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SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY

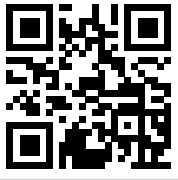
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- Concurrent with recovery 05
- Design must be more sustainable 11
- B2B platform for rural India 08
- Business powered by deliveries 19

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Potential aplenty

Tourism Minister **G Kishan Reddy** has said that the tourism sector has huge potential for job creation and economic growth.

Nisha Verma

GKishan Reddy believes that the pandemic has given a setback to the tourism industry as well as an opportunity to rethink how the sector can be reinvented to make it more resilient and future-ready. "Tourism has emerged as one of the fundamental pillars of economic development and employment generation. It will not be an understatement to say that we have a powerful mix of cultural and natural wealth to offer to the world like no other nation in the world. At the same time, tourism has always been a strong driver for economic growth in our country as well as



G Kishan Reddy
Cabinet Minister for Tourism, GOI

globally. In 2019, the industry contributed US\$ 194 bn to the Indian economy and created about 40 mn jobs, which is 12% of total employment," he added.

Contd on page 14 ▶

QualSTAR certifies Roseate

Roseate Hotels & Resorts has become the first hotel group in India to receive QualSTAR certification, for achieving the highest level of safety and hygiene standards. In a bid to minimise physical contact with guests at their hotels, they have launched 'Care by Roseate'.

Nisha Verma

QualSTAR is India's first and only hospitality rating agency accredited by the Quality Council of India to provide COVID compliance certification to hotels. After the extensive online and on-site audits, Roseate was independently assessed by QualSTAR to meet more than 470 safety and hygiene standards.

"We are truly honoured to be recognised by this leading certification body for our safety precautions and hygiene practices which is the most



Kush Kapoor, CEO, Roseate Hotels & Resorts, receiving QualSTAR certificate on behalf of group

important factor, especially during these COVID times," says **Kush Kapoor**, CEO, Roseate Hotels & Resorts. "We would like to thank QualSTAR for recognising us and certifying our practices," he adds. Roseate Hotels & Resorts ensures to provide an unparalleled experi-

ence and utmost satisfaction to its guests keeping all hygiene and safety standards in place. 'Touchless Hospitality' is the new future that is here to stay, and Roseate Hotels & Resorts has completely remodelled its standard operating procedures towards providing

greater care and ensuring a safer environment for guests. In a bid to minimise physical contact with guests at their hotels, they have launched 'Care



by Roseate', a novel approach towards instilling confidence among customers about their

Contd on page 14 ▶

In tandem with states

Arvind Singh, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, shares that in their meeting with state representatives, they stressed on prioritising vaccination and having a uniform policy all across. Digitally connecting all tourism stakeholders is the next initiative for them.

Nisha Verma

Ministry of Tourism recently held a video conference with all state tourism boards, where they had discussions over several issues. Sharing details of the same, **Arvind Singh** said, "I found that a lot of proactive steps have been taken by various states. States like Karnataka and Maharashtra have already given industry status to the hospitality and hotel sector, which provides substantial relief in water and electricity tariffs. Other states have also given some relief depending on their financial resources. However, the general mood and trend that we have seen

with state governments is that in this financial year, they have been broadly supportive of the hotels and accommodation industry."

In fact, Singh also said that the tourism minister is sympathetic towards the hospitality industry and understands their plight. "He knows about all efforts we have taken, and we need to be working side by side with the industry to move forward and see what further measures are required to support the industry," he added.

Prioritising vaccination

In the meeting with the states, participants also spoke over prioritising vaccination for workers in



Arvind Singh
Secretary, Ministry of Tourism

the tourism sector. "In the meeting, I got the sense that there is significant progress in that regard. States like Madhya Pradesh said that they have vaccinated almost all stakeholders. J&K said that

almost 90 per cent of tourism workers in the state are vaccinated. Hence, we are seeing work happening in that direction. Also, we saw an uptick in domestic tourism in Central India states," he informed.

Uniform policy

In his dialogue with the states, Singh shared that it was emphasised that all states move towards a uniform policy. "We should lift the restrictions and not make it very difficult. One suggestion that emerged was that we should not insist on RT-PCR certification for those who are fully vaccinated. Recently, Maharashtra took steps

Contd on page 16 ▶

G Kamala Vardhana Rao is new DG, Tourism

GKamala Vardhana Rao has become the new Director General (Tourism). The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has announced it as an additional charge for him. He would remain as the Chairman & Managing Director, India Tourism Development Corporation till appointment of a regular incumbent or until further orders, whichever is earlier. Rao is a 1990 batch IAS officer of Kerala cadre, who has earlier held positions within the state of Kerala and has even been the Director and Secretary Tourism in Kerala.

In the last 30 years, Rao has served multiple positions in-



G Kamala Vardhana Rao
Director General, Tourism

cluding Chairman of Indian Tobacco Board; Director of Fisheries Department; as well as Director, Department of Tourism and Culture, Andhra Pradesh government. Rao will be taking up the position after **Meenakshi Sharma** moved on from MOT to CAG of India.

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Uniform state rules needed

From focusing on carbon-free tourism to adopting AI-based marketing solutions, Ministry of Tourism (MOT) will offer a different take on 'Adopt a Heritage' scheme, and will try and ensure uniform protocols across all states, says **Rupinder Brar**, ADG, MOT.

Nisha Verma

Amongst the several initiatives of the Ministry of Tourism is innovatively selling the same product, says **Rupinder Brar**. "We are developing a narrative with a carbon-free or relatively lesser carbon footprint-based tourism. Ladakh is the first state for which we are writing a vision document – staying responsible or sustainable, and incorporating all those practices in how we go about building our ecosystem when we talk of tourism," she asserts.

In order to market the country to tourists both domestic and international, MOT, claims Brar, is thinking of utilising Augmented Reality and get into teleport. She says, "People spend a lot of time at the departure lounges, food courts, etc. We are receiving inputs to make some of our



Rupinder Brar
ADG, MOT

airports give an experience that is unique for both domestic and inbound travellers," she adds.

The ADG also highlights that the government does understand they need to get into infrastructure in a big way and thus, a lot of work needs to be out in public as well as private funding. "We are again going forward with our 'Adopt a Heritage' initiative aggressively. Besides interventions like providing drinking water and restrooms, people are coming up with



solutions that will make the travel experience around a monument far more interesting," she shares.

MOT will also focus on Indian heritage. "Heritage needs a lot of work in terms of conservation and marketing it as a strong product for somebody who would like to spend a few hours there. A lot of work is going on with Heritage Association of India on that. Under Adopt a Heritage, a lot of interesting ideas are focused on how we could marry public-private interests in those areas and make the whole experience of tourism far more interesting in times to come," adds Brar.

And, with other countries putting in a lot of effort in marketing their products, India's tourism ministry will also now need to focus on how it packages the products.

Brar also claims that in order to facilitate opening of borders, effort is being put into harmonising internal travel both for out-

Under Adopt a Heritage, ideas are focused on marrying public, private interests

bound and inbound tourists, to ensure that there is uniformity in internal travel. "Hopefully, we will soon have uniform travel norms across India, so that travellers don't have to look up for regulations for each state," she concludes.

IATA's report on the effects on global air transport last year, states that air connectivity declined by more than half in 2020 with the number of routes connecting airports falling dramatically at the outset of the crisis, and down more than 60% y-o-y in April 2020.

Exhibit A

Covishield

Highly advanced vaccine to tackle the pandemic of Covid-19 undergoing multiple manufacturing checks before it is made available to the public.

Exhibit B

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VIEWPOINT

A good start?

The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on all segments of travellers, students included. There were calls for semesters to be delayed amid the ongoing travel and visa ban, which was true across the world. Students were dismayed and particularly worried and hassled about their future. And while the world is more online today than offline, like travel, education, too, cannot be a long-distance affair alone. And so, the plight of students has been heard by every nation, and they are gradually opening to the segment for travel. Students are ecstatic that there is finally light at the end of the tunnel, but some hurdles are yet to be crossed.

While governments are aggressively holding programmes to get their student travellers vaccinated, the future of the vaccine itself is in disarray. The acceptance of Covishield over Covaxin is already worrisome, and in between all the chaos students are perplexed if they will need to get vaccinated again in their destination country. Long queues have been seen in vaccination centres of India for students, but the future is still a bit uncertain. Some students have also already faced the hassle of transiting through certain countries basis their visa and vaccination status.

But, this could well be a litmus test for the travel segment at large. With a limited number of student travellers, countries have the chance to iron out any shortcomings in their travel management. Visa application and issuance centres need to be strengthened with more manpower, airports need to align themselves with the wave of travellers that is expected to gush in as soon as guidelines are eased some more, and tour operators need to be well-equipped to handle the traffic.

Another important criteria, especially for India, is to vaccinate the entire tourism and hospitality staff as frontline workers, on priority. This is a time-consuming process and as dynamic as the virus is, some programmes need to be kick-started as soon as possible. We hope the industry and the authorities take cognizance of the fact that people are going to travel with a vengeance and that the beginning of student travel is a curtain raiser to what's to come.

Policy for spiritual tourism

It is every state's responsibility to ensure it has adequate policy measures to establish itself as a spiritual destination. Here is an excerpt from a knowledge paper on spiritual tourism in Maharashtra by IMC Chamber of Commerce & Industry in partnership with IRR Advisory.



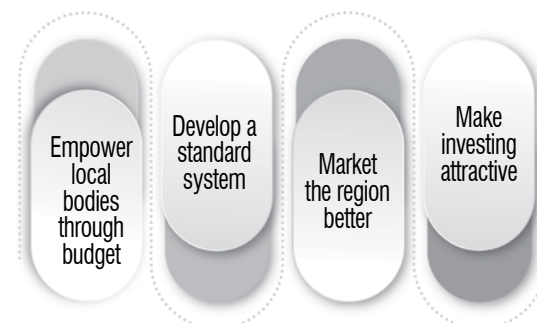
TT Bureau

While the Maharashtra state government has recognised tourism as a major thrust area for economic growth, no specific policy measures have been announced for promoting spiritual tourism despite the inherent advantages the state enjoys by being blessed with large number of holy sites. Further, majority of the domestic travel is mainly for religious purpose. Hence, the state government needs to come out with policy measures

commodation services across various price points should be improved.

b) Prepare phase-wise plan to develop various holy places in similar lines of Shirdi by creating the necessary surrounding eco system to attract the pilgrims. The initial focus could be on developing five such places across Maharashtra which could also be the hub for undertaking the spiritual trails.

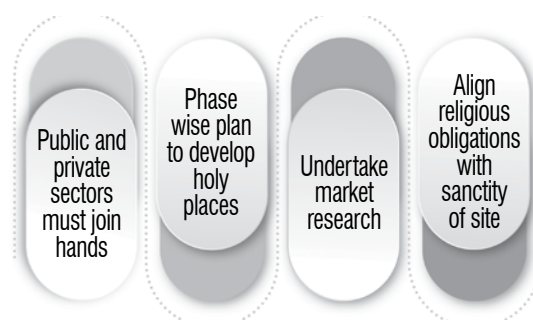
Further, while better last mile connectivity through road, air,



operation, regularity, and reasonable fare, more specifically, during the festive occasions.

d) Align the religious obligations of the pilgrims and sanctified atmosphere of the religious sites through greater synergy between the various trusts and governing bodies of temples, mosques, churches etc and the local administration for improv-

ing the destination better within India and overseas particularly the ASEAN region, especially considering Ajanta and Ellora's attraction as part of the national Buddhist circuit. This includes setting up an effective and ongoing market representation presence with the travel trade in each source market and launching an Internet portal accessible in various languages for providing



to attract tourists and ensure their comfort and well-being while visiting the shrines.

Key interventions entail...

a) Encourage public private partnership to improve physical infrastructure and connectivity. Special incentives and tax holidays to be given for the establishment of physical infrastructure in terms of hotels, hospitals and develop connectivity from state highways and railway stations etc. Particularly, the quality and consistency of ac-

cess, rail, air or water is required, chopper services options should also be explored for destinations, particularly those that are hard to reach through other means of transport, so that the well healed can take day trips.

c) Undertake market research programme to understand needs analysis of tourists and provide appropriate interventions to address their requirements. Transport network to be augmented with focus on connectivity,



ing tourist experience. Training of locals should be undertaken to enable them to cater to the tourist related activities, including tour guides.

e) Local urban bodies to be empowered in terms of adequate budget support and decision making for improving water, sewerage and waste management and address seasonal heavy influx of pilgrims. Further, government should consider creating economic clusters near holy places which will not only attract pilgrims but also provide employment opportunities to people in the town and protect them against seasonal income.

f) Create a more favourable eco-system and focus on market-

information. Alongside, marketing budget to be provided for creating theme-based and customised marketing campaigns to create awareness and promote places as major religious destinations.

g) Develop a robust accreditation and standardisation system to promote uniform quality of service and infrastructure across the spiritual destinations.

h) Finally, the state needs to take a leading role in attracting investments for infrastructural development and ensuring that Maharashtra becomes the leading spiritual destination in India. The government could consider holding conferences on wellness and spirituality at spiritual destinations in state.



Concurrent with recovery

After the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture recommended the inclusion of tourism in the Concurrent list of Constitution, the industry is elated and praising the Ministry of Tourism for pushing their case. It is confident that the request will be heard.

“Bringing tourism under the Concurrent List has been a long-standing demand of IATO. There are multiple reasons for which we support these recommendations. Firstly, it will lead to rationalisation of multiple levies on the tourism sector. Secondly, it will lead to better coordination between state governments and the central government vis-a-vis tourism promotion policies. Thirdly, security clearances for visiting some states would be easier to get.”



Rajiv Mehra
President, IATO



Jyoti Mayal
President, TAAI

“We are pleased to know that MOT is pushing our cause. Putting travel and tourism in the Concurrent List would standardise the industry with correct values and ease of business. It would also enable us to be more sustainable and become a stronger, more resilient sector. I would go a step further to say that the states should start looking into the same and not waste any more time mulling over its adoption after it is included in the concurrent list. We need to utilise our strengths to achieve our goal.”

“It is a very good initiative by MOT to consider putting tourism in the Concurrent List of Constitution. I think, if it gets this status, it would be possible to realise its full potential. This demand has been there for a long time and would only help in ease of doing business and increase our revenue. It will help in increasing employment generation and even recovery of the industry from COVID. We look forward to getting included in the Concurrent List for better prospects.”



PP Khanna
President, ADTOI



KB Kachru
Vice President, HAI

“We welcome the initiation of a proposal by the Ministry of Tourism for including tourism in the Concurrent List of Constitution. Once implemented, this status will play a key role in post-COVID recovery besides other benefits. Tourism activities and products differ from one state to another. Placing tourism in the Concurrent List will facilitate seamless coordination. This will, perhaps, promote the quick implementation of various schemes and project a pan-India face of Indian tourism.”



Gurbaxish Singh Kohli
Vice President, FHRAI

Input by Nisha Verma

Tourism Breaking News

■ IndiGo to launch IATA Travel Pass for int'l travel on Aug 20

■ Andaman opens for tourism; hotel quarantine mandatory till availability of report

■ Around ₹25,000 crore to be spent for growth in civil aviation

■ Railways merges helplines, launches RailMadad

■ Sarovar Hotels signs new property in Tadoba, Maharashtra

■ Ladakh Police's Tourist Wing launched by Lt Governor RK Mathur to address tourist issues

■ DGCA advises passengers flying out of India not to refer to meta search engines for fares

■ Chandigarh-Kullu heli route cheaper from August 15

■ FHRAI requests FM's intervention in ₹60,000 crore loan guarantee scheme not yet notified

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Ganga Yog Retreat by Yog Gurukul, Rishikesh
GingerGrass Resort, Jim Corbett
Rajasthan
The Golden Camp, Jaisalmer

Rebuilding our future intelligently

Liz Ortiguera, Chief Executive Officer of PATA, discusses the need for the industry to become more resilient so that we can collectively rebuild it – one which is healthy for the local communities as well as the environment. This is the time to be more mindful, she says.



Hazel Jain

Having taken over the reins only two months ago from Mario Hardy, **Liz Ortiguera**, CEO of PATA, has deep-dived into it all. She says, "Over the last two months I have come to really appreciate the PATA network. It is quite multifaceted and represents every aspect of the vast ecosystem of travel and tourism. I have been

busy meeting all the members, partners and stakeholders of PATA chapters."

"For months now," she continues, "we have all been seeing and feeling the immense tragedy that has been hitting India and many other markets. The news has been challenging even in the recent weeks in terms of spike in numbers. I assure you that it is part of our core mission of PATA to help our



Liz Ortiguera
CEO, PATA

members and the industry at large to survive and thrive coming out of this. First of all, our crisis research centre launched last year is open to everyone. It has relevant playbooks for various industries – whether it is aviation, hospitality, or any other industry in the sphere of travel. The playbooks will vary depending on the stage that your market is in the COVID crisis. I urge everyone to please check that out. It is a resource as a support to the industry."

Exchanging ideas and solutions

Sharing an update on a recent event held with PATA's government members, Ortiguera says that she sees a continuous need to support the members and accelerate their learnings. PATA International's government members recently participated in a government-members only forum in partnership with World Bank. "This is intended to be a learning best practice share so that we can get more learning at minimise risks and open up markets faster by sharing what we are learning," she reveals.

"Later in August, I am also kicking off an innovation series of workshops for members. We just issued a survey and received feedback that some of the ideas that we developed do resonate. Things like digital marketing, entrepreneurship,



etc. So these workshops will be held in the coming months. And most importantly, I am kicking off an official support from PATA for Covaxin initiative. Covax is currently getting vaccines in to South Asia in countries such as India. My goal is to take the platform that PATA has and continually do advocacy and education with the intent of engaging multinationals and wealthy countries to donate vaccines to the rest of the nations," Ortiguera says.

Sharing the example of Singapore, she said that the country is targeting to open up borders

in the beginning of September after achieving 80 per cent vaccination rate across its population. "This is what is critical to opening up borders. This is actually like a war time period, when in order to help the recov-

We need to look within ourselves and see how we can be part of the solution

ery we also need to look within ourselves and see how we can be part of the solution. And therefore, my recommendation to India is vaccine deployment!" Ortiguera says.

Virtual PATA Travel Mart (PTM) 2021

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) announced that Virtual PATA Travel Mart (PTM) 2021 will take place from 2-5 September and Leshan, China will once again be the featured destination for the event. The event is being organised in conjunction with the Sichuan International Travel Expo (SITE). It will offer two business days of one-on-one meetings with up to 50 matched appointments across all time zones from 2-3 September. There will also be two trade visitor days on 4-5 September. In addition, industry trends and insights will be a part of the programme as well as interactive networking breaks with special sessions from various national tourism organisations.

Maharashtra on the right track

Valsa Nair, Principal Secretary, Tourism, Excise & Civil Aviation, Government of Maharashtra, says that right from policy initiatives to infrastructure development, Maharashtra is making sure that it offers the best possibilities for domestic tourism in the state, and that tourists get a gamut of experiences within driving distances.



Nisha Verma

Talking about the various initiatives Government of Maharashtra has taken since the pandemic struck, **Valsa Nair** says, "We planned it all under three verticals — first was policy-level changes, second was infrastructure support, and third was a change in marketing and branding. Since Maharashtra has a huge outbound population, in the last two years we have been able to get all of them back to rediscover their own state." She believes they would be in a better position by the end of August.

Policy initiatives

Under the beach shack policy, Nair explains they wanted to give an institutional framework to set up a beach shack and to ensure that there is no environmental degradation happening because of it. "We are leveraging



Valsa Nair
Principal Secretary, Tourism, Excise & Civil Aviation, Government of Maharashtra

720km of Maharashtra's coastline to promote local tourism, cuisine and employment. We will be rolling it out soon, as beach shacks are not yet permissible under the coastal zone plan," she shares.

The state's Agro-tourism policy already existed but, Nair explains, they wanted to give it a formal framework with guidelines, and a process of registration and being incentivised by the government. "We have also made it mandatory

for schools to do their education trips only at these centres once schools reopen," she says, adding that the policy has changed the face of tourism in the state.

Another initiative has been the caravan tourism policy. "We have

by the government. There is no road tax on them, and incentives are being given to them by other departments as well. The government has also worked out MoUs with established hotel groups who would provide a parking base for these caravans at night, while the

were a lot of fly-by-night operators who were doing it and in many cases, safety and security were compromised. Hence, this policy was brought about to ensure everything was under a framework," she shares.

But, Nair claims that the policy that has really led the revival of tourism in the state is the vacation rental policy, which was a new discovery in COVID times.

"A lot of independent houses and farmhouses in the state have now been thrown open to tourists. There are many categories and prices have skyrocketed. There are also operators who are now running such homes. As a government, we are in the final stages to make it easier not only for tourists to book these vacation homes but also make it easier for owners to ensure that the right tourists come. Vacation rental, I think, is

going to be the backbone of tourism revival in Maharashtra."

Infrastructure development

Nair says that Maharashtra is looking at hard and soft infrastructure development. While

Vacation rental is going to be the backbone of tourism revival in Maharashtra

the former entails the launch of the PPP policy for resorts, the latter entails digital guide training and training tourism staff to work on both digital and contactless formats.



Meghalaya: Waiting to be tapped

The time has come for India to promote its lesser-known destinations to its own people, thereby creating economic opportunities for these places. One such incredible state is Meghalaya about which little is known but has immense potential just waiting to be tapped.



Hazel Jain

Ensuring last-mile connectivity and creating economic activities around border towns can be key drivers for promoting border tourism in Meghalaya. However, some fundamental issues such as air and road connectivity, infrastructural facilities at tourist sites in terms of accommodation, transport, drinking water, sanitation, healthcare, etc needs to be addressed. Needless to say, all infrastructure development will need to be done carefully, keeping in mind the ecological fragility of the mountain state.

Sharing his ideas about how the state can promote itself, **Vinod Zutshi**, Former Secretary – Ministry of Tourism, said that border tourism has immense potential if promoted and marketed well as it gives an opportunity to

see the neighbouring countries without actually crossing the border. He added that campaigns such as 'Dekho Apna Aur Padosi Desh' can be introduced to promote 'semi-international' travel. "A national level seminar should be organised by the Ministry of Tourism with all the 18 border states and UTs to create awareness about this segment, which will help to increase domestic as well as international tourists. There is also huge potential for promoting its festivals and the state government should create a mega tourism festival on the lines of Hornbill Festival in Nagaland," he added.

Cyril Diengdoh, Director – Tourism, Government of Meghalaya, said that the state has seen a steady growth of tourist arrivals from Bangladesh over the years with 4,300 arrivals in 2014, which went up to 13,000 in



Vinod Zutshi
Former Secretary, Ministry of Tourism



Arijit Purkayastha
Chairman – North East Chapter, ADTOI

State should create a mega tourism festival on the lines of Hornbill Festival in Nagaland

There is also a need for skill development in border areas to help generate employment

2018. An MoU has been signed between Tour Operators Association of Meghalaya and Ban-

gladesh Tour Operators Association to promote Mountain to Sea Tourism. He added, "The tourism

department is keen to develop 'experiential eco-tourism' apart from adventure tourism, rural tourism and homestays. In order to enhance the experience of tourists, the state government is following the three fundamentals – right pricing, carrying capacity and zero waste."

Ease of movement key

There are 13 border blocks in the state and 435 recognised border villages. In order to ensure ease of movement for the tourists, several projects have been funded under the Border Area Development Programme (BAPD) for construction of roads, parking and wayside amenities. The Meghalaya government is keen on promoting homestays in the state as that will encourage off-beat, experiential tourism in addition to increasing options for the domestic and international tourists.

Arijit Purkayastha, Chairman – North East Chapter, ADTOI, highlights the different aspects of tourism – cultural, natural and spiritual – that offer opportunities to promote experience-based travel in Meghalaya. However, there is a need to improve infrastructure, connectivity in the state which will help to double the number of tourists especially from Bangladesh. There is also a need for skill development in the border areas which will help generate employment. The problem of border districts and tourism development is an important challenge for local communities. Although institutional environment and security barriers remain a stumbling block for entrepreneurial cooperation, conditions to enhance border tourism can be created by setting up of easy frameworks for better cooperation of public and private entities.

Travel plans signal tourism boom

More than a year into COVID-19, Flywire examines the major travel trends to expect based on consumer attitudes from frequent travellers in five countries. From destination preference to health & safety, six key insights will help travel companies everywhere prepare for a significant bounce back.



TT Bureau

People will spend more money on travel than ever before

The study revealed that 70 per cent travellers will spend more money on travel in 2022 than they have in the last five years. The money they saved not travelling during COVID will boost their travel budget this year and next. 64 per cent respondents said when they travel again, their budget will increase for the remainder of this year in comparison to the past two years. 63 per cent are willing to pay more now to secure a spot on a trip they'll take in the future. About 76 per cent would pay more for a trip with certain additional health and safety protocols, such as rapid testing.

Travel payment experience matters

Ease of payment experience



can impact which company travellers choose to book with. 89 per cent say ease of payment is important. 70 per cent travellers feel ease of payment impacts their choice of travel agent and/or tour operator. 90 per cent of them prefer to be billed and/or pay in their own

currency for trips. Looking at the payment method preference, it was revealed that most frequent travellers prefer paying through credit card (78%).

Boundaries between work & travel are blurring

People are booking longer stays

to take advantage of work from home flexibility. 34 per cent of travellers worked from either.

About 25 per cent worked for a few days from domestic accommodations, such as a hotel or resort during the pandemic while 17 per cent

worked for a few days from international accommodations, such as a hotel or resort during the pandemic. 10.57 days is the average time travellers have worked away from home during the pandemic. 59 per cent say remote work will be a consideration in their future travel plans.

First vacations post-pandemic will look a little different

About 75% travellers said they will look for a destination where there are not a lot of people. 65 per cent will take a much longer vacation than usual for their first post-pandemic trip. 93 per cent are now more likely to choose a provider with a flexible cancellation policy. 85 per cent are more likely to book at a resort, timeshare, or vacation club than they were before the pandemic. Most travellers preferred to visit a beach for their first vacation.

Not travelling can strain mental health

Travelling can be emotional. Business travellers may dread it, while vacationers long for it. 68 per cent have negative feelings about not travelling while 34 per cent have positive feelings. 84 per cent frequent travellers are as enthusiastic about travel as they have ever been.

Travel will resume soon and trips will last longer

65 per cent of the travellers say the first vacation they take after the pandemic will be much longer than their typical vacation.

Demography wise, men are more likely than women to take a long post-COVID vacation. Younger people in the age bracket 24-34 are more likely to take a long post-COVID vacation.

Accor's net profit positive

French-hospitality giant Accor has reported a group revenue of €824 million and a net profit back to positive at €67 million. The Accor group reported first-half 2021 revenue of €824 million, down six per cent like-for-like versus H1 2020. The change amounted to 14 per cent for Hotel Services and +8 per cent for Hotel Assets & Others. During the first half, Accor opened 121 hotels representing 15,000 rooms, which suggests net system growth of +1.9 per cent over the 12-month period. The pace of the gross opening was subdued as the hotel owners are cautiously monitoring the activity rebound. The group expects a net system growth in the low range between three and four per cent. At end-June 2021, the group had a portfolio of 762,000 rooms (5,199 hotels) and a stable pipeline of 211,000 rooms (1,203 hotels). As of July 26, 2021, 93 per cent of the group's hotels were open.

B2B platform for rural India

Actor **Sonu Sood** has launched a new travel venture for the trade fraternity located in smaller cities of India that claims to offer easy booking and refund options for flights, hotels, trains and buses at zero investment.

 Hazel Jain

Bollywood actor **Sonu Sood** has launched a travel-tech business venture to digitally empower and build a travel agent business community in smaller cities and rural areas of India. Called Travel Union, the platform is an assisted travel business brand for rural India to support small business owners. It has a mobile application as well as a web portal. It aims to be a one-stop shop for all travel businesses and agents across India's hinterlands, offering vast inventory, competitive prices, and state-of-the-art technology.

During the launch, Sood urged the trade to become a Travel Union member. The company claims it will democratise travel services by providing a platform

to Travel Union members to serve travel needs of rural customers at a district, block and gram panchayat level.

The travel sector at the rural level has been largely unorganised with no player focusing on the needs of Indians in tier II towns and villages. Travel Union addresses this need of rural travel agents, small business owners and enterprises, the primary one being the absence of travel-tech platforms designed for rural travel at the core.

Sood says, "During the lockdowns, I had first-hand experience of the challenges that rural Indians face when it comes to travel as well as the struggles of small business owners. The lack of tailored offerings catering to the needs of Bharat and addressing digital needs of rural citizens stayed with me. In fact,



Sonu Sood
Actor

currently rural consumers have no option to pre-plan their travel and have to run to multiple operators for different kinds of travel needs. I envisioned Travel Union so that we can remove all barriers to travel and give an entrepreneurial opportunity to anyone in the nation who wants to start a career in travel industry. Travel Union, a B2B travel tech platform catering to rural travel agents, is an important initiative that enables them

to provide the best of travel offerings to their localities. It can be an additional source of income for existing rural entrepreneurs or a building block for aspiring ones. While I have already taken steps to offer employment opportunities to Indian youth, Travel Union furthers my dream of bringing self-employment opportunities to the hinterlands of India, so the rural youth can develop their local economies without having to migrate to urban cities. With Travel Union we are taking yet another big step towards enabling self-reliance among the rural population in India and building a truly digital Bharat."

Travel Union is presently available in English and Hindi. It is soon to be launched in 11 more Indian languages. New and upcoming offerings on the platform also include domes-

tic and international holiday packages, visa services, Forex services as well as travel accessories. The platform will give access to all trains operating in India through IRCTC, over

 We are taking a big step in enabling self-reliance of the rural population 

500 domestic and international flights, 10,000-plus bus operators and 10 lakh-plus hotels to its members and consumers. It also offers the lowest IRCTC agent ID purchase cost. 

DoT conducts free training

Department of Tourism (DoT), Government of Maharashtra, recently conducted a special five-day guide training programme for the benefit of the tribal communities at Karnala Sanctuary and Phansad Sanctuary.

 TT Bureau

The Directorate of Tourism (DoT), Government of Maharashtra, in association with Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management (IITTM), an autonomous body under Ministry for Tourism, Government of India, conducted a special five-day guide training programme for the tribal communities at Karnala Sanctuary and Phansad Sanctuary, in Raigad district in the first week of August. This is the first-ever offline tourist guide training programme being conducted by DoT. A total of 31 local tribal unemployed youth, including 20 from Karnala Sanctuary area and 11 from Phansad Sanctuary area between the age group of 20 and 35, were provided training and awarded certificates on completion of the programme.

The session was divided into two parts: theory and practical. The topics included introduc-




Dhananjay Sawalkar
Director, DoT Maharashtra

tion of the tourism and basics of tourism, challenges in tour guide profession, roles and responsibilities of tour guides and how to become a good tour guide, concept of biodiversity, nature trail, wildlife, etc. in the sanctuary, how to practically conduct walking tours, handling difficulties, difficult tourists and stress management, etc.

Dhananjay Sawalkar, Director, DoT, said, "There is huge demand for trained guides in places with diverse tourist destinations. To understand the tourist destinations as well as to make

the visit enjoyable, tourists need good guides to provide authentic and relevant information. At the same time, proper implementation of the local rules and regulations of tourist destinations as a local guide will be possible. This will also help in creating

 This initiative will be a catalyst for the growth of the tourism industry in Maharashtra 

employment opportunities at the local level. Given the need of the hour, local students/candidates will get an opportunity to study and undergo the training of tourist guides. This initiative will be a catalyst for the growth of the tourism industry in Maharashtra." 

Students beware: VFS Global

VFS Global advises prospective students to be wary of scamsters looking to take advantage of this peak-demand period. The company is itself taking all necessary measures to accommodate student visas.

 TT Bureau

With borders slowly reopening for Indians after months-long closures owing to the pandemic, particularly student visa applications being submitted for various countries are at volumes higher than ever before. With this higher demand for visa application appointments, VFS Global has continually faced the issue of scammers posing as employees or associates



of the organisation and embezzling innocent customers. **Pranav Sinha**, Head – South Asia, VFS Global, said, "We understand anxieties engulfing students and parents with the reopening of international borders. With high demand for student visas, it is also important for our





Pranav Sinha
Head – South Asia, VFS Global

customers to be wary of miscreants looking to take advantage of this peak demand period. VFS Global urges prospective students to beware of such malpractices. VFS Global is taking all necessary and proactive measures to accommodate student visas as per directives from the respective Embassy and or Consulate."

An all-too-frequent modus operandi involves a scammer using new software and other technology to clone VFS Global's web page and mask their phone numbers, so it appears that the

call has indeed come from an official VFS Global line. The victim is then asked to verify the number on the official website, leading him/her to further believe the caller. Touts could also reach out

 With high demand, it is important for customers to be wary 

to customers via chat apps, offering simple assistance such as booking an appointment slot to apply for a visa at a VFS Global centre at an additional fee. VFS Global does not charge customers for appointments to submit applications. All appointments are available online on a first-come-first-served basis. 

Unhindered travel for the vaccinated

Suman Billa, Director, Technical Cooperation and Silk Road Development, UNWTO, talks about how tourism is going to change with the vaccination drives underway across the world. He also highlights some key areas that India needs to work on in order to make its presence felt in the post-pandemic era.



Nisha Verma

Suman Billa believes that the world is at a critical turning point, and that two simultaneously running trends have been noticed. "The first is that several countries are rapidly vaccinating their population and several of them have come very close to hitting levels required for herd immunity. Secondly, the COVID-19 virus is mutating into various forms, especially with 'Variants of Concern'. Hence, the face-off is how effective vaccination is going to be against the variants of the virus," he says. Billa also believes that while vaccination will not be able to ward off the virus completely, it will reduce hospitalisation and will reduce mortality, therefore, countries will have to look at the Singapore model.



Suman Billa
Director, Technical Cooperation
and Silk Road Development, UNWTO

What India could do

Billa suggests that India should open unhindered travel for those who are vaccinated. "This means that for domestic travel, if I have been vaccinated and I have a certificate to prove it, I should be allowed to travel wherever I can. Secondly, for international travellers, we need to jettison the principle of reciprocity because many countries are looking at opening their borders if the same is reciprocated by the



other country. However, when we are in a situation where there is risk, we should only consider a vaccination certificate as proof and ask people to open borders even if it is unilateral," he adds.

And while there will always be a concern around some countries where the pandemic is raging, Billa says, "You could always ask that to be substituted or augmented by an RT-PCR test certificate that is taken two hours before travel. However, I think the idea is that India should take an open position to activate travel because by this time, all of us are fairly convinced that if you are vaccinated, you pose much

less of a risk and you would be able to travel without having much infection."

Make travel predictable

Billa advocates the idea of making travel more predictable. "If you are going to allow vaccinated people to travel all across, then we also need to have our systems in place, which enable people to travel because today, one of the biggest challenges in travelling, even within India, is that there is a multiplicity of health regulations varying from one state to another. This makes it risky for people to travel. One should be able to give travellers a predictable outlook for them to be able to travel. I think, Government of India and



For international travellers, we need to jettison the principle of reciprocity

Indian states should sit down along with the industry and MOT, MoCA and Ministry of Health, and should take the lead. The idea is to harmonise and prescribe a system which is predictable and simple for people to travel," he suggests.



Billa also suggests that we need to look at having an entirely new set of guidelines for the new normal, so that we can reassure inbound tourists of India being a safe destination. "Another thing we could do is to get our hospitality staff vaccinated soon and treat them as frontline workers. Also, we need to see how we can cover the entire population of tourist destinations. This is an approach that would yield dividends in the long run. We could look at two elements—one is LTC, by which we can enable people to travel now instead of in the future and second, to leverage benefits of direct tax for those in the private sector to utilise their LTC now," he says.

PATA indicates contraction rates and loss of arrivals to remain severe this year. The exception, however, is Asia, which is predicted to have a positive annual growth of almost 51% y-o-y, under the mild scenario.

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INDeco and Blusaz join hands

Steve Borgia, Founder & Chairman of INDeco Hotels, has engaged Blusaz Hospitality to manage his hotels. Borgia and **Sanjay Sharma**, Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Blusaz Hospitality, signed an agreement at Yercaud in Tamil Nadu, and each is going to benefit from the other's expertise.



Nisha Verma

Steve Borgia has passionately pioneered rural tourism. "It wasn't just for a hotel business, but because I wanted tourism to be a socio-economic tool for rural development and therefore sustainable tourism was far left behind. I was talking about regenerative rural tourism. In the last 40 years, the growth is very organic. We were not aiming to make big money, but wanted to see development in our rural areas and we have achieved a lot," he says.

Today, claims Borgia, people are rushing to rural areas. "People want to go to rural areas because they believe it is safe. Now, people look for what we offer. The organic growth is not needed. Hence, we need to find people who can add shine to rural tourism. It is time we have many more rural hotels, and

hence we need to find operators. Probably in the beginning we need to handhold them, but we need to have operators to manage the beautiful heritage and eco hotels," he adds.

Since everybody is asking for experiences, Borgia says, "India has gone one step beyond experiences. We are the only country in the world that can sell emotion. We need to exploit that. When the pandemic rush will die eventually and we will go to normal times, the whole world will start coming here. That time we have to be ready with the shine on rural hotels. We need to add luxury to the rural hotels. I thought that was very critical and this was a key reason why I looked at various operations and management companies. We narrowed down on Blusaz to operate our hotels because I think most hoteliers and tourism people know Sanjay



Steve Borgia
Founder & Chairman, INDeco Hotels

Sharma's credibility in managing hotels. He has pulled many dead hotels out of the grave. Great in operations, he himself has gone through a big awakening. He has operated India's flamboyant hotels. Suddenly, he felt the need to have a rural experience and was looking to promote rural India. After meeting them I said that this is the kind of company that I would like to operate my hotels with, and we signed an agreement. Now we must make the agreement work."

When asked if he won't be actively involved in the hotels after the MoU with Blusaz, Borgia shared, "Just like you can't separate the dancer from the dance, I have been such an integral part of the hotel, its story, history, museum, etc., that I will handhold the soft features for some time. I am there, but it's just that a lot of work must be put into the hotel. I want that shine and luxury to come in. Blusaz will be operating, managing and marketing the hotels entirely, we don't need to interfere in that. Of course, if the concept is changing, we can bring to their attention, but they are professional and they understand the concept very well. We have discussed that enough.

They will have the liberty to run it the way it should be run."

He adds, "Blusaz as a team sees the importance of heritage and

We are the only country that can sell emotion; we need to exploit that

culture in this country. They have operated the Starwood, Meridien, and other big hotels in the best

possible manner. They understand the cultural aspect and the very brand that they have indicated here is Blusaz Rural Experiences, which is a great amalgamation and great coming together. I was looking to add finesse and luxury to my operation and they were looking at a brand. And what's better than INDeco Swamimalai and INDeco Yercaud for experiences. Today, every heritage hotelier or rural tourism hotelier is looking for such passion because it is also taxing for one person to run a great organisation."

Borgia claims that Blusaz knows the brand value that is already being created, and that it would be best to carry that forward. ➔

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) and UNCTAD have extended their collaboration to facilitate international trade, particularly e-commerce. The extended partnership will enrich their history of working together.

4 top priorities for travel players

This peak-travel season, tourists are returning with a vengeance. But despite promising signs, the tourism industry will likely struggle to capitalise on the imminent spike in travel demand. McKinsey & Company highlights four priority areas that travel companies should focus on to ensure traveller satisfaction.



TT Bureau

From airlines and car rentals to hotels and airport restaurants, the entire travel supply chain is already showing signs of strain. Wait times at security checkpoints are stretching into hours at some airports, while popular vacation destinations are facing rental-car shortages. Needless to say, bad news travels fast, and a negative experience can quickly become fodder for a viral video and bad publicity, leading customers to look for alternatives more in their control, including nearby drives and rental properties. While the process is daunting, clear-sighted travel leaders know that preparing their organisations for a surge of travellers is also an opportunity to redefine their value propositions.

McKinsey
& Company

Bring back capacity

Many contract and temporary workers in the restaurant industry who were laid off during the pandemic have found other employment and are reluctant to go back to their former jobs, resulting in

a labour crunch. Global aviation capacity levels are also still well below pre-pandemic levels as many planes remain in long-term storage and staff remain furloughed. Even though reactivating airline pilots and cabin crews,

preparing grounded aircraft for service, and rehiring and training service staff can be pricey, the cost of standing by and doing nothing would be higher.

Invest innovatively to improve the entire customer journey

Remember that the customer experience is shaped across the entire end-to-end journey, from booking to travel to the return home. Even seasoned travellers will have to adapt to new protocols such as digital health certificates and safety measures. Travellers now need more, not less, assistance. Furthermore, certain critical journeys and moments carry a disproportionate weight in consumers' minds when they plan their next trip. The anticipated volume of traffic during the summer and peak holiday periods will only compound these issues.

Reimagine approaches

Travel companies may rethink their commercial approaches. The profiles of airline passengers and hotel guests will be different: more leisure guests, later booking windows and higher demand for flexible tickets. Historical booking curves are no longer a good indicator of current behaviour. Travel companies need to use every source of insight they can to anticipate demand and optimise pricing. Flexible pricing models can also ease customer discomfort with today's heightened levels of unpredictability. Hotels will need to find new purposes for meeting and conference spaces, which will be slower to fill. Airlines need to figure out how to fill intercontinental Business Class, likely with premium leisure promo-

tions. For all travel companies, the boom may be higher in traveller numbers than in profits, as the most lucrative corporate business has been slow to return.

Learn from critical moments

Aside from streamlining processes and personalising the customer experience, investing in digital analytics can allow companies to identify opportunities to differentiate their services. Companies would also be able to discern emerging trends and hiccups before they turn into nightmares. Industry players, such as online travel agents, may also be a trove of useful insights pertaining to how the external ecosystem is evolving; their experiences may be beneficial for hotels and airlines to explore potential partnerships with them. ➔

Bring back capacity

Invest innovatively

Reimagine commercial approaches

Learn from critical moments

Design must be more sustainable

The advent of the current and ongoing widely known prognosis has led to profuse and diverse ad hoc practices implemented across hospitality industries. But, the industry needs to eradicate them and come up with a more sustained approach in hotel design and a standardised implementation of the same across the industry.



Ananya Kukreja

Whilst disasters over the years have incited consequent disruptive contrivance, Sars-CoV-2 with its mutations has yet again begot an opportunity for hotels and parallel establishments to redesign and improve their services in order to better suit and provide for guest expectations, convenience and satisfaction. Hygiene and sanitation must prevail without intruding or making the traveller experience inconvenient; recognising that said precautions will be followed for a long term and a foreseeable future, hoteliers ought to better plan the same durably.

Conversion in Crises

With no prior knowledge, and the entire planet struggling, no stan-



Geeta Ahuja
Interior Designer and Architect
Caryatid Design Studio

One careful human can save another human; one careless human can spread & kill 70

– Ahuja

dard procedures could be executed and the industry, through trial and error, learnt and adapted to the evolving needs. **Geeta Ahuja**, Interior Designer and Architect at



Gautam Sen
Associate Professor – Operations Management, IHM – Aurangabad

Markets of the world are utilising ergonomic design to enhance staff productivity

– Sen

Caryatid Design Studio, sums up this pandemic by stating, “One careful human can save another human being, but one careless human can spread and kill 70.”

After the initial disruption of travel and accommodation sectors, business gradually improved, greater information on the virus was circulated and guidelines were issued by authorities. Hotels in the Indian demographic adhered to the same whilst also complimenting the procedures with higher safety protocols, so as to compete with international standards. All the while one thing remained constant, and that was the provision of ad hoc practices. This has led to an outlook of improving services beyond guest expectations and incorporating new ideas throughout hotel operations in terms of design.

Progressive designs

The notion of luxury has in the recent past shifted from power and opulence to more inclusive expe-

riences with a focus on generosity, flexibility and support. **Gautam Sen**, Associate Professor – Operations Management at Institute of Hotel Management (IHCL), Aurangabad, says, “Significant changes in design and space allocation is the way forward, where major markets across the world are utilising ergonomic designs to enhance staff productivity and guest convenience.”

The significant rise in awareness about benefits of exercise, health and wellness has now steered the way for biophilic designs which will prove intrinsic in re-designing public spaces. Allocation for natural light penetration and air circulation will not only provide for an acoustic sensory experience, but will also assist in reassuring the guests with



Rishi Puri
Senior Vice President – Operations & Development, Lords Hotels & Resorts

Hoteliers can create revenue by converting public areas into spaces for virtual meetings

– Puri

flexible facilities whilst working wonders against the incubation virus. This includes inclusion of outdoor spaces like open terraces on lower floors and rooftop lounge bars, or at minimum, provision of windows in all closed spaces like guest rooms and staff quarters for air circulation and sunlight imbued decontamination. Ahuja, in continuation states that hotels over the last year, started a revolution of outdoor catering and services and realised the importance of open spaces due to aerosol contamination. To add to her assimilation,



Dheeraj Kukreja
Chief Operating Officer
Piccadilly Holiday Resorts

We have reorganised FF&E in high footfall and frequent touch point areas

– Kukreja

research suggests that there is an increasing consideration and ensuing implementation of open kitchens, non-invasive decorative screening and private booths in dining areas, lounges, and lobbies, especially in upcoming properties. Guestrooms, at least a select designated, are claimed to change in design and become larger in order to accommodate sleep, work, dining, work out and any other guest requirements, all in-room and in a confined space, till their confidence restores.

Rishi Puri, Senior Vice President – Operations & Development at Lords Hotels & Resorts, mentions that while existing hotels may not be able to fully benefit from these unviable structural changes, upcoming emerging hotels can very well in-build such ideas into design planning. He further mentions assembling of cabins for temperature checks along with sanitation stations located conveniently around the property, which does not require exceptional redesigning. “Additionally, with business travel reduced, hoteliers can create revenue by converting certain public areas, and even guest rooms into spaces for prevailing virtual meetings,” he adds.

One of the greatest changes the hotel industry continues to witness is FF&E (Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment) specifications.

Interior designers here will have the most influence in terms of sensitive selections of materials and finishes that respond to the threat of contamination without losing the intrinsic human desire for warm, welcoming and tactile surroundings. FF&E specification is always in the front line, and this is especially true now.

Dheeraj Kukreja, Chief Operating Officer at Piccadilly Holiday Resorts, has made considerable changes to their properties in terms of entry/ exit points of employees and guests. “We have reorganised the FF&E configuration in high footfall and frequent touch point areas like cafeteria, restaurant and lobby,” he says. In their PASS (Piccadilly Assured Safety & Security) programme initiated last year, they have established easily accessible sanitation stations, standardised masks, PPE kits, sanitisers and disposable gloves as amenities, revamped safe procedures for buffet service otherwise discour-

ease of information delivery for informed decisions. Likewise, RFID (radio frequency identification) technology may be used by hotels to track guest movement while in transit and around the property for more quick and personalised experience.

“While its impact has subconsciously reduced, COVID-19 is not gone,” states Puri, and to palliate the same, “greater use of mentioned practices will drive bulk manufacturing, increase competition and subsequently reduce prices of the same,” recommends Kukreja, who further adds that governments must devise guidelines and encourage hotels towards said practices with slight rebate on taxes and subsidy provisions, which would elevate the execution.

Moving forward, hoteliers must consciously design for intentional flexibility that will offer the least amount of disruption to the guest experience and operations in a



aged, optimally spaced public area seating, and advisedly allowed sunlight in circulation. Kukreja believes that such provisions and more should be incorporated as a part of hotel design instead of seemingly ad hoc practices and be standardised throughout the industry.

Way forward

While travel is being authentically facilitated through health/vaccine passports, Kukreja regards software upgradation as a high priority where hotels can retrieve COVID-related information through government portals, reducing fudged reports and increasing

time of need and make processes seamless. One must be cautious of unsustainable over-correcting practices and allow progressive ideas due gestation time for research before heavily investing in expensive designs and technologies; in the meantime, training and staff skill development is the way to go. At the end of the day, one must think if such provisions are worth the expense, a rumination especially for small-scale properties. Hoteliers must ensure that such inclusions lead to their progression, not regression, and technologies as well as designs implemented are disruptive in its intended meaning. 🐦

“We are truly honoured to be recognized by this leading certification body for our safety precautions and hygiene practices which is the most important factor especially during these Covid times. We would like to thank QualStar for recognizing us and certifying our practices.”



Mr Kush Kapoor
CEO, Roseate Hotels & Resorts



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Etihaad opens bookings for travel from India

Etihad Airways has launched a number of flights from five Indian gateways, allowing eligible UAE residents to return, and for transit to Etihad's network. It has also begun flights from three additional Indian cities for travel to the UAE for transit

than 14 days before travel. Unvaccinated people in certain categories eligible to return include medical workers, UAE based teachers, students, residents with extenuating circumstances, patients undergoing medical treatment in the UAE and employees who work for



passengers to access Etihad's global network of destinations. Flights have been added from Ahmedabad (for transit only), Hyderabad and Mumbai.

Passengers returning to the UAE must have a valid residency and proof of having received both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine within the UAE no less

federal or local government agencies. All passengers must apply for permission to return through the Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship website. These latest categories are in addition to previously exempt categories of UAE nationals, Diplomatic missions, official delegations and Golden residence holders.

Hotels keen on incentive travel

Decision makers from leading hotel chains talk about how incentive travel will take shape in the post-pandemic era. A uniform policy for vaccinated travellers must prevail, they say, sharing their optimistic view of business in the future.

“We believe that as the vaccination level starts increasing exponentially around the world, travel will come back into its own. The need for human connection is very high. Incentive travel is a shared and joint experience to learn, discover and rejuvenate. The key point which will make a difference is the uniform policy adopted across the world on vaccination and vaccination-related travel. Governments should ease the infrastructure around the process.”



Rohit Chopra
Regional Director of Sales - India
Accor

“We have received good number of queries; groups will very soon start travelling outbound. It depends on which country or NTO invites Indians with open arms. Government is taking a lot of efforts to make things better. More relaxed travel norms will lead to more travel. Everyone shall get their share as we approach Q1 2022, but domestic will kick-start first as international borders will open slowly. Queries for international travel are expected to increase by December.”



Ritika Gupta
Vice President Market
North & West India, IHCL

“Incentive travel is selling experiences. In the last couple of months, brand India has taken a huge hit amongst the foreign markets. So, going forward, to turn things around, we need to change the perception of the country in the minds of foreign travellers. Good things have happened and that needs to be spoken about. The trend of competing will become more aggressive because countries are desperate to revive tourism. If we need to compete, we need to open soon.”



Dhananjay Saliankar
Head Sales & Marketing - India
Fortune Hotels & WelcomHeritage

“What I see in the future is that companies not making major profits will look at cutting costs and hence they will take a hybrid approach to doing events. Companies are now used to technology, so we might see hybrid events becoming more popular. IT companies have done well, so incentive travel-wise, they will be very eager to travel. Domestic travel will move faster as international travel for MICE will still take another year to pick pace.”

Inputs by TT Bureau

Be digital, be relevant

► Contd from page 1

Quoting a report, he said that return of the investment and tourism is comparatively higher than any other sector. “For a ₹10 lakh investment, tourism can provide 78 jobs as compared to 45 jobs in the manufacturing sector. This shows the immense potential of the sector to bring about socio-economic change in the nation,” he shared.

He further said that because of the onslaught of COVID-19 pandemic, the industry has witnessed a major shift. “The global tourism industry is going through a phase of transition. There is a need today to take initiative for rethinking travel, tourism and hospitality sector.

There is a need to focus our energies, not just in reviving the sector, but making it one of the drivers to revive the economy. We have taken it on priority to interact with experts and stakeholders. We want to involve everyone in the sector to re-energise the sector and address all the challenges faced in the last 1.5 years.”



G Kishan Reddy
Cabinet Minister for Tourism, GOI

He also added that digitalisation can be the way forward to make tourism more attractive. “Stakeholders impress upon the state governments to give industry status to tourism. This will greatly help in the development of tourism, particularly infrastructure. To achieve true potential of tourism, the first fundamental requirement is to ensure coordination at every level of the activity.

We need to have a proactive approach from every stakeholder—be it centre, state, or the industry and private stakeholder, everyone needs to jointly identify the priority areas, so that the revival of tourism is focused on sustainability and responsible travelling,” he insisted.

Sharing his view on a tourism policy, Reddy revealed, “There should be a policy in Indian tourism. We are also thinking it should be in the Concurrent List. Also, I am requesting everybody to participate in preparing a new

We want to involve everyone to re-energise the sector and address challenges

national tourism policy which, once introduced, would be particularly helpful for stakeholders. Through this policy, we can get a proper response, investments and support, from village Gram Panchayat to town municipality and Government of India. The Prime Minister is very keen on the tourism sector to rise from this situation.”

A validation of efforts

► Contd from page 1

safety while staying and dining at restaurants. Care by Roseate involves stringent procedures in place to ensure no contamination enters via any route. The measures involve thermal screening at entry gates of all passenger vehicles, display of ‘Safe’ status in Aarogya Setu App for staff and guests, and mandatory wearing of masks to enter the hotel premises.

All hotel vehicles are disinfected at entry points and after every use. Sanitisers are kept in all prominent locations within the hotel. Guest luggage would also be disinfected from outside on arrival. To enable seamless, remote check-ins, touchless check-ins would be facilitated via an App, in which all information would already be pre-registered. After check out, the same room would be allocated only 24 hours post being thoroughly disinfected.

Roseate Hotels & Resorts would also follow an alternate room occupancy policy to maintain social distancing. Housekeep-

ing staff would wear Personal Protection Equipment (PPE). Delivery and clearance of Room Service orders would be just outside the hotel room entrance. To ensure touchless usage of elevators, a staff member in PPE



would be present to operate them with not more than three members at a time.

Touchless dining is also going to be paramount at Roseate. For dining, the guest, while booking a table, can see the menu and order from it. The guest shares their location with the hotel so that the kitchen staff starts preparing the meal when the guest is enroute to the hotel's restaurant.

Guests also have an option to add more items while they are enjoying their meal. In addition, the App would allow guests to see food

being prepared live in the kitchen. In the end, the bill comes on the App on which it can be paid via credit card. There would be no buffet services for the time being.

The tables in the restaurant will also be placed at a minimum two-metre distance and kitchen & service staff will wear PPE (masks, gloves and other protective gear) at all times. Moreover,

We are honoured to be recognised by this leading certification body for our precautions and practices

regular temperature checks of staff will continue to be a part of the new normal. Personnel from areas designated as hotspots will be discouraged to enter the hotel premises.

Singapore: Re-inventing itself again

Singapore Tourism Board recently conducted a mega virtual event for its trade partners, thereby raising the bar and setting new standards for the travel industry in organising a virtual event. **GB Srithar**, its Regional Director (India, Middle East and South Asia), tells us more.



Hazel Jain

What was the idea behind organising the virtual familiarisation event for the trade in India?

With the SingapoReimagine Virtual Experiences Familiarisation Day, we wanted to create a differentiated and immersive experience for the travel trade fraternity in India, and to reimagine and evolve their definition of travel. It was a great opportunity for us to connect with our Indian travel trade partners, and let them virtually



GB Srithar
Regional Director (India, ME and South Asia), STB

experience Singapore and its offerings through a fresh lens, while we await the return of physical



**Passion
Made
Possible**

travel. It was held on two days, on July 27 for travel agents from the South and West region and then on July 31 for travel agents from North and East India. It was a fun-filled day with diverse experiences specially curated for our travel agents. Many travel agents

were seamlessly executed and delivered with customised features, branding and animations on the Zoom Chrome platform.

Keeping in mind that the audience may already be fatigued from attending virtual sessions over the past one year, we had to ensure that our programme was well thought through and differentiated to engage the audience as if they are physically experiencing Singapore, while delivering our marketing objectives.

We went the extra mile in ensuring audiences were treated to a Singapore-themed lunch personally delivered to them, including a cocktail-making kit to get them actively engaged during the masterclass and have a hands-on experience. We also carefully selected and engaged two emcees who were able to sustain the audiences throughout the day with fun banter and keep their energy levels up.

Does India remain an important source market for Singapore?
India is a highly important source

have uncovered the potential of promoting Singapore virtual experiences to their customers and MICE corporates. We will be exploring with interested agents and

What the event entailed

The event kicked off with a virtual in-flight experience of landing in Singapore on Singapore Airlines. There were edutainment tours arranged for travel agents by Wildlife Reserves Singapore, getting up close virtually with the animals at the Singapore Zoo, and a virtual stroll down by the Singapore River, one that was livened up by games, quizzes and nuggets of trivia by Monster Tours. They also toured the Brass Lion Distillery, a full-fledged working distillery known for its special Singapore dry gin. The highlight of this session was a cocktail making masterclass conducted by the Distillery's brand ambassador and mixologist.

engagement theme through our regular and consistent communication in the form of virtual platforms, e-newsletters, videos, industry update sessions.

To ensure that Singapore remains top-of-mind prior to the resumption of travel, STB India has been actively engaging consumers to strengthen Singapore's brand and destination image. We have stepped up digital marketing efforts to engage Indian consumers meaningfully since mid-2020.

A straw poll of all participants found that more than 80% of the agents would recommend such a session to their customers while physical travel is not possible. More than half of them would price such sessions to be between ₹500 to ₹1,000. These are good indications of how such

niors. It is expected that around 80 per cent of the population would have received two doses of the vaccine by September. The Multi-Ministry Task Force in Singapore has said it will progressively review the COVID-19



What agents say



Prashant Binnany
Director, Discovery Holidays

STB has always been thorough and put into action their plans way ahead of time, creating ripples and setting standards. The virtual Fam was nothing short of a great idea. The whole experience, starting with the SQ plane taking off to the three curated virtual experiences, made one feel physically present in Singapore. We understood the product has potential with corporates, kiddy groups and short school programmes. We see the possibility of a virtual school trip to Singapore as a regular programme.

The entire virtual familiarisation programme was well-executed. The experience had me nostalgic for travelling to Singapore. While I have visited some of these places before, the depth and detail of the tours made me feel like it was my first time visiting them. I felt encouraged by Singapore Tourism Board's call to reimagine, re-energise and reconnect. Now more than ever, we cannot wait for the borders to open and to return to Singapore.



Sunita Amarnani
Vice President - FIT, MICE
Operations and Trade Relations,
Hyperlink Brand Solutions

our stakeholders to actively push these products to the market.

What went behind the meticulous planning of the event?

The event was attended by over 200 travel agents from 29 cities across India who sat through the seven-hour programme and found it thoroughly entertaining and engaging from start to end. This is due to the various creative and immersive elements that

market for Singapore. Prior to the pandemic, India was Singapore's third largest market for visitor arrivals, the top cruise source market and a key market for MICE travel. Since COVID-19, STB India has been constantly engaging our partners to show our solidarity and to discuss how to make travel better, safer, and more seamless once travel resumes. We ramped up engagement efforts by adopting the #UnitedWeStand trade

virtual experiences may be positioned to interest consumers before travel reopens.

What is the current situation like and what is the possibility of allowing completely vaccinated tourists in near future?

The Singapore government will synchronise Singapore's reopening with the vaccination coverage of its overall population and its most vulnerable se-

Travel agents have uncovered the potential of promoting Singapore virtual experiences to their customers

situation, but any easing of measures will be only for vaccinated people who are much better protected against the virus.

In its next phase of reopening from August 10 onwards, vaccinated people will get to dine out in up to groups of five, and they will also get to do indoor sports and exercise at gyms and fitness studios with masks off, as well as attend larger events.

Singapore considers an individual to be fully vaccinated two weeks after receiving the second dose of any vaccine approved under the World Health Organization's emergency use listing. Singapore will begin to progressively reopen its borders and allow vaccinated people to travel. It will start by setting up travel corridors with countries or regions that have managed COVID-19 well, and where the infection is under control. People vaccinated against COVID-19 will be given some concession when travelling to Singapore, said the Singapore authorities.



Vaccination in full throttle in Kerala

Kerala has accelerated its COVID-19 vaccination campaign to turn all tourism destinations completely risk-free for visitors. Vythiri in Wayanad has thus become the first 100%-vaccinated tourism destination in the state. Major centres to be covered under the initiative are Alappuzha, Munnar, Fort Kochi, Kovalam, Kumarakom and Varkala.

Hazel Jain

Kerala has accelerated its total COVID-19 vaccination campaign to turn all tourism destinations completely risk-free for visitors, with Vythiri in upland Wayanad district becoming the first holiday hub to cover the entire population, including tourism sector stakeholders, under the initiative.

Rollled out by Kerala Tourism Minister **PA Mohamed Riyas**, the mission aims to keep the whole of Kerala ready to receive visitors when the pandemic recedes. The inoculation drive has picked up momentum in all destinations - hill stations, backwater hubs, sea-side holiday spots, and heritage and cultural tourism centres in the state.

"In the post-pandemic phase, visitors will be looking for



PA Mohamed Riyas
Tourism Minister
Kerala



Dr V Venu
Additional Chief Secretary
Tourism, Government of Kerala



VR Krishna Teja
Director Tourism
Government of Kerala

Government considers it vital to administer the vaccine in all destinations

- Riyas

Industry bodies, locals and employee forums are actively involved

- Venu

This initiative will position Kerala as a risk-free place to visit

- Teja

Blessed with unsurpassed natural beauty, Wayanad has immense tourism potential. We have major plans to develop the area as a hub for a rich mix of holiday and leisure activities," says Riyas.

employee forums and local communities are actively involved," he says.

"This initiative will position Kerala as a risk-free place in the post-pandemic phase. Enhanc-



Dr V Venu, Additional Chief Secretary, Tourism, Government of Kerala, says that the vaccination campaign is picking up well as it is being conducted on 'mission mode'. "Industry bodies, em-

ing the visitor confidence in places they choose to travel will be a key factor in the future," according to **VR Krishna Teja**, Director Tourism, Government of Kerala. 🐦

Mission: Digital Tourism

► Contd from page 1

in that direction and I hope that other states also follow the same," he suggested.

Digitally forward

Stressing that in the field of digitalisation they have seen development in the NIDHI portal.



Arvind Singh
Secretary, Ministry of Tourism

has been the guiding force behind the COWIN website and portal, which helped vaccinate more than 40 crore Indians. Also, he is the force behind the national digital health mission, and has helped guide us in the direction, which we are taking. Hence, I think in the coming months, you'd see work happening on setting up a digital tourism mission, which will digitally connect all tourism stakeholders," he said.

National Tourism Policy

Informing that they are in the process of drafting a new national tourism policy, Singh said, "We have got feedback from some stakeholders, especially relating to post-COVID focus on sustainable and responsible tourism. We are also working on sectoral strategies, including rural tourism, medical tourism, MICE tourism, eco-tourism and adventure tourism, for which we are seeking public consultation before finalising." 🐦

directives of the PMO, we set up a taskforce for the national digital tourism mission, which will provide an overall strategy and roadmap for accelerating digitalisation of the tourism sector with the overarching objective for enhancing its competitiveness.

There is a national digital health mission that has come up, which is connecting all the stakeholders within the health sector. Using the same analogy and using similar platforms, we have now started and recently we had a meeting, a live webinar with RS Sharma who

We are working on sectoral strategies, including rural, medical and MICE tourism

"We are trying to expand the portal to now cover tour operators and other tourism service providers. Recently, under the

Continued recovery in July

ICRA has revealed that there has been continued recovery in domestic passenger traffic in July 2021 with a sequential growth of 56-57%, as COVID-19 infection trajectory has dropped.

TT Bureau

Domestic passenger traffic grew 56-57 per cent at around 48-49 lakh in July, compared to 31.1 lakh in June 2021, signifying a Y-o-Y growth of 132 per cent, says ICRA. The airlines' capacity deployment for July 2021 was around 90 per cent higher than July 2020 (47,200 departures in July 2021, against 24,770 departures in July 2020). On a sequential basis, the number of departures in July 2021 were higher by 49 per cent, as COVID-19 infections demonstrated a downward trajectory.

The Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) permitted increasing the capacity deployment on domestic routes gradually from 33 per cent, with effect from May 25, 2020, to 80 per cent, with effect from December 03, 2020. However, it reduced the permis-



sible capacity deployment to 50 per cent of pre-COVID levels with effect from June 01, 2021 due to the resurgence of the second wave of the pandemic. It has now permitted increasing the capacity to 65 per cent with effect from July 5, 2021, applicable up to July 31, 2021.

traffic (inbound and outbound) for Indian carriers has been 39 lakh for the period May 07, 2020 to July 31, 2021. For July 2021, the international passenger traffic for Indian carriers under the VBM was estimated at 2.1 lakh, a sequential growth of 43 per cent.

As for the ATF prices, until February 2021, they were lower on a Y-o-Y basis while in March 2021, April 2021, May 2021, June 2021 and July 2021, prices were higher by 3.0%, 59.8%, 103.4%, 86.3% and 59.7%, respectively, on a Y-o-Y basis. In August 2021, the prices have been higher. 🐦

Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) and Event and Entertainment Management Association (EEMA) have come together to jointly address concerns faced by its members over copyright issues of broadcasting AV content.



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Innovation with SaaS

SaaS can help the tourism industry get access to best-in-class technology and therefore be an enabler in their efforts to differentiate. SaaS brings a host of growth opportunities, explains **Asish Z Koshy**, VP & Head (Tour and Cruise Business), IBS Software.

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-a-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.

SaaS, which is one of the three mainstays in cloud computing, 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

Travel companies need technology driven differentiation to be successful

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.

How is SaaS helping?

SaaS application development has helped to deploy better software engineering practices and has simplified the integration of solutions with satellite systems. With this, travel companies – from start-ups to large-scale or-

ganisations – can build engaging online experiences for their travellers. They help travellers plan their entire trip seamlessly, choose the prices that fit in their budget and post reviews for others.

The pay-as-you-go model of SaaS helps businesses to reduce their IT capital expenditure and keep their operational expenditure in line with business volumes.

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.

SaaS applications can further support by aggregating and

analysing a vast amount of data available. They facilitate the statistics required to verify different propositions and provide various customers insights that enable personalization.

The next boom because of SaaS

A WTTC report reveals that the total market size of the tourism and hospitality industry in India, which stood at \$117.7 billion in 2014, is expected to reach \$418.9 billion by 2022 growing at a CAGR of 14%. SaaS-based enterprise travel technology solutions leveraging AI and Analytics will also be increasingly adopted by the travel industry in India. Several niche travel providers will emerge both in the leisure and corporate travel space who will increasingly leverage technology to provide personalised self-service capabilities to travellers.



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

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

A change of course

Airports and aviation companies have been evolving and innovating themselves to not just stay relevant during the pandemic but to zoom ahead of the curve and do their bit to re-open travel quickly. These seven instances could give us an indication of where the industry is headed.



Hazel Jain

In-flight testing

Israeli airline El Al recently carried out in-flight tests on a JFK-Tel Aviv flight. Passengers who either tested in-flight or just before boarding will be able to skip taking a test immediately on arriving in Israel. They will however have to isolate for a week, after Israel placed the USA in a higher risk category.

Robot patrol

Urumuri, meaning 'light' in Rwandan, is one of five robots stationed at Kigali International Airport in July 2020. Its job is to screen passengers' temperatures at a rate of between 50 and 150 people per minute. In the event someone isn't complying with mask rules, Urumuri can approach them and request them to mask up. It can also identify coughing and other signs of possible COVID-19 infection.

Private flying

The biggest shift we see since COVID-19 in the way travellers are flying is that more people than ever are flying private. And the reason is that it's never been more accessible. Flying private is no longer just for the ultra-rich. Thanks to new Apps and services offered by companies like Wheels Up, XO, Blade and Aero, flying private can be as easy — and sometimes almost as affordable — as ordering a car. There are dozens of

regularly scheduled 'private' flights that can be booked by the seat when there's no scheduled service available.

Quarantine loophole

The citizens of India are barred from entering many countries during the pandemic unless they spend two weeks in another country en route. To take advantage of this loophole, many travel agencies in India are re-routing their customers via other countries



such as Serbia as a stopover destination for Indians because they offer them visa-free entry if they have been vaccinated and test negative for the virus. Many termed this new segment of travel as 'quarantine tourism'.

Monitored self-testing

This is gaining traction since the past six months, where passengers take a pre-departure COVID test themselves and it is then verified. A number of major airlines

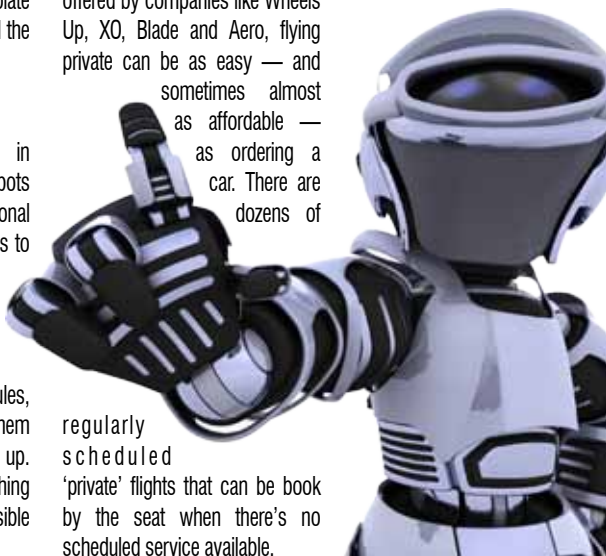
are already on board with this. They offer antigen tests for passengers to pack in their luggage. The passenger then takes the test before returning to the USA, while being monitored on video.

No-charge insurance

Among the initiatives adopted by airlines such as Emirates, WestJet, Etihad, and Virgin Atlantic is the introduction of no-charge COVID-19 travel insurance and medical cover for some customers.

No more lost luggage

British start-up UtterBerry has worked on the development of airport smart trays – a wireless AI Blockchain technology that could do wonders for the future of airport security. This will not only increase security at the border but make airport checks quicker and easier for passengers. The trays use a mix of Blockchain technology, machine learning and AI.



Business powered by deliveries

India's food delivery market is growing at a rate of 33 per cent per annum and is expected to touch ₹93,600 crore (\$13 billion) by 2023, despite an initial drop in sales over health & safety concerns in the wake of COVID-19. The findings are from 'India Food Service Delivery Report 2021'.



Lipla Negi

While the pandemic initially led to a drastic 70 per cent drop in online food delivery, especially from March 2020 to the end of 2020, many 'better brands' managed to recover 50 to 60 per cent of their pre-COVID sales, eventually, according to the report. "There was also a trend for DIY food and cocktail kits from various restaurant chains. Many new cloud kitchens have come up during the pandemic, increasing the choice for customers," adds **Samir Kuckreja**, Founder & CEO, Tasanaya Hospitality, who has also worked on this report along with Jasper Reid, Founder – IMM and Peter Backman, a globally renowned food service professional.

On the road to recovery, both aggregators and restaurants have worked together to deliver a safe dining experience. "Some of the measures implemented include temperature checks for kitchen and delivery staff, live streaming from restaurant kitchens, and strict COVID protocols being fol-



Samir Kuckreja
Founder & CEO, Tasanaya Hospitality

lowed in the kitchens and by aggregator teams," says Kuckreja.

The food delivery market at present is dominated by two major players—Swiggy and Zomato—sharing 85 per cent of the total market between them.

Battling for loyalty

The report also gives some rare insights into how restaurants and fast food chains in the country are battling aggregator platforms which retain control over valuable customer information, even as they depend on them to reach out to customers.

"The aggregators are able to mask customer data, which

means that the operators (restaurants) cede the knowledge of and their relationship with their customers. In the absence of data sharing, it's not possible for the operator to understand its delivery customers, market to them, measure loyalty, etc. On the other hand, it means that the aggregator deliverer owns valuable information about customer habits and preference, which can be used to improve customer experience," the report notes.

Direct connections

The monopoly over data has forced some restaurant chains to invest in self-managed delivery programmes for direct connection with customers and to provide greater control over quality, branding and other marketing initiatives. The battle for customer loyalty has also led to deep discounts and high commissions, resulting in conflicts between aggregators, deliverers and restaurant operators.

Some of the brands that have taken steps to minimise risk of losing customer control to aggregators are Impresario Hospitality, Fat Lulu Pizza and Cold Love Ice Cream. Fast food outlets like Domino's, McDonald's and Pizza Hut are also developing algorithms on their Apps to increase visibility to customers and also reduce customer acquisition costs to create sustainable business models. The initiative, however, does not mean the brands are going to forsake aggregator platforms anytime soon. Instead,

it will lead to more of a co-existence between the two different systems, the report notes.

Numbers speak

According to the report, India's food delivery market has witnessed unprecedented change in the last five years with new entrants powered by sophisticated technology, radically altering market dynamics with innovative models such as cloud kitchens (restaurants that accept delivery only on orders without a tradi-

What will drive growth?

- ❖ Increase in disposable incomes
- ❖ Increase in internet and smartphone penetration
- ❖ Consumer behavioural changes such as reduced time available for preparing meals at home, disposable income groups replacing home cooked food to (home-style) subscription meals
- ❖ Regulatory policy changes
- ❖ Emergence of new aggregators
- ❖ Reduced levels of investment in existing aggregators

erable potential for future growth in the country "as restaurant delivery starts to eat into the retail market's share of wallet."

food service delivery market, not including takeaways, meal kit delivery services and ingredient delivery, was worth ₹37,440 crore (5.2 billion dollars) in 2020.

The report is based on the dual, top-down and bottom-up approach pioneered by Buckman. All figures provided in the report

Cloud kitchens have come up, increasing the choice for customers

tional restaurant or dining-in facility), hyper local services (food service delivery and more) and restaurant partners.

India's restaurant industry today is one of the largest service sector industries, contributing nearly three per cent of the GDP and the single largest employer in the service sector with more than 7.3 million people on its payroll.

The report, which focuses on three key elements of food delivery - aggregators, cloud kitchen operators and restaurants - predicts consid-

The total volume of India's food services market size as of 2019 is pegged at ₹4,62,000 crore. Out of this, the organised food services market size is around



₹1,68,000 crore and that of food service delivery market is around ₹25,200 crore. The food service delivery market share of 15 per cent is similar to the share in the UK and somewhat higher than that in the US. The Indian

have been cross-referenced with other sources, including the National Restaurant Association of India Report 2019 and checked for accuracy with leading industry players, both operators as well as aggregators.



PV Sindhu at Novotel Vijayawada



Olympic medallist **PV Sindhu** received a traditional welcome on her recent stay at Novotel Vijayawada Varun. Sindhu was in the city to meet Andhra Pradesh's CM after her bronze win at Tokyo Olympics 2020. The hotel's General Manager **Ravi Rai** along with the operations manager **Abhishek Pani** were elated to extend their warm wishes to the athlete.

Olympic winners felicitated



Indian Olympic champions returning from Tokyo Olympics were felicitated at The Ashok New Delhi. Ministers of Sports and Youth Affairs and Minister of Law and Justice felicitated the Olympic medal winners. A spokesperson from The Ashok commented that the hotel felt privileged to be the preferred hotel for this unprecedented event.

EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



AUGUST 2021

Date	Event	Time
23-25	ASTA Global Convention	Chicago
25-26	Civil Aviation South East Asia Summit	Bangkok
25	MICETalk Digital Conclave	11:00 am
27	CLIA Virtual Cruise Forum	05:30 am
27-28	India International Travel Mart	Chennai
27	The Embassy of Switzerland Visa Section	3:00 pm

SEPTEMBER 2021

1-2	India International Travel Mart	Bengaluru
2-5	Thai International Travel Fair	Bangkok
3	Self-drive - The Grand Tour of Switzerland	3:00 pm
3-5	Philippines Travel Mart	Pasay
7-9	OTDYKH	Moscow
9	Swiss Travel System	3:00 pm
10-12	TTF	Kolkata

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

Privacy in the Himalayas

The pandemic has made travellers increasingly opt for more intimate accommodation settings that offer minimal contact and maximum relaxation. One such property that invokes the grandeur of the British Raj in a safe, hygienic setting is Jungle House, Shimla.



Lipla Negi

Rising above the middle Himalayas, Jungle House Shimla offers a splendid blend of nature, history and modern comfort. The Shimla home of HH Princess Kusum of Bharatpur, it comes with an illustrious history that dates back to the late 19th century. A witness to the heydays of The Raj, Independence and the birth of Himachal Pradesh, the home has welcomed nobility. Interestingly, it also makes a 'special appearance' in the oral anecdotes shared locally as the place where a vicereine once dropped by for a chat! Perched on a sunlit spur at over 7,700 feet on Jakhu Hill, Jungle House commands sweeping views of the middle Himalayas. While the morning tea comes with the complimentary and breathtaking view of the sunrise, the evenings come dotted with a million stars.



Karan Singh
Chairman and Co-Founder, 1524 Delhi

With social distancing, work-from-home and staycations becoming the new normal, this immensely private estate addresses the heightened need for solace, peace and privacy.

"People are increasingly looking for private villas, homestays and boutique hotels that do not require them to share facilities with people outside their family bubble, and assure a higher degree of privacy, intimacy, personalisation and security," believes Karan Singh, Chairman and Co-Founder,

1524 Delhi – that represents Jungle House Shimla.

The estate offers two exquisite suites in a stone cottage that effortlessly combine contemporary style with colonial hill architectural design. The cottage has been meticulously renovated to preserve its original features while providing exceptional levels of modern comforts and luxury. Set in lovingly tended gardens, the rooms offer unparalleled privacy and intimacy. Exquisitely manicured lawns, fragrant nooks and a fire pit provide the perfect setting for a brisk game of croquet, a quiet read or a romantic evening under the stars.

In response to the current COVID-19 pandemic, the boutique homestay has initiated additional stringent protocols to further safeguard the health & safety of its guests and em-

ployees. Guests are required to furnish documentary evidence of having received two doses of the vaccination against COVID-19. Also, they are required to submit an RT-PCR

Homestays and boutique hotels assure a higher degree of privacy, intimacy, personalisation

negative report of a test taken no later than 24 hours prior to arrival. "All staff at the property are vaccinated," says Singh. As the second wave ebbs and travel within India gains momentum, Jungle House is confident of attracting tourists.

Restart international tourism

The global vaccination roll-out and increased adoption of digital solutions for safe travel should lead to a rise in international mobility over the weeks and months ahead, according to data in the latest edition of the Travel Restrictions Report from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).



Hazel Jain

Borders are mostly open

Since June 1, only 29 per cent of destinations all over the world have their borders entirely closed for international tourism. Of these destinations, more than half of them have been completely closed to tourist arrivals since May 2020 or longer, with the majority of countries belonging to the Small Island Development States of Asia and the Pacific.

3 countries open fully

In contrast, three destinations, Albania, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic, are completely open to tourist arrivals, without any restrictions in place. One in three of all destinations, or more precisely 34 per cent, are currently partially closed, and 36 per cent of them require tourists to present a negative COVID-19



test result upon arrival, in some cases along with a quarantine requirement.

Nuanced approach by countries

The data confirms the trend towards destinations adopting more nuanced, evidence-and-risk-based approaches to restrictions on travel, particularly in light of the evolving epidemiological situation and the emergence of new variants of the virus. 42 per cent of all destinations have introduced dis-

tinct restrictions for travellers arriving from countries where variants have widely spread by suspending flights, closing the borders, or imposing compulsory quarantine requirements.

Link between restrictions and vax

UNWTO noted that the data suggests a link between easing of restrictions and vaccination speed. In contrast, destinations that have higher vaccination rates and countries that can work together on harmonised

protocols and rules, such as those utilised in the Schengen Area, are better placed to allow tourism to return gradually.

Regional differences

The report revealed that regional differences related to travel restrictions remain: 70 per cent of destinations in Asia and the Pacific are entirely closed, 13 per cent of destinations in Europe are entirely closed, 20 per cent of desti-



nations in the Americas are entirely closed, 19 per cent of destinations in Africa are entirely closed, 31 per cent of destinations in the Middle East are entirely closed.

Vaccinated pax requirements

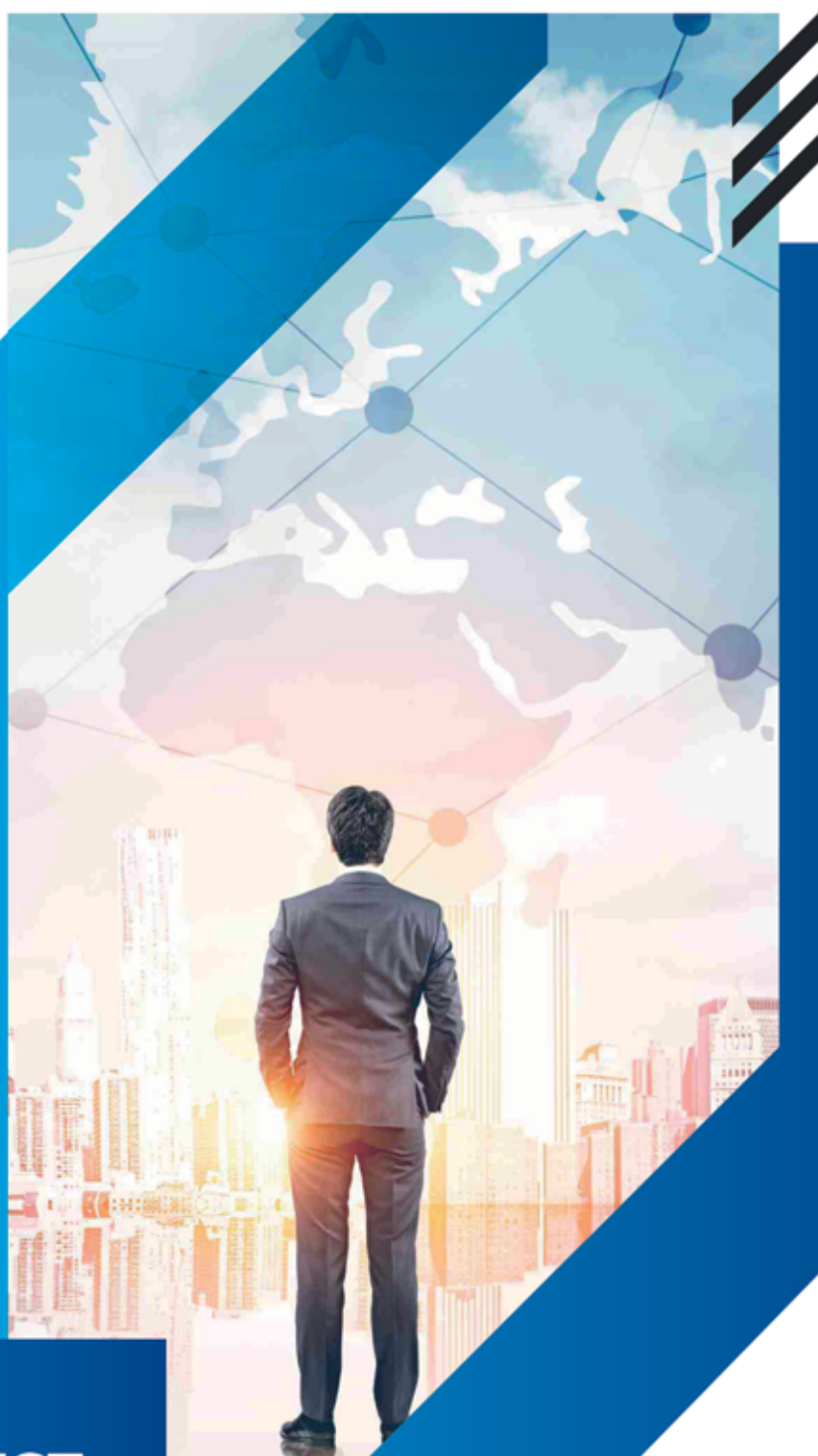
Assessing current requirements for vaccinated passengers, 17% of all destinations worldwide specifically mention vaccinated passengers in their regulations. In most cases, travel restrictions continue to apply to fully vaccinated passengers, though in others, all restrictions are lifted.

Collab, collab, collab!

The report indicates that the restart of global tourism will remain muted so long as governments continue to advise caution. Four of the 10 top source markets keep advising their citizens against non-essential travel abroad (these four generated 25% of all international arrivals in 2018). Governments are instrumental for the restart and recovery of tourism through collaboration, use of data, and digital solutions.



Rebooting the **Indian MICE** landscape



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 Managing Director,
 Goa Tourism Development
 Corporation



Sabbas Joseph
 Founder-Director,
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NIRAAMAYA WELLNESS RETREATS

India

Niraamaya Wellness Retreats has appointed **ALLEN MACHADO** as Presiding Chief Executive Officer. Machado specialises in strategically developing profitable business models, luxury hotel operations, strategic revenue management and fund raising. Heading trendsetting luxury hotels in India and the Middle East, and delivering top-quality service has been his forte. In the new role, Machado hopes to take the company through higher growth, transforming it into a global wellness and luxury destination.



GRAND HYATT HOTEL AND RESIDENCES

Mumbai

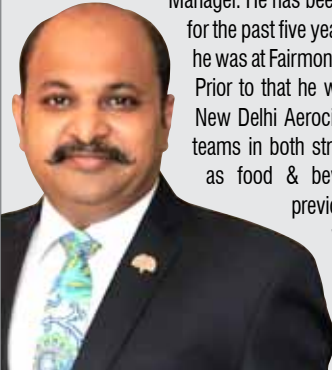
DIETMAR KIELNHOFER has been appointed as Area Vice President of Hyatt India and General Manager of Grand Hyatt Mumbai Hotel and Residences. With over four decades of experience, Kielnhofer is truly a veteran in the hospitality industry, having circled three continents and worked in cities such as Tokyo, London, Sun City – South Africa, Istanbul, Bangkok, Vienna, Mallorca, Zermatt, Lugano and more, in various roles. His last assignment was in Mumbai where he was General Manager at the JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar.



RAFFLES

Udaipur

After an outstanding experience of 20 years in the hospitality industry, **VISHRUT GUPTA** joins Raffles Udaipur as the Hotel Manager. He has been part of the Accor family for the past five years. Before joining Raffles, he was at Fairmont Jaipur on a brief mission. Prior to that he was with Pullman Novotel New Delhi Aerocity where he was leading teams in both strategic operations as well as food & beverage service. He has previously been associated with brands such as ITC and Leela.



VFS GLOBAL

Dubai

DR. ELENA PRIMIKIRI has been appointed as VFS Global's first-ever dedicated Head of ESG (Environmental, Social & Governance) function. She is based in Dubai, UAE and reporting directly to CEO Zubin Karkaria. In the new role, Primikiri will be responsible for increasing the sustainability components and ESG initiatives of VFS Global – from strategy formulation and implementation to operational control – to accomplish the goals set in her capacity as Head of ESG. She brings with her a rich experience of 15 years.



CROWNE PLAZA ADYAR PARK

Chennai

Crowne Plaza Chennai Adyar Park has appointed **ANAND NAIR** as General Manager. Nair brings with him 24 years of hospitality industry experience, with first-hand expertise in managing business and leisure hotel portfolios. In his new role, he will oversee the complete operations and management of the hotels along with the senior leadership teams. He will ensure the highest levels of guest engagement and profitability, and continue to build on the positioning and reputation of Crowne Plaza Chennai Adyar Park. Nair joined IHG in 2019 as GM of InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort.



Udaipur

SHIWANG AGRAWAL has been appointed as Director of Finance at the newly-opened Raffles Udaipur. He brings with him nine years of experience in the hospitality industry, with renowned brands like Marriott, Four Seasons and Leela. His most recent assignment was at Accor, with Grand Mercure Bengaluru Gopalan Mall. Agrawal has been acknowledged for his expertise in effectively handling finances for some of the renowned hotels and will now be overlooking the financial planning for Raffles Udaipur.



FOUR POINTS BY SHERATON INFOPARK

Kochi

VIKAS KUMAR has been appointed as General Manager at Four Points by Sheraton Kochi Infopark. With extensive experience of more than 19 years in the hospitality industry and a decade spent with Marriott International, Kumar shall lead the executive team of Four Points by Sheraton Kochi Infopark. In his new role, he brings his progressive experience of hospitality and dynamic knowledge base to make this hotel a brand icon in Kochi. His most recent role was that of General Manager at The Westin Pushkar Resort and Spa.



THE WESTIN RESORT & SPA

Pushkar

GAURAV SEKHRI has joined The Westin Pushkar Resort & Spa as the new Hotel Manager. Sekhri has an extensive work experience spanning more than 17 years in the hospitality industry across national and international hotels. In the new role, he will actively be enmeshed in curating an exponential experience of wellness and luxury for the guests, and playing his part in hotel operations, strategic planning, cost and efficiency management, as well as customer satisfaction.



Sekhri moves to this role from that of GM, MGM Muthu Hotels in Europe.

Udaipur

Raffles Udaipur has appointed **PRACHI TANDON** as Marketing & Communications Manager. Possessing a decade of experience with pioneers in the luxury hospitality and entertainment industries of India, Tandon has proven strengths in driving strategic marketing, branding and communications, with a focus on amplifying revenues. She holds a master's degree in Business Administration from the Institute of Management Technology.



THE TRAVEL CORPORATION

Singapore

Travel Corporation (TTC) has appointed **NICHOLAS LIM** as Chief Executive Officer effective August 16, 2021. Lim will lead the change and replicate the success he has had in the past. He has in the past headed TTC Asia as Managing Director from 2018 to 2020, and before that was President (Asia) for Trafalgar from 2011 to 2018. Prior to his appointment as CEO of TTC, Lim was General Manager of Norwegian Cruise Lines in Asia. In his role, he will report to Gavin Tollman, and will focus on the transformation of TTC's distribution of key brands. He will work with each of the global brand executives.



CLICK HOTELS

Mumbai

Click Hotels by Suba, post its acquisition of 1589 Hotels, has appointed **RAJAN KALRA** as Director Sales. Kalra brings experience of over a decade in diversified hospitality and expertise from the markets of India, Asia and Africa. He has worked with various international and domestic hotel chains like Accor, Sun International Hotels, and Sarovar Hotels & Resorts. In the new role, Kalra will be responsible for the development and implementation of strategies to increase visibility and further enhance the perception of Click & 1589 hotel brands.



VEDIC VILLAGE SPA RESORT

Kolkata

Vedic Village Spa Resort has announced the appointment of **RAJIB ROY CHOUDHURY** as the Senior General Manager. With over two decades of experience in the hotel industry, Choudhury has been associated with the Taj, Radisson Hotels, Cidade de Goa, Chances Casino & Resort, Floatel, The Fern, The Sonnet (member of Preferred Hotels & Resorts) and his last assignment was with the TheAnanda Imperial by Svenska in Chhattisgarh. In the new role, he will continue to enhance the guest experience at Vedic Village Spa Resort and work on strategies to tide over difficulties being faced due to the pandemic.



CROSS RIVER KWAI

It is located beside the most beautiful stretch of kwai noi river with a spectacular background of mountain ranges and blue sky.



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Time to be agile, innovative

Kerrie Hannaford, Vice President – Commercial, Accor India & South Asia, talks about the launch of Raffles Udaipur as a move in line with the brand's long-term vision to operate in the ultra-luxury and premium segments.



What have been your considerations behind coming to India?

We strongly believe that the future of luxury hotels is very bright in India. Raffles is the 10th brand that Accor is introducing in the country. There is a promising future for such brands in the region as there are discerning customers that are actively looking for memorable, inimitable luxurious experiences that a brand like Raffles delivers.

Was 'social business' (MICE & big, fat Indian weddings) a consideration for entering India?

MICE and weddings are segments that remain a focus area for most hotels. In a country like India, weddings will always see traction, as they are firmly entrenched in the culture. The ongoing global pandemic has brought in a wide range of new trendsetting patterns in the 'Big Fat Indian Wedding' industry - a complete shift towards contactless food services and micro wedding ceremonies in addition to the present norms of socially distanced gatherings, with a focus on highly sanitised venues. Our brands have a strong focus on the meetings and conventions market as well as an extremely high brand recall in the weddings and socials market.

Raffles Udaipur will extend the largest ballroom in the city facilitating big meetings, weddings, conferences and product launches while the smaller meeting rooms can be used by corporate groups staying with us for their board meetings, giving us an opportunity to engage with the business segment.

Major international luxury hotel brands are not present in India.



Do you think Raffles Udaipur will give you an edge over others?

Our aim is to deliver the Raffles legendary brand experience in India and to match with the other most prestigious Raffles hotels and resorts worldwide. We are confident that our immersive hospitality and unparalleled

peace, calm and discovery. One of the most preferred domestic as well as international tourist destinations, Rajasthan is brimming with cities such as Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Mount Abu and Bikaner that boast of beautiful and inviting landscapes, delectable cuisines and warm people. It was all these elements that helped us choose Rajasthan for India's first Raffles.

Things are bright for the luxury segment; people are looking for ways to indulge in lavish, mindful experiences

Industry forecasters and experts are predicting a slow pace of hospitality business for the next two years. What made you go ahead with the decision to launch the hotel this year?

It has been our long-term vision to operate in the ultra-luxury and premium segments, and we've always had a forward-looking attitude towards new signings and openings. Yes, the recovery is going to be slow, but we are already seeing a return of luxury travel across the globe, in countries that are opening up. Things are looking bright for the luxury segment,

especially because after all the uncertainty and chaos that people have been through because of the pandemic, they are now looking for ways to indulge in lavish but mindful experiences.

Today, fixed costs are high and travel restrictions are here to stay for a while. How do you plan to sustain for the next two years when the property would majorly be relying on domestic business?

We will certainly see more caution, and guests will be more prudent while making travel plans. The hospitality industry will remain dynamic but will now be extra cautious, agile and innovative. The future is still unknown, but we are cautiously optimistic. Under current circumstances, with travel restrictions, more and more Indians are exploring domestic destinations. We strongly believe that this will help us sustain bookings and attract more traffic to the hotel.



Kerrie Hannaford
Vice President – Commercial
Accor India & South Asia



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