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SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY

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## NE trade to aid MOT

Rupinder Brar, Additional Director General, MOT, says that they have constituted a committee of stakeholders who will be instrumental in promoting the Northeast region.

Nisha Verma

The newly-constituted committee of stakeholders in the Northeast met for the first time and deliberated on a strategy to promote tourism in the region. Chaired by **Rupinder Brar**, the meeting was held on March 19 at Radisson Blu Guwahati. "The Northeast region of the country is a relatively lesser-explored region and given the thrust on



Rupinder Brar  
ADG, Ministry of Tourism

infrastructure that the government has put in, we have created a small dedicated group of people to work in the Northeast. We brought in people who would help us craft itineraries and small promotional campaigns for the Northeast, in the months to come," she says.

### Domestic gets boost

Brar adds that there has been similar interest in Jammu &

Contd on page 6 ▶

## nepal shows new side

Nepal Tourism Board, in its bid to changing the perception of the country as a pilgrimage and mountain destination, is now offering everything from freshwater beaches to great nightlife.

Nisha Verma

A delegation from Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), headed by **Dr Dhananjay Regmi**, Chief Executive Officer, NTB, recently met the travel trade in India. Speaking on the purpose of their trip, Regmi said that there is a lot more to Nepal than being a pilgrimage destination and this is precisely what they want the Indian travel trade and travellers



Dr Dhananjay Regmi  
Chief Executive Officer, NTB

to know. "While Indians relate Nepal to Pashupatinath, even in that segment we have other religious sites that are lined up with the Mahabharata Circuit, Ramayana Circuit, Shiva-Shakti Circuit, as well as the Buddhist circuit. If we focus on inter-linked packages, we can enhance the relationship between Nepal and India," he believes. But, he realises that Indian tourists cannot be attracted by

Contd on page 6 ▶

## Better insurance cover?

Do insurance companies need to hone their products to meet the changing traveller demand for a better insurance cover? Travel agents say yes, along with better product knowledge for more clarity.

Hazel Jain

After a year of pandemic-related challenges, travel insurance has become a topic of conversation in the travel community, as travel agents search for the best

way to protect their clients. But, what is available in the market, especially now with vaccination in the picture? It is still possible for clients to contract COVID-19 if they haven't been vaccinated and it's still possible for them to have to quarantine for 14 days

if they test positive in a foreign country. Have insurance policies adapted to this need by offering medical evacuation or coverage for the 14-day quarantine? Insurance companies need to ensure that travel agents receive regular training on different prod-

ucts. Even with training, the ever-changing nature of the insurance industry's response to the pandemic has complicated the process of choosing the right policy. Here's what some agents and service providers have to say.

Contd on page 6 ▶

## Travel post vaccine

Industry stakeholders share their view on how, if at all, COVID vaccination will change the way people travel.



Rajiv Mehra  
President, IATO

"I believe that what WTTC is also saying is that once you have been vaccinated and given a certificate, it should be good enough to travel. There should be no need for a PCR test, so the government could allow that as an authenticated certificate. These could be issued by different governments and be easily verified online. Once that starts, they should allow e-visas."

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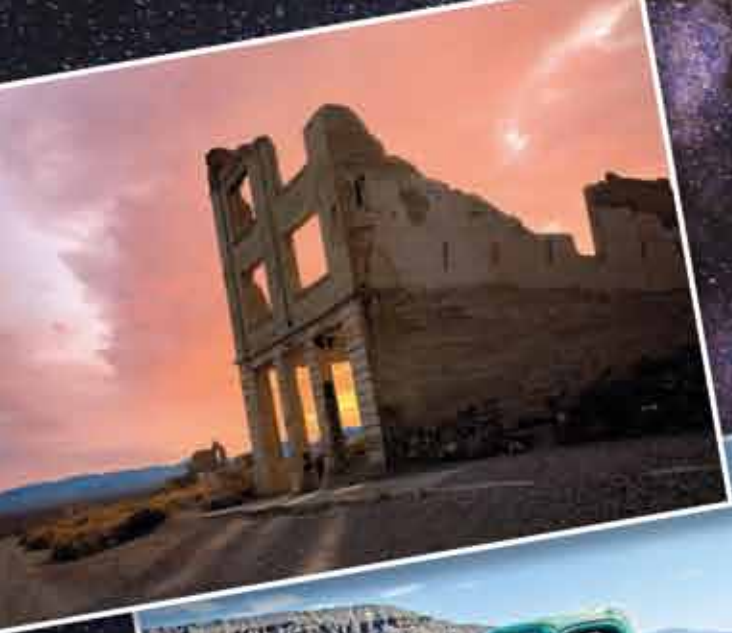


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## Domestic travel picks up in NE

Domestic travel, and especially sustainable travel, is slowly picking up within Assam and the Northeast, with FITs booking anything from three to nine-night packages to destinations that don't have too many COVID restrictions.

Hazel Jain

With his finger on the pulse, **Arijit Purkayastha**, Chapter Chairman – North East, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI) and CEO, Koyeli Tours & Travels, shares an insight on what's happening



**Arijit Purkayastha**  
Chapter Chairman – North East,  
ADTOI and CEO, Koyeli Tours  
& Travels

on-ground in the Northeast region. According to him, domestic and sustainable travel is slowly picking up within Assam and the Northeast. "This is evident from the fact that at Koyeli Travels itself, we have handled a few FIT tours ranging from three

There are still restrictions in Arunachal, Meghalaya, Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland

nights to nine nights' stay covering either Assam and Meghalaya or Arunachal Pradesh or Tripura in the last couple of months with tourists coming from Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and other metros," he says.

However, Purkayastha adds that there are still COVID restrictions in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland (except Manipur and Tripura) where guests have to arrive with a COVID-negative RT-PCR report which is valid only if they were tested within 72 hours and provide the COVID-negative certificate at the airport or the railway station

or at the entry point at Facilitation Centres at the respective states mentioned. He highlights an interesting trend that he has noticed. "Local tourists in Assam are opting for more localised destinations owing to travel guidelines applicable in Meghalaya. Shillong can be reached in a hop from Guwahati, where tourists have to

on different dates have taken a day-long tour to such places or with a night's stay through Koyeli Travels within Assam," he says, adding, "They have actually avoided crowds at popular destinations during weekends, and enjoyed the hidden gems – rural tourism with nutritious tribal meals. We are therefore hopeful that tourism will revive,



stay mandatorily for one night and produce COVID-negative RT-PCR report. Now, local tourists from Assam are taking the services of tour operators within the state to venture the unknown. Families from Assam

albeit with a change. Families and FITs have started travelling with COVID-negative certificates from other parts of the country into this region. Northeast India is an ideal destination for repeat tourism." ↓

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# TRAVELTALK

## VIEWPOINT

### Can we afford to say no?

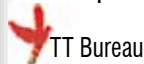
Today, all research carried out anywhere in the world to understand how the travel and tourism sector can truly rise from the ashes of a forlorn year points to only one direction – that of governments and industries collaborating to ensure that travel becomes seamless. To achieve that on a global scale, it is but imperative that a globally-accepted set of protocols be adopted by all countries so that people are less hesitant to travel to destinations of their choice. And while this may swell well for the travellers, countries must also realise that as the dynamics of competition change in the new normal, those who have understood the dire need for such an affiliation will be the first ones to recover and tide over the ill-effects of a devastating virus. WTTC has already introduced the SafeTravels stamp that was created for travellers to recognise destinations and businesses which have adopted the SafeTravels health and hygiene standardised protocols. IATA, too, has introduced the Travel Pass - a standardised solution to authenticate country regulations regarding COVID-19 passenger travel requirements. While several airlines are already trialling this system, India doesn't seem to have warmed up to the idea, yet. Must we not be more open to these innovative ideas that show promise? Should we be averse to taking risks without analysing the economic returns we may be foregoing? It may be time for both government and industry to put their foot down for the right purpose.

### Up go the numbers

In his recent address at the Rajya Sabha, Tourism Minister Prahlad Singh Patel said that tourist inflow to the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir has risen from over 3,700 persons in January 2020 to 19,000 persons in January 2021. This marks a whopping 413% growth. In fact, owing to COVID regulations of social distancing and travellers now increasingly seeking wide open spaces to travel to, wildlife tourism is also gradually picking up, with the Northeast region seeing footfalls trickling in. The domestic tourism sector continues to shine through, setting an example of resilience, collaboration as well as a can-do attitude!

# Vistara a top APAC carrier

Initiatives of 102 airlines were evaluated across Asia Pacific, out of which nine airlines scored a Safe Travel Score of 4.0 or above – the highest ratio worldwide. Air China and Vistara are the top APAC full-service carriers with a Safe Travel Score of 4.1 out of 5 each.



Even as airlines continue to struggle in the light of COVID-19, the need of the hour is to streamline passenger-centric COVID-19 safety and health protocols worldwide. To achieve that, governments and the aviation industry at large are doubling down the concept of health passports. Essentially, these 'passports' prove travellers' COVID-19 vaccination status, and supported with the independent health passes, could enable the means of ensuring safe travel.

#### APAC carriers soar

Each airline is undertaking varied operational strategies to adjust to the new market realities. Air China and Vistara are the top APAC full-service carriers with a Safe Travel Score of 4.1 out of 5 each. Vistara was at heels with Air China on the January 2021 leaderboard with a Safe Travel Score of 4.0. Through various initiatives over



the month, it took the leap to a score of 4.1 on the February leaderboard. Air India came in at number seven with a score of 4.

As far as the LCCs are concerned, AirAsia and IndiGo lead the LCC leaderboard with a Safe Travel Score of 4.0 each. Three Indian airlines made it to the top 10 list with IndiGo leading the way and SpiceJet following close at number three with a 3.9 score. GoAir came in at number five with a 3.8 score.

VID-19 Safety Protocols (98%) and Traveler Convenience (100%) – which contribute to the Safe Travel Score. Emirates falls slightly shy of Qatar Airways with a Safe Travel Score of 4.4 in the same month. Indian carrier Vistara came in at number eight with a 4.1 score and the only Indian carrier to figure in the top 10.

Indian carriers did much better in the LCC



#### Safe Travel Score, Worldwide Airlines, February 2021

Full-Service Carriers	Country	Safe Travel Score
Qatar Airways	Qatar	4.5
Emirates	UAE	4.4
Ethiad Airways	UAE	4.3
Delta Air Lines	USA	4.3
Lufthansa	Germany	4.1
Air China	China	4.1
Turkish Airlines	Turkey	4.1
Vistara	India	4.1
Iberia	Spain	4.1
Cathay Pacific	Hong Kong	4.0

#### Safe Travel Score, Asia Pacific Airlines, February 2021

Full-Service Carriers	Country	Safe Travel Score
Air China	China	4.1
Vistara	India	4.1
Cathay Pacific	Hong Kong	4.0
Qantas Airways	Australia	4.0
China Southern Airlines	China	4.0
All Nippon Airways	Japan	4.0
Air India	India	4.0
Korean Air	South Korea	3.9
Japan Airlines	Japan	3.9
Singapore Airlines	Singapore	3.9

#### Safe Travel Score, Worldwide Airlines, February 2021

Low Cost Carriers	Country	Safe Travel Score
Southwest Airlines	USA	4.0
AirAsia	Malaysia	4.0
IndiGo	India	4.0
SpiceJet	India	3.9
JEJU air	South Korea	3.9
Ryanair	Ireland	3.9
JetBlue Airways	USA	3.9
EasyJet	UK3.8	
GoAir	India	3.8
Eurowings	Germany	3.8

#### Safe Travel Score, Asia Pacific Airlines, February 2021

Low Cost Carriers	Country	Safe Travel Score
AirAsia	Malaysia	4.0
IndiGo	India	4.0
SpiceJet	India	3.9
JEJU air	South Korea	3.9
GoAir	India	3.8
Indonesia AirAsia	Indonesia	3.7
Citilink	Indonesia	3.7
Scot	Singapore	3.7
Thai AirAsia	Thailand	3.7
Jetstar Japan	Japan	3.6

#### Carriers worldwide

Per the assessment on February 28, 2021, Doha-based Qatar Airways leads for the second consecutive month with a Safe Travel Score of 4.5 out of 5.0. Qatar Airways' lead worldwide and specifically among full-service carriers is driven by its initiatives associated with two sub-categories – CO-

segment with three Indian airlines in the top 10 list. Southwest Airlines from the US maintains the top spot on the low-cost carrier leaderboard with a Safe Travel Score of 4.0 in February 2021. It, however, is tied with two prominent Asian LCCs – AirAsia as well as IndiGo.



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# Knowledge boost for TAAI members

Organising its first physical event in the COVID-era, the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) recently conducted a Tourism Conclave from March 9-12, 2021 at the Statue of Unity in Kevadia, Gujarat. The event saw participation from more than 200 members and also included a tour of the area.

Manas Dwivedi

Members from 20 regions and chapters across India gathered and experienced the newest tourism attraction of the state. Organised in association with Gujarat Tourism and supported by Ministry of Tourism, the conclave's focus was to educate travel trade members and promote Gujarat as a tourism destination for domestic as well as inbound tourists, stated **Jyoti Mayal**, President, TAAI. "Members of the trade are going through challenging times due to the pandemic and this offered them an opportunity to adapt to transformation, and explore possibilities. It was necessary to take our members out after a long hiatus because we need to motivate not only our members but consumers as well to travel and

explore domestic destinations. Our conclave provides more avenues to our members and gives them the hand-holding they need to revive themselves and help them move forward. I am happy that we got such a great reception from more than 240 members who participated and showed enthusi-

asm during the conclave and enjoyed their stay at the destination. I would like to thank Gujarat Tourism and MOT for their assistance and support in organising the TAAI Tourism Conclave," she added.

Delegates experienced the accommodation facilities at Tent City 1 and Tent City 2 at Kevadia along with a visit to the tallest statue in the world. They also visited nearby attractions such as Jungle Safari, Aarogya Van and many more apart from enjoying a dinner cruise on river Narmada.

Talking about the success of the event and the prospect of organising more such conclaves elsewhere in the country going forward, **Jay Bhatia**, Vice President, TAAI, said that the success of conclave in Gujarat depicts the need to impart skills, educate and



(L-R) Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI and Jay Bhatia, Vice President, TAAI

empower members. "This initiative of TAAI shall ensure members were familiarised with the region to promote 'Dekho Apna Desh' and revive the promotion of domestic and inbound tourism through personal experience. The idea was to ensure that our members know more about the products and offerings at Statue of Unity before they start promoting it. Apart from familiarisation, we had three informative knowledge

sessions that focused on how we can move forward after the pandemic. All participating members gave good feedback about their trip. Going forward, we are going to tie up with more states and tourism boards to work together and to provide members with more practical experiences," Bhatia mentioned.

**Jenu Devan**, Commissioner of Tourism and MD, Gujarat

We are going to tie up with more states and tourism boards to provide members with more practical experiences  
- Jay Bhatia

It was necessary to take members out to motivate them and the consumers to explore domestic destinations  
- Jyoti Mayal

Tourism, addressed the conclave via a live video call wherein he highlighted the initiatives of the government in promoting Gujarat and thanked the TAAI committee for bringing their members to SoU. He also assured support and encouragement to members in promoting Gujarat as a wholesome destination.

## South India gets exclusive GSA

TravelBullz has signed on Bangalore Classic Tours and Travels as its GSA for the South Indian market. The move will help the company expand its reach across the region, including tier-II and III cities.

Manas Dwivedi

With an aim to expand its reach to tier-II and III cities across South India, TravelBullz has announced Bangalore Classic Tours and Travels as General Sales Agent (GSA) for expanding its reach in the southern market of the country. This move will allow travel partners to increase their product portfolio and earn more revenue with the advanced B2B booking engine provided by TravelBullz. It will also help in management of agent and sub-agent accounts, which will make transactions smooth and hassle free.



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hands with another expert in this domain, TravelBullz, a company that has helped millions of passengers plan their tours with ease.



Amarnath N  
Founder, Bangalore Classic  
Tours & Travels

Bangalore Classic Tours and Travels is IATA-accredited, an active member of TAAI, and even licensed by the RBI as a full-fledged money changer, helping many travel agents to get best B2B rates. Its Founder, Amarnath, was recently elected unanimously as Treasurer of the TAAI Karnataka Chapter. A great networker, he is also the co-founder of BNI Nakshatra Chapter and a member of FKCCI.

The company now aims to support the fraternity with easy and reliable travel solutions, joining

Bangalore Classic Tours and Travels, founded by **Amarnath N**, has been serving the industry since 1983 as a ticketing agent

A recent study by ANAROCK suggests that in the newly-forged post-pandemic world, fractional ownership of vacation homes or high-worth resorts can potentially gain popularity.

## Tourism Breaking News

- IndiGo announces Rajkot as its newest destination
- FHRAI teams up with IRCTC to offer accommodation
- Redevelopment of railway stations initiated in 10 states: Piyush Goyal
- Greece & Iceland open for vaccinated travellers
- IATO waives subscription fee for FY2021, extends deadline for previous year as well
- Flight tickets could cost more as lower fare band increases by 5%
- Jeh Wadia bids adieu to GoAir, Ben Baldanza new VC
- UAE approves multiple-entry tourist visa for all nationalities in the world
- Mumbai exempts vaccinated travellers from quarantine

# Quarantine expense not covered?

## AGENTS SPEAK

► Contd from page 1



**Pradip Lulla**  
CMD, Cupid Travels

“I am advising my clients to take a separate insurance for COVID before travelling overseas. In my opinion, the regular travel insurance does not cover COVID; you need to take a separate one that does. There are some insurance companies that offer COVID cover within India. For instance, Edelweiss offers group insurance that covers COVID which is a top-up. Alternatively, you can buy a local COVID insurance in the country you land in. The best is to buy both – one from India and the other local to ensure complete cover.”

“Right now we are mainly selling Maldives and Dubai, and if we take travel insurance for these two countries, it doesn't cover quarantine if someone tests positive in these two countries. But it covers hospitalisation. I don't know any Indian companies that sell travel insurance that offers any special COVID cover to travellers. But, an international company called Allied does offer that travellers can buy online in USD for Maldives. However, there are cases where clients have complained about discrepancies.”



**Anshu Tejuja**  
MD, Ashoka Dream Holidays



**Mehernosh Colombowalla**  
Director, Beyond Borders Travel Management Company

“There are some insurance companies that are offering a cover for COVID-19 such as TATA AIG. However, the cover is for hospitalisation only if clients are tested positive. It does not include hotel or house quarantine and COVID-19 test costs. My advice to clients is to always get themselves tested for COVID-19 before they travel overseas, and always take overseas insurance when they travel. The cost of insurance is negligible and well worth an investment to avoid any possible expense during your vacation.”

## SERVICE PROVIDERS

“Currently, all our overseas travel policies cover medical expenses due to COVID-19 if contracted during trip duration. The medical expenses incurred during quarantine period are also covered. We offer coverage for medical expenses related to COVID-19 when the insured is outside India, at no additional cost. We offer insurance for five traveller segments – leisure (international), business (international), students, domestic and senior citizens.”



**Dev Karvat**  
Founder & CEO, Asego

“We have launched a unique combo product that covers the travellers' COVID-19 related expenses as well. It includes hospitalisation, hotel quarantine, cancellations along with other new-age travel protection benefits such as roadside assistance, emergency medical and accidental expenses which not only provides immediate relief in case of travel emergencies but also boosts traveller confidence. Considering the travel bans, this product is being offered only to domestic travellers. We are planning to start a similar product for international travellers.”



**Parag Ved**  
Executive VP, Consumer Lines  
TATA AIG General Insurance

## Travel by road to boost footfalls

► Contd from page 1

just that. “Indian tourists mostly look for sun, sand and sea. In Nepal's mid-hills, you can find the first two and while we don't have a sea, all major rivers that flow into the Indo-Gangetic plain originate in Nepal and hence, there are many freshwater beaches. One can even enjoy all recreational activities like camping and rafting. The best part is that all this is available just an hour's drive away, in a country that has a similar culture,” he said.

The CEO also added that in their research, NTB analysed



**Laxman Gautam**  
Head - Tourism Marketing & Promotion Department, NTB

that Indian travellers were looking for everything from a nightlife to new properties in Nepal. “Hence,” he added, “why shouldn't we showcase that in India and do our branding in a differ-

ent way here. That's why we came to India with 25 companies from Nepal to showcase what we can offer.” He also shared that they have appointed Buzz Travel Marketing to help with promotions in

If we focus on interlinked packages, we can enhance the relationship between Nepal and India

– Dr Dhananjay Regmi

India. The NTO has already met a number of OTAs as well as heads of various travel trade associations here. Regmi said that they are all happy to support Nepal in its campaign. “We have also invited them for a Fam trip in April. Let's hope that together we can achieve what we are looking to,” he shared.

**Laxman Gautam**, Head - Tourism Marketing & Promotion Department, NTB, added that while they will be adopting the traditional approach of participating in fairs, organising functions, publicising via media and organising familiarisation trips to Nepal, they will initiate some new programmes.

“We are working out special programmes and want to present to the market packages in collaboration with the private sector, so that people would be able to understand the changed landscape of Nepal. They will look at it from a different, modern view,” he shared.

Gautam also added that they are primarily focusing on the Indian market. “We will go to other countries, but in terms of budget and a human resource focus, we will try to reach out to the tier-II and III cities of India as well, because there is a large and growing outbound population from these cities that has a good capacity to spend. Earlier, we were only focusing on metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Bengaluru,” he added.

## Boutique events soon

► Contd from page 1



**Rupinder Brar**  
ADG, Ministry of Tourism

Kashmir as well. “Gulmarg is exhibiting full hotels and even Srinagar has been exhibiting a fair response. We understand that there is a lot more that we need to showcase and webinars are being planned on that front. Events will be hosted once the weather gets better. The same goes for Leh and Ladakh. We will be hosting boutique events, keeping in mind that COVID is still lurking and hence we need to be respectful of protocols. There is a lot more focus on adventure as well,” she adds.

Brar says that a lot of events on the domestic front are

city building and scaling up of operations, and the recent unveiling of India@75 at Sabar-mati Ashram.

### International marketing

Brar shares that the global media plan, which Ministry of Tourism crafts every year, is already underway. “We are try-

### Industry status for hotels in all states

Hoping that the hospitality sector is given an industry status in all states, Brar says, “It is a state subject and therefore, as a Ministry, we have been advocating this at all levels. The Minister has also reached out to all the state governments to accord industry status, and we are glad that some states are coming forth with it. We hope that other states will also take cue and accord an industry status to the sector.”

already happening, such as the ADTOI Convention in Kevadia, the ITM, a three-day workshop for homestay owners of Darjeeling on capac-

ing to bring in more countries, such as Latin American nations. There will also be more focus on the ASEAN and APAC regions,” she says.

### Land borders open

The Nepalese government has announced the opening of land borders with India. “There are immigration points between India and Nepal near Darjeeling, Siliguri, Gorakhpur, Lucknow and Bihar. Even from Delhi people can drive for 3.5 hours and reach one of the borders of Nepal. Right now, there is only one flight each from India and Nepal between the two countries under the air bubble agreement. If we wait for flights to resume, it will be late and with the summer season almost here, people will look for travel packages. I have suggested to the industry in India that they make land transport packages to Nepal,” said Regmi. Around 9,000 tourists from India travelled to Nepal last month, which may increase if flights open.

# Turning the tide for Indian travellers

Conrad Maldives Rangali Island wants to woo the Indian market with its amazing offerings, many of which are tailor-made for Indian travellers and will certainly attract them in large numbers. Besides an underwater suite surrounded by colourful sea life, the resort has also re-designed its menu to include Indian vegetarian dishes.

 Nisha Verma

**C**arla Puverel, General Manager, Conrad Maldives Rangali Island, says that the “iconic” property is one of the first in the Maldives, in the South Ari Atoll that is a quick seaplane ride away from the international airport. “We also have a twin-island experience that offers a lot of space to guests, especially now when space, privacy and seclusion are so important. While the water villas are more suited for adults, our main island is more suited for families. The jewel in the crown is The Muraka, our three-bedroom residence with an underwater suite. We have a very beautiful location and a lot of Manta Rays are in our lagoon in the evening. One can walk across the 500m bridge in between the two islands and the Manta Rays are often swimming underneath and



Carla Puverel  
General Manager  
Conrad Maldives Rangali Island

feeding — it’s beautiful to watch. We are one of the few resorts in the Maldives where one doesn’t have to get on a boat to see them. We are also very close to the whale sharks and can see them most of the year,” she shares.

Claiming that the lush green vegetation on the island gives a “Robinson Crusoe feeling”, Puverel adds that a lot of the resorts don’t have that. Another advantage that the property has is 12 dining op-

tions which, she claims, other resorts don’t.

### Safety & hygiene

Claiming that Hilton’s CleanStay is an amazing programme, Puverel says, “Our rooms are completely sealed 48 hours before the arrival of guests. In the Maldives, you must enter with a negative PCR test within 96 hours of travel and then we also have a dedicated medical team that can administer the PCR test before departure, which is very important. In fact, we have even started getting our team members vaccinated and right now, 60 per cent of our team has been vaccinated with the first dose of AstraZeneca.”

### Twin Island Experience

Another advantage that the property has is its twin island experience. Honeymooners enjoy a secluded island for adults at Rangali Island

while families are entertained at the more livelier island, Rangali-Finolhu home to the resort’s kids club Majaa Explorers Hub complete with a splash park.

The family island offers one and two bedroom villas including the Grand Water Villas. The resort also offers 12 dining options including Ithaa Undersea Restaurant.

Puverel also says that engaging with the trade is very

### Indian food for every taste bud

Puverel says that the Indian market is very important to them. She adds, “It’s one of the few markets that is travelling regularly right now. Hence, it’s also very important that we attract them. Also, when the Indian market travels, they may give us feedback, allowing us to adapt to their needs. The Indian market is also very loyal. If they come to a property once, and if you can make a connection and have a relationship, then they return with family and friends and do word-of-mouth publicity. Also, many Indian carriers are flying into the Maldives, as well as close to where we are located and not only the international airport.” While they have had guests coming from India, Puverel thinks it’s not as many as they would like. “Hence, we are growing our brand presence within India. We are also relaunching one of our restaurants, which would be more suited to Indian food, such as Jain cuisine, vegetarian food on Tuesdays, etc. A lot of our team members in the kitchen are from India and it’s important that we have an identification and relationship so that people feel comfortable,” she shares.

important. “Our Commercial Director is from New Delhi, and he has many connections. We are also working with **Sandeep Raghav**, Vice President, ISA, and we do a lot of communication on WhatsApp groups that

agents use in India. It is the fastest way of communication. Every time we have a new offer, a flyer is sent out. We do a lot of webinars as well as virtual Fam trips so that the agents can see the property,” she says.

 We have a twin-island experience that offers a lot of space to guests 

# ‘We are building a community’

Fahd Hamidaddin, CEO and member of the Board of Saudi Tourism Authority, made a keynote address at the launch webinar titled ‘Journeys of Arabia’, where he shared that 89 per cent of respondents to their recent survey said they were keen to travel again. This definitely is a huge opportunity.

 Hazel Jain

**F**riends and partners of the Saudi Tourism Authority, welcome to ‘Journeys in Arabia’ – our first-ever STA-owned event designed especially for you – our international travel trade partners. You join us at a very opportune moment in the history of tourism. Travel is preparing for a rebound as the world begins to get the COVID pandemic under con-

trol. Travellers are re-thinking how they want to spend their vacation time – thinking of visiting safe, less-crowded destinations where they can be assured of a warm welcome. I’m especially happy to welcome our friends from India. As the tourism market begins to re-open, India is supposed to become the most significant source market of the world. Eighty nine per cent of respondents to our survey we did recently said they were

keen to resume travel. And that is a huge opportunity. But, to take advantage of that opportunity, we need to think differently.

The pandemic has shown us how important it is to be agile and responsive. In the tourism industry, we need to use information in the way Silicon Valley companies do – as a source of competitive advantage. In the New World, knowledge is empowerment. That is why we are building smart systems that will give you access to rich data and insight from all around the world at the same time we are seeing it. That is why, we are taking a lesson from social media companies and building a dynamic and responsive content syndication system. Content that is accessible in real-time and approved for use.

At STA, we are not building a network, we are building a community. A community dedicated to positioning Saudi as a unique tourism destination – as home for Arabia. We have to show travellers a country of natural beauty, great diversity and hidden treasures – of lush valleys, clear seas and rugged mountains, of 10,000 ancient sites and stunning modern architecture. A destination where iconic places and unexpected stories meet exceptional experiences delivered with true Arabian hospitality.

It will not be easy. Today, Saudi has only five per cent global awareness as a travel destination. But we’ve all faced challenges before. In these times, it’s perhaps more true to say that uncertainty is the only certainty. But despite the ever-changing global



landscape, one thing we know remains the same – people continue to dream of travel. Today more than ever before, they seek inspiration, they yearn to discover places unseen, to experience the unknown. The growth opportunities in this new world of tourism are endless. And together we will realise them through partnership and through a shared commit-

ment to create a new disruptive way of working together.

We are excited to have you on this journey with us. Together we will create a place for Arabia in the hearts and the minds of travellers. We will create new business opportunities and delight our visitors together. I look forward to welcoming you to the home of Arabia – to Saudi.

### Saudi Arabia to open Red Sea by 2022 end

The Red Sea in Saudi Arabia is the world’s most ambitious luxury tourism development, offering an exclusive experience of unparalleled diversity for discerning global travellers. The Red Sea will welcome its first guests by the end of 2022 and will attract a million overnight visits per year by 2030. It will be an exquisite sanctuary offering luxury experiences customised to the needs of each visitor. Smart technology will deliver innovative, tailored services from the moment visitors begin to research their trips to the time they return home.

# Re-opening cautious but safe

**Razaidi Abd Rahim**, Director, Tourism Malaysia, South India & Sri Lanka, says they have a number of campaigns in the pipeline as they look to convince the India travel trade to encourage their clients to the destination.

Nisha Verma

With Indian tourist arrivals to Malaysia dropping by 78.8 per cent in 2020 compared to the same period in 2019 owing to the pandemic, **Razaidi Abd Rahim** says that they had to focus on designing a sustainable business plan. "We had to rebuild the entire strategy and to ensure that we are ready once borders open and attract people to Malaysia, making them feel it is a safe destination. For this to happen, we have been in touch with our partners in South India and Sri Lanka," he shares.

But, Tourism Malaysia will approach recovery in a gradual manner. Abd Rahim adds, "Awareness, safety measures, value-added packages, strategising with our airline partners and agents will be key. We also have the support of travel associations like TAAI, TAFI, SIGTOA and other national-level asso-



**Razaidi Abd Rahim**  
Director, Tourism Malaysia  
South India & Sri Lanka

ciations to ensure complete support and participation of airlines like Malaysia Airlines, AirAsia and Malindo Air to build on our strengths and enhance Malaysia as the preferred destination for travel."

He also shares that the NTO has around 12 campaigns in the pipeline for travel partners. "At a pan-India level," Abd Rahim says, "we have been planning a promotional campaign with select travel partners and airlines for special incentive schemes targeting leisure,

educational tourism, MICE and filming. Hybrid activities will continue, perhaps in the second half of the year or as and when border opens. The roadshows will involve MTEX and cover major regions of interest in South India. We will be working closely on shopping, diving and weddings in Malaysia as part of the promotional

We will be working on shopping, diving and weddings as part of the campaign

campaign." The country, however, will be cautious in opening borders to avoid another possible lockdown.

# Malaysia looks at Q3 opening

Malaysia may open its borders in the third quarter of 2021, but already has the Indian travel trade excited. They've already raised queries and are seeking information for sending their clients to the destination.

Nisha Verma

Just as everyone else did, **Sulaiman Bin Suip**, Director, Tourism Malaysia, North & East India, also thought that the pandemic wouldn't last long. But, he says that after a year of closed borders, the biggest learning was to not take anything for granted and be prepared all the time. "Another thing we learnt from the pandemic was the importance of online promotions. Virtual engagements are going to be key in future, and we should be prepared for such eventualities," he says.

Bin Suip reveals that they recently had a meeting with partner agents, airlines and associations where they concluded that everyone should now be prepared with countries beginning to roll out their vaccination programmes. "We don't want to be left behind. We have come



**Sulaiman Bin Suip**  
Director, Tourism Malaysia  
North & East India

up with some joint promotional campaigns with our travel trade partners. When borders open, we will implement them and will work with our industry partners in Malaysia to add value to packages being offered by travel agents. India is one of our most important markets. We have also asked airlines to work with us to create awareness. I think, there are two key issues we should be addressing—awareness and confidence. Hence, we have planned to conduct Fam trips for agents, media and key opinion leaders,

which will help us convince them that we are taking all necessary precautions and protocols to ensure that the tourists visiting Malaysia remain safe," he adds. In fact, the Director informs that Indian agents are already asking them about bidding for big MICE groups to Malaysia. "We have been receiving enquiries from agents if

We will work with industry partners to add value to packages being offered by agents

they can start bidding for MICE group movements to Malaysia. These are groups of 700-800 Pax," he shares.

# Air Seychelles resumes Mumbai Ops

**Remco Althuis**, Chief Executive Officer, Air Seychelles, reveals that the twice-weekly commercial flight to Seychelles starting April 8 is a step to attracting the lucrative Indian source market to visit the archipelago. The airline is keen on leaving no stone unturned to persuade Indians to visit.

Nisha Verma

Air Seychelles is all set to resume its commercial flight between Mumbai and Seychelles starting April 8, 2021, in line with the air bubble agreement with India. The twice-weekly flight schedule has been charted out in a bid to offer both business and leisure travellers the chance to book a short or extended holiday in the country. **Remco Althuis**,



**Remco Althuis**  
CEO, Air Seychelles

CEO, Air Seychelles, says that it is the right time to launch these flights since Seychelles

has reopened its borders to welcome visitors regardless of their vaccination status.

"Seychelles, with a relatively small population and vaccination level high enough for the country, will be protected. This means that now everybody can come with no quarantine upon arrival and no restrictions on movement. Hence, Seychelles is now more accessible. Also, Seychelles maintains an air bubble agreement with India, allowing the two countries to operate commercial services and therefore, Air Seychelles could re-launch its service into the important Indian market in April," he shares.

Althuis adds that they are exploring more routes based on demand and if business is feasible, they would seek the regulatory governmental approval to operate on these routes. "We are very optimistic

about the Indian market, especially after seeing so many Indian visitors to Maldives, which is a lot more than normal since there is a lack of destinations. Hence, we also

We have appointed Bird Travels as our GSA in India and through them, we look at trainings and meetings

want to use this opportunity to get more Indians to see Seychelles and hopefully, in the future, it would lead to an increase in visitor numbers,"

### Flight schedule and fare details

- ❖ **Fare:** Starts at ₹32,457 for Economy, ₹74,443 for Business Class
- ❖ **Aircraft:** Airbus 320 Neo
- ❖ **Service:** All full-service carrier amenities and in-flight entertainment

Flight	Origin	Destination	Depart	Arrive	Day
HM260	Seychelles	Mumbai	2210hrs	0415hrs	Wed & Sat
HM261	Mumbai	Seychelles	0515hrs	0810hrs	Thurs & Sun

he says, adding that while they are currently not flying to South Africa, once it reopens, there will also be a lot of Indian guests who will find their way via Seychelles to get to South Africa.

To extend their reach in the market, they have worked closely with the Seychelles Tourism Board on various awareness activities.

"We are working with partners on organising media Fam trips, social media engagements with influencers, etc. Histori-

cally, Seychelles has been a very important market for weddings and also for honeymoons; that clearly changed with the pandemic. However, we know that in the future, demand will be there. Hence, we will do different activities to increase visibility for the airline and the destination. We have also appointed Bird Travels as our GSA in India and through them, using technology like Zoom, we look at sales trainings, sales meetings and destination trainings to strengthen our engagement with the trade," Althuis concludes.

### Travel SOPs

- ❖ Negative PCR test certificate prior to departure from Mumbai, regardless of vaccination status
- ❖ Complete Health Travel Authorization at [seychelles.govtas.com](http://seychelles.govtas.com)
- ❖ No quarantine on arrival in Seychelles
- ❖ Travellers to Mumbai need negative PCR certificate and self-report on [airsuvidha portal](http://airsuvidha.portal)
- ❖ 14 days home quarantine upon arrival in Mumbai
- ❖ Onward domestic passengers must verify entry guidelines of final destination



# Minar now India GSA for Air Peace

Minar Group has been appointed as the General Sales Agent for a Nigerian airline based in Lagos – Air Peace – which is expected to start operations in India this year out of Mumbai. It will be the first Nigerian carrier to connect India with Lagos and other West African countries.

 Nisha Verma

**M**inar Group will be undertaking sales and marketing activities for Nigerian airline Air Peace in order to position the brand and create awareness about it in the Indian market. Speaking on the new airline on board, **Harvinder Singh Duggal**, Managing Director, Minar Group of Companies, says, "We're excited to establish a footprint in the West African market. Experts estimate that by 2034, India will become one of the largest aviation markets in the world, and business ties with Africa will grow manifold. We're gearing up to take a strategic positioning and look forward to a close partnership with Air Peace." Air Peace currently serves the major cities of Nigeria and flies to West African and Middle Eastern destinations.

While the exact date of the route launch is not yet decided,

**Ruhani Duggal**, Director, Minar Group, says it will start with Mumbai. "We are just gearing up for that, including sales, promotions, and setting up the infrastructure and we are super excited to col-



**Harvinder Singh Duggal**  
Managing Director, Minar Group

laborate with Air Peace and position them to the top when it comes to the Indian market. The aircraft in operation for Lagos-Mumbai route is the Boeing 777 which has a three-class configuration. The airline also has some fabulous connections when it comes to the Middle East," she says. So far, Mumbai is the only route



that has been confirmed out of India.

In terms of their strategy, Ruhani shares that they are going to take a two-pronged approach with sales. "The first approach is, of course, the B2B channel. Since we have a strong portfolio of GSAs in our company, our network of B2B agents is strong pan India and we think it's all about building relationships

when it comes to promoting airlines. What is required are good promotional offers and a strong network where we can promote Air Peace and show our agents the value of choosing it over other airlines. When it comes

place, the connectivity, etc., and then we start narrowing down specific selling strategies, and look at incentives for our B2C as

are a lot of ideas that we are experimenting with. Air Peace already holds a lot of love when it comes to public sentiment. I have no doubt that we can do a remarkable job to position Air Peace at the top."

 **The aircraft in operation is the Boeing 777. Air Peace also has connections when it comes to the Middle East**   
– Ruhani Duggal




**Ruhani Duggal**  
Director, Minar Group

 **Experts say that by 2034, India will be one of the largest aviation markets; business with Africa will grow**   
– HS Duggal

to B2C customers, which is our second approach, we will start by educating the Indian customer first about what all is there in West Africa to explore. Usually with marketing in Minar Group, we like to take a reverse funnel approach. We first like to set the base about the airline, about the

well as B2B clients," she details. Air Peace already has a wonderful loyalty programme, she reveals. "Besides that, we'll look at offers and promotions, and collaborating with social media bloggers. Hence, there

Outlining the safety and sanitisation measures, Ruhani adds, "We will be doing standard checks like having RT-PCR tests uploaded before travellers board the flight, and temperature checks and masks are mandatory. Sanitisers are available and the aircraft is sanitised before and after arrival of passengers. There is also a health evaluation form which needs to be uploaded on Nigeria's portal when one is flying with Air Peace. Besides that, Air Peace is also an IOSA-certified airline, which is a standard benchmark when it comes to safety in aviation. Hence, I think Air Peace is doing a great job when it comes to sanitisation and it's going to be no less when it starts flying to India." 

## 'We expect 2022 to be a stellar year'

Speaking about the eleventh-biggest market in terms of spend for the UK, VisitBritain CEO, **Sally Balcombe**, expects that India will climb up to the NTO's top 10 list soon given the market's growth trajectory. The pent-up demand to travel among Indians is expected to be a driving force.

 Hazel Jain

**S**peaking exclusively to TRAVELTALK on the sidelines of the annual five-day global trade event ExploreGB, **Sally Balcombe** said, "We expect 2022 to be a stellar year. The event saw 30 buyers from India this year and we are expecting huge numbers from India when international travel resumes. ExploreGB goes to show that you can really conduct these events virtu-

ally, and that we can have as many meetings as we normally have during a physical show, and that people do make great connections during such virtual events."

ExploreGB Virtual brought together more than 350 global buyers to connect online with 350 tourism industry suppliers and destinations from across the UK to do business. Travel industry buyers from 20 countries joined the event and



**Sally Balcombe**  
CEO, VisitBritain

more than 1,000 pre-scheduled one-to-one virtual business meetings took place during the event.

Referring to the in-house research conducted by VisitBritain, she added, "Our research shows that India is ready to travel. India was more positive about travelling than pretty much any other nation. It also scored very high on the VFR traffic. There is just so much pent-up demand to travel. In India, the lockdown was

brutal so we expect it to be one of the earliest markets opening up. And we will be delighted to see you and welcome you!"

**Plans for 2021-22**  
Balcombe explains that the destination is getting ready to welcome visitors. "We are now building to 2022 which will be a massive year for the UK with the Platinum

Jubilee of Elizabeth II and the Commonwealth Games which will have a huge draw for India. So we are expecting a lot of business from India in 2022 which is going to be a stellar year for us.

Our marketing strategy for this year will be all about how we open up safely with our 'We're Good to Go' scheme where nearly 44,000 businesses have signed up. It has also been recognised by the WTTC. That, supplemented with our vaccination drive, the India market needs to know that we are a safe country," she added.

She also commented on the new protocols for international travellers who are already vaccinated and said, "We are working on that at the moment. There will be some

sort of vaccination passports. The UK government will announce this soon, after which we will announce the new requirements for inbound travellers."

"At the moment India is 16<sup>th</sup> in volume and the eleventh-biggest market in terms of spend for us. But, the really important thing is that you are growing fast. We know we are the second-most popular destination in Europe for the India market. Indians spend a lot of money here and stay a longer time – 56 per cent more time than others on an average. We really value you as a market and would like you to grow even more. Your growth trajectory will take you into our top 10 international markets very soon!" Balcombe added. 

 **In India the lockdown was brutal, so we expect it to be one of the earliest to open** 

**'Good to Go' and 'Safe'**  
VisitBritain has announced that tourism businesses in the UK registered to the 'We're Good To Go' industry standard scheme can now be automatically issued with the international 'Safe Travels' stamp from the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC). The WTTC stamp enables travellers to recognise destinations around the world which have adopted global standardised protocols - so they can experience 'Safe Travels.' VisitBritain is coordinating the Safe Travels stamp issue in the UK, on behalf of the WTTC.

# AI keeping agents at bay?

Rajiv Bansal, CMD, Air India (AI), said the airline would move to a more web-based than agent-based sales model. AI's recent ban on agents from selling select sectors has resulted in uproar. TRAVTALK gets the trade to speak.



**Pradip Lulla**  
Acting President & VP, TAFI

“While Air India has restricted Indian travel agents from selling inventory on select sectors like Rome, Toronto and Vancouver, it has allowed agents in Europe, Canada and the USA to sell seats on the same routes to India and vice versa. There seems to be a dichotomy of policy and a misuse of their commercial authority. Air India has completely ignored the support that Indian agents have been offering to them on their weak sectors to help increase the seat-factor percentage. MoCA and the CMD are unaware that this is harming AI.”

“This has created a wrong perception amongst customers to not book through accredited agents. Being IATA-accredited agents and Air India being an IATA BSP-concurrent airline as well as the national carrier must ensure that the trade and agents are protected and assisted. Air India does not connect with us to support and assist in booking challenges. We have received assurance from the MoCA Secretary Pradeep Singh Kharola that Air India and all Indian carriers shall assist and facilitate our member travel agents.”



**Jyoti Mayal**  
President, TAAI



**Subhash Goyal**  
Secretary General, FAITH

“I am surprised and amazed at the role Air India has now started playing because this is the time when all IATA agents and tour operators need its help. Not only are they holding on to refunds due to agents and tour operators, they are also not allowing them to sell flights. Now that's a very monopolistic tendency and it will not be tolerated. I hope that good sense will prevail. When the country opens up, and if today Air India does not stand with agents, the agents will not stand with Air India.”

Inputs by Nisha Verma

# New Residence in the capital

Madhav Sehgal, GM, Hyatt Delhi Residences, says that the property will offer a new experience with its multi-category serviced apartments and the unique style of service for both business and leisure guests.

Nisha Verma

## Please tell us about Hyatt Delhi Residences.

Located at Aerocity, Hyatt Delhi Residences provides an all-new luxury experience. Curated for the discerning traveller, it includes 124 well-appointed apartments divided into bedroom apartments and duplex townhouses, with spacious interiors paired with Hyatt's signature service excellence. Hyatt Delhi Residences is strategically located between Delhi and Gurugram business districts and provides guests with the opportunity to travel across both cities with ease.

## Which segments are you targeting?

Along with high-income households, Hyatt Delhi Residences targets groups of people ranging from guests looking for relocation, single female travellers, corporate travellers,

families, expats, medical tourists, embassies and project-related businesses.

## Tell us more about your strategy for engagements.

Keeping in mind an ideal stay for guests, we offer various stay packages that include



**Madhav Sehgal**  
GM, Hyatt Delhi Residences

staycations, bed and breakfast, long-stay deals and a lot more. As for engaging with our online travel partners, we are working with them for leisure business. We have long-staying offers and deals

For engaging with our online travel partners, we are working with them for leisure business

uploaded on the [hyattdelhiresidences.com](http://hyattdelhiresidences.com) website.

## What about collaborating with Andaz for MICE?

Hyatt Delhi Residences and Andaz Delhi are two different properties catering to different target groups and offer separate services and amenities. But, if a guest staying with us would like to opt for a service at Andaz Delhi or vice-versa, we'd be happy to facilitate it.

# 1,800 Pax to Dubai for MICE

Benazir Nazar, Chief Executive Officer, Akbar Holidays, shares an account of what went behind successfully conducting a MICE group tour of 1,800 delegates to Dubai in February 2021. She says that the operations team in India also made sure that all visas and COVID-19 tests were done on time.

Sun, shopping and some of the world's best hotels – people visit Dubai to absorb it all. From incredible modern architecture to glossy beaches and high-end restaurants and hotels, this is a stylish blend of a city and beach break. We, at Akbar Holidays,

a tough decision during these unprecedented times. But, we have always believed that there is nothing in it but to prepare, adapt and persevere. It took us several trips, meticulous planning, numerous Zoom calls and meetings with the Dubai tourism board to prepare and make

were very few airlines flying to Dubai since many airlines' slots were cut down from 7-8 to merely one or two slots. All this was possible as we could manage permissions to operate charters.

## Seamless entry and exit

Our pre committee team along with the team of our local DMC, Arabian Journeys, made sure everything was seamless from the time the group arrived until they departed. Just like the residents, we experienced the city's precautionary measures first-hand. While those masks can prove irritating in the UAE heat, it's good to know you're in a country with a relatively low infection rate, in part because of the masks. The mask rule extends to Dubai's theme parks, such as IMG Worlds of Adventure, where rules apply on two-metre social distancing and keeping every other seat empty, except when occupied by

family members. Visitors should get used to the smell of the sanitiser. Dispensers are everywhere and everyone is expected to use them.

Thanks largely to early, comparatively strict movement directives, sterilising procedures and group gathering limitations implemented by

cedures that can appear odd or excessive at first, depending on what guests are used to. Less visibly but equally reassuring were the guest rooms that were subject to additional cleansing, with non-vital paper items removed. Our guests are very pleased with our approach to safety and sanitisation measures across all properties, and we've enjoyed great reviews and word-of-mouth recommendations on social media ever since this trip.

and prospective) updated, the 'Dubai experience' remains at its core essentially the same. The facilities and services of Dubai are exceptional, you can do wonders in Dubai! And, most important are the measures taken to ensure the guests' safety and health. Of course, this has been an extremely challenging time, but we have moved forward and adapted our product offerings and experiences to ensure our market gets what it deserves.



are proud to share that we successfully operated a group of 1800 delegates to Dubai, accepting the new norms, in the last week of February 2021.

Commitment to the client to operate a group of such size was

sure that every new norm in the book was followed and executed to a T. Our operations team in India made sure that all visas and COVID-19 tests were done on time. And, we managed to operate this group in the midst of the air bubble where there

All this was possible as we could manage permissions to operate charters

the UAE authorities, Dubai is back to something approaching normality. Our hotels followed – and in some cases went beyond – mandated pro-

## Vacationing has changed

The coming months provide a unique opportunity for low-risk travellers to explore an incredible destination like Dubai without the usual mass influx of tourists. On the face of it, vacationing here has changed, but as we continue to monitor evolving travel and safety situations and, where possible, keep guests (both present



**Benazir Nazar**  
Chief Executive Officer, Akbar Holidays

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

# Bahrain at MICE Engage 2021

As one of the exhibitors at the upcoming MICE Engage 2021 virtual roadshow, Bahrain Tourism & Exhibition Authority (BTEA) hopes to inform the key corporates attending it about the destination's safety and unique offerings for all their MICE requirements, helping bring the destination to the forefront.



Hazel Jain

Sharing the idea behind participating in MICE Engage 2021, **Sunil Mathapati**, Director, Intrepid Marketing and Communications, the India representative for the Bahrain Tourism & Exhibition Authority (BTEA), says, "In the past one year, pre-COVID Bahrain has seen good demand for MICE movements. We have successfully converted some large

MICE movements with some incredible reviews from the corporate and MICE agents on how seamlessly it was managed with BTEA assisting at every stage. This shows the preparedness of the destination to handle any MICE movements. Our participation in MICE Engage 2021 is to bring Bahrain to the forefront for the corporates, and showcase to them that Bahrain can be considered for their next movement."



**Sunil Mathapati**  
Director, Intrepid Marketing and Communications

Mathapati adds, "MICE movements should start as the situation gets back to normal and we think that corporate participation to this event will be to explore new destinations within close proximity to India that has direct flights."

Sharing his perspective on virtual events, he says that while he is a firm believer of physical meetings that help in transacting business much faster than virtual, looking



at the current situation, we have to do with virtual meetings. "We are positive to get good traction from this event. We have been getting some MICE queries and are working on some leads which are in the month of June and July. This brings us to understand that corporates are looking at international destinations with direct flight connectivity, support from the tourism boards and strict safety protocols. We do expect that there would be small movements," Mathapati shares.

Year 2020 has been a rough phase for all. "Even 2021, which is limping back to nor-

mal, is seeing cases rise sporadically. There is a fear of travel but there is eagerness also. MICE travel will start but, in my opinion, it would be with a smaller number of Pax. Corpo-

'Safety for all' will be the mantra in the future," he says.

The vaccination drive in Bahrain is at very fast pace, he says, and BTEA expects that Bahrain would be able to vaccinate the majority of the population in the coming months.

"Bahrain has set up a Special Task Force which has instructed all hotels, DMCs, restaurants, malls and tourist areas to strictly follow COVID protocols. The current protocols ask travellers to board the flights to Bahrain with a negative certificate. On landing, they will have to download the 'Beware App' and then proceed for RT-PCR test with a fee. The travellers will be allowed to leave for their hotels, but would have to quarantine themselves till the report is available on their App," Mathapati explains.

We are positive to get good traction. We do expect there to be small movements

rates would look at closer destinations with direct flights for now. Corporate clients will also want to review their preparedness at every stage before they plan their MICE movements.

## JTB India invites NTOs, hotel chains to participate in MICE roadshow on April 28

With MICE travel from India slowly gaining momentum, JTB India will host a unique B2C virtual platform dedicated to MICE travel slated to be held on April 28, 2021. JTB invites National Tourism Offices and global hotel chains to participate in this in order to take advantage of its wide corporate network. The event will see attendance from top corporate companies in India. For more information, contact **Kritika Kunden** at [kritika.kunden258@jtb-india.com](mailto:kritika.kunden258@jtb-india.com) or **Deepali Gupta** at [deepali.gupta040@jtb-india.com](mailto:deepali.gupta040@jtb-india.com).

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# The cutting edge in travel is here

The World Tourism Forum Lucerne (WTFL) is an annual event where global leaders in travel and hospitality meet the next generation of innovators. The scale of innovation and creativity is vast. TRAVTALK highlights six promising start-ups, including two from India, who reached the finals.



Hazel Jain

These challenging times call for a pandemic pivot. Travel and hospitality companies, regardless of their size, must

take cue from the new normal and re-invent themselves to adapt to the new world order. Small start-up companies are already disrupting businesses and it will serve us well to take heed or risk irrelevance.

One such platform that is putting the spotlight on new businesses who have innovative products to offer is the World Tourism Forum Lucerne through its annual Start-Up Innovation Camp. It received

over 400 applications from more than 90 countries, covering a broad spectrum ranging from digital solutions and gastro-guides to mattress rental. The scale of innovation and creativity is vast. Of these, 15 finalists were chosen under five categories. From India, it received more than 50 applications! This proves that innovative spirit is alive and well, despite the ongoing global pandemic. That's why it is more important than ever to connect the driving forces behind it with established sources of knowledge and expertise, in order to shape the future of tourism together.

The Start-Up Innovation Camp 2021 will culminate in a hybrid festival dedicated to innovation in tourism on April 29-30, 2021 in Andermatt, Switzerland. ↴

## Six finalists to watch out for

**Ecowrap (India)** is an IoT and SaaS-based one-stop solution to help HORECA (hotels, restaurants, cafes) in sustainable treatment of their solid waste and also create livelihood opportunities for women.

**Indy Guide (Switzerland)** is a booking platform for local guides, drivers and tour operators in underrated destinations.

**PIX Moving (China)** builds autonomous driving chassis PIX-

BOT to integrate living, working and entertaining spaces atop, forming different moving spaces and shared mobility. Its application can enable small vendors reach larger audiences.

**Booknook (UK)** is an all-in-one platform for restaurant transformation to redesign management and customer experience.

**Avisio (Austria)** is an all-in-one supply management platform

for hotels. It helps hotels digitise analogue purchasing and storage processes by using data for better decision-making and more efficiency.

**PashooPakshee (India)** mission is to design and supply socially responsible and destination-specific souvenirs which are made by artisans and locals living near the destination. It was short-listed for WTFL Innovation Camp 2021 in the top 10 in the Impacting category.

## Innovator Speak

"Ecowrap is a waste management cum FMCG supply chain platform for hotels, restaurants and cafes. We offer free waste bins to users to segregate different types of waste at source. Once the waste is collected, it is resold to recyclers, manufacturers. To promote waste segregation at source we provide infrastructure and training. Our business model incentivises waste generators for segregating waste at source."



Angraj Swami  
Head of Execution, Ecowrap (Jaipur)



Savini Sonavaria  
Managing Partner, Pashoo Pakshee (Mumbai)

"PashooPakshee works with communities that live near tourist destinations to make sustainable souvenirs. All our products are made by local artisans and women from marginalised communities living in wildlife conflict areas. The idea is to contribute to local economy with sale of souvenirs and inculcate a sense of pride in locals to preserve their destination. Usually, 20-25% of the proceeds go back to the communities as stipends."

# 'Ecowrap stood out for us'

Prof Martin Barth, President & CEO, World Tourism Forum Lucerne, discusses the two finalists from India and why more start-ups should consider applying for their Innovation Camps. He adds that the main factors they considered in the selection process were pressing problems that candidates aimed to solve and their potential to scale.



Hazel Jain

Was there a recurring pattern in the type of innovation developed by the finalists this year?

Not at all, and this makes it so interesting for us and the whole industry. The start-ups have different backgrounds, tackle different issues and come up with great new business models. There are great ideas of supporting companies to make remote work more meaningful. Another start-up is focusing on mobile ordering and delivery of food. One is focusing on mobile-based tour guides or a new supply management concept for hotels.

Tell us what made you pick Ecowrap as one of the finalists?

Ecowrap is a finalist in the Impacting category (Sustainability and Social Impact) where the competition was very tough and we received many high-potential,



Prof Martin Barth  
President & CEO  
World Tourism Forum Lucerne

very diverse business models which made it very challenging for the jury to select three finalists. The main factors that weigh up in the selection process are the pressing problems that candidates are solving and their potential to scale. Ecowrap stood out exactly for this reason. It offers a much-needed solution to a pressing problem in emerging countries- a one-stop solution for waste segregation, collection, tracking, and recycling and up-cycling for HORECA sector. It has also demonstrated solid

traction and great potential to go international, and therefore we believe that it could benefit enormously from the camp's exposure to foreign markets outside India. PashooPakshee stood out among close to 150 other applications as they offer a solution to a real problem to both tourists looking for purpose and destinations looking to showcase better their unique identity and support local artists.

**What will the Start-Up Innovation Camp involve?**

The Start-Up Innovation Camp

It has demonstrated solid traction and great potential to go international



gives start-ups a chance to connect with investors and the industry. During the four days, they will be coached from master students from the university in Lucerne who arrange individual meetings for them including personal coaching with our innovation partner Accenture. Different keynotes, discussions and exchanges will complement the Camp. Last but not least, all start-ups work on a local

challenge to add value to the destination in which the Camp will take place.

**When can start-ups send in their application for the next year?**

The dates for 2022 are not fixed yet. But what we know is that we will organise our second Start-up Innovation Call and Camp in India in 2021. After our successful start in December 2019 in Bengaluru, we will be back with our partners

IHCL and TATA Trusts with the Subcontinent India call soon. We hope to have more partners who will join our initiative to support and highlight the best start-ups. India is a very interesting market for travel and tourism. India has to offer what tomorrow's travellers are looking for: great hospitality, outstanding landscape, rich culture, enough space, sustainable tourism products and delicious cuisine. ↴

# Vaccine efficacy making people wait

► Contd from page 1



**Swadesh Kumar**  
Owner, Shikhar Travels India

“Vaccination is the only solution. If you want to go anywhere, you need a vaccination certificate and show it to them and you will be allowed to go. Hence, it will be a passport to travel and those thinking of travelling should get the vaccination done as well. When we announce that India is open to tourists, people will come. They would only need two doses of vaccination, and that’s the passport for you to travel to anywhere in the world. In my opinion, June-July would be when domestic market will bounce back and September-October would be when inbound will bounce back.”

“Vaccination will undoubtedly change the landscape of travel. However, I think it’s going to be a slow and gradual process. Some of the tourism bodies that we talk to, such as the NTOs, are saying that it would still take time. They are looking at getting their entire population vaccinated before they even consider opening their borders. I think, even after they open up the borders, there will be many protocols in place depending on the country and based on their requirements. It’s not that it will be a ‘free for all’ and every citizen of every country can come in. Yes, the vaccination will help, but it’s going to be a slow process. It’s not going to open up overnight.”



**Anil Srinivasan**  
Executive Director, JTB India



**Jagdeep Bhagat**  
National Coordinator, NIMA

“Vaccination is giving some sort of confidence not only to travellers but to other stakeholders like airlines, hoteliers and tour operators as well. The hoteliers are very optimistic that once the vaccination starts and if it’s done for most of the population, people will start moving. However, if you talk from the traveller’s perspective, they are still in a wait-and-watch module. Even if they have got the vaccine, they still aren’t sure of its success rate, despite what the vaccination companies claim. As an operator, my confidence is building, but not as a traveller. It will take at least a year for them to think of moving in good numbers.”

“COVID-19 vaccination coming in is a good thing for the travel and tourism industry. I think it will take another three to four months when most of the people in this world will be vaccinated and travel will gradually start. Hopefully, there is no new mutant form coming in. While there have been new mutant forms in the past, when people are vaccinated, it will be easy for them to travel safely. So, I believe that in the next four to five months, we will see clear guidelines and hope that inbound tourism returns. Hence, it can be said that inbound will start bouncing back from October or the last quarter of this year.”



**Deepak Bhatnagar**  
MD, Aamantaran Travel

“If people in our source markets are fully vaccinated, I am sure they will be more confident to travel and come to India. We have already made a request to IATO and to the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare that at least the frontline tourism workers should be given the vaccination on priority. If we can do that, we will be able to convince our partners across the globe and in various source markets that even though the country is so big and everybody is not vaccinated, at least the tourism workforce be vaccinated, so that travellers have no problem in coming to India. This, I believe, will help us.”



**Ravi Gosain**  
MD, Erco Travels

“Vaccination will make a difference. We are looking at a new normal and that new normal will be travellers carrying their green vaccination passports and checks at the airport. They may not be looking for other things but vaccinated passengers, to welcome them and on arrival at the airport, also look to getting them vaccinated again or getting it checked. I am of the opinion that just like SARS or bird flu, this is going to stay, and we have to get used to living with it and move forward in life. Tourism is an activity which cannot be stopped because it’s human nature to travel.”



**Rajnish Kaistha**  
Director, Paradise Holidays India



**Sanjay Razdan**  
Director, Razdan Travels

“Vaccination is an ongoing process, and I don’t think it’s going to change much considering inbound or outbound. Nothing will change till flights are not re-started or the tourist visas are not issued, because as far as India is concerned, the cases are going down except in a few places. I think we are ready, as one can see domestic tourism moving at a big level. For inbound, I still feel that it will take time because the source countries, mainly Western Europe, USA, Canada, Australia, etc., are still badly affected. Until the source countries are not fine, it would still take at least 6-8 months before people will think of travelling long haul. Vaccination definitely is going to instil a lot of confidence in the travellers for sure, but until quarantine and other SOPs are not removed, inbound and outbound travel is still going to be difficult for some time. However, I hope that should start by October.”

“Slowly, all the countries will start opening their borders for travellers. However, travellers will definitely take precautions despite being vaccinated. All SOPs and protocols will have to be in place, I believe. All the countries will do the checks at the border, but slowly and steadily, it will start. Many countries may open in April, like Turkey, Malaysia, Thailand, Russia, Ukraine, etc. However, they will definitely monitor the situation because not everyone is sure about how long it will take to stop the spread even after vaccination. We are not expecting travel to start 100 per cent immediately, but vaccination will definitely help in encouraging movement for tourism. Domestic travel is already in full swing. In a highly populated country like India, managing vaccination with such a great speed is commendable, and it will also help in outbound traffic’s surge.”



**Riaz Munshi**  
President, OTOAI



**Manmeet Singh**  
Proprietor, Sky High Tours & Travels

“No one had dreamt what the COVID virus could bring to the entire world. What began in late 2019 and devastated all of 2020 still continues to exist. And, with new mutations coming in, something we keep hearing of every now and then, it is again very difficult for anyone to precisely say what will happen in the future as the new variants are different from the initial virus, to an extent. Things continue to be uncertain and there’s no knowing which way they will turn and when. However, trusting on World Health Organization and the medical fraternity which has come up with the vaccinations, I definitely feel that it will not only help health-wise, but will also definitely help in the economical movement and turning into real-time businesses. That said, only time will give us a true picture of how the COVID-19 virus will act out this year and how business will be.”

Inputs by Nisha Verma

## Swosti's intriguing tours

Swosti Travels is promoting its exciting six-night, seven-day itinerary to the *shakti peethas* in Odisha which could be promoted to not just pilgrims but also cultural tourists looking to learn about the Indian culture.



There are 12 *shakti peethas* in popular Odisha culture and Swosti Travels’ tour covers some of them. This six-night, seven-day itinerary covers places like Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Jajpur, Khordha-Ganjam, Puri and Jagatsingpur.

**Day one** starts from Bhubaneswar where guests visit Hirapur 64 yogini Temple, Kedar Gouri Temple and Lingaraj Temple. The capital city of Odisha, Bhubaneswar is also known as the ‘Temple City of India’ owing to a congregation of over 600 temples. It also has activities like zoological park, botanical gardens, planetarium and a museum. **Day two** excursion includes travel from Bhubaneswar to Cuttack’s Chandi Temple, Bhattarika Temple at Badamba and Maa Biraja Temple at Jajpur. **Day three** includes proceeding to Gopalpur, on the way visiting Ugratara Temple and Taratarini Temple. The evening is free



Advertorial

for guests on the beach of Gopalpur.

On **day four**, guests proceed to Puri, on the way visiting Narayani Temple, Bhagabati Temple at Banpur and Chilika Lake – Asia’s second-largest brackish water lagoon. Chilika Lake welcomes migratory birds during December to April from Siberia, Australia and other countries. The wild Asiatic Irrawaddy Dolphins are one of the major attractions here. Guests can also do boating on the lake to see Kalijai Temple situated on an island. Rest

of the day is free at Blue Flag Beach. **Day five**, guests visit Shree Jagannath Temple and Maa Vimala Temple in Puri. Then proceed to Bhubaneswar where guests visit Konark Sun Temple and Maa Mangala Temple at Kakatpur on the way. **Day six** includes a visit to Maa Charchika Temple at Banki and Maa Sarala Temple at Jagatsingpur.

This itinerary is the best way for tourists to explore the cultural & heritage sites as well as experience its natural offerings.

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# Should India adopt IATA Travel Pass?

While two international airlines have adopted the IATA Travel Pass, IATA is in talks with the Indian authorities and airlines to adopt the application. The Pass moves existing paper processes to a digital platform with up-to-date information on entry requirements. Here's what it can do to solve the existing challenge of allowing international movement safely.

Hazel Jain

To address the challenge of health-check inefficiencies, errors and fraud – which is an increasing problem around the world, IATA has developed a solution called IATA Travel Pass, a mobile App to help passengers easily and securely manage their travel in line with government requirements for COVID-19 tests or vaccines. The IATA Travel Pass moves existing paper processes to a digital platform and joins it with up-to-date information on entry requirements. This makes the process more convenient for travellers and helps avoid fraudulent documentation.

Sharing his views on why this product is good for India, too, **Vinoop Goel**, Regional Director, Airports and External Relations, Asia Pacific, International Air Transport Association (IATA), says, “An electronic process will be better to manage the volumes of data that are likely to be needed and it will help passengers to adapt to any changes more easily in government requirements. Importantly, there will be paper-based alternatives for people who do not have mobile phones, albeit less convenient ones. IATA is already managing



**Vinoop Goel**  
Regional Director, Airports and External Relations, APAC, IATA

health requirements through its Timatic solution, so IATA Travel Pass is a natural evolution to support the industry during the pandemic.”

Two airlines, one from Asia Pacific (Singapore Airlines) and the other from the Middle

the first to pilot components, Qatar Airways was the first airline in the Middle East to pilot the components.” Passengers on Qatar’s Doha-Istanbul route began trialling the digital platform from March 11.

Qatar Airways’ Group Chief Executive, His Excellency **Akbar Al Baker**, says, “We are the industry’s firmest advocate for introducing digital solutions to help passengers safely and seamlessly navigate complex and ever-changing entry restrictions across the globe. We are proud to be at the forefront of trialling this platform, being



**HE Akbar Al Baker**  
Group Chief Executive  
Qatar Airways

languages used, it will be very difficult to implement a paper-based certificate verification process,” he says. There is a cost to the airlines but the pricing is yet to be determined. But it will be free for passengers.

## Different stages of implementation

Singapore Airlines became the world’s first airline to pilot the Travel Pass mobile application for digital health verification, starting with passengers travelling from Singapore to London from March 15-28, 2021. This marks the second phase of its digital health verification process trials. Passengers with mobiles on Apple’s iOS can download the App and create an ID. They can also book their pre-departure COVID-19 test at one of seven participating clinics in Singapore via an online portal. They will be able to view their test results, as well as confirmation status to fly, directly on the App.

Ethiad Airways is currently running a trial but it is still in the implementation stage, reveals Goel. **Mohammad Al Bulooki**, COO, Etihad Aviation Group, shares, “COVID-19 tests and vaccinations will be key to get the world flying again. Since August 1, 2020, Etihad is the only airline requiring a pre-departure negative PCR test result for all passengers worldwide, and again on arrival in Abu Dhabi.”

Meanwhile, British Airways has launched a third travel passport App through its check-in portal.

Given the scale, it's difficult implementing a paper-based model  
– Vinoop Goel

East (Qatar Airways), have already adopted this. Goel adds, “While Singapore Airlines was



**Mohammad Al Bulooki**  
COO, Etihad Aviation Group

one of the first globally and the first airline in the Middle East to do so. IATA Travel Pass is a huge step towards proving that ICAO’s global standards for digital passports do work. It will also help governments across the world to come together in the development of standardised regulations.”

**Where is India in all this?**  
Have any of the Indian airlines shown any interest in adopting the IATA Travel Pass? Goel

Tests and vaccination will be key to get the world flying again  
– Mohammad Al Bulooki

It is a step to proving ICAO's standards for digi-passports work  
– HE Akbar Al Baker

Indian population is well versed with such mobile solutions and we are confident that they will be quick to adopt the IATA Travel Pass. Given the scale and diversity of the Indian air travel market and the multiple

says, “Yes, we are in talks with Indian authorities and the Indian airlines for the Travel Pass to be used in India.” While the airlines don’t need any governmental permission to trial or adopt the IATA Travel Pass,

## IATA Travel Pass & aviation

**Airlines that have adopted IATA Travel Pass:** Singapore Airlines and Qatar Airways

**Airlines that are running trials:** Thai and Thai Smile, Air Serbia, ANA, Gulf Air, airBaltic, Malaysia Airlines, RwandAir, Air New Zealand, Copa Airlines, Emirates, Etihad, IAG, Singapore Airlines, Qatar, Qantas.

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# A solid TAAI with domestic tourism

Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) recently collaborated with Gujarat Tourism to host its Tourism Conclave for the year at Statue of Unity, Kevadia, from March 9-12. The Conclave brought members from all regions together to brainstorm on new ideas and opportunities in domestic tourism in the new normal.



# Book Thai ASQ hotels on

Unveiling a new product, TravelBullz is now offering travel agents the option to book Alternative State Quarantine (ASQ) hotels in Thailand on its portal. This may well serve as a new opportunity for agents to earn while selling outbound packages, also allowing them to enjoy a multitude of other benefits.

 Manas Dwivedi

For non-Thai nationality travellers, many hotels in Thailand, together with hospitals, have launched Alternative State Quarantine packages for those returning from abroad. The ASQ is a process of quarantine at government-accredited hotels in Bangkok at the traveller's own expense. These hotels have been approved by Thailand's Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Defence, and cover a wide price range.

The packages are being made available online, and provide a big opportunity to all travel agents to make bookings seamlessly for their clients and earn additional revenue. With instant confirmation, trade partners can easily



**KD Singh**  
Founder & President, TravelBullz



complete COE to Thailand, finish visa formalities and book the hotels at best rates on [www.travelbullz.com](http://www.travelbullz.com).

Sharing more information is **KD Singh**, Founder & President, TravelBullz, who says that there are numerous benefits for travel agents in booking ASQ hotels on TravelBullz.

"Instant confirmation and vouchers, seamless transactions, a wide variety of hotel

choices based on their client's budget, detailed process and requirements listed on the booking engine for the benefit of agents, and client information are some of the few advantages that our state-of-the-art booking engine provides," he shares.

Looking at the current situation, Singh feels that long

 Instant confirmation and vouchers, and a variety of hotels based on client's budget are some of the advantages 

quarantine requirements are affecting tourism in Thailand from the Indian market. "Yes, it has had a huge impact. Normal leisure travel is non-existent and only essential travel is taking place due to the quarantine requirement. However, we are expecting the Thai government to relax mandatory quarantine stay to be reduced to seven days for vaccinated travellers and 10 days for non-vaccinated travellers," he says.


With the arrival of the COVID-19 vaccine and the rapid pace at which travellers are getting inoculated, Singh thinks that once a

single global system of a vaccine passport is approved, the tourism business will start becoming normal.

"Once that is implemented, all tourism boards will open borders for travel and incoming tourist traffic will start reaching pre-COVID levels. We are also expecting that in the next 6-12 months, travel restrictions may be lifted and international travel may start again as normal, subject to no new challenges arising due to COVID. Vaccination will give travellers an insurance and safety against COVID, and they will start travelling and planning their vacations,"

Singh believes, adding that social distancing and masks will become the norm even with the vaccine in place. This is not going to change.

TravelBullz is keenly waiting for Thailand and Singapore to open their borders, and looks forward to welcoming guests to these destinations.

"We believe that now is the time for the outbound travel fraternity to start preparing for outbound travel and business. We see light at the end of the tunnel and look forward to business going back to normal across all destinations," he concludes. 

*World Travel & Tourism Council will host its 20<sup>th</sup> Global Summit from April 25-27 on the theme 'Uniting the World for Recovery'. The Summit is set to take place in the popular Mexican resort town of Cancun.*

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# Indians can now fly direct to Maafaru

Maldivian, the national carrier of Republic of Maldives and owned & operated by Island Aviation Services (IAS), will start direct flights between Maafaru and Mumbai from April 13, 2021. **Aishath Jennifer**, Deputy Managing Director, Maldivian, shares details and what lies ahead for the carrier.

 Nisha Verma

**A**t present, Maldivian operates three flights from Malé to Trivandrum and two flights from Malé to Kochi. The Mumbai flight connecting to Maafaru will operate on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays. **Aishath Jennifer** says, "We look forward

to welcome Indian tourists to the north and assure them that we will make the experience memorable. The Maafaru International Airport is located in the north of Maldives. The island and the airport are surrounded by beautiful blue sea and sandy beaches, unlike the airport located in the capital. Hence, we thought it would be



**Aishath Jennifer**  
Deputy MD, Maldivian

atolls with about 10,000 tourist beds in the region.

Maafaru International Airport, located in Noonu Atoll, opened in 2019. It is also managed by Island Aviation Services.

### Indian market

Jennifer says that they have received good feedback from the resorts in the region and that tour operators are highly moti-

### Route details

Maldivian will operate the A320 and A-321 aircraft on the route. The A-321 has a capacity of 200 seats and includes Business Class as well. Maldivian will be serving hot meals on board. Tourists are required to report only two hours prior to departure of flight from Maafaru International Airport.

### More routes in future

Maldivian is closely studying new routes and might add direct flights from other cities in India as well, perhaps in the next couple of months.



ated to promote this flight. "We see huge potential in this area. We would love to see a lot of Indians use this opportunity to come and visit us. We believe that the Indian market will be equally excited to explore this new side of Maldives," she adds optimistically. Jennifer also says that tour operators in India believe there will be huge demand for this flight. "We have been flying to India for the last 13 years. This would be our fourth Indian route. We hope to get a good load factor from this sector and I am sure it will be a great success as well," she adds.

"We haven't completed our studies, but hopefully, we will soon be able to announce new routes as well. Delhi is also in our plans. We are looking at new ways to connect India and Maldives. Now that we are connecting north of Maldives, in the future, we plan to connect India with the south of Maldives," she says.

### Bird Travels appointed as India GSA

Maldivian has appointed Bird Travels, the airline management service arm of Bird Group, as its General Sales Agent in Mumbai. The appointment is a move by the airline to build upon its presence in the international arena, support its expansion in India, strengthen the airline's sales team and provide support to the Indian travel trade. "This relationship with Bird Group is a vital one for us and one we believe it will flourish," says Jennifer. To this, **Vijay Bhatia**, President, Bird Group, adds, "We are confident that together, both organisations will have a long and successful partnership. Strengthening the airline's commitment and growing confidence in the market, Bird Travels is happy to take up the responsibility for the airline's sales, marketing and ticketing activities in Mumbai."

a good experience for people who want to travel to the north of Maldives. They don't need to come to the capital, which could be expensive if they want to travel back to the north. We are giving Indians an opportunity to come directly to the north and take a speed boat or air taxi to their place of stay, thus minimising their travel time along with ticket fare. This is the first time an international flight will come to Maafaru." She adds that there are four

 We are giving an opportunity to come directly to the north, minimising travel time and fare 

## Luxury amidst nature



X2 Hoi An Resort & Residence, by Cross Hotels & Resorts, is the newest addition to Vietnam's An Bang Beach stretch. A green sanctuary idyllically located, it features 650 metres of river frontage and is home to 70 private villas, 8 Pool Suites as well as a hotel with 31 loft units and 61 Deluxe rooms.

## Delhi celebrates India@75



Indiatourism Delhi (Northern Region) organised a heritage walk in the Mehrauli area of the capital on March 23 to commemorate the 75-week-long celebration of India@75. It also organised a photo exhibition on the life of Shaheed Bhagat Singh, inaugurated by **Arvind Singh**, Secretary, MOT. **Rupinder Brar**, ADG-MOT, was also present.

## Gujarat's latest GIFT to India

Gujarat Tourism recently conducted a Fam tour for agents to promote its international-class MICE destination in the making – GIFT City. Narrating his experience is **Randhir S Vaghela**, IATO Chairman (Gujarat Chapter).

**A**dding another flower to its bouquet of offerings, Gujarat Tourism is now looking to promote a new world-class destination that it has been developing – GIFT City in its capital city of Gandhinagar. About 25 members of the trade associations IATO and ADTOI from Ahmedabad recently went on a familiarisation tour to GIFT City (Gujarat International Finance Tec-City) which is being promoted as a MICE destination.

so travel agents could get first-hand information on GIFT City and GIFT City Club & Business

 The target audience is the corporate and MICE clientele. We will start promoting it 

missions. So there is a lot of potential for GIFT City. We will start promoting it now. The GIFT City Club has 65 operational rooms right now out of the total of 103.

GIFT City is an integrated development on 886 acres and includes offices, residential apartments, schools, hospital, hotels, clubs, retail outlets and various recreational facilities. GIFT City has multi services, SEZs and all buildings are green and sustainable structures with their own chiller plants and waste management systems.

It is India's first International Financial Service Centre and the world's fifth. The 103-key GIFT City Club located within the City is officially classified as a five-star hotel and offers all club facilities. The two-day trip was organised by Gujarat Tourism

Center, which was the main focus. The target audience is the corporate and MICE clientele.

Since Gandhinagar is the capital, there are lots of ministerial offices and diplomatic

### Getting to GIFT City

Gujarat International Finance Tec (GIFT) City located on the banks of the Sabarmati River is 12 km from Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport and is India's first operational smart city and international financial services centre.



**Randhir Singh Vaghela**  
IATO Chairman (Gujarat Chapter)

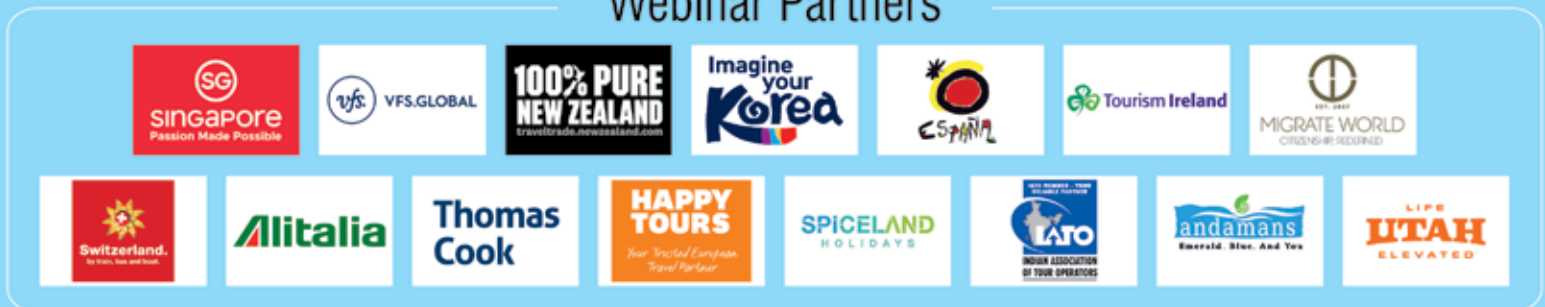
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# A new era of personalised travel

Technology will play a major role in facilitating recovery, ushering in a new era of personalised travel that will present more opportunities for businesses and a better experience for travellers. **Sean Menke**, Chief Executive Officer, Sabre, outlines how Sabre enabled change beyond the pandemic.

Year 2020 was game-changing – it presented the greatest challenge ever faced in the travel industry, with global air and hotel bookings down more than in any previous year. As a leading technology provider to the global travel industry, Sabre has had a front-row seat, with insight into global trends and data as events unfolded.

As the impact of the COVID-19 virus spread, Sabre took quick and decisive actions to improve its resilience, taking measures such as reducing fixed costs, raising additional liquidity and introducing a flexible ‘work from anywhere’ programme. These actions allowed the team to focus on the day-to-day business in 2021 and 2022. “We also had to focus on our customers – many of them around

the world were facing the headwinds that we were dealing with and we needed to help them work through what was taking place. While we are still manag-

**We intend to continue to focus on tech transformation and delivering differentiated products**

ing through the crisis, there is a group of us at Sabre that is very focused on our evolution beyond COVID-19. We believe



that the initiatives we have been able to set up through 2020 and are continuing to work on now will enable us to reshape travel in the years and decades to come,” said **Sean Menke**.

Despite the headwinds of 2020, Sabre recorded some major achievements. The company advanced its technology transformation and modernisation which included the continuing migration of its technology to Google Cloud. On the hospitality IT side, the company signed key commercial wins and renewals in 2020 with major players like All-Inclusive by Marriott and Louvre Hotels. Sabre also extended distribution agreements with some of its largest airline customers,

among them Southwest Airlines and Lufthansa Group.

“Long term, we believe that travel will continue to be a growth industry. Over the last 50 years, there have only been six calendar years in which global passenger volume

declined, and the maximum decline was less than two percent – even factoring in previous obstacles to growth like the 9/11 attacks, SARS, or the 2008 financial collapse. While no one can predict exactly what future travel will look like, especially on the

other side of this pandemic, I am certain that travel will rebound. We are committed to our vision to create a new market for personalised travel by 2025, and intend to deliver on that vision by continuing to focus on our own tech transformation and on developing and delivering flexible, differentiated products that help our customers drive revenue and yield,” said Menke.

### Key focus areas to overcome the crisis

- ❖ Consumer demand for a personalised experience, focusing on IT capabilities, processes and intelligence to enable intelligent retailing
- ❖ Future of distribution by enabling airlines to distribute personalised offers through the GDS marketplace and Sabre’s direct channels
- ❖ The low-cost carrier market, where Sabre worked to create more ways for LCCs to retail and distribute content
- ❖ Strengthening the hospitality IT solutions portfolio by growing the CRS business and adding full-service capabilities to its property management system
- ❖ Technological transformation, Google being one of the more important partnerships



**Sean Menke**  
Chief Executive Officer, Sabre

*(Views expressed are of Sabre and Menke. The publication may or may not subscribe to them.)*

# How to build a brand in a pandemic

Representing 14 luxury brands within less than a year of its inception, the One Rep Global team didn't let the pandemic bog down its spirit. They share their mantra for sustenance through a tumultuous year for people and businesses around the world, some of the latter still reeling under the impact of the outbreak.

**Manas Dwivedi**

The OneRep Global team turned the pandemic into an opportunity. Now representing 14 brands in less than a year of its inception is a testimony of what hard work and commit-



**Hemant Mediratta**  
Founder, One Rep Global

ment to good service can do. Sharing their success story, team One Rep Global shares its mantra.

**Hemant Mediratta**, Founder, One Rep Global, says his team is committed to partnerships



and they work to deliver a great experience. “What makes us different from others is the in-depth knowledge and expertise. We also believe that who you know is very important in our business to get things done and we have friends all over. We have an enviable advisory board comprising the who’s who of the

**We believe that who you know is very important in our business**  
– Hemant Mediratta



**Sheena Raina Raniga**  
Director of Strategy - Tokyo  
One Rep Global

**We learnt to not rely on a handful primary markets, but diversify & invest**

– Sheena Raina Raniga

industry to guide us. Sales distribution-wise, our reach is beyond 30 cities across six countries,” he says.



**Sowmya Rao Vijaymohan**  
Director PR & Communications,  
One Rep Global

**Ensure client’s offering is communicated to the right audience**

– Sowmya Rao Vijaymohan

To this, **Sheena Raina Raniga**, Director of Strategy -Tokyo, One Rep Global, adds, “What we learnt is to not rely on a hand-



**Mayank Tuteja**  
Director of Sales, Delhi  
One Rep Global

ful of primary markets, instead diversify and mitigate risk by investing in multiple markets. Hotels will require specialist representation companies in geographies unfamiliar to them, to represent them.”

For **Sowmya Rao Vijaymohan**, Director PR & Communications, One Rep Global, it is the belief in providing a 360-degree solution to clients that has ensured their success. “Hotels typically rely on a handful of primary markets and in a post covid era our advice to

aid hotels is to not rely on the previous markets but instead to diversify and invest in multiple markets in order to mitigate risk,” she adds.

**We have received trust and support from our luxury travel advisors**

– Mayank Tuteja

**Mayank Tuteja**, Director of Sales, Delhi, One Rep Global, says, “With the kind of trust and support we have received from our luxury travel advisors, we are focused to have a rewarding year. One Rep Global is synonymous with luxury and ultra-luxury brands,” he shares.



# a premier dive destination

Themed 'Our Sea, Our Story', the three-day Philippine International Dive Expo (PHIDEX) 2021 was conducted virtually by Department of Tourism (DOT) Philippines to help support and sustain the country's dive industry.



Manas Dwivedi

In her opening remarks, **Bernadette Romulo-Puyat**, Tourism Secretary, Department of Tourism, Philippines, said, "This is the largest platform in the country for mobilising industry experts, stakeholders and divers in one space. We are here to foster collaboration, innovative ideas, sustainable solutions and economic opportunities. With the gradual activation of dive travel and tourism in various parts of the country, world events such as this are more crucial for the recovery of the diving industry. With Philippines widely recognised by scientists as the centre of marine biodiversity, it is fitting that we lead the region in marking an

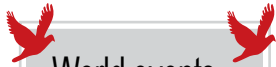


**Bernadette Romulo-Puyat**  
Secretary, Department of Tourism,  
Philippines

event that reflects the world-class diving destinations we are promoting with the theme 'Our Sea, Our Story'. This event raises awareness not only in the Philippines about its rich biodiversity but also the different initiatives that contribute to the growth and development of the diving tourism industry. These are the efforts that sus-

tain our standing as a leading diving destination in the world."

She added that the Department of Tourism recognises diving



World events such as this are crucial for recovery of the diving industry

as a major tourism product and hopes to further grow this industry in the country through an event that advocates for

sustainability of the marine environment. "PHIDEX is distinct from other dive shows as it is the only one with a dive travel exchange – Travex, a B2B programme solely meant for the dive market along with post-event familiarisation trips to complement the trade Expo. Through these event components, we understand the Philippines advantage in the region both as a dive destination and as a dive travel business hub," Romulo-Puyat shared.

This year's PHIDEX hosted discussions by a number of prominent international personalities who are experts on the sea. Expo participants were able to view all these lectures and panel discussions on the event website. It also served as a space for divers and enthusiasts to purchase experiences and equipment from partners and exhibitors through the virtual marketplace called Travex.

*A survey by Travel Consul reveals that a majority 46 per cent respondents feel that business will be back to normal pre-COVID levels only by 2022, while 26 per cent feel this will happen only by year 2023.*

# EVENT TALK

Media Partners:

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APRIL 2021

Date	Event	Time
1	Gulf Travel Show (GTS)	11:30 am
6	STB Cruise World India Webinar	11:30 am
8	Spain Tourism Webinar- Sevilla	3:00 pm
6-10	AAHAR	Delhi
7-9	ITB India (Virtual)	10:00 am
8-10	AITF	Baku
15	Spain Tourism Webinar- Andalucia	3:00 pm
15	CAPA Live	08:30 am
21	IATA Webinar on vaccine transport	05:30 pm
22	Spain Tourism Webinar	03:00 pm
27-29	MRO-Americas	Orlando
27-29	Virtual PATA Annual Summit 2021	07:30 am
28	JTB Corporate MICE Show	10:00 am
28	UNWTO Asia Pacific Webinar	10:00 am
28-30	OTM	Mumbai
28-30	World Tourism Forum	Lucerne, Switzerland

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# MICE budgets unchanged?

Data from SOTC MICE Survey reveals that 25 per cent of corporates are looking at foreign destinations for MICE and 39 per cent indicated their MICE budgets would remain the same. **SD Nandakumar**, President & Country Head (B2B & Foreign Exchange), SOTC Travel, shares more insights.

Business environment is now rapidly different from the first two decades. For the MICE segment, there has been an increasing shift with preference for virtual and digital experiences and in the short-term, hybrid events have become a preferred event format. In addition to corporates in India, there has been a demand for virtual events from corporates based in the ASEAN countries. We have successfully conducted a large number of virtual events for corporates based in the ASEAN countries. We are seeing a lot of interest among corporates across industries for their senior team members/CXO-level meetings, and with the success of this, incentive travel and events are likely to begin.

historical and cultural heritage, best business hotels and developing infrastructure are the key reasons for the growth of



There has been optimism among corporates to visit venues with a clear focus on safety



reassurance with the future of MICE travel. There has been optimism among corporates to visit destinations and venues with a clear focus on hygiene and safety. Our innovative initiatives launched during the lockdown: MICE Plus, Hybrid Virtual MICE and our Assured Safe Travel Program have been receiving strong appreciation across our corporates - seeking the expertise of our MICE Teams in their business plans for the future. The fundamental opportunity that exists and the demand that we

fulfil is the interaction between the corporate and their partners (for employees/dealers/suppliers/customers). There is a need for personalised face-to-face business interactions, product launch events, supplier/customer meets to generate feedback. To cater to this growing demand, MICE events will surely be organised.

**Data shows positive trends**  
Many countries are seeing a gradual re-opening for the MICE sector and as per customer in-

sights and data obtained via sustained corporate engagement and the SOTC MICE Survey, 25 per cent of corporates are looking at foreign destinations for MICE travel and 39 per cent of the corporates indicated that their MICE budgets would remain the same.

SOTC has successfully delivered an international MICE group of 750 delegates to Dubai in January 2021 and has been receiving interest from corporates for MICE tours to international destinations such as Dubai. In addition to international destinations, SOTC MICE has witnessed an encouraging response for domestic destinations for a group of 40-250 delegates to domestic destinations such as Delhi, Mumbai, Goa, Ooty, Bengaluru, Jodhpur, Jaipur, Kashmir, Hyderabad, etc. With an opportunity to re-think and reimagine offerings to customers, SOTC MICE has

elevated the next level of MICE experience for the next generation with its latest innovation – MICE Plus. It presents the extra edge and skill to handle the needs of domestic and global clients of the MICE segment. MICE Plus has been curated with inputs from our esteemed corporate customers, global hotel chains, airlines, tourism bodies and also feedback received from our passengers. MICE Plus caters specifically to the current travel requirements.



**SD Nandakumar**  
President & Country Head (B2B & Foreign Exchange), SOTC Travel

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

### Shift to India for MICE

India has emerged as one of the most preferred MICE destinations. Warm hospitality, rich

domestic MICE. There has been pent-up demand for domestic MICE, and destinations like Ooty, Munnar and Kashmir are being preferred.

We do see a shift in preference for bigger brands for trust and

## ACCOR India & South Asia

**Reema Diwan** has been appointed as Director Design and Technical Services at Accor India and South Asia. With an extensive background in hospitality design and a futuristic technical expertise, Diwan will lead the planning, design and construction of projects under Accor and will be responsible for designing high-impact guest experiences. In the past, she has been associated with Starwood Hotels & Resorts and Taj Hotels, Resorts & Palaces, where she was instrumental in crafting brand identity and conceptualising various brands under the IHCL portfolio.



## SAYAJI HOTELS Mumbai

Sayaji Hotels has appointed **Amit Gera** as the new General Manager Operations. An alumnus of IHM Shimla, Gera is a passionate hospitality professional with more than 20 years of experience in operations. Prior to taking up the new role, he was associated with Hilton Chennai as Director of Operations and has previously worked with hotels like The Oberoi Cecil Shimla, Marriott Mumbai, Taj Fort Aguada (Goa), Leela Palace Bengaluru, Sheraton Bengaluru, Radisson Blu Jaipur, Crowne Plaza Ahmedabad and Hilton Bengaluru.



## THE FERN HOTELS & RESORTS Bengaluru

**Sujadh Khan** has been appointed as the Director of Sales for RSO-Bengaluru for Concept Hospitality - The Fern Hotels & Resorts. He has 14 years of experience in the hospitality industry. Before joining Concept Hospitality, Khan had worked with Lemon Tree Bengaluru as Director of Sales. His last assignment was Director of Sales for Royal Orchid Hotels, Bengaluru. Concept Hospitality is an environmentally sensitive hotel chain with 82 hotels and resorts currently operational under management or opening shortly under The Fern, The Fern Residency and other brands.



## THE WESTIN Goa

**Sunil Kumar** has been appointed as General Manager of the soon-to-be-launched The Westin Goa. With over two decades of experience in world-class luxury hotels, he brings to the role his dexterity in hospitality operations and management. In the new role, with focus on health and wellness, Kumar will bring forth his beliefs in personal well-being to offer an enriching experience to guests. Prior to taking up a position at The Westin Goa, he was the hotel manager of JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu and has also worked with Four Seasons as Hotel Manager.



## JUMEIRAH HOTELS & RESORTS Mumbai

**Yash Chandhok** has joined Jumeirah Hotels & Resorts as the Sales Manager in India, and will be based in Mumbai. He will be responsible for driving the sales and brand-building of Jumeirah Hotels & Resorts in the Indian market. Chandhok brings with him three years of experience in the hospitality industry and in the past, has been associated with big hotel brands such as IHG and Marriott International. Jumeirah Hotels & Resorts operates 24 Jumeirah-branded properties in eight countries and has been making a distinguished impact on the global hospitality market for more than two decades.



## HYATT CENTRIC MG ROAD Bengaluru

Hyatt Centric MG Road Bangalore has appointed **Rahul R Nair** as Director of Sales and Marketing. With more than a decade of sales experience, he has worked with leading Indian and international luxury hospitality brands such as the Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces, Fortune Hotels, ITC hotels, Park Hyatt and Hilton Hotels Worldwide. His most recent position was as Director of Sales with Hyatt Place Rameswaram. In his new role, Nair will be responsible for the entire sales and marketing and will spearhead the growth and development of the hotel.



# What's kept the trade busy?

## Our heritage, our power!



At the recently-concluded 10<sup>th</sup> International Heritage Tourism Conclave in Panchkula, **Rupinder Brar**, Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism, released a Knowledge Report titled 'Harnessing Power of Heritage Tourism with Focus on Sustainability'. The report offers an insight into the scope and opportunities in preservation of cultural and natural heritage.

## Poona Hoteliers enjoys a good game



Poona Hoteliers Association organised its cricket Premier League 2021 (PHAPL) across three days in early March. The event generated good response and saw active participation from 20 teams. Team Sayaji, that played its final match with Team Blue Diamond, created history by lifting the PHAPL championship for three consecutive years.

## Cricket never fails to unite



To coincide with England's ongoing cricket tour of India, Nijhawan Group, TBO Group, Vistara, VFS Global and the UK government organised a cricket tournament in Gurugram. As a keen cricketer himself, British High Commissioner to India, **Alex Ellis**, attended and played in the tournament. At the close of play, Travel Trade 11 were crowned winners.



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# Long-haul, direct flights to shine

Vinod Kannan, Vistara's Chief Commercial Officer, believes there's going to be opportunities for long-haul and direct flights from India. He also discusses in detail how the airline is faring and what lies in store for 2021-22.

 TT Bureau

**D**espite the pandemic, Vistara has not cancelled any of its planned deliveries. In fact, over the last couple of years, it has taken about seven or eight of them, including deliveries of the 787s and the 321s. In a panel discussion conducted by CAPA – Centre for Aviation recently, **Vinod Kannan**, Vistara's Chief Commercial Officer, outlines the airline's strategy for the near future. Sharing more details on the planned fleet, he says, "To put things in context, pre-COVID, 90 per cent of capacity was deployed on domestic. We had only about five destinations internationally, but we've expanded. In fact, we've grown more internationally now with the travel bubbles India has with various countries. We started flights to London and Frankfurt, for example. It's actually been an opportunity for us. We remain committed to the order book of about 70-plus aircraft in the next couple of years. We will have a fleet size of 120 by about, I would say, mid-2023 is what we're shooting for."

He believes there's going to be opportunities for long-haul and direct flights from India, with people wanting to fly direct. "We have two 787s for long-haul and four more on order. We will have a fleet of six, hopefully by next year," Kannan says.

#### Crystal ball-gazing



Sharing his views on international travel in the Asia Pacific,

Kannan says it's going to happen in stages. "I think regional travel will start probably in the next three to six months, assuming that we don't have any major second, third or fourth wave in various countries. But, inter-continental or long-haul travel might take eight to 12 months, probably towards the end of this year. The Civil Aviation Ministry is already thinking about a

network planning team was changing networks almost every other day because the demand patterns were changing, and different states were coming up with different rules. In an ideal scenario, you can plan for certain leisure routes or certain labour-dependent routes, but in reality, we will probably be looking at routes that have the least resistance, routes that are the easiest for people to actually travel on," he says.

#### Contactless service

Technology is something that every airline is now looking at to see how they can offer more self-help, more contactless, or a better customer experience. "One thing that is really important to point out is, at least in the Indian context, the mindset of customers has changed. If you look at it pre-COVID, the percentage of customers who did an off-airport check-in was between 30-40 per cent. Now, it's 95 per cent because you need to have a boarding pass before you can even enter the airport. I think some of these changes are here to stay. This crisis has hastened some of these changes which might have taken much longer for passengers to come to terms with at least in the domestic context," Kannan says.

 Some routes were not on the top of our list, but with people moving to tertiary cities, those have become important 

mechanism they should put in place for scheduled international travel. It's probably going to be bilateral. I don't think they're going to open up the whole world at once."

Speaking on network planning, Kannan says that every airline will probably take what they're given, given the current situation. "As much as we'd like to say that the network planners could predict what's going to happen, all that was out of the window 12 months ago. My

#### Vistara flies to Malé

Vistara inaugurated its non-stop flights between Mumbai and Malé on March 3. It offers choice of Business, Premium Economy and Economy class on the route. The airline will fly three times a week under India's transport bubble agreement with the Republic of Maldives.

#### An evolving hub strategy

Looking at the way Vistara is positioned – as a full-service carrier between metro cities, as well as to serve the international market, its primary and secondary hubs would remain. "What will probably change is some of the routes that we would not have thought of operating in the past, we are operating some of them today. Some routes were probably not on the top of our list pre-COVID but then because of migration, because of people moving from primary cities to secondary, tertiary cities, those have now become important. That's an evolving landscape but, fundamentally, we're not going to look at any major changes in the hub structure," he says.



Vinod Kannan  
Chief Commercial Officer, Vistara



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