

1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP

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Focused promotions by MOT

Rupinder Brar, Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism, shares that while they are planning to start international campaigning, the current focus is on domestic tourism for which MOT is adopting market-specific promotions.



Nisha Verma

Amongst the many initiatives of the Ministry of Tourism (MOT) this year is the India Tourism Mart (ITM) that is set to be a virtual affair. According to **Rupinder Brar**, this may well be the first step towards opening doors to foreign visitors.

"We are happy to share that the first virtual ITM is going to happen from February 18-20, and a large participation is expected for the same. FAITH is working with the Ministry on this, and we look forward

to the success of it as we are also beginning to open as a country to travel to," Brar says.

International marketing

The global media plan of MOT is being touted as a critical part of its strategy for international promotions. Brar adds, "Ever since we closed our campaign in March 2020 when travel stopped, we have been reviewing the situation around the world and in India. Now the plan is in place, and we are only waiting for the probability of travel. However, a majority of our source markets are still in red as far as COVID goes.



Rupinder Brar
Additional Director General
Ministry of Tourism

Fortunately, India has dealt with it well with numbers continuously going down, and as a welcoming country we are waiting to do promotions in our source

markets like the UK, USA, Western Europe, etc. Apart from that we are focusing on the Far East, Southeast Asia and countries that are closer home for short-haul flights. In the future, we look forward to leveraging tourists for the venerable Buddhist heritage in the country. As always, Yoga, wellness and Ayurveda will also remain very important. We are increasing our footprint in Africa and Latin America as well."

Domestic marketing

For MOT, domestic tourism is also an immediate focus area. "COVID has made us and the stakeholders realise the

Contd on page 8 ►

Jaisalmer trade unites

The travel trade in Jaisalmer has come together to reinstate SpiceJet flights to The Golden City.



Nisha Verma

SpiceJet flights to The Golden City, Jaisalmer, were withdrawn because the route was incurring losses, which eventually were underwritten by the travel and hospitality fraternity in the city along with small traders who are giving a 'Minimum Seat Guarantee' to the airline by contributing to a pool for a 'Viability Gap Funding', which would allow the airline to operate on the route in a sustainable manner. This drive was set in motion by **Manvendra Singh Shekhawat**, MD, Suryagarh and Founder, I Love Jaisalmer, with the



Ritika Modi
Regional President
UNIGLOBE Travel, South Asia

support of **Ritika Modi**, Regional President, UNIGLOBE Travel, South Asia, to reach out to **Shilpa Bhatia**, Chief Commercial Officer, SpiceJet.

Contd on page 15 ►

India's prowess...

Medical tourism, already on the rise, can be a game changer in the future if the government and travel trade unite.



Nisha Verma

India was booming as a medical tourism destination pre-COVID. By mid-2020, India's medical tourism sector was estimated to be worth US\$5-6 billion. In 2017, 495,056 patients visited India to seek medical care. But, the COVID pandemic has affected the tourist movement globally so much that it is still going through a lull, claims **EM Najeeb**, Senior Vice President, IATO. Medical tourism might just be seen in a new light post-COVID, with the world now well-aware of India's medical prowess and handling capacity.



EM Najeeb
Senior Vice President, IATO

Future of medical tourism

Najeeb, however, still believes that there are many advantages of medical treatment in India. "These include lower costs, the availability of latest medical technologies, and a growing

Contd on page 16 ►

Money matters for hotels

The Maharashtra hospitality sector is thankful for the industry status effective April 2021. But what about making finance available at a lower rate of interest with a longer gestation period, hoteliers ask.



Hazel Jain

In an event held in Mumbai recently, the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) along with its western India regional association HRAWI felicitated State Tourism Minister **Aaditya Thackeray** for making Maharashtra the first and the only state to award its hospitality sector the industry status. Also present at the occasion were **Valsa Nair**, Principal Secretary, Tourism & Excise, Government of Maharashtra. Effective April 1, 2021, Maharashtra's hospitality industry will be levied



tariffs and duties on electricity, water, property, development and non-agricultural taxes at industrial rates. **Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**, Vice President, FHRAI, says, "The biggest win for the sector was the gov-

ernment's announcement of according industry status to our sector which had remained a promise on paper for over 20 years. Maharashtra has set the benchmark for other states to follow."

Thackeray also spoke about the reduction of licences and enabling ease of doing business in the state. At the function, he said quite a few reforms will be rolled out soon.

Contd on page 10 ►



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WITT to empower women

TAAI, along with DDP Group, has launched a new avenue and stream for women in the travel trade. **Jyoti Mayal**, President, TAAI, shares details on the initiative that has been aptly named 'Women in TAAI and Travel' (WITT).



Nisha Verma

Jyoti Mayal feels that the women in the tourism industry haven't been represented well. "After a long time, there was a woman in this chair, and the first one was literally 15 years back. We felt that women in the industry were missing out. Despite being everywhere, they are not mentioned or hold important positions. We also want more women to be skilled and come into this industry," she says.

Mayal believes that travel and tourism can provide women with a plethora of opportunities. "Across the world, the tourism industry has always had twice



Jyoti Mayal
President, TAAI

as many female employers as other sectors, providing significant opportunities for women in terms of workforce participation, leadership, entrepreneurship and empowerment than many other sectors, particularly in developing countries, and as such it can have a tremendous effect in poverty reduction in rural communities. At a macro

level, a stronger representation of women in the travel and tourism industry is really needed, and I reiterate that by saying that more women should come out and utilise their knowledge and talent. More women joining the industry would make tourism and our country a safer place to move around, with women being in all sorts of jobs including cab drivers, guides, handicraft makers, police officers, as well as in hospitality where they are in big numbers. But, more women should take up leadership roles as well," she asserts.

Explaining the idea behind WITT, Mayal says, "Women in rural areas should be skilled and those in urban areas need to take more leadership and front-office work and come forward. That's where we want WITT to come in. We have already tied up with MOT and FICCI-FLO to see how we can encourage more women to come in front and at all levels,"

The TAAI President believes that there is a dire need to

educate women right from the roots. "We will be taking this up in phases. We will be involving our 20 regional chapters and are already in talks with the chairpersons of these chapters to see how we could

Women in rural areas should be skilled; those in urban areas need to be leaders

adopt certain clusters where there are more women and educate them in life skills and bring them to the forefront. We could be the link to the product to sell it, especially in tourism, which is a huge value chain, where everything is interlinked," she says, adding, "Initially, we will use FICCI-FLO's strength."



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TRAVELTALK

VIEWPOINT

Not a minute to waste

The Union Budget for the year has come and gone, but the travel & tourism industry is still seen expecting financial support from the government. If tourism were not considered an 'elitist' activity or its impact on both economy and employment an insignificant contribution to the country's growth and development, tourism may have found a mention in the Union Budget. But, to the dismay of the industry and its stakeholders, the announcement this year was no different from that of previous years.

The situation, however, does raise two crucial scenarios – one, when a country is riddled with a pandemic of such size, will a government not be prone to concentrate its energies on the physical well-being of its citizenry who are in dire need of basic facilities to survive the situation? And, two, has the tourism industry been fair in demanding what it has during such a time when all sectors and all persons are fighting the ill-effects of a pandemic? Clearly, the voices that have been raised haven't made it to the government's to-do list, but hasn't the government already provided enough?

Without further ado, it may be wise for stakeholders of the tourism industry to pause, re-assess their requirements, study the schemes of the Ministry of Tourism and Government of India, and see how best they can be employed to their benefit. The hospitality and tourism associations must take up the cause NOW! They must re-evaluate the ground situation and not harp on old demands. If the industry largely believes that no help has been received, it must strive to survive on its own for itself and its people. The largely unorganised sector of travel and tourism may benefit most only if it comes together in an organised fashion. The leaders must accept responsibility and work to truly bring a change. Else, it may be best to hand over the reins and make way for those who have the ability to segregate needs from demands and bring the sector together.

The vaccine has been rolled out and the world around us is changing. People are willing to travel for both business and leisure, and with them raring to go, return to normalcy is not far away. The industry must get going and not let opportunities slip away.



TT Bureau

PATA's report titled 'Asia Pacific Visitor Forecasts 2021-2023' presents three growth prospects for international visitors into and across 39 Asia Pacific destinations, covering mild, medium and severe scenarios. By the end of 2023, international visitor arrivals (IVAs) into and across the Asia Pacific



Mario Hardy
CEO, PATA

region could return to 96 per cent of the volume of foreign arrivals received in 2019, at least under a mild scenario. The less



fortuitous medium and severe scenarios, however, could see those proportions reach just 74 per cent and 49 per cent, respectively, at that time.

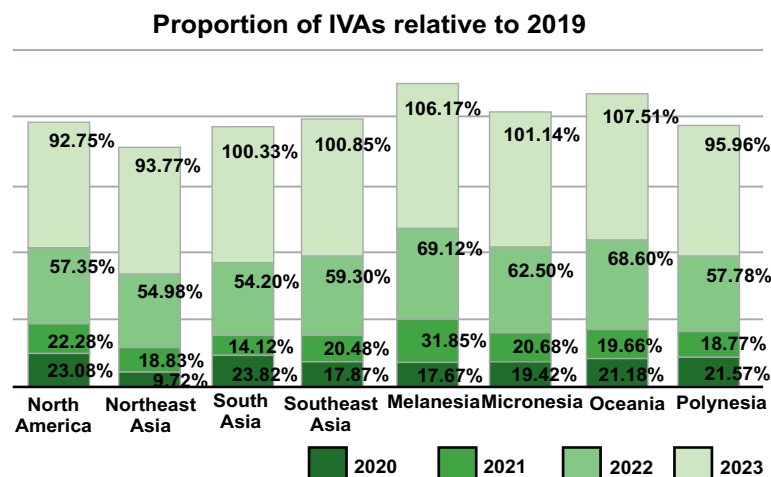
Mild scenario

Of immediate concern, for all of the Asia Pacific destination sub-regions under each of the scenarios, 2021 is likely to be another difficult year for international travel movements. Any growth is likely to be extremely uneven, and for some sub-regions may be further below the levels of 2019 and even those of 2020. South Asia, in particular, under this mild scenario, is expected to lose even more IVAs with its relative proportion to 2019, falling to around 14 per cent in 2021, before rebounding strongly in 2022 and 2023.

APAC has hope, but mild

According to a PATA study, by the end of 2023, international visitor arrivals into and across APAC could return to 96 per cent of the volume of foreign arrivals received in 2019, albeit under a mild scenario.

IVAS into/across Asia Pacific by year relative to 2019 MILD SCENARIO



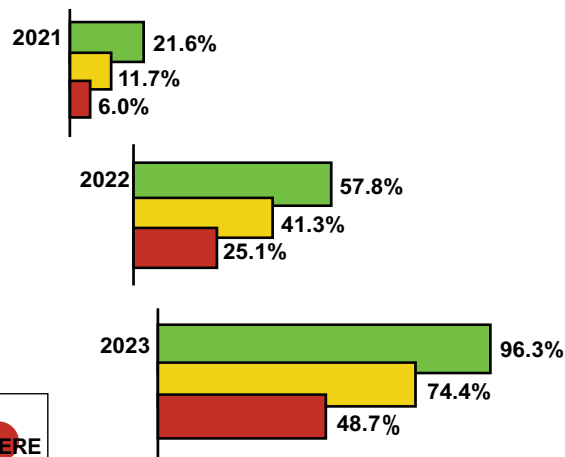
IVAs in 2019



IVAs in 2020



Proportion of IVAs Relative to 2019



Medium scenario

Under the medium scenario, more destination sub-regions are expected to fall into further decline in 2021 relative to 2019, before turning to some tentative recovery in 2022 and 2023.

Severe scenario

Furthermore, 2021 is anticipated to be remarkably challenging under the severe scenario. South Asia, in particular, under the severe scenario, is expected to lose a considerable number of IVAs with its relative proportion to 2019, falling to less than two per cent in 2021.

Mario Hardy, CEO, PATA, says, "Calendar year 2021 is likely to be difficult for most destinations, with almost 40 per cent of

Further belt-tightening is needed in intl sector; more innovation is required in domestic sector

scenario, it could well be the case for all 39 destinations. Clearly, a further round of belt-tightening will be needed in the international sector, with more innovation being required in developing what is available in the domestic sector."

According to Hardy, though vaccines are becoming more freely available and inoculations are proceeding rapidly, the first results are very encouraging, but their effectiveness over a wider proportion of the population has yet to be fully demonstrated. "It is likely that travellers in the future will have to carry proof of inoculation and being COVID-19 free, something that is already trialling. Whatever the outcome, travel will never be the same again," he says.



MADHYA PRADESH



ADOPTED RESPONSIBLE - TOURISM MISSION -

Boosting Economic Vitality, Environmental Conservation and Social Awareness

Multifaceted gem that is Madhya Pradesh is a state with hidden treasures of nature and heritage with a turn around each corner. The dense forests, a hotspot for wildlife, a place of three UNESCO Heritage Sites and the tag of "Tiger state of the Country" and also recently added "Leopard State of the Country" are just a few domains to warm up your travel appetite.



Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board has always been one of the few first to take imperative initiatives to conserve its indispensable heritage and culture. Promoting Responsible Tourism is another vital initiative undertaken by the Tourism Board of Madhya Pradesh.

Responsible tourism refers to the commitment of taking responsible initiatives to make decisions in the avid interest of local communities, environment, culture and heritage of the place, while travelling. The objective of Responsible Tourism is to serve the interests of local communities thereby uplifting and assisting them with their way of life. The vision of the initiative is to minimize the negative economic, environmental and social impacts associated with travel while delivering relishing experiences for the tourists through elevated involvement of local people, encouraging healthy and humble interactions and cultural exchange between tourist and locals ensuring a boost to the natural and cultural heritage.

Madhya Pradesh is working on the vital and substantial idea of Economic Vitality, Environmental Conservation and Social awareness. It will also cater to all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. It has been conceived with three kinds of responsibilities - social, environmental and economic which have been termed as 'triple bottom line'.

1. Social and Cultural awareness- Respect host culture, conserve built and living cultural heritage and promote inter-cultural understanding.
2. Environmental Conservation- Optimize use of resources, maintain ecological processes and help conserve natural heritage.
3. Economic Vitality- Long term business viability, provide socio-economic benefits to all the stakeholders, creating thriving communities for stable employment opportunities and contribute to poverty alleviation.

The vision is to support various sectors for achieving responsible tourism in Madhya Pradesh. It aims to provide the direction for components that will guide the implementation of Madhya Pradesh Responsible Tourism Document.



The major components taken under the umbrella of Responsible Tourism Mission are:

1. Community Development and Inclusive governance
2. Economic Development
3. Cultural Protection and Exchange
4. Protection and Conservation of Environment



5. Promotion of Arts and Crafts
6. Empowering Human Capital and building talents through skilling and training
7. Public Health and Hygiene
8. Knowledge Building and Dissemination
9. Peace Building and Happiness
10. Stakeholders Promotion Programs

The various departments, agencies of tourism industry have to stepped up to adopt and adapt to the norms of Responsible Tourism. Combined endeavour and zest make goal achieving easier. Achievements will be majored and accreditation will be done based on certain identified parameters. Recognitions by the authority will aid the organizations associated with tourism sectors to be motivated and driven to adopt the norms of responsible tourism.

MOT budget gets 61% hike

The annual budget allocation for FY 2021-22 is 61 per cent higher than the revised annual estimates of FY 2020-21, says **Arvind Singh**, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism (MOT). He says that the budget will be used for various infrastructure projects and promotional activities for the tourism sector.



Nisha Verma

Arvind Singh has said that the annual budget outlay for 2021-22 for MOT is ₹2026.77 crore as against the outlay of ₹1,260 crore that was approved for the revised Budget Plan 2020-21. "The annual outlay in FY 2021-22 is 61 per cent higher than the revised annual outlay in FY 2020-21. Out of the proposed budget allocation of ₹2026.77 crore, about ₹950 crore will be used for cre-



Arvind Singh
Secretary, MOT

ation of tourism infrastructure at different destinations and about ₹670 crore would be spent on tourism promotional

activities," said Singh while briefing on various budgetary provisions benefitting the tourism sector. He revealed

₹950 crore will be used for creation of infrastructure and about ₹670 crore would be spent on promotional activities

that the remaining would be allocated towards funding other schemes, including capacity building for service providers and the Champion Services Sector scheme.

The Secretary also said that India's performance in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic will inspire a sense of confidence and help MOT project India as a safe destination to travel to, and that the opening of wellness centres in urban and rural areas will also give fillip to wellness tourism in the country while propagating the theme of an 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'. He added, "The change in MSME definition during the pandemic has also brought relief to the travel and hospitality sectors."

Talking of ensuring last-mile connectivity to tourist sites via helicopters, he ensured that since he previously held the position of Chairman AAI, he knows that this is happening. "Under RCS, helicopters are starting in certain parts of the country, especially in the Northeast, Himachal and Uttarakhand. Under UDAN, there will be more heliports in the future," he said.

More from MOT



Meenakshi Sharma
Director General, MOT

"The National Tourism Policy was revised owing to the COVID-19 situation and describes how we would recover from the pandemic. Now, it has a different foundation of responsible and sustainable tourism. It has already gone for state consultation, and industry consultation is happening with associations. We have got very good suggestions from the industry."

"The Goods & Services Tax refund has already been tabled as a statutory act in the GST Act. There is a Section 15, which already says it must be done. Last year, in March, it was put up as a pilot with two airports where there is significant international traffic. Unfortunately, just when it was to be put in place, international travel stopped. Now, we are hoping for that to begin."



Rupinder Brar
Additional Director General, MOT

Other highlights of Budget as per Singh

- ❖ Development of expressways to offer better connectivity to tourist sites
- ❖ Construction of 3,500 km highway in Tamil Nadu in 2022; to include Madurai-Kollam corridor and Chittoor-Thatchur corridor
- ❖ AAI airports in tier-II and III cities, NHAI toll roads and railway infrastructure to strengthen tourism might of India
- ❖ New, aesthetically designed Vista Dome LHB coach on tourist routes to offer better travel experience to passengers

Breaking News

- Adani Airports now holds 74% stake in Mumbai Airports
- Culture Ministry withdraws draft heritage bylaws at Puri
- MOT sanctions ₹50 crore to develop Amarkantak
- Malanad-Malabar River Cruise to launch in Kerala from Feb 15
- Bilaspur-Delhi gets RCS connect via Bhopal, Prayagraj, Jabalpur
- Accor opens 2nd Grand Mercure in Bengaluru
- Golden Chariot 2.0 by IRCTC to run from 14th March
- IRCTC expands services, launches online bus booking

MOT realises domestic power

► Contd from page 3

potential of domestic tourism," claims Brar, adding, "There will be a lot of focus on domestic market promotions in a more organised fashion, which will be a priority area of our campaign this year."

These will be market-specific promotions. The ADG says that the basic principles of marketing and promotions will remain the same because what might interest a 20-year-old may be different from what may be enjoyed by tourists of another age group. "Hence, it is vital for us to create nuanced promotional campaigns and content in an organised fashion," she says.

After creating itineraries of unknown places with major industry associations and

Same MDA benefits for all

A concern for the trade is having the same benefits and requirements for old and new tour operators in the MDA scheme and approval by MOT, which is an issue amongst few seasoned operators. According to Brar, "It's a big pie and everybody can eat out of it. Hence, no one should feel threatened because we need to encourage young India and entrepreneurship. We will benefit as a country if we can create that spirit of enterprise in our people as we move together and try to make ourselves a more self-reliant country. I think, the government needs to take such steps to support and promote people, because when we talk about green shoots, we are also talking of those who do not have deep pockets but have ambition and ideas. Hence, it's important for us to support such people. Thus, in my opinion, we need to focus on our green shoots."

different states, MOT is now conducting more meetings with local chapters of associations because they believe there is more to discover about India. "Working with associations is a continuous effort. We are already educating everybody about the revised guidelines of the domestic MDA scheme.

It would allow the tour operators to do a lot of work with us through domestic promotions. The regional offices have already started doing roadshows.

For such partnerships with the industry, the expenses are taken on by us as MOT and they can collaborate in

terms of content, people to be invited, logistics, etc. In fact, the initial thought was that if we in the government will step out and go for these physical events, there will be a lot of confidence amongst people to travel, too. It is also a way of providing support to the

October-November, and we are happy to carry on with them," asserts Brar.

Trade & domestic bookings

With people booking domestic tours themselves online, the role of tour operators in this sector is minimal.

It is vital for us to create nuanced promotional campaigns and content in an organised fashion

industry in these tough times and it adds business, too. Even if you do a small boutique event at a place, you are providing a lot of economic value to that place. We started these roadshows with this thought in

Commenting on the same, Brar suggests, "The cake in the domestic market is so large that there is something for everyone, but every business requires one to be smart. Tour operators need to make good packages, make them more interesting, and that's where creating innovative, experiential tours is an important need for the domestic market. I don't see the need to distinguish in the quality of the product that needs to be pitched for an outsider or for domestic tourists. The domestic tourists are equally discerning. Hence, making the experience of tourism unique and customised to tourists is an important part of the drive in the industry."

A total of 57 deals were announced in the global travel and tourism sector during January 2021, which is a decrease of 29.6% over 81 deals announced in December 2020, according to data and analytics company GlobalData.

VisitBritain scores super innings

Keeping with the shared passion for cricket for both countries, the VisitBritain Cricket Carnival invites trade partners in India to form their 'Dream Teams' on the 'Dream11' App and participate in the tournament, as sports tourism continues to play an important role in driving future tourism into Britain.



Hazel Jain

What was the idea behind launching the fantasy cricket league campaign?

A top focus for VisitBritain is to continue to work closely with our trade partners in India and across consumer outreach. The shared passion for cricket between the two countries is a very strong connection. The on-going India-England bilateral series provides an opportune moment to celebrate this connection and drive engagement with our trade partners. The VisitBritain Cricket Carnival is a virtual Cricket League tournament, in partnership with TravTalk and Dream11 that will be hosted for a period of 6 weeks until the 28th of March 2021. It invites our trade partners in India to form their 'Dream Teams' on the mobile app 'Dream11' and



Vishal Bhatia
Country Manager – India
VisitBritain

participate in the tournament. It will also feature weekly contests themed on cricket and trivia around Britain as a holiday destination. These contests will be hosted on TravTalk's India Facebook account with prizes to be won every week.

Which UK cities would you like Indians to connect with?

Britain has a mix of historic towns and cool cities to explore. Vikings, Romans, Tudors –

they've all left their mark on Britain. And whether strolling the medieval Shambles in York or soaking up the Roman heritage of Bath, visitors will experience living history at every turn. Fans of more modern attractions can choose from the musical legacy of Liverpool to London's vibrant culture and Glasgow's urban allure. If they're looking for cool culture, our cities will have them spoiled for choice.

How important is cricket tourism for VisitBritain?

The ICC Cricket World Cup, hosted by England and Wales in 2019, offered a great spectacle for the UK to promote Britain. With the on-going bilateral series, Indian Premier League that sees significant participation of international players from the UK, and the Indian men's cricket team touring England this summer, this

The virtual contest will feature weekly contests themed on cricket and trivia around Britain as a holiday destination

year proves to be a big opportunity to celebrate this passion. Sport tourism will continue to play a hugely important role in driving future tourism to Britain. In previous years,

VisitBritain has encouraged overseas visitors to plan their visits around these events and experience their favourite sports while getting out and exploring the diversity of our visitor attractions and experiences. Our research has found that tourists who come for cricket in the UK are among the most beneficial to the economy because they traditionally stay for longer and have a propensity to travel around the country.

How was the response for the 2019 cricket World Cup?

India delivered the majority of viewership (5.68 billion; 85% of the total), epitomising the

popularity of cricket in the market. Indian fans bought 41% of the tickets sold for the finals. Cricket provided us with a fantastic opportunity to not only promote the destinations where the matches were played but to also put the spotlight on associated destinations and tourism activities.

What confidence-building activities will you undertake?

The travel trade continues to be extremely important to us and we are supporting our travel industry partners to ensure they have access to VisitBritain's recovery approach and campaign information as it develops. ↓

According to a recent survey report by IHG Hotels & Resorts, nearly 45 percent of the respondents have said that business travel improves their working mood and makes them more motivated.

The Global Rep launches in India

Tourism and hospitality veteran of 30 years, **Sandeep Khetarpal** has launched 'The Global Rep', a sales representation and marketing agency focused on promoting tourism and travel technology



Sandeep Khetarpal
CEO & Founder, The Global Rep

brands in India, CIS countries and the Middle East. The Global Rep is the brainchild of Khetarpal, who is the CEO and Founder of the company.

With offices based in India, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Serbia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan, The Global Rep is able to deliver a comprehensive service with return on investment in mind.



Nisha Verma

Preparations for the first Virtual ITM are in full swing, reveals **Subhash Goyal**, adding, "The inaugural session will start on February 18 at 10:20 am and post that, B2B meetings will take place. We already have more than 220 international buyers, around 150 domestic buyers, and over 570 visitors, both international and domestic.

Also, this is the first time that apart from the buyer-seller meets, we also have a knowledge conclave with various sessions, each of them to be chaired by the head of one of the 10 member associa-



Subhash Goyal
Honorary Secretary General
FAITH

tions of FAITH. There is a session on adventure tourism, which will see President of an international association of adventure tour operators. There is also a session on MICE, which will have World MICE Congress Chairman. I will be chairing a session on medical tourism, where



Dr. Naresh Trehan from Medanta will give a keynote address and it will also have Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Minister of Health and Family Welfare, along with the chiefs of Max and Dr. Lal PathLabs. There will be other similar sessions on various topics, which will be open to everyone."

Goyal shares that unlike the previous two ITMs, the matching of buyers and sellers will not be done by a computer software. "This year, information will be provided on the ITM website—www.indiatour-

ismmart.in — and exhibitors will select the buyers. Those who will not be selected

We have confirmation from more than 60 countries, an unexpected response within a short span of 1.5 months

will be matched with the help of computer software. We still have some buyers in the waiting list, but we are keeping it in proportion to the number of sellers. I am hopeful that it will be a successful event," he says.

Claiming that this is the right time to do the event, he adds, "The world's largest vaccination programme is going on in India, and this is the first international event which is jointly being organised by Ministry of Tourism (MOT) and FAITH. This event will be a curtain raiser to the whole world. We already have confirmation from more than 60 countries and it was an unexpected response within a short span of 1.5 months." The inauguration of ITM may be a hybrid ceremony with a limited gathering of association heads and office bearers among others.

Exhibiting at ITM?

The fee for exhibitors for Virtual ITM 2021 has been reduced from ₹1 lakh to only ₹10,000 per booth.

ITM 2021 packs a virtual punch

The third India Tourism Mart, to be held from February 18-20, will be quite different from its previous editions, besides being a virtual affair. **Subhash Goyal**, Honorary Secretary General, Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism and Hospitality (FAITH), shares details.

By the end of 2023, international visitor arrivals (IVAs) into and across the Asia Pacific region could return to 96% of the volume of foreign arrivals received in 2019, at least under a mild scenario, says PATA.

Industry status comes with benefits

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"Post COVID, Maharashtra government intends to allow restaurants 24x7 operations in Mumbai," announced the Minister. Referring to the Union Budget, he had earlier tweeted that there is nothing for tourism "neither in the budget, nor in the ₹20 lakh crore package announced earlier."

Maharashtra
has set the
benchmark for
states to follow

— Gurbaxish Singh Kohli

Last year, the Maharashtra government brought down the number of licences from 70 to 10, and 70 separate application forms were reduced to just eight. Recently, the government also agreed to waive off the excise licence fee on pro-rata basis along with the roll-back of the 15 per cent annual fee increase for the year 2020. The new policy also replaced the need for obtaining NOCs from various departments with self-certification by establishments.

The industry reacts

While everyone has applauded the benefits, especially to operating costs for hotels, there were some misses that some pointed out. According to **Nandivardhan Jain**, Founder & CEO, Noesis Capital Advisors, while the industry status will help hotels lower their



operating costs, the availability of finance and the increased gestation period has still not been considered. "The industry needs finance available at a lower rate of interest with a

the asset owners are seeking from the government. It should be taken into consideration to ensure we have more branded and quality assets in the country," he explains.

several benefits and concessions, including longer loan repayment tenure and lower borrowing rates, which will help in attracting substantial fresh

including rebates in electricity charges as well as water and property taxes. It will also give our brand the encouragement to further expand in tier-II and tier-III cities, too. We hope other states also accord this prestigious status," he says.

Underlining the many cost benefits, however, **Sandeep Talaular**, Managing Director, Jakson Hospitality, says,

category for water consumption. The prices will be published in the new Central Budget in

Hotel assets
being capital
intensive, the loan
tenure required is
around 15-20 years
which currently is
between 8-10 years

— Nandivardhan Jain

We have asked
for industry and
infrastructure status
as hospitality is
capital-intensive
and cannot survive
on a high rate
of interest

— Satyen Jain

longer gestation period. Hotel assets being capital intensive, the loan tenure required is around 15-20 years which currently is between 8-10 years, making investments in the asset class restricted to only a limited people and a high proportion of equity needs to be infused in the project to make it viable. It is a long-awaited demand that

It will let hotels avail
benefits, including
rebates in electricity
charges as well
as water and
property taxes

— Pushpendra Bansal

investments and will go a long way in improving the health of the sector, which is currently struggling due to the pandemic. But, if the status is provided without any benefits then it will be meaningless."

Meanwhile, according to **Pushpendra Bansal**, COO, Lords Hotels & Resorts, the industry status approval is a landmark moment for hotel industry. "It will let hotels avail benefits,

We will avail of 4
cost advantages.
The biggest
benefit will be in
electricity tariff

— Sandeep Talaular

"We will avail of four big cost advantages with this. The biggest benefit will be in electricity tariff. At present, there are three categories of electricity tariffs in Maharashtra. We will be also covered under the industrial rate

Every policy has
something
discomforting
to a few

— Manav Thadani

February. It will also have a positive impact on property taxes. Again, the state budget will define the new rates shortly. Lastly, tourism on the whole will benefit from the MSME policy. We will also avail of other MSME subsidies in the policy."

Summing up the industry sentiments, **Manav Thadani**, Founder Chairman, Hotelivate, adds, "My view is that every policy has something in it that is discomforting to a few and therefore it's difficult to get everyone on board. Overall, however, we need other states to emulate Maharashtra."

Etihad flies with vaccinated crew



Etihad Airways, the national airline of the United Arab Emirates, has become the first airline in the world with all its operating pilots and cabin crew vaccinated to help curb the spread of COVID-19 and give passengers who travel with the airline peace of mind.

RATO organises Fam to Bikaner



The Rajasthan Association of Tour Operators (RATO) organised a familiarisation trip for 13 tour operators to Bikaner, including destinations like Sanchu Border and Karni Mata Temple, with the sole motive of fuelling demand for domestic tourism in the state and portray Bikaner as a two-night destination.

More airports to be privatised

Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) is working towards reinstating of the tourist visa with other ministries, as well as privatising about 10 more airports starting financial year 2021-22.



Nisha Verma

Pradeep Singh Kharola, Secretary, MoCA, has shared that the government is planning to privatise another six to 10 airports starting April, and will be clubbing profitable and non-profitable airports during the sale process. "AAI is examining giving non-profitable airports and profit-making airports as a package. We can see six to 10 airports being taken up. The airports will be given to the private sector for 50 years," he said. On being asked about working towards restarting the tourist visa, Kharola said, "MoCA is in talks with various others ministries for restarting the tourist visa."

Air India update

Speaking on the divestment of



Pradeep Singh Kharola
Secretary, MoCA

Air India, the MoCA Secretary said that the transaction advisors are in the process of scrutinising the expressions of interest. "The transaction adviser has received the expression of interest from bidders. The advisor will now seek financial bids from qualified bidders," he informed.

Fare bands to discontinue soon

Amongst the many decisions that the government had taken when

restarting domestic operations in May was the introduction of fare bands, which, in November, was extended till February 24. However, Kharola added that it won't be permanent and the government would do away with fare bands once normal operations resume. "Fare bands

The airports will be given to the private sector for 50 years

are not going to be permanent. As soon as normal operations start, fare bands will go away," he said.

IATA is offering an online training course to help laid-off airline cabin crew members re-enter the job market. This course will be offered free of charge for those who register between February 9 and 23, 2021.

TAAI UP to mentor students



The Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) is doing its bit to encourage the youth to join the industry. TAAI's UP Chapter recently signed an MoU with the Department of Business Management, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia Avadh University in Ayodhya, to offer training, placements and even internship to students of MBA in Tourism Management.

Bollywood goes to Kashmir



Raja Rani Travels curated and organised a familiarisation tour of Kashmir for stakeholders of the film industry from Film Producers Guild, Rohit Shetty Films, Ajay Devgn Films, Sanjay Dutt Productions, Excel, Endemol, Zee Studios, Rajkumar Hirani Productions and Emmay, as well as Bharat Dabholkar, Sanjeev Kapoor and Nitin Kulkarni.

Assam undertakes agent engagement

Assam Tourism, with the help of trade associations, recently conducted a workshop as well as a familiarisation tour for travel agents to inform them about new experiences and destinations in Assam. Around 14 travel agents participated in the tour. The Chief Guest of the workshop was **Deba Kumar Misra**, MD, Assam Tourism Development Corporation.



Hazel Jain

A workshop on community tourism and green protocols was held at the Shikdamakha Village of Umswai Valley in January 2021 by the Root Bridge Foundation in association with Assam Tourism.

The Umswai Valley, which is being promoted as a new tourism product in Assam, comprises many small villages and is inhabited by the Hill Tiwa tribes. This workshop was held under the Swacchata Action Plan in Shikdamakha, which has been recognised as the cleanest village of Assam. Also present at the event was Lunsing Teron, Executive Member, Tourism I/C, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC).

The Chief Guest of the workshop was **Deba Kumar Misra**,



Arijit Purkayastha
Chapter Chairman for North East ADTOI

Managing Director, Assam Tourism Development Corporation and Director, Directorate of Tourism, Assam Tourism. The Umswai Valley Tourism logo was also released during the inauguration.

The day-long workshop was divided into two sessions with **Arijit Purkayastha**, Chapter Chairman for North East, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI), who said, "It is easy to develop

a successful rural tourism destination while ensuring rural livelihood and we must strive towards creating this in the region."

Shapna Medhi, Asst. Professor, Department of Tourism and Travel Management (B.Voc), Sonapur College, was also part of the session and spoke on the dos and don'ts of intercultural sensitivity in a rural tourist

It is easy to develop a rural tourism destination while ensuring rural livelihood
- Arijit Purkayastha



Hemanta Das
President NEITOA

destination. The workshop was attended by the enthusiastic villagers of Shikdamakha and the neighbouring cluster of villages. The villagers also got to interact with the resource persons regarding the problems and prospects of tourism in the village.

Fam tour to Dikchak

Destination Dikchak is an initiative that was conceived with the objective of introducing community-

Dikchak can be an excellent stop for tourists to Guwahati from Kaziranga or even day excursions
- Hemanta Das

based tourism (CBT) in Dikchak, an adopted village of Sonapur College in Assam.

A familiarisation tour was organised for the government as well as private tourism stakeholders of the state to highlight the potential of CBT in the village and the surrounding areas. The project, conceived

by the Department of Tourism of Travel Management (B.Voc), Sonapur College, received extensive support from Indiatourism North East and the North East India Tour Operator Association (NEITO) headed by **Hemanta Das**, its President. Das explains, "Based on eco-tourism principles, special care was taken to conduct the traditional activities in broad daylight to avoid using sound or light systems. The tour provided an opportunity to women to earn and motivated youngsters to revive traditional sports. The village can be an excellent stop for tourists on the way to Guwahati from Kaziranga or even for day excursions."

The occasion was inaugurated by Deba Kumar Mishra. Also present were members of NEITO, ADTOI and Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA).

Government of India



**Ministry of Commerce
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'We are moving from fear to caution'

Thomas Cook India conducted its first MICE roadshow in Mumbai recently, no doubt prompted by their corporate clients' desire to return to normalcy, and having already conducted a few MICE events. While virtual events may still be popular, it will, corporates say, will complement physical MICE events in the months to come.



Hazel Jain

Un a bold initiative, Thomas Cook India conducted a roadshow dedicated to MICE for its corporate clients at the Renaissance Mumbai Convention Centre Hotel. **Madhavan Menon**, CMD, Thomas Cook India, said,



Madhavan Menon
CMD, Thomas Cook India

discussion, a motivational session by actor Ashish Vidyarthi and table-top meetings.

Sharing the intention behind this event, **Rajeev Kale**, President & Country Head – Holidays, MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India), said, "The MICE business requires a human element and so we decided to organise this in order to engage our partners. We had corporate clients from the western region – Pune, Ahmedabad and, of course, Mumbai."



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

"We have reached an inflection point where we are able to move from fear to caution." The event included a panel

What corporates say



Dr Satish Wagh
CMD, Supriya Lifesciences

"Corporates do want to come back to normal and restart MICE trips. While we don't have anything on the cards as of now, we will plan something soon. Every year, I would make at least 70 international trips for business. But, 2020 was the first year when I didn't travel anywhere. I am eager that I now start travelling for business and attending MICE events in India and abroad."

"With the doctor community coming together, we will soon look at conducting small off-site meetings or conferences with them of around 30-40 individuals. It is a slow process, but people are now ready to connect face to face. But, virtual is here to stay and will complement physical events. So by the end of this year, things will likely come back to normal in terms of MICE travel."



Nitin Khanna
Head (Retail Businesses & Marketing), ICICI Lombard

"We have not initiated full-fledged MICE events yet, but we have done small local events in Mumbai. But, generally, events start from the summer every year around May-June and we are definitely looking forward to conducting a few MICE events this summer. Last year was a wash-out but this year we will start slow with caution. Each state tourism board is doing a lot to promote itself."



Nikhil Chopra
CEO, JB Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals

"The MICE options available in India are great and at the end of the day, the experience offered rather than the destination counts more. But, we are ready to conduct MICE – no one is going to come and tell us, okay – now it is safe to do events. There is no 'one day' which will make it safe for MICE; it is a slow process and it is us who will have to decide whether we want to restart MICE or not."



Navin Tewari
MD & CEO, Capital Foods

Agents get a taste of Madhya Pradesh

Indiatourism has been aggressively engaging travel agents during the pandemic and has now upped its game by conducting physical events and familiarisation tours, this time with Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board. Besides MP, tour operators from Gujarat, Maharashtra and Manipur were invited for the event and tour.



Hazel Jain

Under its 'Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat' initiative, Indiatourism Mumbai office recently conducted a roadshow in Indore in association with the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board (MPTB). Present at the roadshow was Sonia Meena, Deputy Secretary and Additional Managing Director, MPTB. The occasion was also graced by Yogendra Tripathi, former Secretary, Ministry of Tourism.

Tour operators and travel agents from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Manipur and Madhya Pradesh were part of this roadshow that was followed by a three-day familiarisation tour to Mandu and Maheshwar in MP along with a city tour of Indore, sponsored by MPTB. More than 20 agents

were a part of these familiarisation tours. The new regional airline, Flybig, was also part of this and had sponsored the tickets for Ahmedabad-Indore-Ahmedabad for around 10 travel



Sheo Shekhar Shukla
Principal Secretary of Tourism in Madhya Pradesh and Managing Director, MPTB

agents. Mandu and Maheshwar are among the key focus areas for the tourism board. It had recently announced the second edition of its popular Mandu

Festival for February 13 and 14, 2021. In a celebration to bring the focus back on this quaint fort city – Mandu, MPTB has been highlighting this destination and promoting it among travel agents as well as on social media.

Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary of Tourism in Madhya Pradesh and Managing Director, MPTB, said during a virtual roadshow, "Moving a step ahead from the mindful tourism we offered, we have become a



heartfelt tourist destination. We have witnessed high footfall within a period of one month and

have had an estimated 2.25 lakh visitors between December 15, 2020 and January 15 this year.



We witnessed high footfall within one month and had an estimated 2.25 lakh visitors between Dec and Jan

It was 1.5 lakh in the same time period in 2019. It is an optimistic sign and people are travelling to unravel."

Highlighting new points of interest, Shukla said the tourism board strives to establish a strong emphasis on rural tourism and economic activities in the state's small pockets.

A win-win for all in the travel trade

► Contd from page 3

“Right from big and small hotels, tour operators, transport operators and guides to airlines, everybody is part of the same ecosystem, and even one amongst these not working would affect every other element,” says Modi.

For Shekhawat, it started with a phone call he received on his visit to Jaipur from a travel fraternity member in Jaisalmer, telling him about the flights being stopped from January 28. “I reached out to the Rajasthan Governor and presented the case to him. It happened



Manvendra Singh Shekhawat
MD, Suryagarh and
Founder, I Love Jaisalmer

because SpiceJet was bearing losses and the flights were not successful. Hence, we thought, since everyone benefitted from

Our travel agents have been asked to start making packages for Jaisalmer, and we will be promoting it

– Ritika Modi

the flights, why not share the losses of SpiceJet, which will give them greater confidence of operating the flight. I wrote to every stakeholder possible, suggesting this plan, and that if we did a few things, this plan could work.” It was then that he called Modi. “I asked her to connect me with someone in SpiceJet’s senior management, and she introduced me to Shilpa Bhatia,” adds Shekhawat.

Modi shares, “We had a Zoom meeting with her and we explained how their losses can be compensated by the travel and

It is the first-of-its-kind partnership where citizens are underwriting potential losses of an airline

– Manvendra Singh Shekhawat

hospitality professionals who pooled in together.”

Shekhawat explains, “I asked them about their losses and they gave me a number. We proposed to reduce the frequency of flights and start the flights so that we have maximum load factors. Then, we carefully observed the data of how the airline was performing in December till January 24. Then we drafted a letter to be sent to District Collectors and other members of the tourism industry. This way, everyone in the fraternity came on a platform and we all said that if the airline would make a revised schedule, we will underwrite the losses.”

Within two days, they met with the SpiceJet team and negotiated a deal. “We contributed money to a common pool of funds under the District Administration, funded the bank guarantees, and got the flights reinstated. Now, the flights have started from February 12,” Shekhawat says. “We created videos to share with the travel fraternity, asking them to support us by sending tourists to Jaisalmer. It is the first-of-its-kind citizen-airline partnership where citizens are underwriting

Airline-Citizen Partnership, Jaisalmer	
Date	Sequence of Events
January 26	Meeting held with District Administration, SpiceJet (on call), Jaisalmer tourism stakeholders to discuss challenges faced by SpiceJet. I Love Jaisalmer suggests plan of action to stakeholders
January 27	Second round of meeting held with District Administration, Jaisalmer tourism stakeholders. House decides to pool resources to meet airline viability loss on Jaisalmer route; run initiative as pilot project for a month; decide flight routes and frequency; tourism fraternity to set up mechanisms and platforms to boost ticket sale
January 28	SpiceJet discontinues Jaisalmer flight operations
January 29-30	President, I Love Jaisalmer, meets SpiceJet management in Delhi to finalise details in MoU for operations
February 2-3	Second round of meetings with SpiceJet management in New Delhi
February 4	Jaisalmer Vikas Samiti, under chairmanship of District Collector, signs MoU with SpiceJet
February 4 & ongoing	I Love Jaisalmer releases documentaries sensitising travel agents, people of Jaisalmer for maximum cooperation I Love Jaisalmer volunteers for city cleanliness drives. Jaisalmer prepares to welcome tourists in clean city
February 5	SpiceJet resumes flight bookings to Jaisalmer
February 5 & ongoing	City sets pace to organise Desert Festival cancelled earlier and Holi; plan to make Jaisalmer 365-day tourist destination along with night tourism
February 12	Flight operations to Jaisalmer resume

the potential losses of an airline in order to encourage the airline to continue operations,” he says. Modi adds, “All our UNIGLOBE

travel agents have been asked to start making packages for Jaisalmer, and we will be promoting it.”

‘Paddle to Preserve’



Muziris Paddle flagged off the fourth edition of its two-day kayaking expedition jointly organised by Kerala Tourism, Muziris Heritage Project and Jellyfish Watersports. Held on February 12 and 13, this year’s edition followed the paddling route from Muziris to Kochi, and the kayakers covered an overall distance of 40 km.

More mobile testing in Mumbai



After operating multiple COVID-19 mobile testing laboratories in Delhi and Haryana, and conducting more than 750,000 RT-PCR tests, SpiceHealth, in association with Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM), has launched three mobile testing laboratories in Mumbai at BKC, National Sports Club of India (Worli) and NESCO (Goregaon).

India is ideal for medical tourists

► Contd from page 3

compliance to international quality standards, doctors trained in western countries including the United States and the United Kingdom, and English-speaking personnel that is seen as a great attraction. Medical treatments provided by the skilled doctors here has made India the hub of medical tourism, taking nearly 18 per cent of the global market. Because of this great confidence internationally about India, the demand would surely sustain and the traffic would begin after the restrictions of the pandemic are eased. Once international connectivity resumes and people show their willingness to travel, India would have a great future in medical tourism. Many European countries, Arab countries, SAARC countries, South Asian countries, have been taking medical treatment from here. In many developed countries, a

especially after the invention, distribution and trust created by the pharma companies and hospitals, as well as frontline staff that is on a par with other international companies in the developed world. The time taken to invent the COVID vaccines is highly appreciated with the existing science and technology available in India."



Ranga Reddy
Chairman - Telangana & AP state Chapters, IATO

India has always been a hub for medical tourism, claims **Debjit Dutta**, Chairman- West Bengal Chapter, IATO & ADTOI. "The country offers state-of-the-art medical facilities for neighbouring countries. Hence, for the promotion of regional



Debjit Dutta
Chairman- West Bengal Chapter IATO & ADTOI

adding that eastern India can offer great opportunity for medical tourism for neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh, from where many people come for treatment to Kolkata, which is booming with super-specialty hospitals.

quine to many countries, including the developed nations like USA, to facilitate development of doses for protection from COVID-19," claims **Manmeet Singh**,



Manmeet Singh
Chairman - Punjab Chapter, IATO and Chairman - Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh and Northern India, ADTOI

Chairman - Punjab Chapter, IATO and Chairman - Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh and Northern India, ADTOI.

Reddy agrees that India does have many advantages. "These include daily cost of travel within India, stays available for attendants close to treatment cen-

Facilities must be provided pan India

"Medical tourism can be best promoted in a big way only if the government supports it and creates the right environment and infrastructure for medical tourism in conjunction with the private sector. Thereafter, specialised tour operators can promote the packages in the international market. Some states like Kerala are already doing well and reaping the advantages as well as providing the much-needed services not only to Indians but to the world. We need to step up and provide facilities on a pan-India basis."

— Manmeet Singh

Commission International (JCI) & 619 hospitals have been accredited by National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH). Other things that work for India is lower mortality rate post-surgery. Alternative choice of Ayurveda, allopathic, Yunani (Greek), homeopathy, Yoga, Siddha, naturopathy and bariatric surgeries are available in the country. India has healthy international relations with other developing countries and there is a strong reputation of Indian hospitality abroad," he lists.

Sharing that tour operators have started putting together 'Medical Tour India' packages, Reddy adds, "This allows them to combine a sight-seeing tour with medical treatment. India specialises in surgeries such as joint replacement (knee and/or hip), cardiac surgery, dental surgery and cosmetic surgery-

cal tourism can be promoted to a small extent only. Speaking from a state perspective, Kerala and some other cities are good for medical, health and wellness tourism. Post-COVID, it will have great scope," he asserts.

Dutta claims that the sector has never been properly explored. "Majority of tourism industry stakeholders are not aware of the opportunities and potential in this segment. There is a very small number of Ministry of Tourism-approved tour operators in the medical tourism segment. Only about two per cent of tour operators are in this segment, primarily because of lack of awareness and because they don't understand the potential of this segment. Hence, understanding of this segment is required by the people who are working in the tourism industry. This is the

Once int'l connectivity resumes and people show their willingness to travel, India would have a great future in medical tourism

— EM Najeeb

The success and skill of Indian doctors and medical staff is well-known overseas, as is their professionalism

— Ranga Reddy

If the medical tourism industry and hospitals understand each other, we can generate more traffic and revenue

— Debjit Dutta

Kerala and some other cities are good for medical, health and wellness tourism. It has great scope

— Manmeet Singh

"Apart from neighbouring countries, people are coming here from the Northeastern states as well as Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh for treatment," he shares.

Advantage India

"India has a positive impression worldwide in terms of overall medical conditions and services. India is known for handling the crisis well and has brought out the vaccination for COVID quite early. The country had previously supplied Hydroxychloro-

res, low treatment-cost advantage, as well as post-treatment recovering environment. There are effective specialised treatments, shorter connectivity to metro cities, as well as the availability of medical and leisure at one place. Nearly 38 hospitals have got accredited by Joint

More pockets must be developed

"Wellness pockets can be developed across the country, as currently they are condensed mostly in the southern part of India. Destinations like the Sunderbans can work as wonderful wellness destinations."

— Debjit Dutta

good treatment requires a long period of waiting for surgeries and the cost is high, too. We have no such waiting in India," he shares.

Echoing Najeeb's opinion is **Ranga Reddy**, Chairman - Telangana & AP state Chapters, IATO, who says, "India is going to witness the glory of medical tourism in the coming years,

medical tourism, there are huge prospects. Both for medical and wellness tourism, India is famous worldwide," he says,

Tour operators must ensure global reach

"They should tie up with good hospitals offering medical tourism services and study their treatment packages well and get into a good tie-up with them. Once the health packages are ready with them, they can start marketing them in potential markets through the operators in those countries who arrange and sell the packages to the ones who need the service. The tour operators can also reach the product to all concerned through brochures, websites, product portals, and through selective and focused digital channels. They should enlighten the market about the competitiveness of the medical facilities in the country and other advantages. Tour operators should ensure global reach for the product they have in hand through social media and digital technology."

—EM Najeeb

Packages must be competitive

"Competitive medical and leisure package pricing should be done and more informative brochures with medical specialisation hospitals should be made. There is a need to create more trust for patients and health-care providers. Also, there is a need to create more medical package tours. There should be annual medical destination conferences in different locations in India. The trade needs to work closely with airlines and hotels for discounts for medical visa holders, handle more effectively the entire process of pre and post-care treatments, transferring of medical records, handling travel arrangements, personal manager or a translator in some cases, or even scheduling tours in the destination country. They need to facilitate the dissemination of information, coordinate with hotels, guest houses."

—Ranga Reddy

ies, individuals with rare genetic disorders followed by dental, cancer surgery, diagnosis for obesity and IVF treatment. Rejuvenation therapies are also popular. The success and skill of Indian doctors and medical staff is well-known overseas as is their professionalism and compassion. Other advantages are the emergence of a corporate health sector, cheap international airfares and good connections, as well as a sub-continental weather."

Concerns

Singh believes that medical tourism is a segment of tourism that can be pursued on a large scale in a proper manner only if the required infrastructure is built at a national level. "Otherwise, at a small scale or individual unit level, medi-

primary bottleneck. If the medical tourism industry and hospitals understand each other, we can generate more traffic and revenue to the country and the state. In fact, even Siliguri, because of its strategic location as a gateway to the Himalayas and its proximity to Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh, can be developed as a medical and wellness tourism destination," he says.

Another issue, according to him, is that this segment is not structured. "Hence, I think, considering the opportunity that we have in eastern India, there should be wellness and medical facilities that are streamlined and structured. Hence, focused events and workshops need to be organised," he points out.

Save Tourism, says Gujarat

As part of a pan India peaceful protest campaign, members of Tourism Leaders Club and other stakeholders raised slogans of 'Tourism Lives Matter - Save Indian Tourism' at various destinations in Gujarat. Held on February 5, the campaign aimed to showcase the state of the tourism sector and how lack of attention from the government was ruining the livelihood of its people.



Riding on the Kevadia wave

With a popular tourist attraction just minutes away from it, Tent City 1 is basking in the glory of the buzz created by the Statue of Unity close by. **Bhavik Sheth**, Finance & Operations Manager, Lallooji & Sons, that manages the luxury tents, discusses their plans.



Hazel Jain

What is the kind of occupancy you are seeing since Gujarat re-opened borders?

As the borders have opened up and there are no requirements for COVID-negative tests on entering the state, the occupancy is improving. The efforts of Gujarat Tourism to promote destinations in the state and encouraging people of Gujarat to travel within the state for stay-cations are also commendable.



Bhavik Sheth
Finance & Operations Manager
Lallooji & Sons

Our occupancy has improved since January 2021 and a majority of our guests are

residents of Gujarat itself. In view of the COVID-19 situation, adequate measures have also been put in place at Tent City to protect guests from the coronavirus.

Your distribution channel?

We are promoting through OTAs as well as travel agents for the distribution of the property. We have a travel

agent base of more than 10,000. We send them regular emails, conduct Zoom meetings to promote our properties, call them on regular intervals, provide all the assistance with respect to content creation and promotion, give them a credit period so they can rotate the money, and even offer convenience to cancel or modify date in case of a guest emergency.

How many nights do visitors usually stay?

Usually, guests stay for three nights. We have recently launched a three-night package and it is getting good response. Tourists can make this destination a multiple-day stay with many attractions open-



ing up nearby. We are the only property in the entire vicinity providing single-window clearance with respect to food, accommodation, sightseeing (including tickets), and transportation with local guide. There are many attractions in the entire Kevadia region. It is almost impossible to cover it within two days.

Do you plan to expand?

Apart from Kevadia we have our presence in Rann of Kutch with 350 tents and Odisha with four locations having approximately 50 tents each. In Odisha, we are operating the eco-retreat tent city at Konark, Daringbadi, Satkosia and Hirakud. We are also seeing expansion opportunities in other states.

Occupancy has improved since Jan 2021 and majority of our guests are residents of Gujarat



Like the new UK and South Africa strains, we can expect a string of new strains popping up around the world. This will definitely mean last-minute travel restrictions and closure of certain routes with immediate effect, causing chaos once again.

Summer itineraries to be 15 days

The ever-optimistic **Jay Bhatia**, Director of Tulsidas Khimji Holidays, is upbeat about the approaching summer months and he foresees an increase in domestic travel with itineraries of around 15-18 days. He says that it is expected that from mid-February, there will be 15-20 per cent growth compared to the last few months.

As lockdown across the country was being lifted, we expected normalcy to commence from end of December, but this was deferred due to the restrictions and concerns of the new UK strand. The extension in lockdown is until January 31, 2021 as well as the mandate to do RT-PCR testing for travellers arriving from many states to Maharashtra has changed the sentiments of travellers.

Now, since the vaccination drive has commenced, it is expected that from mid-February we shall see 15-20 per cent growth as compared to the last few months. Until vaccination is not completed in India, which shall take at least eight to 10 months, pre-COVID business is not in sight. Destinations such as Rann of Kutch in Gujarat are one of the popular

seasonal winter destinations and we have done a couple of bookings for the sector. Kashmir, especially Gulmarg,

With the Caravan Tourism Policy being set, we are hopeful travellers will want to experiment this new concept

Pahalgam and Srinagar have been witnessing high volumes, and months from December 2020 to mid-March 2021 are expected to see a boom with hotels being sold out complete-

ly. Skiing is the favourite developing winter sport in India and many are developing their skills.

National parks are popular

Further, local driveable destinations of about three to four hours have also gained momentum, since many prefer to stay in private or rented villas. Goa is evergreen and is now seeing traffic from across the country, too. Additionally, destinations like Udaipur, Jodhpur, Kabini, Pench, Tadoba, Ranthambore, Rishikesh and Puducherry have been on the action scene. Travellers are now preferring to travel into regions which are more open, landscaped with natural beauty and with a bit of adventure.

We have seen more travellers venturing with family and friends in groups of around 10-12 persons, including kids. The age group of 60 years and



above is not yet venturing out beyond a few hours' drivable destinations. These travellers, which constitute around 60-65 per cent, prefer to book resorts or individual villas which have all facilities. Others are frequenting luxury hotels, which are following appropriate safety protocols. Corporate movements are not yet seen beyond a night or

two. Most are visits to factories in other locations or for an utmost emergency trip only.

As the summer months approach, we are seeing trends in queries for domestic travel increase until international sectors open up completely. Ideally, summer itineraries expected this year shall be

around 15-18 days, to destinations in the Northeast, Kullu, Manali, Shimla, Coorg, Ooty, Kerala and Munnar. Many flights connecting to Odisha have commenced, so we are sure of a tilt towards developing tourism there. With the new Caravan Tourism Policy being set in, we are hopeful that many mature travellers will want to experiment this new holiday concept.



Jay Bhatia
Director, Tulsidas Khimji Holidays

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

Inbound future bleak up to 2022

Ravi Gosain, Managing Director, Erco Travel and Honorary Treasurer, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), believes that inbound tourism to India might not start fully before next year. He also foresees an extreme change in how the business of travel and tourism is conducted going forward.

The COVID-19 vaccination gave us some hope for revival of the tourism and hospitality industry not only in India but across the world. It's been almost a year that we have been out of business ideas, because this pandemic severely affected our positive and creative thoughts. However, moving forward, we all know that tourism will restart probably in the third quarter of 2021. Hence, we must regain all our energies and experiences, and put them in a direction to rebuild our businesses. Tourism revival will be a gruesome task for many of us, because we don't know yet how many of our clients will survive or remain in tourism. A thorough, channelised planning is required and I suggest that our fellow colleagues plan their steps carefully.

I have no doubt that in 2022, we will have surge in tourism

activities and those who are ready will be the winners. Although the industry will take its own course for revival, industry associations along with

It's hard for an individual to come up after remaining out of work for a year. Hand holding is needed

Ministry of Tourism, Government of India do play an important role to uplift and facilitate tourism activities. We require clear guidelines for border opening, the visa application process, and resumption of international



flights sooner to facilitate industry players to plan their business activities accordingly.

Most of the industry associations like IATO, TAAI, FHRAI and CII were chasing the government for a survival package but, unfortunately, no relief came from the exchequer. In my view, associations should keep on knocking on government doors. However, they must also work

on a plan-B and come up with some guidelines or a thoughtful action project to help colleagues in the tourism business. It's hard for an individual to come up again after remaining out of work for a year. Hence, hand holding, motivation and skill development are the needs of the hour. I am sure leaders at the helm are thinking in this direction and will take cognisance on this matter.

Additionally, I am not against virtual conferences, but more physical interaction and seminars are required in the coming days to regain confidence. Also, more patience and courage are required to win this battle against the COVID-19 pandemic, and a good thing is that we are already through most of the 'bad phase'.

Going further, business in the future won't be the same as

what it was in the past. We all must gear up and accept the reality with lots of new SOPs in place for various segments of tourism and hospitality. Our employees need to be trained and get accustomed to a new way of doing business, which will be required to carry forward our businesses. We also need to understand the changed requirements of our customers. I think that the next one year will be the toughest to realise and operate.



Ravi Gosain
Managing Director, Erco Travel and
Honorary Treasurer, IATO

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

Abu Dhabi aims to be 100% 'Safe'

An initiative spearheaded by Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi), the Go Safe certification programme is continuing to be rolled out across the emirate as DCT Abu Dhabi works towards its target of standardising health and safety measures across all retail, tourism and commercial establishments in Abu Dhabi.



The initiative has brought together the Abu Dhabi Department of Economic Development (ADDED), the Department of Municipalities and Transport (DMT), Aldar Properties, Modon Properties (Modon), Yas Theme Parks and attractions, as well as Etihad Airways in a joint partnership created to combat the spread of COVID-19 and keep the local economy moving by reassuring visitors and residents they are safe to visit any establishment because of the stringent safety protocols in place.

The partnership paves the way for the capital to become 100 per cent Go Safe-certified as further establishments, managed by participating partners, become part of the certification's expanded implementation



plan. Following clear and rigorous guidelines, the partners will now play a key role in ensuring their respective establishments complete all the checkpoints and implement measures required to attain the certificate.



Since its launch in June 2020, and in collaboration with key authorities, DCT Abu Dhabi has certified 95 per cent of hotels, as well as Yas Marina Circuit, four theme parks on Yas Island, 33

malls across the capital and two cinemas, after conducting rigorous on-site inspections.

The first step of the programme is guided self-assessments that establishments undergo as per guidelines and checklists provided by DCT Abu Dhabi, followed by thorough site inspections conducted by dedicated teams to ensure compliance to the highest standards of cleanliness. Those who meet the requirements are awarded the Go Safe certificate. With more establishments presently undergoing the assessment process, DCT Abu Dhabi aims to ensure the entire UAE capital is Go Safe-certified.

"DCT Abu Dhabi's Go Safe campaign has underpinned Abu Dhabi's efforts to safely reopen its attractions for domestic and international visitors. As we enter 2021, maintaining these high standards of safety and hygiene remains our top priority for protecting public health while empowering the economic contribution of our partners in the



hospitality and entertainment sectors," says **HE Ali Hassan Al Shaiba**, Executive Director of Tourism and Marketing, DCT Abu Dhabi. "With even more partners signed up to this rigorous certification programme, we look forward to implementing Go Safe effectively across the capital, to achieve our goal of a completely Go Safe destination," he further says. Following stringent guidelines based on recommended practices from World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Go Safe

ensures a safe environment for both residents and visitors. In addition to inspections, regular COVID-19 testing for staff across the tourism and retail sector has been made mandatory. The Go Safe certification initiative aligns with ADDED's efforts to boost economic activities in the emirate despite the spread of COVID-19 by utilising key measures that ensure and raise the level of safety while conducting business and strengthening the confidence of customers and visitors in all commercial areas in Abu Dhabi.

Maintaining high standards of safety and hygiene remains our priority for protecting public health

Delhi-Jaisalmer flight resumes

Through the united efforts of the travel trade and hoteliers of Jaisalmer, SpiceJet's Delhi-Jaisalmer flight was reinstated soon after its cancellation and a new lease of life was given to tourism in the desert city. Sharing their joy, the trade suggests that such partnerships can bear fruit in other destinations of the country as well.



Sharing details on how the series of events unfolded in Jaisalmer, **Mahendra Singh Rathore**, Senior Vice President, RATO and Chapter Chairman - Rajasthan, ADTOI, says, "The travel trade in Jaisalmer united and formulated a memorandum. The same was submitted to the District Magistrate and the state tourism department. Connectivity has been an issue in Jaisalmer with limited flights and trains operational from Delhi, so the tourism stakeholders in the region were not in favour of closure the SpiceJet flight. Although inbound tourists are absent right now, domestic travellers are handsomely favouring the destination and 70 per cent of hotels here are getting good numbers of tourists. If the flights stop,



Mahendra Singh Rathore
Senior Vice President, RATO and
Chapter Chairman - Rajasthan, ADTOI

the number of tourists will go down and the stakeholders who are solely dependent on tourism activities for their livelihood will suffer the most as they have been heavily impacted with no business since the last 10 months. I am happy that the government and SpiceJet authorities understood our condition and agreed to resume the flight." When asked about the trade bravely agreeing on sharing losses if

the minimum loadfactor is not met, Rathore says that it was an obvious decision since the trade was sure the routes will get traffic. "If the flights run regularly and we try our best to bring in tourists to Jaisalmer, business will increase. We are even estimating that the airline will earn more profits with this unique partnership. I

The govt and SpiceJet understood our condition and agreed to resume the flight

— Mahendra Singh Rathore



Kartik Gagar
CEO & Founder
Rajasthan Studio

would urge other destinations and the travel trade around the country to unite and work out similar plans with airlines to strengthen relationships. This will definitely lead to more business. The trade promoted the destination and packages on all its communication platforms, including social media, which showed results. This is a win-win situation for everyone. I want to thank the Rajasthan government and the

This is a great example of working together in times when domestic travel is the only source of business

— Kartik Gagar

state tourism department, who supported us," he adds.

Connectivity key to revival
Sharing his view, **Kartik Gagar**, CEO & Founder, Rajasthan Studio, says, "We really needed this flight into Jaisalmer, which offers something unique to tourists – the sand dunes. It is also a very

popular wedding destination. This flight saves a lot of time for tourists because Jodhpur to Jaisalmer is around 300 kms and Bikaner to Jaisalmer is 330 kms, which means 5-6 hours with a halt. So, the travel community getting together and bringing this flight back is a great example of working together in these times when domestic travel is the only source of business. There are many other pockets like Jaisalmer that require direct flights such as the tourist belt of Ajmer-Pushkar-Kishangadh or even Agra for that matter. I would say Jaisalmer would benefit even more with a flight from Ahmedabad, Mumbai and Kolkata. If there are no flights, no one will benefit. Only when a tourist visits can the hotels, the tourist guides, the travel agents get business."

EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



FEBRUARY 2021

Date	Event	Time
17	TOFTigers Webinar- Designing wildlife trips	03:30 pm
17	Saudi Tourism Authority webinar	04:00 pm
18	Tourism New Zealand Webinar	11:00 am
18-20	India Tourism Mart (ITM) 2021 Virtual	TBA
18-20	TTF	Chennai
25	CAPA India Webinar	04:00 pm
25-27	Travel Turkey Izmir (Digital)	TBA
26-28	TTF	Kolkata

MARCH 2021

1-2	Belgium Travel Expo	Belgium
1-5	Kerala Travel Mart (KTM) Virtual	TBA
2-3	Saudi Tourism Authority Roadshow	TBA
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
6-7	LA Travel & Adventure Show	Los Angeles
9-12	ITB	Berlin
10	JTB Corporate MICE Show	TBA

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

IATO members ready for business

The Uttar Pradesh and Bihar chapters of IATO organised a 'Getting Tourism Ready' event at Hotel Taj Ganges, Varanasi, on January 21, to bring all stakeholders together on a common platform and iron out all wrinkles.



Hazel Jain

Chaired by Prateek Hira, IATO's Chapter Chairman for UP and Uttarakhand, and Susheel Kumar Singh, its Chapter Chairman for Bihar, the meeting was attended by 35 tour companies apart from IATO



members. The event was supported by Ministry of Tourism (MOT) and Amit Gupta, Assistant Director, Indiatourism, who informed the industry about the new marketing initiatives and support schemes that are now being extended for domestic



roadshows. Gupta also shared that Indiatourism Varanasi will be organising roadshows in Bengaluru and Hyderabad along with IATO, and will then extend them to other cities in India.

Speaking at the event, Hira said that it was time all travel trade associations brought their members together and geared up for tourism that is expected to commence soon. "Be 'tourism ready' so that when tourists start coming in, we are not caught unaware and are prepared to welcome

them and show them a better India," he said, adding that MOT is leaving no stone unturned and has been really active even during the lockdown through its outreach programme 'Dekho Apna Desh'.

Hira, who coined the term 'Getting Tourism Ready', said that being without business is no excuse to be lethargic, rather an opportunity to better equip oneself with knowledge, plan business, re-establish, re-focus and expand business horizons

to enhance revenue when tourism returns. Governments, too, need to be in this 'ready' mode and work for betterment of the destinations and the industry, he believes. Addressing attendees, Singh spoke about the importance of Buddhist tourism and was of the opinion that this might open up sooner than other markets. He emphasised how the state government in Uttar Pradesh should be more forthcoming to handhold tour operators, especially after the worst time that the travel industry has experienced.

To this, Hira added that a similar outreach is being planned in UP and a White Paper will be prepared on issues plaguing the industry. A meeting with the Principal Secretary will then be planned. "It is important to give government departments solutions and work along with them, than to just give them a list of problems," Hira said.

'We are merely surviving'

Despite Goa receiving one of the highest number of visitors from across the country, the state's travel trade is merely surviving as these are low-spending, short-stay tourists. TTAG (Travel & Tourism Association of Goa) has requested its government to share the Rs300 crore budget it has received from the Centre for its independence celebrations.



TT Bureau

The state of Goa has been receiving good domestic tourist footfalls since December 2020 with Christmas and New Year holidays, says Nilesh Shah, President of TTAG (Travel & Tourism Association of Goa). Unfortunately, the chartered flights have not yet started into Goa due to restrictions. "As a result, more than 2,500 smaller hotels out of the total official figure of 4,100 hotels registered in Goa have not started yet," he says. How-

ever, Goa is expected to witness yet another packed weekend with its annual festival Carnival kicking off in the second week of February.

But Shah says that overall business is still bad. "It is a matter of survival for us right now and we are somehow able to manage because of the domestic traffic and the fact that we don't have mandatory quarantine or negative certificate requirement for domestic tourists anymore. This was the biggest plus for



Nilesh Shah
President, TTAG (Travel & Tourism Association of Goa)

us. But, the smaller hotels and travel agents continue to suffer until foreign tourists start coming in because they are long-staying tourists who stay for 15-21 days," Shah says.

He adds that Goa's tourism industry has not received any sort of relief from its government. "There is nothing for us in the Budget also. The Goa government has received Rs300 crore special package from the Centre for celebration of 60 years of

independence from Portuguese rule. We hope that 50 per cent of this money is allocated to tourism. Every time we ask our government for any relief, it has the best answer—we don't have funds! But unless the tourism industry in Goa survives, the state will have a tough time," Shah warns.

The good news is that the number of flights to Goa is increasing with "more than 65-70 domestic flights a day," Shah says, adding that some of these flights are from new sectors like Lucknow, Chandigarh and Jaipur.

More industry representation

Shah's association has been requesting for a meeting with the Goa CM since two months to discuss various issues. However, he says, this has not happened yet. "We want more representation from Goa's tourism industry in government tourism bodies. We have asked

for some structural changes which hopefully will be heeded. We have already had one round of discussion with the Tourism Secretary on this and shared our suggestions on how the industry can have a good platform to be heard. The industry should have

We hope that 50 per cent of this money is allocated to tourism

TTAG has also suggested forming of a 16-member committee with participation of different stakeholders from the industry – hotels, transport agents, travel agents, trade associations, etc – which will be under the tourism board. "This will have eight people from the industry and eight from the government, and the industry will choose who will be nominated to represent them. This committee has not been formed yet," Shah adds.

Most airlines will not be able to bring back 100% of their scheduled flights. A lot will depend on vaccine roll-out, on how fast infection rates are dropping, on any new strains and on the public appetite for travel.

Goa finds mention in Union Budget

"2021 is the year of many important milestones for our history. I mention a few of these: It is the 75th year of Independence, 60 years of Goa's accession to India," said FM Nirmala Sitharaman. "Goa is celebrating the diamond jubilee year of its liberation from Portuguese rule. From the government of India's side, I propose a grant of Rs300 crore to the government of Goa for the celebrations," she added. The speech, however, did not offer clarity on when the funds would be disbursed and if they would come for any specific purpose.

a say on how the funds need to be spent on marketing Goa – which markets to tap and how to attract FTAs. We should be consulted on a regular basis on this because we have our ears to the ground," Shah explains.



Great Basin National Park



INDIGO

New Delhi

InterGlobe Aviation (IndiGo) has appointed **Jiten Chopra** as Chief Financial Officer effective February 21, 2021. He succeeds Aditya Pande and will report to Ronojoy Dutta, Whole Time Director and CEO. Chopra joined IndiGo in February 2020 as Head of Governance, Risk and Compliance. Prior to joining IndiGo, he had about 25 years of working experience at BSR & Co (KPMG) in Audit and Risk Management, Business Development, Operations and Transaction Services.



INDIAN HOTELS COMPANY LIMITED

Mumbai

Gaurav Pokhariyal has been appointed as Senior Vice President & Global Head – Human Resources at Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL). He will take over the role from PV Murthy and will join the Executive Committee (ExCom) of IHCL. Pokhariyal brings with him three decades of rich experience in operations and has held a number of critical roles, the most recent being Head of Operations for key markets in the northern region. He is known for his decision-making ability.



Parveen Chander Kumar has been appointed as Senior Vice President – Sales & Marketing at IHCL. He will be taking over this leadership role from industry and IHCL stalwart Renu Basu, and will join the Executive Committee (ExCom) of IHCL. With three decades of expertise in operations, Kumar has successfully led key positions across marquee IHCL hotels, including those in the western region. A formidable executor, his customer-centric focus is one of his key strengths.



SAROVAR HOTELS & RESORTS

New Delhi

Sarovar Hotels and Resorts has announced the appointment of **Aneesh Mohammed** as the new Regional Sales Manager for North. He will be responsible for driving all sales-related actions taken and implemented from the RSO Delhi (Corporate & Travel Trade). Mohammed brings with him a wealth of knowledge and over 13 years of experience in sales. In his last assignment, he worked as Associate Director, Sales, and managed the Gurugram market.



JW MARRIOTT JUHU

Mumbai

Nikita Ramchandani has been appointed as General Manager at JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu. She has previously led the Operations discipline for a 135-hotel Marriott International portfolio as Senior Area Director of Operations. With over 20 years of experience in the industry, Ramchandani's astute business and leadership skills have seen her take strides across her career graph with different challenges and roles across the industry. In her new role, she envisions a stellar roadmap for the hotel's positioning within the hospitality landscape.



SAYAJI HOTELS

Pune

Sayaji Hotels Pune has appointed **Ajay Kanojia** as General Manager. A well-recognised industry veteran, he has 15 years of experience in the luxury and upscale hotel segments. In the new role, he will work to deliver high levels of customer service and successful positioning of the hotel. Kanojia is highly skilled in sales & marketing and is known for his deft approach in revenue analysis, yield management and property management systems, making him a stalwart in the hospitality industry. He has previously worked with brands like Park Plaza, Jay Pee Residency and Lemon Tree Hotels.



This Thai getaway ticks all boxes

As families look to travel together, spaces that offer privacy, convenience, safety & hygiene as well as social distancing are going to be in high demand. Serving this very target audience is the X2 Chiang Mai South Gate Villa by Thailand-based hospitality group Cross Hotels & Resorts.



With more international borders expected to open this year for tourism and people waiting to make the most of this much-awaited development, travel is going to enter a never-seen-before phase. And ensuring the new demands of guests are met is the X2 Chiang Mai South Gate that sits amid lush tropical gardens and features an expansive swimming pool, luxurious living spaces and a fully-equipped kitchen and dining room. It is a six-bedroom luxury villa located directly be-



side the South Gate entrance to the old city of Chiang Mai and its cultural heart. Though as contemporary as all X2 properties, Chiang Mai South Gate Villa has more natural touches. Inspiration for its design comes from the property's abundant tropical gardens and Chiang Mai's historic natural environment. Using hand-crafted timber, polished concrete and local art, the property blends local culture and inspiration with

very height of convenience, allowing guests to enjoy a delectable meal while basking in the luxurious surroundings. With countless activities on offer for guests during their stay, the Sala at the heart of the villa serves as an exquisite entertainment space with all modern amenities.

X2's core design philosophy of soulful tranquillity, freedom and simplicity.

Artfully designed for maximum comfort, the large living and entertainment space at the villa guarantees guests have a delightful and memorable stay. X2 Chiang Mai South Gate Villa offers guests a private chef for an evening barbecue party. The on-site butler and concierge services deliver the



And, should guests wish to take a stroll along old alleys and streets to truly immerse themselves in Thai culture, the old city of Chiang Mai has much to offer. With centuries-old temples, magnificent pagodas and markets selling local wares and handicraft, guests will have the best of both worlds. After a day of leisure walking and sightseeing, they can simply unwind by X2 Chiang Mai South Gate Villa's poolside or indulge in a relaxing swim. Now, isn't that enticing!

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MOT addresses crucial concerns

Addressing important queries of parliamentarians pertaining to various issues related to the tourism sector, **Prahlad Singh Patel**, Minister of State (I/C) for Tourism & Culture, offered written replies in both houses of the Parliament during the Budget session.



Manas Dwivedi

After Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Budget in the Parliament, Tourism Minister **Prahlad Singh Patel** shared his views on the Budget for his Ministry and also addressed some of the concerns raised by MPs in both the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha through written replies. Among the many issues he addressed were GST rates on hotel rooms and special incentives for tourism, while also divulging information on the effect of COVID-19 on tourism and initiatives and schemes of MOT. The Minister asserted that no MOT project or scheme had been deferred or stalled due to COVID-19. Here's a look at some of the other questions he answered:

Impact of lockdown and COVID-19 on tourism

On COVID's impact on the tourism sector, Patel said, "Since the situation is still evolving, the final impact in numerical terms can only be ascertained in due course. However, the Ministry has held several rounds of discussion and brainstorming sessions with industry stakeholders to assess the impact on the segment and has recently engaged the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) to conduct study on 'India and the Coronavirus Pandemic: Economic Losses for Households Engaged in Tourism and Policies for Recovery'. One of the objectives of this study is to quantify the sector-wise and overall loss in income of the economy and of the household sector and also the loss in jobs due to the impact of the

coronavirus pandemic on the tourism sector. The study will also propose policy measures appropriate to provide relief to the tourism sector."

Steps to promote domestic tourism

On this, the minister said, "The Ministry has launched the Dekho Apna Desh (DAD) initiative to promote domestic tourism.



The Ministry is communicating with the industry on issues related to opening of the tourism sector

DAD is promoted extensively on social media accounts and website of the Ministry and by domestic India Tourism offices. The Ministry and the regional offices are regularly communicating with the travel industry and other stakeholders on issues related to opening up of the tourism sector, handling of tourists, protocols of safety and security, service standards, etc."

Special incentive to tourism sector

When asked about the impact of COVID-19 on tourist arrivals in the country, the Minister said that on the basis of information received from Bureau of Immigration (BOI), Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in the country declined by 75.50 per cent in 2020. On the estimated

revenue loss to the tourism industry in 2020, Patel said that no formal study had been instituted for assessment of loss of revenue in 2020. However, several rounds of discussion and brainstorming sessions with industry stakeholders indicate massive loss of revenue, foreign exchange and jobs. "In view of the highly unorganised nature of the sector, the impact in numerical terms can only be ascertained in due course," he added. When asked whether the government had provided any special incentive to the tourism sector to overcome COVID's impact, the Minister spoke about revised guidelines of the MDA scheme. When asked about details for planning such an incentive, the minister replied, "Does not arise."

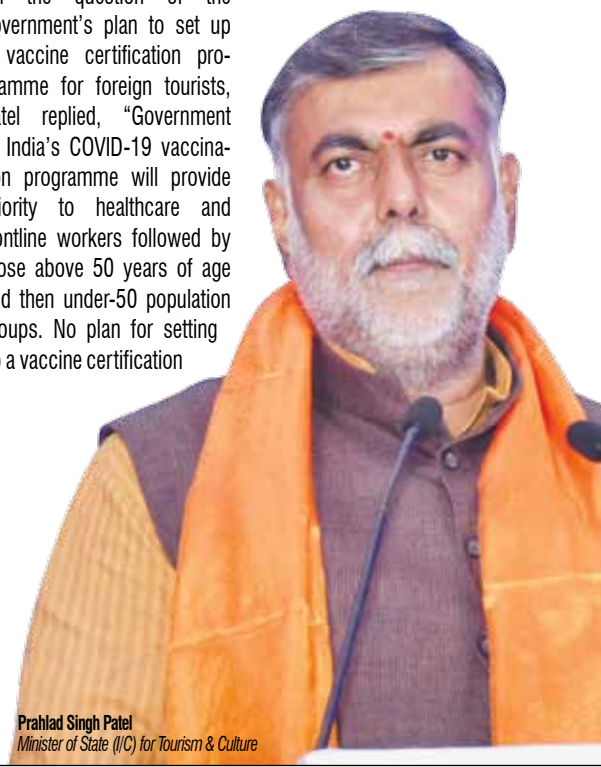
Vaccine certification for foreign tourists

On the question of the government's plan to set up a vaccine certification programme for foreign tourists, Patel replied, "Government of India's COVID-19 vaccination programme will provide priority to healthcare and frontline workers followed by those above 50 years of age and then under-50 population groups. No plan for setting up a vaccine certification

programme for foreign tourists has been announced yet."

Reducing GST on hotel room rates

When asked if the Ministry will consider approaching the GST Council for reducing GST on all hotel rooms to 12 per cent in view of the severe impact on tourism sector, particularly the hotel industry, Patel said, "MOT is aware of taxes levied on tourism products, including hotels. At present, Ministry of Tourism has no plan to approach the GST Council for reducing GST on all hotel rooms to 12 per cent, since the GST Council decides the rate of taxation after taking into consideration the factors affecting various segments of business as well as to ensure optimum revenue generation required for overall development of the economy." 📌



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



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