V Krishnamoorthy**, Deputy High Commissioner of Sri Lanka, as the guest of honour. The delegation also included officials from Ministry of Tourism, Government of India; officials from national associations TAAI and TAFI; and the local travel fraternity, including ADTOI members.

Office bearers (Tamil Nadu chapter)

Kalaimamani VKT Balan
of Madura Travel Service – Chairman
P Ashok Kumar
of Maanas Sarover Tours & Travels – Secretary
Vishnu Vasanth Kumar
of Emperor Traveline – Treasurer
R Saraswathi
– Lady Entrepreneur Officer (LEO)

Himalayan state for Convention

Among the projects undertaken by Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) is the 'Introduce Yourself' scheme for members and finalisation of its convention for the year. It will also be the knowledge partner for Uttarakhand Adventure Summit to be held in March.



Manas Dwivedi

Sharing details on the list of activities along with updates on the association, **Captain Swadesh Kumar**, President, ATOAI, said, "We are working very hard on two-three projects and ATOAI is actively involved in them. One of the important projects we are working on is Uttarakhand Adventure Summit, planned by the Uttarakhand government at Corbett National Park in Ramnagar. I am very happy to inform that we have agreed to become the knowledge partners for the summit."



Captain Swadesh Kumar
President, ATOAI

the schedule of our 15th annual convention that would be in one of the Himalayan states."

The association celebrated 25 years of its existence last year and Kumar said that they are keen on doing innovative things for their members. "Our aim is to provide more opportunity to our members for skill development, networking and growth of business. One of the important things we have done in this direction is to launch a new scheme called 'Introduce Yourself' to members. We believe that among ourselves, we can do a lot of business. Every week, three or four members of the association are

Our aim is to provide more opportunity to our members for skill development, networking and growth of business

introduced to the industry and they have to explain what all they do," he added.

The president also shared that adventure tour operators were

very keen to use satellite phones for adventure tourism. "It is a huge demand of the industry that satellite phones must be allowed. Government of India did allow us to buy satellite phones, but they put a restriction on using them in Ladakh and the northeast states. The bulk of the business goes to Ladakh. So, we are working to persuade the government to resolve this issue. I am happy that the government accepted another demand to carry satellite phones on aeroplanes officially and legally," he said.

In memoriam

KK Sharma
(1948-2020)

KK Sharma, Director, Sheraton Travels, has left for heavenly abode. He is survived by his wife and two sons. Much loved and respected in the fraternity, he contributed immensely to the growth of Sheraton Travels. He will be fondly remembered and greatly missed for his kind heartedness.





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AIR INDIA

New Delhi

Senior bureaucrat **Rajiv Bansal** has been appointed as Chairman and Managing Director of Air India, according to a Personnel Ministry order.

Bansal, a 1988-batch IAS officer of Nagaland cadre, assumes the position from that of Additional Secretary in Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. The post became vacant after incumbent chief Ashwani Lohani completed his tenure. This is Bansal's second term as Air India chief, having first been appointed as the interim CMD at the airline for a period of three months in 2017. He has previously served in the Ministry of Electronics & IT, and MoCA.



GOAIR

Mumbai

GoAir's Board of Directors has approved the appointment of aviation veteran **Vinay Dube** as Chief Executive Officer. He will report to the Chairman, Managing Director and the Board, and will be responsible for the management of the airline and also for meeting the goals and long-term growth objectives of the company. Dube has an established track record of corporate transformations and business development of large, multifaceted international organisations across three continents. In his earlier assignments, Dube has held the position of Senior VP - Asia Pacific at Delta Air Lines and CEO at Delta Technology LLC, among others.



HYATT HOTELS

South India

Mausam Bhattacharjee has been promoted as Area Director of Sales – South India at Hyatt Hotels. He has been with the Hyatt since 2013 and was the Director of Sales & Marketing of the Park Hyatt Hyderabad and later the Director of Sales & Marketing at Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty and Lulu Bolgatty International Convention Centre. He was a part of the team which launched the largest luxury convention space in South India in April 2018 and the same is already a big driver for international conventions, incentives and wedding business to Kerala. Bhattacharjee has over two decades of experience in upscale and luxury hotel chains.



SIGNUM HOSPITALITY

South India

Signum Hospitality has appointed **PK Mohan Kumar** as Strategic Officer for Growth & Development in South India. A hospitality veteran with over 46 years of experience, his professionalism has led him to be so accomplished in the industry.

Kumar has previously donned many a hat during his tenure and renowned hospitality companies such as the Taj group of hotels, and has also made a mark in the hotel consultancy and management field abroad. He has spearheaded several initiatives and being an operations specialist involved in business and brand equity, has helped turnaround properties under his charge. Kumar will be based in Gurugram.



VIVANTA HOTEL

Dwarka, New Delhi

Vivanta New Delhi, Dwarka has appointed **Surinder Singh** as its new General Manager. Following a distinguished career in hospitality with over 30 years of experience, Singh has held leadership positions and has worked with renowned properties of IHCL. In the new role, he will be responsible for the continued success of the 250-room Vivanta New Delhi, Dwarka through his strategic leadership, and ensure margin enhancement and overall operational excellence. Singh's previous assignment was at Taj Chandigarh, where he successfully facilitated the overall business evolution while driving guest satisfaction.



HOLIDAY INN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Mumbai

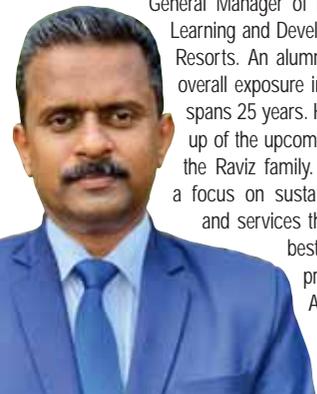
Holiday Inn Mumbai International Airport, part of InterContinental Hotels Group, has appointed **Shital Sethi** as the Director of Sales & Marketing. In the new position, she will play a pivotal role in driving and overseeing all aspects of sales and marketing strategies at Holiday Inn Mumbai, including driving core sales, creating relationships, promoting brand strategies and creating the best experience for all guests. Sethi comes with a rich experience of over 20 years in the sales and marketing industry. Prior to this, she has worked with reputed brands such as Novotel, Radisson, Sarovar and the Orchid group of hotels, among others.



RAVIZ HOTELS & RESORTS

Kerala

Ajit Nair has been appointed as General Manager - Business Excellence of Raviz Hotels and Resorts. Prior to this, he was the General Manager of Raviz Calicut and Head of Learning and Development at Raviz Hotels and Resorts. An alumnus of IHM Trivandrum, his overall exposure in hospitality and operations spans 25 years. He is also leading the setting up of the upcoming hospitality institute from the Raviz family. Raviz hotels are built with a focus on sustainable models of products and services that are nothing short of the best in class and comfort. Its properties are located in Ashtamudi, Kadavu, Calicut and Kovalam.



THE RAVIZ HOTEL

Kovalam

Anil George has been appointed as General Manager of The Raviz Kovalam, located just 15 minutes from Trivandrum airport. An alumnus of IHM Kolkata and a hospitality veteran with 33 years of international exposure across international hotel chains, he will continue as General Manager - Operations of Raviz Hotels and Resorts, where he will also oversee the operations of Raviz Ashtamudi, Raviz Kadavu and Raviz Calicut. Spread across 60 acres of greenery, The Raviz Kovalam offers six categories of rooms and several meeting & banquet facilities that can cater to gatherings of all sizes.



CROWNE PLAZA

Greater Noida

Lavraj Matnani has been appointed as Associate Director – Crowne Meetings at Crowne Plaza Greater Noida, a hotel that boasts 11 meetings rooms with total meetings space of 47,000 sqft and the largest room equipped to accommodate as many as 1,000 pax. In the new role, he will lead the catering and MICE sales for the hotel. Matnani brings close to a decade of experience in hospitality sales, having begun his career with The Westin Gurgaon. His last assignment was with Pullman & Novotel hotels in Aerocity, New Delhi.

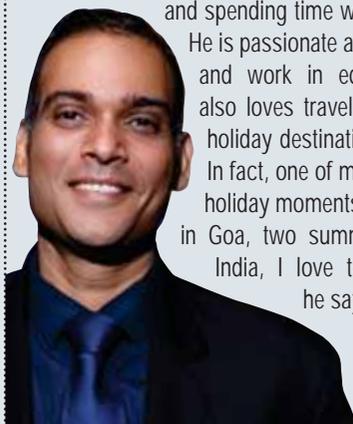


TALKING PEOPLE

Music is one thing that always keeps **Sujeet Kumar**, General Manager, Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway, going. "In fact, not many people know that I started my career as a DJ at a club in Chennai. I also enjoy watching movies, travelling and trying new F&B concepts. I am also really passionate about F1 racing and every year, I try to cover one race at least," he says. When it comes to travelling, Kumar's favourite holiday destinations are Goa and Bali.



Atul Donde, Director of Events, Hyatt Regency Pune, unwinds by going on long drives, listening to good music and spending time with good company. He is passionate about family, friends and work in equal measure. He also loves travelling. "My favourite holiday destination in India is Goa. In fact, one of my most memorable holiday moments was with my son, in Goa, two summers ago. Outside India, I love to visit Portugal," he says.



Cooking and baking is something that **Seema Kadam**, Regional Director, India, Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board, tries to make time for as it helps her unwind. "I also love the Indian classical dance forms of *kathak* and *bharatnatyam*, and would love to pursue this further. Likewise, I am partial towards Indian cuisine with its rich diversity. It is the food for my soul!" she says. Kadam also finds time to pursue her other love – travel.



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MOT to address TCS issue

With reinforced confidence after the recent budget allocated to MOT and a plan in place, the ministry is now looking to address the industry's concerns over TCS and other issues. **Meenakshi Sharma**, Director General, Tourism, says they will work hand-in-hand with trade.



Nisha Verma

Upbeat about the budget allocated to Ministry of Tourism (MOT) for the period 2020-21, Meenakshi Sharma says that they will use these funds to work on both new and old schemes. "Our focus will be on iconic sites, Swadesh Darshan and PRASAD schemes, while global promotions will continue being important under the Incredible India 2.0 campaign that has panned out well. For domestic promotions, we will continue focusing on the 'Dekho Apna Desh' campaign," she says.

Concerns & issues

When asked about the issue of TCS or Tax Collected at Source under Section 206 (C) and the growing concern over outbound tours getting costlier, Sharma says that outbound tour operators have already written to them about it. "We are writing to Ministry of Finance to consider the request made by outbound tour operators. I think we can discuss this issue further. However, MOT has not really analysed this issue in depth, which it is in the process of doing presently," she adds.

Commenting on the new MOT criteria of recognising inbound tour operators, which IATO is discussing with them, Sharma says, "Let them come out with a proposal. We also want more people to become a part of the business, whether through registration or by just being attached to us. We have to find a method and bring in more people, more industry voices, so that we can discuss issues with each other. Hence, we will look at IATO's suggestions and

work on them. The ₹2 crore revenue limit has been discussed many a time. I think, times have changed and this should not be the way it is. It is under discussion."

Sharing her view on the MDA scheme, she adds, "In my personal view, these schemes have outlived their importance, but we will look at what the industry wants and how it helps them. This ministry has always been interactive; all the decisions are taken in consultation with stakeholders."

Conclaves and events

The ministry has already rolled out its global campaign and will be focusing on promotions in a big way. Sharma says that the promotion of iconic sites will hopefully begin from April this

✦ We are writing to Ministry of Finance to consider the request made by outbound tour operators. I think we can discuss this issue further ✦

year. "We also have the international Buddhist conclave this year. We are going to decide the venue for the same and will invite all our Buddhist tour operators, opinion makers and media as well. We hope to have a very good conclave sometime in September or October," she adds.

Among international events, she insists, ITB Berlin is the biggest and most important one for the Europe market, and that MOT is looking to go ahead with a high-level delega-

tion, one that may be led by the tourism minister himself along with the joint secretary. "ITB Berlin is a place where most of the travel community comes together and a lot of interaction happens. We hope to get some good interactions with our source markets, where we can talk about our strategy going ahead and also learn some new practices," she says.

Inbound numbers

Growth rate of inbound tourism for 2019 was lower than that of 2018 and Sharma says that though the final numbers have not come in yet, the rate has declined. "However, we are still much better than the global growth rate. We would see the impact of recent initiatives in this year because all things, like the liberalisation of GST and the visa fee, came towards the end of 2019. Hence, we will see its impact in 2020," she says.

With 2019 having been a good year for Ministry of Tourism and its schemes taking off well, Sharma says that the number of travellers or the foreign exchange generated are only an outcome. "What the ministry has to do is to create the right environment for people to come; we are working towards that. The recent

downturn due to coronavirus in China may have some impact on global tourism, including in India. We are yet to see the impact and we are waiting for the numbers. Otherwise, we are hopeful, as infrastructure is improving, connectivity is getting better, the visa policy is more liberalised and things are upbeat. This is what we are looking for in 2020," she concludes. ✦



Meenakshi Sharma
Director General, Tourism

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