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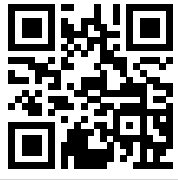


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## MOT focus on intangible heritage

Prahlad Singh Patel, Minister of State (I/C) for Tourism & Culture, launched the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of India on April 18, World Heritage Day. Ministry of Tourism (MOT) celebrated the special occasion by conducting a series of webinars titled 'Dekho Apna Desh'.

TT Bureau

Through Ministry of Tourism's webinar on the ancient temple city of Mamallapuram (Tamil Nadu), **Prahlad Singh Patel** addressed attending participants from India and beyond. He said, "India has a repository of unique Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) traditions, 13 of which have also been recognised by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The National ICH List is unveiled with an aim to recognise the

diversity of Indian culture embedded in its intangible heritage. It will raise awareness about the various intangible cultural heritage elements from different states of India at national and international levels, and ensure their protection. This initiative is also a part of 'Vision 2024' of the Ministry of Culture."

The second webinar in the series was titled 'World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism at Humayun's Tomb'. Highlighting the importance of India's hos-

✦ The National ICH List is unveiled with an aim to recognise the diversity of Indian culture embedded in its intangible heritage ✦

pitable culture and traditions in times of COVID-19, the minister shared, "Our tradition and culture is not only ancient, but also invaluable. During the pre-

sent COVID-19 crisis, it is the values of humanity and warm hospitality of our heritage that define us and make us what we are. As Indians, our motto is 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is our family) from the Maha Upanishad, which demonstrates our spirit of warmth and humility through the help extended to all tourists stranded in India. When it came to offer medical help to tourists, we did not flinch and offered it to people from developed nations like



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

America and even developing countries like Brazil, as well as our neighbouring nations."

He also added that the Prime Minister has set 'Vision 2024' as a timeline, by which we should be able to enlist, preserve and showcase the deep and invaluable heritage and culture of our country's monuments and traditions.

The Intangible Cultural Heritage list is only going to grow considering the depth and vastness of our ancient civilisation, he said. The list is available on the website of Ministry of Culture. ✦

## Tourism Task Force for revival

Ministry of Tourism has constituted a National Tourism Task Force in a bid to revive the industry from the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, which has taken a toll on travel and tourism sector in an unprecedented way. The task force, headed by the tourism minister, shall convene its first meeting soon.

Nisha Verma

Citing the importance of reviving the travel and tourism industry in India, Ministry of Tourism (MOT) has taken a big step to work with the industry in its revival.

"The outbreak of COVID-19 will have a major impact on the tourism sector and its revival is of paramount importance, as it's the major contributor of employment as well as GDP. MOT has constituted the National Tourism Task Force to meet the challenge posed by the outbreak of



**Rupinder Brar**  
Additional Director General, MOT

COVID-19 and make appropriate recommendations for the revival of the tourism sector in the country. The task force will be headed by **Prahlad Singh Patel**, Minister

of State for Tourism and Culture (I/C), Government of India, and it will include state tourism ministers; Joint Secretary-level officers of the concerned central ministries; industry associations such as CII, FICCI, ASSOCHAM and WTTC; and the heads of tourism and hospitality associations. Ministry of Tourism shall hold the first meeting of the National Tourism Task Force shortly," reads the statement released by MOT.

**Rupinder Brar**, Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism, said, "The National Tourism Task

Force is part of the ongoing initiative the MOT to continue its dialogue with different stakehold-

✦ These are unprecedented times for everyone; this is also the time for us to create value and improve our way of functioning ✦

ers. These are unprecedented times for everyone and the MOT wants to hear the industry's problems and also some ideas

on what can be the way forward, what can be done, and how do we take tourism forward and take care of all our stakeholders. This is the time for us to create value and improve our way of functioning."

She added that the task force will also be discussing and laying out the kind of safety measures and protocols that will be followed by tourism stakeholders, including hotels, agents, tour operators, etc. This is the reason various associations will be part of the task force. Agrees Brar, "We want to widen the ambit of

inputs because there are so many people to value add to tourism and hospitality as an industry. We would be benefitted by wider participation and inputs, as each sector would have something different to say and each sector would have its own issues. The Hon. Minister is keen that the we work on this task force with different sectors." She added that they would be discussing the protocols, safety measures and other things once the task force meets, but in the meantime, will depend on the protocols that the Ministry of Health will come up with. ✦



# Up in the air in Nevada



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## 'Revenue to decline by ₹90,000 cr'

Overall revenue of the Indian hotel sector is expected to decline by approximately ₹90,000 crore in 2020 according to revised estimates by HVS ANAROCK of the impact of COVID-19 on the sector.

 Nisha Verma

In a recent report, HVS ANAROCK has shared its revised assumptions on the overall revenue loss that the hotel industry will face in 2020. "The overall revenue of the Indian hotels sector is expected to decline by approximately ₹90,000 crore in 2020, reflecting an erosion of 57 per cent compared to last year. RevPAR in the organised segment is expected to decline by approximately 58 per cent. The industry has not witnessed such an unprecedented decline in RevPAR in the last two decades, since HVS has been recording this data," read HVS ANAROCK's monthly newsletter — Hotels & Hospitality Overview India (April).

The report further mentioned that the unorganised segment, which is 10 times the size of the organised segment, is also anticipated to witness a similar quantum of decline. While the organised sector would see a revenue loss of ₹40,309 crore, the semi-organised sector






would have losses to the tune of ₹8,379 crore and in the unorganised sector, these losses would be ₹41,126 crore.

Rate (ADR) in top 13 markets in India in March was ₹5,690, which declined by 14 per cent as compared to February 2020,

The RevPAR was ₹1,750, a drop of 64 per cent from February this year and 56 per cent from March 2019.

Mandeep Lamba, President (South Asia), HVS ANAROCK, says, "We should now use the learnings from this disruption

### Revenue Loss Expected in 2020<sup>2</sup>

HOTEL SECTOR	ORGANISED	SEMI-ORGANISED	UNORGANISED
 Revenue Loss	₹40,309 Cr	₹8,379 Cr	₹41,126 Cr
 Occupancy	-47.9%		
 RevPAR	-57.8%		

<sup>2</sup> Revised estimates as on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Source: Ministry of Tourism, STR & HVS Research

It claims that the Indian hotels sector has come to a standstill in the last one month, with most of the hotels partially or completely shut. The report also reveals that the Average Daily

and declined by 6.8 per cent as compared to March 2019. The occupancy in March was 31 per cent, which dipped by 58 per cent from February this year and by 52.9 per cent in March 2019.

and plan for the new realities beyond COVID-19, keeping in mind that we need to better prepare ourselves for future events of a similar or even more vicious impact." ↴

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# TRAVTALK

## VIEWPOINT

### Upgrade the framework

‘Domestic tourism will be the first to bounce back’ is a statement that reverberates through the Indian tourism and hospitality industry today. But, for the industry to achieve pre-COVID levels in terms of revenues and arrivals, one must first look at it as an amalgamation of its three vital divisions – outbound, inbound and domestic travel. Hence, a mere revival of domestic tourism will not meet the cause. The industry today, even experts believe, needs a comprehensive countrywide strategy that urges each state tourism board, hotel, tour operator and other stakeholders to work **towards influencing the Indian outbound traveller** to look towards their own country. This would, of course, mean an upgrade of facilities and a complete overhaul of marketing campaigns. In the end, this will ensure that Indian tourism enters its next phase of development.

### Begin locally, think globally

Learned, well-travelled, demanding and always on the lookout for genuinely new experiences – the Indian outbound traveller wants more than is on offer within his own country. Only a well-planned, well-researched product that meets the level of international standards that exist today can entice him to pay a visit. Hence, before we upgrade our facilities, policies and offers to uber-luxurious standards, we must stop to understand our customer. Price alone will not turn heads; packaging of the tourism product will. Hotels and tourism boards must first begin locally, digging deep into the customer’s mindset to determine what will tick and what won’t. It is time we went beyond our standard tourism destinations to decode a customer’s aspirations and revive luxury travel within the country.

### The certainty in uncertainty

India has a young working-class population that will definitely continue to drive the demand for international tourism in the months to come. That said, it is the short-haul destinations that experts believe will pick up first, while long-haul ones will need to brace the aftermath of the COVID-19 for a while longer. Tourism boards across the world have continuously been observing and studying the aspirations of Indian outbound travellers and will, without a doubt, turn to them for support to help revive tourism in their own countries. India may well be on its way to being the new, much sought-after source market.

# ‘Long-term optimism is high’

Coming off a high performance base in 2019, JLL says that the COVID-19 outbreak and the containment measures introduced by the government have resulted in a severe drop in foreign and domestic travel, across both the tourism and business traveller segments.

India’s hotel and hospitality industry has declined sharply in the first quarter of 2020, as the COVID-19 outbreak impacts various segments of the sector. “In the third week of March 2020, at an all-India level, the hotels sector witnessed a decline of more than 65 per cent in occupancy levels as compared to the same period of the previous year. As travel restrictions around the world intensified further, Q2 and Q3 of 2020 are likely to be similarly impacted,” reads the report titled ‘India Hospitality Industry Review 2019: The Show must go on’ by JLL. The report estimates that at least 30 per cent of hotel and hospitality industry revenue could be impacted if the situation doesn’t improve by the end of June 2020. With more than 60 per cent of organised hotels in India already shut and several others operational with single-digit occupancies, a recovery will be gradual.

Industry estimates indicate that in India, branded and organised hotels’ annual revenue is ₹38,000 crore. Corporate businesses will be left with less money to spend on travel, lodging and entertainment. Behavioural changes will lead to reduction in socialising, which in turn will impact F&B in hotels. All this will impact GOPs and further reduce yields to hotel owners.

It is also indicated that the working capital of hotels will be stretched this year. Cost optimisation at all operational levels will be the key. “FF&E Reserves



would need to be cautiously utilised. Operators would need to support the hotel owners more than ever,” adds the report. It also provides a comprehensive overview of hotel development in India in 2019. Whilst 2019 witnessed a shifting of concentration to mid-scale and affordable branded hotel segments, more established developers and owner operators activated their existing land banks and announced expansion plans across key corporate markets in India. The report indicates that the strong performance of the office sector was the key to robust hotel market performance across the top seven business cities of India.

Tourism has always been a significant contributor of employment generation and a massive source of foreign exchange earnings for the country. This sector not only employs workers in cities but also provides livelihood to people across social strata in rural areas. The sector has also been amongst the most diverse employers in India as it employs significant number of women across hotels and its supporting businesses. “There are several macro factors that play favourably to India’s hotel and hospitality industry. First and foremost, the massive domestic sector, which has also become travel savvy over the years, will likely drive the rebound as travellers extend their average length of stay at a certain destination. Secondly, India may get an increased share of manufacturing and logistics business that may bring back business travellers to the country in the medium term,” says **Jaideep Dang**, Managing Director Hotels & Hospitality Group, JLL India.

JLL advises that the focus on development could shift towards Tier-I cities, which are fundamentally stronger business-driven markets. On debt side, new hotel

development will be impacted as there will be limited lender appetite, particularly in more volatile resort markets. Investors led by private equity funds will be looking out for stressed assets as the working capital pain and reduced revenues will impact yields for existing hotel owners.

“Year 2020 started with a strong deal pipeline estimated at about US\$ 1 billion worth of tradeable assets. Investment action will likely get deferred as the sector rebuilds itself after containment of COVID-19, however, we estimate that more assets may fall in the ring for sale in the latter half of the year,” the report suggests.

Growth and development is likely to slow down in the next two years. Projects under development will likely get delayed and raising development finance will also become more challenging.

The report also points out that imports will become expensive because of the rising Foreign Exchange Rate. Developers could focus on locally available products to optimise project costs. On the investment front, cracks will emerge from over leveraged assets and hotel companies. ↴

## What can be done

- ❖ Sales and marketing strategies need to be programmed around the domestic traveller
- ❖ Focus on staycation demand
- ❖ Special focus on guest health and safety parameters
- ❖ Food & Beverage (F&B) should be re-aligned
- ❖ FF&E Reserves would need to be cautiously utilised
- ❖ Focus on development could shift towards Tier-I cities
- ❖ Developers could focus on locally available products to optimise project costs



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# Welcome to the new normal

On-ground realities are poised to change dramatically once we learn to live and travel with COVID-19. From health check-ups to safe distancing, travel policies and operational protocols will be re-evaluated. Here's what the new normal might look like.

## HOTEL

“ We have been working with our sanitation partners, along with local medical and government authorities to ensure regular cleaning protocols. **We have implemented a very strict outline of measures that all our hotels have to follow, including frequent cleaning of public spaces, regular sanitation of high-touch points such as elevator buttons and public tables/chairs, and enhanced cleaning processes for rooms.** We will implement new protocols. ”



**William Boulter**  
Chief Commercial Officer  
IndiGo

## TOUR GUIDE

“ The tour guides will have to play a vital role once travel resumes, as they interact with tourists physically starting from arrival to departure. **Tourists want to indulge in local culture, so we have to be very careful to avoid the threat of the virus. In this case, helping them enjoy local events while maintaining social distance is key.** We will also use hand sanitisers, hand gloves, and masks for both the tourists and the tour guides. ”



**Mahendra Vakharia**  
Director  
Pathfinders Holidays

## ATTRACTION

“ **Mt Titlis will adapt to the regulations which will be enforced by the Swiss Federal Office. We have already taken a few measures even before the closure.** These include distancing with the number of persons to be transported in the cable car, sanitising points at all stations and restaurants, spacing at all our restaurants, cleaning of all areas, etc. When we re-open, we have to see what additional measures will be necessary as guided by the authorities. ”



**Rayomand Choksi**  
Regional Director  
Titlis Cableways

## AIRLINE

“ We will restart operations on vital corridors. We will begin for domestic only, and then gradually ramp it up to some international routes. We will follow stringent safety measures like frequent deep-cleaning of aircraft, our staff and crew wearing PPE, temporary discontinuation of on-board meal services and barring on-board and duty-free sales. **We will fill airport buses at 50% capacity and allow boarding for limited number of customers at a time.** ”



**Jean-Michel Cassé**  
COO – India & South  
Asia, Accor

## TRAVEL AGENT

“ We will look for hotels that are following the highest order of cleanliness and hygiene. The same goes for transport agencies that we book vehicles with. We might consider getting our team members to take COVID testing until a vaccine is developed. **We will ensure that none of our clients fly out without a proper medical insurance that covers any expense related to COVID-19 while out of India.** ”



**Tapan Kumar Mishra**  
National Tourism Awardee,  
Best Tourist Guide (Odisha)

## Breaking News

- Spain to prepare for reopening of tourism sector
- Nepal Tourism working on recovery plan to sustain industry
- Firm action required by governments to support tourism recovery: UNWTO
- Bankruptcy looms over Air Mauritius, placed into voluntary administration
- France makes carrying travel certificates mandatory
- Arabian Travel Market postponed to next year; new dates are May 16-19, 2021
- Maharashtra Govt hikes bar license fee by 15%; associations appeal for roll back

## AIRPORT

“ We are operational round the clock despite the lockdown to handle passenger relief flights and the cargo flights ferrying essentials. While we are awaiting the government's directions on the resumption of operations, GHIAL is fully equipped to commence operations with a completely sanitised terminal and ancillary zones, which will have all hygienic and sanitisation norms in place. Some of the key measures include the tech-ena-



bled interfaces for contact-less passenger processing (e-boarding), a contact-less shopping and F&B experience, etc. **The new normal will include personal protection through mask and gloves for airport staff, and passengers would be encouraged to undergo thermal screening at both departures and arrivals along with an advice to wear masks while entering the airport.** ”



**Ian Banerjee**  
Director  
Global Anchor Cruises

## CRUISE

“ Even though cruises have high protocols, we will see stronger protocols and higher standards of cleaning procedures, such as increased frequency of cleaning, more sanitization stations, etc. Secondly, the focus will be on social distancing and minimising touch points. **Genting Cruises has already announced that they will not have any self-service buffets and will increase distances in seating between tables at restaurants.** Also, use of paper menus or App-based menus will be encouraged. There will be a limit on every area/excursion to enable distancing. The use of automated entry/exit points will be increased to reduce touch. ”



**Florian Sengtschmid**  
CEO  
Azerbaijan Tourism Board

## NTO

“ The Azerbaijan Tourism Board, together with the State Tourism Agency (STA) of the Republic of Azerbaijan and in cooperation with Food Safety Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan (AQTA), has launched an innovative programme called SAHMAN (Sanitation and Hygiene Methods and Norms). **Supported by UNWTO, the programme will focus on accommodation, F&B and touristic transportation providers.** Our stakeholders will be expected to commit to sector-specific checklists introducing initiatives such as mandatory precautionary measures, safe distancing, disinfection, quarantine areas, cleaning methodology, and more. ”

## CONSULTANT

“ Masks may become part of room supplies, perhaps customised for the brand. Monitoring temperature of guests was already in place prior to lockdown. Advance check-in and check-out systems will have to be adopted to avoid crowding in lobby. **Guests may have to produce health certificates as well. Swimming pool, gym and spa will not be operational initially. Disinfecting rooms after check-out, minimum three feet distancing between tables in restaurants, and FSSAI & HACCP standards be followed. Hotels will have to schedule manpower with equal staff spread across all three shifts to ensure safe distancing.** ”



**Harmeet Singh Bedi**  
Director, Hotels & Hospitality  
Group India, JLL



**Joel Katz**  
MD, Australasia & Asia, Cruise  
Lines International Association

## CONSULTANT

“ Our members have begun creating a new health framework. The industry is working with medical experts and health authorities internationally to lay a new foundation for the cruise sector. We are using this time to define the new landscape we will work in when the time comes to sail again. Many teams around the world are working in tandem with experts to ensure we learn as much as possible from these unprecedented events. **Maritime policy work underway within CLIA will define the specific screening, cleansing and medical protocols that cruise lines will adopt globally, in addition to those already in place.** However, it is too early to discuss specific procedures. ”

## CONSULTANT

“ Increase in travel will depend on the success of different testing regimes and how effective the airport safe buffer zones are. **There will be realisation of new habits and changed behaviour that occurred during the isolation. We will see a 'Zoom' effect – moving even more to an all-digital world will mean greater use of video conferencing, which will severely impact one-to-one travel.** Webinar growth will reduce convention/meetings travel. Certified safe places such as regulated hotels will become popular and home rentals without safe ratings will fall away. Staying with family will be popular. ”



**Timothy O'Neil-Dunne**  
Operating Partner  
777 Partners for Phocuswire

Inputs by Hazel Jain

# Master the MSC Masters

Enrolling in MSC Cruises' B2B certified programme called MSC Masters is a great way to learn about a new product right now. The company is also regularly conducting systems as well as soft skills trainings.

Hazel Jain

Skill development is an important element in an industry like ours, says **Rashmi Ahuja**, Commercial Coordinator, MSC Cruises India. "Ours is a progressive industry and things keep changing regularly. Effective training programmes, be it online or otherwise, not only help develop the existing skills and knowledge, but are also the building blocks to organisational success to survive and prosper in the modern world," she says.

The team at MSC Cruises India is constantly encouraged to undertake training. "Depending on the existing skill set, each talented employee undergoes training that is relevant to their core job role. We do conduct virtual training programmes created by our



**Rashmi Ahuja**  
Commercial Coordinator  
MSC Cruises India

corporate office for developing our own flyers based on existing guidelines set. Further, we are also conducting systems training for some who will work on content management of our B2B portal as well as B2C portal.

Besides this, we also conduct soft skills trainings enabling them to communicate more effectively, develop interpersonal skills, etc," Ahuja adds.

Not just internal, MSC Cruises is also constantly looking at educating the trade about its products and cruising as a concept. "We have developed a B2B certified programme called MSC Masters, which is accessible to our registered

It is a comprehensive programme designed to enhance knowledge on MSC products

agents on [www.msccademy.com](http://www.msccademy.com). The new e-learning programme is designed to enhance knowledge on MSC products. It also has virtual ship tours available with a catalogue of courses," Ahuja adds.

# Revival to begin in Sept

According to **Deepak Narula**, MD, GRN Connect, revival from COVID-19 will take at least 5-6 months and normalcy will return only in a phased manner. For now, the company is staying afloat.

Nisha Verma

Though times are not favourable for any segment of the travel industry, **Deepak Narula** believes that things could start returning to normal in the next five to six months. "We can expect business to be close to normal by the end of September 2020, as we need to give at least six months for travel to bounce back and as expected, domestic travel will start first, then business travel, followed by leisure and cruise vacations," he shares.

His company, too, like many others, has taken a hit because of COVID-19. "This pandemic has hit us very hard as is the case with other trade partners. Currently, we are only handling cancellations and refunds. We are trying to keep our expenses under control to have minimal damage," he says, adding that the current situation, whenever it gets better, would be a learning for the future. "I think we need to be better prepared in the future



**Deepak Narula**  
Managing Director  
GRN Connect

for such an eventuality," Narula remarks.

In addition, he feels it is also important to keep teams together and empower them through knowledge sharing sessions and trainings. "All our team members are safe and staying indoors. We are regularly interacting with each other to stay in contact. We are using this period to enhance our destination knowledge as well as to reinvent our online portal with some new features. We are also working on a post-COVID strategy to revive business by first bringing it to a normal level and then growing

further," he says. The company is also planning to come up with some exciting new products.

We need to be better prepared in the future for such an eventuality

GRN Connect, like several others in the industry, will be opening its office in a phased manner. "We are thinking of going slow on working from office; we will start only with absolutely necessary staff and once the situation is well under control, we will open the office for all," he shares.

## For ease of users

Their website has been specifically designed to give easy direct booking access to competitively priced hotel rooms and other leisure products.

Results of the TravTalk Salary Survey 2020 reveal that almost 77 per cent of the industry had to resort to pay cuts to battle the financial impact of the COVID-19 crisis.

# Kerala involves all stakeholders

Taking the lead in the fight against COVID-19, Kerala's state tourism machinery is involving all its stakeholders in its discussion about what the state's industry needs to – first survive, and then recover. It expects inbound tourism to pick up only by next year, while domestic travel may begin in the last quarter of 2020.

Indeed, it is a grim situation, especially since Kerala has traditionally depended on tourists from UK, US, and Western Europe. But perhaps, as a country, we are losing out on a lot of potential for domestic tourism. We need to work more towards domestic tourism, and must use this interim time to showcase our strengths and pitch ourselves to other states, and create a marketing campaign around this.



**Rupinder Brar**  
ADG  
Ministry of Tourism

I have drawn out a revival strategy for the short, medium and long term, based on my discussions with many members of the trade and travel associations. We have submitted a proposal to the minister of tourism, on which we will need approval from the finance and chief minister as well. We hope to get the necessary sanctions for the industry. We expect domestic tourism to start by October.



**Rani George**  
Secretary, Department of  
Tourism, Government of Kerala

One of the things we need to impress upon is for the government to extend to this industry a bailout package that has monetary and fiscal elements. We also need support in terms of ease in taxation. The ministry should spearhead the efforts in putting this forth. Tourism is well justified in demanding these packages, which need to be offered soon. The state government is trying its best to address the loss of livelihood.



**Dr Venu**  
Principal Secretary, Revenue  
Government of Kerala



**Baby Mathew Somatheeram**  
President  
Kerala Travel Mart (KTM)

Kerala is now making all preparations to receive tourists once the country becomes COVID-free. Kerala Tourism is drawing up ambitious plans to attract domestic tourists in a big way. The experience of foreign tourists, who have recovered from COVID-19 by receiving treatment in Kerala, will boost our tourism prospects. I must add that our employees need to be protected as they are the most affected.

Today, our billing is zero every month. Under these circumstances, paying our staff every month is very, very difficult for us. We can do this for maybe one or two months, but beyond that will be a Herculean task. That is why, we really need a loan package, with zero to four per cent interest that is payable in 2021. In all probability, we will see international tourists coming in by Jan 2021 and domestic tourists from Oct 2020.



**Bakul Gala**  
Vice President, Corporate  
Communication, GoAir

MoCA as well as the DGCA have announced a rule that airlines have to keep the middle seat vacant. When I do the math, almost 33% of my capacity is lost. So, for the next few months, I have to operate at 66% as full load, and that has led to a lot of economic shuffling with ticket prices. In the end, the airline must also survive and needs to charge adequately.

Inputs by Hazel Jain

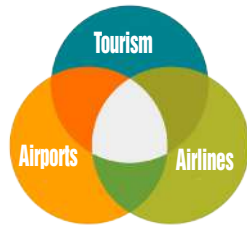
# ‘Together we’ll fight the menace’

**Inderjit Singh**, Aviation Consultant with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and former CEO of Indra Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) New Delhi, reflects on the impact of COVID-19 on tourism and a probable recovery mechanism for the sector.

The tourism industry is very resilient. The COVID-19 outbreak presents the industry with yet another major and evolving challenge. It has come out of several crises with panache and shall win over this one, too. COVID-19 is unquestionably a war, and one against an unknown enemy. What’s discouraging is that we do not yet fully understand the virus, and we might not for a while!

### Tourism in the global economic environment

A strong bond exists between the tourism and aviation sectors. Together, we have undergone the onslaught of viruses such as SARS, H1N1, MERS, Zika and the EVD (Ebola). The COVID-19 pandemic, however, is a different ball game altogether and unique due to its rapid spread across 210 countries. The earlier viruses were localised and confined to certain regions only.



Synergy between Tourism, Airports & Airlines

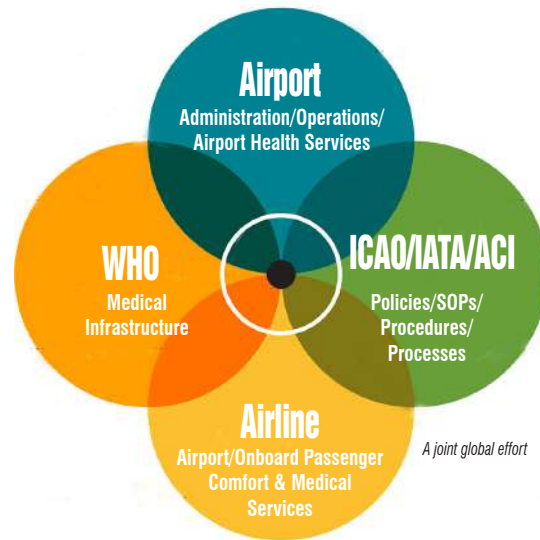
Airports and airlines, the two major constituents of the aviation sector have handled with alacrity incidents such as the 9/11 and the Eyjafjallajökull - the volcanic eruption that closed Europe’s airspace, and more recently, the worldwide grounding of the 737 MAX. These have adversely affected air transport and consequently, tourism stakeholders.

UNWTO, ACI and IATA collectively estimate a drop of US\$1.3 trillion in 2020 compared to the forecasted pre-COVID-19 figures.

**Recovery: Slow but certain**  
While the recovery in demand

will be long and slow, it will definitely happen. In the interim, even in the post-COVID era, some new trends will emerge.

- ❖ Domestic tourism will recover faster than international.
- ❖ Airlines should expect to switch to flying fewer and smaller aircraft.
- ❖ Airports must integrate social distancing measures. The relatively smaller aircraft with less passenger payload and frequency of movement will work without extra areas.
- ❖ Social distancing norms should be followed in aircraft seat allocations. This would certainly effect revenues, but is important for larger social obligations.
- ❖ Social distancing norms should be extended to surface transport vehicles, hotels, restaurants and tourist sites.



❖ Technology should be leveraged to minimise personal contact between the stakeholders at all stages and in all the facilities.

**Cracking COVID-19**  
The UNWTO, ICAO, IATA, Airport Council International (ACI) and the WHO ought to collectively formulate a joint

global effort and integrated facilitation procedures to ensure the health and safety of travellers. I have attempted to evolve a mechanism to ensure that every element in the supply chain works in tandem in a fair, effective and coordinated manner. One weak link and the chain will snap!

**Conclusion**  
The million-dollar question is when will we return to pre-COVID levels? My short answer is: not for a very long time! The only way to get through this crisis is for all segments of the industry to remain calm against all adversaries and work together. Hence, no more one-time quick-fix solutions and Band-Aid arrangements, but long-term strategies kept ready to fight this recurring menace.

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



**Inderjit Singh**  
Aviation Consultant, ICAO

# Local guests on hotel radar

While everyone is waiting for the lockdown to be lifted and things to get back to normal, hotels are prepping to bring back business while making sure that they meet all safety and hygiene norms that the government may put in place soon. Hotel brands talk about the markets and traveller segments they will approach once the COVID-19 crisis is put behind us.

“Our marketing plan will be to approach Odisha-based corporate, banks, the IT sector, Pharma companies, etc., for holding their conferences and meetings within the state. We will also approach all those guests who have cancelled their bookings due to COVID-19. We have already approached our government for declaring directives that all meetings of the government and private sector be conducted within the state.”



**Pushendra Bansal**  
COO  
Lords Hotels & Resorts

“The lowest hanging fruit that we see within the domestic segment is that of self-drive holidays. We have, in the last 10 days, created brand new products focused entirely on this segment and we are confident that with the right digital marketing approach, we will see good traction and conversions for these products. At this point in time, potential guests are not going to look at brand, price or product.”



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

“The fundamental tectonic shift that will emerge for hotels out of the COVID-19 crisis will be around three pillars— efficiency, automation and technology. The most important approach, once the lockdown is over, is to attract customers to our destinations. We should be making new strategies and evaluating them on a monthly basis. We should relook into our pricing to make it more pocket-friendly for leisure market.”



**Dhananjay Kumar**  
Vice President – Operations  
Evolve Back Resorts

“Once the lockdown is over, domestic corporate business will be the first one to hit the road. Industries like Pharma, agriculture, banks, public sector, FMCG and infrastructure, etc., should immediately start their operations and create some demand. This will also depend on the financial health of the respective sector and companies, as well as the grant or support being extended by the government to revive the economy.”



**JK Mohanty**  
CMD  
Swosti Group

“We will promote staycations for local travellers. We will also upsell SPA, local art & culture, dining, and organise local field trips and day-long picnics during this period. On the hotels front, we will enhance our cleaning protocols to include additional sanitation and cleaning routines. Sanitiser bottles will be kept at public areas. Seating capacity of restaurants and bars will be reduced.”



**Akhil Anand**  
Director, Tree of Life  
Resorts & Hotels



**Naresh Arora**  
Managing Director, Truly  
India Hotels & Resorts

“In the immediate aftermath, driving holidays will be preferred. We are going to re-engineer our SOPs pertaining to hygiene and sanitisation. The frequency of sanitisation will increase and we will ensure enough sanitisers are placed from staff entrance to guest areas. We will use and encourage our guests to upload their IDs online by self-check-in process. Guest pick up vehicles will be sanitised.”

*Inputs by Nisha Verma*

# India Assist helps 350+ tourists

India Assist turned out to be an effective digital tool for foreigners stranded in India amidst the COVID-19 outbreak by providing real-time aid. **Harish Khatri**, Founder, India Assist, shares the story behind the mobile-based application and future plans for it.

Nisha Verma

For **Harish Khatri**, it all began when he was travelling to USA sometime in 2013-14. "I could see that there was a lot of excitement about travelling to India, but there was still this nagging fear of whether India was safe for tourists or not. To understand their apprehensions, I began researching on the support that was available if a tourist got into any distress situation and to my surprise, there was none. After returning to India, I discussed this idea with a few people and everyone said that there was a



**Harish Khatri**  
Founder, India Assist

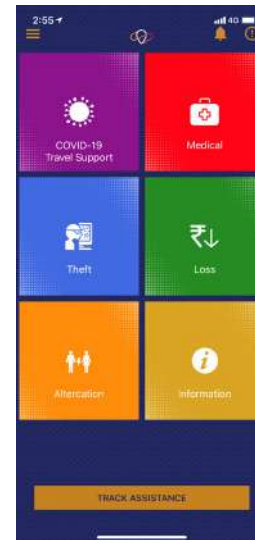
huge gap in the market. By mid-2015, we started working on this project. We identified a serious gap in the current travel and tourism landscape in terms of security and active

assistance. We found a serious lack of a centralised system that could provide foreigners in India verified information and trusted assistance. We conceptualised and launched India Assist with a vision to bridge the gap and enhance the Indian experience for travellers," he says.

At a micro level, we want the states to adopt this model and at a macro level, we want to venture into other countries as well

travel. This has ensured that we create a world-class product, a product which we would want to use ourselves as travellers. Our core product offering is the assistance and distress management service via a subscription-based mobile App. We provide help to travellers in India, which includes verified information and personalised assistance through our on-ground team, in medical emergencies, theft, loss, altercations and transit. The model of our product is on-ground assistance and human interface, and we help by allocating personnel to the tourist at their live location. We are also constantly working with our teams to ensure they are compassionate. Their motto is to 'Help First' and ensure the subscriber is put at ease and comforted."

Sharing details of the kind of services they offered to



stranded foreigners at the time of COVID-19 outbreak in India, he adds, "India Assist supported foreigners with verified information, arranging food and shelter, helping them take evacuation flights during lockdown, even recharging their phones

and sharing positivity. We responded to their queries and provided possible solutions in real time. Our technology has an in-built chat, which helps us address multiple queries at a time. It can capture live locations of tourists, which helps us provide on-ground assistance swiftly"

Their strategy for the future includes many new things. "Our plan entails creating an ecosystem for foreigners arriving in India, and becoming the most reliable information and assistance platform for them while they travel within India. At a micro level, we want the states to adopt this model and at a macro level, we want to venture into other countries as well. We also look forward to support from within the industry since we are not in competition with stakeholders."

## Aid during COVID-19

India Assist was able to help over 350 foreigners through verified information and assistance since the lockdown was imposed across the country. Some of the tourists were assisted in reaching their nearest international airport so they could fly out of the country, back to their homes.

# Amusement industry seeks stimulus

The Indian Association of Amusement Parks & Industries (IAAPI) seeks an emergency decision to rescue the industry, which is running out of working capital and is finding it difficult to meet financial obligations. It has made a representation to the government seeking relief.

TT Bureau

The amusement industry creates employment both directly and through ancillary and other related industries like hospitality, F&B, transport and more. But it is in dire straits due to the COVID-19 outbreak. As a consequence, the amusement industry is looking at pan-India financial distress and bankruptcies, closure of businesses and massive job losses.

The Indian Association of Amusement Parks and Industries (IAAPI), an apex body representing the interests of this industry, is seeking an urgent stimulus package to bail it out. As per the advisory issued by Heeralal Samariya, IAS, Sec-

retary - Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India, IAAPI has requested all



**Ajay Sarin**  
Chairman, IAAPI

its members not to terminate jobs and to pay the wages and salaries of permanent and contractual labourers without any deductions for the month of March 2020, and continue

to do so for the lockdown period. **Ajay Sarin**, Chairman, IAAPI, said, "We seek an emergency decision to rescue the entire amusement industry. The only way this can happen is by reducing fixed operating expenses significantly

The only way is to reduce fixed operating expenses significantly in the immediate term

in the immediate term. The industry is running out of working capital and is finding it difficult to meet its financial obligations in such a crisis."

## IAAPI's representation to the government

- ❖ **Complete GST Holiday for 12 months:** To make entry prices economical to attract patrons, complete holiday for 12 months (Central and State level) is sought, also as with almost no revenues, there is hardly going to be any GST, as the revival of business may take time.
- ❖ **Deferment of Fiscal Statutory Compliance Deadlines:** Deferment for 6 months in payment of direct or indirect taxes of all statutory dues like advance payment of taxes, PF, ESIC, etc., at the central government level or state government level.
- ❖ **Waiver of Custom Duties on Import of Spare Parts:** Waiver on custom duties on import of spare parts to bring down the repair and maintenance cost.
- ❖ **Reduction of Effective Rate of Interest on Loans from Financial Institutions:** Reduction by 200 basis points in effective interest rate being charged by financial institutions on term loans, working facilities and other facilities with immediate full transmission for working capital to reduce the burden on cash outflows.
- ❖ **Moratorium of 12 months on Payments to Financial Institutions:** 12 months moratorium on instalments of principal and interest payments on loans and working capital from financial institutions besides a doubling of working capital limits on interest free and collateral free terms.
- ❖ **Fiscal support for salaries:** Support fund for 12 months on the lines of MNREGA to support basic salaries with direct transfers to affected amusement industry employees.
- ❖ **Concessional pricing for water and electricity:** Provision of water and electricity to the amusement industry for six months on subsidised rates.
- ❖ **Lower rate of IT and early settlement of IT refunds:** This is to enhance cash inflows and reduce cash outflows.
- ❖ **Request Employee State Insurance Corporation** to pay the entire wages of the employees of those units that are covered under ESI for the period of lockdown. As COVID-19 has caused a medical disaster ESI is well justified in meeting this commitment of employees.

WTC has launched a new marketing campaign, #TogetherInTravel, aimed at galvanizing the global travel and tourism community. The video can be viewed on and shared from [TogetherInTravel.com](https://www.togetherintravel.com)



## Battling crisis with 'Pride'

Satyen Jain, CEO, Pride Group of Hotels, says that while the group battles the COVID-19 crisis today, it has already strategised a plan to revive business in the post-COVID era as well.

TT Bureau

Pride Group of Hotels has taken several measures and has even launched some initiatives to navigate through the COVID-19 crisis. Keeping safety measures at the forefront of its business strategy, the group is working round the clock to support and cater to its guests. Satyen Jain says, "To avoid any safety threats to guests and staff members, we have minimised manpower across Pride properties. This step has also helped us in controlling our operational cost. We are trying to conserve cash in an uncertain environment while minimising our fixed cost and running more efficiently. Besides that, we continue to maintain a strong relationship with our corporate clients and build a business pipeline for months to come."

During lockdown 1.0, the group's hotels distributed food



Satyen Jain  
Chief Executive Officer  
Pride Group of Hotels

parcels daily. This initiative was launched to support those brave hearts who were working on the frontlines during the crisis. Pride has also strategised initiatives for the post-lockdown phase, like creating an alternate workspace for mid-senior level employees who are accustomed to travelling and working in isolation, maintaining social distancing in services, and launching food delivery in select cities.

While the hospitality industry has been affected drastically by the COVID-19 outbreak worldwide,

it is expected that the Indian hospitality sector will continue to see the impact of the pandemic for some more time, resulting in very low hotel occupancy.

At the end of H1 & early H2, the industry should gradually be back to 50 per cent occupancy if COVID-19 cases are controlled and the lockdown is lifted completely

"However, at the end of H1 and early H2, the industry should gradually be back to 50 per cent occupancy if COVID-19 cases are controlled and the lockdown is lifted completely," says an optimistic Jain, adding that with the substantial loss of revenue, the industry has to find ways to navigate the crisis.

## A tough road lies ahead

JB Singh, President and CEO, InterGlobe Hotels, says that they are closely monitoring the fast-changing situation and preparing themselves for the time ahead.

Anupriya Bishnoi

JB Singh believes that with the growing number of COVID-19 cases in India, extending the lockdown was a necessary step. "We support the government in this decision as this is essential in ensuring the health and safety of the people. As a hotel company, these are challenging times as there was no business in the month of April, and the rest of Q1 (April-June) would also struggle to gain volumes," he says, adding that during this time, InterGlobe Hotels' focus will be on putting in place a 'go to market' strategy so that they are ready to take on the first wave of business when the situation improves and travel recommences later this year. "As patient capital investors, we are monitoring the



JB Singh  
President and CEO  
InterGlobe Hotels

situation closely and reviewing our systems and processes. This would allow us to not just emerge from this crisis, but also be on a new growth trajectory which is stronger than before," he shares.

Singh also urges the government to come forward and help the sector which is suffering the most. "The Indian hospital-

ity industry is undoubtedly one of the biggest casualties of the COVID-19 outbreak. We expect the government to provide us a

These are challenging times as there was no business in April, and the rest of Q1 (April-June) would also struggle to gain volumes

monetary stimulus package to stabilise and support the sector in the near term," he says. In the medium to long term, Singh explains, the government should look at policy-level decisions on issues ailing the industry.



According to 'Hotel Sentiment Survey 2020 (Impact of COVID-19)' by Horwath HTL, 64% of the respondents believe that demand in the wedding segment is likely to recover to pre-COVID levels once the outbreak is over.



KOREA TOURISM ORGANIZATION

Korean Daily Life | Korean Trends

Modern Side of Korea

# KOREA - where Traditionalism and Modernity coexist in perfect harmony!



Korea Tourism Organization conducted various webinars focusing on Korea as a tourist destination and highlighting student travel.



25<sup>th</sup> March



3<sup>rd</sup> April



17<sup>th</sup> April

Imagine your Korea



# Domestic travel versus int'l

Domestic travel is believed to be the main driver of tourism after things come back to the new normal in India. This was the focal point at TRAVTALK's second Digital Conclave on April 21, where panellists agreed that a number of things needed to be reassessed to achieve the desired impact, right from changing the traveller's perception of domestic tourism to infrastructure development.



Nisha Verma

While domestic tourism is believed to be the first travel segment to recover once the COVID-19 crisis is put behind us, it is still not considered an 'elite' activity, especially by seasoned travellers. The segment itself needs a dynamic overhaul if we are to promote it among India's discerning outbound travellers.

## Re-define domestic tourism

Sharing his views during the second TravTalk Digital Conclave on April 21, **PP Khanna**, President, Association of Domestic

tourism—states and hotels. For hotels in India, we only have one request that they should have a uniform rate for both online and offline travel agents. They should not quote direct discounted rates to clients, especially corporates. The aim should be to promote domestic tourism in India, for which hotels can offer add-ons like upgrades, offerings for special occasions, etc., to clients. During this period of lockdown, the hotels can also organise knowledge sessions with the domestic tour operators."

He added that the states, on their part, could showcase their



make our packages cheaper than those of other countries. Airlines, too, have a very important role in doing that because they have high prices during season," Khanna explained.

Even **Ashwani Lohani**, Chairman, Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC), believes that there will be a lot of apprehension in the minds of people in travelling far off, because they will fear getting stuck or being quarantined. He said, "I feel that there will be a major shift towards domestic tourism from international tourism. These are unprecedented times and are tough for everyone. We could have never imagined such a scenario. Ever since I started my journey in tourism in 1993-94, the word 'tourism' meant inbound tourism. It was all about people coming from international shores. Now that transport has stopped completely, international travel has come to a grinding halt, so has domestic travel."

For hotels in India, we only have one request that they should have a uniform rate for both online and offline travel agents

- PP Khanna

## Dealing with competition

Hotel room fares in India are much higher than those in other countries, especially in South-east Asia where for the same price one can get a better product. If it's cheaper to travel internationally, how can one expect domestic tourism to flourish is a question that comes quick to the mind.

**Kerrie Hannaford**, Vice President Commercial, Accor (India & South Asia), says

that before anything else, one needs to build the consumer's confidence on health and safety checks, and to let everybody know and understand what has been certified and what is the certificate of health.

"We need to come together as an industry so that travel agents, who are the authority and the one source our consumers can rely on to get information, get everything they need. The ho-

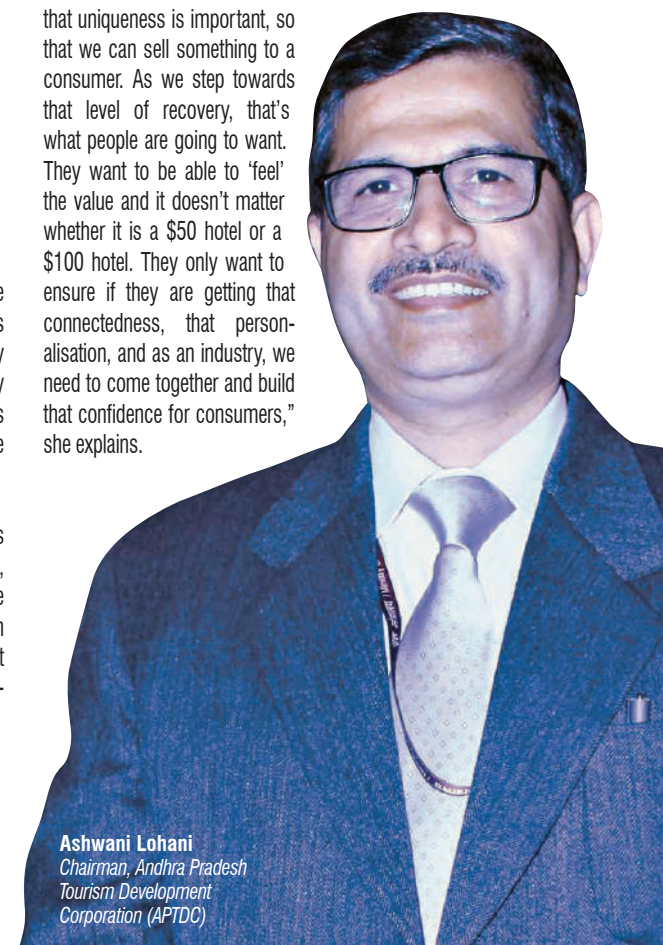
I feel that there will be a major shift towards domestic tourism from international tourism. These are unprecedented times and are tough for everyone

- Ashwani Lohani

tels need to work very closely, as a community. Hence, anyone who engages with the consumer needs to have that certificate of health. That's our number one priority," she explains.

Once these health measures have been established, one needs to redefine the value proposition being offered to the consumer as well as the travel agency. "There is a perceived value that it's best to travel abroad rather than stay in your own backyard. What we need to do collectively, with our consultants, is to become absolute experts in offering something unique and bespoke. There must be those 'surprise & delight' moments for our customers. Here, the perception of value for money is going to be crucial. It is also important to know what unique experiences we can give to consumers, whether they are from the same city or have travelled from another end of the country. How the travel agent community helps us to establish

that uniqueness is important, so that we can sell something to a consumer. As we step towards that level of recovery, that's what people are going to want. They want to be able to 'feel' the value and it doesn't matter whether it is a \$50 hotel or a \$100 hotel. They only want to ensure if they are getting that connectedness, that personalisation, and as an industry, we need to come together and build that confidence for consumers," she explains.



**Ashwani Lohani**  
Chairman, Andhra Pradesh  
Tourism Development  
Corporation (APTDC)

Lohani says that right now, instead of crossing borders, pure domestic tourism will be favoured. "When flights start taking off will be the right time to come up with new campaigns

covering many destinations. What is required is to position domestic travel right. Let the effect of COVID-19 start fading, and only then should we start a campaign. Under the PPP

## Every bit counts...

"We must start somewhere! Just making grand plans doesn't really help. As far as tourism is concerned, a lot of small things must be done. Now is the time to commission a good study on domestic tourism, then make all the states and stakeholders follow it. For energising domestic tourism, we need to have a very aggressive campaign, which can create that desire in the hearts of people to explore their own country. The report should be made by one of the tourism organisations — FAITH, IATO, TAAI, etc."

- Ashwani Lohani

Tour Operators of India (ADTOI), said, "Once the COVID-19 crisis is over, there will be new restrictions and norms for tourism. There are two important factors that govern domestic

products by undertaking publicity campaigns, something that India lacks when compared to other countries. This could be done through social media, digital media and print media campaigns. "States should also think of tax reduction to boost tourism traffic in the country. Most of the countries in Europe and even in our neighbourhood have competitive tax structures. The Central government and the states should consider doing that. It is important to



**PP Khanna**  
President, Association of  
Domestic Tour Operators  
of India (ADTOI)

## An opportunity for traditional agents

"All the people cannot be catered to by Online Travel Agents (OTAs). Hence, today, people are asking for the traditional travel agent because they are facing a lot of problems with OTAs, including that of refunds, responses and the human touch, which they can get from a traditional travel agent. We have a lot of scope in India with rural tourism, farm tourism, MICE, weddings, beach tourism, film tourism, adventure tourism and eco-tourism. All these things can be explored in the right way through traditional travel agents and not OTAs. However, which state would start travelling first only depends on the kind of restrictions and measures they have taken to fight COVID-19."

- PP Khanna

"Travel consultants are experts, and personalisation is going to be critical now more than ever. A lot of people are going to have questions, and there will be a lot of information coming from hotels, tourist destinations, theme parks, etc. Hence, it's important to talk to your consumers. This is probably one of the biggest opportunities because it will no longer be a fast-transactional purchase. People would want the human touch and the expertise."

- Kerrie Hannaford

"While direct financial assistance may not be possible, agents can give suggestions as to what is to be done and the state governments do that, since they also want to do promotions. It helps the agents also because then more people travel to the state and will come to the agent. It helps everyone and agents should look forward to such help from the state governments. It takes tourism forward."

- Ashwani Lohani

model, states should make it easier for private investments to come in for creating tourism infrastructure. We need land banks in place and simplified processes. In Madhya Pradesh, we came

consultants put in a lot of hard work and man hours when they are making a package. Hence, they want to ensure a good remuneration when they finally sell that package. There will be a

the supply is there, we will also be able to give \$30-40 rooms to clients. Today, hotels offer huge prices in season time, which has to change."

## MICE will surge

"Both states and hotels should look towards doing joint promotions with the travel agents to boost domestic tourism in India. MICE is a big segment and according to 2018-19 data, this segment earned a revenue of Rs25,000 crore. With new ventures like banquet halls, trade fairs and facilities in cities like Delhi coming up, it is expected that by 2022, this revenue could double to the tune of Rs40,000-50,000 crore. All the states should consider opening new MICE facilities."

— PP Khanna

up with a booklet that mentioned every process and rule that was needed for private investors. Such initiatives should be taken forward," he recommends.

difference in commission levels between a ₹7,000 booking versus a ₹12,000 booking. Hence, we should always consider the supply chain."

Hannaford feels that rates are going to be very interesting because there is going to be a survival period and then a revival period. "In the survival period, we will be talking to our partners and working through what needs to happen, how we need to make it happen and what value additions are going to be there, which is very critical. I have worked all over the world and my observation is that the Indian hospitality and tourism industry has shown such solidarity that I've never seen anywhere else. If any country can pull itself up quickly, it's India. It is so resilient and optimistic that turning the corner is near. It's very impressive," she says.

## Price point and perception

While it may not be difficult getting a hotel room of even a four-star deluxe property in USA or Europe for a rate as nominal as \$40-50, this isn't the norm in India. One needs to understand if domestic tourism still stands a chance in this reality. Hannaford says that revenue management has a huge part to play in pricing. "Sometimes, this can also be about driving occupancy, wherein you will find that for a limited time, a hotel may have a price to possibly entice new customers to come, or they must be newly opened, or they might have gone through renovation. There are several governing factors as to where a price point sits, and it's been around for centuries. This again goes back to one's perception of value," she explains.

✦ The states should come forward and ask private entrepreneurs to invest in tourism infrastructure under the PPP model. Private investors can build hotels and the states can give subsidies ✦

— PP Khanna

For Lohani, it is a question of demand and supply. "The number of hotel rooms in India in the classified category, I think, is around 125,000, which is not enough. That's a major issue—star-rated rooms are much less than what is required. We need to build more hotels, roads, signage, etc., and with all of this we should build tourism," he says.

## Learnings from China

Hannaford says, "Our team has observed that people were celebrating and corporates have started coming back very slowly. They revealed that people in China are wanting to spoil themselves — by having a birthday cake, by getting back together with friends, relatives, colleagues and people they haven't seen in quite some time. Thus, they want to spend a little bit more than they normally would. Not every

✦ If any country can pull itself up quickly, it's India. It is so resilient and optimistic ✦

— Kerrie Hannaford

major city is back yet. However, we are seeing something positive — people are staying locally at a hotel. Hence, it's important to be talking to the travel consultant, about doing something special and unique. The team in our sales offices are on the phone talking and advising them in terms of what they can offer."



Another observation she shares is that midscale hotels started off first, followed by five-star hotels. "However, it would still be a long

ever, he feels that as soon as tourism bounces back, all these people will also come back. He adds, "A lot of competition will

and tour operators." He says that all stakeholders must focus on attracting leisure tourists. "This digital conclave is part of

## On the cards...

"We are going to be working with a number of companies to make sure that there are new standard operating procedures in our hotels and it's not just for internal use. Also, we want to share that with the travel agency community because they are going to be a source of authority and they don't have to go back and double check if something is safe to use or recommend. That is step one for us. Secondly, we realise that information is going to be critical, hence, constant communication is necessary. We are preparing a dedicated area for both the online and offline travel agent community to provide updates. We will be sending out newsletters about our different product offerings and value propositions, exclusively for that community. While these are the priorities for Accor, speaking on behalf of the hotel industry, I can say that it's critical for us to communicate exactly what we are doing and that a certificate of health is going to be critical in building consumer confidence again."

— Kerrie Hannaford

while before any international travel would happen for people in China, as they are still scared. We are also watching the price points, as well as both online and offline travel communities.

get built in between the states to attract MICE. Each state would aspire to get as much MICE as possible in its territory and that may lead to incentives. This would further boost domestic tourism and more will be the propensity of that state to give incentives to travel agents

✦ Now is the time to commission a good study on domestic tourism, then make all the states and stakeholders follow it ✦

— Ashwani Lohani

confidence building and is an effort towards bringing focus on domestic tourism. Confidence building measures should be taken up by governments and tourism boards. When everything is alright, they can announce that tourists would be safe when they visit the respective state. They can claim to take care of tourists' hygiene and make sure that they don't get infected. Such things should come into the campaign. The time for domestic tourism has come!" he remarks. ✦

✦ Anyone who engages with the consumer needs to have a certificate of health. That's our priority ✦

— Kerrie Hannaford

Personalisation and understanding the client is key. Communication is important," she believes.

## Bouncing back

Lohani says that temporarily, job losses are there because in the tourism sector, everyone working in and around a tourist destination or a monument generally belongs to that area and is not a migrant worker. How-



**Kerrie Hannaford**  
Vice President Commercial  
Accor (India & South Asia)

# Could India also mean luxury?

A definite and a resounding yes! This could be an opportune time for our travel advisors to realign themselves to this new oncoming wave of domestic tourism. A key ingredient for this would be to finely decode the customer's aspirations to the T and ensure that he is offered something new, exciting and worth his while!

 Hazel Jain

If you can't go outside, go inside. This profound line became the lockdown tagline for many of us who reached the point of being stir-crazy. Perhaps this could also double up as the mantra for tourism post COVID-19. For something that has remained in the confines of 'budget travel' can now enter the realms of 'luxury'. But how? We speak to three experts who were

## Why so few?

As per 2019 figures, about 1.83 crore domestic tourists visited Kerala of which 62 per cent were locals and the remaining 38 per cent (around 70 lakh) travellers were from other states. This is just one per cent of the total domestic tourists in the country. In comparison, outbound tourists from India stood at 3.25 crore last year.

part of our Digital Conclave Part 2 titled 'Where is the money? Selling domestic luxury' that recorded around 1,863 participants at its peak.

## How can we sell luxury within India?

Opening the session as its first panellist was **Arjun Sharma**, Chairman, Select Group, believes that this industry will go through a deep and prominent transformation in these coming months – it is just a matter of realising the importance of domestic tourism. "Our domestic market is the biggest catchment area after the Chinese domestic market. In fact, all our neighbouring countries have survived on this – be it Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, or Dubai. They have all existed because of the Indian



outbound market. I think this is the first time that the Indian travel industry can reposition itself dynamically to create the paradigm that is necessary for that domestic traveller to look at India as their next luxury holiday destination," he says.

Sharma shares an anecdote that involves watching Netflix with his daughter. "We watch this series called Buddha that showcases all the places that Buddha travelled to during his spiritual journey. That makes me ask myself, 'How can we spend 10 days on the Buddhist Circuit?' But when I look around there are hardly any Indian domestic tour operators that are packaging the Buddhist circuit. I think this is opening doors to big opportunities for us as tour operators," Sharma adds.

## Circuit training

Why is it that the circuits or packages available for the inbound tourists are not available for the Indian domestic traveller,

asks Sharma. "There is a need to bring our circuits back to the forefront. Domestic tourism should not be positioned just as a weekend package. We should make it a five or six-day package whether it is religious, wildlife, or experiential in nature. We need to mix and match, add standalone hotels in the itinerary. Trust me, we don't have to fear the online giants. We have to work with them," he says.

## Bringing hotels into the fold...



"And why have we positioned domestic tourism in a two-star three-star hotel bracket?

 What travel agents can do, certainly no hotel can do individually – the ability to package beautiful experiences 

- Arjun Sharma

This is the time to unshackle it completely. There is no reason why our hotels – and we have very fine hotel chains – are not included in these packages. Indian hospitality is par excellence. It has the best talents in the world and the experiences they provide is absolutely stunning," the travel agent-turned-hotelier adds.

He also attempts to debunk the myth that luxury tourism in India is expensive. "I think it is about perception. When we talk about luxury tourism in Europe and Asia, the rates are extremely high. Even before Covid-19, you could still rent a really good five-star hotel in India for US\$

 Travel is something which can never go out of fashion. In the meantime, agents can create packages within the cities, as I think it will open up first. Configure yourself to the new normal 

- Dr Ankur Bhatia

400 a night which anywhere in the world would not be less than US\$ 800-1,000 a night. So it is a complete misnomer that the Indian luxury product is expensive," Sharma adds.

Sharma's argument brings into focus the need to get high-end hotels, who until now had been creating their own packages and selling them separately, to work with travel agents in creating these luxury packages. "As a hotelier, I'm always thinking of ways to keep the guest inside my hotel at all times. But I need

## ...And airlines too

With more than two decades of experience in aviation industry, **Sanjay Kumar**, Chief Strategy & Revenue Officer, IndiGo, reminisces how he (when at Air Sahara) more than 20 years ago joint hands with Arjun Sharma to create an air-hotel package for Goa. "We did 5,000 passengers in just over three months during the monsoon. It was a revolutionary step in those days. We have forgotten to package those things today," Kumar adds.

However, he has a different take on what luxury would mean in terms of air travel. "In my opinion, there is nothing like luxury as far as domestic air travel is concerned. We believe that any product which is safe, reliable, on time, and affordable is luxury. If we can scratch even a two to three per cent of the total domestic market, and make air travel a part of their journey that would be great. Right now, these travellers are taking their own transportation, or trains, or buses. But if we can create an ecosystem for them which is

Kumar says, adding that IndiGo has 63 destinations across the network of which 25-30 destinations have been launched in the last two years.

He also revealed his airline's openness in creating a luxury package around a popular circuit along with hotels and travel agents. Praising Modi's timely 'Dekho Apna Desh' campaign that encourages Indian nationals to travel to at least 15 destinations by 2022, Kumar said that we need to realise the potential for this market. "In fact, Covid-19 has created a new opportunity for us all. There is a new segment that we as an industry can tap for luxury products. Replying to what Arjun Sharma mentioned earlier, IndiGo already provides excellent connections to the entire Buddhist Circuit – Gaya, Banaras, Gorakhpur, Allahabad, Patna, Ranchi, the entire belt," he shares.

## Redefining luxury

**Dr Ankur Bhatia**, Executive Director, Bird Group which owns Roseate Hotels and Resorts, echoes the need to re-look at the context of luxury. "I don't know when and how travel will resume. But when we do start



**Dr Ankur Bhatia**  
Executive Director  
Bird Group

## MoT's 'Dekho Apna Desh' series

Ministry of Tourism's 'Dekho Apna Desh' webinar series launched in April 2020 is a step towards promoting India as a great holiday option among Indians. The series, which will be an ongoing feature, provides information on different destinations. So far, it has already conducted more than 10 webinars that have been attracting an average of 3000 participants not only from India but also abroad.

to break that mould and it is ultimately the travel agent who has the expertise in creating experiences and bringing them together. The level of experiences that have been built around an Indian domestic product, according to me, can be rated one out of 10! This is the time when we need to need to come back to the drawing board and join forces. This is the time of deep collaboration, not competition," suggests Sharma.

cost-effective and efficient, that can help them travel the way they want to travel, then I think that can be called luxury too," Kumar explains.

While some might argue that IndiGo is a low-cost carrier and not close to 'luxury' as we understand it, but for others, traveling by air itself is luxury. "They have graduated from ground to air and if you have a network aligned to that in every state or tourist point, it makes for a great opportunity,"



**Arjun Sharma**  
Chairman  
Select Group

to open up, we will realise that luxury has taken a new meaning. Just being out of their homes and be able to meet their friends and family will be luxury. People will get into their cars and drive to the nearest holiday destination. That in itself will be luxury for them," he says.

With international borders closing, domestic tourists will become the main target audience and any kind of revenue will come from domestic tourists, says Dr Bhatia. "And why not – our cities are as big as some of the European countries. We need to work on domestic packages and look at a more localised audience rather than a globalised audience, at least for the short term."

### Bring in some collaboration

More collaboration between the stakeholders seems to be the popular sentiment. Sharma says, "With the growth of technology, whether it is an airline or a hotel, the idea is to get as much direct business as possible. As a result, there is very little collaboration between the various industry groups. This has led to the birth of these mega booking sites. So rather than working with many agents, hotels work with just couple of online sites. So we as hoteliers are also at fault because we didn't build that partnership with the travel industry. Nevertheless, there is no inopportune to rebuild it."

Highlighting the travel agent's strengths, Sharma adds that what they can do, certainly no hotel can do individually – the ability to package experiences. "Unfortunately, I have not seen that kind of expertise being translated into domestic packaging. What agents can start doing is build their database, have more social media presence, and market yourself hyper locally. Only those who can turn this current situation into an opportunity will be able to survive. Besides, luxury is different for different people. Even a good clean room can be luxury for some at times," he says.

Sharing an example, he speaks of a tour operator who changed his business model to start doing school groups with India itineraries with a 30 per cent mark-up. "So there is a market out there for quality experiences, it's all about the packaging."

### Airlines: The nodal points

In all this, one stakeholder that has a very important role to play

is the airlines. Kumar says, "We have added 22 destinations over the last 18 months and half of these destinations primarily see domestic tourist traffic whether it is Jodhpur, Gaya, Shirdi or Aurangabad. Shirdi for instance was not connected by any other airline earlier. This shows that whenever you fly into a new market, there is a huge opportunity to tap and to package its experiences. We believe that if you're getting into a new market, provide connectivity from all major cities so you can bring in a lot of traffic from different parts of the country." Of the 93 airports in India that can accommodate narrow-body domestic operations, IndiGo touches down on 63 of them.

### The good news

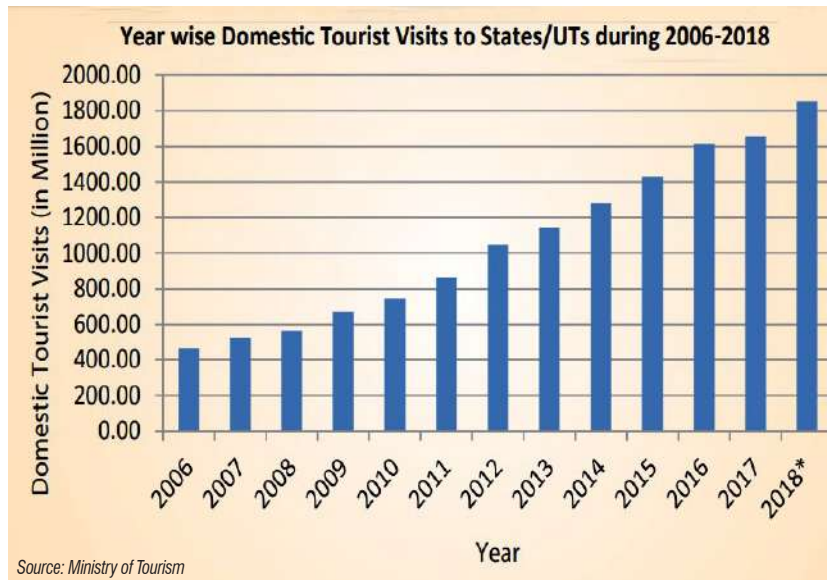
There has been a continuous increase in domestic tourist visits, with the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of domestic tourist visits to all states/UTs from 1991 to 2018 being 12.61%. In fact, 2018 witnessed a growth of 11.9% in domestic tourist visits over the year 2017. But the question remains: how much are they spending per trip this?

Dr Bhatia concurs with Sanjay Kumar. "Our hotel in Rishikesh has guests coming in from all over the country, thanks to the Dehradun airport. It is now being upgraded to get international flights as well. That gives a huge impetus to domestic tourists coming into the Uttarakhand region," he says.

Changing tracks, Dr Bhatia states that one of the reasons why India didn't have too many Covid-19 cases was because we didn't have many foreign tourists coming in at the time. "Whatever guests we had in terms of luxury were domestic tourists. In fact, over the last four to five years, we have seen that the quality and the ability to pay by domestic tourists have gone up tremendously. When we opened our first hotel five years ago, we were hardly getting any domestic tourists. But this has changed over the last couple of years," he reveals.

### More co-operation, fewer touch-points

Meanwhile, as the nation slowly tackles Covid-19, Dr Bhatia has already put into place certain measures that will encourage travellers to stay there. "As a



Source: Ministry of Tourism

group we have already taken some steps keeping social distancing in mind. We have developed an app that can be used to pre-order meals at our restaurants, check-out, use laundry service, etc. The new norm for group travel will also come into place. Weddings, for instance, will be very different. The government has mandated the number of people attending weddings," he says.

Amidst all this, he continues, the travel agency is here to stay for sure. "For a simple reason – hotels don't know the domestic tourist. The small agency has access to them in their local neighbourhood and I don't think that's going to change."

Sharma agrees. "The travel agents have access to database, or the ability to create it. You can't offer a luxury product

### How much are we spending?

According to Statista, Indian tourists spent around US\$ 44 billion on shopping, F&B and recreation during their travel in 2018. This revenue could potentially stay back in India by developing the domestic luxury market.

to anybody. You need to know who your customer is. First, they need to build their database and identify the potential clients. So a quick dip-stick survey will work that can help them find their requirements and then create a luxury package for them based on this."

This he says can be any kind of package – experiential tours or even an industrial visit for students. "Experiential travel can

also be luxury. For instance, I recently did a walking tour of the Jama Masjid with a small boutique agency that gives a lovely guide. It was fabulous. There is some outstanding talent out there. All they need to do is understand what their client's aspirations are, and use social media to reach them directly. It is not easy, but it is possible. They don't have to be dependent on anyone. It is indeed time to relook at how you do business. My suggestion to agents is to move their focus to packaging experiences and circuits," Sharma says.

### Post COVID-19

Will travel bounce back? Sharma is optimistic. He says, "India is a very big market. Yes, there is a pain in the economy right now but one of the reasons why the Indian economy will outshine others is because our debt levels as a family is very low as compared with western countries. In India, we have a certain family structure, and we tend to save a lot more in the middle class. So travel will not stop. One of the main expenditures a family makes after meeting

### Good to know

Domestic trips occur over 68 times more frequently than outbound trips. Many Indian travellers are keen to undertake cultural and heritage tourism within the country.

Source: ResearchAndMarkets.com

its essential needs is travel. It is very high on the bucket list. In fact, almost eight per cent of household income is spent on tourism in a middle class segment. In a country with 1.2 billion people, that is huge."

Kumar agrees, and says, "Once things get back to normal, people will get more confident to travel. While there is a lot of distress in the economy,

The parting shot from Dr Bhatia are words of solidarity. "These are difficult times for small agents as well as big hotels so everyone is in this together. Until travel restarts, I would suggest being in touch with your customers on a regular basis. Travel is something which can never go out of fashion. It's just a matter of time. In the meantime, create packages within the cities as I think it will open up first. Configure yourself to the new normal," he says.

Sharma on the other hand lists down top few picks that he would want the government to extend to the travel industry. "Tourism will recover. There is a short and medium term pain but there is a need to evolve. The industry definitely needs some assistance to recover

### Good to know

Indian residents between the age of 35 and 49 took the most holidays in 2018. Indian residents within the 25 to 34 age range are one of the quickest growing market segments in terms of tourism.

Source: ResearchAndMarkets.com

the story for India in the long term continues to be robust. I see great opportunity. We only need to align our thought processes and products to the change in demand and meet the requirement for every segment."

He also takes a question from the audience on the possibility of high fares in future and

✦ We need to realise the potential for this market. In fact, COVID-19 has created a new opportunity for us all. There is a new segment that we as an industry can tap for luxury products ✦

- Sanjay Kumar

adds, "Fares over the last 15 years have crashed below 45 per cent in this country despite the inflation. In fact, India continues to have the lowest fares in the world despite having a high cost structure. It is lower than that of Malaysia, EasyJet and even Ryanair. So I don't expect the fare structure to change drastically post COVID-19."



**Sanjay Kumar**  
Chief Strategy &  
Revenue Officer, IndiGo



The Department of Tourism (DOT) Philippines has launched a series of videos titled 'Wake up in the Philippines' that highlight the archipelago's many destinations and activities. Watch them at <https://philippines.travel/wakeupinph>

# The all-purpose source market

In the third session of the second TRAVTALK Digital Conclave, panellists discussed the potential of India as the new global source market for tourism in the post-COVID era. India's outbound traveller market has the ability to cater to various segment demands across the world. One must, however, keep in mind the visa and travel policy changes that are on the cards.



Manas Dwivedi

Now that much has already been said about COVID-19's financial impact, it is important to dig deeper and decode what the future holds. India has always been known as a resilient market, and experts say that it is this resilience that will define

utes a major share as it is among the top three source markets for us. In fact, India is also the fastest-growing outbound market for us.

India's stronghold in global tourism cannot be estimated from these numbers alone, believes **Sandeep Dwivedi**, Chief



India outbound's trajectory in months to come as the world reels under the aftermath of a devastating virus.

Operating Officer, InterGlobe Technology Quotient, who said, "In today's new normal of social distancing, people using

According to **Vinay Malhotra**, Regional Group COO, South Asia, Middle East & North Africa, Americas, VFS Global, the Indian market is well poised to touch the 50 million mark in the number of outbound tourists from India in the next decade. Speaking at TravTalk's second Digital Conclave on April 21, he added, "VFS Global processed over 32 million visas in 2019. Out of this data, India contrib-

**More and more countries are liberal in granting visas for longer durations and therefore, the price automatically does gain some elasticity**

- Vinay Malhotra



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

'Namaste' to greet is the first signal that that India itself is becoming a global market from a cultural point of view. That is the first fundamental aspect. The COVID-19 crisis is different from all the crisis we have faced in the past. Insights and different economic models predict how the situation will

## The way travel agents do business will change

"The way travel agents do business in the industry will change once the COVID-19 pandemic is over. Year 2020 is a halt, not a stop. No country can survive without tourism. How travel agents do business will definitely change. So, I would urge all travel agents to understand how the digital world works. Customers will have access to the digital world. So, if you have not equipped yourself with digital technologies to distribute and make your work happen, I am afraid that we will all be left behind."

- KD Singh

"We have been talking about ancillary sales for a very long time now and going forward, there will be more focus on ancillary sales. They are going to increase day by day and travel agents have to start educating themselves on this. As far as airlines are concerned, they want to commission all kinds of activities; it is not their normal course of business. Airlines would like to compensate a travel agent for any activity that is an extra revenue generator for them."

- Sandeep Dwivedi

continue to pose a risk to the tourism and aviation industry. If I try to bifurcate the future, it'll consist of the short term, the

**The '30 million outbound tourists' mark could possibly grow up to 50 million, which is what most experts and research say for the next decade**

- Vinay Malhotra

medium term and finally, the long term. If I investigate the medium- and long-term future, they look secure due to the resilient nature of tourism. That said, I would like to add that one must be cautious still of the optimism we are building."

To this, **KD Singh**, President & Founder, TravelBullz, added, "I am sure it is going to be mutual learning. We will have to break down recovery into three segments: The first is to survive, then we get into recovery mode and resurgence is most likely to happen sometime next year."

He explained that if one were to look at the last five-year numbers, especially for travel to short-haul destinations, this is one

segment that is most likely to bounce back after domestic tourism in India. "Travel to short-haul destinations outside India, like Dubai, Thailand, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, etc., has almost doubled between 2015 and 2019. Countries like the Maldives have seen 100 per cent growth in the number of travellers from India in the last few years. Bali has also seen tremendous growth from India and Dubai is a shining example of how short-haul destinations are popular with Indians."

## What makes India lucrative?

India has everything required of a growing market. Malhotra says, "India has all kinds of travellers. We have all the ingredients in place, and I do feel that the stage is set and we are ready to catapult to an even better growth in the time to come. The '30 million outbound tourists' mark could possibly grow up to 50 million, which is what most experts and research say for the next decade."

## Potential to be number one source market for visas

"India already has all the ingredients required to be on top. Even today, a plethora of bookings are routed to us from travel agents in our ecosystem, who I like to call travel specialists or travel consultants. The travel agents need to now come together and work for a common cause, which is stimulation of travel. I think, if all people get together and put in that effort and collaborate, there is scope for us to either go to the top or stay right up there. Even in terms of passport penetration, we are at just about six per cent and China is at nine per cent."

- Vinay Malhotra

Dwivedi seconds that opinion. "The whole COVID situation has created a huge opportunity for the country. In the long term, India as a market will continue to be very relevant, where jobs will be in demand and continue to be generated. The current situation, from a short-term perspective on how tourism will recover, will depend on stability and how the situation normalises. The trajectory of growth will be driven by demand in the market, which is currently damaged. However, given this tremendous



**KD Singh**  
President & Founder  
TravelBullz

dous uncertainty around the duration of the recovery phase, predicting how long it will take for the situation to normalise economically will be tough. Of the parameters that will come into play, one would be social burden and the other, a financial burden. In earlier crisis, there was supply, but demand was a challenge. Right now, both demand and supply are choked, with total suspension of travel. Demand is suppressed due to dislocations and we are going to see slow or negative GDP growth. I believe the broken supply chain will develop low consumer confidence, and nobody knows when the situation will improve. It is very difficult to predict when the industry is going to bounce back.

The restrictions will not be lifted overnight; travel will start again in a staggered manner," he says.

Dwivedi adds that when we speak of international travel, recovery will be very gradual. "That said, when we look at it from India's perspective, though CAPA has talked about recovery

**As soon as India opens up, there will be a huge demand internationally and India will become a major source market**

- Sandeep Dwivedi

ery in Q3 or Q4, I think that it will take much longer. As soon as India opens up, there will be a huge demand internationally and India will become a major source market."

Singh says that connectivity and supply have always created more demand. He shares, "That is where the focus would be when we get back to recovery and start doing normal business. The other thing that I think

has played a pivotal role in the outbound industry is the interest that the tourism boards and the governments of countries have shown for the consumers. That again is a testimonial of the strength of the outbound travellers from India. We have seen a lot of crisis in the industry before but each time, Indian travellers are the first support to destinations. So, we can be really positive about the fact that Indians will be the first ones to start travelling as soon as supply is available, but a lot of this will depend upon what will be the new regulations to travel. There will be checks and balances, the visa-on-arrival scenario will also change a little and more planning will be required when applying for a visa to any country."

He adds that a 'fit to travel' certificate will become a reality in the coming days. "When you look at some of the numbers, we have 26.3 million people who travelled outbound in 2019 out of India. We were soon to reach the 50 million mark but that will now take a while after COVID-19; at least 3-4 years. I do not think any of us need to lose hope as long as we know how to survive. To give you a clear picture of what helps outbound tourism market and what makes the demand kick, I think connectivity is important," Singh says.

### Evolved visa process after COVID-19?

According to Malhotra, at this point in time, none of the governments are busy preparing visa regimes or new norms. "They are all currently occupied in ensuring the health and safety of their citizens. The governments we work with are also extremely busy with the repatriation of their citizens who are currently overseas. For any and every visa change that happens, VFS Global will ensure it reaches people on time. I would urge eve-

ryone to keep a close watch on [www.vfsglobal.com/covid-19](http://www.vfsglobal.com/covid-19). This information and all FAQs are updated on the website daily. In the same breath, I would also like

✦ Whenever you see that there's more demand, it happens because there are more flights, more seats ✦

- KD Singh

to say that there is a whole lot of information around visas, which is out there and not all is from au-

so that people visit a visa centre only at an appointed time. In other words, trying to avoid crowds at any and every given point for the larger interest of the staff as well as the well-being of the applicant who walks in is a priority," he shares.

### Importance of short-haul destinations

According to Singh, the demand for short-haul destinations from India has been supported by supply. He says, "Demand has actually been created by the availability of supply, the availability of flight connections, availability of visa and visa-free

### Working class and millennials will fuel growth

"The working class and millennial sectors will fuel tourism. The resilient nature of the travel industry will secure its medium and long-term future. The working-class population will be crucial for that. Instant travel demand will be created by different demographics of the Indian population post COVID-19. India has grown considerably in terms of intra-country demand in recent times, which has helped the cash flow and the economy as well. There is no doubt that domestic tourism will be crucial in the short-term recovery plan."

- Sandeep Dwivedi

thetic sources. So, I would urge you to only believe in information from authentic sources and that one source could be our website," he said.

Malhotra also feels that the price of a visa could go either way, as countries may want more and more tourists to come in. "More and more countries are liberal in granting visas for longer durations and therefore, the price automatically does gain some elasticity. But, what is important is that the new normal will be quite different from what it is today. Even we are already planning in visa centres, how we can ensure social distancing, how we can ensure more hygiene, how we can ensure more use of digitalisation and technology,

travel, and the availability of hotel rooms in each of these countries. So, whenever you see that there's more demand, it happens because there are more flights, more seats. Dubai has always led that side of the business from our company. There were over 600 flights a week, thousands of seats going in. That is why we were able to achieve our target of serving over 2 million pas-

✦ We have seen a lot of crisis in the industry before but each time, Indian travellers are the first support to destinations ✦

- KD Singh

sengers out of India last year, followed by growth for markets like Singapore, Thailand, Bali, Maldives and some other destinations. If you look at the kind of impact direct flights to Phuket and Krabi from India had on travellers, you can see an 18% jump, compared to 8-9% average growth they achieved over the last five years."

He predicts that anytime between August and September this year, we will start to see the



tricking in of bookings. "Travel, therefore, would be anytime between October and December 2020. Then it will become a matter of confidence-building measures by the government, by airlines, by the travel industry and by all of us together. If

✦ Demand is suppressed due to dislocations and we are going to see slow or negative GDP growth ✦

- Sandeep Dwivedi

it is safe to travel, I am sure the tourism bodies, airlines, DMCS, tour operators - everybody will put in time, money and effort to promote this sentiment of travel. There will be a lot of last-minute bookings. By next April, we will be back where we used to be," Singh believes.

### Weddings and MICE will pick up?

Singh believes that this is an issue across the world and not outbound or domestic-related. "So, if weddings can happen in India, they can happen anywhere in the world. This will, however, depend on governments, how those destinations have taken care of situations and how they have prepared themselves to be COVID-free. So, if India will have large gatherings, so will Thailand, Malaysia and other countries. Intra-region travel to short-haul destinations will increase. I do not see any challenge. Yes, the format will change for MICE over the next six to nine months. The numbers will not be that big. So, you will not see a thousand people travelling for incentive. There will be rationalisation in the number of people travelling together," he explains.

### Short-term road map for survival

Survival doesn't just mean the commercial health of organisations or travel agents and tour operators. We all are driven by people. To ensure companies and people survive, one needs to first take care of the mental strength of colleagues and the people, and the industry at large because a lot of people are obviously quite disheartened and disillusioned on what the future has in store for them. We may see a lot of people wanting something else from life because they've seen what nature can do to them, and us, in a jiffy. So, while the challenges of social distancing, a health certificate for travel, and visa and connectivity will exist, they will all sort themselves out. As soon as we find an antidote and see the curve of infection going down, we will start to see people travelling again."

- KD Singh

### What will fuel demand?

"We do not know how many 'W' curves India will see. A 'W' curve means downfall, recovery, downfall and then again recovery. Even in the current circumstances, when the global GDP is going down, India is going to see good growth even in the short-term future, according to an IMF report. So, factors like GDP, demographic mix and working-class population work in our favour. All these factors will work in fuelling demand from an India point of view," Dwivedi explains.

The panellists concluded the day on a positive note of India's resilience in time of crisis. They also agreed that in the post-COVID world, n e w

norms will be the talk of the town. Since it is a question of the overall health of all fellow travellers on an aircraft, panellists felt 'healthy to board' must be made a norm for all flyers. ✦



Sandeep Dwivedi  
Chief Operating Officer  
ITQ

### Jobs will continue; travel will happen

"Everyone is going through a crisis, no doubt about it. But, if you investigate and compare India to the global equation, our story is entirely different. The whole situation has created a huge amount of opportunity. India is going to become one of the largest markets from a procurement point of view because of money. You need to put money back into the market. So, investments will come in. From a long-term perspective, India is a market where jobs are required; jobs will continue to be there. Resultantly, the younger population would like to explore a lot more. In crisis also, India is showing GDP growth which is a great sign, and the government is doing a good job."

- Sandeep Dwivedi



Going by Pacific Asia Travel Association's recent visitor forecast for 2020-2024 for the Asia Pacific region, visitor numbers to South Asia are likely to reduce by 31 per cent in 2020, but return in 2021 with a 10 per cent year-on-year change.

# Foresight is the key to survival

**Tanuja Pandey**, Founder & Director, MICE Online, says that it is crucial for travel and tourism associations in India to have a disaster management plan in place that can help shield members' business and their employees from adversities such as COVID-19. Salary and job cuts should not be the solution one resorts to in such trying times.

Tourism and hospitality are fragile industries. Any disaster, natural or manmade, affects tourism immediately. While in other developed and developing countries tourism is given preference and a primary industry status, unfortunately, in India, it is neglected and oft times taken for granted.

Severity of the impact that today's situation has had on the tourism industry cannot be taken lightly. While 2019 alone witnessed some big industry collapses such as Thomas Cook and Cox & Kings, a number of smaller entities have also fallen apart in the last one year or so. The government, too, has made things more difficult lately through higher taxation, new taxation, zero commission from airlines and zero commitment to the industry, incomplete/non-existent policies, etc. However, I feel that we cannot

Trade associations should have had the foresight to keep or start a fund that could have helped in disasters

keep blaming the government all the time. We, too, have to be responsible. In times of crisis, there is no insurance or safety net provided to trade partners by private players or by the government, and this is the service industry that generates crores of revenue in taxes and contributes huge numbers to the national income.

Any pleas for help to the custodians/guardians of our trade get recorded after time-consuming follow-ups; their implementation is another story altogether. I have not yet seen an association that proactively thinks and prepares for



unforeseen events. I am sure they have been formed as representatives of the trade, but they have no disaster planning committee.

A shock like the COVID-19 is a learning in disguise and it is time to act on opportunities. It is also time for the government to do something concrete. Big business houses are crippling our banks and the economy with unpaid loans and fleeing, but the resilient lot of our travel fraternity - we stay put and keep our businesses

afloat and pay exorbitant taxes.

We also need to look out for our own. To reduce staff or not pay salaries is not the only solution, but sadly, many in the travel industry have begun doing just that. If we had an insurance plan or a plan-B for disasters like this, we would have been able to take care of such unforeseen and unfortunate situations.

Trade associations should have had the foresight to keep or start

such a fund that could have helped in disasters. We refuse to learn from our mistakes, but I still hope we all wake up today and plan tomorrow.

That said, we are hoping the government bails us out. It could offer an exemption or a refund on taxes for FY 2019-20 for those who have paid advance tax and a tax holiday for FY 2020-21. We do not see business for us in Q4 of 2019-20 and Q1-Q2 of 2020-21. We

do foresee job cuts and loan repayments on the anvil. Do associations have a fund for this? How can we ensure that each employee can keep their house running? We are our own morale boosters, but today we need someone to boost our morale. I urge the younger lot to also come forward with ideas and a plan. We are all hoping for a better situation and that the government see our plight.

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



**Tanuja Pandey**  
Founder & Director  
MICE Online

## 'Be a travel advisor, not an agent'

**Deepak Mehta**, Managing Director, Sachiya Travels (Jaipur), feels that though traditional travel agencies had already been facing challenging times by being unable to cope with in-demand OTAs, now may be a time to resurrect themselves as the latter fail to address customer grievances amid the virus outbreak.

Before delving into the present reality of the COVID-19 and its impact on traditional travel agencies, it is important to acknowledge that their survival is already being challenged due to the advent of the next generation as present and potential customers. Armed with smartphones and fast internet whilst exhibiting ease and deftness in use of technology, they have been slowly changing the manner in which business is conducted. It is fair to say that a travel agent's advice on travel had already begun to be questioned and countered by these new, tech-savvy customers, who have at their disposal a plethora of choices available on the internet.

A quantifiable value addition, which is the main premise for any business, was clearly missing and the qualitative value addition was not acknowledged until the COVID-19 pandemic, when people stuck with online bookings and needing to return home were left stranded by

online booking platforms. People all over the world, desperate to get home or wherever they felt safer, were confronted by pre-recorded messages and computer-generated emails expressing the inability to resolve their issue due to high volume being experienced. It was at this time that the factor of reliability and dependability of orthodox travel agencies and tour operators came to the forefront by providing their customers with solutions, alternate routes and sound advice. This, of course, should be a positive driver of volumes at our agencies post situations of exigency such as this one (COVID-19), but will it be enough to get the confidence of our old customers back? No, I don't think so. It is imperative that travel agencies must look for viable solutions for sustainable survival.

### The way forward

In the coming months, as the world recovers, there is little

doubt that leisure/holidays will be the last priority on the minds of people who would themselves be struggling to secure their own financial stability. The natural re-

Reliability of orthodox travel agencies and tour operators has come to the forefront by providing their customers with sound advice

course would be scrambling to cut down on recurring costs.

For agencies catering to both business and leisure travel, working from home may be detrimental to their credibility and perhaps result in losing their business travel customers. In or-

der to escape such an eventuality, they should opt for relocating offices to smaller commercial spaces with lower rentals/opportunity costs. They would also need to lower leverage costs by optimising credit facilities at a comfortable level, thereby limiting any losses that may arise in case of a default.

Perhaps the only way for airlines, hotels and other intermediaries to contain the damage that results from this would be to be as transparent as possible with clients and keep financial exposure towards suppliers and customers to the lowest.

Greater investment in technology, MIS, structuring of work flow should be done to improve efficiency of work so as to maximise compliance and minimise errors. Structuring of work flow would involve human resource management.

For travel agencies dealing with only leisure travellers and specialising in fixed departure tours, the coming six months will be very difficult. The first viable move for such agencies would be to do away completely with establishment costs. They can work from home and maintain virtual connections with customers.

For agencies dealing in inbound tours, the coming year or two look extremely grim. Early 2021 may see stimulus in inbound business due to movement from South-east and East Asia, hence, the way forward for them would be to tap the domestic tours market.

The leisure outbound/domestic travel industry will recuperate and resurrect as soon as the lives of people are back to normal. Their vacation

platter should have more resort and experiential products on offer.

Travel agents should strategise to create personal offers for customers as per their preference and requirements. The role should change to being a travel advisor instead of a travel agent. Providing free-of-cost information to a customer on anything should be done away with altogether.

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



**Deepak Mehta**  
Managing Director  
Sachiya Travels (Jaipur)



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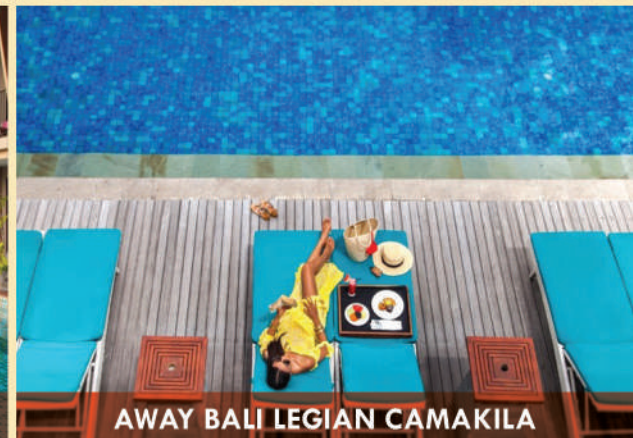
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# ‘Adapt to a new normal’

Tiffany Misrahi, Vice President of Policy, World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTTC), believes the future of travel will depend on rebuilding the confidence of travellers, understanding the enduring changes towards digital solutions and adapting to the ‘new normal’ with agility.

**Hazel Jain**

## Q How do you think travel will change post this pandemic?

While many governments have acted to mitigate the economic impacts of COVID-19 through policies focusing on facilitating cash and liquidity, enabling fiscal support and protecting workers, the sector will unlikely be left unchanged. In effect, even if these measures are successful, the sector will have to adapt to a ‘new normal’ with an increased focus on health and hygiene security, sustainability and even digitalisation.

To thrive in this new era, governments, businesses, destinations and travellers alike will need to adjust to the shifted expectations and requirements. Furthermore, the travel and tourism sector must integrate the learnings from COVID-19 to enhance its preparedness, management processes and recovery strategies to ensure its resilience to future crises. The

future of travel will depend on rebuilding the confidence of travellers, understanding the enduring changes towards digital solutions, and by adapting to the ‘new normal’ with agility.

## Q There is a disagreement between agents and airlines about refunds. Your take?

WTTTC has urged governments to implement exceptional flexibility around consumer refunds to alleviate the unbearable pressure

✦ The sector must integrate the learnings from COVID-19 to enhance preparedness, processes and recovery strategies ✦

on the tourism sector. What are your recommendations to the tourism and civil aviation ministries in Asia, especially in India, in



Tiffany Misrahi  
Vice President - Policy  
WTTTC

terms of supporting and helping in reviving the tourism and hospitality industries?

WTTTC has proposed three vital measures to support tourism in the turbulent months ahead. First, we believe that financial help must be granted to protect the incomes of the millions of workers. Second, governments must extend vital, unlimited interest-free loans to global travel companies as well as the millions of small and medium-sized businesses as a stimulus to prevent them from collapse.

Third, all government dues and financial demands on the tourism sector need to be waived with immediate effect for at least the next 12 months. WTTTC believes that governments, including tourism and civil aviation ministries, should commit to four key principles to achieve a faster recovery. This would involve including the private sector in the coordinated response, ensuring all measures put the over-

✦ WTTTC plans to create a dashboard to provide signposts to recovery and facilitate the sharing of best practices ✦

all traveller experience at the heart of their actions. This would include a seamless traveller journey with enhanced health security standards enabled through technology, developing joint public-private and

G20-wide health protocols as well as ongoing support packages for the tourism sector beyond lifting of the lockdown and into recovery.

## Q You have recently released an open letter to governments on steps they need to take to ensure tourism revival. Has any country taken up any of the recommendations?

WTTTC has been engaging with about 100 governments to advocate on our members’ behalf for swift governmental action. The reality is that this is an unprecedented situation and governments are looking to share and learn from each other as well as engage with the private sector, and WTTTC is there to help. We have received many positive responses from governments to date. WTTTC plans to explore the future of travel and what that ‘new normal’ will look like, consider the standards and guidelines for that ‘new normal’, create a dashboard to provide

signposts to recovery and facilitate the sharing of experiences, success stories and best practices between governments and advocating on behalf of the sector to ensure supportive policies are implemented.

## Qs WTTTC also talking to travel trade associations and guiding them as to what steps they can take to guide their members?

WTTTC is working closely with global and regional industry associations and international organisations. We are sharing knowledge and insights, aligning on messaging, and working to advocate on behalf of the sector to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and hopefully, soon support its recovery. WTTTC works closely with WTTTC India that engages directly with both the public and private sectors. WTTTC also estimates that a staggering one million jobs are being lost every day due to the pandemic. ✦

## Zillion offers digital capability

Amidst the chaos reigning the travel industry is a silver lining in the form of Zillion Holidays whose operating system can help DMCs hit the ground running.

**TT Bureau**

Zillion Holidays, a Singapore-based company with presence in more than seven cities in India, brings to the industry a unique product that has been four years in the making. It offers world’s first leisure GDS. It can help DMCs and agents to recover from the lockdown faster and hit the ground running. **Ram Mohan**, Founder and Director, Zillion Holidays, says, “A global platform provides an excellent opportunity to DMCs to improve staff productivity, while also extending reach to many more global buyers. Such automation enables the DMC to join the digital ecosystem at a low cost.”

Zillion Holidays has created the world’s first Leisure GDS, where content from the DMCs and the tour operators is consolidated



Ram Mohan  
Founder and Director  
Zillion Holidays

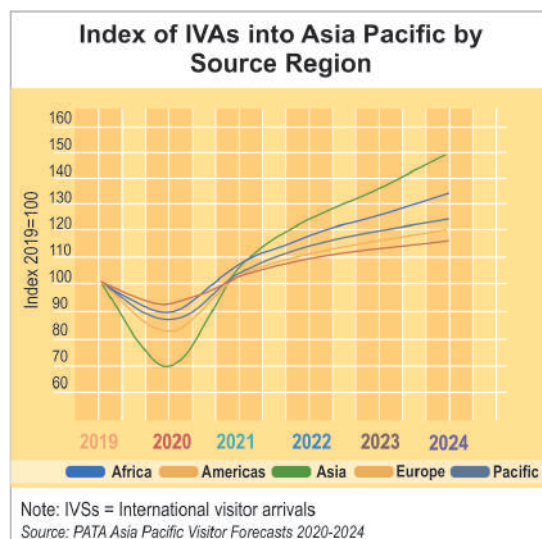
into a Leisure GDS that can be accessed by users such as travel agents and online portals to fulfill their booking requirements. **Amal Purandare**, Senior Vice President, Zillion Holidays, adds, “Zillion’s Leisure GDS and the DMC operating system minimises risks for both these businesses and once operational, will not only help normalise their businesses in no time, but also give them a sustained growth month on month.” ✦

## Asia to drive early visitor recovery

Asia is predicted to spearhead a return to visitor growth across Asia Pacific in 2021, according to the newly updated forecast released by Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA). The volume of arrivals is now expected to return to over 610 million in 2021.

**TT Bureau**

This initial recovery, says PATA, is expected to see growth of around three percent above 2019 levels and herald a return to the initial forecast levels shortly thereafter. The growth in international visitor arrivals (IVAs) is likely to vary by source regions, with Asia expected to rebound with the fastest growth rates relative to 2019. The Americas, which is expected to show the lowest contraction in its rate of growth in 2020, is forecast to continue with much weaker growth rates over the years to 2024.



IVAs into Asia by the Top 5 Source Sub regions					
Source Sub-region	IVAs, mns			IVA Change 2021/2019	Change Proportion
	2019	2020	2021		
1 Northeast Asia	198.61	116.86	205.09	6.48 mns	28.9%
2 Southeast Asia	64.58	52.81	70.67	6.09 mns	27.2%
3 South Asia	15.47	12.69	18.02	2.55 mns	11.4%
4 Central America	20.09	19.65	22.13	2.04 mns	9.1%
5 East Europe	18.76	17.71	20.52	1.75 mns	7.8%
<b>Total Top 5</b>	<b>317.52</b>	<b>219.73</b>	<b>336.43</b>	<b>18.91 mns</b>	<b>84.3%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>445.60</b>	<b>326.61</b>	<b>468.03</b>	<b>22.43 mns</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Notes: IVAs = international visitor arrivals | mns=millions | reforecast for 2020-2021  
Source: PATA

Into and across Asia, the largest volume increases between 2019 and 2021 are also predicted to be intra-regional (Asia-to-Asia) for the most part, with a rebound from a loss of almost 98 million arrivals between 2019 and 2020 to an increase of over 17 million between 2019 and 2021. The strongest growth in visitor arrivals into Asia is largely out of the Asian source sub-regions, with strong assistance from Central America.

# Are you COVID-19-ready?

We spoke to five big operators on the kind of measures they are taking to safeguard their employees and to ensure they are ready for a post-COVID landscape. While cost-cutting measures are inevitable at the moment, they are utilising the time well to be ready for the road ahead.

“ We are still figuring out changes to be made in our product offerings as the situation worsens every day. We don't see travel resuming easily even once the lockdown is lifted. We will review and restructure our products once we get some news. As of now, we are at a complete standstill. We have also initiated some cost-cutting measures. Since we have multiple branch locations, we have been forced to suspend certain branch operations.”



**Adl Karim**  
Director  
Creative Tours & Travels (I)



**Himanshu Patil**  
Director  
Kesari Tours

“ We are still not clear what will happen as things are changing every day. So, commenting on anything will be based only on assumptions. Every country is passing its own protocols for entry. For instance, Australia has barred any international visitor for next six months. Fortunately, our business is 60% domestic tourists and we will continue to promote our domestic packages. However, the on-ground logistics, once travel restarts, remains to be seen.”

“ We are looking at doing things differently once the lockdown ends. For starters, we are ramping up our FIT product base as corporates may offer incentives by way of FIT holidays to start with for dealers/distributors, keeping in mind the challenges associated with social distancing. At this point, we have not cut jobs, but are looking at the business continuity plan; we have revised salaries effective April in order to keep all costs in check.”



**Dudley Drego**  
EVP, Corporate Journey  
Fountainhead Entertainment



**Bhavesh Oza**  
Vice President, International Market  
Blue Star Air Travel Services (I)

“ Travel is a psychological need and I am sure it will push people to travel eventually. On the product side, I believe passengers will travel to places that are not very far from their home towns. Staycations will grow, with people wanting to stay at a good property and enjoy its amenities. This crisis has made us understand the art of work from home and I feel this will now be a part of our work culture. Salary cuts are inevitable and understanding from the team is the need of the hour.”

“ We foresee a paradigm shift in booking behaviour in the coming quarters and our teams are aggressively working towards enhancing our products attuned to these changed requirements in a post-COVID world. We are also focusing on bringing our operating costs under acceptable levels. We are not only reducing variable costs, but also looking at optimising all our fixed costs, including outsourced costs.”



**Vipul Prakash**  
COO  
MakeMyTrip

Inputs by Hazel Jain

## Hilton launches curated home deliveries

Hilton has partnered with food aggregators Zomato and Swiggy for home delivery of its signature dishes to customers via safe and contactless delivery. Catering to the needs of its customers and dedicated towards fulfilling its mission to be the world's most hospitable company even during a pandemic like the COVID-19, Hilton's select delivery menu

### Hilton

across cities features the top 20 signature dishes from its most popular F&B outlets in those cities, at special delivery prices. Currently, six Hilton properties are operational for food delivery, including Conrad Bengaluru, Conrad Pune, Hilton Garden Inn Gurugram, Hilton Chennai, DoubleTree Ahmedabad and Hilton Mumbai. The group plans to expand this service to properties in Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Thiruvananthapuram, Pune, Ahmedabad, Lucknow and Chennai.

## Turkish draws biggest flag

Turkey's national flag carrier operated an important flight on April 23, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Grand National Assembly, and National Sovereignty and Children's Day.

The TC-JJF registered Boeing 777-300 (ER) type aircraft, which arrived in Ankara in the morning for this special flight, took off from Esenboğa Airport on April 23 at 09:40,



local time. Representing the date 23 April 1920, flight TK1920 lasted approximately two hours and followed a route in which the crescent and star symbols in the Turkish flag were drawn. After the flight, which was followed by many through the live air traffic site Flightradar24, a crescent-star route emerged and passed into Turkish aviation history.

# 'On the brink of collapse'

Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality (FAITH) has appealed to Government of India for an immediate survival package as it fears there will be massive job losses with the tourism industry coming to a standstill amidst the COVID-19 crisis.



According to a statement released by FAITH, over 95 per cent MSMEs of 53,000 travel agents; 1,15,000 tour operators (inbound, domestic, outbound); 15,000 adventure, 2700 MICE, 19,11,000 tourist transporters; 53,000 hospitality and 5 lakh restaurants are facing the heat due to lack of cash flows owing to the outbreak. The association claims that the COVID-19 pandemic has jeopardised India's once Rs5 lakh crore tourism industry that generated employment for an estimated 3.8 crore people.

Over the past six weeks, FAITH had been appealing to the Prime Minister, Finance Minister, Tourism Minister, Commerce Minister, Aviation Minister, Niti Aayog and the Parliamentary Committee on Tourism and Reserve Bank of India. The release

claims that all the cash inflows of the industry have completely frozen and are likely to stay that way for the financial year 2020-21. To address the issues of



cash outflows, FAITH had recommended immediate measures for survival that need to be addressed parallelly.

FAITH has also recommended that once the survival measures have been implemented, measures for revival of Indian tourism need to be enforced immediately. It further suggests that in order to stimulate tourism exports, SEIS needs to be notified at 10% value for all foreign

exchange tourism companies and needs to be maintained at minimum same value for next five years and for off-season. It could go up to 15 per cent value. To ensure the revival of Indian travel agents, all refunds, advances and cancellation amounts to be immediately paid back by all airlines, railways and state wildlife parks.

Addressing the issue of TCS, FAITH's recommendation document says, "The TCS on travel agent proposed in the finance bill 2020 to be implemented on October 1, should be completely abolished as it puts the Indian travel fraternity at a huge disadvantage of up to 15% vs their global competitors. Additionally, the service fee for credit card charges needs to be below 1% and all corporate travel agent credit cards to be honoured. To ensure the survival of Indian tourist transporters, all inter-state levy

## Recommendations for cash outflow

- ❖ A complete deferment for 12 months of all statutory dues payable by tourism, travel & hospitality industry at the Central Government level, state and municipal government level without attracting any penal interest. These would include GST, Advance Tax payments, PF, ESI, customs duties, excise fees, fixed power & water charges and any fees for licenses and renewal at the state level.
- ❖ A support fund 'Tourism COVID 19 Relief fund' to be set up by RBI or Ministry of Finance or Tourism to support salaries and establishment costs. It should be either in the form of an interest free loan to tourism companies for repayment of the principle over 10 years. The industry estimates the value of the fund to be minimum of Rs50,000 crore which is almost equal to gross banking credit to the Indian tourism industry.
- ❖ RBI has already provided for three months moratorium on EMIs of principle and interest payments on loans and recalculation of working capital from financial institutions. This needs to be without any accrued and accumulated interest during this period and it needs to be extended for 12 months.

need to be reduced and standardised. Year 2020-21 can be declared a GST tax holiday for Indian tourism without stop-

ping the flow of input tax credits since there will be minimal GST collections from reduced travel within India.”

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# 'Make use of unutilised funds'

At a meeting of FAITH members, it was unanimously decided that there was an urgent need to approach the Ministry of Tourism to request an immediate relief for the industry that was running short of precious time awaiting a bailout package from Ministry of Finance.



Nisha Verma

The year 2020 may not witness revival of the tourism industry after it was struck by the COVID-19 outbreak. **Subhash Goyal**, Secretary General, FAITH, says that 2020 should be declared a 'tourism draught' year because of this. "All the airlines would remain grounded and we know that all visas have been cancelled. Hence, our revenues have totally dried up. We had a meeting, through video conferencing, of board members of FAITH where it was unanimously decided to approach our parent ministry — Ministry of Tourism (MOT) — to make use of its unutilised funds for immediate relief to travel agents and tour operators, particularly the small and

medium ones. We do not have the money to pay salaries and other statutory obligations. Hence, it is very important that at least Rs1,500 crore from the

**We don't have the bandwidth to wait for the bailout package from Ministry of Finance; we need funds urgently**

old budget of the tourism ministry, and the new, be given as immediate relief. The TCS, which has been extended just as the moratorium for loans and interest, should be extended for at least one year and should thereafter be com-



**Subhash Goyal**  
Secretary General, FAITH

pletely scrapped because it will kill outbound tourism from the country," he asserted.

Goyal added that in case the government cannot give the industry ex-gratia grants, they should give a 10-year loan, which should be interest-free. "The interest portion of the loan should be paid by

MOT out of their funds, and it could be routed either through State Bank of India or through the respective banks of tour operators, maybe even through Tourism Finance Corporation. What is urgently needed is a bailout package," he said, adding, "This is an SOS message on behalf of the tourism industry to the Minister of Tourism that we need oxygen for the industry to survive. We need some action now. We don't have the patience or the bandwidth to wait for the bailout package from Ministry of Finance. We need funds urgently. We request the government to help the industry and save millions of jobs that are at stake. Rather than moratoriums, we need a financial relief immediately."

# ABTO's formula: Tourism = H3 + NAC

To beat the COVID-19 pandemic and bring the world together again, the Association of Buddhist Tour Operators (ABTO) has invented a new formula through which it is trying to spread the message of happiness, togetherness and a strategy to cope with crisis as one single force.



Manas Dwivedi

"Beat the COVID-19 and take the world along, the tourism industry will be revived by adopting the formula and bring back the industry on track again," affirms Dr Kaulesh Kumar, Secretary General, ABTO, who is very optimistic about evolution of the tourism industry in the post-era of the



crisis. Sharing details about the formula, he explains, "If we start following this formula, Tourism = H3 + NAC, then the day is not far when tourism industry will be the favourite and biggest business of all."

Breaking down the meaning of the formula, Kumar explains, "In the formula, H3 means, Hotel, Hospital and Hospital-

ity. It means that if a hotel that starts a service like a hospital in emergency, so that the employee gets work and maintenance charges are also exempted. Here in Hospitality all the work of tourism, ticketing, transport, guides etc., which will have to come on one platform. Then N = Nature. It means that we should not tamper with the beauty of nature and enjoy whatever we have. A = Agriculture which means that every hotel should adopt one or more villages so that along with organic food, the farmer can avoid suicide. C = Culture. We need to preserve the local culture, customs, festivals and traditions to cooperate in respect and encouragement. If we follow this formula, we will be able to think more about the value of life. After COVID-19, new revolution will come and the whole world will work together.

### Challenges & opportunities

According to Kumar, today, the industry which gives happiness to the world as well as the highest employment to all, is struggling to save its own existence.



**Kaulesh Kumar**  
Secretary General, ABTO

"There are clouds of despair all around, but I am optimistic considering the ideals of great scientists Stephen Hawking and Abdul Kalam. Tourism is not only an integral part of human lives, but it is also an integral part of all animals. You must have heard the name of migrated birds, animals who travel thousands of miles and go from one place to another. Even, Lord Krishna also promotes tourism," he said.

Kumar is very optimistic that the coronavirus will be beaten, and the quarantine will be over soon and people hungry for adventures will start visiting different corners of the planet again and all travel business

owners should get ready for this. "The current situation will not stay forever. The bright days of tourism are ahead and the current situation with pandemic will not ruin this business industry. Yes, there will be losses and complications, there will be temporary halts in many processes but if

**If we follow this formula, we will be able to think more about the value of life. A new revolution will come**

business owners use this time wisely. They can improve the work of their travel companies and attract more sanitised customers," Kumar said.

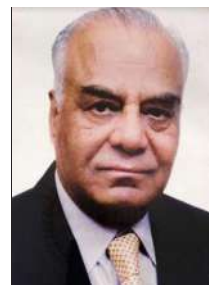
### Digitisation, a game changer

According to Kumar, a business owner, travel agents should not wait till hard times and pass time doing nothing at all. "You can spend this so-called time, 'travel-pause' to optimise your business and

go digital. Building a travel app can be a good idea. Think about your clients and how you can make their experience better and faster. It can be an app for organising the trip, booking flight ticket or hotels or apartments abroad. It can be an app for the local guide building the most interesting tool for sight-seeing. There are many ideas and tech trends you can consider like voice technology, VR, Internet of Things and artificial intelligence," he said.

"It is also necessary to think about your employees. From day to day, travel agents have to deal with a huge load of paper and enter manually the personal data about each client on the computer. To unload your employees a little bit and optimise the routine process, you can consider developing your own customer CRM or use some cloud-based solution for more convenient access to the data and use software for managing and training your staff. Every business is about the future, the opportunities you can get if you take a step," he further said.

## MEMORIAM



## JR Sood

**JR Sood**, Founder & Chairman of EROS Group (that runs Delhi's Shangri-La's - Eros Hotel among others), passed away on April 26. He rose from humble beginnings and founded EROS Group in 1940. He was instrumental in establishing EROS as one of the most trusted brands. Raman Sood, Managing Director, EROS Group, says, "I had the privilege to have a great father. As a person, my father was hard-working, decisive, honest, persistent, upfront and a determined man; he was a real do-it-yourself person. He had passed down some of his traits to me. He will be deeply missed." The Group mourns the demise of its Founder & Chairman, whose legacy lives through his children, grandchildren & great-grandchildren.

# Educational trips in South Korea

Selecting South Korea as a destination for a school trip will leave those involved most satisfied. The greatest appeal for students won't be limited to the historical and cultural lessons. We bring to you some trip ideas for those itineraries in the making.Q



### DMZ Tour

The DMZ Tour offers a glimpse into South Korea's history so students can take time to recognise the preciousness of peace. They get a chance to experience the Korean Demilitarized Zone on the South Korean side and understand how this strip of land came about. The trip starts in Seoul.

### Seoul World Cultural Heritage

The historical background of Korea's Cultural Heritage Sites is diverse. As of July 2019, Korea had 13 cultural heritage sites and one natural heritage site. The sites embody a wide variety of values from tidy and neat artistic spirit to scientific rationality as witnessed in the traditional architecture of royal palaces or temples.



### Lotte World Observatory

For years, Lotte World amusement park has been a popular attraction among locals and tourists alike. With the construction of Lotte World Tower & Mall, the area has become a paradise for all things entertainment and culture. The 123-storey tower includes shops, theatres, offices and a hotel, as well as the 555 metre-high observatory Seoul Sky, opened on April 3, 2017.

### Samsung Innovation Museum

Samsung Innovation Museum is an electronic industrial museum run by Samsung. The museum mainly consists of three sections. Visitors can learn about the history of Korea's electronic industry, as well as the past, present and future of the semiconductor, display and mobile industries, where Samsung made great achievements. The museum also runs an education facility called Children's Display Research Institute.



### Buyeo National Museum

First established in 1929, the Buyeo National Museum was reopened in August 1993 at the current location. The museum has four exhibition halls and an outdoor exhibit with a total of about 1,000 relics on display. Students can visit the museum to see the treasures and riches from the Baekje times and to experience the dynasty's love of form, detail and restrained opulence.

### Hyundai Motors Ulsan Plant

Hyundai Motors Ulsan Plant is the world's largest single plant. It is made up of five independent factories, with approximately 32,000 personnel producing an average of 5,800 vehicles per day. Visitors to the plant can tour the vehicle manufacturing plant and the port that houses 76,000-ton ships. Reservation in advance is required for the tour.



### Tongdosa Temple

Located in southern part of Chiseosan Mountain, Tongdosa Temple is famous for not having any Buddhist statues in the temple. This is because the real sarira (sacred relics) of the Buddha is preserved here. The temple consists of several halls and buildings, including the Daengjeon Hall, Daegwangmyeongjeon Hall and Yeongsanjeon Hall, and also has several national treasures.

### Busan

Busan, a large port city in South Korea, is known for its beaches, mountains and temples. Busy Haeundae Beach features the Sea Life Aquarium, plus Folk Square with traditional games such as tug-of-war. The city's natural endowments and rich history have resulted in Busan's increasing reputation as a world-class city for tourism and culture, and it is also becoming renowned as a hotspot destination for international conventions.



### Gyeongju National Museum

Gyeongju National Museum is loved by visitors and residents alike as it houses numerous historical and cultural artefacts of the Silla dynasty (57 BC - AD 935). The museum recently went through renovation, and the galleries and exhibition halls have taken on a new look. It also strives to take a leap forward to become a cultural centre by promoting international exchange opportunities, social education programmes and a variety of special exhibitions.

## HAHN AIR Germany

Hahn Air is regrouping its departments supporting partner airlines, travel agencies and the global distribution systems (GDS) into the new commercial and operation divisions. Its newly-formed commercial division will be headed by **Alexander Proschka** who has been promoted to Executive Vice President Commercial. His division comprises of the following departments: airline business, communications and marketing, sales analytics and travel agency distribution. Proschka has been with Hahn Air since 2008 and was previously in charge of the sister companies Hahn Air Systems and Hahn Air Technologies.



**Frederick Nowotny** has been promoted to Head of Operation to lead the new operation division. Nowotny joined Hahn Air in 2008 and previously headed up the sales engineering department. His division now includes the teams in charge of all airline and product implementation processes, GDS interfaces and inventory displays. In addition, he oversees the IT and second-level support departments, as well as the Hahn Air Service Desk which assists partner airlines and answers ticketing enquiries of travel agents worldwide 24x7. The restructuring process will enable Hahn Air to maximise results for customer groups.



## ASCOTT Chennai

CapitaLand's wholly-owned lodging business unit, The Ascott Limited (Ascott), has recently appointed **Supriya Malhotra** as Area General Manager for Chennai cluster. In her new role, Malhotra will be responsible for Ascott's overall operations in Chennai. She will also be leading the pre-opening process of the group's new properties due to open in India. Malhotra has been with Ascott since 2013 and was previously the City Manager for Chennai with direct operational responsibilities of Somerset Greenways Chennai. She has a vast experience of over three decades in hospitality.

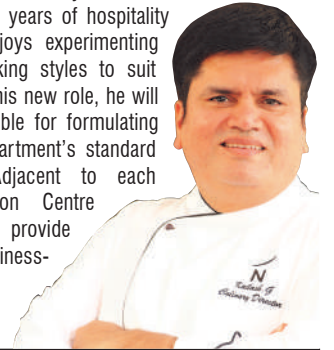


Ascott has also announced the appointment of **Mansur Ahmed** as Deputy General Manager of the 187-unit Somerset Greenways in Chennai. Ahmed has been with Ascott for over nine years and was previously the Director of Sales & Marketing for Chennai cluster. A seasoned sales and marketing professional, Ahmed underwent a rigorous six-month training spread across India and Singapore, prior to his appointment as Deputy GM. In his new role, he will be responsible for managing the operations of Somerset Greenways Chennai.



## NOVOTEL CONVENTION CENTRE AND HICC Hyderabad

Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre and Hyderabad International Convention Centre (HICC) have appointed **Kailash Gundupalli** as their new Director of Culinary for the dual property. Bringing over 20 years of hospitality experience, Gundupalli enjoys experimenting diverse flavours and cooking styles to suit the modern day palate. In his new role, he will predominantly be responsible for formulating and implementing the department's standard operating procedures. Adjacent to each other, Novotel Convention Centre and HICC are designed to provide a comfortable and business-friendly environment.



## THE WESTIN GARDEN CITY Mumbai

**Shalin Jose** has been appointed as the new Director of Spa at The Westin Mumbai Garden City, a scenic sanctuary for business and leisure travel. Jose has over 16 years of experience in the wellness industry. His abilities span every facet of the industry, including management, branding and business development. Jose has a Diploma in Beauty Therapy and Cosmetology. In the new role, he will be responsible for bespoke experiences at the Heavenly Spa by Westin.



# Do a bit of armchair travel

A nationwide lockdown doesn't have to mean missing out on travel. Tick off some items from your bucket list during this quarantine and travel to some amazing destinations from the comfort of your couch! We bring to you the top six destinations that we think you would love to visit.



### The UK: The National Gallery

Many of UK's top tourist attractions have incredible webcams and virtual tours on their websites, which means you can explore them from the comfort of your living room. Take an online tour of the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square and admire its collection of over 2,300 paintings dating from the mid-13th century to 1900.



<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/visiting/virtual-tours>

### France: Musée d'Orsay, Paris

This charming museum which in itself is a work of art now boasts a staggering collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist European masters from 1848 to 1914. Enjoy the extensive display of artworks in this online collection. <https://artsandculture.google.com/search/entity?p=musee-dorsay-paris>



### Kingdom of the Netherlands: Rijksmuseum

The Rijksmuseum is a Dutch national museum dedicated to arts and history in Amsterdam. It has on display 8,000 objects of art and history from the years 1200–2000, among which are some masterpieces by Rembrandt, Frans Hals, and Johannes Vermeer. <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/from-home>



### The US: Nevada's treks

With their 'Roam From Home' option, armchair travellers can explore some of Nevada's off-the-grid favorites from all corners of the Silver State. Wander through slot canyons, hot springs, state parks and beyond on your device. <https://travelnevada.com/google-trekker>



### Switzerland: Lucerne

Lucerne, the gateway to central Switzerland, sited on Lake Lucerne, is embedded within an impressive mountainous panorama. It's attractions, great shopping, and the beautiful lakeside setting with the nearby mountains make it very popular among Indian travellers. <https://www.myswitzerland.com/en-in/destinations/lucerne/>



### South Korea: Busan

If you believe that Seoul is the only city of interest in South Korea, you are yet to discover Busan. Located on the most south-eastern portion of the South Korean peninsula, Busan is a large port city in South Korea. It is known for its pristine beaches, majestic mountains and temples. It also boasts of several museums and historical structures for art lovers. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsgKbjHCxb8>



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# MOT & trade come together

Meenakshi Sharma, Director General, Ministry of Tourism, insists that this is the right time for people to take up the IITFC programme, while the ministry looks at a start-up strategy for tourism together with industry stakeholders.

Nisha Verma

Speaking of the new normal, Meenakshi Sharma has claimed that once the lockdown is over and people start working in a normal fashion, Ministry of Tourism (MOT) hopes that domestic tourism will be the first segment to revive. "It is human nature to travel, hence, it is not expected that people will not travel for a long time. However, owing to the various issues related to preparedness, international travel will take much longer to commence. Even long-distance travel within the country would be on hold because of protocols, which may be required for air or rail travel. On the other hand, travel within the state, or for shorter distances, will happen much faster. Hence, we are looking at a strategy to approach that," she reveals.

Sharma suggests that there is a need to create new experiences for domestic tourists because people will travel in a different fashion going forward. "This means that people might look at less crowded places, as social distancing and apprehensions regarding travel will be on their minds till the vaccine comes out. Keeping that in mind, we thought of exploring various options. We hope that the confidence of people to travel comes back soon," she explains.

#### Now is the time for IITFC

Sharma believes that now is the right time for the Incredible India Tourist Facilitator Certification (IITFC), for which MOT is already seeing a steady streaming. "We have also written to the state governments to encourage their stakeholders who may be working directly, to encourage others further. A programme like IITFC makes a lot of sense currently

because firstly, it helps in getting a certification that is flexible and allows you to work part-time or full-time depending on the circumstances. It also carries the strength of an MOT certification, which can help them in the long term. This is absolutely the right time for taking the course. People have time available and tourism is going to take some more time to get back. Hence, there will be a lean period, which I hope people realise for this purpose," she shares.

#### Digital communication

MOT recently increased the number of languages for its website. The next step in its digital communication strategy are webinars. Sharing details, Sharma says, "The website is doing well and

The problems of the industry are well known and well represented

many people use it for information. We have come up with a webinar series called 'Dekho Apna Desh', which is also getting hosted on our website, so that people can get access to it even if they've missed a webinar or want to re-visit it. We are very happy with the enthusiasm of the industry for these webinars. The ministry is only providing a platform and organising it. However, all the information and presenters are from the private sector. This also means that we will not take too long in revival because people are already interested. People from world over are saying that it is on their agenda to visit India and they will do it as soon as possible."

She adds that the webinars normally get 3000-4000 registra-

tions and at least 2000 people attend it regularly, which is good considering that there are so many online sessions happening simultaneously across the world.

People have time available and tourism is going to take some more time to get back. Hence, there will be a lean period, which I hope people realise

#### Addressing industry issues

While the industry is gaining product knowledge through the webinars, they are struggling in their businesses and have been making representations to the MOT and various other ministries. Sharma claims that everybody in the government is aware of the condition of the tourism industry. "We have already approached Ministry of Finance,

Ministry of Commerce & Industry, and other ministries on behalf of the travel industry. Everyone is aware of the kind of distress tourism is going through. I am sure we will get something, but challenges are many and they are across the board. The immediate challenge is how to handle the health crisis and other things only come next. How much would be done and could be done is yet to be seen. The problems of the industry, however, are well known and well represented," she asserts. MOT is believed to be in dialogue with the industry and the next step would be to work with them on a strategy when the lockdown is lifted.



Meenakshi Sharma  
Director General  
Ministry of Tourism

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