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SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY

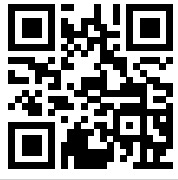
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Plans afoot for inbound tourism

Arvind Singh, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, says that while domestic tourism has shown a promising recovery, the Ministry is now focusing on attracting more international tourists and MICE groups to India via promotional schemes.

Nisha Verma

Tourism Secretary **Arvind Singh** says his Ministry is aware of the hardships being faced by the Indian tourism industry due to the pandemic, and that as part of its effort to mitigate these hardships, the government has taken various fiscal measures to support the industry. Singh was speaking at PATA India Chapter's 10th Update & Outlook Meeting where he addressed these concerns.

The initiatives, he added, include the launch of incentives for tour operators for enhancing tourist



Arvind Singh
Secretary, Ministry of Tourism

arrivals under the Champion Services Sector Scheme (CSSS), launched on a pilot basis and covering short, medium and long-haul destinations across 17 countries. Sharing an update

on the scheme, **Rakesh Verma**, Joint Secretary, MOT, said, "The scheme is approved and is slightly delayed because of the pandemic. We have circulated the guidelines, and the modalities are being worked out. With this scheme we are proposing that interested foreign tour operators register with us; there is a mechanism by which we will calculate the number of passengers the said operators bring in every quarter."

MICE & CSSS

While it will take some time for both domestic and inbound MICE to begin, Singh said that the incentives proposed for MICE

operators under the Champion Services Sector Scheme will encourage MICE operators to bring in more conferences, meetings and seminars to India. He added, "Under this scheme, conferences must have a minimum of 250 participants that must comprise at least 20% foreign participants to be eligible for the incentive in the form of reimbursement of GST for the first two days of stay. This will kick in once inbound travel is permitted."

MOT aims to increase the number of MICE events that take place in the country. According to Singh, India has a very small

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Overtourism ahead?

Countries are slowly opening to tourism, but will this bring in enthusiastic travellers in hordes and cause another problem?

Hazel Jain

While more travellers bode well for the travel trade around the world, there might be a thin line between revenge tourism and over-tourism. **Jay Bhatia**, Director, Tulsidas Khimji Holidays and Vice President, Travel Agents Association of India, hopes that tourism restarts but with all health and safety protocols and SOPs in place which should be laid down at a national level for travel within India and country wise for international travellers. "Of course, full vaccinated travellers should be given priority. Even for children, we request



Jay Bhatia
Director, Tulsidas Khimji Holidays
and Vice President, TAAI

clients that until they too are vaccinated, extra precautions must be taken. Over-tourism is likely to commence in destinations with minimum 10-12 night

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Punjab needs biz

A surge in tourism business before the 2nd wave saw stakeholders in Punjab rejoice. But, the state still has a long way to go.

Nisha Verma

In Punjab, while the second wave saw business dropping for most hotels and tour operators, things were not that bad before March, especially in the domestic sector. **Rupjeet Sagggar**, Owner, Saggger World Holidays (Ludhiana), agrees, but adds that business was nominal as people were getting better rates directly. The same thought is echoed by **Kuldip Sondhi**, Partner, Sondhi Travels (Jalandhar). "Domestic hotels are giving better or similar discounts to customers directly, leaving us with zero or thin margins," says Sondhi.



Rupjeet Sagggar
Owner, Saggger World Holidays

Explaining this further, **Manmeet Singh**, Chairman, IATO Punjab Chapter and ADTOI Haryana & Chandigarh Chapters, says, "Before the second wave, bookings

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'Will make TAFI relevant again'

The newly-elected president of TAFI says that the first thing the team needs to do is revive the faith of its members, because an association derives its strength not from its leaders but from its members. The team's priority is to revive TAFI and make it relevant again.

Hazel Jain

Members from Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) 11 Chapters chose **Ajay Prakash** as their new national president via electronic voting on July 24. He will lead the new team with **Kamal Ramchand** as the Vice-President. Other winners include **Abbas Moiz** as the National General Secretary, and **Hitank Shah** as the Treasurer. The five Managing Committee Members are **Anil Kalsi**, **Lalith Jain**, **Rani Bachani**, **Rai Achal Krishna** and **Seeraj Sabharwal**. The virtual election was conducted by NSDL.

Speaking about the new team's main focus areas with immediate effect, Prakash says, "First thing that we are looking at is greater communication with our members, greater accountability, greater transparency, and to involve more members in the running and the thought process of the association. Unfortunately, though the number of IATA members in the country has increased significantly, the TAFI membership hasn't kept pace. It has actually reduced. That is a worrying situation because an association derives its strength not from its leaders but from its members. And the first thing we need to do is revive the



Ajay Prakash
President, TAFI

faith of our members. So the first thing to do is put the association back on track and everything follows from there. So our priority is to revive the association and make it relevant again." He

was TAFI President from 2010 to 2012.

Prakash adds, "The travel industry is facing tremendous, unprecedented challenges, but challenges compel you to think outside the box and look for creative solutions. We shall engage with our members in a more consistent, meaningful and coherent dialogue. Our Chapter committees need to be empowered and educated on the ever changing scenario, our members need to feel a sense of ownership and pride and to believe that TAFI is there for them. We also need to work closely with all the other

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FM hears tourism woes

Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO and Pronab Sarkar, Immediate Past President, IATO, recently met the finance minister to thank her for recent relief announcements and sought support from the government on issues like SEIS, TCS, ECLGS and export industry status.

 Manas Dwivedi

Rajiv Mehra and **Pronab Sarkar** met Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her office to thank her for the recent announcements for revival of tourism and also to seek support from the government on issues related to SEIS, TCS, GST, ECLGS and export industry status. The delegation expressed gratitude to Sitharaman for clearing SEIS for service providers, announcing five lakh free e-tourist visas, and granting loan for tourism service providers. The team sought more support from the government for revival of tourism and to resolve pending issues that could help Indian tour operators compete with neighbouring countries to attract more tourists to India.

The issues that were raised were to retain SEIS Scripts percentage of 7 per cent, which is being given to tour operators for the last couple of years. The delegation also mentioned that IATO had

been requesting an increase in the percentage to 10 per cent, but should be retained at 7 per cent if it cannot be increased. They also requested that there not be any capping, and SEIS

means effective rate of GST on the total package cost will work out to 1.8 per cent of gross billing of the tour operator to his client with no ITC. It was also requested that GST/IGST be

It was also requested that TCS not be made applicable to persons/companies who are non-resident foreign citizens/tourists/foreign tour operators located outside India for purchasing tour



to tour operators be released without any compromise on the percentage.

The delegation also discussed the cascading effect of GST on tour operators and requested to remove this anomaly by charging GST on the deemed value which could be 10 per cent of gross billing of the tour operators. "This will allow the service to be taxed at 18 per cent on 10 per cent mark-up, which

fully exempted on the services provided outside India, i.e. in neighbouring countries, even if package include India tour, as this is causing loss of business for the tour operators. As a result of tax exemption, bookings will come to Indian tour operators instead of such bookings going to tour operators based in neighbouring countries. This will add considerable foreign exchange for the country," Mehra said.

packages through an Indian tour operator for outside India. Mehra added that the matter of loan under ECLGS was also raised, requesting to amend the guidelines issued by NCGTC.

"Another point was to treat tourism industry as deemed exporter at par with IT industry under Export of Services based on their foreign exchange earnings by relaxing parameters," Mehra concluded. ↓

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TRAVTALK

VIEWPOINT

So, what is the plan?

Pandemics don't die easy! Of the many lessons learnt in the previous year and a half, just as was learnt from pandemics before it, is that in today's world when travel is one of the most sought-after experiences by people, containing a virus is only all the more difficult. The strategy of governments to contain the virus has been as dynamic as the virus itself. The world has been through a period of massive jolts, ups & downs, restrictions on movement within borders and across them, and the COVID-19 virus has been a relentless foe all along.

But battling adversities and coming out a winner is inherent to human nature. While countries have been using the time to formulate their plans for the 'new' future, they haven't forgotten the need for their citizens to venture out of their homes in pursuit of adventure, and socialising & experiencing the world. Travel & tourism business owners, too, had to be looked after; their livelihoods were devastatingly impacted. Hence, to not make things worse, countries slowly started opening borders, and continue to do so, especially for fully vaccinated travellers. But, India seems to be lagging behind. Or is this a deliberate move to curb the pandemic within its borders first, and then allow for foreign travellers to safely visit?

The tourism industry of any country cannot depend on domestic traffic alone. The Ministry of Tourism (MOT) does understand the need to allow international travellers into the country and has been devising a plan to keep India a top-of-the-mind destination for travellers in the international community. Participating in international shows like the Dubai Expo and promoting its Incredible India campaign through its local offices abroad are all part of the plan. But, time has waited for no one and India may be losing out on the flurry of travellers that some of the other countries have witnessed by opening their borders to international travellers. With the COVID-positive case numbers dropping and stricter protocols at tourist hotspots, we may be in a position to open up to vaccinated travellers, even if sparingly. Numbers could be capped at these destinations and protocols not be relaxed to safely open India to the world. We hope considerable action is taken soon.

Now or never for reforms

The following extracts from CAPA India's Airport Outlook FY2022 reveal that Indian airports will need to shift to airline-driven and passenger-centric business models in which they will have to fight to attract traffic and generate revenue.



In any discussion about the challenges in Indian aviation the focus is usually on airline operators. But in the aftermath of COVID, airports too are facing a very serious crisis. Revenue has plummeted, but airport operators are faced with fixed costs that represent an even higher share of their total costs than is the case for



tries, and instead replaced them with air bubble agreements with revised capacity and conditions. To date, such agreements have been signed with only 28 countries. This new framework has impacted international capacity. In light of these conditions, airport

million airline passengers (is equivalent to 80 95 million airline passengers, each of which are counted twice, once at the departure airport and once at the arrival airport) in FY2022, up from 105 million in FY2021, but well below the close to 140 million passengers in FY2020.

bottom end of the range at around 160 million. As was the case in the second half of FY2021, CAPA India expects to see rising confidence and continued traffic recovery in the second half of this financial year.

International traffic

International traffic is projected to be in the range of 16-21 million passengers, and again, based on current settings it is likely to be con-

Hyderabad airport to recover better

Among PPP airports, Hyderabad is expected to recover closest to pre-COVID traffic at 31.3%, while Mumbai will be the furthest behind at 52.3%. However, it may be possible for Mumbai airport to accelerate and achieve higher volumes.

Airport operators to lose billions

In FY2022, major Indian airport operators are likely to report a combined loss of about ₹70.1 bn, comparable to the loss in FY2021. Total revenue is expected to reach ₹97.7 bn in FY2022, equivalent to 42.2% of pre-COVID level.

Traffic to grow considerably

Domestic traffic is expected to increase by 53.7% yoy in FY2022, but will remain 41.2% below FY2020 levels. International traffic is projected to increase by 60.4% yoy in FY2022, however, passenger numbers will remain 75.5% below FY2020.

Financing through equity

Indian airport operators are highly leveraged with limited scope to increase debt. Given the need to raise capital as a result of COVID (especially to finance non-aero losses and capex), financing will need to come in the form of equity.

airlines. Any they have massive capex commitments. The recovery in international traffic continues to be constrained by a combination of muted demand as well as supply-side issues. India has suspended bilateral air service agreements (BASAs) with more than 100 coun-

operators are facing severe financial stress which is reaching critical levels.

Domestic traffic

After taking into account the impact of the second wave, CAPA Advisory's proprietary forecasting model projects domestic airport traffic of 160-190

This projection doesnot take into account a third wave. Although the forecast ranges between 160 million and 190 million, and

strained towards the lower end of the range because of border restrictions, market access and other strategic

bearing in mind the considerable uncertainty that exists in the market, the guidance based on currently available information is for traffic towards the

risks. The report states that PPP airports are expected to handle around 76 per cent of the international traffic in FY2022. ↴



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Durga Das Publications Middle East (FZE)
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DDP is printed, published and edited by Sanjeet on behalf of DDP Publications Pvt. Ltd., printed at Modest Print Pack Pvt. Ltd., C-52, DDA Sheds Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-I, New Delhi-110020 and published at: 72, Todarmal Road, New Delhi - 110 001
Ph.: +91-11-23234177

Retool to revive

Former Tourism Secretary **Parvez Dewan** says that while the COVID-19 pandemic has definitely shaken the tourism industry, reinventing and retooling ourselves might save the day.

Nisha Verma

The first step to reviving from the ill-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is to 'retool ourselves,' says **Parvez Dewan**, citing that restaurants have done exactly that with home delivery, and so have hotels by allowing guests to quarantine themselves at

different properties. Innovation in every sector is thus required to move forward. Giving more examples, he says, "While vaccinations are being invented, it is required to design walk-in temperature detectors, like metal detectors, at airports and hotels. Additionally, hotel staff needs to be retrained not only in housekeeping but also emer-



Parvez Dewan
Former Tourism Secretary

For the aircraft, he says, a Quarantine Class should be established, just like First Class, where social distancing can be maintained. "Airlines might have to remove a few seats for the same. However, in the Economy Class, there can be flexi-glass partitions between seats as leaving the middle seat vacant might not be enough. Within airports also, there should be quarantine rooms," he suggests. Dewan also recommends flexi-glass partitions between seats.

Policy recommendations

In order to avoid crowding, instead of locking markets down, they should be opened 24 hours, says Dewan. "It's a very bad idea to restrict the number of hours a shopkeeper can operate by opening the markets only for two to three hours a day. All the customers would go to the

agency medical aid. They need to know the SOPs and protocols if someone falls ill or needs to be quarantined. Also, we need to ascertain if there will be a requirement for quarantine rooms within hotels. The staff, too, needs to be well-versed with the legal aspects of an infected person walking into the hotel. A lot of luxury hotels provide many freebies in the rooms; hand sanitisers should be added to that list."

shops during that limited period and are guaranteed to jostle against each other. It is not the shopkeeper who needs to be quarantined, it's the crowd we must reduce. Hence, extending the market hours to 24 hours is a better idea so that one can divide the crowd throughout the day," he adds.

In the long run, we must put quotas to not let the crowds accumulate anywhere

The former tourism secretary suggests that such a measure can be adopted at tourist hotspots as well. "Instead of crowding people to one destination in certain hill stations, we need to have a quota of tourists allowed in one place to not let the crowds accumulate anywhere," he says while also advocating the need to diversify destinations in the country.

Countries India must focus on

In terms of countries that India should focus on as source markets, Dewan says that the situation is dynamic and changes month to month. "Indonesia is in a bad shape currently. While India was in great shape last year, it has been in a very bad shape for the past two months. Right now, Europe is doing well. Even some of our neighbouring countries like Nepal are not doing well, while Bangladesh is better. Bangladesh is a huge source of tourists to India and we should continue to focus on it. Europe, Australia and New Zealand have always been relatively free of COVID. While there are no fixed solutions, during COVID we should look at the figures once a week and see which countries are doing well and which aren't," he suggests.

Tourism Breaking News

- HRAWI waives off annual membership fees for 2021-22
- UNESCO confers World Heritage tag to Ramappa Temple in Warangal, Telangana
- WTTC reveals how destinations can grow responsibly using Destination Stewardship model
- Recognise all vaccines under Emergency Use list: WHO
- SpiceJet introduces flights from Patna to Surat, Bagdogra
- Air India launches thrice weekly non-stop flight from Delhi to Kathmandu
- Visit Abu Dhabi launches official public profile on Snapchat
- Punjab sanctions ₹5 cr to develop light & sound show at Hussainiwalla Border
- Singapore aims to start quarantine travel by September

Swosti to unveil resort in Puri

Swosti Group will unveil the first five-star beach resort in Puri, Odisha, scheduled to open in October 2023. The 125-room property will have a bouquet of facilities and multiple venues for the MICE market. Puri has been selected by Swosti Group as it attracts a large number of tourists, and desperately needed a luxurious 5-star resort.

TT Bureau

As another eventful year for Swosti Group comes to an end, it would be unveiling a world-class five-star luxury beach resort - Swosti Premium Beach Resorts - on the banks of the Golden Beach in Puri, Odisha. The Resort will consist of 125 luxury rooms (including three super luxurious suites and one Maharaja Suite for high-end guests), all overlooking miles of the Bay of Bengal. The property will also offer the largest banqueting and conference halls in Puri which can cater to 3-4 large conferences and weddings, simultaneously. Also on offer will be all-day multi-cuisine dining, a food court, infinity swimming pool along with a plunge pool on the second floor, water sports, open-air party lawns, a spa, gymnasium, game zone, sky lounge with Bar at the 13th floor



rooftop, and innumerable amenities. The huge open-air garden lawn, situated on first and third floors, overlooking the beach will give a feeling of standing right in the sea. The all-day dining along with game zone for children and adults, and the spa, overlook the Bay of Bengal. Swosti Group will be the first in the town of Puri to come up with a five-star luxury beach resort.

While Golden Beach has been included in the list of Blue Flag Beaches, Puri (also known as Lord Jagannath Dham), is a famous tourist destination of Odisha and is located at a distance

of 60 kms from Bhubaneswar on the shoreline of Bay of Bengal. Puri is one of the few destinations that offer spiritual salvation along with the thrill of nature. The Beach offers tourists the solitude and serenity to soak in the mystical charm of the city.

With modern technology and state-of-the-art facilities, Swosti Premium Beach Resorts will provide a unique ambience with the largest convention venue for large conferences at Puri, besides three wedding venues.

The property will also offer banqueting facilities and conference halls



Swosti Group has been in the hospitality business in Odisha since 1981 and operates two hotels in Bhubaneswar - Swosti Grand, a four-star hotel and Swosti Premium, a five-star hotel, as well as a beach resort at Gopalpur-on-Sea (Gopalpur

Palm Resort) and a five-star luxury lake resort, the Swosti Chilika Resort that is situated on the banks of Lake Chilika and is the only Indian Green Building Council-certified Platinum Class Resort in eastern India. The company also operates a travel

company (Swosti Travels), one of the largest inbound tour operating companies in eastern India, and has now added a state-of-the-art hotel management institute - Swosti Institute of Management & Social Studies (SIMSS) - to its portfolio.

Nothing beats data-driven business

How important will market research be going forward given that markets will be much more volatile in the aftermath of the pandemic? TRAVTALK speaks to six stakeholders about the importance of research and customer surveys when it comes to tweak their strategy. They have some interesting insights to share...

“Market research will be a key tool that will help us understand the changes in the behaviours of travellers as well as help us plan better and predict trends. Travel agents and operators who are constantly in touch with their clients have a better understanding of the needs as well as concerns of their clients. Our partners in the airline industry have also given us insight to the changes in demands as well as their expectations that they have seen from their clients.”



Neliswa Nkani
Hub Head – ME/SEA
South African Tourism

“It will be crucial to keep our ears to the ground, especially within a market as dynamic as India where packages and promotions for each region will need to be customised and rolled-out depending on the status of vaccinations and the pandemic. Different regions will open up at different times, and each traveller set will demand unique considerations. We have been engaging with consumers, CEOs and MICE leaders to understand consumer travel sentiment first-hand.”



Sammy Yahia
Director of Tourism (India & Philippines), Israel Tourism

“The pandemic continues to alter consumer behaviour and re-shape travel trends. Credible surveys and consumer studies substantiated by proper fieldwork, are key in learning the changing consumer landscape in India, including new trends and emerging spending patterns. For example, STB seeks to better understand and attract new segments such as passion-niche travellers, wedding groups, and those seeking holistic living and wellness experiences.”



Sunil Menon
Country Manager – India
Tourism Fiji

“Post COVID-19 market research will not only depend on historical data but will also include an in-depth understanding of the individual markets. It becomes more critical today to recognise the manner in which information is delivered and consumed. Quality market research will help to keep our eyes on the larger picture, which would then facilitate us to find new market niches along with potential new products and services. We are sure to see a transformation.”



GB Srithar
Regional Director (India, ME and South Asia), Singapore Tourism Board

“Market research is going to be a very important tool for us to be able to cater to the customers’ post-pandemic demands. Since travel is going to be very different in terms of what travellers will look for, their comfort levels, accommodation needs as well as their health and safety requirements, we will need to be one step ahead to be able to cater to their requirements. One big change that we have seen already is that travellers are looking for a more responsible way to travel.”



Chetan Kapoor
Co-Founder & CSO, Videc

“The fundamentals of research and data have shaken since the pandemic. Companies can no longer rely on historical trends to predict future growth. Rather, companies now require to monitor real-time trends more than ever. Be it passenger traffic, traveller behaviour, operational routes and destinations – every bit of the travel industry has been upended, and things are only going to get more complex in the short-term.”



Misha Gambetta
Director – India
Switzerland Tourism

Inputs by Hazel Jain



GRNconnect.com
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DMC for all needs

B2B booking platform GRNconnect has now launched a DMC business in the US to meet the growing requirement for tailor-made itineraries and personalised travel that it has been witnessing. **Deepak Narula**, Managing Director, GRNconnect, talks about the company’s growing global portfolio.

Nisha Verma

Speaking about opening their DMC business in the US, **Deepak Narula** says, “It’s been some time since we have been thinking about launching DMCs, as there was a lot of requirement for tailor-made itineraries and personalised travel. We were planning to launch it in January 2020, and we only delayed it because of COVID. The rationale behind it was that there was a need for quality operators from the US, not that there aren’t

any. However, we understand the Indian market, especially their requirements, making it easier for us to cater to it. Keeping all this in mind, we were sure that this will be a success for us, and we are getting good response so far from India as well as other markets. There are future queries also,” he adds.

With more domestic markets opening, Narula says, “Every country had their domestic business growing, and this is where we embarked on the idea of



Deepak Narula
Managing Director, GRNconnect

distributing more in different countries. Hence, for our DMC, we have a two-pronged strategy — firstly, selling US as a destination to the world and to explore distributing GRNconnect more in the US market, which is one of the high potential markets for us. With better technology, we are distributing to many agents in the US market now. We also have some other products within GRNconnect besides hotels, apartments, transfers sightseeing, etc. We also started ‘pay at the hotel’, which is

becoming very popular for us. In addition, our white label product is very popular right now and API continues to be on an all-time high demand. Overall, it’s a nice basket of products that we are offering to agents on a cross-selling, or buying/ selling basis.”

Expansion plans

Sharing that they have a few destinations in mind for DMCs apart from the US, Narula reveals, “We are looking at Egypt and some other destinations as well, but it will take time. Besides that we have some ambitious plans for GRNconnect also. Currently, we are distributing GRNconnect in America and over 50 countries. This is what we did during the pandemic — we increased our database and our market base; we reached out to more agents. The response might not have been immediate, but we were able to get some response the moment the market started opening up.”

The addition of white label and ‘pay at the hotel’ was done to further improve upon current products. “Hence, we did a lot of contracting, added many suppliers, especially lo-

User interface and user experience is better now. Thus, overall, it’s a much better version of what it was pre-pandemic,” he explains.

As of now, GRNconnect has a registered database of around 30,000 agents in India and abroad. “We are reaching out to them. Our whole idea is to go for domestic tourism in all the countries in different markets,” he adds.

Commenting on the status of industry today, Narula concludes saying, “I hope we all get over this soon and without much help from anyone. I have seen travel agents surviving on their own. They have been very bold in facing this crisis. Everybody’s starting to survive. They have shrunk to their best possible capacity, but I think we all will sail through.”

We understand Indian market requirements, making it easier for us to cater to them

cal DMCs, to our platform. Our rates have also improved, our inventory has increased and our bookings are flawless now. It’s much easier to book with fewer clicks on GRNconnect right now than it was pre-pandemic.



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were mainly for surrounding hill stations like Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu & Kashmir. Our loyal clients trust us for their holidays. However, general customers initially opted for self-drive and booking of hotels. It was only when they reached hills and found it difficult to find a good hotel because of overcrowding that some of them started calling travel professionals.”



Manmeet Singh
Chairman, IATO Punjab Chapter and
ADTOI Haryana & Chandigarh Chapters

When there is a lockdown or curfew, how can any business or work be possible



Kuldip Sondhi
Partner, Sondhi Travels (Jalandhar)

Hotels are giving better or similar discounts directly, leaving us with zero or thin margins

Paramveer Singh, General Manager, Taj Swarna, Amritsar, shares, “Post the phase-wise unlocking across the country last year, green shoots of travel began to emerge driven by an increase in demand for domestic travel, with people keen to explore all that India has to offer. Further buoyed by the festive season combined with facilitation of inter-state travel, leisure domestic travel saw a steady growth, and our

hotel saw a significant increase in bookings.”

Narayan Tharoor, General Manager, Holiday Inn Chandigarh Zirakpur, also says that they were getting domestic bookings at the hotel before the second wave. “Chandigarh attracts a lot of transient travellers. Hence, we have seen a good demand for the hotel in the market. Zirakpur is a convenient location for a halt for pre and post-travel to the northern belt of India. Hence, we host a lot of leisure travellers at our hotel,” he shares.

Speaking on behalf of Radisson Blu Hotel MBD Ludhiana, **Sonica Malhotra Kandhari**, Joint Managing Director, MBD Group, says, “The roll-out of vaccination did bring back the confidence of travellers for staycations, leisure and business trips during the second wave in Punjab. It was good in terms of the road to recovery, as 50 per cent



occupancy was good in the new normal during the second wave.”

Impact post second wave

The second wave of the pandemic has impacted lives and livelihoods across the country severely,



Paramveer Singh
General Manager, Taj Swarna, Amritsar

While business travel will resume over time, it will be slower as compared to leisure travel

says Paramveer Singh. “With many states across the nation undergoing various phases of lockdown and varying travel restrictions being implemented, business was definitely affected. We witnessed cancellations, with people wary to travel unless necessary,” he opines. Sondhi agrees. Manmeet Singh puts forth a pertinent question - “Whenever there is a lockdown or curfew, how can any business or work be possible barring groceries and medical or essential items-related business?”

Tharoor says that while business was slow for a few weeks due to the second wave, Himachal opened and they started seeing good demand in terms of rooms business, and with the relaxed guidelines even started getting enquiries for wedding and related events.

At Taj Swarna, Paramveer Singh brought in some changes. “We extended our signature services by bringing hospitality at home. We identified the changing requirements of our customers in the ‘new normal’ and relooked at our business and services to cater to the same,” he shares.

Green shoots 2.0

“After the second wave, queries for banquets and corporate bookings started flowing in. Even the restaurants could operate at 50 per cent capacity that brought the regular guests back to the hotel,” claims Kandhari.

Even Paramveer Singh accepts that the recent phase-wise unlock and ease in travel restric-



Narayan Tharoor
GM, Holiday Inn Chandigarh Zirakpur

Incentivising travellers for visiting local destinations is expected to boost tourism

tions has seen domestic travel begin to resume. “The recent relaxation in government rules in the state are encouraging for travellers looking to visit the historic and beautiful city of Amritsar, and we have been getting increasing queries from guests. With many people looking to travel to drivable locations and boundaries between work &



Sonica Malhotra Kandhari
Joint Managing Director, MBD Group

The government should definitely grant an industry status to the hotel sector of India

home increasingly blurring, people are looking for ways to break away from the routine while enjoying with family and loved ones in a safe manner, even if it is a short getaway. Staycations are, hence, seeing growing popularity among guests,” he says.

The same goes for Radisson Blu Hotel MBD Ludhiana. “There are a lot of queries that have been converted into confirmed bookings. The queries for rooms, social events, corporate events and business meetings are there in the market and people are showing faith in the brand for following all the new normal safety protocols,” adds Kandhari.

Holiday Inn Chandigarh Zirakpur has started receiving wedding, transient and corporate enquiries again. Tharoor shares, “We foresee that the trend will continue for the next few months before it starts getting stable and consistent over a period of time.”

Queries have also started trickling in for travel agents and tour operators, but Saggar says, “I don’t

think that it is going to start significantly by next year.” He also adds that tourists are not as attracted to Punjab as they are to other states, like Goa. Kandhari explains the reason. “Being an industrial town, most of the travel is for business purposes. Business travellers prefer hotels here because of its strategic location,” she says, adding, “The state is doing its bit to promote tourism by promoting heritage locations.”

How to lure tourists

While Tharoor suggests actively promoting local attractions amongst domestic travellers to encourage more tourism in the state, Paramveer Singh recommends a vigorous vaccination drive and creating relevant awareness about it. “This, combined with flexible travel guidelines, gradual ease of travel restrictions and favourable policies, will boost the sector’s economy,” he believes.

Kandhari says, “The government can help in boosting business by reducing property taxes, electricity rates and excise fees, and by introducing one window for all compliances. The long pending demand is that the government should grant industry status to the hotel sector.”

Tharoor also hopes for continued support from the government to recover from the drastic impact on the hospitality sector, including providing one-time waivers in terms of property tax, various licences and fees. “Incentivising travellers for visiting local destinations is also expected to give a boost to the tourism sector,” he says.

Saggar adds, “If people start getting vaccinated, other countries will open doors for our country. MoCA had said that commercial flights will not resume before March 2022 except some air bubbles and special flight corridors. By that time the country should run the vaccination drive aggressively.”

What people want

While Saggar is only getting VFR traffic, Sondhi is getting both business and leisure queries. Manmeet Singh, shares, “Business tours right now are not happening as most businesses are also effected. They are also facing restrictions but eventually, it is bound to start. Whether offices are open or are still on work-from-home model, people who want to avail holidays not only for themselves but also for their families have started taking trips.”

Holiday Inn Chandigarh Zirakpur received mostly leisure and business-related queries. It’s the same for Radisson Blu Hotel MBD Ludhiana. “The queries are for both leisure and business, as being an industrial town people travel a lot for business, and locals and NRI crowd prefer leisure activities,” claims Kandhari.

For Taj Swarna, Amritsar, it is a mix of all three. “However, the demand for leisure travel is significantly larger with many travellers also looking to combine working remotely with rejuvenation at beautiful destinations, making workcations a popular choice among our guests. While business travel will resume over time, it will be slower as compared to leisure travel,” predicts Paramveer Singh.

Adventure policy gets nod

Adventure tourism providers in Maharashtra will be given a temporary registration certificate from the Directorate of Tourism and a final registration certificate after obtaining all required qualifications.

TT Bureau

In a bid to promote adventure tourism, the Maharashtra government approved the state's new adventure tourism policy. The policy will channelise adventure tourism on land, air and water. Around 25 different adventure activities like trekking, paragliding, water rappelling, river rafting, biking, rock climbing, and scuba diving are covered in the policy. It will cover the promotion of adventure activities as well as registration, regulation, monitoring, planning, promotion, training etc. of various adventure event organisers and adventure training organisations.

State Tourism Minister **Aaditya Thackeray** said, "Safety being the priority, adventure tourism organisers will need to be vigilant as per the provisions mentioned in the policy regarding the safety



Aaditya Thackeray
Tourism Minister, Govt of Maharashtra

of tourists. Norms for trained and experienced trainers, quality, and standardised equipment will be laid down. State level committees and divisional level committees will be constituted for implementation of the policy. These committees will consist of experts in land, air and water tourism."

According to the policy, the organisers of adventure tourism in the state will be given a temporary registration certificate from the Directorate of Tourism (DoT) and a final registration certificate

after obtaining all the required equipment details and qualifications. Under this policy, the organisers of adventure activities will gain several benefits like refund of SGST, discount in stamp duty, discount in power charges etc.

While creating the policy, suggestions from organisations like Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI), Indian Mountaineering Institute, and Association of Paragliding Pilots & Instructors (APPI) and experienced individuals are being taken into consideration. This policy is not applicable to all types of competitive adventure sports such as jeep safaris and nature trips in wildlife sanctuaries.

Detailed safety guidelines and rules for safe and disciplined conduct of adventure tourism activities will be made available on the website of the Department of Tourism.

Stronger Airlink with India

Airlink, the privately-owned South African regional airline based in Johannesburg, has named AirlinePros International as its General Sales Agent for India, strengthening its foothold across borders.

TT Bureau

The privately-owned South African carrier Airlink has appointed AirlinePros International as its General Sales Agent for the India market. The IATA and IOSA-accredited Airlink has more than 50 commercial jetliners operating throughout southern Africa. It operates one of the widest networks in southern Africa to countries such as South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Madagascar, Lesotho, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, and Eswatini (Swaziland), as well as to the remote island of St. Helena.

Speaking about the recently-announced partnership, **Ramesh Marwah**, Regional Managing Partner India, AirlinePros International, says, "India enjoys close strategic, cultural and economic ties with South Africa and neighbour-

ing countries in southern Africa, which will be connected well to India by Airlink in cooperation with its interline partners.



Ramesh Marwah
Regional Managing Partner India
AirlinePros International

We are confident to receive necessary support of our trade partners in India to assist Airlink in not only establishing base in India but also securing optimum market share of travel triggered by growing trade, anticipated surge in tourism, and movement of large number of Indian-origin people residing in South Africa and other nations in southern Africa."



In 2019, Airlink carried two million customers on more than 63,000 flights on 55 routes to 39 destinations in nine African countries and St Helena Island. The company operates independently under its own unique

We are confident to receive support of our trade partners in India

4Z flight code. Even through 2020, Airlink was activating new interline relationships and partners, including British Airways, Air France, Emirates and Qatar.

Raffles Udaipur brings own agenda

Set to open on August 2, 2021, Raffles Udaipur has plenty in store for guests. TRAVTALK gets in touch with its General Manager, **Abhishek Sharma**, who reveals what's in store and how the property aims to cater to the growing market for luxurious hospitality in India while also fulfilling the needs of foreign visitors.

Nisha Verma

The iconic Raffles brand is world-renowned for creating meaningful experiences, and **Abhishek Sharma** claims this is what guests can expect at Raffles Udaipur as well. "Built like a grand country estate, the hotel promises exclusivity, an unexplored destination, and an ultra-luxury experience on a private island on Udai Sagar Lake. The breathtaking views of the lake from every room, unparalleled culinary experiences, the brand's signature Raffles Spa, and the legendary Raffles service will help our guests map their rare place of extraordinary discovery," he adds.

Given how the hotel would be one of its kind, Sharma expects that their guests will be well-travelled and those in a constant quest for peace, calm and discovery. "This



Abhishek Sharma
GM, Raffles Udaipur

would include the HNIs, CEOs and MDs of various top enterprises and guests from the entertainment and media fraternity. We are confident that our immersive hospitality and unparalleled experiences is what will charm our guests. We want our guests to see what we have created, amalgamating Raffles' global ethos with local Indian sensitivities," he reveals.

One of the most distinct features of Raffles Udaipur is its exquisite



location, Sharma says. "It is the only hotel built on the unexplored Udai Sagar Lake, far away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Raffles Udaipur also has the largest ballroom in the city, which sets us apart," he adds.

Business offerings

As modern-day business travelers look for an accommodation or event venue where they can experience exclusivity, peace and

tranquility, Raffles Udaipur aims to be a workcation destination that keeps them inspired. "We can tap into the business segment as we have the largest ballroom in the city besides expansive outdoor meeting venues covering over 40,000 sqft and an indoor Grand Ballroom spread across 9,000 sqft. The extensive culinary offerings are also a big influencing factor for business guests, who can choose from varied options for their close network-

ing dinners, client get-togethers, etc. The origin of business at present would remain domestic until international travel opens. The key international source markets will be the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Europe and USA," Sharma says.

Raffles Udaipur is presently conducting virtual tours and will soon be organising familiarisation tours in partnership with airlines, to help build a stronger brand image

and consumer base by tapping into various segments like leisure, MICE, corporates, wedding planners, etc. "For those planning their first stay at Raffles Udaipur, we

We are confident our immersive hospitality and unparalleled experiences will charm guests

have introduced an exclusive experience - A Royal Escape - priced at ₹45,000 (plus taxes) per night and is valid only for stays between August 2 and September 30, 2021," Sharma shares.

Training needs an overhaul

Sudeep Jain, Managing Director, South-West Asia, IHG Hotels & Resorts, talks about the brand's growth plans and ensuring it attracts business while maintaining the talent pool within the organisation. He also talks about trends and innovations that can keep the hospitality sector afloat in these times.

 Nisha Verma

What are IHG's plans for the year?

As the situation stabilises in India, we are well-positioned to capitalise on the returning demand and remain committed towards our growth and expansion strategy. Earlier this year, we opened Holiday Inn Chandigarh Zirakpur and announced the debut of our world-renowned extended-stay brand, Staybridge Suites, in India with the signing of Staybridge Suites Bengaluru Thanisandra. Recently, we also



Sudeep Jain
Managing Director, South-West Asia, IHG Hotels & Resorts

signed Holiday Inn Express & Suites in Jalandhar to strengthen our footprint in Punjab and Holiday Inn Express Pokhra Lakeside



in Nepal. We are optimistic about the year ahead and are in active discussions to meaningfully expand our presence across key markets in the country.

What made IHG sail through the pandemic?

We were quick to evolve our offerings to meet the demands of the market. We identified new revenue centres and forayed into the food delivery segment across our hotels, which has seen rapid growth since last year. We also partnered with preferred vendors to lease our outdoor venues for intimate weddings and social events to generate incremental revenues.

These offerings, together with IHG's Way of Clean programme that promises a clean and safe environment to guests, helped us instil consumer confidence. We continued to capitalise on domestic travel in both leisure and corporate sectors to drive business. Our effort towards protecting our hotel owners, managing stable revenues, rationalising operating costs, and flexibility to adapt whilst taking care of our colleagues helped us sail through the crisis.

What about maintaining the talent pool?

In the current scenario, the business environment has changed

significantly and the concept of hospitality is being redefined. In order to serve our guests in the new context and make sure

extensive operational guidance on health, safety & cleanliness, and changes to hotel Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for all existing and new employees.

Efficient talent management will continue to remain an important consideration

Efficient talent management will continue to remain an important consideration for the hospitality sector. Keeping this in mind, we are investing in tools for workforce optimisation and labour efficiency as we look to set up for success in 2021 and beyond. Additionally, training of workforce and investing in professional development will continue to remain important.

the talent is fully equipped to do so, we believe it is important that we train all members of our workforce extensively across all hotel operations to adapt to the new normal. Keeping this in mind, we have provision for

Our aim as a company is to come out of this crisis much stronger and it is important that we have the right talent, with the right resources and right training to help us achieve this.

Packages@IHG

IHG is looking to launch a special summer campaign to capitalise on the demand in the coming months. Additionally, as part of its IHG Dining Deals promotion, the group is offering a 25% discount to its IHG Rewards members at participating restaurants in its hotels, to further enhance their experience.

Women's Collective@ATOAI

Instituted on International Women's Day 2021, ATOAI has introduced the Women's Collective, a task force formed with the purpose of inspiring, nurturing and celebrating women in adventure travel.

 Manas Dwivedi

Arshdeep Anand, CEO, HMA Spectrum Handcrafted Holidays, will be the Chairperson of the committee while other members include, **Guneet Puri**, Founding Partner, Bohemian Adventures; **Tejaswini Gopalswamy**, Co-Founder, Unventured Expeditions; **Dilshad Master**, Outward Bound India Himalaya and **Akansha Garg**, Founder Director, Waxpol Hotels & Resorts. Sharing her thoughts on leading the Collective and



Arshdeep Anand
Chairperson, Women's Collective

bringing about a change in the industry, Anand said her team's main objective is to bring women to the fore by giving them a voice and visibility. "Women

are grossly under-represented in the leadership role in the adventure tourism industry and there is a need for women to push their boundaries. I see women travelling freely and also doing adventure activities such as hiking, rafting, trekking. I also see a lot of employment generation

Ultimately, we want to reach a stage where the industry does not require a special women's task force

in the future as well. Ultimately, we want to reach a stage where the industry does not require a special women's task force," she says.

Objectives of the task force

- ❖ Give recognition to women in the adventure travel and tourism industry
- ❖ Create a culture of inclusion where decision-making and power are practiced collectively and women participate at all levels
- ❖ Create a community for women in travel to network, advertise, promote and inspire more women to be a part of the adventure travel industry
- ❖ Encourage women-led travel organisations
- ❖ Create an ATOAI-certified women-friendly network of local operators and travel partners

Protecting agents a priority

► Contd from page 1

associations towards creating a credible lobby whose voice is heard. We need better outreach to the government and the travelling public and drive home the necessity of consultation with the industry on policy matters. But above all we need to inculcate a more responsible approach to tourism by all stakeholders. The term 'revenge tourism' has no place in the lexicon of the next normal. Sustainability has to grow beyond merely a catch phrase; the Green Imperative and Responsible Tourism need to be built into the core business strategy at every level of the tourism ecosystem."

Highlighting some of the other key areas, **Abbas Moiz**, National



Abbas Moiz
National General Secretary, TAFI

General Secretary, says, "We need to urgently ensure that agents are protected against airline failure – this will protect not just agents, but also the travelling public since we have all suffered when an airline folds up. The fractured relationship between agents, airlines and IATA needs a serious overhaul. We shall create legal and facilitation cells to assist

our members. Our objective is to create value for our members, and assist them to look at issues not as problems, but as a learning process, using technology to create unique solutions, suited to their own organisations. We shall also ensure that our members receive regular updates, from

We need to urgently ensure agents are protected against airline failure

our liaison with relevant national government bodies like MoCA, MOT, DGCA, etc, and with our principals, i.e. IATA, airlines, hotels, diplomatic missions, tourism boards and all others of relevance." Two more members are to be co-opted as per the bye laws of TAFI at the first meeting of the new Managing Committee, and **Pradip Lulla** will join the MC as Immediate Past President.

The new team

Ajay Prakash	President
Kamal Ramchand	Vice President
Abbas Moiz	National General Secretary
Hitank Shah	Treasurer
Rani Bachani	Committee Member
Anil Kalsi	Committee Member
Rai Achal Krishna	Committee Member
Seeraj Singh Sabharwal	Committee Member
Lalith Jain	Committee Member

Spain picks its webinar winners!

The Tourism Office of Spain – Mumbai completed another of its hour-long webinar series in July that was exclusively designed for the Indian travel trade. Nine individuals who attended all the three webinars and participated in the educational quiz won Amazon gift vouchers. They share their experience and celebrate their win.

“I learned a lot from the well-thought-out and engaging experiences shared by the expert presenters from diverse destinations such as the fascinating Jacobean pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela, to the stunning past of Spain's 15 UNESCO World Heritage cities, to the vibrant city of Valencia, giving us reasons and impressions of why Spain is one of the most visited countries in the world. The webinar gave us the inspiration to plan culturally rich experiences indulging in incredible gastronomy, thrilling experiences, and a lot more. We look forward to promoting Spain again.”



Sudhir Tuli
Director, Travel Instagram

“While the world is agonised with COVID and is in recovery phase, Spain Tourism took an initiative to organise webinars which were really worthy. All the three webinars were fantastic giving great in-depth knowledge of Spanish culture, heritage and experiences which can be curated along in the itinerary. I would say it was really appreciative as even a layman can speak much about Spain after having seen all the webinars. There were experts of various regions who spoke at length with beautiful pictures and videos. I really appreciate if these webinars can also be uploaded on YouTube for trade assistance.”



Kiran Chokshi
Manager, European Holidays

“Glad to know that I am the winner of the quiz. We will definitely keep on promoting Spain and wish to conduct as many MICE to FIT movements as possible for the forthcoming season. From pilgrimage routes to UNESCO World Heritage cities to local cuisines – everything that was highlighted in the webinars was so nicely covered. It provided a first-hand virtual experience and in-depth knowledge. It will not only assist us in selling the destination effectively, but also boost confidence in selling Spain to our present client base and aggressively target newer corporate and FIT clients.”



Shalini Kalian
Manager, NCS Travels & Tours

“I really appreciate this gesture from Spain Tourism board. All the three webinars were full of valuable information which will profit us immensely in future. I gained new knowledge which I will certainly apply to my work. There was a whole new content and useful tips which will help us sell Spain effectively as soon as the borders re-open. The quiz was very exciting as well. It was one of the reasons to keep us engrossed through all the webinars. I have always been very dedicated in selling Spain as a destination and will continue to do so! Thank you Spain Tourism for always keeping us motivated even during such times.”



Pranay Pednekar
CEO, Hridaan Holidays

“All the webinars were very informative, specially from the point of view of a travel agent. Spain is such a beautiful and diverse country with its art and culture, nature, cuisines, amazing beaches and so much more. After attending the webinars, I believe it will be easy for us tour operators to guide our passengers accurately, based on their interests once travel to Spain opens up. I would love to discover Spain myself some day and experience the destination first-hand so I can advise my clients better! I eagerly look forward to attending more such webinars and learn many more facets about Spain.”



Deepa Nagrani
Account Manager, SWISS Tours

“All the three webinars of Spain were informative and gave insights into the major highlights with information about Valencia, the religious path of Spain, and Spain's Heritage sites. This blend of topics and information will be helpful for me to cater to clients of various travel tastes. With these webinars, we were actually taken on a virtual tour that imparted immense knowledge about the country. Now we know so much more about present-day Spain and its fascinating history as well. However, we can't have it all in a limited frame of time but it certainly gave us insight into major information about Spain.”



Neha Nagrani
Owner, Bourbon Holidays

“It was a pleasure attending all the three webinars conducted by Spain. It was definitely a fantastic learning experience and gave me much more confidence to promote and sell the destination. I would definitely recommend the webinar; it was time very well spent. The speaker was very knowledgeable and interesting throughout the session. It was very clear and understandable. I would like to thank the entire team for organising such excellent sessions! They provided valuable information and taught me so much more about Spain that I didn't know. I look forward to attending more such webinars in the future and get to know the country even better. I am also grateful for the gift voucher that I received. It was all truly remarkable.”



Sanjeev Sharma
Associate Director, Trius Holiday

“During the lockdown, the online seminar was a reliable source of increasing our knowledge about the various cities and what else we can promote in Spain. Although we are selling Spain for a long time, still during these webinars we discovered so many new things which we have not explored although we have been in Spain. Like in the first session of Visit Valencia there was a good MICE event place which we are going to explore for sure. The second session about Follow the way of Saint James was completely new for us although we have heard about it & in the third session Spain's heritage cities, some of them we have already visited but still found so many new things which we missed exploring; may be on next visit will do so. Overall, it was great fun!”



Sneha MS
Junior Agent, SWISS Tours

“I had completed the Spain Specialist Program last year, so attending the webinars was like brushing up my knowledge on Spain. But the webinars gave a much deeper insight and practical knowledge about the destinations, especially Camino de Santiago. And the talk by the Indian guide who had gone for the Camino was what was really needed because it gave an insight from an Indian perspective. The video-rich presentation on the UNESCO world heritage sites was very good, informative and much better than just plain talk as pictures speak a thousand words and videos speak much more. I think the first webinar on Valencia was a good idea because most of the itinerary for Spain is just the two-city programme of Madrid and Barcelona, about which we know a lot.”



Prinston Prakasia
Sales Manager, Travelust India

Inputs by Hazel Jain

TravelSafe with Turespaña

Tour operators can join its online campus to learn about Spain, what the destination is doing to ensure a safe experience for its visitors, as well as earn a Spain Expert Certificate issued by Turespaña.



Turespaña has introduced TravelSafe, a microsite within its official web portal spain.info. TravelSafe is aimed to aid international travellers who wish to come to Spain. TravelSafe has an information system which is updated regularly on travel restrictions arising due to COVID-19. It allows travellers to consult the necessary information to enable organising their trip to Spain from 50 countries, including India.

More secure information is available about PCR tests, quarantines, as well as other prevention measures plus regulations before, during and after the trip. Detailed information on the specific measures in force in each of the autonomous community



has also been made available. This microsite is the cornerstone of Turespaña's communication strategy – 'Travel Safe. Travel Again'. Please consult <https://travelsafe.spain.info/en/> while planning holidays to Spain for your customers.

Spain Specialist Programme
The Spain Specialist Programme (SSP) is an e-learning platform designed by Turespaña

to familiarise tourism professionals with Spanish culture, the regions of Spain, and its tourist attractions. The SSP is designed to give professionals the expertise they need to improve their relationship with their customers and increase their sales. All the SSP courses are free of charge, and can be taken how and when you want. Log onto the online campus at: <http://campus.spain.travel/en-in/>

Time to make a move

Subhash Goyal, President, Confederation of Tourism Professionals, points out why it is essential to announce e-Tourist Visa and scheduled international flights in the months of September-October.

We have to fulfil our Prime Minister's dream of making India a \$5 trillion economy. Therefore, we need to act now before it is too late.

- ❖ The tourist season to India is from October to March, and we need to not lose this opportunity
- ❖ In 2019, India earned ₹2,10,981 crore in Foreign Exchange
- ❖ We received more than 10 million tourists in 2019
- ❖ International tourism accounts for almost 10% of GDP and almost 11% of direct & indirect taxes
- ❖ Hospitality and tourism industries employ about 58 million people directly and about 75 million people indirectly in India
- ❖ About 10 million people have either lost their jobs or are on leave without pay
- ❖ Government-recognised tourist guides, tourist trans-

port operators, tourist taxi drivers pan India, and small tour operators and vendors are starving

❖ We have vaccinated over 350 million people and they should be allowed to travel internationally

The only hope for survival is starting of e-tourist visa and

This will also enable India to further boost its exports and become a global leader

scheduled international flights. The whole world is opening up for people who have received both vaccinations or have tested

negative. COVID is going to stay and we have to learn to live with it. Just like Africa allows people with Yellow Fever vaccine to travel, similarly, we should allow fully vaccinated tourists to travel to India and Indians to travel abroad to the countries that are open via scheduled flights. The sooner we do this, the sooner it will help our economy revive. This will help save millions of jobs and enable India to further boost its exports and become a global leader.



Subhash Goyal
President, Confederation of Tourism Professionals

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

WTM opens registrations

Travel professionals can now register for WTM London 2021, which will be held in a hybrid format. The physical event will take place at ExCeL London from November 1-3, followed by WTM Virtual November 8-9.

TT Bureau

WTM London will be one of the first key opportunities for those working in the world's travel and tourism to reunite in person as the industry embarks on the road to recovery. The new hybrid format means buyers and exhibitors will be able to conduct business face-to-face – then the virtual element enables companies and organisations to increase their brand awareness and join networking opportunities – even if they are not able to physically attend the show. An important advantage is the fact that all exhibitors at the physical event will automatically be included in WTM Virtual as part of their package.

The physical event will feature all the elements for which WTM London has become well-known, including the UNWTO & WTM Ministers' Summit,



Simon Press
Senior Director, WTM London

Responsible Tourism Awards, headline speakers, seminars, speed networking, research & trends, Travel Forward – the co-located travel technology show and more. There will also be exclusive networking opportunities for senior buyers to do business.

Simon Press, WTM London's Senior Director, says, "WTM London is always a crucial time for the industry to gather in order to plan, network and generate ideas. This year it is vital for us to meet face-to-face, to renew business relationships and



forge new partnerships as we look to recover. Recent research has demonstrated that buyers can't wait to get back to physical events – and trade shows

It is vital to meet face-to-face to renew business relationships and forge new partnerships

in particular – to look for new business opportunities. WTM London will enable delegates to promote themselves to a global audience."

Restrict overcrowding at all levels

▶ Contd from page 1

itineraries. Travellers will certainly want to travel for longer durations now. The UK, Europe, USA, Canada and Japan shall probably be safer, especially Eastern Europe since it is less populated. In India, of course, it's going to be Kerala, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Himachal and Kashmir. We are seeing some developments for Odisha as well," he says.

However, according to **Benazir Nazar**, CEO, Akbar Holidays, over-tourism may not be a problem. "The consequences of COVID-19 have hit everyone so badly that over-tourism may not happen. Travellers have become ever so cautious about their safety and hygiene and would rather wait than go where the herd goes. Even the countries that are and will open up have and will have health and safety protocols in place to control such issues. Destinations such as Thailand, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bali, London, Switzerland, and Paris could be prone to this



Benazir Nazar
CEO
Akbar Holidays

We will suggest destinations based on the real-time traffic survey

though. In India, popular states such as Goa, Kerala, Himachal, and the Northeast are prone to over-tourism," Nazar adds.

Over-tourism from an economic perspective will help countries



Henna Adl Karim
Product Development Head
Flycreative Online

Travel companies could sell experiences that are short but enjoyable

revive from the losses they faced during the pandemic, says **Henna Adl Karim**, Product Development Head, Flycreative Online. "However, in terms of health and medical care things are still a blur. We

don't know to what extent the virus is about to mutate and unless its strength weakens with the help of immunization, things could turn sour again. Destinations that are reasonable, very populated and popular are in danger of this. People just want to travel! Somewhere! And with the crunch in many people's finances, the cost will be a factor for most travellers. Cheaper and popular destinations like Thailand could get mass tourism. In India, snow-bound destinations like Himachal, fun destinations like Goa, nature-rich places like Kerala could see some rush as well," she says.

Governments take heed

Bhatia feels that the government must ensure that travel organisers and ground handlers strictly follow the SOPs. "Overcrowding must be restricted at all



levels, be in local transportation, sightseeing locations, monuments, banquets, in-house restaurants in hotels, public places, etc. Special restrictions must be formulated for religious destinations and places of worship where large gatherings are expected. Over-tourism is bound to happen and we are already witnessing the same in a few destinations in North India," he says.

Meanwhile, **Nazar** says that as a travel company, they will strive to prevent this problem

by ensuring that they operate in small groups as far as big MICE group tours are concerned. "We will also encourage travellers to get vaccinated for a safe trip for themselves and fellow travellers, and suggest destinations based on the real-time traffic survey," she adds.

Karim, on the other hand, says pushing more niche and less-explored destinations will help. "Travel companies could also sell experiences which would be short but enjoyable," she says.

Bengaluru Airport has become 100% water positive. This means that the Airport replenishes more water than it consumes. Rainwater on the roof is collected and stored in rainwater harvesting sumps, and then reused further for irrigation & HVAC supply.

Democratisation of travel

Software as a Service, or SaaS, it is believed will accelerate the democratisation of travel where offers are co-produced in collaboration with ecosystem participants. Three experts share their views on how SaaS is bringing about tremendous change even in the tourism business.

Hazel Jain

The tourism and hospitality industry is going through one of the most challenging periods now. It is beyond any question, that the industry be dynamic in response to emerging situations whilst keeping a tight leash on the operating costs as much as possible. Adopting a SaaS platform to power business operations provides the perfect solution for this situation – with flexibility being made possible from a transaction scale perspective and with the ability to strictly manage costs based on the revenues accrued by the travel company.

Explaining this, **Jerrin Jos**, Founder and CEO of Verteil Technologies, says, “SaaS-based solution reduces the financial burden on travel agents as it typically does not involve upfront fees, at least it is usually a low value. There are no monthly or annual maintenance fees. So, it’s extremely cost-effective, especially in an industry like travel where travel agents need to have rolling capital which makes any fixed investment really difficult.”

SaaS, by its very nature, provides multiple benefits. For starters, the software is typically made available in a cloud environment (such as AWS). What this means is that the software is up and running. Setting up new users can be done very quickly, as well as the ability to support tremendous increase in transaction volumes very quickly. The commercial model is structure on a pay-per-use basis. This means that huge upfront investments in infrastructure are not required, as well as the costs incurred are proportionate only to the revenues generated.

Jos feels that his product that is SaaS-based is helping the



Jerrin Jos
Founder and CEO
Verteil Technologies



Asish Z Koshy
VP & Head - Tour and Cruise
Business, IBS Software



It's extremely cost-effective, especially in travel where agents need rolling capital

They enable travel companies to eliminate the need to buy, install & operate hardware

travel businesses tremendously. “Travel, especially air travel, is evolving considerably, especially from a technology angle with NDC initiative from IATA. This would mean travel agents and any travel sellers in general will be forced to adopt new technologies to leverage the commercial benefits airlines are pushing on NDC distribution channel as well as access to real-time and transparent communication from airlines which is so critical during this pandemic phase (change in COVID guidelines, etc),” he says.

Technology-driven differentiation Changes in consumer behaviour are the key forces driving fundamental changes in the structure and business model of travel distribution in the future. Travel suppliers and intermediaries alike need to redefine their roles vis à vis the customer and need to answer how they can establish a sustainable business model with attractive growth and margins. “Unfortunately, most players

in the industry seem to be finding answers that appear to be highly similar, moving everyone into the same potential ‘sweet spot’. Travel companies need technology-driven differentiation to be successful in the future,” says **Asish Z Koshy**, VP & Head - Tour and Cruise Business, IBS Software.

SaaS can help the industry get access to best-in-class technology and therefore be an enabler in their efforts to differentiate. SaaS brings a host of innovation and growth opportunities for tourism and hospitality companies. SaaS is a relatively hassle-free and cost-effective alternative that offers new possibilities, flexible costs as well as easy maintenance and deployment. SaaS encourages launch of start-ups in the industry as they can get to market quickly with minimum upfront investment. Industry will be able to provide a degree of flexibility to travellers to tailor-make their itineraries.

applications around the varying business needs, the tourism/hospitality industry landed up with many scattered, off-the-shelf and on-premise applications. This resulted in operational hassles as well as increased software and datacentre costs. SaaS model has been a bliss to overcome this challenge. It now allows travel technology companies to consolidate various contextual business requirements as well as new functionalities and tools on the platform benefiting multiple travel companies. The SaaS standardisation has pro-

The next boom **Sanjay Ghare**, Co-Founder & CEO at Vervotech, believes that the tourism industry has been going through a digital transformation. “The pandemic has pushed this transformation further. And SaaS-based solutions for TMCs, B2B, B2C and DMCs such as white-label solutions, payment gateway aggregations, and supplier aggregations are helping travel businesses to leverage it for digital transformation. SaaS-based solutions provide cost-effective solutions to businesses and allow them to go to market faster. This

verage technology to provide personalised self service capabilities to travellers – such as OTAs specialising in selling cruises. “SaaS will accelerate the pace of digital transformation within travel companies enabling them to differentiate themselves and provide a greater level of guest experience. Overall, SaaS will accelerate the democratisation of travel where offers are co-produced in collaboration with ecosystem participants,” Koshy says.

Jos explains, “A SaaS solution typically doesn’t replicate different solution instances for different type of customers/geographies etc. It is a singular solution which is centrally managed. This means any improvements, features etc which comes in from other geographies, for other customers etc could be made available to & benefit everyone who uses the SaaS solution.”

The next boom according to Ghare will be in terms of AI-based SaaS solutions which will help digital experiences that are smart as in-person experiences for end customers. “Solutions like chatbots for reducing agent loads, real-time automated hotel and room mapping such as what we offer are getting more popular in SaaS now. These are the special and complex problems which are important for every travel business. But it has not yet become their secret ingredient, so large businesses also prefer SaaS for such services,” Ghare adds.

Ramchandani sees lot of SaaS-based applications being consolidated under a single hood which will allow travel and hospitality companies to source a packaged product for their business needs from single vendor. This is going to reduce the overall operational hiccups and cost that will eventually lead to smoother business operations. He also believes that as the industry recovers, there will be high demand for tools/applications focused on contactless travel as well as the health and security of guests.

“Implementation at individual level will be a costly affair which business would want to avoid; so SaaS is going to flourish and play a key role in the recovery path by developing the needed tools and applications,” he says.



Rakesh Ramchandani
VP & Head - Travel & Hospitality
Cybage



Sanjay Ghare
Co-Founder & CEO
Vervotech

SaaS is going to play a key role in recovery by developing the needed tools and applications

They provide cost-effective solutions to businesses and allow them to go to market faster

Koshy adds, “Start-ups can leverage the quick-to-deploy SaaS applications to build up their business idea from concept, to production, to scaling. SaaS applications enable travel companies to focus more on their business by eliminating the need to buy, install and operate hardware.”

Rakesh Ramchandani, Vice President & Head – Travel & Hospitality, Cybage, says, “Building

provided travel businesses with a wide choice of tools to efficiently integrate applications. This integration enables operating and pricing information to be exchanged across industry and incorporated in final products. A collaboration of knowledge, expertise and precise information has resulted in unique travel products, competitively priced but with margins that reflect the value created for the customer.”

is pertinent because today’s travellers need everything at their fingertips and also demand flexible options and the ability to research and receive personalised recommendations. Businesses are able to offer this with SaaS solutions,” Ghare says.

Koshy predicts that several niche travel providers will emerge both in the leisure and corporate travel space who will increasingly le-

India's SaaS firms worth \$1 trillion?

India’s software-as-a-service industry could reach \$1 trillion in value and create nearly half million new jobs by 2030 as businesses around the world accelerate digitization and automation, according to a new study. There are more than a thousand funded start-ups and 10 unicorns in the country’s SaaS sector, generating as much as \$3 billion in annual subscription revenues, according to a report released by SaaSBoomi, a community of industry founders and builders, alongside consultancy McKinsey & Co and the country’s software industry trade group, Nasscom. The number of unicorns could increase 10-fold by 2030, reaching \$1 trillion in value, it predicts.

5 things to do to stay afloat

A few risk-taking destinations in APAC are trying some new approaches to compensate for the collateral loss of international arrivals. ForwardKeys shares a few highlights to demonstrate that there are still a few things countries can do to keep a steady trickle of tourism revenues until the promised full recovery in 2024.

TT Bureau

Travel analytics firm ForwardKeys says, 'The Asia Pacific region has gone from being a top dog in the travel and tourism sector to being put in the doghouse due to the handling of the pandemic, see-saw COVID-19 case numbers and at times, complacency.' But, this is not the end! It advocates the wise use of this time to think, re-invest energies and let Big Data be a guiding force through this COVID-19 fog. Here are five things, according to ForwardKeys, that destinations can do to keep steady in these turbulent times:

1 Seize the new opportunities in the domestic market: Investing in a sound domestic tourism plan with healthy airline promotions and tour operators in sync has its merits.



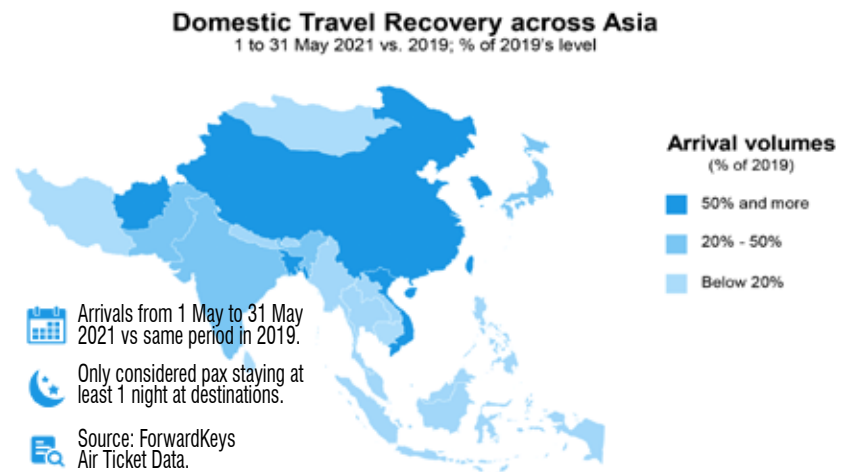
China reached pre-pandemic domestic arrival levels as early as September 2020, even with the pandemic in flagrant, thanks to teaming up its national public holidays with airline deals for couples (two for one offers) and the introduction of tax-free perks for shopping holidays to Hainan.

2 Re-think destination strategies & flight connectivity: Take this period as a time for reinvention as the data is pointing out that this is a glaringly obvious thing to do. Phuket, for instance, saw the strength of the Israel market this summer. For the first time, Israel, a relative newcomer, tied with the UK

as the top source for Phuket in July-September, with Germany as the second biggest source. El Al started operating a daily direct flight from Tel Aviv to Phuket on July 1. This shows the industry needs to look at other factors, beyond travel restrictions, that will shape travel decisions and change traditional market sources and segments. These factors include airline connectivity, currency and safety perceptions.

3 Set up 'safe' travel bubbles or sandboxes: Travel bubbles, when announced early, with uncomplicated travel checks and clear safety protocols can work. An APAC initiative that merits praise is the recent introduction by the Thailand Tourism Authority of the Phuket Sandbox.

4 Make early border announcements: One notice-



able trend in Europe that is replicating across Asia is clear and early announcement regarding the re-opening of borders and the travel conditions applicable. Well in advance of the popular summer season in Europe, Croatia and Greece announced in Q1 that they will be welcoming vaccinated international

travellers from the US and suddenly, it was one of their top source markets.

5 Invent new promotions & activities: Last-minute bookings have become part of the new normal. This trend is a tricky one for hotels struggling with occupancy rates – but if

you know what origin cities your key source markets are, you can improve your marketing spend and enticing offers to suit the relevant audience. For instance, Macau used to be a one-night or two-day experience for Chinese mainlanders as they paired their holiday with a few days in Hong Kong. ↘

Better presence to attract visitors

► Contd from page 1

percentage of the global MICE market, and many Indian groups and Indian MICE events are held in Southeast Asia, Middle East or Maldives. Hence, the short-term strategy would be to attract some of them because of the restrictions on travel.

MDA scheme

Singh also spoke about liberalisation of the Market Development Assistance (MDA) scheme for promotion and marketing of India in overseas markets, including tourism service providers approved by the government and UT administration, besides the MOT.



Arvind Singh
Secretary, Ministry of Tourism

"These service providers have also been allowed to avail assistance under MDA, enhancing financial assistance from ₹2.5 lakh to ₹3.5 lakh, enhancing foreign exchange turnover from ₹15 crore to ₹25 crore to cover a greater number of tourism service providers under



Rakesh Verma
Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism

the scheme. The number of overseas trips permissible has been enhanced from two to three per financial year," he added.

Tourism Marketing Representatives

MOT is also contemplating initiating the process of appointment of tourism marketing representatives in key markets overseas where they don't have representation.

"We aim to enhance our presence in such markets to increase foreign tourist arrivals into the country and to target those emerging countries that have untapped potential. This will help us realise our vision of creating a unified strategy and forge partnerships

amongst MOT, the Indian missions abroad, and all relevant stakeholders to promote inbound tourism to India. We have prepared a detailed framework," the Tourism Secretary explained.

Verma added that the preliminary work had already been done before the second wave. "We identified

three to four months, we would have them ready so that whenever international travel opens, we will have them on ground to help us," he shared.

ITDC as national MICE Bureau

On MOT's proposal to appoint ITDC as a national MICE bu-

rean, which is evoking criticism, of ICPB, so that any concerns or misgivings or misunderstandings are removed." ↘



reau, which is evoking criticism, to position these representatives in. We are working on it and in about

several emails and communica-

of ICPB, so that any concerns or misgivings or misunderstandings are removed." ↘

International marketing

- ❖ Incredible India advertisements during India & Sri Lanka cricket matches
- ❖ Advertisements and promotional campaigns during six months of Dubai Expo
- ❖ 75 Years of Independence campaign on the cards post August 15, 2021
- ❖ 7th International Buddhist Conclave in November at Delhi, Bodhgaya and Rajgir
- ❖ Regional offices to participate in travel events abroad

IATA reveals that the total demand for air travel in June 2021 (measured in revenue passenger kilometres or RPKs) was down 60.1% compared to June 2019. That was a small improvement over the 62.9% decline recorded in May 2021 versus May 2019.

Preparing for post-pandemic MICE

Post-pandemic MICE will be dominated by hybrid events, technological advancements and making sure that clients get to experience the hospitality and ease of doing meetings and conferences wherever they are, before we reach pre-pandemic levels, which may not be before 2023.

 Nisha Verma

Rohit Chopra, Regional Director of Sales & Distribution, Accor India & South Asia, the start of 2021 was encouraging. "We received queries for small meetings, especially from few sectors like pharmaceuticals, automobiles, fertilizer industries, etc. We had a promising pipeline till March, but the second wave brought us back to a standstill. Presently, with unlocking and easing of restrictions, we are seeing some positive trends, but there is still a lot of uncertainty because of the fear of the third wave and certain state guidelines. Corporates are on wait-and-watch mode as the situation is dynamic."

Arif Patel, Regional Vice President, Sales and Marketing, Hyatt India, suggests that in 2021, the industry needs to consider a new, emerging audience that they must cater to, where safety, security and cleanliness will be critical concerns for planners and travellers. "Event planners will seek venues that prioritise health and safety. Here, preparing for hybrid events will be an important step in this direction to ensure guest safety is being considered seriously."

Pushpendra Bansal, COO – Lords Hotels and Resorts, shares that the MICE segment was one of the first areas of travel & tourism to be hit by the global pandemic and will be the last to recover. "While large events and conclaves are restricted, small-scale events and corporate meetings will provide some respite. The focus is currently on domestic market since international travel restrictions are still in place. Besides intimate gatherings we have also seen increased requirements for hybrid events that combine both in-person and virtual experiences."

However, Chopra adds, "We strongly believe that nothing can replace face-to-face meetings

Flexible T&C

"We have started receiving some queries for future meetings in the very recent past. To safeguard the interest of our guests and allow them to plan their meetings fearlessly, we have introduced flexible terms and conditions."

– Rohit Chopra



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



Arif Patel
Regional Vice President Sales and Marketing, Hyatt India



Pushpendra Bansal
Chief Operating Officer Lords Hotels and Resorts

from the expertise of dedicated teams and a seamless digital booking platform. Today, more than 55 per cent of our hotels with meeting rooms are already providing hybrid meetings solutions to clients, and our target is to reach 100

WORKING TO ATTRACT MORE MICE

Agreeing that the MICE sector has suffered, Tourism Secretary **Arvind Singh** says, "It will take some time for both domestic and inbound MICE. Launch of incentives to MICE operators under the Champions Service Sector has also been done to give a boost to the MICE sector in the country by encouraging MICE operators to bring more conferences meetings and seminars to India. Under this scheme, conferences to have minimum of 250 participants and it must comprise of at least 20% foreign participants to be eligible for the incentive in the form of reimbursement of GST for the first two days of stay. This will kick in once inbound travel is being permitted."



Arvind Singh
Secretary, Ministry of Tourism

Talking about the expectations from the MICE tourism strategy, he shares, "The goal would be to increase the number of MICE events that take place in the country. We see that we have a very small percentage of the global MICE market, and that many Indian groups and Indian MICE events are held abroad as people like Southeast Asia, Middle East or Maldives to hold MICE events. Hence, the short-term strategy would be to attract some of them because of the restrictions on travel, and if they are doing any MICE events, to encourage them to hold them at many places in India, instead of going to neighbouring countries."

More than 55% of our hotels with meeting rooms are already providing hybrid meetings

Event planners will now seek venues that prioritise health and safety of their clients

We've seen demand for events that combine virtual and in-person experiences

Bookings trickling in

"Our event planner can guide through the best practices for conducting an effective virtual event. We have already started receiving bookings for conferences and weddings at many of our locations."

– Pushpendra Bansal

and with more people getting vaccinated, those meetings will return in a gradual manner. Till the time that happens, virtual and hybrid event concepts will be a safe alternative."

Technology to the rescue

Technology is playing a huge role for hotels in making sure new-age events take place smoothly and the reach is more than that of a physical event. Chopra shares, "Earlier this year we collaborated with Microsoft to launch ALL CONNECT, a new hybrid meetings concept supported by Microsoft Teams. It enables corporate customers and meeting

planners to combine physical in-hotel meetings with virtual interactions across multiple locations simultaneously. ALL CONNECT focuses primarily on small meetings (8 to 50 physical participants) & meeting planners will benefit

per cent by 2022 across all brands from economy to ultra-luxury, worldwide."

For weddings, Accor India has rolled out a brand-new initiative called 'Vivaah at Novotel' which is conceptualised for the contemporary virtual weddings and extends a hybrid approach.

Patel says that technology is the first step towards enhancing the guest's experience at events. "At Hyatt, we believe that there is a demand to create, connect

and collaborate, whether that's in-person or a hybrid format. We offer a comprehensive set of technological solutions to guarantee that our guests' planning goes unhindered at every stage across every phase of their event. To ensure this, we have the Virtual Hotel Tour, an event concierge App, Hyatt Planner Portal and even a Group Bill that makes our guest experience easy and smooth," he shares.

Bansal believes that hybrid events can be used as a conversion tool to reach those clients who have cancelled or turned

away due to the pandemic. "Potential group revenue derived from rooms would be reduced, but there would be incremental revenue through F&B not just for onsite catering but also home delivery for online attendees," he explains.

Pre-COVID scenario for MICE

Chopra shares that reaching pre-COVID levels will take longer. "We can anticipate that happening by 2023-24. Though the availability of vaccination and commitment from our government to vaccinate maximum citizens by December 2021 gives us a boost of confidence for an early revival. In pre-COVID era, our segment used to contribute approximately 30% of revenue from MICE. Large conference and conventions across globe have been postponed in the last 1.5 years and I am confident that we could see few of them being executed in Q4 2021," he adds.

Bansal, on the other hand, says, "Travel for MICE and other gatherings may not return well till end of 2021 or later. Business travel for major industry events will most likely be the last to return, as it requires a higher degree of confidence in public safety."

Limiting gatherings

"With specialised skill set and deep-rooted expertise spanning events and technology, we facilitate gatherings, which are ideal for upto 15 attendees per location along with a scale for significantly larger groups."

– Arif Patel



Hybrid meetings and events

Year 2022 will witness wedding groups and corporates eager to book international destinations since they have not been able to do so for past two years. Virtual and hybrid meetings will be the new normal until 2022, believes **Hema Hariramani**, Co-Founder & Director, Iskra Events & Celebrations.

We are already witnessing smaller gatherings as the new normal and particular trends include weddings in destinations. Now, this also includes city hotels where guests prefer staying in the hotel rather than having people travel for functions even if they are within the city. Domestic markets and demand has grown. However, the NRI audience will stay away from India until 2022 due to the uncertainty about how long the pandemic will last.

will open up. Further, these destinations are working towards making travel seamless for the wedding groups who are keen to

Adaptability to change needs to work from both sides



Due to the uncertainty and travel restrictions, the wedding clients are looking at destinations within India with a very few willing to explore international destinations. However, 2022 will witness many clients eager to book international destinations since they have not been able to do so for past two years. We are already witnessing clients who are eager to know when international destinations

host their weddings in their countries. For corporate clients, virtual and hybrid meetings is the new normal until 2022.

Hotels need to provide confidence to the clients that they are willing to work with them as a partner. Due to the current times, clients both corporate and weddings are reluctant to confirm

events in hotels due to the heavy deposits and stringent deposit schedules. Additionally, for the domestic market it is imperative for the hotels to build these partnerships to result in repeat business. Even for city hotels, their reliance on domestic market is extremely high. Communities which have the propensity to spend have a fixed mindset on certain requirements, if the hotels

are able to look at these with an open mind they will definitely witness the surge in their revenue streams. Adaptability to change needs to work from both sides.

Let's promote India
With the pandemic going on for over a year, it is our collective responsibility to promote domestic destinations and hotels. There is a large menu to offer. If you want

to have caviar, then you will have to pay for it. And the reality is that since we love to have big fat weddings, the hotels which have a huge demand will charge more. Isn't it always about demand and supply? Today, when we check airline rates for international travel, we do raise an eyebrow. But if we have to travel and we have the moolah, we buy the ticket. Then why should we look at hotels dif-

ferently? There are huge costs involved when running a hotel, not to mention the additional expenses incurred towards maintaining the health and hygiene aspects due to COVID. Hence, if hotels are charging higher it is because the clients want their weddings there. When you want a brand, you don't look at the price tag – it is about what you want!

I have had an enriching journey with Marriott for over two decades. And while the events industry for a hotelier is not something new, it still remains a mystery. As a hotelier, when I witnessed larger than life events it always inspired me to bring to life novel concepts and ideas. To be on this side, provides me as an individual to reimagine, explore the unexplored and conceive ideas and turn them to reality!



Hema Hariramani
Co-Founder & Director,
Iskra Events & Celebrations
(Views expressed are the author's own. The publication may or may not subscribe to them.)

The stone sculptures of Deopahar

Northeast India is a hidden paradise for visitors and Assam is no different. The state has many archaeological sites that are still underdeveloped and some are open for the public, too. One of those sites is Deopahar. **Sidheswar Kumar Mishra**, Founder, Assam Tours & Travels, talks some more about the destination.

Situated on the national highway 129 in Numaligarh of Golaghat district of Assam, Deopahar is well connected with public transportation. Deopahar site is situated on the hillock and the area will spellbind any nature and sculptor admirer. The long, steep steps of Deopahar (Deo means god and Pahar means hills in Assamese language) is hiding the beautiful story of 10th-11th AD, is very hard

to believe until you climb to its peak. A tough flight of staircase is rewarding once you scale and you will be greeted by the cool calm breeze of fresh air coming from the surrounding lush green tea estates. A sight to cherish! The panoramic view of this hillock is very soothing to the eyes as it is set amid the greenery of the tea garden on the hillocks and the shade tree in between the tea plants which acts as saviours of



The temple's importance is narrated by its golden history and architecture

Deopahar becomes the home for giant honey bees and the bees built their giant hives on the bhelue tree or the tetramelesnudiflora. Giant honey bees prefer to build hives in open area far off the ground in the forested area. Witnessing giant bee hives is extremely rare. Looking at its hive one can easily guess the size and the humming sound they make. It is also considerably close to the famous UNESCO World Heritage Site Kaziranga National Park.



tea bushes from the scorching sun during the high temperature of sunlight.

The huge structure of the Deopahar temple narrates the golden history and architecture of its importance. Though it had shredded its hugeness and little remains of the base structure which depicts

the belief system that the locals had for Lord Shiva. The legends say that the shivalinga that was worshipped here had to be shifted under known reasons and soon after, the Baba Than temple was established in the 19th century which is situated on the foothills. But the construction atop the hill is what makes it mesmerizing. From

the first step to the last step on the hillock, one can find many carved stone sculptors of different shapes and sizes. These statuettes are of different deities, flowers, animals and are believed to be related to the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata, the two great epics of India, perhaps making it one of its kind in the world where both the epics have been represented together.

A natural phenomenon occurs during the flowering season,



Sidheswar Kumar Mishra
Founder, Assam Tours & Travels
(Views expressed are the author's own. The publication may or may not subscribe to them.)



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Start charter flights for Goa

The Travel & Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG) has been aggressively lobbying for the authorities to allow international charter flights from Goa's main source markets for the upcoming tourist season so that clients can start planning. But will it be safe?

 Hazel Jain

A delegation from the Travel & Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG) recently met the new Tourism Minister of State **Shripad Naik** and submitted a memorandum about the industry's expectations.

Sharing details of this meeting, **Nilesh Shah**, President, TTAG, says, "We are pushing for the government to restart charters from our main source markets. MoCA has still not announced opening dates for scheduled flights nor the international charters and the ban is on till July 31. This is after announcing five lakh free tourist visas. So until that starts, we will have to depend on domestic tourists. Goa has started domestic tourism but in a calibrated manner so that it opens safely." He added that the Goa government's scheme



Nilesh Shah
President, TTAG

to allow reduction in landing charges is also pending. A provision was made in this year's budget by the state government to extend the landing fees waiver of one lakh for international charter flights till March 31, 2023, and accordingly budgetary allocation done for next year.

"If the government plans to start international commercial flights within the next two-three months, the announcement has to be made now to facilitate booking by charter

travellers. If there is a delay, potential travellers may be diverted to other destinations. Besides, tour operators will not be able to start their marketing activities unless they know when flights will start. Starting of charters will also help small hotels as they largely depend on them," Shah adds.

While Goa saw star hotels opening after the first wave ebbed in October-November last year and domestic flow increased, three star and smaller hotels remained closed as they are dependent on charters.

"We are asking for a travel bubble with countries like Russia, UK and Poland from where Goa receives charters considering that they contribute almost 90 per cent of India's charter business. These charter flights should be allowed to land into Goa with SOPs similar to those provided for domestic travel –

fully vaccinated, RT-PCR test validity of 72 hours and testing facility on arrival," Shah says.

He shares a positive statistic and says, "At our peak since the pandemic hit us, we had 80 flights with almost 12,000 pax

Charters should be allowed with SOPs like those for domestic travel

before March 2021. After that we received only 3-4 flights. Last week, we welcomed about 3,500 pax which means almost 30% of the flights are now full, which is a good sign for Goa."

EVENT TALK

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AUGUST 2021

Date	Event	Time
5-6	Virtual Travel, Tourism & Hospitality E-Conclave	11:00 am
11	Hospitality PowerHouse	11:00 am
11	Mastercard 2021 Travel Trends & Outlook	01:30 pm
13-15	Holiday Expo	Vadodara
18	Experience AIUla webinar	03:00 pm
20-21	Global Travel, Tourism & Hospitality Summit	Delhi
23-25	Global Youth Tourism Summit	Italy
25	Cvent Webinar	11:00am
26	India-Middle East Aviation Dialogue	04:00 pm

SEPTEMBER 2021

2-5	Virtual PATA Travel Mart 2021	10:30 am
8	CAPA Live	TBA
10-12	TTF	Kolkata
14	UNWTO Commission for South Asia Meeting	06:30 pm
27	World Tourism Day 2021 Celebrations	TBA

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

The on-ground realities

Sikkim-based tour operator **Prabir Sen**, Managing Director of Tibet Tours & Travels, raises pertinent concerns that the trade has been facing – from tourists booking hotels directly to difficulties in availing the various MOT (Ministry of Tourism) schemes introduced for registered travel agents.

A new menace which we are noticing as a tour operator is that all are going directly to the hotels and there is no role of the travel agency and the tour operators. There is no restriction and no awareness from the government side. The MDA scheme was given to the tour operators but the situation didn't change and they were stranded in the same place. What the MOT has done is very good and helpful, but it is of little help right now. We are definitely getting some financial help via the MDA scheme, but there will not be much changes in the industry. It's a great help but not a long-lasting solution.

a single one but kept them on a small salary. We haven't had any income for the last 15 months. Our main challenge is finance as we have 52 new luxury vehicles in Kolkata which are under EMI.

We are getting some financial help; it's great, but not a long lasting solution

Understanding practicalities
We are headquartered in a small place called Sikkim. So we did not approach the Ministry of Tourism. But I have faced many challenges. I have 60 staff members in my company but I did not fire

Regarding the same, nobody could provide us with any solutions or help. Our pre-COVID business record is excellent and I have been part of this industry for the last 21 years. We are authorised by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India as



an inbound tour operator and a tourist transport operator. So we are somehow managing ourselves. I have handled a lot of tourists but today we are in a pathetic condition and no one has the ability to understand the situation and how to deal with it. Those who are government service holders will never know how we generate revenue and employment. The biggest travel agencies have sacked their employees but we didn't.

A banana republic?

No matter how many suggestions we give to the authorities, it will not match the thinking of someone who is handling the business. There is a lack of understanding between those who are developing the MOT schemes after collecting the data and people like us who are facing the ground realities. Unless and until the thinking matches, there can be no valid solution. The need of the hour is more tourism awareness than schemes.

First of all, there is no advertisement from the government, the protocol they are implementing should be published in media. Secondly, the government has many organisations/sectors from where a large number of employees go for a vacation and government should implement the thing at least for the next five years employees from government and semi government sectors should travel only through a recognised tour operator.

Third is the menace of the OTAs. During the tough months of the pandemic, they stopped running their call centres and sacked their employees. Still, the government did not take any action. Many customers didn't get their refunds. The same thing is happening again. Now the Indian students who are travelling now were stranded at Belgrade and those who booked the tickets via OTAs did not get any kind of help from them. It's only possible due to there being no tourism regulatory board in India. Everybody is doing as they wish.

In order to ensure that the benefits from the MDA scheme reach every tour operator, the government should establish a tourism regulatory board and ensure that there is no discrimination based on the size of the company.



Prabir Sen
MD, Tibet Tours & Travels

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

Journeying to the Himalayas

Razdan Holidays organised an exclusive 4x4 self-drive expedition for tour operators to Zaskar and Leh via Shinkun La, Singe La and Sirsir La. The treacherous 12-day expedition was led by **Sanjay Razdan**, Managing Director, Razdan Holidays, accompanied by **Dhruv Razdan**, one of the Directors at the company.



Overtourism: A double-edged sword

Although over-tourism can bring many benefits to the local communities and the country at large, including income, employment and international recognition, it can also lead to environmental and social damage. If not managed carefully, it can destroy the very assets on which it depends. Does over-tourism pose a real threat in the post-COVID world?

 Hazel Jain

Benefit to local communities

There is no denying the benefits and people's livelihoods are connected to tourism. While the COVID-19 pandemic has been a temporary salve for over-tourism, it has also revealed how reliant many destinations, jobs and industries are on the tourism industry. Even though tourism generates massive dollars, creates wealth, and provides an opportunity for growth, the sword has another side.

Environment suffers

The downside is that destinations that become popular with visitors struggle with increased pollution, waste management, overcrowding, noise, and higher property values and costs. As more property owners rent out their rooms on online sites, locals have found it difficult to find an affordable



place to live, forcing them out of the city. And cities aren't alone facing these issues.

Garners global attention

Lesser-known destinations and attractions that even the domestic population is not aware of, can receive national and global recognition once it starts to receive high footfalls. Social media has helped many a hidden treasure to receive the attention it deserves from not just domestic but also international visitors.

No social distancing

Countries are investing huge amounts of money and efforts in ensuring that their citizens remain safe during the pandemic. Once travel resumes,

governments will have to continue to ensure that social distancing norms remain in place. In Machu Picchu, tickets are now time-limited, with dedicated time slots. Venice has introduced a new fee for day visitors, and Taj Mahal in India has increased entrance fee while reducing visit time.

Better infrastructure

Government investment in public works is considered one of the cost-effective measures in creating jobs. Infrastructural upgrades to residential precincts



earlier affected by over-tourism in terms of traffic congestion, garbage, sewage and environmental pollution would go a long way to improve emotional well-being of the residents as well, while at the same time providing a better experience for visitors and more jobs for locals.

Economic problems

The trend of mass-tourism has brought out the economic

problem of inflation and displacement of traditional occupation due to the uncontrolled increases of tourism activities. For instance, it has impacted the economy of Fort Kochi in Kerala as it saw a significant change in trends of tourist shopping. Over-tourism and a factory-made market has led to endangering of traditional craftsmanship, threatening it with extinction. 

TRAVELPORT

United Kingdom

Travelport has appointed **TOM KERSHAW** as its new Chief Product and Technology Officer. Kershaw is a seasoned product and technology executive, with more than two decades of experience leading innovation, technical strategy and execution within both emerging and mature organisations undergoing transformation. He most recently held the title of Chief Technology Officer at one of the largest independent advertising platforms in the world - Magnite, Inc. During his career, Kershaw has also held leadership positions at Google, Ericsson, etc.



IXIGO

Delhi-NCR

Travel App ixigo has appointed **AMRISH KUMAR** as Vice President - Technology. Kumar has worked in large and entrepreneurial setups across the US and brings in considerable experience in AI, Machine Learning and data science. He will head technological innovations for ixigo under the leadership of Rajnish Kumar, Co-Founder & Group CPTO. Having worked with reputed corporates in the past, Kumar has managed several projects aligning business goals with technology solutions.



SIGNUM HOTELS & RESORTS

Delhi-NCR

SONIA SHARMA has been appointed as Associate Director of Talent & Culture at Signum Hotels. A self-motivated human resource professional, Sharma comes with over a decade of experience in hospitality. She has worked across Hyatt Hotels, Conrad Bengaluru and ibis Gurugram. In her last assignment, Sharma contributed her expertise as HR Manager at Oblu Select at Sangeeli, Maldives. Sharma is skilled in developing initiatives that improve people management and growth.



HOLIDAY INN RANJIT AVENUE

Amritsar

PUNEET SHARMA has been appointed as General Manager of Holiday Inn Amritsar, Ranjit Avenue. In his new role, Sharma will be responsible for the continued success of Holiday Inn Amritsar through his strategic leadership and ensure margin enhancement and overall operational excellence. His personable leadership style will help him carry his team along effectively. Sharma began his career with Radisson and has been associated with renowned brands like Hyatt and IHG. He joins Holiday Inn Amritsar, Ranjit Avenue from Crowne Plaza Jaipur.



SHERATON GRAND BUND GARDEN HOTEL

Pune

Sheraton Grand Pune Bund Garden Hotel has appointed **SAURABH DUBE** as the new General Manager to lead the dynamic team of the property. Dube has a wealth of experience spanning over 17 years in the hospitality industry. He started his career with Oberoi Hotels & Resorts and swiftly moved up the ranks across working with myriad luxury brands over the years. Dube's most recent role was with The St. Regis Mumbai where he was heading both hotel operations and Sales & Marketing while assisting the General Manager in overall hotel management.



THE FERN BRENTWOOD RESORT & SPA

Mussoorie

ARINDAM BAHEL has joined as General Manager at The Fern Brentwood Resort & Spa, Mussoorie. He has completed his Diploma in Hotel Management from IHM Goa & has over 18 years of work experience in the hospitality industry with brands like Rodas-An Ecotel - Mumbai, Meluha The Fern - Mumbai, Amber - San Francisco, Rasam's IC Lounge - Sunnyvale, Concept Hospitality, Holiday Inn - Jaipur, Yak & Yeti - Kathmandu, etc. His last employment was with The Ananta, Udaipur.



THE WESTIN MINDSPACE

Hyderabad

DEEPAK VERMA has been appointed as Director of Sales and Marketing at The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace, spearheading the hotel's business development, brand reputation and planning strategies to strengthen the positioning of the hotel. Verma comes with a rich experience spanning 13+ years, and has been associated with some of the leading Indian and global luxury brands such as The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts; Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts; Hyatt Hotels & Resorts and Accor. He moves to the role from that of Director of Sales at Pullman and Novotel New Delhi Aerocity.



HYATT REGENCY

Chennai

Hyatt Regency Chennai has appointed **ANIRUDH SANJEEV** as the Director of Sales and Marketing. Sanjeev brings with him over 10 years of hospitality experience where he will be seen spearheading Sales and Marketing teams and focusing on key account management, strategic planning and business development. Sanjeev joined Hyatt Regency Chennai as Sales Coordinator in January 2011 along with the hotel pre-opening team. He was responsible for soliciting market information and was instrumental in setting up the Sales Function.



RAFFLES

Udaipur

Raffles Udaipur has appointed **PRASAD METRANI** as the Director of Culinary. With an illustrious career in culinary operations that spans over 15 years, Metrani will be spearheading the experiential and evocative food and beverage concepts that Raffles Udaipur will offer. A hotel management graduate from IHM, Hyderabad, he has worked with some of the world's leading Indian and international hospitality brands. He is proficient in a wide variety of global cuisines such as modern European, Indian, Arabic and pan Asian.

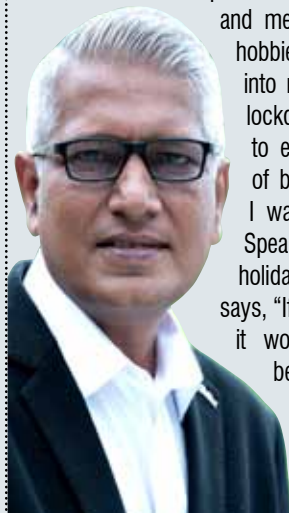


TALKING PEOPLE

HUZAN FRASER MOTIVALA, Partner at Beautiful Planet, likes to travel to her home in Mandwa, look after the garden, potter around the land, and learn about trees, flowers and vegetables that can be grown. "I have also dabbled more in cooking and spending time reading and improving my gardening skills during the lockdowns," she says. Fraser also loves to travel. "In India, I haven't been around much, so the go-to destination will be Goa. I recently travelled to Ananda in the Himalayas and I loved the experience. I love wildlife sanctuaries too. Internationally, I love Norway.



VIKAS SHARMA, General Manager, Radisson Blu Resort Dharamshala, is a music lover and Classical Indian music is his favourite genre. "It helps me soothe my mind. Yoga and meditation were the key hobbies that I introduced into my lifestyle during the lockdown, and I was amazed to experience the benefits of both and realised what I was missing," he says. Speaking about his favourite holiday destinations, Sharma says, "If I have to choose one, it would be Goa for its beauty, Portuguese architecture & vibrant party scene."



When **KANIKA TEKRIWAL**, CEO & Founder, JetSetGo Aviation, is worried about something, you can find her working at her desk. "JetSetGo is my balance in the larger picture. Work-life balance for me is more like what my priority is at that moment. If it's work, it will be work 24/7, and if I wish to relax and rejuvenate, I just cut off myself from everything else. I truly believe that effective goal-setting and an uncluttered mind always lead to a productive day. Plan ahead so you don't overload yourself with extra work and stress."



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India outbound more robust

Prof John Koldowski, Advisor to PATA and Professor at School of Tourism, Leshan University, China, and a renowned tourism analyst, shares an in-depth analysis on the forecast for Asia Pacific tourism, highlighting India as a market.



Hazel Jain

The recently held webinar titled 'Asia Pacific Tourism Forecast' conducted by PATA India Chapter aimed to analyse tourism forecasts based on the recent PATA report and research, with a perspective on both Asia Pacific as well as India markets. Chaired by Liz Ortiguera, CEO of PATA, the session had Prof John Koldowski, School of Tourism, Leshan University in China, share his perspective on how India can seize opportunities post COVID.

Separating ITA (International Tourist Arrivals) from IVA (International Visitor Arrivals), Prof Koldowski believes that there is a huge difference between day

travellers and overnight visitors to a destination. "Both are equally important from a broader perspective. They both have some sort of impact on a destination – financial, social, etc. The data we have on this shows that the numbers appear to be tracking towards the better of the two scenarios. It may be negative for some time in relation to 2019 numbers, but tracking upwards nevertheless, which gives us some confidence that we are moving in the right direction," he said.

India a huge factor

Prof Koldowski added that when looking at India, the -76.15% fall in numbers in 2020 is different from the rest of Asia. "What it does show is just how South Asia as a destination sub-region

fantastic and conversely, if India has a bad year, it reflects negatively in the South Asia figures. However, while inbound is one way, the outbound market from India is a little bit more robust

However, he cautions, "I should add that that that direction can change at a moment's notice. The volatility in the market place is still there and we have to be aware of some of the impacts. So by no means we are out of the woods, we're still deep in the forest. But we are beginning to see that there are some positive gains. Overall, in Asia, there is still a lot of angst out there. Demand is pent up, it is raging. But it's waiting on a wide range of things to actually get better."

and has shown some positive growth. There is a distinct change that India will be almost back to where it was in 2019," he added.

Other factors

Highlighting some other factors that can affect the growth of tourism in the coming months, Prof Koldowski said, "For the first time, it is going to be the policies in the origins and the destination market that need to come into some sort of synchronicity. So we need to make sure

that the governments are speaking with each other and agreeing on certain protocols as we begin to open up. There will also be a greater reliance on travel agents. But can we deliver the same sort of service levels as pre COVID? I would suggest that we need to produce better service levels than it was pre COVID. So there is a lot of change that we need to go through."

He believes that government policies will dictate when the restrictions are lifted and we can get back to some sort of growth pathway. Towards the end of the session, he questioned why tourism industry relies on the dumbest data possible – the number of arrivals! "Just measuring the number of arrivals implies unity of one tourist to another – that one Australia is the same as one Italian or one Thai coming to India. We know that is not true. If we were measuring instead nights in destination, for instance, then we would have a better indicator of where future potential lies," he says.



Prof John Koldowski
School of Tourism
Leshan University, China

Other influencing factors

- ❖ Policies in both the origins and the destinations now feature large
- ❖ Vaccination rates not high enough across the globe
- ❖ Uncertainty about the reality of infection rates
- ❖ Risk of infection when travelling with families
- ❖ Insurance opportunities (might be mandated for some destinations)
- ❖ Stronger reliance on travel agents
- ❖ Business travel likely to lag – alternatives found and utilised
- ❖ Will immunisation passports become universal?
- ❖ Increasing unemployment rates and business failures

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