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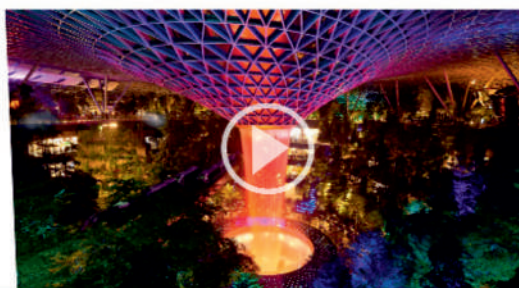
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15th and 16th March, 2021

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Arvind Singh is the new Secretary Tourism

Arvind Singh, Chairman of Airports Authority of India (AAI), has been appointed as the new Secretary of Tourism, Government of India. Singh, who is a 1988-batch IAS officer of Maharashtra cadre, will be replacing Yogendra Tripathi, who, after more than two years of serving as Secretary Tourism, will be joining as Secretary, Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals. Singh has also served as Additional Chief Secretary (Energy) in Government of Maharashtra, and also



Arvind Singh
New Secretary - Tourism
Government of India

worked as Chairman and Managing Director of Maharashtra State Power Generation Company and the Maharashtra State Electricity Transmission Company. He acquired his Master's degree in economics from Delhi School of Economics.

Bharat Parv goes virtual

Virtual Bharat Parv 2021 was inaugurated by **Om Birla**, Lok Sabha Speaker, alongside **Prahlad Singh Patel**, Minister of State (I/C), Tourism and Culture. The event took place from January 26 to 31, in line with 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat'.

Nisha Verma

Prahlad Singh Patel, in his address, said that tourism was the most affected industry during the COVID-19 pandemic, but a positive attitude and effective planning of the government are helping this industry to rebound in a magnificent way.

He said that the diverse culture of India is our great strength and we can introduce it to the world through tourism.

Om Birla also spoke about the tourism sector and pointed



out that there is no state or district in our country that doesn't have a distinct speciality of its own. Because of this uniqueness, India has become a centre of attraction for

international tourists, too. We are working to connect the whole country through tourism and culture. "Through the 'Bharat Parv' programme, MOT has taken a commend-

able step to bringing together India's tourism, spiritual and other activities on a single platform. The tourism sector is the only area that provides the highest employment. If we wish to change the socio-economic conditions in our country, then it is essential that efforts are made for growth of the tourism sector. Every state has strived towards developing its wellness, yoga and spirituality-related destinations in the tourism sector. Despite the odds, the sector has worked to turn this challenge into an opportunity," he said. 🌸

Buddhist tourism a necessity

Though Buddhist tourism holds great potential in India, it has been one of the least explored. But, with the government now wanting to bring it into the limelight, tourism stakeholders help us understand what can be done.



Rajiv Mehra
Vice President, IATO

“I strongly believe that in all likelihood, tourism will open for neighbouring countries first, which hold a lot of potential for Buddhist tourism, and therefore we can expect this sector to begin receiving footfalls first. As soon as the Buddhist source markets/ countries open, Ministry of Tourism should organise roadshows as well as mass media campaigns in those countries.

But what is crucial is that the plan for the same should be ready now. There is an urgent need for basic infrastructure in the Buddhist circuit to be improved immediately. This may include roads, restroom facilities, etc. Being equipped with a comprehensive plan and putting it to action will be greatly beneficial. ”



Lajpat Rai
CMD, Lotus Trans Travels

“I believe that if the government wants to highlight only Buddhist pilgrimage sites, they must come forward and make the destination world-class. Currently, the Buddhist circuit is in a pathetic condition. This is the time when there is no business, and the government should start focusing on the cleanliness, hygiene and upkeep of places. Now, thanks to the Central government, Kushinagar is being developed as an international airport. Once the airport comes, maybe the connection would also come. Once the state governments encash Buddhism, they will forget other industries. Widening the roads, getting electricity and maintaining hygiene would attract pilgrims to these sites. ”

Contd on page 14 ▶

ATS 2021 in March

The virtual Asia Travel Show (ATS), from March 15-16, 2021, will drive business in the new normal and help rebuild tourism.

TT Bureau

With physical events being next to non-existent and making new business connections while maintaining existing ones being crucial more than ever, a tailor-made virtual event is the perfect solution!



Being held for the first time in the Indian subcontinent, Asia Travel Show (ATS), from March 15-16, 2021, will be



Nikhil Jeet
Director, DDP Group

focused on restarting travel post COVID-19.

“Asia Travel Show is a one-of-a-kind networking event for the travel trade of the region.

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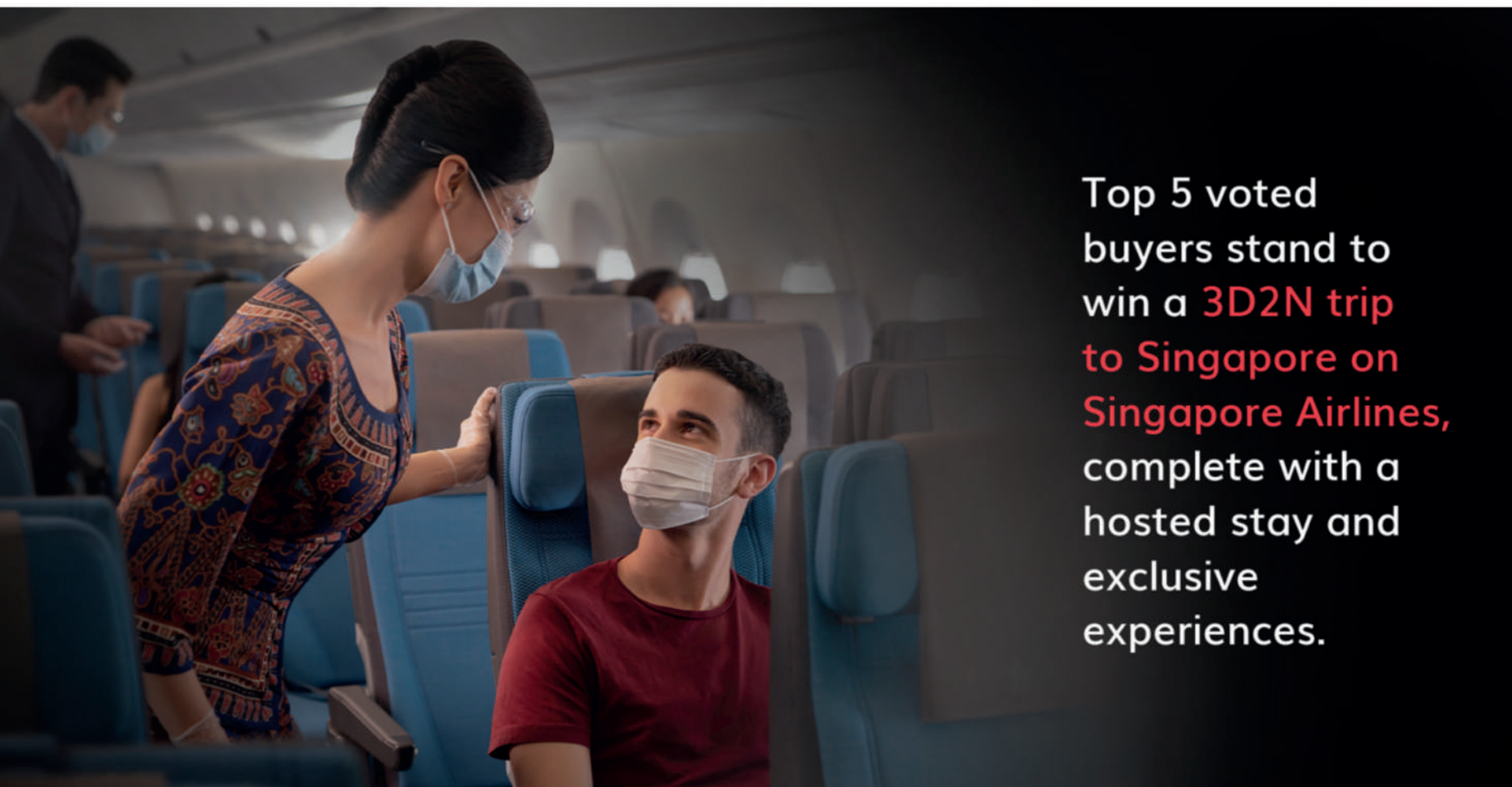


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ADTOI Convention: February 12-14

Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI) has announced its 10th Annual Convention at Statue of Unity in Gujarat from February 12-14. The event will be hosted with the support of Gujarat Tourism.

 Nisha Verma

The theme of ADTOI's upcoming annual convention will be 'Domestic Tourism – Hope for the Revival – Dekho Apna Desh', and will be hosted at Statue of Unity that is



Chetan Gupta
Hony. General Secretary
ADTOI and Convention Chairman

gradually becoming popular among domestic tourists. The main event will take place at

Test and attend!

ADTOI Executive Committee has decided that all delegates attending the convention will have to take an RT-PCR test. They will then have to submit their reports within 72 hours of their travel date to be able to attend the convention.

the Convention Hall, Tent City 2 in Kevadia. **Chetan Gupta**, Hony. General Secretary, ADTOI, will be the Convention

 **It's time that our members and the travel fraternity started travelling**
– Chetan Gupta

Chairman, while **Ashok Dhoot**, Chapter Chairman, Gujarat Chapter, ADTOI, will be the co-Chairman of the convention.

PP Khanna, President, ADTOI says, "The convention is in




PP Khanna
President, ADTOI

line with the Tourism Minister's declaration of 2021 as the year of domestic tourism. We expect the presence of almost 400 delegates for the convention. We are also expecting the Chief Minister of Gujarat to join us for the inauguration. The following day will be for business sessions and presentations." On February 14, there will be a half-day tour of Kevadia. "Kevadia has become a pulsating destination and is growing rapidly in popularity. Statue of Unity is already receiving an increasing number of tourists with each passing day. Gujarat is working hard to revive and stabilise tourism. ADTOI has

also been supporting Gujarat tourism. We will be focusing on many topics, including 'Challenges and Opportunities Pre-COVID and Post-COVID', 'What we have learnt from the pandemic', 'Virtual is the reality today', and 'How

 **We expect the presence of almost 400 delegates for the convention**
– PP Khanna

to convert unorganised tourism into organised tourism'. Apart from that, rural and tribal tourism will also be discussed," he says.

Gupta adds, "It's time that the entire travel fraternity started travelling, so we can tell our clients it is safe to travel." 

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A blessing in disguise

'When the going gets tough, the tough get going' is an age-old adage that applies to modern-day entrepreneurs and innovators of India's tourism and aviation sectors. These stakeholders adapted their product and service to the changing dynamics of the travel & tourism industry that witnessed a significant drop in international arrivals in 2020 owing to unavoidable travel restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the pandemic. And, while the industry was still reeling under the economic strain that resulted from international borders being sealed, a new form of domestic tourism began to slowly emerge.

After months of being home, the discerning Indian traveller was waiting for the first opportunity to travel, and with the absolute ban on both inbound and outbound tourism, the traveller as well as the trade turned their attention to the domestic market. Suddenly, there was an urgent need for stakeholders of tourism to offer products and services to the Indian traveller who had been to several countries by now and knew exactly the quality he was looking for. The tried-and-tested travel products couldn't have satisfied his need to experience something new.

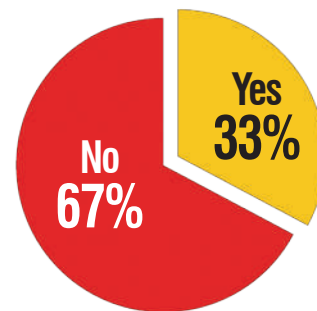
An adversity like no other thus became a blessing like no other, and a new form of domestic tourism was born. With travellers looking to stay in wide open spaces that enabled social distancing, wildlife tourism saw a surge in arrivals and workations became the new fad. Aviation, too, wasn't to be left behind. Charters suddenly became the preferred mode of travel, even among those who couldn't afford them earlier. In fact, some regional airlines also made headlines as they began connecting some of the smaller towns and cities that people were looking to visit.

Another promising sector that came up was cruise tourism on India's inland waterways. While river cruises had already begun before the pandemic hit the industry, cruise operators soon realised that if they were to gain a bigger share among India's well-travelled tourists, they'd have to offer them something that met the standards they were used to. Luxury river cruising thus came into being, and gave hope of a new form of tourism.

India has entered a new era of domestic tourism!

IATA Authorised same as Accredited?

TRAVTALK asked agents if they thought there was a difference between being an IATA Authorised and an IATA Accredited agent, and 67% said there was. While it's easy to get accreditation these days, it authorises agents to sell tickets on behalf of member airlines and allows access to BSP. Is there a need for education about IATA?



A world of plenty

Being an IATA Accredited agency about three decades ago was not easy— it was a milestone! But what is the value of being an IATA agent today? Have we bartered quality for quantity? **Sunil B Satyawakta**, Director, Civica Travels, shares his views.

Some 30 years ago, for a travel agency to be IATA Accredited called for a number of documents at par with any bank – sales figures, office space, safe vaults and grided secured premises. The agency was expected to do ticketing with the airlines as IATA applicant (which meant getting tickets issued directly from airlines against immediate payment without any commission) to meet the area-wise targets set by IATA. The office needed to have specific floor area with grills. A safe vault of specific weight was to be kept or wall-mounted in the office for storing the Cash Value Documents like tickets and MCOs. Apart from the audited balance sheets and other documents, two IATA-qualified staff were also mandatory. A physical inspection of premises and documents by the representatives of two international airlines was the last step before the agency could be declared 'IATA Accredited'.

A golden era

The payments were made directly to the airlines on due dates twice a month and the IATA commission of nine per cent was cool to run the show gracefully. The travel agents thus were known as

IATA agents. No one ever bothered if the phrase used was IATA Accredited or IATA Authorised. For them it was all the same. It may sound strange today, but the agents then used to take the sales guys of airlines to their corporate or regular passengers for sales promotions.



That's how the airlines promoted themselves as well as the agents. The relationship was such that most agents rarely had friends outside. I have experienced this during the visits of airline sales persons to tier-II cities.

A dent in the relationship

About 20 years back came the LCCs offering cheap fares with limited services and only on-the-spot payments from agents. Their growing success made the IATA airlines think if IATA's twice-a-month payment

policy and that, too, with nine per cent commission, was too much? IATA also realised that it was meant to look after the airlines' interest rather than its accredited agents. Gradually, the agent commission was reduced from nine to seven to five to three and then finally to zero. The payment cycle was also reduced to weekly from fortnightly. The reduced commissions which ultimately ended up at zero made a major dent in the agent-airline relationship. IATA took a back-seat and watched airlines and agents discuss the commission issue on various platforms. All the agents got in the bargain was postponed implementations which ultimately got executed.

Quantity for quality?

Today, to get an IATA Accreditation is very easy for a travel agent as there are no office space requirements, floor area restrictions, no inspections by any airlines. To top it all, the accreditation in Go-Lite category of IATA doesn't even require bank guarantee. As a result, the quality of IATA agents has been compromised. With no benefits or facilities to offer, IATA is charging its accredited agents an annual fee merely to monitor agents' timely payments to its member airlines which

otherwise, too, are fully protected through BGs and insurances.

So why do agents go for IATA Accreditation? Firstly, it's ornamental. In India, it gives them the status of being a travel agent as in all states the state governments/ Central government do not have a policy where any registration to operate as a travel agent is mandatorily required. So much so that it is a must for an agent to be an IATA to carry out LTC business. IATA Accreditation nowadays is really not required for the purpose of airline ticketing as the various online portals and consolidators are ready to provide better services. The airlines are now taking a step further and asking agents to directly approach their booking engines for booking tickets in lieu of NDC. A major change in travel trade seems to be in the offing.



Sunil B Satyawakta
Director, Civica Travels

(Views expressed are the author's own.
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► *Contd from page 3*

Convenient, easy to use and innovative, the ATS online platform aims to bring the travel trade together in these times of a pandemic so that business continues while being

in sync with the new normal. There is no better way to stay connected with existing clients and form new relationships from the comfort and safety of one's home or office than at Asia Travel Show

2021," says **Nikhil Jeet**, Director, DDP Group.

At ATS, the buyers mix is hand-picked and includes travel agents, corporate and MICE buyers, and wedding planners from Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka apart from India.

What makes ATS 2021 appealing?

Access to Big Data: Asia Travel Show will provide exhibitors with detailed analytics on buyers, their download patterns during the show and contact details, which can help sellers predict demand and plan their sales and marketing strategy accordingly.

Diverse mix of companies: The ability to generate qualified leads directly from the office without having to run up expensive travel bills makes Asia Travel Show extremely attractive. Lower barriers to entry also mean that it will attract a more diverse mix of exhibitors and attendees that would not have otherwise met.

Dedicated Project Manager: They will be available 24x7 to help resolve any technical issues or assistance and ensure that no relevant buyers miss out on visiting the exhibition booth. A dedicated PM also means that they will have all brochures, videos and other necessary details.

Chance to listen to experts: The Asia Travel Show will bring extensive thought leadership and panel discussions with experts from around the world on the side lines of the exhibition. Those interested can attend these seminars and keynote speeches during or after the show at leisure

Easy video meetings: The easy one-on-one video calls or pre-scheduled meetings means that it is as good as attending a live show. The easy user interface of this show will also offer chat functionality in case participants prefer that over video, and allow them to save all key communication.

ATS aims to bring the travel trade together in these times so that business continues while being in sync with the new normal

Exhibitors are also vast and varied, and include national tourism organisations, tour operators and DMCs, hotels and resorts, airlines, cruises, car rental companies, attractions, as well as travel insurance providers. ↴

ARRA on expansion drive

As part of its massive acquisition drive, ARRA Hotel Group has acquired two new properties in Bengaluru under the 'Twist' brand, and now plans to diversify its portfolio further.

 **Nisha Verma**

Armed with a young, dynamic team and the drive to excel, ARRA Hotel Group, which has acquired two new properties in Bengaluru, is also diversifying into the microbrewery and nightclub segments. Revealing some details,



Anshu Malik
MD, ARRA Hotel Group



Anshu Malik, Managing Director, ARRA Hotel Group, says, "We will be opening Asia's largest microbrewery by March 15 in Bengaluru. It is 150,000 sqft in area. More breweries will be coming up in Mumbai, Delhi and Gurugram. Our project report is ready to be shared with potential investors, and we hope to expand this business as well."

Malik is already on a hotel-signing spree across the country. "I am travelling to Rishikesh, Haridwar, Nainital, Jim Corbett, and Goa to sign properties, and all of them will be operational by end of February. Our investors have given us a deadline to be world market leaders by 2022, and we intend to have at least 100 properties under our various brands across the world," he shares.

Malik adds that they are in talks for the acquisition of a popular hotel brand's property, and

will be announcing the name very soon. "We were aiming at opening 25 properties by the end of the year, but the way we are going, we will exceed this figure. Every day, we are signing almost two properties. We

We intend to have at least 100 properties under our brands across the world

have taken advantage of the COVID situation and are taking properties at a good rate. We strongly feel that the market will definitely move up after three months. As soon as the market opens, leisure destinations and corporate business will boom," he says. ↴

STB India's successful Tradeshow

Singapore Tourism Board (STB) India's Virtual Tradeshow themed 'Charting Our Pathways to Tourism Recovery' drew a good turnout of over 3,200 buyers over four days. STB India continues to engage with the travel trade fraternity to prepare for travel restart.

 Nisha Verma

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) India's Virtual Tradeshow were held on 12th, 15th, 19th and 21st of January for South, North, West and East India, respectively. The theme for the trade



GB Srithar
Regional Director, India,
Middle East and South Asia, STB

establish new business contacts and strengthen existing ones," says **GB Srithar**, Regional Director, India, Middle East and South Asia, Singapore Tourism Board (STB).

Both buyers and STB partner stakeholders lauded the event for its unique virtual platform and many were pleased to be able to interact virtually with a good number of buyers

under the current conditions. Besides the buyer-seller meets, the event also displayed product offerings in Singapore to attendees through videos played in the virtual Auditorium.

Srithar added, "The city-state has made progress in its gradual and calibrated return to some normalcy. We had entered the third phase of a three-phased 'A Safe Singapore' transition on December 28, 2020 and are adopting a deliberate and cautious re-opening of our borders for international travel, with necessary safeguards in place. We are prepared for recovery to be a slow, deliberate and cautious process, but we are confident that we can overcome this pandemic because the fundamentals of our tourism industry remain strong."

 We can overcome this pandemic because the fundamentals of our industry remain strong 

Over 3,200 buyers attended and interacted with 48 tourism stakeholders from Singapore, which included airlines, airports, attractions, hotels and DMCs.

"The key objective of the virtual tradeshow was to effectively engage with our valued Indian travel trade partners across the four regions in India, and provide a platform for Singapore stakeholders to reconnect,



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engagement initiative was 'Charting Our Pathways to Tourism Recovery'. STB and Singapore tourism stakeholders shared and exchanged ideas, while updating the Indian travel trade about the current status and readying the industry for tourism restart.

Int'l coordination must be stepped up

The Global Tourism Crisis Committee met for the first time in 2021. Organised by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the cross-sector body met in Madrid during the 113th session of the UNWTO Executive Council to advance solid plans to restart tourism. Key outputs from the meeting focused on the integration of vaccines into a harmonised approach to safe travel and launching a coordinated effort to boost confidence in the sector.

With countries around the world now rolling out vaccines against the COVID-19 virus, the Committee noted that this opens a critical window in the fight against the pandemic and to promote the safe resumption of international travel. Members highlighted the importance

of stepping up coordination, within the framework of the International Health Regulations, of vaccination certificates to ensure the implementation of common, harmonised digital related travel principles, protocols



and documents. This would be in line with the work being carried out by the World Health Organization (WHO), which has reported at potential applications of digital technology to enable safe international travel and facilitate arrivals and departures. The implementation of CART Take-Off Guidance was also identified as an effective tool.

Exploring Buddhist Circuit by rail

Ministry of Tourism's recent Dekho Apna Desh webinar showcased a comprehensive itinerary of the Buddhist Circuit Tourist Train that passes through key Buddhist sites in India. The journey, which guests will find to be enlightening and peaceful, also includes sites that exhibit the vast and diverse culture of the country.

 Manas Dwivedi

Ministry of Tourism (MOT) recently organised a webinar titled 'Exploring Buddhist Circuit by Train' as part of its 'Dekho Apna Desh' series. The webinar focused on promoting and showcasing the rich Buddhist heritage in India and highlighted the major destinations in the country said to have been personally visited by Buddha. The webinar also brought to light heritage left behind by his disciples, including modern monasteries. Focus was also laid on providing first-hand information to viewers on the arrangements for travel (especially by train) and accommodation options at these Buddhist sites in India.

Participating from MOT was **Arun Srivastava**, Deputy Director General, who said that



Arun Srivastava
Deputy Director General, MOT

sides adding to the religious diversity of the land."

The webinar was presented by **Dr. Achyut Singh**, Joint General Manager (Tourism & Marketing), Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC). He informed that IRCTC Buddhist Circuit Tourist Train has been envisioned for covering the most venerable sites of Buddhism, following

 The Indian Buddhist heritage is of great interest to the followers of Buddhism the world over 
—Arun Srivastava

the life path of the Enlightened One - the Buddha himself. The Buddhist tourist train covers all the places which had a significant impact on Buddha's life and teachings.

Singh added that the IRCTC Buddhist Circuit Tourist Train itinerary enables all guests to pay their respects at the holy site in Lumbini, in addition to the Mayadevi temple dedicated to the Enlightened One's mother. "The Buddha's moment of enlightenment, enshrined for eternity under the Maha Bodhi Tree at Bodhi Gaya, occupies an important place in the itinerary as much for its religious and scholarly significance as for the monumental beauty of its confluence of Buddhist traditions from all over the world. In crafting the itinerary, special care has been taken to include the site of the Buddha's origi-





Dr. Achyut Singh
Joint General Manager
(Tourism & Marketing), IRCTC

nal sermon which gave birth to Buddhism, from where sprang all its varied forms, sects and distinctions. Guests also have the opportunity to be mesmerised by the Ganga Aarti that is performed on the banks of the Holy Ganges in the evenings," he said.

The itinerary traces the life of Buddha from his birth to his ascension from the bindings of the material world, and incorporates the Mahaparinirvan Temple at Kushinagar,

with its Reclining Buddha depicting the divine soul's last earthly position of rest. "Aspirants who wish to achieve

 Special care has been taken to include the site of the Buddha's original sermon which gave birth to Buddhism 
—Dr. Achyut Singh

deeper insight into Buddhism can delve into its intricacies while reflecting on the sermons given by the Buddha at Sravasti, specifically the Jetavana monastery," Singh concluded.

Now is the time to go wild

Fewer people in remote areas make wildlife tourism the perfect safety bubble for travellers during the pandemic. And, with travellers being more environmentally conscious than ever, wildlife tourism has the potential to be an ideal option. With wide and open spaces, it might be the perfect choice to stay away from crowds.

 Hazel Jain

Move over staycations and workations. Jungle safaris are the new go-to holidays during the pandemic. Whether it is at a driving distance

feels that the role of the travel agents in the wildlife sector is slowly reducing because everything is now online. "But because the systems are not fool proof, agents will do well

sam have picked up very well and they are going full right now because they are well-



Dr Anish Andheria
President and CEO
Wildlife Conservation Trust



Julian Matthews
Founder and Chairman, TOFTigers



Nirmalya Choudhury
Executive Director (Operations),
JTI Group and Chapter Chairman,
North East States, IATO



Shoba Mohan
Founder Partner, RARE India

fabulous recharge and education for the family. Further, responsible tourism is critical to saving wildlife and using TOFTigers eco-certified lodges provides you with better experiences while ensuring clients leave the wildlife destination in better shape than before. The park authorities have introduced a range of COVID protocols to keep visitors safe, and the TOFTigers lodging communities have also introduced countless measures," he says.

to the more well-known of wildlife destinations in our region. We hope visitors will also start exploring the numerous lesser-known but equally enriching wildlife parks of our region," he adds. JTI Group specialises in wildlife tours and operates many jungle lodges.

A safety bubble

With travellers prioritising their health and safety now, this kind of travel makes perfect sense. Indophile and an expert on sustainable travel, **Shoba Mohan** is the Founder Partner of RARE India. She feels that it is time Indian travellers who have been travelling around the world for wildlife appreciate the beauty of our own natural heritage and understand the challenges. "Besides, since these destinations are remote, provide smaller places of accommodation and tough to connect to, they provide relatively safer bubbles during the pandemic. They are also a great opportunity for Indian travellers to participate in conservation initiatives, and introduce the forests to the younger generation," she adds. Mohan is see-

at hotels. Earlier, Maharashtra had limited it to four people per vehicle and refused senior citizens, but that impacted visitor footfalls. However, none

protected and wildlife is visible. "These parks are maintaining a basic level of health and safety protocols on ground like masks, but it's difficult

here. I'd say wildlife is a good field for them to focus on right now because it will get fewer

or just a flight away, travel agents and tour operators in India must relook the appeal of wildlife tourism for their clients and make a niche for themselves.

Wildlife is a good field for agents right now because it will get fewer people and is out in nature

- Dr Anish Andheria

It's outdoors, COVID-proof, gets the children excited, it's adventurous and a fabulous recharge

- Julian Matthews

Most national parks are doing a good job in ensuring visitors are aware of safety measures and that protocols are followed

- Nirmalya Choudhury

Since these destinations are remote, provide smaller places of accommodation and are tough to connect to, they provide relatively safer bubbles

- Shoba Mohan

people and is out in nature. Also, agents must be part of a network of hotels that are truly eco-friendly so they can do their bit for the environment," he says.

for the drivers and rangers to wear masks for four hours on the vehicles. I'm not sure if vehicles are being sanitised after every trip. Parks are not checking negative COVID certificates either, but it is being checked

Dr Anish Andheria, President and CEO, Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT), who works a lot with various national parks,

According to his research, parks in Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra and As-



of the parks have had any incidents so far of infection. But, COVID protocols do need to be followed stringently," Andheria adds.

Another wildlife conservationist, **Julian Matthews**, Founder and Chairman, TOFTigers, says there has never been a better time to travel to see the extraordinary biodiversity wealth of India than now. "It's outdoors, it's COVID-proof, it gets the children excited, it's adventurous and it's a

safest places to visit. The only challenge is to ensure that all and not just a few famous wildlife parks receive visitors. Most national parks are doing a good job in ensuring visitors are aware of their safety measures and that the protocols are followed on the ground. We in the Northeast are experiencing good demand so far and a steady increase in the number of visitors from other regions of India as well. But to a large extent, this demand has been restricted

ing good demand for wildlife lodges, but most of the traffic is from feeder markets. "For example, Dudhwa has more queries from Kanpur and Lucknow, while Tadoba and Pench have much of their traffic from Nagpur. The good news is that a small number of travellers are becoming adventurous and making long road journeys. The wildlife lodges we promote are punctilious about health & safety protocols," she says.

India GSA for Maldivian resort



1524 Delhi, the boutique luxury lifestyle and services firm, has been appointed as the general sales agent for The Nautilus Maldives, in India. An ultra-luxury bohemian hideaway in the Maldives, The Nautilus is a highly personalised and immensely private island resort with 26 houses and residences where every experience is tailored for the guest.

Making India incredible again

According to global data provider OAG, India's domestic capacity increased from -30% to -23% in a month in terms of domestic market seats, making it the third-largest market after China and the US. With domestic inquiries trickling in, travel agents and tour operators are thinking of newer itineraries and destinations to encourage their clients to book.



Jay Bhatia
Director, Tulsidas Khimji Holidays

“ We saw domestic bookings commence a week prior to Diwali, although nothing substantial. In the last two months our team had done around 30 bookings averaging 5-7 nights each. Summer itineraries this year are expected to be around 15-18 days, to destinations in the Northeast, Kullu, Manali, Shimla, Coorg, Ooty and Kerala including the backwaters and Munnar. Many flights to Odisha have also commenced, so we are sure to see a tilt towards that state, too. ”

“ We were predominantly into international bookings. However, we have been getting a steady streak of enquiries for domestic travel. Initially it was for weekends and driveable locations only. But, over the last few days, we are seeing enquiries for longer itineraries for the states which have spelt clarity on travel SOPs. Corporates are still in slumber though and may take another six months to revive. All states should formalise a common SOP to gather momentum. ”



Shivadatta Wagle
Director, Meandering Vacations



Hasan Patel
Director, Tripjack

“ Weekend holidays are where we are seeing maximum uptick. To ease bookings, we have curated a list of popular destinations and hotels across categories and budgets, and made them available under a ‘Weekend Deals’ tab on our website. Destinations like Goa, Udaipur, Jaipur, Shimla and Ailbaug are among the favourites. Travel has started mostly with FITs, but there is a fair portion of families as well. But, trip durations are on average shorter. However, we take this as a sign of gradual revival. ”

“ The market is bouncing back but slowly with the domestic market, and we have made substantial bookings in the past few months. People are looking at extended weekends using Ro-Ro ferries to Alibaug to reside in five-bedroom villas with private pools. North India is also popular as people have realised they can experience snow in Shimla, Kullu-Manali and Srinagar – these destinations are seeing full flights and no hotels available! ”



Arijit Purkayastha
CEO, Koyeli Tours & Travels

“ Domestic and sustainable travel is slowly picking up in the Northeast. We have handled a few FIT tours ranging from 3-6 nights covering either Assam and Meghalaya, or Arunachal Pradesh, or Tripura in the last two months. We have also noticed that travellers from Assam are booking through tour operators. So far, four families from Assam on different dates have taken a day-long tour to such places or with a night stay, through us. We are hopeful that tourism will revive, albeit with a change. ”

“ We have operated 14-odd files till now which is a start, but we have a long way to go. It is more of week-end movement and there are hardly any long-itinerary movements at the moment. Destinations that are drivable within 4-6 hours are popular. Self-driving FITs and families have started travelling, but package tours are yet to pick up. Most tourists taking self-driven trips are visiting Rajasthan (Udaipur, Kumbhalgarh and Mount Abu). ”



Randhir Singh Vaghela
VP, Garha Tours & Travels



Rajeev Kale
President & Country Head, Holidays, MICE, Visa Thomas Cook (India)

“ Indians are displaying a keen interest in domestic travel with 52 per cent respondents of our second edition of Holiday Readiness Report (December 2020) indicating their preference for a domestic holiday in 2021. We have witnessed a 30 per cent growth in bookings over the last two months, to domestic destinations with a healthy mix of travel for weekend or extended weekend breaks as also longer duration holidays ranging from 6-8 days. While customers had earlier restricted their bookings to close-to-home staycations, we are now seeing a shift to flight-inclusive holidays, indicative of growing consumer confidence in air travel. ”

“ Everyone needs a break and with various states opening their borders for tourism, we did see a good increase in domestic bookings. We curated various itineraries, fixed and customised, including experiential travel, suited for both luxury and budgeted travel. There has been a good increase in destinations like Kashmir, Kerala, Northeast, Rajasthan and Goa. Each of these destinations has a lot to offer from skiing, hiking and backwaters to safaris and beaches. Families, millennials, corporates and even solo travellers are travelling. We have also operated MICE groups in Mumbai, Rajasthan, and two more to be operated in Goa. The market is definitely bouncing back. I am foreseeing revenge travel once people are vaccinated. ”



Benazir Nazar
CEO, Akbar Holidays



Pradip Lulla
CMD, Cupid Travels

“ According to me, though domestic tourism has picked up, it hasn't to the extent we thought it would. Also, the report for December 2020 for domestic flights showed a fall of about 46 per cent compared to last year. So I think that though it was a holiday season, there was a sort of apprehension among travellers because of reports of infection rates and also the quarantine procedures in certain states. Also, the RT-PCR tests hampered domestic movement. Goa has been very popular not just from Maharashtra but from other states as well, but lots of people travel to nearby places as well by road. ”

Inputs by Hazel Jain

Seaplanes connect cities

The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways has commenced the process of operating seaplanes on select routes from hubs in Delhi, Mumbai and Surat to various tourist spots of North and West India.

Manas Dwivedi

The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways is kicking off the ambitious project of Sagarmala Seaplane Services (SSPS) with potential airline operators. To run the service, the authorities are keen to associate with interested scheduled and non-scheduled airline operators. The proposed origin-destination pairs under the hub-and-spoke model include islands of Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep; Guwahati Riverfront & Umranso Reservoir in Assam; Yamuna Riverfront in Delhi (as hub) to Ayodhya, Tehri, Srinagar (Uttarakhand), Chandigarh and many other tourist places of Punjab & HP; Mumbai (as hub) to Shirdi, Lonavala, Ganpatipule; Surat (as hub) to Dwarka, Mandvi & Kandla; Khindsi Dam, Nagpur & Erai



Mansukh Mandaviya
Minister of State (I/C) for Ports, Shipping and Waterways

Dam, Chandrapur (Maharashtra) and/or any other hub-and-spoke suggested by the operator. One such seaplane service is already in operation between Kevadia and Sabarmati Riverfront in Ahmedabad.

Mansukh Mandaviya, Minister of State (I/C) for Ports, Shipping and Waterways, says, “By providing air connectivity to numerous remote, religious and tourist places as well as unexplored locations near water bodies will make the journey

easier. It will generate employment opportunities and stimulate tourism in these new locations, which will consequently contribute to the country's GDP in the long run.”

It will generate employment and stimulate tourism in these new locations

Besides being a game-changer providing a supplementary means of faster and comfortable transportation across the nation, the service will boost tourism among both domestic and international travellers.

A large, stylized letter 'A' in a gradient of blue and green. The top bar of the 'A' is replaced by the silhouette of an airplane in flight, facing right.

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For the first time in the Indian Subcontinent

Karvat Group launches Asego

In order to strengthen its position and consolidate its travel ancillary services, Karvat Group will now own the entire India travel assistance and insurance business helmed by **Dev Karvat**, with the launch of a new venture called Asego. The aim is to boost overall performance and bring a revolution in the insurance sector.

 Hazel Jain

In a strategic move, the Karvat Group has taken over the reins of the travel ancillary business, and will here on steer its business in India with sole proprietorship. This move further strengthens Karvat Group's position in the Indian travel ancillary services market. **Dev Karvat** will take the ownership of the entire group's operations in India as the company's CEO. This will enable Karvat Group to achieve better overall performance across their business portfolio, while also providing strong and experienced leadership at its helm.

Elaborating on this development, Karvat reinforces that the company's core values



Dev Karvat
CEO, Asego

now focusing on greater agility and more India-centricity in our offerings for the travel business, which has seen significant changes in the wake of the pandemic."

Karvat Group is aiming to lead with a disruptive business model that will not only con-



and commitment towards the Indian travel trade is as persistent as ever. He says, "More than 22 years in the travel ancillary domain has given us immense knowledge and experience. We are thankful to the Cover-More Group for enriching that experience with their global expertise and supporting us in enhancing our capabilities. We would be happy to welcome them back to India in the future. We are

The new venture will create, develop and nurture unique general insurance solutions

continue to provide best-in-class travel assistance and insurance but also offer a plethora of additional opportunities for its stakeholders to expand their business horizon. "With the aspiration to expand our portfolio and capabilities, I am happy to share with you the launch of a new venture called Asego. Based on a highly progressive business model, this new venture will create, develop and

nurture unique general insurance solutions, with stronger travel assistance and insurance offering, driven by cutting-edge digitisation," Karvat announces.

With innovation and values of integrity, genuine care and, most importantly, excellence in client servicing practiced by the group over the last two decades, Karvat Group looks forward to begin a new

revolution in the Indian insurance sector with its new venture. Karvat Group provides travel assistance and insurance services including global medical assistance, family protection, concierge services and other ancillary products. With a fully integrated and in-house assistance team, Karvat Group protects more than five million Indian travellers every year. 

Firdaus by Citrus County, Punjab, joins RARE India

Firdaus by Citrus County has now become a member of the RARE India community, which consists of some of the finest hand-picked conscious luxury boutique hotels, palace stays, wild-life lodges, homestays and retreats in the subcontinent. It has four villas spread out with plenty of open spaces that encourage guests to stay out as much as possible. Popular among children, Firdaus encourages children to be a 'farmer for a weekend' where children are given duties, and towards the end of the session, discuss challenges, insights and ideas about farming. Parents often drive down with their children from Delhi and other surrounding cities, sometimes even as far as Mumbai, for experiences that are focused exclusively on children and young adults. Firdaus is also perfect for star-gazing.

► Contd from page 3



Prateek Hira
President & CEO
Tomos & Gastroutes

"I am personally seeing a few reasons that make me optimistic about this market opening up earlier. The travel distance is short and flights are economical from these countries into India, and I believe religious travel will be the first to restart as it is a way of life. Perhaps people would want to be blessed in the land of Lord Buddha after a devastating last year, so I call it an 'Essential Leisure'. Buddhist destinations in UP and Bihar have many addressable issues and if these are addressed in time, they can become much more welcoming and attractive."

"Buddhist tourism, post COVID, will have a positive impact as devotees would like to undertake the pilgrimage while also having the chance to see other attractions that they may have missed during the time borders were sealed. Any development or positive steps undertaken by government would help in boosting the sector. We need to urgently improve the infrastructure and ensure good quality roads, hotels and tourist transport in this sector. This is still lacking as it is not up to international standards. We also need international airports catering to the Buddhist sector."



Deepak Bhatnagar
MD, Aamantanar Travel Company

Buddhist tourism essential leisure



Sunil Gupta
Director, Travel Bureau

"Our neighbouring countries have a substantial number of Buddhist followers and the recovery shall be faster from Southeast Asia and the Far East. Yes, there have been significant developments in connectivity and hotels. The new international airport at Kushinagar and more international flights to Bodhi Gaya and Varanasi airport will further augment direct international arrivals in the Buddhist circuit. But, the first task is completing the roadways, which has been underway for many years, and to improve the remaining roads in the circuit. The next is good, paid restrooms."

"In my opinion, short-haul travel is the first thing people would look for as soon as the borders open for international flights. Buddhist pilgrims all travel short-haul, which offers good potential for the industry to fall back on its feet. Government initiatives must follow a pragmatic, sustainable and responsible tourism approach, and should yield good results. It's important to prioritise the destination's readiness with better infrastructure in place, especially with regards to health, hygiene and safety. Post-COVID, visitors would look at 'New India'."



Sushil Singh
Chapter Chairman
Bihar & Jharkhand, IATO

"I believe that with the COVID-19 lockdown having kept people from travelling or even visiting pilgrim sites, followers of Buddhism would be eager to pray at places related to Buddha. As of now, we haven't seen any initiative by government, Centre or state. However, to start this market, the government should develop roads and reduce taxes on hotels and for agents (GST) for at least a year. Pilgrims will definitely come. India Tourism and state tourism boards, especially Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, can conduct roadshows and provide liberties in the visa fee."



Sandeep Jain
Director, Special Holidays

Inputs by Nisha Verma

TAFI welcomes its new teams

TAFI welcomed new teams at three of its chapters – Western India, Gujarat and Pune – by having physical events. **Titul Mehta** came in unopposed as Chairman, Western India; **Manish Sharma** was declared Chairman for Gujarat chapter; and the Pune team that came on-board unopposed for the term 2021-2022 has **Sunil Uttam** as Chairman.



PUNE



GUJARAT

WESTERN INDIA

The rise and rise of domestic tourism

The time for Indians to see India has arrived. Never has there been so much thirst to see our own land as now, and it bodes well not just for the destination but also for the travel trade. **Sudhir Patil**, Founder & Director, Veena World, shares his thoughts on the subject as he gives out details on the company's new campaign for group tours.

Hazel Jain

A remarkable thing happened when Veena World opened a few of its branch offices in November and December of 2020. It started seeing a good jump in bookings for domestic packages, especially during Christmas and New Year holidays. In those two to three months, the company saw more than 500 passengers travelling with them on an individual basis to various parts of India. "This was not just over the weekends but for a proper seven-day itinerary. Maharashtra and Gujarat are the top two states that are



Sudhir Patil
Founder & Director, Veena World

showing a high propensity to travel," says **Sudhir Patil**.

This gave the team at Veena World an idea. Patil shares, "When we saw this uptick, we felt we needed to launch something new. During the

Makar Sankranti weekend we launched a new campaign called 'Dekho Apna Desh – Veena World Style Se' borrowed by the Ministry of Tourism campaign title. These are escorted group tours for pan India destinations, keeping in mind state and Central government travel regulations."

Patil explains that while there were travellers who were going to nearby destinations by road, his team noticed a large percentage of leisure travellers, particularly honeymooners, who wanted to take a proper holiday, take

a flight, while observing all safety and security protocols.

"The new normal is that there is no need to tell anyone to take precautions while travelling. Everyone knows and understands that it is mandatory. Under this campaign,



we decided to give one tour manager for every group with 10 guests per group, so it's easy to take care of them. Each group is escorted in small vehicles," he says.

The company is seeing huge demand for packages to Himachal Pradesh, Kashmir, Kerala, Coorg, and Gangtok and Darjeeling. These range anywhere between five and eight days.

"We also offer flexible date changes and cancellation options to clients. However, airline cancellation rules will be applicable to all packages. We also work with a network of Preferred Sales Partners. We are always looking to expand our network. We will welcome anyone who is interested in joining us as our PSA. We understand that we have to walk together in these times," Patil adds.

Under this campaign, we decided to give one tour manager for every group with 10 guests per group

The government of Cyprus has announced that if the virus infects any of the tourists visiting their country, their accommodation, food, medication and everything will be taken care of by the government for free.

More partnerships for Qatar

HE Akbar Al Baker, Group CEO, Qatar Airways, says that the airline is keen to pursue more partnerships with other airlines. It will also continue to offer different fares for different classes.

Manas Dwivedi

HE Akbar Al Baker believes that the future of the aviation industry may be slightly grim because once the pandemic is over, there will be fewer airlines still operating. But, he says, Qatar Airways has the capability to carry on. "Post-COVID, we will look at which routes we will reintroduce earlier than



HE Akbar Al Baker
Group CEO, Qatar Airways

Canada is an example. In our industry, we are not adversaries, we are part of a larger aviation family."

Qatar Airways has signed an expanded code-share agreement with Oman Air to provide more flexible travel options for both airlines' customers.

The airline has also become the first airline in the world to achieve the five-Star COVID-19 Airline Safety Rating by international air transport rating organisation Skytrax. Qatar Airways has also in-

troduced different fare levels for different classes to encourage people to travel. "So, you'll have different fare classes that you could choose

We will not take advantage of a situation where there are fewer airlines or there is lower capacity available

from depending on when you are booking and how close to the date of departure you're booking. We will not take advantage of a situation where there are fewer airlines operating or where there is lower capacity available," Al Baker concludes.



others, but we are not going to withdraw from routes permanently. We will have 129 destinations by March. So, you can see the commitment we have towards our industry and our passengers," Al Baker shares.

"Today," the Group CEO continues, "we are very close with American Airlines. We are now going to expand our partnerships with other carriers, Air

Demand drives decision

Destination management company Eastbound quickly changed gears to adapt to the rising demand for domestic products and mitigate the pandemic's impact on inbound travel.

Nisha Verma

As was for most others, year 2020 was a challenging time at Eastbound, too. **Prithviraj Singh**, its Co-founder & Director, says that as unprecedented as the event was, it certainly prepared them for any curveball in the future. Hence, realising that inbound tourism could well be the last segment to recover, Eastbound started focusing on domestic products.

"From highlighting locations that were least affected by the pandemic to introducing market strategies that kept safety at the forefront, we have been trying to ride out the storm in the best way possible. We are putting strict measures in place to ensure that we are well-equipped to conduct all future tours responsibly. The buzz words for us are sanitisation, customisation and partner clearances. We will



Prithviraj Singh
Co-founder & Director, Eastbound

keep a strict control on all three counts, and any negligence shall strictly be monitored and be non-negotiable," says Singh.

Eastbound has developed a comprehensive manual on crisis management that it claims will be strictly adhered to in-house, and that all its partners will also be asked to comply with. "It includes a code of conduct for tour operators and all participating tour guides, drivers, local experience providers, hotel partners and even guests. Masks, use of sanitis-

ers and social distancing will continue to be the norm, and travel partners will be chosen on their ability and commitment to mitigate the risk of the virus," he elaborates.

Partners will be chosen on their ability and commitment to mitigate the risk of the virus

Optimistic on the future of inbound tourism, Singh says, "The news of the vaccine has returned confidence in travel. It is only a matter of time before inbound tourism begins to pick up, too. Hopefully, the second half of 2021 will witness arrivals in good numbers."

TAFI national elections in February

After completing elections for 10 out of 11 chapters, the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) is now getting ready for its national elections which, in all likelihood, will be held in the month of February. On the refunds front, TAFI member agents have started receiving their due, but some airlines are still not issuing full refunds.



Hazel Jain

Sharing an update on the association's elections, starting with its 11 chapters, Pradip Lulla, Acting President and Vice President, Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI), says, "We have completed 10 chapter elections so far and the last one, which is the Madhya Pradesh chapter election, will be held on February 3, 2021 because of a technical problem of the chairman not being avail-



Pradip Lulla
Acting President and VP, TAFI

able. As far as the national elections are concerned, we are ironing out certain things on the digital front which is why we



have not announced the dates yet. In all likelihood, it will be held around mid-February 2021. We will announce the nominees and the election date soon."

Refunds from airlines

When asked about refunds, Lulla said, "We have not seen much progress on the refunds front from the airlines. Yes, the refunds are coming in but there are certain African airlines which are not paying refunds at all – like Ethiopian and Kenyan. Hopefully, we will see them come in after March 31, 2021 since the SC order says that refunds pending after March 31, 2021 should either be refunded

to the passengers or to the agents directly. Or the shells should be transferred to agents who have issued the tickets on behalf of the passengers. The airlines will have to honour that court order. So there has been progress and some airlines that were paying slowly have started processing refunds." He added that refunds for all new bookings made on bubble flights are coming in immediately on the IATA settlement.

Jet Airways revival

While a final decision on reviving Jet Airways could come this month, Lulla feels that the airline will not be able to restart so soon because there will be some court cases over and above the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)

We are ironing out certain things on the digital front, which is why we have not announced the dates yet

hearing. He adds, "The NCLT decision has come and it very clearly says that the committee of creditors, which are basically the banks, will get a stake in the new entity.

"The others, like travel agents, have still not been paid. They

will be receiving eight per cent or eight paise in a rupee. The Jet Airways staff has also moved the court for their salaries that are still due. So there is bound to be some delay in its revival."

He adds that as an association, TAFI doesn't have any *locus standi* in terms of filing a case as an association because it is an airline which has gone out of service.

"Now these would be individual cases so there cannot be a policy decision as far as TAFI goes to get money for its members. I personally don't think the airline will be able to start from this summer if these appeals come in – there will be a delay. But this is just speculation," Lulla adds.

Jalan-Kalrock consortium's plan

As per the resolution plan, Jet Airways intends to operate all of its historic domestic slots in India and restart international operations. If everything goes as per plan and the consortium receives the NCLT and regulatory approvals on time, Jet Airways would be back in the skies by summer of 2021. The revival plan by the Jalan-Kalrock consortium proposes to support tier-II and tier-III cities by creating sub-hubs in such cities.

New business practices must emerge

Sarab Jit Singh, Managing Director, Travelite (India), says that with the growing need for tourism to make a comeback post-COVID, all concerned ministries and the private sector must come together to formulate a strategy of revival. With ample time at hand in the interim, policies must be drafted so we're not caught off-guard when tourists start pouring in.



Nisha Verma

Sarab Jit Singh believes that with inbound tourist arrivals next to nil, the industry must join hands with the government to decide how they must move forward – whether to continue the old way of doing business or adopt new ideas and a new approach to help regain lost ground and put tourism's revival on the fast track. He insists that much can be achieved through

marketing and promotion as well as developing destinations that tourists are looking forward to visiting.

Singh adds, "The government and private sector need to sit and discuss this in detail. Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Commerce & Industry (MoCI), Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and other ministries should work on things together. The speed with which the approval and certification has been done for the COVID-19 vaccine is needed



Sarab Jit Singh
Managing Director, Travelite (India)

for the tourism sector as well, so that we can put tourism back on the rails without losing time. Whenever tourism starts post-COVID, we should be ready."

While private players may have a lot of issues because of the financial crunch, the government, believes Singh, will have to come up with a policy to support the marketing initiatives, and a marketing development fund must be

made available to tour operators and other companies trying to promote their products in the international market.

"It is very important to have a large number of tour operators in every region across the globe to sell Indian products. This may need a lot of persuasion and financial support, and the governments should be looking at incentivising operators who are giving results," he asserts.

Contribution of MoCI

Singh points out that SEIS is now the only hope for tour operators, who are looking for the incentive to come in so that they can have some financial support.

"The government has not given that incentive to us for the last year and we look for-

ward to when it will give the same. I think, MOT and MoCI should be doing things collectively rather than indi-

It is very important to have a large number of tour operators in every region across the globe to sell Indian products

vidually. The need of the hour is to have a mega show once the situation improves, and invite tour operators and media representatives from around

the world to make an impact," he explains.

MDA scheme

Speaking about the MDA scheme, Singh says, "The scheme keeps out people who don't have business of more than ₹2 crore and those doing business of more than ₹25 crore. This is incorrect because successful people are getting business over ₹50-100 crore. If we support them, there will be better possibility of getting more business into India than supporting new entrants. The government should support green shoots through a separate fund. Also, everybody shouldn't have equal assistance under MDA. A person with a ₹5 crore business and someone with a ₹25 crore business cannot have the same claim of ₹10 lakh."

Steps for quick revival

- ❖ Equate tourism exports with merchandise exports
- ❖ Tourism exports not be taxable like domestic sales
- ❖ Tax refund or exemption be decided between government and private sector
- ❖ Targets must be time-bound, aggressive and collective
- ❖ Government to help both foreign and Indian carriers

Government of India



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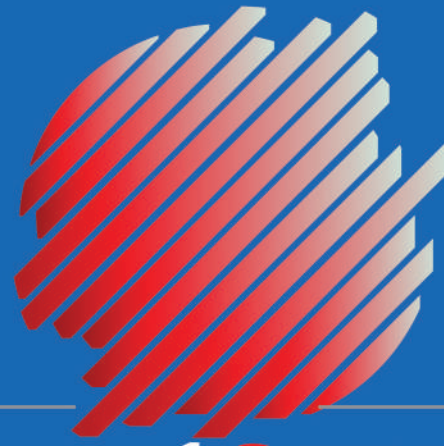
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Pololikashvili could lead UNWTO again

The Executive Council of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has expressed its continued support for Secretary-General **Zurab Pololikashvili**. Meeting in Madrid recently, its members nominated him to continue leading the United Nations specialised agency for four more years.



Zurab Pololikashvili
Secretary General, UNWTO

At the end of the 113th session of the Executive Council, held as a hybrid event in the Spanish capital, Members voted in person and in secret for their choice of leader for 2022-2025. Incumbent Pololikashvili won 76 per cent of the votes in a process where the Kingdom of Bahrain also put forward a candidate for the position, Shaikha Mai bint Mohammed Al-Khalifa. Her Excellency congratulated Pololikashvili on his win and the Government of

Bahrain expressed its support for UNWTO. Pololikashvili had based his campaign for re-election both on the progressive institutional and policy reforms undertaken during his first term, and on his clear leadership of global tourism throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The Executive Council's recommendation will be carried forward to the 24th Session of the UNWTO General Assembly, due to be held in Marrakesh, Morocco, towards the end of the year.

Future of river cruising bright

India's long-forgotten inland waterways have caught the eye of travel innovators. Prominent luxury travel planners talk about the potential of the up-and-coming segment of luxury river cruising in India.



Reena Sachdev
Founder, Travel Arena

“The potential of river cruising in India is immense, even better in current times when travellers prefer intimate and impactful vacations and holiday options. Small is better, safe, hygienic and more boutique. River cruises are more compact with fewer people and easy to control with better contingency plans in place. So, naturally, river cruising is a good prospect in comparison to ocean or sea cruising. Indian travellers will adapt to this mode of tourism.”

“The segment is poised to go a long way with the emergence of good, reliable brands offering an ultimate cruising experience. There are tailor-made luxury river cruise itineraries available to excite any seasoned traveller. It's just that they need to be sold in a more precise manner, highlighting the activities and experiences travellers will enjoy and gain on the river cruise. In current times, a slow-paced itinerary is ideal.”



Kunal Jain
Director, Spectrum Holidays

“India as a market is really evolving, as a lot of people want to experience new things and many of them even want to be first-movers so they can do certain things and others can follow. I think, river cruising in India can be sold as a family adventure or a charter where people can book the whole cruise for a certain period of time for a special occasion. This segment has the potential to evolve, and many travellers will come forward to experience it.”



Kaushal Bhuva
Founder, World of Vacations

“I think, the current time is absolutely fantastic to promote river cruising in India because right now, people are looking for such products where social distancing is taken into consideration. A river cruise fits best as a private, enriching experience where one can comfortably have a family get-together or a group of 50 together. I believe Indian travellers will opt for it. This is a good product to sell right now.”



Jinali Nakhat
Director, Travellers Paradise

Inputs by Manas Dwivedi

Luxury experiences in East India

Travel agents need to explore new destinations and experiences within India, which is brimming with rich history and culture. 'Look at things beyond the obvious and you will have new experiences in places that have existed for years,' says **Mehernosh Colombowalla**.

I recently travelled to East India and would like to share my experiences.

Antara Cruises, Kolkata

Kolkata, India's erstwhile capital under the British Raj is known for its grand colonial architecture, art galleries and cultural festivals. Look further and you will find some of the world's best luxury river cruising on the Ganges. Antara Cruises, voted among the six best river cruises in the world, hosted a few luxury travel agents on a curated two-night itinerary and sailed past some of the most iconic heritage sites along its river bank and to some interesting villages.

The ship had huge cabins with large bathrooms, exquisite food and on-board service to match international standards. We had the very gracious chairman, Raj

Singh, sailing with us, whose knowledge and passion on hospitality and the destination notched up the experience a hundred fold. Antara Cruises, which has been extremely popular with inbound guests, has now curated sailings for the domestic market.

Glenburn Penthouse

You can team your cruise with a stay in the City of Joy at the Glenburn Penthouse, an elegant residence in the heart of historic Kolkata. With just nine spacious suites, this is a haven of sophisticated luxury where visitors can savour the culture, history and cuisine of Bengal. I strongly recommend the early morning heritage walk with the owner Husna Prakash, where you succumb to the magic of the bygone era through her knowledge of the past and present – an experience not to be missed. The drawing

The mélange of beautiful locations and pampering hospitality is what essentially defines India's finest luxury resorts

and dining rooms are adorned with bespoke wallpaper, with scenes of rural India from days gone by. Leading off this gracious sitting room is a balcony and a Tea Verandah overlooking Victoria Memorial, perfect for outdoor dining, and where breakfast and afternoon tea is served in congenial weather.

Rajbari Bawali

Later, a few travel colleagues and I visited the Rajbari Bawali, a 300-year old heritage property, exhibiting the opulence, style and grace of the Zamindars of Bengal. Enjoy old-world charm at this heritage luxury resort just an hour and 30 minutes from Kolkata. Here you are immediately transported into the bygone era as you unwind in one of their spacious rooms. Ajay Rawla, the owner, not only entertained us with his wit but also arranged some unforgettable rural experiences for us.

Glenburn Tea Estate

Our next short flight was to Bagdogra. Drive three hours to a heavenly little plantation retreat, high in the Himalayas, overlooked by the mighty Kanchenjunga mountain range. You will then reach, 'A corner of heaven' – The Glenburn Tea Estate. Stunning scenery, old-

fashioned elegance and the opportunity to see the rituals of tea production, makes this estate a compelling blend. Currently owned by the acclaimed 'Chaiwala Family', it is an all-inclusive retreat where fresh herbs, fruits, vegetables and spices are sourced from their own garden. One can not only praise the tea plantation but also raise a toast of freshly brewed tea and buy the varieties. With just 8 elegant suites, when you stay there, it's almost as if the Prakash family decided to open their own tea estate for guests who may be interested in knowing about how a tea leaf makes it to their tea cup.

Taj Chia Kutir Resort & Spa, Darjeeling

We completed our journey at Taj's newest property – the Taj Chia Kutir Resort & Spa, Darjeeling. It has spacious rooms, signature spa and all the trap-

pings of luxury at the resort. The staff is extremely courteous and go out of their way to make your stay a comfortable one.

The mélange of beautiful locations, relaxing ambience and pampering hospitality, is what essentially defines India's finest luxury resorts. Intended for facilitating a soothing and revitalizing experience to visitors, these resorts have elevated the bar of extravagance to a new level.



Mehernosh Colombowalla
Director, Beyond Borders
Travel Management Company

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

Showcasing the Heart of India

TAAI's MP & CG Chapter recently held its fifth chapter meeting led by **Hemendra Singh Jadon**, Chapter Chairman, where it had invited **Venkatesan D**, Regional Director, Ministry Of Tourism, as Guest of Honour. Also present were **Aryama Sanyal**, Director of Indore Airport and **Yuvraj Padole**, Deputy Director, MP Tourism.



Kevadia : A boon for travel agents

Not just exciting activities, but Kevadia in Gujarat now also has great connectivity to other parts of India whether by air, road, seaplane or railway – the latest feather in its cap. The destination has given fillip to the state's tourism potential, and has everything to offer from a jungle safari and river rafting to MICE venues.

Hazel Jain

When Prime Minister Modi stayed a night in Kevadia recently and tweeted about it saying it's "a must visit", it was evident that this destination was about to become the next big thing India had to offer. While there, the PM inaugurated various development works, including facilities for jetty and boating. He also launched not one but eight train



Randhir Singh Vaghela
Chairman (Gujarat Chapter), IATO

routes connecting Kevadia to other parts of India, via video conferencing.

Sharing his view on how Kevadia has managed to package a complete tourism product, **Randhir Singh Vaghela**, IATO Chairman (Gujarat Chapter), says, "With the eight train routes connecting Statue of Unity to the rest of the country, it has made it so easy to package it and create itineraries around this destination. Of special mention is the Vistadome



feather to Kevadia's cap. "There are so many activities added around the Statue of Unity that it is now a minimum two-night destination and we are hoping that it will soon become one of the global destinations that every tourist would like to visit," Vaghela adds. Kevadia is also registered as India's first green railhead with a green building certification.

Statue of Unity is at least a two-night destination and we are hoping it will become a global destination

coach on Jan Shatabdi that connects Kevadia to Ahmedabad. It is a truly unique experience and also has very convenient timings."

He adds that the Statue of Unity has by itself become a great destination for tourism. The seaplane launched on October 31 added another

With the new trains – that are existing routes extended to Kevadia – Vaghela says that it has become easy to create itineraries for all budgets. "Those who can't afford a car or a flight can now use the trains. Everybody can visit Kevadia now. It has given a 100 per cent boost to tourism. All the new activities are on right now while observing all health and safety protocols," he shares.

New train connections

Route	Train Name	Frequency
Dadar to Kevadia	Dadar-Kevadia Express	Daily
Ahmedabad to Kevadia	Janshatabdi Express	Daily
Kevadia to Varanasi	Mahamana Express	Weekly
Kevadia to Hyderabad	Sampark Kranti Express	Bi-weekly
Chennai to Kevadia	Chennai-Kevadia Express	Weekly
Kevadia to Rewa	Kevadia-Rewa Express	Weekly
Pratapnagar to Kevadia	MEMU train	Daily
Kevadia to Pratapnagar	MEMU train	Daily

Seaplanes by SpiceJet

Santanu Kalita, CEO, Spicejet – Sea Plane department, says, "Sea planes can bring a revolution in the tourism sector, specially in India." He has played a key role in getting the maiden sea plane service of the country off the ground in Kevadia, Gujarat.

Travel demand in 2021 pivotal

Sandeep Dwivedi, Chief Operating Officer, InterGlobe Technology Quotient (ITQ), shares his views on the increasing consumer sentiment to restart travel, which in turn is leading towards air traffic surge. He expects full domestic recovery to 2019 levels by end of the year.

The first weeks of 2021 have renewed our hopes for a recovery, especially with the news of vaccines in world's major economies. As consumer and business confidence slowly returns, it is still too early to say when 'new normal' statistics will meet the old. Irrespective, industry has been staying rather optimistic and estimates a full domestic recovery of 2019 level by 2021, provided substantial risk mitigation, consumer acceptability and aviation adaptability ensue. This makes demand for travel in 2021 more critical to sustaining the mild surge in traffic recorded during last Christmas and New Year's Eve.

In the last quarter of 2020, as consumer sentiment re-

vived, we saw two positive outcomes: first was improved confidence in air travel and second, an increased allocation for flights by aviation ministry. It is only fair to say that a further increase of up to 10 per cent by February 2021 is expected, provided number of air passengers rise in these initial weeks, number of cases detected on-board decline, and safety is elevated with successful vaccination of frontline aviation personnel.

All these bear high possibility, considering growing signs of declining health crisis domestically, latest vaccination drives, and increasing confidence in air mobility as well as rising engagement in economic activity and safer protocols.

It has been witnessed that leisure domestic travel is slowly picking up considering most

With over 50% of the population under 25 and over 65% below 35, travel is likely to recover sooner in India than abroad

international routes, including the ones in high demand earlier, are off limits. Domestically, travelling by road appears



to be the preferred mode for most leisure travellers. The trend seems to shift towards air travel with the affluence, distance, limitations on time and need for enhanced safety. Snowfall in major northern attractions is also adding to the traction in domestic air traffic.

An interesting trend is picking pace under the name of 'revenge travel' and is likely

to grow in 2021, considering limited travel opportunities presented by the year that passed by. With over 50 per cent of India's population under 25 years of age and over 65 per cent below 35, travel, including air travel, appears to be one sector likely to recover sooner in the country than its counterparts abroad. Even more with the concept of digital nomads picking

pace. Much still remains to be seen, given consumer's price sensitivity due to previous economic contraction and preference for value and quality, especially in these sensitive times. The different stages of away-from-home activities that modern travellers are on, is another factor expected to impact this anticipated surge in traffic.



Sandeep Dwivedi
Chief Operating Officer, InterGlobe Technology Quotient (ITQ)

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

Vishwas Makhija is ATOAI Prez

At its AGM and election held virtually, ATOAI elected office bearers and its Executive Committee for the 2021-23 term. The new team has decided to set up a dedicated Women's Task Force consisting of women entrepreneurs within the membership, in an effort to encourage their participation in manner and in numbers in the adventure tourism industry.

Manas Dwivedi

During its AGM and election held virtually, ATOAI elected new office bearers and EC for the 2021-23 term, and formed a Women's Task Force. The new team at the helm of the association also held its first Executive Committee meeting after the virtual election and decided that two past Presidents, Tejbir Singh Anand and



Ajeet Bajaj, will be co-opted into the Executive Committee. In addition, Capt Swadesh Kumar, immediate past president, has also taken his rightful place in the EC. The new ATOAI team will continue to further the growth of adven-



Vishwas Makhija
President

Rajesh Ojha
Sr. Vice President

Vaibhav Kala
Vice President

Vinayak Koul
Hony. Secretary

Pradeep Murty
Hony. Treasurer

Executive Committee 2021-23

Capt Swadesh Kumar, Shikhar Travels
Commander Sam T Samuel - Kalypso Adventures
Ronny Singh Gulati, Youreka Campouts
Nirat Bhatt, Nidus Enterprises
Nadeem Sheikh, Sea & Sky Travel (India)
Arvind Bhardwaj, Red Chilli Adventure Sports
Milind Bhide, Countryside Adventure Holiday
Tejbir Singh Anand, Holiday Moods Adventure
Ajeet Bajaj, Snow Leopard Adventures

ture travel in India by taking forward the Association's aims and helping shape government policy for this sector. Apart from resolving issues

impacting adventure tourism in the country, its main objectives would be to bring more adventure tour operators across the country into

the mainstream of quality and responsible tourism practices as members, getting all states to adopt ATOAI's safety guidelines, prioritising operational risk assessment within the membership, conducting skill development & capacity building workshops in association with state tourism departments and local associations, running educational seminars and Fam tours for members, fostering new and innovative adventure tourism products, and creating a pool of

trained human resources within the industry. ATOAI also seeks to take measures to reduce the environmental impact on India's natural resources, check mass-tourism in remote locales, and take active measures to help reduce a rising accident rate as a result of mass-tourism. There are also plans to introduce an ATOAI mobile App showcasing India's adventure activities.

Singapore will start a new travel lane for business and high economic value travellers that will allow people to visit without quarantine for short-term stays and reside in a dedicated bubble facility near the airport.

ATOAI team for 2021-23

President:	Vishwas Makhija , Managing Director, Inside India Tours
Senior Vice President:	Rajesh Ojha , Managing Director, Banjara Camps
Vice President:	Vaibhav Kala , Managing Director, Aquaterra Adventures India
Hony. Secretary:	Vinayak Koul , Director, Snowlion Expeditions
Hony. Treasurer:	Pradeep Murty , Director, Muddy Boots Vacations

India Travel Mart in Lucknow

Taking the lead in re-starting physical exhibitions for the industry, India Travel Mart was organised in Lucknow from January 15-17. The first travel exhibition in the state since lockdown was inaugurated by **Mukesh Kumar Meshram**, Principal Secretary, Tourism and Culture, Government of Uttar Pradesh.



EVENT TALK

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FEBRUARY 2021

Date	Event	Time
03	STB GCC Virtual Roadshow	11:30 am
03	TOFTigers Webinar- Marketing sustainability	03:30 pm
8-11	PATA Beyond: Travel Recovery Solutions	10:30 am
10	CAPA Live	08:30 am
10	TOFTigers Webinar- Sustainability Awareness	03:30 pm
12-14	ADTOI Convention	Kevadia
12-14	TTF	Bengaluru
17	TOFTigers Webinar- Designing wildlife trips	03:30 pm
18-20	India Tourism Mart (ITM) 2021 Virtual	TBA
18-20	TTF	Chennai
26-28	TTF	Kolkata
26	Expedia- TAAP Webinar	11:30 pm

MARCH 2021

1-5	Kerala Travel Mart- Virtual	10:00 am
03	TOFTigers Webinar- Create your own forest	03:30 pm
3-4	Singapore Reimagine MICE Virtual Show	TBA
4-6	TTF	Ahmedabad
6	IATO Elections	Delhi

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

Smoothen domestic, int'l travel

TAAI has appealed to MoCA and the MOT to set up protocols right away and issue certificates for vaccinated travellers – both domestic and inbound – in order to ensure that inter-state and cross-border travel is smooth when the time comes.

Hazel Jain

to an issue that might flare up later. Sharing this information in an exclusive interview is **Jay Bhatia**, Vice President, TAAI, who says, "We have written to MoCA and MOT about urgently setting up protocols for travellers who have been vaccinated



Jay Bhatia
Vice President, TAAI

against COVID-19 and issuing certificates to them."

This move, he says, will eliminate the need for travellers to get their RT-PCR tests done and quarantine themselves every time they have to fly or cross international or domestic borders. "The first thing everyone – whether it is the hotel, the airline or the state bodies – asks travellers to do is get these tests, which is greatly hampering tourism. So there has to be some kind of mecha-

nism that is proof of vaccination and which can be easily verified that the holder of the certificate is vaccinated," he says. TAAI has a meeting with Rupinder Brar, ADG, MOT, this month on the matter.

Bhatia however points to another problem that can crop up. "International travellers have already started showing interest to visit India. Certain countries have already set up some sort of protocols for their citizens who are vaccinated. But these Apps are in their local languages which cannot be verified in India. That is why we need to set some sort of precedence and have a universal certification for our inbound travellers so they don't have to undergo the process of testing and quarantine," he underlines. What TAAI has also proposed is the need to have a mandate

There has to be some kind of mechanism that is proof of vaccination and which can be easily verified

on health and travel insurance for all travellers coming into India. "We need to figure whether we allow them to take insurance in India through travel agents and tour operators making their arrangements or let them use their country's travel insurance policies. While we still have some time before the tourist movement can start in full swing, we should have these policies and norms in place," Bhatia asserts.

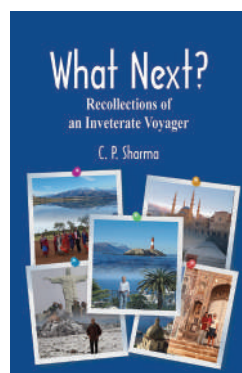
Stretching one's horizons

Author and Critique **Rama Joshi** offers a compelling review of 'What Next? Recollections of an Inveterate Voyager', a travelogue by **CP Sharma**, Managing Director, Neptune Travco.

Belonging to the genre of a travelogue, the book is also a kind of bildungsroman. This book is akin to a very big travel bag bursting from its seams. There is an



CP Sharma
MD, Neptune Travco



vignettes stand out, like the mountainous beauty of Bhutan and the Ferrari trips in Italy. The storytelling skill, fluid narration and commentary of the author, which sounds like friendly banter, take the reader along in the journey which is physical, emotional, educative and explorative.

"It is a marathon project, not a time pass; it is not a book to read, but to savour & keep."

(Views expressed are of Author and Critique Rama Joshi. The publication may or may not subscribe to them.)

encyclopaedia of information in terms of a plethora of facts, picturesque details, in-depth study of men and manners, culture and tribes, graphic details in words and pictures, bold adventure tips, excellent resource material and much more

The author has embarked upon a massive project that affords delights of mystery, exploration, adventure, diversity of cuisine along with a wide range of activities, impossible to mention and contain. Some enchanting

Korea's online tourism festival

Korea Tourism Organization has announced an Online Korea Grand Sale 2021 targeted at travellers, starting from January 14 until February 28, 2021. The sale brings together K-content popular around the world.

TT Bureau

Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) has an on-going culture and tourism festival with content that best describes Korea's tourism offerings for travellers starting from January 14, 2021 to February 28, 2021. Called the Online Korea Grand Sale 2021, the event is hosted by its Ministry of Culture, Sports & Tourism and Visit Korea Committee to engage foreign travellers.

The Online Korea Grand Sale brings the K-contents that are popular around the world.



This includes 'Korean Tourism Product Purchase Promotion' for long-awaited travel to Korea, 'Korea Online Video Program' that showcases local experiences of Korea, and an 'Online Shopping Promotion' providing special discount

benefits on beauty and fashion products. The festival is designed with various benefits for foreign travellers who have long been waiting to travel to Korea. Early bird promotions and special offers will be available on flights, accommodations and other sightseeing and experiential activities for the future travellers.

Consumers can virtually enjoy various lively Korean content such as K-Pop, K-Beauty, K-Fashion, K-Food and K-Heritage, which will be introduced by Korean celebrities. Online shopping special promotion 'Pick Item' will be available on Korean brand products through website and social media.

With the virtual travel and online experiences and shopping facilities, the Online Korea Grand Sale is one of the first steps to touch base with the global consumers for post-pandemic travel.

Travel update!

As of date, short-term tourist visas remain suspended for all countries and all international arrivals are subject to 14 days quarantine. Direct flights between India and Korea on Air India and Korean Air remain suspended as of date. While there is no official confirmation, it is expected that regular travel to South Korea may begin by second half of 2021. To know more about the Online Korea Grand Sale, log on to en.koreagrandsale.co.kr

It is a marathon project, not a time pass; it is not a book to read, but to savour & keep

To know more about the book, contact the author at:

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Email: cp@neptunetravco.com

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THE LEELA PALACES, HOTELS AND RESORTS

Mumbai

The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts has promoted **Shridhar Nair** to Vice President - Operations. In his new role, Nair, who joined the company in 1997 as a Management Trainee, will handle the operations of The Leela group and will relocate to the corporate office in Mumbai. With his profound market knowledge, strong business acumen and deep understanding of The Leela brand, he will add tremendous value to operations as The Leela continues on its next new phase of growth and development.



EASTBOUND GROUP

Gurugram

Manish Rajora has re-joined Eastbound Group as Head of Contracting. Constituting brands like Eastbound, Distinct Destinations, 2HUB, Eastbound Discoveries and CHIME, Eastbound Group, headquartered in Gurugram, offers solutions for experiential journeys, integrated travel representation, event management, B2B hotel distribution, B2B e-commerce, as well as inbound and domestic travel. In the new role, Rajora will be responsible for contracting and vendor management for the entire group.



SHERATON GRAND AND ALOFT

Bengaluru

Sharad Puri is the new Cluster General Manager at Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Center and Aloft Bengaluru Cessna Business Park. An industry veteran with an exemplary track record, Puri brings with him an amalgamation of knowledge, experience and learning of over 25 years in the luxury hotels business. In the new role, he will oversee the complete operations and management of the hotels to ensure the highest levels of guest engagement, and continue to build on the positioning and reputation of both the hotels.



JW MARRIOTT

Kolkata

JW Marriott Kolkata has appointed **Vikram Sharma** as Director of Human Resources. He has earned his repute of a veteran HR professional over the years of diligence, specialising in strategic planning and a subject matter expert. He has fostered his talents by excelling in the fields of strategic recruitment planning, manpower resource deployment, compliance and documentation and the likes. In the new role, Sharma will employ his gamut of expertise to administer recruitment, strategic HRM, training and development accompanied by other administrative responsibilities.



HYATT REGENCY HOTEL & RESIDENCES

Pune

Reema Wadajkar is now Director of Events at Hyatt Regency Pune & Residences. She brings with her 12-plus years of experience in the hospitality industry, specialising in weddings. In the past, Wadajkar has worked with renowned hospitality brands like The Oberoi Group, Taj Hotels, Accor, Marriott and Hilton in India. Prior to joining Hyatt Regency Pune Hotel & Residences, she helmed the conferences and events team at Conrad Pune, and in the new role will oversee key sectors, including business development, contract management and client servicing among others.



CROWNE PLAZA

Greater Noida

Crowne Plaza Greater Noida has appointed **Parul Diwan** as Assistant Manager - Marketing. With over five years of professional experience, Diwan has a wealth of knowledge in the fields of Marketing and PR, having managed media relations for travel and hospitality brands like The Kingsbury Hotel and Amaya Resorts in Sri Lanka and Maldives, Destination Canada, NBTC - Holland, Visit Maldives, Visit Brussels and Qatar Tourism National Council. In the new role, she will plan and execute result-oriented marketing communications activities at Crowne Plaza Greater Noida.



Testing before travelling? Take note

With COVID-induced lockdowns as the order of the day, the opening up of borders and sporadic lifting of travel restrictions is often accompanied by various caveats for would-be travellers. Here's VFS Global addressing a few FAQs that are doing the rounds about travel-related COVID testing.



Un the new normal, travellers are made to take special note of government regulations, travel bubbles,



special flights, quarantine upon arrival, and chief among all - COVID testing, an outcome of governments being vigilant about tracking people that fly in and out of their countries, even as they are trying to revive travel and business. This public apprehension to travel is further fuelled by false information and myths around how to go about COVID-testing and what rules need to be followed before some-

one sets out on their first post-lockdown international trip. Understandably, this has also sparked nervousness among travellers regarding all the regulations they need to keep in mind before they travel - and if they will be denied entry to their holiday destination if they don't meet any of the criteria.

Although it seems like a big, extra step to go through before you get into travel mode, it may just be the most crucial part of your travel journey. Increased testing has been key in being able to trace and control the spread of the pandemic. With these handy tips, you can avoid all the unnecessary stress and misinformation, and make informed choices the next time you choose to travel.

Testing window

The timeframe within which you test yourself is crucial - test too early and you may not be infected or be showing symptoms yet, test too late - and you won't get your results in time for your flight.



To optimise the efficiency of your testing and minimise the chances of travelling while infected, most governments and airlines require testing yourself 48-72 hours before you're scheduled to fly. Travellers are still recommended to check government advisories.

Testing at your doorstep

One of the most significant concerns that people have is visiting diagnostic labs. However, that is no longer an issue. Companies such as VFS Global have now introduced services wherein travellers



can get themselves tested for COVID right at their doorstep. People can now book their testing appointments online and authorised personnel from certified medical laboratories, associated with VFS Global, will perform the test at a location of the customer's choice.

Waiting for your results

India currently allows different testing methods of which the most commonly used is the RT-PCR test. While initially testing and result rates were quite sluggish, today, test results are converted in just



over 24 hours. Trials are also currently being conducted to develop tests that can detect the virus in under a minute. This could be a game-changer for travellers who will be able to get tested right before they travel. Make sure you get the right one.

Insuring yourself

Given the unprecedented nature of this pandemic, COVID-19 was not a disease included in the roster of insurance companies. Fortunately, not only did insurance providers later rectify this,



but also went on to introduce COVID-specific medical insurance solutions. They have also introduced several products customised to evolving requirements. It is crucial that you verify with your insurance provider the type and extent of COVID coverage they offer.

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Sikkim prepares well-ahead

Government of Sikkim has announced that 2022 will be 'Visit Sikkim' year, a declaration on year-long tourism promotion and marketing for the state, focusing on having tourists in Sikkim for the whole year.

 Manas Dwivedi

The northeastern state of Sikkim offers more than one could imagine. From pilgrimage, village and adventure tourism to MICE and heritage

who faced a tough time amidst the ill-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chief Minister asserted working with the state tourism department and the Travel Agents Association of Sikkim (TAAS) to chalk out a plan for the year-long tourism activities in 2022.



Prem Singh Golay
Chief Minister of Sikkim

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of 'Capacity Building Training for Tourism Stake-

 It is an attempt at rebuilding the tourism sector with aggressive marketing of Sikkim tourism
- Norgay Lachungpa

holders of Sikkim' in Gangtok, the Chief Minister also announced the commencement of flights from Pakyong airport from January 23.

government would help the tourism industry in every way possible. Also, a budget will be allocated for the promotion and marketing of Sikkim tourism in major cities of India," he said. Golay also highlighted that the tourism industry should focus on rural tourism where tourists should visit and experience rural, agricultural and traditional Sikkim.

spreading, hence, people are looking to visit Sikkim. Therefore, the focus will be on quality tourism with required infrastructure being developed

 The focus will be on quality tourism with infrastructure being developed by 2022
- Lukendra Rasaily

 A budget will be allocated for the promotion and marketing of Sikkim tourism in major cities of India
- Prem Singh Golay

holders of Sikkim' in Gangtok, the Chief Minister also announced the commencement of flights from Pakyong airport from January 23.

Lukendra Rasaily, Chairman, Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation (STDC), recounts that the pandemic severely impacted the tourism industry in the state and recovery is still a long way ahead. "The road is still not clear; the congregation of tourists cannot happen. The stakeholders have suffered a lot. We have been successful at curbing the pandemic from

by 2022 with promotion of the state's nature and culture on an international platform," he says.

Norgay Lachungpa, President, Travel Agents Association of Sikkim (TAAS), appreciates the steps taken by the state government. He says, "This will be a grand event in 2022 for which both government and organisation will work together to frame a plan. It is an attempt at rebuilding the tourism sector with aggressive marketing of Sikkim tourism." 



Now, the Chief Minister of Sikkim, **Prem Singh Golay** has announced 2022 as 'Visit Sikkim' year for dedicated focus on promoting tourism in the state. Extending support to various tourism stakeholders

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