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More hotels listed with MOT

Prahlad Singh Patel, Minister of Tourism & Culture (I/C), claims that the COVID-19 crisis has given the Ministry of Tourism an opportunity to mend procedures for the future and put things in order. He adds that they have also been able to list more hotels with MOT during the crisis.

Nisha Verma

Calling Ministry of Tourism (MOT) as a stakeholder of the tourism industry, **Prahlad Singh Patel** says that owing to COVID-19, most damage has already been done to the industry and revival will come only after survival. That said, he adds that the crisis has also given the industry opportunities in disguise. "Statistics have always been in question; we realised that earlier, only 1400 hotels were listed with

MOT and we started enrolments amid the crisis. Now, the number has reached 17,000. Even for guides, we didn't have statistics. We have used this opportunity to do something for the stakeholders," he said, speaking at fourth edition of National Talent Competition in Tourism & Hospitality Sector by PHD Chambers.

Patel also welcomed the move to open hotels and restaurants in Delhi, and thanked the Home Minister as well as Lieutenant Governor of Delhi. "Opening of the two biggest segments of the



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

tourism industry - hotels and restaurants - in the country's capital is a positive move that will help push domestic travel

and give much relief to the industry which has been readying itself with all health and safety

Opening of the two biggest segments of the tourism industry, hotels and restaurants, in the country's capital is a positive move that will help push domestic travel.

protocols," he shared, adding that soon, they will be able to open banquet halls with 50 per cent capacity.

With regard to revival of the aviation industry, Patel said, "We have been able to revive air travel to a certain extent and will continue to increase it. Today, most of the airlines have shown interest in flying to India."

The Minister also stressed on the importance of the tourism industry as an enabler of economic growth, adding, "We have im-

Upcoming utilities

MOT will launch NIDHI (National Integrated Database of Hospitality Industry) on September 27. It is also working on another platform, SAATHI (System for Assessment, Awareness and Training for Hospitality Industry).

mense opportunities to increase wellness tourism in the country. We need to handhold and collaborate so that the tourism industry bounces back smoothly."

Charters: A tough sell even today

They are high in demand, thanks to COVID-19, but charter flights are a tough job to pull off. Amidst lack of clarity about state and country-wide quarantine protocols and permissions, operators have to jump many hurdles to get the aircraft off the tarmac.

Hazel Jain

Even as one of the oldest charter solutions provider in the world since 1973, Chapman Freeborn faces many challenges - and air chartering both passenger and cargo charters is its core business. **Shailendra Seth**, Country Manager - India, Chapman Freeborn, says, "Our biggest challenge is the permissions and government approvals for charters as there are strict protocols and quarantine rules for

each country, although the Indian government has been very helpful on this." The good news is that the company is getting several requests for repatriation of foreign nationals stuck in India and also Indians stuck abroad. It is mainly for countries which are not covered under the air bubbles. "We see this business grow in the future as the customer becomes more conscious of the health and safety aspects," Seth surmises.

Echoing a similar sentiment is **Santosh M Punjabi**, CEO, Re-



gional Director of Travel business (India, Saudi Arabia & Afghanistan) SatguruTravel, that has just concluded a charter flight from Delhi to Nairobi and from Mumbai to Lagos for

repatriation. He says, "A lot of Indians now want to go back to their work place. The challenge in conducting charters is getting the necessary approvals from various government authorities."

A majority of their clients are corporate and they sell via a strong network of agents across India. "Charter business is something we could do in the near future, although we would really like to see normal schedules start. But the traffic for charters is not going to be leisure at all," Punjabi adds.

Price as a factor

The cost of chartered flights is also a key element in the demand and supply see-saw. **Ranjeet Das**, President, Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA),

says, "Charters from certain dedicated markets in a controlled manner may counter-balance the slowdown post-COVID. If the airlines are willing, some tour operators who have been bringing groups to Northeast India can be encouraged to operate groups through air charters on a regular basis. Northeast has high potential as a preferred destination. However, the bottom line will be to be able to offer the most competitive pricing by these airlines for the chartered flights."

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Should we open Goa hotels?

According to the President of Small & Medium Hotels Associations in Goa, its members are looking to open their doors only by 2021, considering high operating bills even with miniscule or zero occupancies.

Hazel Jain

While the star category hotels in Goa are seeing some guest check-ins, the small and medium hotels in the UT are rolling under mounting water and electricity bills with almost zero occupancy.



Serafino Cota
President, Small & Medium Hotels Associations

Serafino Cota, President, Small & Medium Hotels Associations, says, "Our members don't want to keep their hotels open anymore. What is happening in Goa is that while the government is trying to show that it is opening the state to tourism, at the same time, it is not extending any help to us. Even if we get one guest with great difficulty for a few days, the government marks the hotel as 'operational' and then they start charging you for full electricity, water bill, etc., so people prefer to close it altogether."

Cota is also a hotel owner but he is now looking at doing agriculture for the time being. "There is no scope for business

right now. It will take some time. If you really want to open things up and the economy to grow, then you also have to help the businesses stay open. The government is just looking to charge the hotels for everything. We are not asking for dole or anything. But at least be fair with us, we can't afford to pay the water and electricity bills with a single guest. When there is no guest, that means there is no consumption, but the rule in Goa is that even if one guest is there, we are charged for minimum consumption," Cota adds.

He explains that minimum consumption is not the same as

actual consumption. "Earlier, we could afford to pay bills on minimum consumption because we had business. Now, for not consuming the minimum electricity we are still being charged. Our bills are coming with the remark 'minimum consumption' fee, which is quite high," Cota adds. For example,

Even if we get one guest for a few days, the government marks the hotel as 'operational' and then they start charging full electricity, water bill, etc., so people prefer to close it altogether

if a hotel is normally using 100 units, the minimum consumption is fixed at say 50 units. But with one or two guests, hotels can't even manage to use one unit. "The government did give us a 50 per cent waiver on

electricity duty charges, but that is not very high anyway. So we have decided to open only in September 2021," he says.

No charters this year

Cota shares that even the charter companies are not showing any interest in coming to Goa. "The cases are increasing. Also, charters require a lot of permissions and they have to work out a schedule three to four months in advance. So far there is no information of any charters. I expect Goa to be at peak in November 2020 in terms of number of cases," he says.

The bottom line is, he says, that they want guests to be safe, staff to be safe, and the people of Goa to be safe. "We have a policy that anything we do has to be in the interest of the community. We have to control the infection rate and we would rather have a better business later than get dangerous business now. When people move around, the infection is bound to rise," Cota adds.

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VIEWPOINT

Virtually impossible

When and why do people travel?

It is important to understand 'why' people travel. For instance, 'when' preparing to attend a destination wedding, people also, on the side-line, may enlist the things they would want to see and do while they are there. A wedding, a conference, an event invite thus induces in them the desire to see a destination some more, try its food, witness its culture and indulge in its offerings.

But, today, the scenario has drastically changed with virtual events being all the hullabaloo.

COVID-19 has set the global MICE industry back by millions of dollars, even though some organisers are mustering the courage to continue with their planned events. Some others, like the World Travel Market in London, have set the ball rolling by hosting the show in both formats - an in-person event followed by a virtual conference. There is no perfect combination and there is no right answer. However, the only fact that remains is that if the MICE industry is unable to host events today and continues to suffer from a rapid downturn, tourism, too, will suffer immensely. The MICE sector is unlikely to fully recover before 2024; some of the bigger conferences and shows may still get by, albeit with strict safety and hygiene protocols in place, but the smaller ones may vanish altogether.

A more massive loss in tourism receipts for years to come is on the horizon and recovery seems bleak. COVID-19 may have accelerated digital trends, but its subsequent impact on an already ailing tourism industry will be immense. If MICE-induced tourism is to be saved, subsequently saving several jobs and economies, MICE as an industry cannot cease to exist, not even in the short term.

There will be no better way out from this state of affairs than the development and circulation of a vaccine, but even that doesn't seem like a possibility anytime soon.

Thus, before we celebrate the birth of virtual events, we must **STOP** to think of its impact on economies and the tourism industry. **Are we prepared to incur the loss when the global tourism industry hangs by a thread?**

Safeguard your interests

With focus on sustainable business operations, industry players are advised to focus on identification and retention of key talent. Hasty layoffs can have a ripple effect on business. **Dheeraj Nair**, Partner at J Sagar Associates, offers a simple understanding of contracts.

The hospitality industry, particularly, is a very individual-driven industry with a lot of business either coming or getting retained due to the personal equation developed between staff members and customers. Hence, loss of key talent also comes with the risk of loss of business and the apprehension of losing proprietary information such as client lists, marketing strategies and other confidential information. Ordinarily, in cases where former employees indulge in any such activities, if they want to challenge their termination, or make any post-employment claim, the only recourse available is filing a civil suit for injunctive reliefs or damages. This, of course, is the litigious route of safeguarding the confidential and proprietary information. Instead, it is advisable to have a precautionary approach in this regard by ensuring that the engagement contract with the employees has the requisite safeguards.

Non-compete clauses

Section 27 of the Indian Contract Act, 1872 declares an agreement to be void if it is in restraint of trade. Indian courts have consistently taken a view that employees cannot be restrained from working for competition post-resignation or termination. Non-compete clauses are enforceable only during the term of employment, and at best during the notice period. This leads to a major concern for most employers when a key employee exits a company to join a competitor, as there is always a threat that the ex-employee will share and divulge confidential information of the ex-employer which may include business strategies, client lists and employee data. While the law seeks to protect an ex-employee, courts have also struck a balance so as to prevent an ex-employee from sharing the confidential information of its former employer, by deciding on aspects such as non-solicitation of clients. Therefore, employment contracts should clearly steer clear of having non-

compete clauses for employees which will never be enforceable post-employment and instead, concentrate on the information and data that needs to be protected by the employer.

Confidentiality & Non-solicitation clauses

Confidentiality clauses prevent an employee from disseminating confidential and proprietary information which is exclusive to the business or knowledge of the employer, such as client lists, trade information, etc. Non-solicitation clauses prevent a former employee from inducing clients and employees of the former employer for his personal benefit in his own venture or for his new employer.

Employment contracts should clearly steer clear of having non-compete clauses for employees which will never be enforceable post-employment

While these clauses can be enforced by the employee during the employment of the person, the post-termination enforceability of these clauses is based on the facts and circumstances in each individual case depending on how the organisation is able to define what protected information is. Employment contracts are often taken for granted with the impression that they will never litigate an employment dispute with its employees or employers. These contractual arrangements have recently gained more prominence than ever before. With the distressed economic condition of this industry and hostile lay-offs becoming a reality, there are going to be numerous anguished employees who may explore opportunities with competitors by using their former organisation's proprietary infor-

Termination clauses

Termination clauses in agreements need to contain watertight provisions to ensure that employments can be terminated without any legal obstacle. To ensure that termination clauses exhaustively cover all aspects, the following provisions are necessitated in these agreements:

With cause: Typically, an employment contract indicates the obligations and duties of an employee with a provision for the employer to initiate suitable action, including termination, in the event of breach of such listed responsibilities. Such provisions ought to contain an exhaustive list of these obligations and duties and comprehensively lay down the termination procedure in case of breach.

Assessable performance standards: In addition to the duties of an employee, termination clauses must exhaustively detail the assessable performance standards for the employee, such as determination of targets, conformance to certain industry standards, etc. Such a provision allows there to be quantifiable and reasonable basis for termination, and thus preventing scope of challenge. This clause must naturally empower the employer to issue a notice of termination in cases of non-adherence.

No-cause terminations: No-cause termination clauses are those whereby an employer may terminate services even beyond the terms and conditions of the employment contract. This provision is premised on the principle that employment contracts are inherently determinable in nature and are thus, unenforceable under the Specific Reliefs Act, 1963.

mation as a lucrative incentive. This may also lead to employees filing wrongful termination cases, defamation suits, frivolous police complaints, public interest litigations by Human Rights' Commissions, NGOs, etc. Employment cases most often get settled out of court because the employer-organisation seeks to protect its goodwill and manage the public/media optics, or it exceeds the spending power of the employee to survive the litigation. In either case, litigating an employment dispute is a lengthy and financially draining processes, which neither party can afford today.

There is no foresight on the duration of the lockdown or the curtailment of COVID-19, resulting in unpredictable business prospects. Since that aspect is currently beyond the control of the industry, it is advisable for industry members to mitigate any other potential financial losses and take this down-time to revisit their organisation's

employment policies and re-assess its existing and future employment contracts to account for requisite safeguards and incorporate adequate enforceable rights.



Dheeraj Nair
Partner, J Sagar Associates



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(This article is co-authored by Vishrutji Sahni, an associate at J Sagar Associates. Views expressed are the author's own. The publication may or may not subscribe to the same.)



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Travel trends from key markets

It has become imperative for inbound players to now make informed decisions before promoting India to the rest of the world and ensure that they channelise resources into a rapier-pointed marketing plan. Experts from India's key source markets share key travel behaviours.

US MARKET

Keen on new destinations and tourism products

Focusing on the inbound traffic from India's biggest source markets, **Alan Merschen**, Partner (International Insights) at MMGY Global and Chairperson, Travel Consul, says, "Americans are likely to consider new hotels – another strong indicator of an openness that we haven't seen before. Over 90 per cent will investigate new destinations. The important thing to remember is this will probably be through consumers making the requests."



Alan Merschen
Partner (International Insights), MMGY Global and Chairperson, Travel Consul

UK MARKET

Fewer but longer holidays, for which India is ideal

Amanda Hills, Founder and CEO, Hills Balfour, says that UK travellers will be looking to travel for a longer time to reduce the risk of travelling. "What India offers really matches what UK is looking for. Travel is in our DNA and annual holidays are sacrosanct to us. Many of us will prioritise travel and we anticipate huge growth in travel movement to places like India. About 64 per cent of all UK travellers that we recently surveyed have said that those who expect to travel will expect to travel the same amount in the future," she adds.



Amanda Hills
Founder and CEO Hills Balfour

ITALIAN MARKET

Italians are preferring back-to-nature activities

Massimo Tocchetti, President of marketing and communications agency AIGO, says, "As the fourth-largest European market for India, Italians are preferring back-to-nature activities and luxury products. The North of Italy accounts for 65% of total travel expenditure, with Lombardy having the highest spending, followed by Lazio and Emilia Romagna. This is the time for India to reinvent not just as a destination but also the time for it to reinvent its relationships."



Massimo Tocchetti
President AIGO

GERMAN MARKET

Germans want to travel abroad despite the virus

The reputation of Germany as the nation with the world's keenest travellers is still intact, according to a survey on travel in times of corona conducted by IPK International and ITB Berlin. Interest among Germans in outbound travel is above average with over 80% still wanting to travel this year, but travel types and destinations vary greatly. Improving their perceived safety in destinations has top priority.



Inputs by Hazel Jain

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Hotels finally begin unlocking

In June, the government announced the first Unlock that permitted businesses including hotels to re-open in a phased manner. Since then, two more Unlocks have further opened up the sector. But have the hotels seen any traffic? Some industry stakeholders help us understand where demand lies and how it can be tapped.

“It’s still early days. The industry got the permission to open recently and that too with limitations. With the unlocking we have seen some more activity on the occupancy front. However, it is going to take some time to get good numbers. We have a huge locational advantage. A lot of corporates operate from Hiranandani Gardens and we have a captive audience. Training manpower has been a challenge.”



Atul Upadhyay
Vice President (Operations)
Pride Hotels

“The biggest challenge while reopening will be the implementation of new standards, which will require developing a new set of skills in terms of cleaning, disinfection and inspection. The current crisis has also taught us the value of being prepared for pandemics. MICE will take a little more time to recover but once it does, we are hoping to get higher demand as some of the international events will shift to India due to the travel restrictions.”



Punish B Sharma
Vice President (Operations)
The Fern Hotels & Resorts

“Nearly 77% of our guests are domestic, thus our dependence on the international inbound traffic is limited. The hotel has by now hosted a healthy number of Indian weddings (respecting the 50-guest limit) and we have also been getting requests for rooms from airlines dealing in cargo and private jets for their crew. We were able to capture this business as we are close to the airport. There is slow percolation of corporate travel with request for boardrooms.”



Prantik Ray
Area General Manager
Sayaji Indore

“The prime focus should be on guest safety and sanitisation. Sticking to brand USP, customising packages and promotions, focusing on transit travellers, engaging with on-line channel partners and targeting less-impacted corporate bodies are a few strategies to boost occupancies. Recovery will be prolonged by at least 3 to 4 quarters with normalcy around two years away. Small-scale business will recover first whereas group or MICE will be the last to recover.”



Rubin Cherian
General Manager
Novotel Hyderabad Airport

“We are slowly seeing an increase in intra-state travellers visiting our properties. We are hopeful that, in time, inter-state travellers will also return. The biggest challenge the industry will face in the coming months will be to establish trust amongst clientele. We are aware that some things have forever changed, and it will be imperative to ensure safety measures and protocols to suit the new reality.”



Gaurav Sinha
Director of Operations
JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru

“A positive outlook has made us look beyond the conventional way of opportunity. We are seeing development in terms of social events and staycations, but MICE will take longer than expected. For large events, we have seen some possible light with enquiries for Q4 of 2021. So business continuity is a severe challenge. We are taking all measures to hold on to talent.”



Shruti Shibulal
CEO and Director
Tamara Leisure Experiences

Inputs by Steena Joy

MMT gives access to agents

In order to expand its distribution reach, the OTA giant has now given access to its entire inventory to travel agents via the myPartner platform. Access will be granted at no fee for the time being, this being the only gateway for them to MakeMyTrip’s (MMT) inventory.

Hazel Jain

MakeMyTrip.com has launched a new platform that will give travel agents access to its entire inventory. **Rajesh Magow**, Co-Founder and Group CEO, MakeMyTrip, says, “We have built a robust inventory over the years, especially in the accommodation space both in the domestic as well as international market. The idea behind this new product is to give access to all this rich content to



Rajesh Magow
Co-Founder and Group CEO,
MakeMyTrip

travel agents, which is not necessarily available freely in the market today. A lot of people are seeing it more

as an opportunity to be able to work together and ride on the work that we have done in terms of technology and content, and leverage that for their own clients. Hopefully, this will help them bring back their own business sooner.”

He adds that with this new product, the travel agents can upgrade their technology and ride

the digital wave. “This B2B2C foray will also allow agents to use our technology to service their customers. They will now



Vipul Prakash
Chief Operating Officer
MakeMyTrip

Explaining the commission structure for this, **Vipul Prakash**, Chief Operating Officer, MakeMyTrip, says, “Our policy is very clear on this.

We are just bringing them the inventory at a particular rate and they can decide how much they want to charge and communication will be between them and their customers

– Vipul Prakash

decide how much they want to sell it for to their client. We don’t want to dictate or interfere with their business model. We are just bringing them the inventory at a particular rate and they can decide how much they want to charge and the entire communication will be between them and their customers.”

With myPartner, agents will get a user log-in and it will be at no fee at the moment. Prakash adds, “We are not going to encourage any offline changes. The system takes care of this. We have perfected this over the last few years with our B2C business. If they need to make any booking changes for their clients, it can be made on myPartner by the agents and our back-end will take care of the rest.”

be able to access around 77,000 hotels in India via our platform, and if we include alternative accommodation, that number goes up to 100,000 hotels. Internationally, we have around 500,000 properties listed as of today,” Magow adds.

This is the travel agents’ business and we are just playing a role of giving them a service. So the hotel will charge a rate to the travel agent and they can

What myPartner offers agents

- ❖ Makes MMT’s entire inventory available to them
- ❖ No need to talk to hotels to make booking changes
- ❖ Personalisation of itineraries
- ❖ One-click access to all booking and payment records
- ❖ Invoices available at a single click

A lot of people are seeing it more as an opportunity to ride on the work that we have done in terms of technology and content, and leverage that for their own clients

– Rajesh Magow

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Travel agents to be preferred

A new Travelport research has revealed that travellers in India will prefer to book through a travel agent now more than ever. The report also delves on some key trends it sees among Indian travellers, including their being safety-conscious. In fact, demand for almost every safety measure is the highest in India among the countries surveyed.

 TT Bureau

Travelport, in its new independent research, has revealed that travellers in India are now ready to consider booking domestic and international trips, but only if airlines, airports, hotels and car rental companies collectively implement 10 different safety measures throughout

their journey, which includes fully flexible or refundable flight tickets. Another finding of the research was that the demand for almost every safety measure is highest in India of the five countries surveyed. It was also found that travellers found it critical that during all parts of the travel journey, they must have social distancing rules, mandatory use of face masks,

and ready access to sanitising gel or wipes, face masks and gloves. Another revelation was that additional measures still need to be implemented by airlines, airports, hotels and car rental companies to fully restore consumer confidence.

Travelport's Guide to Recovery report also revealed. It also highlighted that globally, this

trend was much more evident among millennials (44 per cent). Overall, around three-fourth of travellers in India (73 per cent, compared to 65 per cent globally) who claimed this said it's because they feel travel agents are best placed to provide them with the latest travel safety information.

✦ Air travel

More than half the travellers said that to consider booking a flight, they need to know in advance that a wide array of specific measures have been implemented by both the airport and airline. At the airport, these include temperature checks on arrival (66 per cent), plexi-glass at check-in desks (58 per cent), and managed boarding by row (56 per cent). When it comes to airlines, measures in high demand include enhanced cleaning (71 per cent) and disinfection (70 per cent), further

A clearer picture is a must-have today

"Travellers' safety and consistent communication of respective safety measures, including frequent modifications, is of utmost importance to restore confidence in travel. Travelport's latest study is a commendable step in this direction, one that will help travel agents understand ongoing procedures and identify opportunities to offer better experience to end traveller."



Sandeep Dwivedi
COO, InterGlobe Technology Quotient

temperature checks before boarding (66 per cent), socially distanced seating (66 per cent), and fully flexible or refundable tickets (64 per cent).

✦ Hotels

The study revealed that for travellers to have the confidence to book a hotel room, the majority want six specific safety measures in place including enhanced cleaning (73 per

cent) and guest services accessible via their mobile phone (51 per cent).

✦ Car rental

Also, it was revealed that to book a car rental, majority of travellers want five key safety measures in place both at rental destinations and in vehicles, including contactless car collection and drop-off (55 per cent).

| | Airports | | Airlines | | Hotels | | Car Rentals | |
|--|----------|--------|----------|-------|--------|-------|-------------|-------|
| | Global | India | Global | India | Global | India | Global | India |
| 1. Enhanced cleaning and/or disinfection | Global | Global | 71% | 72% | 73% | 74% | 72% | 73% |
| 2. Access to sanitizing gel/wipes, face masks and gloves | 69% | 76% | 61% | 65% | 70% | 77% | 66% | 75% |
| 3. Social distancing | 68% | 80% | 66% | 76% | 66% | 78% | 64% | 77% |
| 4. Temperature checks | 66% | 74% | 66% | 75% | — | — | — | — |
| 5. Mandatory wearing of face masks | 64% | 80% | 64% | 79% | 64% | 77% | 61% | 74% |
| 6. Fully flexible or refundable tickets | — | — | 64% | 61% | — | — | — | — |
| 7. Improved air filtration | — | — | 62% | 62% | — | — | — | — |
| 8. Contactless services | 58% | 65% | — | — | 58% | 68% | 55% | 63% |
| 9. Plexi-glass at check-in | 56% | 62% | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| 10. Plexi-glass at check-in | 56% | 63% | — | — | — | — | — | — |

KTO focus on luxe experiences

Expecting a rise in demand for luxurious experiences in the near future, Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) has been conducting a series of webinars focusing on unique destinations and activities, some of which can only be booked through a DMC or a travel agent.

 Hazel Jain

Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) has been conducting a series of webinars for the travel trade, and one of them focused on luxury options and experiences available in South Korea. The main aim behind this was to provide agents a competitive edge in the coming times as a lot of the activities can neither be booked online nor through an OTA. If clients want to include them in their

itinerary, they will have to book through an agent. This webinar also saw some participants joining in from the Middle East.

Luxury travel in South Korea is being highlighted as KTO believes that going forward, travellers would prefer exclusive experiences where they can have privacy and an itinerary that allows them to travel at their own pace without being a part of larger groups. The options that were highlighted in

this webinar included curated experiences in South Korea where physical distancing can be maintained and places that have the best of health and hygiene protocols in place.

Traditional stays: Hanoks

An exclusive and unique stay for families and solos, hanoks are private without many hotel staff or guests. These traditional Korean stays come with the comfort of modern amenities and are available in various locations across South Korea. Hanoks are centuries-old but maintained and preserved well till date and are ideal for families with children as well. All hanoks have in-built floor heating system, making it very comfortable even for winter holidays.

Traditional cuisine

Visitors can experience the authentic local cuisine and

appreciate Korea's unique flavours with a private food experience across the country, both for vegetarians as well as non-vegetarians. Courses range from 14-150 items.



Unique activities

The next section of the presentation was dedicated to activities that can be safely undertaken by travellers. One of them is visiting Korea's museums that do not involve large groups of

people. Some of the museums are private in nature and can be done with appointment only, escorted by the staff or the curator of the place, and where all safety measures are in place.

have been designated as a national heritage.

A unique sightseeing option includes a visit to the Panmunjom – the demilitarised zone where leaders of North and South Korea meet for official purposes. Other premium products include yacht experiences, cruises, wellness experiences, etc. Self-drive options are also easily available for Indian visitors on international licence.

Webinar Alert!

The presentation, a DMC list, and a MICE support document are available to download on **TravTalk's** social media platforms. The next webinar will be conducted on September 4, and will focus on unique educational tours in South Korea.



Testing key to get events back

Daniel Gidney, CEO of Lancashire Cricket and Emirates Old Trafford, outlines the need for better testing arrangements before a full-blown return to non-socially distanced events can be considered, as well as a need for clearer government guidance on measures required for events.

Hazel Jain

Has Emirates Old Trafford opened for matches or events?

We have proposed a re-opening of the events sector in the UK from October 1. However, Emirates Old Trafford has just staged three test matches this summer between England and the West Indies – the first international cricket fixtures to be played since the pandemic. Emirates Old Trafford has also unveiled a 'Safe in One Place' initiative that highlights the measures required to host events in line with current government guidelines. It is based on our experience that we



Daniel Gidney
CEO, Lancashire Cricket and Emirates Old Trafford

gained turning Emirates Old Trafford into a bio-secure environment. This has provided us with a blueprint to move forward and understand what events will look like in the future. We are effectively currently the

only large events venue in the country that is operating, and have developed strong operational discipline.

Tell us about this guideline and is it available for the industry at large?

It is a document outlining key learnings and best practices for events industry professionals to download via the Emirates Old Trafford website. The guid-



ance includes the very latest practical information to ensure event organisers and venue operators in the UK understand how they can work and host business events and conferences, while keeping both guests and staff safe.

What challenges do you foresee for the events industry to re-open?

I believe that testing is key to getting businesses and events back on track. Testing gives people confidence. We need government approvals on

90-minute testing kits which will be a game-changer. It's not a silver bullet; you still need a number of mitigations. I would still have thermo-screening, take the delegate details for test and trace, still have one-way systems, hand gels, PPE and masks and, of course, social distancing. Ultimately, when people are paying for delegate, exhibitor or sponsorship spaces at an event, the cost of a single 90-minute testing kit is between £100 and £150 here in the UK and that might become a cost of the industry.

Testing is key to getting businesses and events back on track. We need government approvals on 90-minute testing kits which will be a game changer

About Emirates Old Trafford

Emirates Old Trafford is a multi-purpose venue that can cater from 10 to 2,000 people from small meetings to large exhibitions. It also has a four-star Hilton Garden Inn hotel with 150 rooms, 85 of which overlook the famous Lancashire Cricket pitch.

Tourism Breaking News

- Taj Mahal and Agra Fort likely to reopen by mid-September
- EEMA forms task force, proposes SOPs for different MICE segments
- Air travel may become expensive with hike in aviation security fee
- TAFI cuts subscription fee by 25% considering slowdown in business
- FAITH asks MOT to action negative American travel advisory to India
- DGCA starts safety audit of airports and domestic airlines
- Dusit International to re-enter India with property in Kolkata
- Extend moratorium and relax Unlocking-4 norms: FHRAI

COORG CALLING

Nestled on the slopes of the Western Ghats, Coorg (also called Kodagu) the land of Coffee, Cardamom, Colonels & the Cauvery, aptly dubbed as 'the Scotland of India'.

Rates are valid till 15Dec'2020. *T&C Apply

Amritara Ambatty Greens Resort
Includes 02 Nights accommodation with Breakfast & WiFi
From ₹ 8,499 pp*

WelcomHeritage Ayatana
Includes 02 Nights accommodation with Breakfast & WiFi
From ₹ 12,649 pp*

Coorg Wilderness Resort
Includes 02 Nights accommodation with Breakfast, Usage of health club & swimming pool & WiFi
From ₹ 15,499 pp*

Evolve Back Chikkana Halli Estate
Includes 02 Nights accommodation with All meals & Nature based activities.
From ₹ 16,499 pp*

Taj Madikeri Resort & Spa
Includes 02 Nights accommodation with Breakfast & WiFi
From ₹ 17,799 pp*

The Tamara
Includes 02 Nights accommodation with All meals, Guided treks and plantation walk, Coffee Experience & Use of Steam and Sauna.
From ₹ 20,649 pp*



OTTILA INTERNATIONAL PVT. LTD.

Mumbai (Registered Office & Corporate Headquarters)

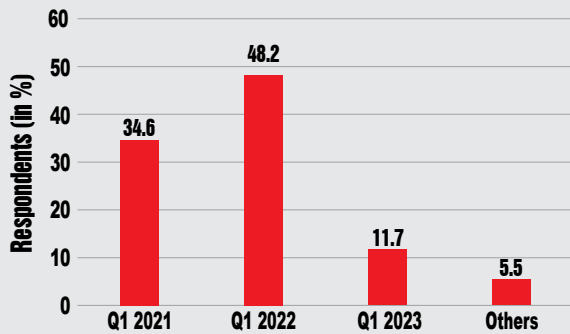
Ahmedabad | Bengaluru | Chennai | Coimbatore | Hyderabad | Indore | Kochi | Kolkata | New Delhi | Pune | Nasik

CEO Survey: Into the future!

The in-depth TRAVTALK CEO Survey, conducted across the varied segments of India's tourism industry, offers an insight into the future of the travel business by asking industry leaders pertinent questions, and helping making better sense of the entire situation today and a possible scenario tomorrow.

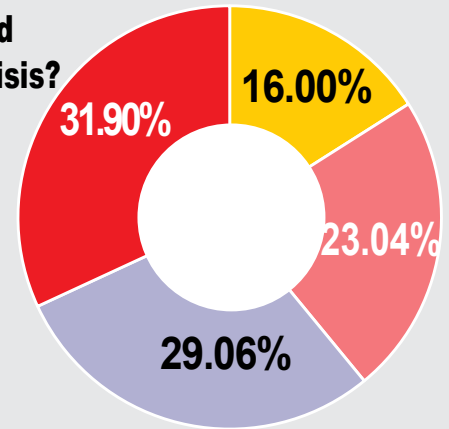


When will economic activity return to the level it was before the pandemic?



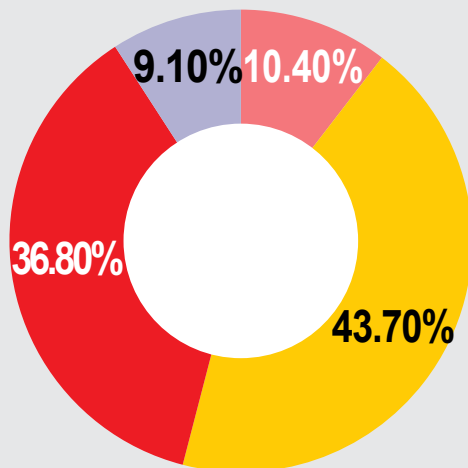
Have you laid off or furloughed workers in response to the crisis?

- Yes, less than 20%
- Yes, 20% - 50%
- Yes, more than 50%
- No layoffs



When will at least 90% of your workforce have returned to their usual workplace?

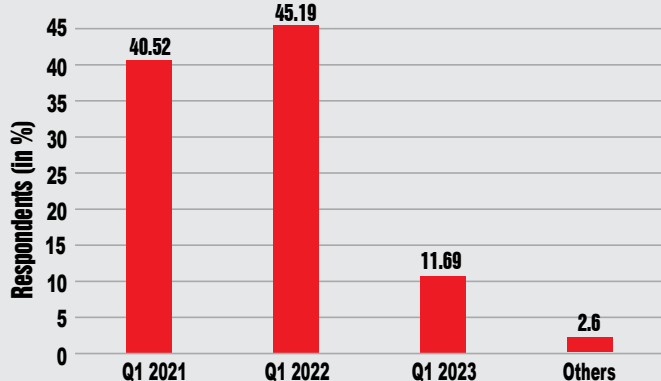
- Sep 20
- Jan 21
- Jun 21
- Never



In January 2021, how do you expect your company's total employment to compare to what it was in January 2020?

| | |
|--------------------|--------|
| Significantly less | 41.71% |
| Slightly less | 26.42% |
| Roughly the same | 24.09% |
| Slightly more | 5.18% |
| Much more | 2.6% |

When will business travel at your company return to the level it was before the pandemic?



After the pandemic passes, how will travel and tourism have changed?

65.63% say domestic travel will rise

64.06% say travellers will pay more for hygienic and safe options

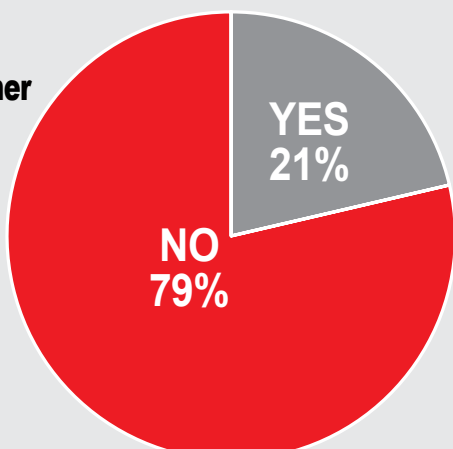
51.30% say agents will become more important than online booking portals

45.83% say business travel will become less frequent

9.11% say there will be other changes

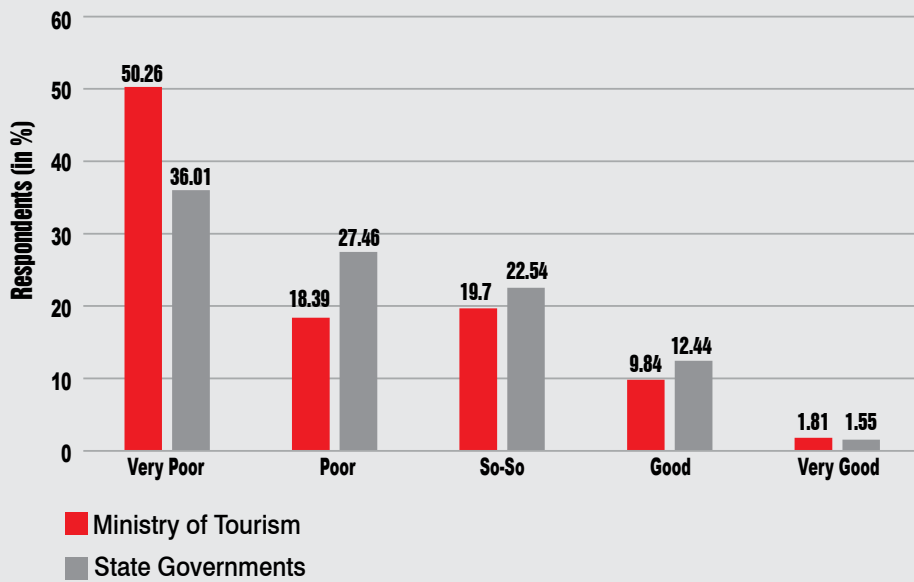
(Note: Respondents had the choice to select multiple options)

Have you started another business during this pandemic?



Please rate the performance of the following in addressing the crisis:

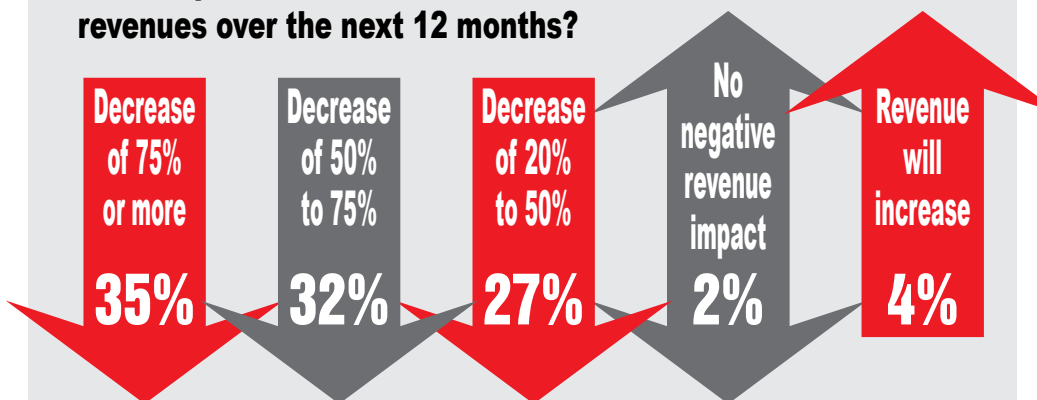
- ❖ Ministry of Tourism
- ❖ State Governments



What is the single most important thing you have learnt during the pandemic?

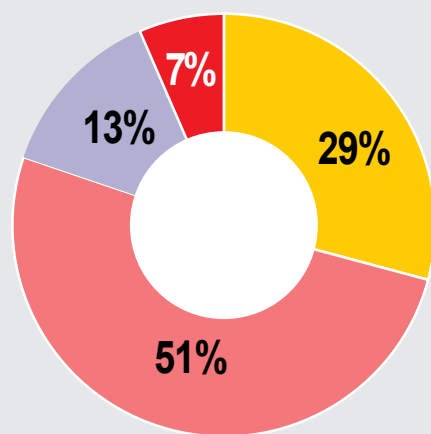


What impact will COVID-19 have on travel and tourism revenues over the next 12 months?



Is your business strategy still relevant?

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- To a minor extent
- Not at all



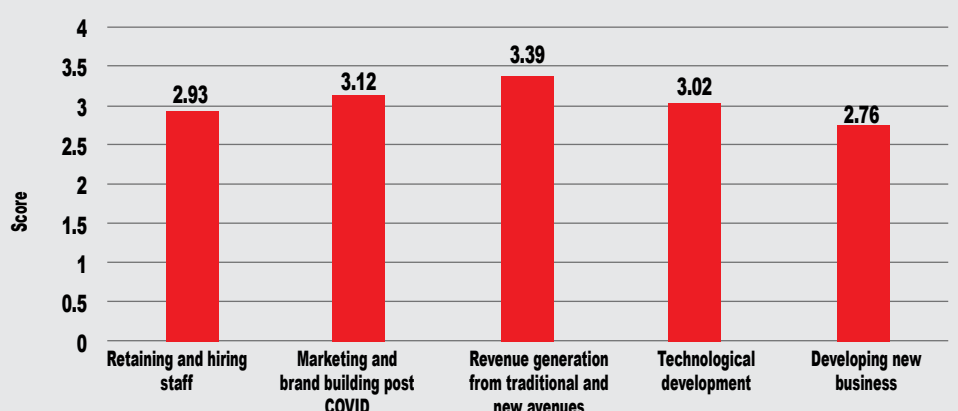
What change will you bring to your business due to this pandemic?

- 32.4% say they will invest more in technology
- 25.3% say they will employ less people or keep employee costs down
- 21.15% say they will keep costs, other than staff costs, down
- 16.97% say they will change how they engage with their customers
- 4.18% say business will not change at all

Which country or region do you see as presenting the best tourism opportunity next year?

| COUNTRY | REGION |
|-------------|----------------|
| India | Southeast Asia |
| Australia | Europe |
| New Zealand | Middle East |

What are your main priorities going forward?



SCB to host virtual round table for UIA

Seoul Convention Bureau (SCB) will make the annual Union of International Associations (UIA) Round Table in Asia-Pacific region virtual from September 17-18 this year in close partnership with companies in the Seoul MICE industry. The UIA Round Table Asia-Pacific is the first virtual round-table where the invited delegates listen to keynote speeches and panel discussions, participate in discussions on various issues, and join the networking activities at different virtual venues representing Seoul. The N Seoul Tower, Changdeokgung Palace, Seoul Botanic Garden, Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP), and Floating Island Convention have been selected to show the charms of Seoul to delegates on the virtual map. Seoul will present virtual tour videos introducing what makes the city a top-class MICE destination. Attendees can choose and watch these 360-degree VR videos that are arranged in different themes.

New-look RCI to reshape travel

With a fresh look and feel, RCI is powering a new kind of global travel network curated by forward-thinking travel experts. The new RCI experience goes beyond once-a-year timeshare exchange with enhanced product offerings for its nearly four million members around the world.

 Manas Dwivedi

Aimed to creating a new and enhanced 360-degree travel experience, vacation exchange company RCI has reinvented itself, allowing subscribing members to book all of their door-to-door travel needs in one place and benefit from exclusive pricing on hotels, car rentals, cruises, destination activities and more. **Paul Mulcahy**, Managing Director - APAC, India and EMEA, RCI, says that this brand re-launch has a fresh look and feel, to get members excited about travel. "RCI is now more than just an exchange company — it is a global travel network that connects owners to once-in-a-lifetime getaways from one spot: RCI.com. We are taking the best of our knowledge as industry leaders and supercharging it with forward-think-

ing additions to our portfolio. While this year there has been a constant change in the air, our commitment to travel, exchange and timeshare remains — in fact, it is stronger than ever," he shares.





Explaining the reason behind the re-branding, Mulcahy says, "We believe now is the time to accelerate innovation. The re-branding work supports the reinvention of every part of our portfolio and sets us up for growth for the next 10 years and beyond. Our affiliates, RCI members and guests still want to travel, and we remain committed to be their travel source for planning and booking.



Paul Mulcahy
Managing Director - APAC
India and EMEA, RCI

When they will be ready to travel, a new RCI will be there to help them." Additionally, RCI Platinum membership will provide greater discounts, upgrades and Priority Access to select exchange vacations and, of course, members continue to have access to their 4200+ affiliated properties. He adds, "Our aim with this relaunch is to allow our global member base of close to four million to travel and explore 110 countries, including India. In ad-

dition, they will also have access to use their deposit trading power (TP) and buy down the cost of already discounted hotels and

 Our member base will have access to their deposit trading power and buy down the cost of already discounted hotels and other accommodations 

other accommodations at more than 600,000 properties around the world."

Talking about the impact of rebranding on India, he says that RCI has planned a fo-

cused approach in the Indian market. "We will be paying special attention to our affiliated resort partners as they are very important to us. We will be offering competitive technology provided by ARN and will be delivering a new suite of services which enable custom travel and club solutions driven by leading digital technology. This will give RCI the ability to offer travellers a wide array of travel and lifestyle services through the delivery of an optimised booking engine, inventory at over 600,000 hotels and resorts, and competitive pricing.

Through this approach our aim is to expand the traditional idea of timeshare in India and reshape it into a global travel network curated by travel experts," shares Mulcahy. 

Realistic communication is key

Constant communication with FTOs and updating them about the situation in the country will go a long way in keeping trust alive. This, says **Kapil Goswamy**, Managing Director, Trans India Holidays, will prove to be a fruitful move for when travel restrictions do open and people begin to travel again.

COVID-19 is a black swan event for the entire world, and most so for the travel and tourism industry which is amongst the worst affected. Up until end February, things were quite normal and the industry was having a reasonably good year, but since then there has been nothing but gloom and uncertainty. While many of us remain cautiously optimistic

about tourism bouncing back in the current scenario, it does appear that it will take a year or perhaps even longer for things to return to normal. The Indian government, on its part, has done reasonably well in the handling of the pandemic, but sadly not so in the handling of what has so far been done for the tourism and hospitality industries, which have so far hardly seen anything

coming their way by way of financial support.

The opening of hotels in Delhi as well as several other states, and the formation of air bubbles with several countries, are of course steps in a positive direction. However, for tourism to even restart in a small and phased manner, the government needs to take several steps, including restarting the issuance of tourist visas and spreading awareness that India is not really an unsafe destination to travel to. This would be the key to restoring confidence among travellers.

The role we play

We, on our part, have been in constant touch with our FTOs and have been updating them with the situation on the ground here in India. In fact, all our communication has been stressing that India is not really an unsafe destination for tourism and we now have the COVID situation in

control. By way of comparison and to project India in good light, we've even sent communication to our FTOs explaining that given our size and population,

 The industry has been doing all it can to project India in a positive light. It is perhaps now time for the government to actively restart promoting India as being a safe destination for travellers 

the comparisons we've shared are somewhat as per the tourism hotspots in India.

Delhi, the most frequently used tourism gateway city, is among the worst-affected and sits at 1,60,000 cases with a popu-

lation of over 20 million. Rajasthan, a major attraction for travellers and a state that houses Jaipur, Jodhpur and Udaipur, has about 70,000 cases, with a population of over 80 million. Similarly, Uttar Pradesh, the state that is home to both the Taj Mahal in Agra and the holy city of Varanasi, has 1,90,000 cases with a population in excess of 240 million (actually more than the combined population of five of the most populous European countries). Goa, India's most popular beach destination, has only 14,000 cases with a population of over 1.5 million. Similarly, Madhya Pradesh, which is home to most of India's best-known tiger reserves, has a case count of 54,000, with a population of 85 million. While this total case count does seem high, when you look at it in terms of an over 76 per cent recovery rate and only a less than two per cent fatality rate, the situation in India isn't that

bad and it is certainly time for a phased reopening of tourism.

The industry in itself has been doing all it can to project India in a positive light, and all stakeholders, i.e. hotels, resorts, transport providers, etc., have adopted new and enhanced cleanliness and sanitisation standards. It is perhaps now time for the government to actively restart promoting India via online and offline channels, as being a safe destination for travellers.



Kapil Goswamy
MD, Trans India Holidays

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



Creativity will help survive

Rupinder Brar, Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism, has said that two important aspects of their discussions with the travel industry have been ensuring safety of travellers and harmonisation of protocols across states. She also claims that marketing the country as a safe destination has already begun.



Rupinder Brar
Additional Director General
Ministry of Tourism

Nisha Verma

Rupinder Brar has said that from their discussion with industry stakeholders, it has emerged that the most significant enabler in times to come is safety and that there is a need for harmonisation of quarantine rules across states. "People have to feel safe to travel, which not only requires the safety protocols to be in place, but what is equally important is to create the perception of safety, for which the government, as-

sociations, industry and citizens should work together. In order to ease travel, we also need to create harmonisation between rules of different states, based on local conditions," she said speaking at a FICCI conference. The Ministry has started mild messaging about the destination already. "From our end, we have started sending the messaging out in terms of creatives. As we gradually open hotels, monuments and tourism sites, it's extremely important to also

We will have to look at some interesting packages and itineraries. Creative things need to be done

have the right equipment in place, such as sanitisers," she shared.

Brar also revealed that MOT officials along with the Tourism

Minister and TAAI President had a meeting with Minister of Civil Aviation (MoCA) Hardeep Singh Puri. "We were happy to know that more than 90,000 (now over 1 million) people are travelling every day and that the confidence of people is beginning to trickle down by word of mouth."

Domestic travel

The ADG feels that smart packaging will be needed to boost domestic travel now. "We've had a lot of domestic travel-

lers earlier, but the focus on converting outbound travellers from India and bringing them into the fold of travelling within India is a great challenge as well as an opportunity. Thus, we will have to look at some interesting packages and itineraries. Creative things need to be done. In fact, 50 per cent of states have already responded with one to two-night itineraries out of major cities. When we are a little safer in terms of COVID, we will make 'smart packaging' of all

itineraries," she said, adding that with millennials looking for adventure, MOT wants the industry to join them to create itineraries that promote lesser-known regions as well as those that promote adventure, where social distancing can be maintained.

Charters will not be for leisure

► Contd from page 1

This is where the HNIs come in. Jay Bhatia, MD, Tulsidas Khimji Holidays and VP of TAAI, feels that the demand



Shailendra Seth
Country Manager - India
Chapman Freeborn

created during initial lockdown has died down. "However, now that people know that charter



Santosh M Punjabi
CEO, Regional Dir - Travel (India, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan) SatguruTravel

Is availability of aircraft an issue?

According to Jitul Mehta, Managing Director, VP Travels and Chairman of TAFI Western India, small business jets are in demand right now, mainly from the Gulf and nearby countries. "There are a new set of customers for charters - those who fly First Class, business-



Ranjeet Das
President, Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA)

18 per cent GST on total value of charter kills our profit. If the GST is between two to five per cent, then the volume of charters will go up. We have been offering charter service to our clients

Charters from certain dedicated markets in a controlled manner may counter-balance the slowdown post COVID
- Ranjeet Das

since the last few years, but the volume was low. However, since COVID-19, there has been rising demand. We expect this to remain in demand permanently," Mehta says optimistically.

Meanwhile, Marc Asia has also been conducting charters for its partners in Oman. Tour Oman, a DMC in Oman and part of Travel Point, is represented by Marc Asia in India.



Jay Bhatia
Managing Director, Tulsidas Khimji Holidays and VP, TAAI

Priya Rupani, Vice President (Sales & Marketing), Marc Asia, says, "Travel Point is operating chartered flights from cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Lucknow, Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi to and from Muscat. However, it's a tricky

There can be a new market created just for charters, provided the government looks into it more carefully and considers relaxing the regulations
- Jay Bhatia

and challenging venture as multiple interactions are required to be carried out with airlines, embassy officials, government departments in origin as well as destination city, and finally with passengers. Gathering data for travellers in a given

Sri Lanka keen on charters from India

"Sri Lanka has identified India and the Middle East as key market for luxury travellers and are working on various touch points when tourism resumes. We have almost 600 jets from India which are waiting to travel and for the country to open. We have sent out the proposal to the Cabinet on opening the country for tourists."



Kimari Fernando
Chairperson
Sri Lanka Tourism



Jitul Mehta
Managing Director, VP Travels and Chairman, TAFI Western India

format has been a daunting task, so is ensuring that all passengers comply with quarantine formalities at the destination. Charters can become a lucrative revenue earner for many in the future if one puts all jigsaw

If the GST is between two to five per cent, then the volume of charters will go up
- Jitul Mehta



Priya Rupani
VP (Sales & Marketing)
Marc Asia

Charters can become a lucrative revenue earner for many in the future if one understands the requirements and matches cost expectations
- Priya Rupani

pieces together, understands the requirements and matches cost expectations."

We see this business grow in the future as the customer becomes more conscious of the health and safety aspects

- Shailendra Seth

Charter business is something we could do in the near future, but the traffic for charters is not going to be leisure at all

- Santosh M Punjabi

flights can be booked easily through travel agents, the demand may return. There can be a new market created just for charters, provided the government looks into it more carefully and considers relaxing the regulations," he shares.

men, NRIs and family & friends who are more concerned about their safety. Our main challenge is the availability of aircraft. In India, we don't have so many small business jets and even if there are, it's in a different airport so the cost increases. Also,

New cruise brand - Antara

Hemant Mediratta has recently launched a new river cruise brand, Antara Luxury River Cruises. Joining the company as Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer, Mediratta has laid the agenda and a clear roadmap for expansion with new cruise ships and enhanced service offerings. He brings with him over two decades of hospitality experience and has earlier served as the Senior Vice President of Oberoi Hotels & Resorts. Speaking about the brand, he says, "Antara be-

came a source of inspiration for us to make a difference and take you on a journey along the spiritual rivers of India, to rediscover yourself and experience the joy of spending time with your loved ones in luxury. We want travel to be experiential and transformative, and this is our attempt with Antara".

Antara Cruises is one of India's leading luxury river cruising companies that owns and operates its fleet across the Indian rivers. The all-suite cruises take you to untouched



Hemant Mediratta
Co-founder and COO
Antara Luxury River Cruises

destinations along the Indian rivers while you experience the all-inclusive warm, personalised and unmatched Antara hospitality.

SriLankan is up and ready

SriLankan Airlines is all set to play a pivotal role in the reopening of tourism in Sri Lanka by instilling the confidence of flying in potential passengers. It has all safety and hygiene standards in place.



SriLankan Airlines will play a vital role in the country's economic recovery, as the island nation gears up to restart tourism. Sri Lanka's health and safety situation is now under control, and its national carrier is all set to revive operations. **Ashok Pathirage**, Chairman, SriLankan Airlines, has claimed that despite the challenges, they are excited about the reopening. "We have



Ashok Pathirage
Chairman, SriLankan Airlines

the new normal," he shares. In a bid to instil confidence in flying, SriLankan Airlines has

guidelines issued by local and global aviation and health & safety organisations such as the ICAO, IATA, EASA, WHO and Sri Lanka's Ministry of Health and Department of Civil Aviation. SriLankan will continue with its expansion goals for 2020, with plans to add destinations such as Sydney, Incheon and Cheng-



been working round the clock to adapt our operations to meet health and safety guidelines, and the challenging requirements of

implemented extensive protocols for health and safety on board its aircraft and across its terminal facilities as per the

We have been working round the clock to adapt our operations to meet health and safety guidelines, and the challenging requirements of the new normal

du to its network in the coming months. However, their main aim is to consolidate their position in key markets.

The sun also rises



Travco and Marc Asia that is handling the logistics for the Sunrisers Hyderabad team welcomes the players at Dubai for Indian Premier League 2020. This is the 13th season of the League, scheduled to be held between September 19 and November 10, 2020.

Getting off the tarmac

Three global experts share their perspective on how the aviation industry – aircraft, airports and passenger traffic – may look like in the coming months.

Aircraft Manufacturer

"We need to demystify some of the ideas regarding bio-security on board an aircraft. It is an extremely controlled environment that we manage from the airport gates. Aircraft cabins have a very high renewal rate of air and changes every 2-3 minutes. It can be compared to the surgery rooms in hospitals. My family and I feel very safe while flying."



Bruno Fargeon
'Keep Trust in Air Travel'
project Head, Airbus



John Grant
Chief Analyst
OAG

Travel Data Provider

"We are waiting for the Indian government to ease travel restrictions and they've indicated that they will make a decision on this soon. But the pace of return anticipated between Sept-Oct in Asia seems unlikely. It's worrying times in Asia and you struggle to see how we are going to get out of this in the short term. It's a double-whammy effect; airlines do not make money at 30% capacity. In fact, they haemorrhage money at 30%."

Airport

"We have been working with other airports and authorities on the idea of getting a single ID for a passenger so if they check-in at one location, we could use their documents just that one time, digitally encode them, and use them at every checkpoint in the journey. That whole process is seamless and means you only have to enter your data once. But trying to get this off the ground and agreeing to common standards are still up in the air."



Paul Griffiths
CEO
Dubai Airports

Inputs by Hazel Jain

Now, 6 new ASI circles

The Ministry of Culture recently announced six new circles of the Archaeological Survey of India on Social Media. The Ministry has also announced the expansion of Hampi and Delhi circles.



The announcement of the new circles by Ministry of Culture came in line with the Prime Minister's call to facilitate and strengthen the process of preservation and registration of archaeological monuments along with registration of artefacts with self-declaration.

Prahlad Singh Patel, Minister of Tourism & Culture (I/C), shared that new circles had been created in Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, West Bengal and Gujarat, and include Trichy, Raiganj, Rajkot, Jabalpur, Jhansi and Meerut.

There were 29 ASI circles across the country earlier. Patel added, "In archaeology, Hampi in Karnataka is a place of international repute, hence, Hampi mini circle has been converted into a full-fledged circle." He also shared that Jabalpur was

now a new circle along with Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh. This will include the monuments from Jabalpur, Rewa, Shahdol and Sagar divisions. Even Delhi has been made a bigger circle now.

mil Nadu, which has thousands of temples and glorious memories of the Chola kings, Trichy has been made a new circle along with the circle of Chennai. In West Bengal, Raiganj has been made a new circle along



Jhansi in Bundelkhand and Meerut in western Uttar Pradesh have been announced as two new circles along with Lucknow and Agra in Uttar Pradesh. Patel said that in a large state like Ta-

with Kolkata. This will eliminate geographical inconvenience in a big state like Bengal. In Gujarat, Rajkot has been announced as a new circle along with Vadodara."

'Rest, refund, restructure, rebound'

Jaal Shah, Group Managing Director, Travel Designer Group, claims that a positive outlook and a clear strategy towards recovery helped them deal with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic head-on. Now, with green shoots in business in some of the markets that they operate in, they are looking ahead to recovering some more in the months to come.

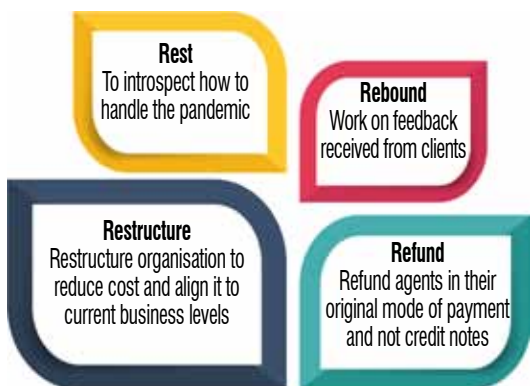
Nisha Verma

Q What were the main issues you faced during the lockdown and what kind of impact has Travel Designer Group seen on its business?

The travel industry has been one of the heavily impacted industries during the COVID-19 pandemic and Travel Designer Group is not immune. As an organisation, we went through one of the most challenging times throughout our existence since 1999. Fortunately for us, we started tracking the developments of COVID-19 as early as January. When some parts of the world started going into lockdown, we started preparing, in early March, for a similar scenario in the countries where we operate. This ensured that we did not face any major issues to our operations and helped us to settle seamlessly to work from home.

I think the business impact is like all other organisations in the industry. The main characteristic of this pandemic is the steep fall in business starting

4 stages of response



mid-March. The drop was sudden, and no one could have done anything, considering that it was induced by government-led travel restrictions around the world. With leisure, business

and MICE restricted, the only business left was from stranded travellers and quarantine requirements. It is all behind us now and we are seeing green shoots in some of our major markets. We should see more recovery in the coming months.



Jaal Shah
Group Managing Director
Travel Designer Group

Q What steps have you taken to sail through the pandemic?

Travel Designer Group was founded based on strong financial fundamentals and we had been profitable since inception. Further, over the last two years, we analysed all risks associated with our business model, such as currency

About RezLive.com

Launched in 2007 in India, RezLive.com is the flagship product of Travel Designer Group and is one of the largest and fastest-growing online B2B travel portals in the Middle East, South Asia and Southeast Asia.

lier, we tracked the pandemic right from its early stages and had plans for different scenarios. Hence, when the lockdown began, we never had a moment of indecisiveness.

I would classify our pandemic response into four stages:

❖ **Rest:** The entire senior management took a few days break during the initial phase of lockdown to introspect on how we will handle the pandemic.

We tracked the pandemic right from its early stages and had plans for different scenarios. Hence, when the lockdown began, we never had a moment of indecisiveness

❖ **Refund:** Our first goal was to refund travel agents in their original mode of payment, and we were clear that we will not issue credit notes. Fortunately, many of our supplier partners stepped-up and announced force majeure. This helped in quick resolution of reservations affected by COVID-19.

As we speak, we have refunded all the affected reservations and our client feedback is testimony to our efforts.

❖ **Restructure:** In my assessment, I think the earlier expectation of a V-shaped recovery is no more realistic. Looking at the modest rebound in some of the markets where business is opened to near normal, I think that the recovery will be steady but slow and it will be at least a year and a half to two years before we can rebound to 2019

levels. With that assessment, we also had to restructure our organisation setup to reduce our cost, align it to current business levels, and strengthen it for sustainable business. We had to take some tough decisions and let go of some wonderful talent we had. However, we ensured that we were transparent right from the start and tried to minimise the impact in all possible ways.

❖ **Rebound:** This is where we are now. In the last two months, we worked on every little feedback that we received from our clients about our product to bring many new innovative features that made our platform more robust and user-friendly. Our sales team across all markets is working closely with clients, educating them about possible travel trends post-COVID and how we can together emerge with a sustainable business model.

Q What do you think is the future for outbound travel from India in the short term?

I think that it will be another two to three months before we can see recovery in outbound tourism from India. Currently, there are lot of restrictions on In-

Since August, we are seeing significant movement in domestic tourism. This will partially substitute business lost in outbound tourism

dian travellers. We have established travel bubbles to several European countries for essential travel and movement of residents, but not for tourists. Only after these restrictions are removed, we can get a fair sense of recovery.

IPL 2020 could be a litmus test. UAE has opened its borders for Indian tourists, and the cricket board is mulling allowing spectators. That will be an excellent opportunity and could spark outbound travel from India.



Q With limited outbound travel, do you think Indian domestic tourism could become a better revenue earner?

Traditionally, domestic tourism takes a significant chunk in travel spending of Indians. In the initial phase of COVID-19 with international borders closed, we anticipated domestic tourism to multiply. Unfortunately, the inter-

gone into making guests feel safe and comfortable. Cleaning procedures, social distancing and contactless service have taken centre stage. This might also prompt guests to choose well-known brands, where they can feel comfortable. We can also expect many safety precautions followed by airlines and airports to become a norm post COVID.

Keeping guests confident

"Looking back, we are quite happy with what we have achieved in the last few months. We launched REZ2020 and redesigned RezLive.com booking engine to suit the new-age requirements. Our operations and accounts team worked tirelessly to refund all COVID-affected reservations to our clients in their original mode of payment. Our sales team engaged with each one of our clients, updating them about COVID impacts, travel advisories, health and safety precautions by hotels and attractions, and new product updates from RezLive.com. Personally, I spoke with over 400 clients globally via video conferencing to thank them and to learn about their post-COVID business expectations and how we could work together to emerge stronger. I intend to reach out to more clients in the coming weeks."

state restrictions did not allow tourism at all. Since August, we are seeing significant movement in domestic tourism. This will partially substitute business lost in outbound tourism.

Globally, we are seeing some support from governments to encourage domestic tourism. Such measures would encourage tourists to take more domestic vacations post-COVID as well. We have not seen any tourism sector-specific relief measures from the Indian government. It will be of great help if the government could intervene.

Q Do you think travellers' requirements will be different now?

Safety and hygiene will become a key point. Recently, we reached out to a number of hotel chains, stand-alone hotels and attractions to gather information about their safety and hygiene practices during this time and we were heartened to know that a lot of thought and effort had

IPL 2020 could be a litmus test, an excellent opportunity and could spark outbound travel from India

Q When, according to you, would tourism bounce back?

This depends on multiple factors. First, international borders must open and then the restrictions related to COVID testing and self-isolation must be relaxed for leisure travellers to comfortably take vacations. Availability of a vaccine would remove these pain points.

Then, it is down to economic conditions and disposable income of people. Global economy is expected to shrink this year and would most likely recover over the next two years. Tourism will also recover steadily, and I am confident that we can see pre-pandemic levels in a year to year and a half.

Learnings from a pandemic

"The biggest learning, I would say, is the revelation that the world can throw challenges at our business any time and it is important for us to be prepared for any situation. Our response to these challenges depends on the strength of business fundamentals on which an organisation is found. Staying focused on these fundamentals, optimising and maximising the available resources, and setting up a high-performance, customer-centric work culture is essential to mitigate such challenges. With a smaller market size, innovation, proactivity and customer focus are going to be critical to retain market share."

Wyndham expands in South Asia

Nikhil Sharma, Area Director - Eurasia for Wyndham Hotels & Resorts EMEA, shares that the brand is ready to open new properties across India that cater to different segments of travellers, while also expanding their portfolio in neighbouring countries like Bhutan and Nepal. Safety of guests and staff remain their priority.

Nisha Verma

What is Wyndham's expansion plan in the Indian subcontinent?

Wyndham Hotels & Resorts has a strong growth trajectory in the region with the opening of our first hotels in Nepal and Bhutan. Our economy brands such as Days Hotel and Hawthorn Suites continue to show momentum, together with our most dominant midscale brand in the region - Ramada by Wyndham. We expect to open our 50th Wyndham-branded hotel in the Indian subcontinent next month, highlighting our commitment to continuous growth across the region.

What kind of business are you expecting from Hawthorn Suites in Dwarka, Gujarat?

We see tremendous potential in religious holiday destinations across India. Dwarka is one of



Nikhil Sharma
Area Director - Eurasia
Wyndham Hotels & Resorts EMEA

the four main pilgrim destinations for Hindus, which makes it the perfect location for a Wyndham-branded property. We currently have various hotels in religious destinations such as Varanasi, Amritsar and Ajmer, and are exploring opportunities in Tirupati, Vrindavan, Shirdi and Kathmandu among others. Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham in Dwarka is a villa development, which makes it an ideal property for families looking for a hotel that

can accommodate them for an extended stay.

Aligarh, too, is a different choice as a destination.

What kind of business are you expecting?

Over the last few years, we are seeing a significant uptick in interest for internationally branded hotels that offer large meetings and events space. Aligarh is a Tier-III city as well

as an industrial city located in western Uttar Pradesh, famous for its brass and meat processing industry. It is also home to public sector undertakings such as Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, making our Ramada by Wyndham Aligarh GT Road a convenient, amenity-rich location for meeting, event and industry-specific business travel.

What about your Pune property? How different will it be from other properties in the region?

Ramada Plaza by Wyndham Pune Hinjewadi is strategically located in Hinjawadi - India's largest IT Park - and home to the Balewadi Stadium. This prime location not only garners significant business from international and domestic IT and automobile companies, but also offers sports fans a great home base when travelling for sport-

ing events taking place at the nearby stadium.

How do you ensure adherence to the new SOPs the government has put in place?

We recently launched 'Count on Us' across Europe, Middle East, Eurasia and Africa. It is our new hygiene initiative that puts the safety of our guests and team members first. Its immediate focus is to further enhance a broad range of health and safety protocols across our properties, including the consistent use of top-of-the-range disinfectants through a partnership with hygiene expert Ecolab, the introduction of robust new training, and ongoing access to critical health essentials through trusted suppliers. In addition, every Wyndham hotel in Europe, the Middle East, Eurasia and Africa is also encouraged to appoint a 'Hygiene Hero' on hand to ad-

dress any concerns guests may have and to champion the new protocols in place.

How are you engaging with the travel industry to boost sales?

Wyndham Hotels & Resorts' newest promotional offerings such as 'Welcome Back', 'Travel Again' and 'Stay for Two Nights' help us engage with our guests and in turn boost sales. Our regional sales team is also working on deploying a variety of sales initiatives, including Wyndham Easy Book that offers discounted rates for small to medium-sized businesses. This new initiative was designed to build on Wyndham's already-strong presence in the corporate travel space. These small to mid-sized businesses are a critical business segment to attract domestic travel which, as we've seen, is dominant in today's market.

We expect to open our 50th Wyndham branded hotel in the Indian subcontinent next month, highlighting our commitment to continuous growth across the region

Pune's DoubleTree re-opens



DoubleTree by Hilton Pune Chinchwad has re-opened along with cultivating a happy staff environment for its employees. The hotel has aligned its safety protocols with Hilton CleanStay, a worldwide programme rolled out by Hilton in partnership with Reckitt Benckiser.

Testing at Heathrow ready



Collinson and Swissport have announced a dedicated COVID-19 testing facility ready for use at Heathrow's Terminal 2, with the same to be ready at Terminal 5 by end of August. Over 30 countries and half the world's busiest airports are already utilising 'Test-on-Arrival' as a safe and effective alternative to quarantine.

Vervotech signs 6 clients

Two-year old Pune-based hotel mapping company Vervotech has signed up six new businesses since the pandemic struck – an indication that companies are now beginning to invest in the future.

Hazel Jain

A SaaS company offering AI-based hotel mapping and room mapping services to travel companies globally, Vervotech is breaking all barriers that this pandemic has put up for businesses around the world. It has signed up six new clients since the pandemic hit! How? By creating a product that helps travel companies scale up their business. Sanjay Ghare, Founder, Vervotech, says, "As we know, hotels and destinations around the world are either closed or in various stages of opening, or they are changing their suppliers, etc. Therefore, a fully automated system is required to get the latest rates. This pandemic has shown us how important access to the latest updates and information can be for business. A completely updated content and mapping is really important for agents



Sanjay Ghare
Founder, Vervotech

to capture that business. That's why we have started getting clients. For example, during the pandemic we signed Musafir.com, Travel Brands in Canada, and now Unsold in USA."

Ghare adds that a lot of big companies are using the German company Giata. So why move from Giata to Vervotech? "Mapping coverage and mapping speed are key. We are mapping at more than 98 per cent and at a speed of three million properties in 24 hours. Due to mapping inef-

iciencies, suppliers are not able to sell their full content to their customers. Since it is an AI-based product, it is completely supplier-agnostic. Our focus right now is to add features that will help companies

A completely updated content and mapping is important for agents to capture business. During the pandemic we signed Musafir.com, Travel Brands in Canada, and Unsold in USA

to go live immediately," he reveals. It currently has clients in eight countries including industry leaders such as TBO Group (India and UAE), Travel Leaders Group (USA), Travel Brands (Canada), etc.

Experience as crucial as safety

Not everyone got bogged down by the havoc that COVID-19 created in the hospitality industry and instead of calling it doomsday, Tree of Life Resorts & Hotels took it in their stride and managed to sail through. **Himmat Anand**, Founder, Tree of Life Resorts & Hotels, talks about the need to stay positive and focused.



Nisha Verma

Himmat Anand believes that “The industry is at fault to have created a negative scenario for themselves by discussing about how the industry will close, hotels will be doomed and travel will be unsafe. This way we doubled our troubles.” But, in the face of adversity, Tree of Life Resorts & Hotels took a positive approach to business. Anand says, “We accepted that everything was lost and decided to build ourselves back from zero. We were positive and proactive on social media and took out new programmes. The idea was that we wanted to have a continuity of our presence and of our business. We were the first in the country to announce the opening of our property; in mid-May, we announced that on June 19, we will open.”



Himmat Anand
Founder, Tree of Life Resorts & Hotels

Tree of Life Resort & Spa was the first property they opened. “We were conscious of the fact that we will only open properties which are within four to five hours of driving distance from the source market, hence, Jaipur was the best bet. We started with an occupancy of 28-30 per cent in June, and slashed June prices. I believe that pricing is only determined by demand. To activate the market again, we went for a deep 50 per cent discount in

June. In July we brought it to 40 per cent and in August we had around 25-30 per cent discounting. By October it would come to around 10-15 per cent of discounting. This means that out of eight properties, at least in four things will be stable.



For us, as much as hygiene and safety are important, it is important to make sure that this factor doesn't supersede why a guest is there with us

Jaipur did unbelievably well in July and took us by surprise; we did better this July than that of 2019. Our occupancy in July

was about 68 per cent with an ARR of Rs10,700. Interestingly, our luxury pool villas are the ones to sell out first and they sell between Rs14,000-16,000 per night only with breakfast plus GST,” shares Anand. A key learning he has had from this experience is that it isn't that the domestic market doesn't pay, it will pay if the product is right.

Small weddings do the trick

For the hotel group, small weddings also got in some business. “Before COVID happened, we launched a brand called 'Intimate Moments by Tree of Life'. The idea was that people wanted to get away from huge numbers and host small wedding celebrations, anniversaries, birthdays, baby showers and bachelorette parties. Through 'Intimate Moments' we are focusing only at small functions at our properties that have 10-18 rooms and can accommodate 35-50 people.

Status check

Tree of Life Resorts & Hotels has opened both its Jaipur and Udaipur properties, and will open Ranthambore soon. Their three properties in Uttarakhand are ready to open, but due to the possibility of issues at the border for guests driving to Uttarakhand, the opening has been delayed. The Banaras property will open in September-October.

This is an exciting space for us as things like social distancing, being away from city centres, having lesser keys, no buffets – things that people talk about these days - are the mottos on which Tree of Life started 10 years ago. All of this has been second nature to us. Hence, we don't need to go gung-ho about it,” Anand shares.

It's hospitality, not hospital, business

Commenting on the way different hospitality brands have been promoting their safety

and hygiene SOPs, Anand says that people should understand that we are in the hospital, and not hospital, business. “Brands have gone a little overboard in order to project their hygiene and safety message. We, on the other hand, have been very cautious and very contained in our pronouncements as far as hygiene and safety are concerned. For us, as much as hygiene and safety are important, it is important to make sure that this factor doesn't supersede why a guest is there with us,” he adds. 🐦

Recreating demand: Way forward

Now that hotels and flights are gradually opening, tour operators face a new challenge – bringing back demand and starting business soon. While some think this demand exists, others feel that there's still time before beginning international promotions. Opinions are many, but the underlying factor remains the same — restart.

“ To keep domestic business going, to increase and to keep the traveller's trust intact, it is very important that 'no quarantine' be enforced. It should be publicised very well through all media channels so that everyone is aware of it if they are travelling within India. The traveller should carry the COVID-negative test certificate while travelling and that should be a passport to travel within India. ”



Jatinder Singh Taneja
Vice Chairman
PATA India Chapter

“ The foremost priority is to bring back customers' trust by incorporating top-level safety and hygiene standards in every aspect of business. We, at Accor, with the ALLSAFE label have strictly been abiding to cleanliness and hygiene measures, be it in rooms, public spaces, restaurants and all the possible places one can think of. Our focus initially is to promote domestic travel, weekend getaways and staycations. ”



Kerrie Hannaford
VP Commercial
Accor - India and South Asia

“ The last few months have brought an unprecedented avalanche of challenges for the hospitality sector. However, with the country opening, both leisure and business travel is bound to increase. We have launched staycations, work from hotel, and exclusive long-stay packages, which are very popular among our guests. A mega sale on our brand website is currently underway. ”



Pushpendra Bansal
Chief Operating Officer
Lords Hotels and Resorts



Ravi Gosain
Managing Director
Erco Travels

“ We have been in touch with our clients overseas and no one has a clear indication about the future. Even if we push our products, we don't know if it is the right time because they are also not creating any products for their clients who are the ultimate travellers. I think we must wait for some time before doing any planning or making a strategy for promotions. There is no clarity on visa. The regular flights are not happening. ”

“ When it comes to demand, it is already there as people are craving to travel and get out of homes. If a vaccine comes tomorrow, 75% of people will be out of their homes and travelling. Hence, creating demand now is not the correct term, but creating demand after the pandemic is over is what needs to be focused on. The industry has learnt a hard lesson in terms of doing business. ”



Debjit Dutta
Chairman, IATO - West
Bengal Chapter

“ Firstly, as a company we are in touch with our FTOs and focusing totally on making the client trust us so that when they start booking, they are as safe as they are in their homes. Also, we are trying to market whatever little we understand of domestic marketing, which is a complete overhaul for us as we have been in inbound business for the last 25 years. ”



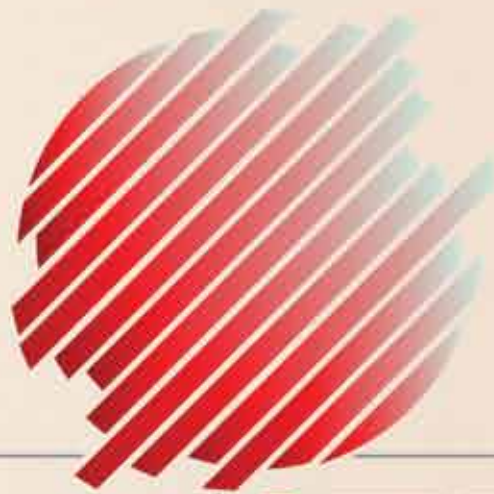
Vinayak Koul
Director
Snowlion Expeditions

Classification and Rating of Hotels & Restaurants

**Now, we also provide
COVID Safety
compliance Audits & Certification**



India's only hospitality rating agency



QualSTAR
CLASSIFICATION & RATING

In accordance with ISO/IEC 17065:2012



NABCB Accreditation

(Under process)

The only way to view the Taj



"While Taj remains closed, here's a perfect alternative – a serene Taj viewing point near Mehtab Bagh. This was an idea I shared with DK Burman (then Deputy Director, UP Tourism) some 15 years ago that finally saw the light of day," shares Sunil Gupta, Chairman & Managing Director, Travel Bureau.

Sayaji re-opens in 5 cities



Sayaji Hotels has re-opened its Indore, Pune, Vadodara, Kolhapur and Raipur properties. The hotel group has also put in place its 'Care beyond Compare' initiative through which patrons will be updated on change in service design and standard of operation that will be congruent to norms of social distancing, safety & hygiene of staff, and cleanliness of the hotel.

IPL: To be or not to be?

To be held from September 19-November 10 in the UAE, IPL is expected to garner a lot of interest among Indian travellers to watch the match live, though it is still unclear if spectators will be allowed in stadiums.



Sports events attract tourists as participants or spectators, and destinations try to add local flavours to them to distinguish themselves and provide authentic local experiences. With BCCI taking IPL to UAE this year, the annual sporting extravaganza can be a litmus test to start tourism movement to the Middle East from India.

The Indian tourism industry is also hopeful to receive appropriate guidelines from organisers on whether or not spectators would be allowed to visit stadiums and watch matches. Indian citizens can currently travel to UAE with any type of valid visa under the air travel bubble agreement. With medical insurance and a COVID-19 certificate necessary to travel, visitors are also subject to COVID-19 test in the UAE when they land. According to current guide-

lines, visitors need to follow self quarantine norms upon arrival. Twenty one matches each are scheduled to take place in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, while Sharjah will host 14 matches.

At such a juncture, Jaal Shah, Group Managing Director, Travel Designer Group, believes that



Indian travel trade and the tourism industry will have to watch the developments in the coming days to make any estimation. "IPL 2020 could be a litmus test. With UAE allowing Indian tourists and mulling to allow spectators, it could mark an early onset of winter tourist season. After all, Indians account for the highest number of tourist arrivals to the UAE," he says.

According to Manoj Saraf, Managing Director, Gainwell Travel, Indian travellers are very enthusiastic to travel to the UAE if allowed to watch matches, and there is a lot of buzz around travel packages, hotel deals and all travel arrangements to UAE.

"There is a lot of enthusiasm for IPL among Indian travellers. We have got a lot of B2B queries, many travel agents have called up to inquire if they can buy match tickets for selling packages for IPL. As of now, there has been no official announcement by the organisers that spectators will be allowed. We are waiting for guidelines to take this further. We have our partners in Dubai and if and when spectators are allowed to watch matches, I think there will be a lot of interest to travel to the UAE, particularly from cities where the country has direct connectivity. On our part, we are ready with the packages," Saraf says.

Tourism in your neighbourhood

A new-age indigenous entrant making waves is hospitality management technology domain Streetgooser, founded in 2019 by three visionaries - Shakhivelu M, John Varghese and Deenath Sharma. The trio has designed a unique hotel management software with an interesting ideology - 'We want to change the neighbourhood into a destination'.



Hospitality was one of the first industries to experience the headwinds of COVID-19. Government decisions to shut down hotels, restaurants, theme parks, cinemas, not to mention the entire disruptive effect of the travel ecosystem, all had a sizeable impact on global tourism. The Indian hospitality and tourism industry in India accounts for approximately 10 per cent of India's GDP, which is approximately \$275 billion, and if the virus does not taper off in the coming months, further downfall in the GDP can also be accounted for.

It is palpable that Property Managers around the world face the dreary prospect of a protracted recovery. While the sector has in the interim period shown phenomenal maturity by working closely with the government and helping out society by

making their venues available for hospital beds and hospital employees, once the pandemic abates and revenue targets become the crux of existence, the survival of properties will vary



Shakhivelu M
MD & Co-founder
Streetgooser

based on a number of factors, including chain scale, location and demand profile.

However, with revenues still in a spiralling decline, it is equally vital for hoteliers to assess smart ways by which they can manage



John Varghese
CEO & Founder
Streetgooser

their inventory and cash flow as proficiently as possible, while simultaneously riding new trends to evolve rapidly in the post-pandemic world on the back of cutting-edge technology.

The Cloud has been one of the most emergent hospitality technology trends in the past few years. Both large and small hoteliers who have started shifting to cloud-based solutions are already witnessing a big rise in productivity. All they require is

a computer, tablet and a steady internet connection. The centralised dashboard offers a state-of-the-art built-in front-desk



Deenath Sharma
Chief Technology Officer
Streetgooser

management system, channel manager, POS functions, house-keeping supervision, rate shopper, reputation management,

website builder, payment gateway, booking engine, reports, analytics and more. Overheads are also decreased. All these numerous advantages unquestionably make for a prodigious leap forward for hoteliers in the decade ahead.

A new-age indigenous entrant in the domain is Streetgooser. Starting out from humble village backgrounds and working their way up into leadership positions in various domains around the world gave Streetgooser's founding trio a unique bird's eye perspective of the potential of Tier-III towns and small villages in offbeat locales bursting with potential and opportunity in the accommodation sector

but not having the capability to reach out to consumers looking for that rare exotic destination for their MICE engagement or holiday requirements. This led to the trio designing a unique hotel management software with an interesting ideology - 'We want to change the neighbourhood into a destination'. This tech-driven Property Management System offers products and solutions that are cost effective and efficient, with an aim to ease all operations. by providing them with a platform and intuitive Apps that are smart, easy to use and reliable, therein ensuring an increased market reach and seamless streamlining of daily functions.



COTRI reveals that in the new decade, the interest for nature, family tours, new experiences and satisfaction of their special interests will be stronger than before among Chinese outbound travellers. The risk of dissatisfying them will be bigger than before.

No relief, no survival for hotels

JK Mohanty, Chairman and Managing Director, Swosti Group, claims that there is a need for the state government to incentivise the setting up of hotel infrastructure in Odisha so that it is on a par with other states. He even urges the Central government to look at a change in policy that offers relief in taxation and duties.

TT Bureau

JK Mohanty says that they have already been in touch with the government at all levels to represent the plight of the hospitality sector. "On behalf of the hotel industry and the tourism sector, we are continuously interacting

and following up with both Central and state governments, highlighting various issues that are being faced by the hotel industry in the pandemic. Although both governments are extending some relaxation in terms of EMI payments to banks, bar licence fee, etc., we are hopeful that the government would declare a good relief



JK Mohanty
Chairman and Managing Director
Swosti Group

and the state government, and all our team members and staff are also adhering to these guidelines and hygiene protocols," he says.

However, adds Mohanty, like every other hotel in the country, Swosti Group is also going through a very bad phase with

Recommendations to Odisha Govt

- ❖ Extend attractive incentives for people to invest in tourism infrastructure.
- ❖ Recognise the potential of star category hotels at important tourist locations other than Bhubaneswar and Puri to compete in the domestic segment.
- ❖ Allow 30% capital investment subsidy up to a maximum limit of ₹25 crore and 5% interest subsidy up to 11 years on repayment of term loans. If subsidy is given only for 3 years, many hotels will come up as required.
- ❖ Extend moratorium on payment of EMIs. Industry needs a minimum of one-year moratorium on all working capital, principal, interest payments, loans and overdrafts.
- ❖ Allow collateral and interest-free loan of up to 3 years for hotel industry.

Demands raised to government

- ❖ Deferment of bank loans and interest-free loans
- ❖ Restructuring of loan with outstanding of more than ₹25 crore
- ❖ Waiver of BMC holding tax
- ❖ Waiver of bar licence fee
- ❖ Exemption of ground water fee
- ❖ Waiver of minimum demand load of electricity and payment of electricity bill be allowed on actual demand load
- ❖ Financial assistance for payment of salary/wages, ESIC, etc
- ❖ Facility to avail sickness benefit of employees under ESIC
- ❖ Special relief package for industry revival

package for the hotel industry and its survival," he says.

On their part, while Swosti Group hasn't done any business during the pandemic, it has constantly engaged with clients and maintained hygiene standards at all properties which, he believes, is one of the most important factors for the hotel industry today. "We are seriously following and adopting all the recommendations and guidelines of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare

Although both governments are extending some relaxation, we are hopeful they would declare a good relief package for the hotel industry and its survival

zero occupancy and zero income since the end of March 2020. "All our hotels and resorts have been

closed. During this period, the hotel industry is facing serious problems in paying salaries and wages, ESIC, bank loans, interest, overdrafts, holding tax, bar licence fee, electricity fee, ground water fee etc.," he says. Mohanty also believes that although domestic tourism flows have been

severely affected by restrictions on the movement of people, they are expected to recover more quickly once the lockdown is completely lifted. "The most important thing now is to focus on the vast potential of domestic tourism with a vigorous marketing plan," he shares.

Liquidity is the need of the hour

According to **MP Bezbaruah**, Secretary General, Hotel Association of India (HAI), today liquidity is one of the biggest issues being faced by the hospitality industry, and that there is an urgent need for policy changes. He also says that the industry must focus on MOT as its mouthpiece when making a representation to other ministries.

Nisha Verma

There is no doubt that the pandemic has created one of the toughest periods for the hotel industry of India and echoing that very sentiment is MP Bezbaruah. He says, "The RBI has also agreed that hospitality and tourism are the most affected sectors. When we gave our White Paper to them, we mentioned a revenue loss of around ₹90,000 crore. In fact, figures are being quoted of a revenue loss to the tune of ₹190,000 crore by now, and these are changing every day."

He believes that the most important thing for the hospitality industry now is liquidity. "Around 30 per cent of the cost in hotels is fixed. There is no revenue, and this cost is mounting. What we need is liquidity for past loans and new ones for current expenditures. There is a need



MP Bezbaruah
Secretary General
Hotel Association of India

for policy change. The moratorium has to be extended. Even investment and current liabilities of hotels must be taken care of, for which loans are needed. But, this is also a problem as banks, too, have their own systems. Hence, we have suggested that there should be a fixed interest rate based on basic points plus repo. We have also pointed out that there are small things that the government can do. For example, there are 28 compliances required for a hotel to

function and 30 licences are required which must be renewed. We have suggested that the government allow us some relief by deferring them," he recommends.

Around 30 per cent of the cost in hotels is fixed. There is no revenue and cost is mounting. What we need is liquidity for past loans and new ones for current expenditures

The hotel industry has supported the government in providing COVID relief in terms of offering quarantine and hospital facilities, says Bezbaruah, adding that the other contribution has been by

individual hotels coming up with corporate social responsibility schemes to provide employment. "We are prepared to help the government in whatever way possible. We need to give attention to liquidity problems. Once we start, the world will be different and we will need Information Technology, Virtual Reality and Artificial Intelligence. We will not be able to survive unless we are up to date. The government should do something innovative or set up a public private partnership (PPP) so that the industry can survive and thrive in coming times," he shares.

MOT making the right moves
Speaking about how Ministry of Tourism (MOT) is dealing with the situation, Bezbaruah says

that their effort to have a round of discussions with the industry is a welcome move. However, the main issue is that the government has its own problems of finances. He also believes that while there are other ways of approaching the government for help, the industry should concentrate on MOT for its issues. "MOT is taking the lead now to focus on our problems, and we must concentrate on them to be our spokesperson. They will carry our voice to other ministries. HAI, on its part, will continue to be the mouthpiece of the hotel industry and present their problems specifically, but we will join hands with everybody else to focus on the holistic picture. We must do a lot for tourism and fo-

cus on sustainable and responsible tourism, so that people feel safe coming to India and visiting destinations here. Just like the government is talking about migrant labourers, we have to find out some security mechanism like a fund, insurance or something of the sort, for people who are likely to be vulnerable in such situations. Every industry, every hotel can think of creating a fund for its people and employees," he believes.

HAI is in the process of organising its chapters in a way that they can all individually look into matters. With advocacy as its main idea, the Association is looking to join hands with other organisations for its issues, informs Bezbaruah.

Croatia, Ecuador and Ghana are the latest in a long line of major destinations to use the world's first-ever global safety and hygiene stamp, launched recently by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTTC).

Safe stay with Cross Hotels

Thailand-based hotel group, Cross Hotels & Resorts has opened a number of its properties with strict health and safety protocols in place. From the time of arrival of the guest at the airport to the time of departure, staff at Cross properties follows the guidelines religiously. The group is also offering flexible incentives to Indian travel agents.

“ We are following the standards received from Amazing Thailand Safety and Health Administration (SHA). From India, we are eager to welcome leisure and MICE travellers, as well as sportspersons, sports teams and wedding groups. Based on static rate offers, we could consider providing incentives based on the number of room nights. For example, 0-500 room nights get 2% incentive and 501-1000 room nights get 3%. ”



Jaruwat Boonyoung
General Manager
X2 Koh Samui – A Spa Retreat

“ From the time the guest arrives at the airport, we offer only the resort’s private transfer with a qualified and well-trained driver and all safety & hygiene preparations. From temperature check at check-in, cleaning of the villa, hygienic food & beverage preparation as well as safe and hygienic spa services to the time the guest is to depart from the property, all checks are regularly maintained. The resort can also cater for up to 60 guests for a wedding. ”



Semachai Pluemjai
General Manager
X2 Vibe Buriram Hotel



“ X2 Kui Buri Resort has a very large public space at four acres. As per resort style, our public areas are in the open air. Being at the beachfront, airflow is to the maximum and social distancing is not a problem for a small size resort of 23 rooms. Maximum hotel capacity is around 50 guests (if hotel runs on 100% with double occupancy). At the resort, safety and hygiene protocols are followed, including strictly. ”



Kiattiyos Aprachitpairin
General Manager
X2 Kui Buri Resort

Inputs by TT Bureau

Of cricketers and charters



Indian Premier League (IPL) teams select Vistara for their travel to the United Arab Emirates for the upcoming games that will be held in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah from September 2020 after a six-month delay. The airline has flown all IPL teams to the UAE.

IndiGo carries out VBM



Indian nationals return home on-board Vande Bharat Mission (VBM) flight 6E 8753 enroute from Kuwait to Bhubaneswar. From Kuwait, IndiGo also flies to Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Kannur, Kochi, Kozhikode, Lucknow, Mumbai and Thiruvananthapuram under VBM.

77% drop in int'l passengers

Based on its continuous research and monitoring of the industry since the COVID crisis took hold, CAPA India has made some key predictions on the Indian aviation market post the crisis.



In its webinar on August 21 titled Financing Indian Aviation in the post-COVID Era, CAPA India revealed some predictions it has made for FY2021 and FY2022.

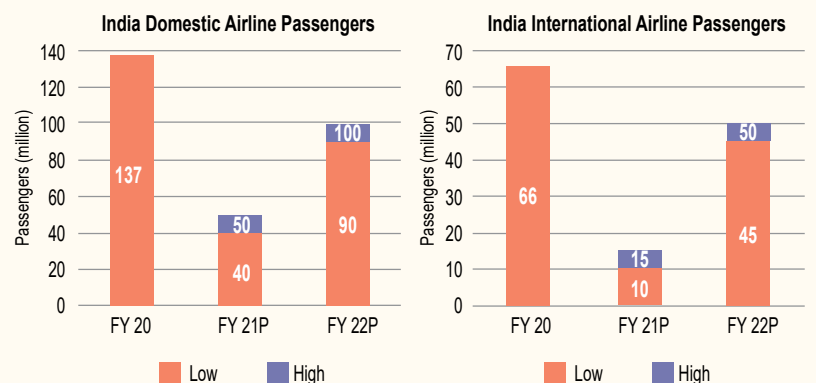
It says that due to health concerns and travel restrictions, passenger traffic has been

decimated. This will be further exacerbated as the economic downturn bites harder. Demand risks are serious and in line with the lower end of the range of CAPA's projections released in March and April 2020. CAPA expects India's international airline passengers to range somewhere between 10-15 million in FY2021, a significant drop from the low of 66 million passengers who

travelled in FY2020. However, in FY2022, numbers are expected to pick up again, ranging anywhere between 45 million and 50 million.

“It is clear that the industry cannot absorb such dramatic declines in traffic alone. Industry and government collaboration is essential for survival and revival,” CAPA India states. ↴

Demand risk are serious and in line with the lower end of the range of CAPA's projection released in March and April 2020



India needs to up its wildlife game

A passion for protecting wildlife and a desire to build India as an attractive wildlife tourism destination prompted this trio from Kolkata to launch an intense 35-series episode on Big Cats. Now, they say, would be a good time for private operators to realise that going green today and supporting better ecotourism would go a long way.

 Hazel Jain

With the aim to educate the travel trade about the eight Big Cats, wildlife conservation and sustainable tourism, Kolkata-based tour operator Time Travels has been conducting a 35-series live webinar starting from August 10. The hour-long webinars have 35 experts from nine countries speaking on their area of expertise. **Supriya**

Khaitan, CEO, Time Travels and Co-Founder of FOMONoMore, says, "We created a big team of experts from all walks of wildlife who wished to address the need for conversations, and this led us to establish FOMONoMore."

Speaking about how the idea germinated, she adds, "I approached Dr Latika Nath and soon we had a team of experts from scientists, biologists,

researchers, photographers, conservationists, ecologists and carnivore biologists who wished to share their research with us. The videos are available on our social media platforms." Also involved are Co-Founders, **Arvind Agarwalla** and **Chaitanya Khaitan**, COO of Time Travels.


Need for a wholesome product
With 104 national parks and 551



Supriya Khaitan
CEO, Time Travels and Co-Founder FOMONoMore

There is a lot that can be done to make India's ecotourism known to the world. Explaining this, Khaitan says that avoiding human conflict with animals is the first step. "COVID-19 has taught us that most of

with private operators, need to work with the government to up our game and provide accommodation at the same level as Africa and South America, or even better," she says. Taking this thought further, she adds, "The industry needs to work together rather than compete with each other. Private operators need to understand that it will be cheaper in the long run to go green today. This is the first step to win the confidence of government officials to make necessary changes in the rules.

To view webinar details, see our EventsTalk section. 

Implementation of responsible eco-tourism, generation of funds for conservation, and education of visitors could be the starting point to providing wholesome wildlife tourism



wildlife sanctuaries of which 88 are conservation reserves and 50 sanctuaries, India is a haven for wildlife lovers. "Unfortunately, travellers are used to the top-of-the-line African experience and we are unable to provide something on a par since the parks in India are run within protected zones which are led by the government. Implementation of responsible eco-tourism, minimisation of environmental impact, generation of funds for conservation, and education of visitors could mark as the starting point to providing wholesome wildlife tourism," Khaitan adds.

the Big Cats and other animals have been living very peacefully in cities without our knowledge. Once we saw them coming out we realised that this coexistence needs to have a balance. As responsible travel agents, we, along

DID YOU Know?
Dr Latika Nath has been given the title of 'Tiger Princess of India' by the National Geographic.

In a web of eternal lockdowns

Zahoor Qari, Chairman, TAAI - Jammu & Kashmir Chapter, shares that travel agents in the valley had been suffering even before the lockdown began, but with the pandemic the situation has only worsened. He says that setting aside of a Kashmir-specific tourism package is the only way out.

 Nisha Verma

Zahoor Qari says that even before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, Kashmir had been in a state of lockdown. "While we have the experience of being in such a situation, due to COVID-19, business has taken a big hit. Earlier, only Kashmir remained closed but the rest of the country was working. Hence, we were in touch with our contacts. It might be a small percentage of business, but it was going on. However, due to COVID-19, we are not able to sell anything. The tourism sector is shattered, especially in Kashmir," he shares.

as empty accounts by banks. Hence, they are left with no alternative but to close their business, to sell their assets and to continue their lives," he says.

But, Qari is hopeful that at least Kashmir will get a financial package even if no tourism-specific package was announced by the Central government. "Every-




Zahoor Qari
Chairman, TAAI - Jammu & Kashmir Chapter

seem to be impressed with our meetings and representations regarding financial help from the government for survival," he explains.

Representations made
In its representations, TAAI - J&K Chapter has made a few demands. Elaborating on them, Qari says, "In addition to the chapters, our national office bearers have sent representations to the new resident governor, to the chief

secretary and to the concerned advisor regarding our problems with Kashmir tour operators' authorities. Apart from that, we gave personal representations to the Lieutenant Governor and also to the Home Minister, with other associations of Kashmir, so that we have maximum membership. We represented jointly at different forums and every time we have been given an impression that we will be getting financial help or there will be some alternate arrangement. However, neither the Central government nor the Lieutenant Governor have even touched upon the topic of tour operators. Now they have given a monthly financial help of Rs1000 to the *Shikara-waalas*. All the as-

It was said that we will find a flood of tourists in the Kashmir Valley, but that has not been the case. The government should give priority to Kashmir

to which many agents can't get any communication from IATA as well, and eventually their IATA certification has been terminated. Concluding, he says, "Apart from 4G restoration in the valley and financial assistance, there should be promotion of the tourism by the Central Government because that will help us a lot. A special cell should be created for the Union Territory which shall be looked after by MOT officials that should work on how to promote tourism. At every stage it was said that we will find a flood of tourists in the Kashmir Valley, but that has not been the case, and hence the government should give priority to Kashmir to promote tourism." 

sociations have not accepted this help, and we have given another representation to the government that it is not fair to pay so less."

One of the biggest hurdles, according to Qari, is the lack of internet services in the valley owing



Travel agents in the valley have now started other businesses. "Tour operators have vehicles financed by the banks and they are unable to repay them, and they have been declared

body knows that we have been closed for the last one year, but no such initiative has been taken either by Government of India or by that of our Union Territory. Our Lieutenant Governor did not

 To mark the start of the United Nations 'Decade of Action', UN Tourism News was launched to provide the latest updates of UNWTO's work and key insights from tourism as it leads the way in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



SEPTEMBER 2020

| Date | Event | Time |
|-------|--|----------|
| 2 | CAPA Australia Pacific Aviation Summit Virtual | 7:30 am |
| 4 | Korea Tourism Webinar | 11:00 am |
| 5 | MOT's Dekho Apna Desh Webinar on Punjab | 11:00 am |
| 8 | HVS Global Outlook Webinar | 7:30 pm |
| 9 | Amazing Thailand Virtual Roadshow | 3:30 pm |
| 18 | CAPA India Webinar | 4:00 pm |
| 21 | Southwest Germany Webinar | 12:30 pm |
| 23-27 | Virtual PATA Travel Mart | 10:30 am |

OCTOBER 2020

| | | |
|-------|--------------------------|---------|
| 21-23 | ITB Asia Virtual | 9:30 am |
| 21-23 | MICE Show Asia | 7:00 am |
| 21-23 | Travel Tech Asia Virtual | 7:00 am |

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

'Goa wants charter flights'

Worried that the upcoming tourist season is not a dampener, the Travel & Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG) requests the state government to announce policies that will allow charter flights from international markets.



Hazel Jain

After getting some sort of relief from the Centre on electricity charges for two months, the travel agents of Goa are now demanding that the international charter flights be allowed from October-end, which is when the inbound season begins. Nilesh Shah, President, Travel & Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG), says, "As a state, Goa receives among the highest number of international charter flights with tourists. We therefore request the state government to allow charter flights to come in from October-end, which is when the season starts. To start receiving charters from our main source markets – that is the UK, Germany, Russia and the Scandinavian countries in October, they need to start booking now."

He adds that if the government is serious about restarting



Nilesh Shah
President, Travel & Tourism
Association of Goa

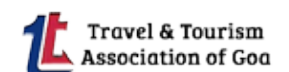
tourism in the state, they must relax rules around incoming charters. "There is a lot of bureaucracy right now with many permissions required. For this, the state tourism needs to step in. The government needs to take a bold step. We will be meeting the Chief Minister of Goa regarding this soon," he adds.

One SOP throughout India

Shah is grateful that the Centre allowed the hotels some relief in terms of electricity charges on

low – just about four to five per cent in the last few months. One of the major reasons for this is the COVID-negative certification required for tourists entering the state or paying ₹2,000 for this test at the border. For a family of four, this becomes very expensive. Moreover, different states have different SOPs. We should have one SOP throughout India, which will make life for tourists easier," Shah says.

To start receiving charters from our main source markets, that is the UK, Germany, Russia and the Scandinavian countries in October, they need to start booking now



Flights to Goa currently are few and far between. At the moment, it is only connected with six cities: Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai via IndiGo.

actual consumption for April and May 2020. "The occupancy levels in Goa have been extremely



IATA is appealing to all travellers to wear face covering during the travel journey for the safety of all passengers and crew. Wearing face coverings is a key recommendation of ICAO's guidance for safe operations during the pandemic.

There's potential in golf & film

Rajan Sehgal, Managing Committee Member, TAAI and Chairman, Indian Golf Tourism Association (IGTA), claims that with international travel restrictions in place, golf tourism will be in demand post-monsoon and India should look at promoting it. He adds that even film tourism holds great potential as a driver for domestic travel.



Nisha Verma

Though the industry was caught unawares by the COVID-19 pandemic, Rajan Sehgal says that all associations have been meeting regularly to gauge the way forward. However, he claims that as much as anybody says that domestic tourism would pick up, "I can assure that domestic tourism will not start before October." Sehgal, who has been focusing on niche tourism products like golf tourism, film tourism and heritage tourism, has also been conducting motivational webinars for TAAI members pan India, as Chairman for Skill and Education Committee of the Association.

Golf tourism

Sehgal believes that domestic golf tourism will be in great demand once the monsoon season is over. "The first thing



Rajan Sehgal
MC Member, TAAI and Chairman
Indian Golf Tourism Association

to open under Unlock 1.0 were golf courses. In Delhi-NCR, all golf courses are full because they offer an open space, are close to nature and help maintain social distancing. I believe that Indian golfers who once travelled to Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam for golf tourism will now travel within India," he says.

Sehgal has also had a discussion with the Advisor to Governor of Kashmir, requesting

them to open travel and tourism at the earliest in the Union Territory, attracting visitors from across India.

He says that even Ministry of Tourism realises the potential of golf tourism, and hence did

Indian golfers who once travelled to Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam for golf tourism will now travel within India

a special 'Dekho Apna Desh' webinar on golf tourism and approached IGTA for it. "We did the webinar titled 'Golfing tour of India', which was appreciated across the country and even outside," Sehgal adds.

Film tourism

Another niche segment that he believes should be looked at is film tourism. In his role as Co-Chairman, Tourism Committee, PHDCCI, Sehgal organised a virtual film tourism conclave that was attended by movie directors and MOT representatives. "Since it's not easy nowadays to travel overseas for shooting films, it's the right time for Indian states to tap this opportunity because movies won't be released in theatres and people would be streaming and watching them at home, making it more likely for them to choose domestic destinations to travel to. It is time states promote their film policies and allow single-window clearance for film shoots.

Most of the shots are not taken in studios, and the crew would prefer hotels and resorts at nearby destinations to maintain social distancing," he shares.

Commenting on the restriction on weddings and events to only 50 Pax, he says that they have asked the Ministry of Tourism to increase the number and allow hotels with space to accommodate around 250-300 people, and a minimum of 150 people while maintaining social distancing.

Otherwise, in the upcoming wedding season, it will be difficult, he adds. Sehgal points out that there is also a need to have synergy between stakeholders, the Central government and the states.

"If a traveller is going from Delhi to Uttarakhand, there should be a separate lane for tourists at borders, toll plazas or barriers. There can be stickers on tourist vehicles with travellers having confirmed hotel bookings, and they should be let through a separate lane. It would motivate and lend confidence to travellers who are already scared because of different restrictions in different states.

In fact, the government should think of reimbursing tourists when they are required to take a COVID-19 test before crossing borders because if it is done for a family of four, it will only add to the already-high cost of hotel and GST," he suggests.



Delhi hotel sector revenue performance declined 44.3% in January-July 2020 (y-o-y), says a recent report by JLL. However, this decline is the most modest decline compared to all major cities in India reeling under the impact of COVID-19.



BE PART OF THE FUN



Rhyolite: The king of ghost towns!

With no residents for more than 100 years, dilapidated buildings in a pristine Wild West setting, and no goods or services, Rhyolite is, without a doubt, one of the best ghost towns in Nevada, USA, making for an incredible day trip out of Las Vegas. Today, as one of the most photographed ghost towns in the West, Rhyolite should be a priority when planning a Nevada adventure.

TT Bureau

Rhyolite's hypnotic state of arrested decay couldn't be any more satisfying to see in real time, whether it is its incredibly distinctive history, scratching that desert exploring itch, or hard-to-compare photo ops you're after. This fascinating boomtown sprung to life after a couple of prospec-

towns, what still stands at Rhyolite today has qualified it as one of the coolest ghost towns in Nevada. Maybe that's because of what's left, what's vanished over time, or maybe a masterful balance of the two.

The story of Rhyolite...

Rhyolite, located just outside Death Valley National Park, experienced an incredibly short-lived boom. Established in 1905 as a silver and gold town, its population quickly grew to 6,000 residents, but unfortunately for investors, the value of Rhyolite's

ore was grossly miscalculated. During the initial frenzy, three railroad lines were built, along with a handful of banks, a stock exchange and more — all at a cost that far exceeded the value that was extracted from the ground over the town's lifetime. In less than five years, Rhyolite was nearly abandoned with just a few hundred residents left. In its heyday, there were over 53 saloons to choose from across the few blocks of town, and this sparked local resident Tom Kelly's creative genius: Rather than chuck all those empty beer

bottles into a landfill, why not use them to build a house? Over five and a half months, it is estimated Kelly collected over 30,000 Adolphus Busch (now known as Budweiser) bottles and plastered them together with adobe mud. The result was the foundation of a three-bedroom house that Kelly eventually raffled off.

In 1925, Paramount Pictures took over the town, featuring the bottle house in two flicks — The Air Mail and Wanderers of the Wasteland. Following that, the house was lived in for many decades, but eventually fell into disrepair until it was acquired by the Bureau of Land Management and restored in 2005. Today, it is considered to be the oldest and largest complete bottle house of its kind. While you can't go inside



the bottle house, a visit to the site provides a glimpse into Rhyolite's quirky past.

These days though, Rhyolite is most famous for the Goldwell Open Air Museum, where art and history meet. In the 1980s, a group of artists led by Belgian sculptor Albert Szukalski travelled to the Amargosa Desert and created what

could be considered one of the spookiest art installations in the American West. "The Last Supper," Szukalski's centerpiece, consists of a series of eerie ghost-like plaster figures draped in flowing white robes. The Goldwell Open Air Museum now hosts a diverse outdoor sculpture garden, which is free and open to the public 24 hours a day.



tors discovered high-grade ore in 1905. In the grand scheme of things, Nevada's got it easy when it comes to these still-standing ghost towns and all-around evidence of another era, thanks to one teensy little detail: climate. As one of Nevada's 600+ ghost



A recent report by KPMG – Catalysing the National Infrastructure Pipeline (Project India) - reveals that precautionary travel bans due to COVID-19 would impact the influx of medical tourists in the short to medium term.

'A pathfinder and an inspiration'

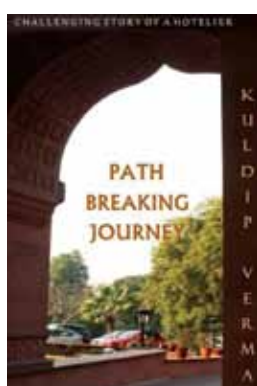
Parvez Dewan, Former Secretary (2012-2014), Ministry of Tourism and former CMD, India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), offers a compelling review of 'Path Breaking Journey – Beyond the Charted Path', a book by Kuldip Verma who has donned many a hat in his career, including that of Senior Vice President, ITDC.

'Path Breaking Journey' is a motivational book and a sincere effort to bring forth the challenges that Kuldip had to face, and he did so with determination, during his long innings with ITDC. He worked diligently as a hotelier, marketing head, chief of Ashok Travels & Tours, an event organiser and head of the HRD division - The Ashok Institute of Hospitality & Tourism Management in New Delhi. Kuldip's positive approach towards his various assignments in ITDC, his creative thinking, his taking ownership of responsibilities and loyalty to the organisation were the main reasons for his successful tenures.

I am of the opinion that the book will prove to be a pathfinder and will inspire young IHM students across India in their future careers

and hotel industry professionals looking to explore new avenues.

Kuldip has summed up his journey as a hospitality and tourism professional, right from his joining IHM, Calcutta about half a century ago and his subsequent selection to the India Tourism Development Corporation as a Management Trainee. He started his career in the ITDC as an



Kuldip Verma
Author
Path Breaking Journey

Assistant Manager and worked his way up, facing organisational challenges, to retire in 2010 as Senior Vice President.

I have seen his passion in all the assignments entrusted to him from very close quarters. He used to come up with innovative ideas, at times things just not imagined before. For example, I sent him to Gangtok to represent ITDC for a North East Develop-

ment Council meeting attended by Chief Ministers, Governors, Minister (DoNER) and Secretary (DoNER). At the Meet, Kuldip

I have seen his passion in all assignments from very close quarters. He used to come up with innovative ideas, at times things just not imagined before

ment Council meeting attended by Chief Ministers, Governors, Minister (DoNER) and Secretary (DoNER). At the Meet, Kuldip

(DoNER) and thus thousands of candidates were trained and provided jobs. Kuldip also suggested to the Minister (DoNER) to allow government employees to travel by air to northeastern states as part of their LTC facility, so as to promote domestic tourism to the Northeast. This suggestion was also accepted and two months later, this became a reality.

Kuldip displayed excellent planning and management skills in handling the 'Sindhu Darshan Festival' at Leh and did it for five years, which was part of the erstwhile J&K state, which was my cadre. At the state end, I was associated with the first Sindhu Darshan Festival. It was good for the economy because it opened the tourism season at Leh a month in advance. He also successfully managed the India Pavilion at the World Travel Market (London) and

ITB Berlin where the Incredible India campaign was launched.

Kuldip was instrumental in converting ITDC's Manpower Development Centre into The Ashok Institute of Hospitality & Tourism Management in New Delhi where he launched a four-year Bachelor's Degree programme in International Hospitality Business Management, with a six-month internship in London.



Parvez Dewan
Former Secretary
MOT and former CMD, ITDC

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



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MOT explains MSME benefits

Devendra Kumar Singh, Additional Secretary & Development Commissioner, Ministry of MSME, chaired a webinar by Ministry of Tourism, where he updated stakeholders on policies, benefits and registration under MSME.



Nisha Verma

Following to COVID-19, Government of India has changed some things in the MSME sector; while some of these changes are meant for the long term, some others are meant for the near future, claimed **Devendra Kumar Singh**, who said, "We feel that tourism is one sector that has been affected most adversely due to COVID and it has caused the highest level of disruption in business. Thus, there is a need to cope with the situation in the short term, and how we change our businesses is very important. In this context, Ministry of MSME has undertaken a few initiatives, one of which is changing the definition of MSME."

Singh added that the threshold limit has also been increased. An undertaking with a turnover of up to ₹5 crore will be considered a micro enterprise; if the turnover is up to ₹50 crore, it will be considered a small enterprise; and a turnover of up to ₹250 crore will be considered as a medium enterprise.

Public Procurement Policy

Under the micro and medium categories, the government has a Public Procurement Policy.

"Hence, one is entitled to take benefit of any public sector undertaking (PSU) which is procuring the service. If a PSU is organising a seminar for its stakeholders, the tour operators have a claim to get that order from that PSU under the procurement policy. They also get a difference in the price up to 15 per cent. Hence, if a tour operator is participating in the PSU tender, and if its prices are

a little higher, it is still given an opportunity to reduce cost and offer the service. Currently, we do not have any list of mandatory procurement of services like we have in the manufacturing sector, but we are open to suggestions from MOT so that we can include these services in the mandatory list of procurement. Hence, there is a benefit in getting EMD (Earnest Money Deposit) and then tenders are free of cost," he informed.

Cluster development scheme

"Your strategy could be to align with the present needs and requirements of the people,



For those who are starting their business for the first time, we will go by their self-declaration

and for that we have certain schemes," Singh said as he addressed industry stakeholders.

"If you take a loan from the bank, you can take interest against incremental loans. There will be schemes for cluster development under which if a group of people plans together and they would like to create a common facility for their clients or different users, we will be open to those suggestions. Also, the requirements of the sector are huge and very different. For example, if someone is running a small cottage and for modernisation of your amenities you approach a bank, you are eligible for loan under the pri-

Benefit to tourism stakeholders

Under the Public Procurement Policy it is mandatory to procure 25% from the MSME sector by the Central government ministries and its PSUs. This is not applicable to the state governments. Out of the 25% target, 4% has been exclusively reserved for SCST entrepreneurs and another 3% for women entrepreneurs. From the MSME entrepreneurs, no tender fee is charged and no Earnest Money Deposited, provided that they have got the Udyam registration numbers. Hence, tourism stakeholders can avail these benefits under the services sector classification.

ority sector. Hence, the benefit of being an MSME is that you get the priority sector lending from banks, which has been stipulated by RBI. Therefore, that benefit you must avail and demand from the banks that you are eligible," he added.

It was informed during the presentation that the concept of caravan tourism can be considered under the cluster development scheme. It just needs to be vetted by the Tourism Ministry.

Registration issue

Addressing the issue of registration, Singh informed that Udyam registration is compulsory. "The earlier Udyog Aadhaar Memorandum process has been changed and it is a free-of-cost registration where no documentation is required. We are taking the data from Central Board of Direct Taxes and GST to know your turno-

ver and your investment in the plant. Those who are starting their business for the first time, we understand that they have not filed any income tax returns, which is not a hindrance. We will go by their self-declaration," he shared, adding that any entrepreneur can register as a service under MSME if they provide any service.



Devendra Kumar Singh
Additional Secretary & Development Commissioner,
Ministry of MSME

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