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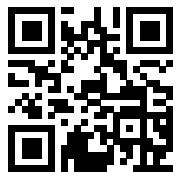
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MOT adapts to new demand

Prahlad Singh Patel, Minister of State (I/C), Tourism & Culture, says that while NITI Aayog is working on tourist infrastructure, MOT is ensuring the industry can reap the benefits of this future growth.



Nisha Verma

Prahlad Singh Patel has said that with NITI Aayog working on the development of tourism infrastructure, work in the Andamans on the same lines has already begun. "The Prime Minister wants us to exploit opportunities with our long coastline," Patel said, adding that Ministry of Tourism (MOT) will work with other ministries as well as the private sector once NITI Aayog comes out with its report. The Minister was speaking at the 16th CII Annual Tourism Summit's valedictory session.



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

Getting better ratings

In 2021, the industry and government need to work together to improve India's tourism ranking worldwide, believes Patel. "We were speeding towards a

better ranking in tourism, but COVID shattered that growth and now it's our responsibility to move up from our old ranking. However, there are challenges. In the hotel industry, big hotels are facing occupancy issues, but smaller hotels have shown positive signs, inching towards the previous year's statistics. Same is the case with states, which gives us hope that we will have opportunities and we will move forward. However, after huge losses, it will be a challenge to work as fast and efficiently as we did pre-COVID," he said.

Patel also shared that Jaipur, Gwalior and Orchha have

been included in the UNESCO list. "Soon, Dhulaveera will be examined by a team from UNESCO. All these things give us strength. However, during the pandemic, the government, especially our PM, certainly changed the perception of our country to a great extent. Hence, we have also changed the focus of our promotions. For example, we will be promoting every venue and facility, whether it is public or private, on all our 100 national highways. People, including tour operators, hotels and guides, are working towards promotion of tourism."

Contd on page 11 ►

₹1000 cr for tourism

₹1000 crore has been earmarked for the tourism and medical value sectors, coordinated by the commerce ministry.



Nisha Verma

Darpan Jain, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Commerce & Industry (MoCI), says that there is a need to ensure that all health protocols are strictly followed at the ground level and that this is reflected in the promotional strategy so that there is confidence in travelling. "It is an opportunity for all of us to emerge as a trusted player in the tourist segment," he said.

Financial incentives

Speaking on financial incentives, he said, "There is a scheme called Champion Services Sectors, which the Department of Commerce is coordinating, and



Darpan Jain
Joint Secretary
Ministry of Commerce & Industry

we have identified 12 Champion sectors which we need to focus on and prioritise to promote exports from the country. Tourism and medical value travel are the two sectors that are part of these 12 sectors. A financial outlay has

Contd on page 16 ►

A move to kill business?

The sudden travel ban and mandatory institutional quarantine for Maharashtra passengers has agents fuming.



Pradip Lulla
CMD, Cupid Travels

"All my clients travelling to Dubai have cancelled their bookings because of this sudden travel ban and institutional quarantine that has been imposed only for Maharashtra passengers. Not just Dubai, even domestic sectors from other states have cancelled due to the mandatory quarantine requirement. This was a total of 25-30 clients gone! These were all families who had

booked with us for the month of December. We are now booking for February on the assurance that we will refund clients 100 per cent of their amount if cancelled."

Contd on page 26 ►

Trade optimistic in 2021

After a tumultuous 2020, the industry is hopeful that the New Year will bring different opportunities, as they work towards new beginnings with learnings from the year gone by. They see 2021 as the light at the end of the tunnel.



Jyoti Mayal
President, TAAI

"I hope that year 2021 will take us past the pain and catastrophe that we suffered. There should be guarantee of our money from our stakeholders and other aviation bodies. The government needs to ensure this. Another thing we require is an industry status; now, we had to be dependent on ourselves. We need to restructure the way we work, put in the new norms and regulate ourselves, and see how we can be a healthier, prosperous industry. We also need a good connect with the government and government bodies. I should be able to demand to be protected as an industry, because our businesses are also contributing to the economy."



EM Najeeb
Senior VP, IATO

"We hope that in 2021, things will change and get better. In many countries, things are getting normal and most of the economic activities are getting back to normal, except tourism. Tourism has got restrictions not only in India, but all over the world, whether in full or partial. However, it is slowly opening up, but when international tourism, international flights, visa regulations will be eased, then only things would be absolutely normal. I hope and pray that we are going to be in a better situation in 2021 than we were in 2020."

Contd on page 8 ►



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AI bidders to soon be analysed

Hardeep Singh Puri, Minister of Civil Aviation, has said that the ban on international flights to and from the United Kingdom has been extended till January 7, 2021. He also talks about the Air India disinvestment process, which has crossed the first stage.



Nisha Verma

With a new variant of the coronavirus having been found in the UK, the Ministry of Civil Aviation has extended the temporary suspension of flights to and from the UK till January 7. "Thereafter, strictly regulated resumption will take place," Hardeep Singh Puri recently said.



Pradeep Singh Kharola
Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation



had directly or indirectly come from the UK since then. So far, around six people who came from the UK have been reported to have been detected with the new COVID strain."

In fact, it was also informed that as a measure of increased

precaution, passengers arriving from UK in all transit flights (flights that have taken off or flights which reached India before December 22, 2020, at 23:59 hrs) should be subject to mandatory RT-PCR test on arrival at the concerned airports.

Air India update

Speaking about the Air India disinvestment process, Minister Puri said, "In the Air India disinvestment process, we have crossed the first stage, as December 14 was the last date of filing expression of interest. Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) has indicated that multiple bids have been re-

ceived, out of which those that have qualified after having met the criteria will be disclosed on January 5, 2021. After that, potential bidders will be given 90 days to go through Air India books and accounts. And the government will also get time to vet the potential bidders and do due diligence, after which financial bids will come."

Adding his view on the subject, Pradeep Singh Kharola, Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, said, "The process of disinvestment is made in such a way that it is transparent and robust, and now we are moving on to the second stage of financial bids."



Hardeep Singh Puri
Minister of Civil Aviation

The government had initially imposed a temporary suspension when there were almost 60 flights per week to the UK. Puri informed, "We went back to November 25 and did contact tracing and gene sequencing of passengers who

Those that
have qualified
will be disclosed
on January 5

— Hardeep Singh Puri

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A year to cross limits

Whatever is said about year 2020 may not be sufficient. Was it disrupting? Yes! Was it tragic? Yes! Did it catch us unawares? Yes, and the list goes on. But, if one were to look at it optimistically, it could be said that the year taught us to be more sustainable in our practices, less wasteful of resources, and more mindful of people and their circumstances. The travel and tourism industry, too, had a few lessons for the taking. From being financially sound and well-backed up to ensuring that one's interests were protected when venturing into contracts, the COVID-19 pandemic made the industry realise that nothing, including the interest of travel agents in the light of big-budget airlines, must be taken for granted.

Through the year, one often got news of how travel agents, hoteliers and the industry at large was innovating both practice and product to suit the changing needs of the market, while ensuring that their own employees and business also get a fair share of the evolution and the resultant revenue. Survival, after all, was the name of the game in 2020 and the industry had learnt this in time.

Now, the trade enters 2021 with the hope that domestic tourism, an oft-ignored sector but one which allowed the industry to stay afloat during the pandemic, would again be the driving force for the industry. While international travel still poses to be a lucrative option for the Indian traveller who is eagerly waiting for borders to re-open and quarantine norms to completely be done away with, travelling within India is also gaining stature in both quality and quantity of products. Luxury river cruising, homestays, drivecation and workcation packages are doing the rounds and keenly being followed, and bought, by the Indian traveller.

But, herein lies the key! If we wish to come out stronger in 2021, we must keep upgrading our offerings to lure the domestic traveller and not let domestic tourism be a 'second option' for them.

Beginning 2021 on that thought, we are certain that the disrupted, rebooted and reorganised travel & tourism sector will come out even stronger, as we are a resilient lot that can play to its strengths.

We wish you a truly 'Happy' New Year!

Jain tourism sees light of day

Himanshu Talwar, Assistant Secretary General, FHRAI, believes that curating a wholesome travel experience by catering to specific religious needs could attract more travellers. In this light, he talks about the importance of Jain tourism and its potential.

India is a land of many cultures, and many religions have found their birthplace here. India's connect with spirituality is deep-seated. It is believed that Jainism found its roots in India. As a matter of fact, Jainism's history is intertwined with that of India. There are many places which commemorate this belief. Masterpieces of architecture, carvings, sculptures and layout, the Jain temples combine beauty with bliss. Each of these Jain pilgrim spots provides a sense of calm and serenity, and draws numerous Jain tourists.

Spiritual tourism is fragmented, and the hospitality sector could gain out of it

One such place and probably the most well-known Jain spot in India and the world is a massive black stone structure of Gommateshwara, the first Tirthankara standing, which is 18 metres in height, situated in Karnataka. Another one of the most popular and beautiful Jain temples in India is the Dilwara group of temples situated in the midst of a forest near Mount Abu, and renowned for the stunning use of marble in its structure. Apart from these famous Jain pilgrim spots in India, there are a lot of obscure and underrated sites related to Jainism all over the country.



The tourism ministry of India has decided to focus on the development of thematic circuits, each circuit covering tourist places of a particular theme. One such circuit happens to be the Tirthankar Circuit which covers sites related to Jainism such as Jain temples and pilgrim spots. The ministry is working closely with various state governments to develop this circuit with adequate funds and strict guidelines.

The hospitality sector is crucial in the implementation of such schemes. It is imperative to

focus on the augmentation of infrastructure at these pilgrim spots to bring them on a par with sites in Varanasi, Amritsar, etc., which have an enormous footfall of pilgrims. The

wholesome, comfortable and organised travel experience by catering to specific religious needs and beliefs would attract a huge untapped market. Pricing of facilities and products



provision of better facilities for pilgrims or tourists enhances their experience and brings in more people. The spiritual tourism category is untapped and fragmented, and the hospitality sector could gain a lot out of this category. Curating a

by the hospitality sector should be worked out in a way that would fit into any budget, as the spiritual tourism sector brings in pilgrims or tourists from various walks of life. The provision of pamphlets or guided tours or various other methods to throw light on the rich history of Jainism could be another highlight of the spiritual experience.



Himanshu Talwar
Assistant Secretary General, FHRAI

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



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A lot depends on international travel

► Contd from page 3



Jatinder Taneja
VC, PATA India Chapter

“At present, we don't have big expectations from year 2021. From what we are observing, while domestic tourism has already begun, the inbound business will still take time to start. Even as the vaccine's discovery gives us as well as the industry hope to revive, the path is not free of challenges. In my opinion, making the vaccine available for everyone and administering most of the world's population is something that will surely take time. We are hoping for some inbound business to start from August 2021.”

“Year 2021 is like a silver lining to a dark cloud that has engulfed our country, the tourism industry in particular. We can see light at the end of the tunnel because almost 60-70% of domestic flights are operating and we hope that in 2021, all air bubbles will turn into scheduled international flights and visas will start getting issued. We are hopeful of good news, as not only in Russia and America but also in India, the vaccines are in stages of completion and distribution. This has given us a lot of hope and we are confident that by the end of 2021, we should be back to pre-COVID days.”



Subhash Goyal
Secretary General, FAITH



Sandeep Dwivedi
COO, InterGlobe Technology Quotient

“According to me, year 2021 shall emerge as a progressive year for the travel and tourism industry, swapping limitations with innovations. We expect a huge demand for travel to begin as soon as the endearing no-more COVID-fear is affirmed through vaccination. A strong collaboration between technology and travel is also anticipated, leading to a reformative metamorphosis of how travellers interact with the industry during several touchpoints, including check-in, boarding, lounging, dining, flying and most importantly, returning to out-of-home activities.”

“There will almost certainly be a travel recovery early this year as our industry has faced and survived similar challenges before, like the 9/11 attack, the 2008 recession, as well as SARS and NIPA. Even though nobody can predict what will happen in the future, one thing is sure that we won't be able to travel as freely as before. We at IAAI believe that learning from past experiences, industry stakeholders will try to understand the value, virtue and goodwill of unity within the industry, and work together for a speedy recovery of travel and tourism.”



Biji Eapen
National President, IAAI



Ankur Bhatia
Executive Director, Bird Group

“There hasn't been any help from the government, but we are hoping that in the Budget this year, the government will at least not give short shrift to the sector that employs millions. With the vaccine almost here, we are hoping that the sector will revive in 2021, but that also depends how soon international travel starts and domestic airline capacity returns to pre-COVID levels. It's important that international flights resume as most of the countries around the world have a defined quarantine procedure and passengers can decide accordingly.”

“We should not hesitate in taking tough measures, lesser credit in the market and having an online portal. Hence, we should all embrace technology. Going forward, the travel industry will definitely see a boom, maybe starting April. It's possible that leisure travel may see a revival sooner than business travel, which will take a little longer. It may take a few years to come back to normal though. This also depends on different markets, as international travel from India may recover slower than travel within Europe or America. I think, domestic travel in India will continue to see huge growth.”



Deepak Narula
Managing Director, GRNConnect



Mahendra Vakharia
MD, Pathfinders Holidays

“The biggest learning for me personally is the reinforcement of my belief that spending time to build and nurture relationships is very important and always helpful in life. We are simple actors in the drama called 'life', and have to play our role as given by the director (the supreme power), nurture and respect Mother Earth and take care of her. My expectation for 2021 is hope that the human race will be wiser from the experience and impact of the last nine months of the pandemic and realise what wrong we were doing and rectify it for the betterment of the human race.”

“I believe that in 2021, there is going to be a massive change in the way of working. The first and foremost example is digital communication, which has given a way to all corporates to carry on their meetings without organising a physical event. They don't have to hire a hotel or take the staff to a destination to carry on the meetings. Work-from-home is a culture that is here to stay, so is online food delivery. Even the way people do weddings has changed. Money transactions are already happening online and this goes for all kinds of payments.”



Lajpat Rai
MD, Lotus Trans Travels



PP Khanna
President, ADTOI

“We are looking forward to 2021 as a tourism growth year for our country. Tour operators have a lot of expectations as domestic tourism has started growing slowly, but we are also expecting moratoriums and loans from the government and banks. Only then would we be able to survive and revive. While MOT is supporting the tourism and hospitality industry, we expect Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Commerce to also support us. Till the vaccine is launched, there will be a fear in the minds of people. However, it will still take another 5-6 months to see full growth in the tourism industry.”

“We have high expectations from 2021 and we have started preparing for the upcoming holiday season as well. We are also working on new business strategies to tap the burgeoning domestic market that is looking for relaxing and safe holidays. Our properties' USP is their location, which offers natural social distancing, a greener environment and huge spaces, thus naturally adhering to a COVID-safe environment. In 2021, we will also be adding new properties to our existing portfolio and we hope that the year will be a fruitful one not only for us but for the entire hospitality industry.”



Abhinash Manghani
CEO, WelcomHeritage



Homa Mistry
CEO, Trail Blazer Tours

“If we do 50% of the business we used to do pre-COVID, we are home. We know that the same business will not happen in 2021, but if we are able to achieve 50% of that, I think we would have achieved enough for 2021. After that it should be normal. Hence, we are holding on and are positive that things will bounce back and continue smoothly. We have seen many problems before, like Mumbai attacks, Tsunami, 9/11, 2018 economic crisis, plague, etc. We survived earlier and I am sure we will survive now as well. It might take time, but things would be fine.”

“Sometimes travel companies have extravagant expenses like marketing, freebies, giving credits, exploiting the suppliers, and giving unnecessary benefits to customers. With the COVID-19 pandemic having exhausted resources, all this will end, I hope, because it only reduces margins and in such a situation, you stand nowhere. Hence, in 2021, I am sure the market will correct and I think operators will have a responsibility among themselves because many of us will be out of business. Hence, it is necessary to work in a sustainable way.”



Ravi Gosain
MD, Erco Travels

Contd on page 27 ►



”

By showing how countries can consistently comply with hygiene and safety measures, Singapore is a pioneer in organising events for a new era.

– Ms Katariina Rohrbach
*Managing Director,
Hannover Fairs Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd*

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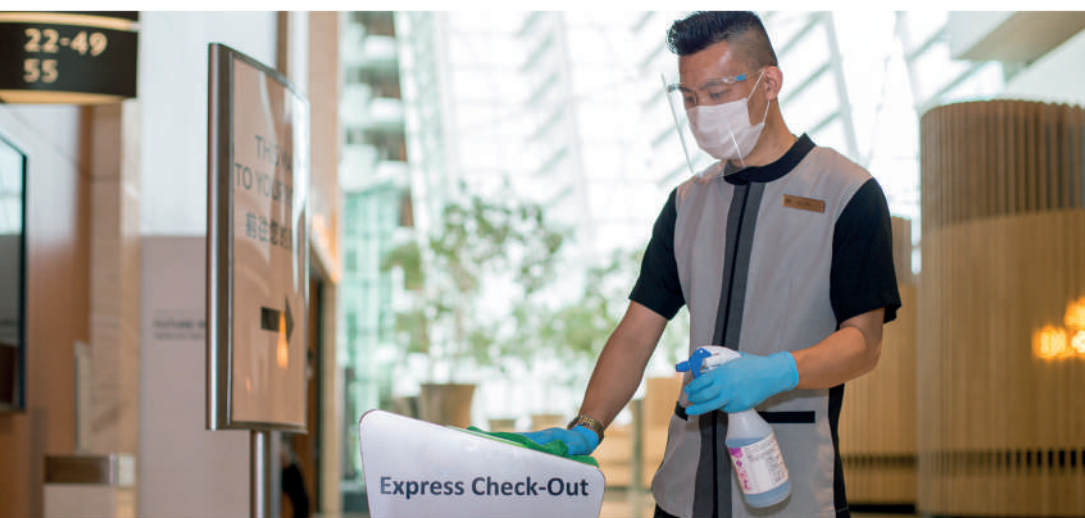
Singapore continues to solidify its position with SG Clean – a national mark of excellence for tourism businesses adhering to the highest standards of cleanliness and hygiene.

What is SG Clean?

An initiative supported by various agencies of the Singapore Government and audited by third party assessors, the SG Clean quality mark is a stamp of assurance that establishments are upholding rigorous, sector-specific sanitation and hygiene practices. While businesses across the island have adopted Safe Management Measures – such as social distancing, minimising physical touchpoints and enhanced cleaning of premises – SG Clean goes a step further, promoting collective action to make Singapore a cleaner and more pleasant environment for all.

Since March 2020, more than 5,000 local establishments such as hotels, attractions, restaurants, retail outlets, and prominent business event venues like the Singapore Expo and MAX Atria, Suntec City Convention & Exhibition Centre, Sands Expo and Convention Centre at Marina Bay Sands and Resorts World Sentosa Convention Centre have been awarded this certification. With SG Clean being adopted across more establishments around Singapore, event organisers, delegates and business travellers can be at ease as they return to the city to do business.

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A bit of fun, a bit of work

The eighth edition of the popular North East Festival was held as a hybrid event in Guwahati and streamed live via Facebook and YouTube channels. Experts also deliberated on how the region can be developed as a tourism destination, agreeing that easing of movement between the different states would boost travel.



Hazel Jain

It was not just fun and dance at the annual two-day North East Festival that took place at Radisson Blu Ho-



This will be remembered as the first festival in the country which adapted the virtual model while having a physical event

— Arijit Purkayastha



Arijit Purkayastha
Festival Organiser and Chapter Chairman for North East, ADTOI

tel, Guwahati on December 19, 2020. It was held with support from the Ministry of DoNER (Development of North Eastern Region), Government of India and the Government of Assam. **Arijit Purkayastha**, Festival Organiser and Chapter Chairman for North East, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI),



Our focus is more on local and domestic tourists, but we need creatively planned projects which will appeal to more people

— Deba Kumar Mishra

how such big events can be organised while following all COVID protocols.”

Focus on luxury travellers

Hitting the nail on its head, **Deba Kumar Mishra**, Director Tourism, Government of Assam, said that luxury travellers from cities is a good target audience.

“Our focus is more on local and domestic tourists. But we



Deba Kumar Mishra
Director Tourism
Government of Assam

need creatively planned projects which will attract and

appeal to more people. The Northeast region shares borders with many countries and it is an incredible boon. Assam is close to West Bengal and has five international borders which give us an edge. We need more promotion of eco-cultural tourism and even medical tourism. We need to welcome high-end travellers from Mumbai, Delhi, Telangana, etc,” he said.



Santanu Kalita
CEO, Spicejet – Sea Plane

SpiceJet mulls seaplane service for Northeast

Speaking on the sidelines of the festival, **Santanu Kalita**, CEO, Spicejet – Sea Plane department, said, “Seaplanes can bring a revolution in the tourism sector, especially in the Northeast which is one of the most beautiful natural lands in India. We will reflect on the planned fly-scheme for Guwahati to Kaziranga to Dima Hasao, etc. We have sufficient eight months to set the fly-plan scheme which will help tourism flourish in the region.” Kalita played a key role in getting the maiden seaplane service of the country off the ground in Kevadia, Gujarat.

Northeast an international hub?

While there is immense potential in the region, does it have sufficient infrastructure to be able to be developed as an international or even a domestic tourism hub? Experts deliberate during the ICC North East Travel Conclave 2020. Another point they bring up is the need for an upgrade of the product the states in the region offer.



Hazel Jain

What is the kind of business potential for the tourism sector in Northeast India and is there a possibility for it to emerge as a tourism hub in



Capt. Swadesh Kumar
President, ATOAI

Southeast Asia? This was the topic that many experts discussed during a conclave dedicated to the region. **Capt. Swadesh Kumar**, President, Adventure Tour Operators

Association of India (ATOAI), was of the opinion that while the region is beautiful, developing a product is crucial. “Unfortunately, although all eight states are open now, it is very crucial for the local industry to develop the product well. Right now, I’m seeing the same itinerary copied and pasted from one another. I humbly request my col-



Vasuki Sundaram
Chairperson, IATO
Maharashtra Chapter

leagues in the trade to please create new programmes. Visit the area yourself and then create them, use photos to showcase them to your clients. When we are making a package, we need to add two to three states, so co-ordination between agents in those states is important. If you want to survive today, you have to form friendships and alliances. You cannot survive alone. Please also promote the festivals in the

region. That is one of the highlights of the Northeast. Right now, there isn’t much information available on that,” he said.

Meanwhile, Pawan Hans has deployed helicopters in this region for passenger ser-



Nirmalya Choudhury
ED – Operations, JTI Group &
Chapter Chairman, North East
States, IATO

Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. Development of river cruise circuits is also coming up.

Sharing her honest opinion, **Vasuki Sundaram**, Chairperson, IATO, Maharashtra Chapter, said, “I feel this discussion on developing this region as a tourism hub in Southeast Asia is a bit futuristic. It is way ahead of its time as we are still waiting

for the government to put the essential logistics in place whether it is air connectivity with neighbouring countries, waterways or road. We also

What we need now is a common SOP for visitors from rest of India and abroad

— Nirmalya Choudhury

It is crucial for the local industry to develop the product well. Right now, I’m seeing the same itinerary

— Capt. Swadesh Kumar

Discussion on developing this region as a tourism hub in Southeast Asia is a bit futuristic

— Vasuki Sundaram

vices and VIP transportation in states such as Sikkim, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh,

need standardised hotels. Even within India, we need to develop domestic network and connectivity. If we are talking about making the Northeast a tourism hub, it

Contd on page 22 ►

MOT's helping hand to industry

Calling out to the industry to work together with the government, **Rupinder Brar**, Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism, shared that the government is not only working to bridge the information gap and create suitable infrastructure, but is also working on getting the trade organised in line with its new platforms for the hospitality sector.



Nisha Verma

Rupinder Brar says that MOT is closely working with states in creating infrastructure. "We have 29 international airports and over 130 airports offering regional connectivity under the UDAN scheme. With UDAN-4 announcing almost 78 more destinations, I think we are in exciting times as far as infrastructure is concerned. In terms of road network, we are just second to the US. While there are gaps, there is a lot that has been done," she said, speaking at the CII Annual Tourism Summit.

Mending the information gap
Brar believes that a lot of



Rupinder Brar
Additional Director General
Ministry of Tourism

information gaps exist in the minds of people. She asserted that MOT has been trying to bring out all the information to people, telling them that it is not that hard to travel to any destination within India. "There has been a lot of apprehension. They think it's easier to travel to Thailand than from Delhi to Chennai, which is not true. While the railway is already

a huge network, there is a need for us to flag the road and airline networks, since people are looking at short-haul and driveable destinations," she said.

Even in terms of infrastructure around tourist sites, she

We need to flag the road & airline networks; people are looking at short-haul, driveable destinations



added, "There is no dearth of products. The kind of home-stays that India offers today and the kind of properties that are available are some of the best in the world. We should leverage this as a country, not only from the point of view of domestic tourism, but also to attract international tourists who shall very soon be travelling

as protocols and visa rules are eased across the world, and the vaccine comes in."

Int'l travel will continue

One great initiative, according to Brar, is organising the hospitality industry by creating a database. "We have around 35,000 entities registered. Surely, many more exist in India and we

hope that very soon they would come on board. The idea is not just getting them onto a database, but ensuring that we reach out as a support to the industry while also making the ecosystem safe for the future traveller not only from a COVID perspective, but also because a value chain needs to be created for the consumer," she explained, adding, "We cannot say that just because they cannot travel anywhere, they are going to travel domestic. Instead, they shall continue to do so when the world travels again, and it's time for all of us to make sure that we create value in this period which will retain all these travellers within India," she elaborated.

Domestic products get boost

► Contd from page 3

Need for facilitators

Patel shared that the challenge of a number of guides not speaking more than one language, or the absence of guides at several monuments and sites, was met head-on by MOT through its IITFC programme, providing tourists the right information about these places where guides (or guides who spoke their language) were not available.

"We need people conversant in UN languages and we have started the IITFC programme for that. This did stir the existing guide community, which went to court, but we have spoken to them and have assured them that their guide status will not be threatened by IITFC, and they will be taking the case back. We want tourist facilitators because there are so many monuments where we don't have guides. Even if 10 or 15 tourists reach such monuments, they should

have someone to share the right information with them," he shared.

New domestic segments

Patel believes that there are several new sectors in the domestic arena that might catch the traveller's fancy in the future, and

as when the Earth was created. Also, we never identified several other places that could be showcased as tiger projects.

indications that in terms of medical value tourism, post-COVID problems will have a solution in Indian science of medicine and

will be in the list of ASI. There are several monuments with a history of 1,000-1,500 years that are neither in the ASI list



After huge losses, it will be a challenge to work as fast and efficiently as we did pre COVID

listed geological tourism as one of them. "India never focused on geological tourism despite us having places that depict chronology from as far back

We need to focus on new things with the changing ideology of travellers," he asserted.

Post COVID, there is expected to be a lot of focus on Indian medicinal techniques. "We have

healing like Ayurveda, Yoga and other techniques, and people will look for such centres in a big way," the Minister said.

ASI monuments

Patel also shared that MOT has recently changed the platform for ASI.

"We have decided that from January, all the monuments in the country, whether listed or not,

nor in that of the state archaeology department. We will initiate a campaign to list all those sites in our catalogue, irrespective of whether they are under the jurisdiction of the respective states or not, so that researchers and tourists know about them and their status. All related information will be available on ASI's website," the Tourism Minister concluded.

ETAA waives off membership fee

As a step towards a relief to its members, the Enterprising Travel Agents Association (ETAA) board along with the respective committees have decided to waive off the annual



membership fees for the financial year 2020-2021.

Members who have paid membership fee for three years valid till March 2021 will get an extension till March 2022. New memberships will now cost ₹7,670 and the validity will be till March 2022. The association hopes that it will be able to provide a much-needed helping hand to those in need.

Zurich Airport International and Uttar Pradesh government have finalised the nomenclature of the Greenfield airport at Jewar as – Noida International Airport. The brand logo is a symbol that shows a Sarus Crane, the state bird of UP, in flight.

Government of India



**Ministry of Commerce
& Industry**



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NABCB

**National Accreditation
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NABCB (Nation accreditation Board for certification bodies) constituent board of QCI (Quality Council of India) an autonomous body under the Department for promotion of industry and internal trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

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Etihaad: Technology used best

The pandemic has impacted every industry globally with some, such as aviation, facing unprecedented challenges. Etihad Airways has weathered the impact of this crisis through a combination of transformation and innovation, adapting their business to the new reality.



TT Bureau

Building on its tech-driven approach, Etihad Airways has introduced various measures to provide maximum support to guests not only when they travel but also when they plan their journeys.

Interactive travel map

Etihad has partnered with Sitata, a Canadian travel risk management company, to launch an interactive travel map on etihad.com, the airline's official website. The travel map uses advanced computer algorithms to detect new travel information across the globe. With this,

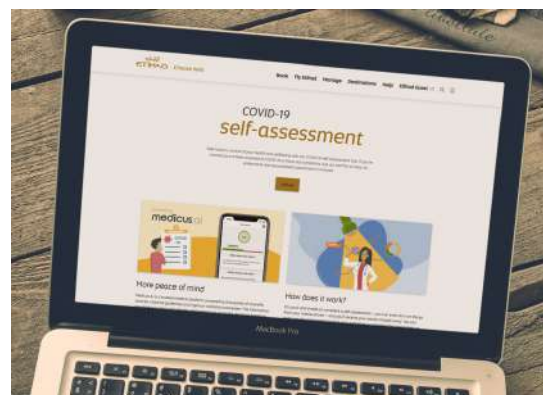
guests have easy access to a comprehensive overview of the situation relating to COVID-19 at each destination in the airline's network, while booking their flights.

Risk assessment tool

Etihad has partnered with Medicus AI to launch a COVID-19 risk-assessment tool that empowers guests to make informed decisions about travelling. The tool guides guests in evaluating the probability of having contracted COVID-19 by responding to 22 questions based on WHO guidelines.

Contactless check-in

Partnering with Elenium Automation, Etihad is the first airline to trial an innovative



airport technology to help identify medically at-risk travellers. These contactless devices will monitor the temperature, heart rate and respiratory rate of any person using an airport touchpoint.

Enhanced mobile App

Etihad has also updated its mobile application, allow-

ing guests to manage their journey with even greater ease. The relaunched mobile App lets guests manage their details, book flights with voice search and enrol in the airline's loyalty programme. Uber and Google Maps are now also integrated into the App to direct travellers to and around the airport. If the

status of a flight should change, an update is automatically pushed to guests through the App. Etihad also publishes digital travel guidelines regularly to ensure that guests are updated with any developments in these dynamic times.

Tech-driven sustainability

Etihad has an ongoing partnership with Boeing to test various technologies that make aviation safer and more sustainable now and for the future. As part of this, Etihad has been an early adopter of testing the Mobile UV disinfecting wand, a handheld ultraviolet light wand for disinfecting flight decks and cabins. The prototype was tested as part of Etihad's participation in the 2020 ecoDemonstrator programme.

Partnerships between Etihad and the industry, including this programme with Boeing, accelerate technology development through collaboration and shared learnings.

Sale-based incentives for agents

After the resounding success of its Travel Agent Fantasy League that saw more than 3,000 winners, Tripjack has now launched two new agent engagements - Hotel Booking Bonanza and Weekend Deals. **Hasan Patel**, Director of the B2B travel portal, shares more details on them.



Hazel Jain

How was the overall response from the entire engagement activity?

Fantasy cricket is one the biggest growth-drivers in India. With IPL 2020 organised from September 19 to November 10, the Tripjack

and achieve the best of it. I would like to thank the entire team and all our travel partners for their participation and enthusiasm throughout the games. Daily match winners won upto 1,00,000 to 3,00,000 TJ coins which can be redeemed on Tripjack.com for flights and hotel bookings. Weekly and mega prize winners received free flight tickets, vouchers and free hotel stays. Overall, we had more than 2,000 winners and we are lucky to have taken this opportunity to do something cheerful and bring back smiles on our partners' faces.

What kind of redemptions did you see from winners?

TJ coins earned during the games are available in our agent logins on our website.



Hasan Patel
Director, Tripjack

We are seeing an increase in leisure travel and domestic drivable destinations are doing very well over the weekend. Internationally, Dubai and Maldives have been very hot.

Are you looking to conduct some more engagement activities for your partners soon in 2021?

Definitely! In fact, we have now introduced two more campaigns - Hotel Book-

ing Bonanza and Weekend Deals on tripjack.com. Hotel Booking Bonanza is a sale-based incentive scheme where travel agents can win Amazon vouchers for making hotel bookings. Weekend Deals are special promotional deals available for popular domestic hotels in India. It allows travel agents to make good recommendations regarding deals to their clients and assisting them in making a holiday decision.

How is the customer travel behaviour changing now?

Customers have become a lot more experimental with their purchase behaviour. We see that offbeat destinations in the domestic segment are seeing some amount of traffic. After months of travel restric-

tions and now the government helping with increasing flight capacity, there is a trend for 'revenge travel'.

also seeing an increase in share for the branded/chain four and five-star hotels.

How is Tripjack redesigning its products to suit the changing requirements?

We are very excited for the future. One thing is for sure - to stay ahead of the curve, businesses will have to reinvent themselves, and the same applies to us. We do have some very interesting projects in development. We want to provide a more fulfilling experience to our travel agent family, so that we can help them with a larger suite of products and services. Our developments are focused on creating long-term relationships with the travel agents and helping them accelerate to the next level.



Travel Agent Fantasy League attracted a huge number of users to participate in fantasy cricket. It was a huge success and truly satisfying to come up with a new concept in the travel industry which no one had thought of. We were able to deliver

Charting pathways to recovery

GB Srithar, Regional Director (India, Middle East & South Asia), Singapore Tourism Board, feels that fundamental shifts in consumer expectations and industry operations are afoot and they will manifest themselves in 2021. The role of tourism establishments and destinations may also need to be more persuasive than before.



Hazel Jain

What's STB India's plan for 2021?

STB and our tourism partners have been leveraging technology and the digital medium for consumer outreach since the start of the pandemic as it is important to continue engaging with them and keep Singapore close to their hearts and minds. In 2021, we will continue to bring engaging content to audiences.

What were STB India's challenges in 2020?

The pandemic is one of the biggest challenges that Singapore tourism has faced in its 56-year history. Singapore is fortunate to have the resources to manage the pandemic in a robust manner and we have made good progress. Most of our tourism industry has safely and gradually re-opened for business. We entered Phase-3 of our three-phased COVID-19 re-opening on December 28.



GB Srithar
Regional Director (India, Middle East & South Asia), STB

Your outlook for 2021?

Tourism will no longer be the same – with fundamental shifts in consumer expectations and industry operations. One key development will be a growing emphasis on hygiene and health amongst consumers. As such, travel will no longer purely be a decision driven by the aspiration to travel or

attractiveness of a destination. The ability of a destination and its tourism establishments to provide good health and sanitisation practices will be vital in inspiring confidence and influencing consumers' choice to travel. It is likely for consumers to prioritise quality brands that can provide trust, especially for families and seniors.

What lessons must destinations learn in the new world order?

Recovery will take time and mass international travel will not return in a significant way any time soon – even if a vaccine is found. That is why we are growing domestic demand to help our tourism businesses through this

period. We will continue to forge ahead with major tourism infrastructure and redevelopment projects, tapping

Travel will no longer be a decision driven purely by the aspiration to travel or attractiveness of a destination

new trends coming out of the pandemic such as nature and sustainable tourism.

Any learnings you may have had in 2020?

I am a firm believer that people matter the most and getting the right, motivated team brings relevant results. Chief among the high points in my tenure here is that I enjoy the privilege of leading a great team.

As a marketer, I frame Singapore tourism promotions into a two-pronged strategy: strong travel trade engagement and innovative, engaging consumer outreach projects. I am pleased that we have built strong, deep and meaningful relationships with travel trade across India. They are not just trade partners but our partner-friends.

Over 40 exhibitors at STB India Virtual Tradeshow

More than 40 stakeholder partners including attractions, DMCs and hotels, will be showcasing at STB India Virtual Tradeshow, to be spread over four days to cater to four different regions of India.

Moscow upgrades to attract Indians

Ksenya Boykova, Head of International Affairs & MICE, Moscow Project Office for Tourism and Hospitality Development, shares that India is a priority market for Moscow and this is the reason they have started promotions here and organised the Discover Moscow Digital Roadshow.



Nisha Verma

The Moscow City Tourism Committee recently held the Discover Moscow Digital Roadshow in India. Claiming that India is a priority inbound tourism market for Moscow, **Ksenya Boykova** said, "The number of tourists from India to Moscow has almost doubled over the past 10 years, reaching 89,000 in 2019. In 2019, India ranked third in the Asia Pacific region, excluding China, in terms of the number of foreign tourists in Moscow. Before the pandemic, the number of tourists coming from India



Ksenya Boykova
Head Intl Affairs & MICE
Moscow Project Office for Tourism and Hospitality Development

to Russia had been growing by 18-20% annually, and in terms of growth rates, India ranked fifth, leaving even China behind."

When asked about the aim behind organising the digi-

tal roadshow, she revealed, "The current situation allowed us to rethink Moscow's promotional strategies and create new digital products. We have launched several interesting projects which, we are confident, have aroused the interest of the Indian professional audience. In the new reality, we saw great potential in online tools, including digital roadshows, in terms of presenting the tourism potential and Moscow's newest tourist products, as well as establishing direct business contacts with Indian companies. Hence, we decided to hold the first digital roadshow in

India that actually covered all the regions of India (which would be challenging for an offline roadshow)."

The four-day event hosted not only companies from Moscow (tour operators and hotels), 25 of which

We have launched interesting projects which have aroused the interest of the Indian professional audience

E-visa from this month

From January 2021, tourists from India will be able to apply for electronic visas. Three out of the 29 entry points where the visa procedure will be simplified to enter Russia are located in Moscow, at the largest Russian airports, Sheremetyevo, Domodedovo and Vnukovo. Besides becoming a more comfortable urban environment, new attractions for tourists in Moscow have also emerged, including Zaryadye Park, VDNH, Moskvarium, the Dream Island amusement park and the Moscow Cable Car.

introduced themselves and their products at online meetings, and more than 10 companies that took part in the virtual exhibition remotely, but also over 600 representatives of the Indian tourism industry. Boykova further revealed, "Indian companies took part in webinars presenting the tourism potential of Moscow and new projects of the Moscow City Tourism

Committee, and as a result of the event, they held over 1,500 online negotiations with Moscow companies. We received positive feedback from our Indian colleagues, which reinforces the value of the digital roadshow format during this challenging time." Moscow offers opportunities for cultural tourism as well as business and educational tourism.

Following its launch in May 2020, WTTC's Safe Travels stamp has now been adopted by 200 destinations around the world. Chile, US Virgin Islands and Dominica have also joined the ever-growing list of destinations.

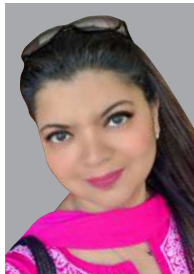
Tourism Breaking News

- Waterways Leisure Tourism launches Cordelia Cruises
- ADB to give loan to Tripura for tourism
- COVID-19 test result at Bengaluru airport in 13 min
- Accommodation for Buddhist Circuit has funds set aside
- TAFI plans chapter and national elections in January
- Baywatch Travels enters sailing with Baywatch Sailzz
- Maharashtra issues COVID-19 SOPs for tourism
- TATA Sons takes control of AirAsia India with 83.67% stake

Accepting today & looking ahead

The two-day Virtual Spanish Travel Show saw more than 1,300 happy buyers from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh interact with 20 Spanish exhibitors. Spain's first-ever virtual roadshow managed to facilitate more than 3,200 one-to-one meetings.

Feedback from buyers



Nagsri Prasad Sashidhar
Chief Happiness Officer
NAGSRI (Mumbai)

“What was really good was the fact that it was pretty seamless and I got to meet some interesting and new partners. Interesting and meaningful discussions made the show well worth my time. Overall, it was a great show and I look forward to meeting our partners in person next year!”

“The show was very well-crafted considering the current scenario. How can we all connect with each other, use this precious time wisely, learn more and strengthen our relationship? It considered all these points. It wasn't simply a virtual show, it was a step beyond. The platform offered good mix of tourism boards, hotels, ground handlers and activities.”



Manu Kashyap
Director, Windmill Holidays, (Mumbai)



Mihika Shaha Dhakhwa
MD, Zenith Experiences Travel Services (Kathmandu)

“For me, the Spanish travel show was a great experience. It was well managed and the interface was very easy to use. I could directly and instantly communicate with the Spanish suppliers. In fact, I would say that the virtual show was almost as good as a physical roadshow. I am very impressed by the DDP team – they did a fantastic job.”

“After months of lockdown and working from home, it was great to interact with our friends from Spain. It was not only a great idea to interact but also to share notes, new ideas and opportunities for when borders re-open. This virtual platform is a sign of the COVID era where a large part of our world is contactless and digital. It was an enriching experience.”



Suzanne Pereira
SVP – Trade Relationships, Communications & Service Quality
Thomas Cook India (Mumbai)

Feedback from Suppliers



Kiran Mansharamani
Business Development Manager
Waq Tourism

“It was a great opportunity to catch up with the trade. Despite the situation being so uncertain, both travel agents and local partners are eager to establish new ways of collaboration. The platform and the team behind the jornadas were the key to the success of the event.”

“Meliá Hotels International is a leading hotel company in Spain, with more than 140 hotels in the European nation and 380 around the globe. At the Spanish Virtual Trade Show, the Spain Tourism office in India provided us with an efficient and contemporary solution to meet buyers during such complicated days and circumstances. The show was a great tool for virtual meetings and business opportunities, and we applaud all the effort put in by the team to bring everything together and make the show a success! Meliá Hotels International also wants to thank the great support we had from Turespaña team and suppliers throughout the process.”



Ignacio Grijalvo
Director, Across Spain

“Based in Barcelona and Madrid, Across Spain handles destination Spain for corporate customers (meetings, incentives, technical visits and congresses) as well as for leisure travellers. It has been an excellent opportunity to meet tourism professionals for two days, in order to showcase our new programmes and to shortly share news about our company and how the pandemic is affecting our profession. From an organisational standpoint, it has been absolutely brilliant. We congratulate the team and recognise the massive effort done. We are confident that minor technical issues will find a solution through time, as we understand the big challenge the team faced, too.”

Inputs by Hazel Jain



Eulàlia Ramírez i Ruiz
Area Business Development
Director (Eastern Spain)
Meliá Hotels International

Industry opinion would help

► Contd from page 3

been earmarked for tourism as well as medical value travel sectors. Around ₹1000 crore worth of programmes have already been approved, and the programmes have just started. In fact, the approvals were given in early 2020, but the roll-out has been a little slow owing to COVID.”

Jain added that the programme will tackle several aspects, including connectivity. “In fact, in the UDAN scheme, there are 40 destinations which have been targeted as part of incentives for enhancing connectivity as they are not connected till now. The second part is, focus on the Buddhist Circuit. We are aware that people from China and Southeast Asia travel a lot to places of Buddhist interest. However, they are not coming to India in the same number as they are travelling to other countries. Hence, an amount has been earmarked for development of tented accommodation in the Buddhist Circuit. Another factor is skilling, which is also getting implemented.

Around 10,000 facilitators are being trained online, even during COVID times, and they

would be trained for giving language and guide services for tourists. Also, under the Champion Services scheme, we need to focus on wellness travel, especially with India having strength in Ayurveda and Yoga. We need to develop and market world-class facilities. Hence, Ministry of AYUSH is imple-

We need to focus on wellness travel. We need to develop and market world class facilities

menting programmes pertaining to establishing world-class facilities in partnership with private players. A lot of work is happening and funds are going into creating infrastructure, providing connectivity, and for promotions,” he explained.

SEIS and exports

The Joint Secretary added that the SEIS scheme, under which tourism exports are incentivised, is part of the foreign trade policy 2015-20. “The policy has given incentives which were increased in 2017 when the rate of incentive was enhanced. Now the scheme is undergoing a review. Hence, my request would be that the industry share its recommendations on how we need to repackage it and make it more effective. Currently, the scheme is very simple, wherein a particular percentage is given on net exports. Hence, it's 5% and 7%, which are the two categories under which the incentives are given. Now, can we come out with a formulation which is more innovative? Can we think of a link with employment that we generate? Can we think of targeting some geographies? Can we think of small and micro sectors when formulating the scheme? Can we make it innovative in a way that we can link it to the amount of foreign exchange that it can actually multiply? We are looking at more innovative schemes and we would want the industry to give its comments,” he shared.

Promotion

Elaborating on promotions, he said, “There are commercial wings in our missions abroad and my request would be that as far as international travellers are concerned, we can work on a national strategy with around 100-200 top sites to focus on. MOT already has a programme of iconic sites, and if we can build up on that programme for these 100 sites, which would be 5-10 sites per state, let's take up all issues related to the four buckets of promotion, facilitation, infrastructure and skilling. The government alone shall not handle all these four buckets, and I think there is a very important role of the private sector in preparing the product, doing promotions and offering services. Hence, I think that the private sector, state and centre—all three need to come together to work on these 100-200 sites. There is no problem of funds, it's only convergence of interest, efforts and prioritisation. If we are able to do that, I think we would definitely see international tourism arrivals rising from around 11 million last year to around 20-25 million in the next three to four years.”

India & its abundant experiences

Just back from her travels to South India, **Anshu Tejuja**, Managing Director, Ashoka Dream Holidays, recounts her wonderful experience and how travel designers need to understand and adapt the new era of experiential travel that the pandemic has ushered in.

Puducherry

Being a travel and fitness enthusiast, it was the best feeling to go to Puducherry for a fit-

ful fitness retreat planned in the widespread area of K Resort, Puducherry. Here, I made new friends and did some exciting activities such as kick-boxing, Bollywood aerobics, regional folk dance, animal flow, sports conditioning and so on. The meals were also healthy but delicious, and the chefs were mindful of every ingredient used. Organising a stay in a luxury resort and adding



offer the best of India to all our travellers. Safety in terms of air travel, ground-handling and transportation was taken care of immaculately and to perfection, and there was nothing for us to worry about during the entire trip. It is only by travelling by themselves and by experiencing everything personally that travel designers and tour operators can offer something new and unique to their clients.

Only by travelling by themselves and experiencing everything personally can travel designers offer something new

ness retreat after an 11-month lockdown in Mumbai. I took the plunge and went to this beauti-



an element of experience has to be the new era for travel designers.

Coorg & Kabini

Soon after Puducherry, I extended my trip to Coorg and Kabini in Karnataka. This was hosted by Panache World in Bengaluru in association with Evolve back hotels. This trip was way beyond my ex-

pectations and it came as a breath of crisp, fresh air. The rooms along with every experience I had here is a story to tell and an experience in itself. It is amazing to see that there is so much to explore in our own country with barefoot luxury experiences.

In 2021, till the world opens up completely, we aspire to



Anshu Tejuja
Managing Director
Ashoka Dream Holidays

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

From big & fat to small & curated

The pandemic was not all destruction, after all. **Sylvain Laroche**, Director of Operations, ibis & ibis Styles, India, says, 'Indians know how to see the silver lining! Turning the adversity of small gatherings into opportunity led to the growth of the trend of intimate destination weddings.'

The global pandemic has made social distancing the norm, which has in turn globally affected the way people celebrate.

The spread of COVID-19 has given rise to smaller and intimate gatherings as the big fat Indian weddings turned leaner this year. With fewer people being able to travel, virtual ceremonies have been paving the way for technological advancements at hotels across the world. Watching the rituals on the big screen is a whole-new experience for guests. From attending office meetings to online lectures, attending weddings online is fast emerging as the latest trend.

The wedding industry in India was pegged (according to Digital Classified in India 2020 by KPMG India and Google) at an estimate of \$50 billion and a rapid annual growth rate, which was attributed to the fact that half of India's 1.3-billion people were aged below 30 and an estimate of 10 million weddings held annually.

Popular online wedding platform Shaadi.com said that a 20-30 per cent surge in the online matchmaking industry during the lockdown is going to result in a reasonable uptick in the number of weddings.

At ibis, we are delighted to see a gradual uptick in wedding queries and bookings over the last few months. Few of our hotels like ibis Jaipur Civil Lines and ibis Delhi Aerocity offer exquisite poolside venues ideal for intimate weddings. Strict adherence to social distancing norms and hygiene protocols remain our top priority. At all ibis hotels, we have adopted contactless measures from booking the room and check-in to check-outs and payment procedures.



While some couples have been postponing their wedding, the others are looking for curated food for their D-day. Pool-side venues that were earlier used for pool parties are now being used for bachelor's night and *haldi* ceremonies.

With the shift in trends, there is a pent up demand due to all the weddings and events that were put on hold during the lockdown period.

Good food, music and décor are at the heart of any celebration. At ibis, self-help buffets have been replaced with one-bowl eats, pre-plated food options served by the team. Our interactive kitchen concept at Spice It – the restaurant, also offers confidence to guests. The food culture at different cities ranging from Kolkata to Delhi to Jaipur is extraordinary. We aim to blend different cultures through food under one roof. We promise and

aim to make every moment personal for the bride and the groom. We don't hesitate to go that extra mile to make the biggest and brightest day of their life a safe and memorable experience. ibis is a smart economy brand from the Accor stable, and has always prioritised the safety of its guests and employees. It has always had high standards of hygiene and cleanliness.



Sylvain Laroche
Director of Operations
ibis & ibis Styles, India

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

At ibis, self-help buffets have been replaced with one-bowl eats, pre-plated food options

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Luxury travel planners on Antara cruise

Antara Luxury River Cruises recently hosted around 20 luxury travel planners for a familiarisation trip which started from Kolkata. It was the maiden voyage of Antara Cruises to explore 'Europe on the Ganges', and the trip lasted for two nights and three days. The luxury river cruise brand was launched in August 2020.



Alitalia looks to restart in March

Italy's flag carrier Alitalia recently organised a webinar for the Indian travel trade, where the team not only educated them on the airline's product offerings but also shared plans to welcome travellers to Italy. Alitalia may begin its India operations in March this year, all the while ensuring a safe carriage for passengers.



Nisha Verma

The delegation at Alitalia's webinar for the Indian travel trade included **Aldo D'elia**, Regional Manager, East Europe & Asia Pacific, Alitalia; **Lucio Rigo**, Country Manager— India, Alitalia; **Salvatore Ianniello**, Representative India, ENIT- Italian National Tourism Board; and **Federico Scriboni**, Head of Aviation Business Development, Aeroporto Di Roma.

Addressing attendees, D'elia said, "Our trade partners are key for us. The pillar in the coming weeks would be flexibility and safety, which is our priority." He also informed that Alitalia will soon be starting a flight to San Paolo and even has



Aldo D'elia
Regional Manager, East Europe & Asia Pacific, Alitalia

plans to start operations to Delhi. "We want to show the trade partners all the improvements that have been done at Aeroporto Di Roma by organising a Fam trip," he said.

Sharing details on the product, Rigo said, "Our plan is to start flying back to Delhi starting summer 2021, i.e. March, and the aircraft will be A330 with 250 seat ca-

capacity. We have a historical operating schedule, which is departing from Delhi at 3:05 am and arriving at 8:05 am in Rome Fiumicino, which is a very convenient schedule for network connection, both domestic and international. On the way back, it departs in the afternoon at 2:10 pm from Rome and arrives day after night at 1:15 am."

We want to show improvements at Aeroporto Di Roma by organising a Fam trip
— Aldo D'elia



Lucio Rigo
Country Manager— India, Alitalia

He also informed that they have on offer charter flights as well on Boeing 777 and A330. "We have a dedicated charter team, too, and we are willing to discuss such operations with trade partners," added Rigo.

While he shared information on the four types of commercial products, he also added that they have special programmes for corporates. "Also, there are dedicated fares

according to traffic and we are trying to be flexible according to market needs. The MilleMiglia loyalty programme has also been extended up to December 31, 2021," he said.

With safety being Alitalia's priority, Rigo said that the safety solutions being provided by the airline are in coordination with health authorities. And while the airport lounges of Alitalia are temporarily closed, entitled passengers can access collect vouchers at select food outlets.

The Italian carrier also has a flexible cancellation policy. Rigo says, "For tickets issued not later than October 31, 2020 for travel between March 11 and October 31, 2020, there can be one re-

booking, rerouting allowed at no penalty to travel within one year from the date of original flight. Entitlement

We have a dedicated charter team, too, and we are willing to discuss operations with trade
— Lucio Rigo

for flights cancelled by the airline were to be requested until December 31, 2020. Also, for flights cancelled by the airline, travel agency can process refund through GDS auto refund."

Closing borders not a solution

While sharing his view on how the past year has been for the aviation industry and what awaits in 2021, **Alexandre de Juniac**, Director General & CEO, IATA, says that waiting for global distribution of the vaccine to reopen borders to travel is not a wise option. Instead, borders must open with systematic COVID-19 testing.



Manas Dwivedi

The IATA CEO believes that the dimension of this crisis is unlike anything that has ever been seen, and the development of a vaccine will play a key role in recovery. "But, the only thing that we can say for certain is that we would not expect it to be widely available until at least midway through 2021. The financial situation of the industry is dire. Our latest forecast is that airlines will lose \$118 billion in 2020. While the situ-



Alexandre de Juniac
Director General & CEO, IATA

ation is expected to improve in 2021, we still expect a loss of \$38 billion. Governments have understood the situation and provided some \$133 billion in aid. Without it, we would have seen many more airlines go bankrupt

or cease operations. Even at that, Cirium has recently estimated that some 40 airlines had failed this year. Looking ahead to revenue projections, we don't see the industry being able to turn cash positive before late 2021. Much of the \$133 billion of government support is running out in Q4 of this year," he said. De Juniac was speaking at the CAPA Live December session.

IATA's priority at the moment is a safe restart of travel. "It's clear that for our customers, safe travel and ef-

fective testing are linked. For governments, meanwhile, restarting travel depends on minimising the risk of

We have the technology; rapid antigen tests are delivering results with over 90% accuracy in 15 minutes or less

We have the technology; rapid antigen tests are delivering results with over 90 per cent accuracy in 15 minutes or less, and new testing technologies under development could be even better," de Juniac explained.

Down the road, vaccines represent a permanent solution, he believes, and adds that news on progress of the vaccine is encouraging and IATA is working with World Health Organization, UNICEF and others in the COVAX initiative to ensure that aviation is prepared to deliver vaccines around the world. "Borders must be open for distribution, and logistics, and facilities need to be available with well-trained

staff and security measures. Passenger operations with belly capacity must be scaled up for the largest and most complex logistical challenge ever," he said.

Making his concluding remarks, de Juniac mentioned that aviation is a resilient industry and global economic recovery from COVID-19 will need the support of strong global connectivity that only aviation can provide. "The dimension of this crisis is unlike any we have seen before, but that should not destroy our confidence to see aviation through as a viable industry. And, the people on this planet have not lost that taste for the freedom to fly," he said.

Destinations welcomed 900 million fewer international tourists between January and October 2020 compared to the same period of 2019, translating into a loss of US\$ 935 billion in export revenues from international tourism.

importing new cases. That also points us in the direction of systematic testing.

River cruising in India a luxury

River cruising in India may have been a travel segment that was once ignored, but if utilised well, could be a product that India can boast of. Sharing their experience on-board Antara Cruises, luxury travel planners explain what defines a perfect itinerary and a boutique, niche holiday coupled with state-of-the-art luxury and an unforgettable experience.



Loveleen Multani Arun
Founder Director
Panache World

“Being on the Antara cruise fulfilled two of my passions - the city of Kolkata and any new product that comes into the tourism industry these days is welcome. River cruising has always been a passionate study for me. It has so much of potential. I really look forward to selling this wonderful new product as an experience that I am sure has miles to go in the industry.”

“Cruising on Antara was really an eye opener. We were not aware that there was such a high-end luxury river cruising experience available in India. The best surprise was the size of the rooms - they were not like the usual European river cruises. The service was also like that of a luxury five-star hotel. The food on the ship was indeed varied and delicious, and trying local dishes was a delight.”



Sanjay Arya
Chief Executive Officer
KFT Corporation



Mehernosh Colombowalla
Director, Beyond Borders Travel
Management Company

“Antara Cruises goes beyond our expectations! With fabulous, spacious rooms, it matches the standard of all international river cruises. In fact, it's heartening that Antara River Cruises has been voted sixth best among river cruises in the world. With such offerings, it would be very exciting for us to promote this product amongst our clients. Short itineraries on Antara are also good.”

“I was extremely delighted that I chose travelling on Antara Cruises for the first trip post lockdown. Initially, I was very worried to travel, but then being on a luxury ship and the kind of sanitation and cleanliness standards that we experienced were at par. It was a perfect place to be safe and enjoyable. The best part was to see Kolkata in a whole new way.”



Sadhna Sharma
Curator of Experiential Journeys
The Intrepid Club



Amit Gilani
Founder, Travel Butler

“People want to explore offbeat itineraries and places, and Antara Cruises defines a memorable, rustic experience with utmost luxurious amenities. One of the highest selling points of the cruise was the service and staff. The ship has expansive decks, nothing cluttered, and it gives one a feeling of being isolated and yet enjoying your time with luxury. The ship has got a spa as well. So, overall, it was delightful.”

“The entire experience of Antara Cruises was pleasantly surprising. One of the things that clearly stood out were the cabins. They were lovely, massive with big bay windows from where you could look out, sit, relax and soak in the entire view of River Ganges. ‘Luxurious’ is just to say the least. All these things make sailing on a cruise a lot more comfortable.”



Rupal Shukla
Director, Tiera Handcrafted Holidays
Inputs by Manas Dwivedi

A single zone for tourism

► Contd from page 10

needs to meet international standards. The trade in turn can help train the youth on this region.”

One region, one SOP

Voicing his concern about the non-homogeneity of the current protocols for the states, **Nirmalya Choudhury**, ED – Operations, JTI Group & Chapter Chairman, North East States, IATO, said, “What we need now is a common SOP for visitors from rest of India and abroad. The North-east is addressed as a single unit. So, in terms of destination promotion, we must recognise that in people’s mind it is a single zone for tourism – and they usually combine two or more states. We must look at developing a common COVID protocol whether they enter by rail, road or air. Right now, they have to go through multiple tests – two to three



times during their stay of 14 days.”

Choudhury added that the tourism secretaries of all the states should come on a common platform and exchange ideas while devising future plans and policies.

“We also need to restart air connectivity with our Southeast Asian neighbours, especially Singapore and Thailand,” he said. The aim for all experts was to focus and promote the entire Northeast region and not just a few states. 📌

Better marketing is key



Ranjeet Das
President, TOAA

“A major point we must all focus on is to showcase our beautiful Northeast region and its potential for rural tourism. The tourism business is no longer how it used to be, but we can now plan better. Once we fulfil their requirements for domestic tourism and in the Northeast region, people will want to explore their own country.”

Red Carpet belted for 2021

Rajesh Kakade, Founder & Global Director, Red Carpet Travels, believes that after a challenging 2020, they are prepared to take on 2021 with positivity, vigour and innovations.

TT Bureau

For **Rajesh Kakade**, 2020 started with a positive note and enthusiasm. “We increased our footprint, adding destinations like Australia as a DMC with an office in Melbourne. However, we experienced the impact of the pandemic as others, so have utilised our time constructively to develop interesting itineraries and unique propositions. Our driving force through this year was positivity, patience and immense gratitude towards it. It helped us evolve, grow, focus on what we have and plan for a better future,” he says.



Rajesh Kakade
Founder & Global Director, Red Carpet Travels

“Think out of the box rather than running along with the masses. Focus on technology and market demand,” he added.

Year 2020 was also a year of innovation. “We at Red Carpet Travels took this opportunity to focus on technology, development of unique propositions. In addition to this we are going to launch a travel partner engagement programme with a lucrative concept in 2021. We constantly endeavour to evolve, and we are working on a new digital platform, which will be a technological advance-

ment for the travel fraternity. It's unique, user-friendly and a good learning tool which will change the way of traditional travel business,” informs Kakade. They have also invested in optimising their resources by upgrading their skill set, destination knowledge and technological

We are working on a new digital platform, a technological advancement for the fraternity

know-how through training programmes. “It will eventually benefit our partners/customers in terms of better products and lower cost with the quick TAT,” he said. 📌

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'A year that accelerated the future'

Neliswa Nkani, Hub Head – MEISEA, South African Tourism, reflects on the year gone by and the hope that 2021 promises to hold with the approval of vaccines. With Indians raring to travel, she adds that this year when borders open, they expect good numbers to take advantage of South Africa's many offerings.



Hazel Jain

What is SAT's focus for 2021?

With international travel reopening and the hope of a vaccine coming in by early 2021, we intend to focus on three key aspects: inspire consumers to travel again by making them aware of all processes, requirements and safety measures of the destination or transfer facilities, and target niche communities.

What safety initiatives have been put in place?

We have internationally benchmarked bio-safety systems in place at all private game lodges and government-owned national



Neliswa Nkani
Hub Head – MEISEA
South African Tourism

parks, shopping hubs, restaurants and accommodation facilities. These include lesser number of tourists in a safari vehicle, digital menus, touchless parking, e-payment systems and disinfection stations. Safety measures should be transparent and should factor overall packages, so that there is no extra cost to travellers.



We are also in conversation with several airlines to figure how we can best reduce travel costs.

What about the e-visa for Indian nationals?

While pilot runs were going on the pandemic hit us, thereby delaying the process. We want to assure Indian travel agents that we are focused on introducing e-visas as soon as possible.

What kind of experiences will you focus on in 2021?

We expect self-drives to be popular with Indian travellers, given that South Africa

has some of the most beautiful self-drive routes in the world. Safe car rentals will

We expect self-drives to be popular. The fact that Indian licences are valid in SA is a huge bonus!

play an important role in the tourism ecosystem. The fact that Indian licences are valid in South Africa is a huge bonus! We want to invite biking groups to explore the

vast South African terrain. We are also looking at having more runners from India participate in our ultra-marathons like the Comrades Marathon and the Two Oceans Marathon.

What about other traveller segments?

In India, experience-seeking millennials, HNIs and the family-oriented middle-class segments are anticipated to be the driving force behind leisure travel recovery. We are also looking at introducing newer, customised experiences and itineraries for the FIT segment. We anticipate that South Africa's new regions and geographies will be a hit with Indian travellers in 2021. Travellers

can enter through cities that have restored international connectivity, either through Cape Town, Johannesburg or Durban, and use these cities as a gateway to the rest of these new regions, including the relatively unexplored Port Elizabeth, Robertson, West Coast, Drakensberg in KwaZulu-Natal, Panorama Route (Mpumalanga) and Garden Route.

Our travel trade partners tell us that Indians are raring to travel. We are already seeing plenty of interest, especially from Indian business and leisure travellers. We expect to see Indian traffic to the destination early in 2021, subject to border restrictions and connectivity.

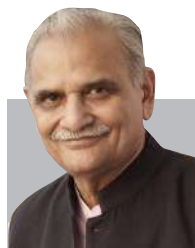
Untapped demand created Antara

With its first successful commercial sailing on the Ganges amidst a pandemic, Antara Luxury River Cruises has commenced its voyage to offer an unmatched service and life-changing experiences to domestic cruisers. With 12 charter bookings already in its kitty, the 2021 season looks promising for the company.



Manas Dwivedi

With COVID-19 having brought a lot of hurdles and challenges for the cruise industry, starting to sail with a



Raj Singh
Founder & Chairman, Antara
Luxury River Cruises and
Heritage River Journeys

new brand was no less than a feat for Antara, but as they say, 2020 has been a productive year for the man of-

ten called the 'Father of River Cruise Tourism in India' - **Raj Singh**, Founder & Chairman, Antara Luxury River Cruises and Heritage River Journeys, who, along with the dynamic 'Luxury Sales Guru of the Industry' - **Hemant Mediratta**, Co-founder & COO, Antara Luxury River Cruises, is on a mission to make river cruising a flourishing tourism product in India.

Sharing glimpses from his journey, Singh says that it took him almost 15 years to plan and then start the first commercial river cruise, in 2010, from Kolkata to Varanasi. "The journey from one ship to five ships at present has been very productive, but challenging, too. Over the years, we have put Ganga on

With over 100 national waterways in the country, the potential is immense
- Raj Singh

the world map for river cruise tourism. Our ship, Ganges Voyager II, has been voted among the six best cruise experiences in the world. With time, we realised that we needed a new brand with all the ships voyaging under one name, and with this thought we launched Heritage River Journeys, Antara Cruises being the new brand," he said.

He believes that in India, river cruising has a bright future. "With over 100 national waterways in the country, the potential is immense. But, first, we need to overcome



Hemant Mediratta
Co-founder & COO
Antara Luxury River Cruises

challenges both external and technical, to make river cruising in India successful. In fact, a major challenge is that the states where a river is capable of operating a

cruise need to have a clear river cruise tourism policy. This will help promote the sector in India," feels Singh.

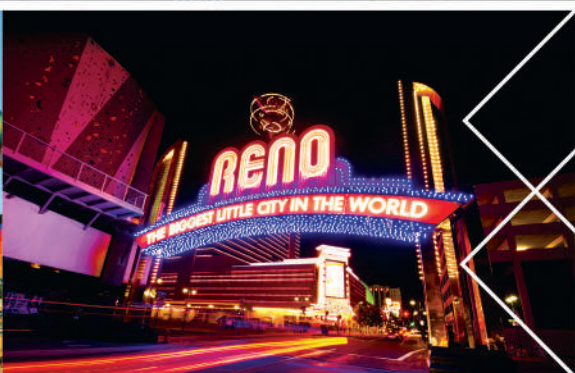
Mediratta, too, expects river cruising to flourish. "The initial reaction we received from the market was phenomenal. We have garnered 10-12 charter bookings for 2021 in a short span of time, which goes on to show, and instils, confidence that river cruising has a bright future. In terms of expansion, our aim is to spread into multiple rivers in the country. In the next five years, we hope to have 20 such ships in multiple rivers; we are in discussion for expansion in destinations like Goa, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. Domestic

tourism has opened a new vista for us," he explained.

Analysing the debut year for the cruise line, Mediratta feels that they have thrived

In the next five years, we hope to have 20 such ships in multiple rivers
- Hemant Mediratta

well despite challenges. "Year 2020 has been a good year for us. It taught us how to be resilient and adaptable. We changed our service offerings," he said.



THE BIGGEST LITTLE CITY IN THE WORLD

Indiatourism showcase for agents

Indiatourism, Mumbai office recently organised a physical event for members of Enterprising Travel Agents Association (ETAA) to showcase domestic products. More than 40 ETAA members participated in this event that was attended by **D Venkatesan**, Regional Director, West & Central India, Indiatourism, Mumbai, who briefed members on the MDA scheme.



More despair among agents

Contd from page 3



Ajay Chhabria
MD, In-Time Travels

“I am livid with this new rule. I had 24 passengers booked for Dubai for December and since this announcement, I have only been busy making their cancellations. These were high-end clients staying at five-star hotels and all of them have cancelled their bookings, except two who are travelling in January. I have even tweeted to Aadiya Thackeray that this makes no sense at all as passengers, before 12 am, were allowed to exit the airport but after a minute they were quarantined. This has also added to my clients' cost of extra hotel stay which is nothing less than ₹4,500 per room.”

“Year 2020 has been a year of despair for the industry. Things had started looking up since November, especially for international destinations like Maldives and Dubai, and we had a few queries in progress for the upcoming Dubai festival, too. However, with the latest rules on quarantine we are seeing clients backing off. This is indenting the already depleted morale of travellers who are losing confidence in making their travel plans. Though domestic enquiries are still in place, they are not getting firmed up due to unavailability of clear SOPs for interstate travel. A clear channel of communication needs to be opened.”



Shivdatta Wagle
Director, Meandering Vacations



Dharmesh Advani
Director, Bombay Travels

“Finally when the business was picking up to some extent, the new protocol issued by the government has put all the plans in jeopardy. My clients who are currently in Dubai for holidays are calling in panic and are stressed. Further, on arrival at the airport, there is a lot of nuisance and the staff is unaware of what is expected out of them. The government should have some plans put in place so the new protocols can be followed more efficiently. Luckily, no client of mine was travelling at the time.”

Inputs by Hazel Jain

10-part wildlife series

The Travel Operators for Tigers India Wildlife Association will conduct a 10-part series of virtual tutorial starting from January 13, 2021 to educate the trade about wildlife.

Hazel Jain

TOFTigers is a collective campaign and global alliance that includes stakeholders such as governments, communities and travellers to spread awareness about sustaining wildlife. Leading this initiative in India is **Ritu Makhija**, Sustainability Manager, Green Team, Travel Operators for Tigers India Wildlife Association. She says, “We have planned 10 sessions for this starting from January 13, 2021. The idea about the sessions is to share knowledge by industry leaders who are part of our membership and reach out to the entire travel community. In the past, we have done sessions on topics such as destinations, digital marketing, sustainability and conservation.”

The focus of these virtual sessions is to share the good practices of sustainability and responsible tourism, and how the travel trade can apply this in their operations, she explains. “The Sustainability Awareness

Tutorials are focused at the Indian travel trade community such as DMCs, tour operator owners as well as their sales team to help them in designing itineraries. These can also benefit accommodation providers and tourism boards. The sessions will be focused on understanding the need



Ritu Makhija
Sustainability Manager, Green Team,
Travel Operators for Tigers India
Wildlife Association

for greater sustainability in designing and building travel programmes. It has monetary and ecological value to both travel companies as well as travellers, along with the destinations who receive visitors,” Makhija adds.

The sessions will focus on understanding the need for greater sustainability in designing and building travel programmes

Sharing her views on how wildlife can be one of the emerging trends of 2021, she says, “Eco-tourism is the fastest growing and covers nature-based tourism, but also rural or wilderness destinations in outdoor environments. Post COVID, the desire for better ecologically focused travel appears to be the net beneficiary of the pandemic.”

For more details on the sessions, please refer to the 2021 calendar ahead. ↴

Recovery in post-vaccine 2021

► Contd from page 8



Harmandeep Singh Anand
MD, GPS and Jagsons Travels

“We are bringing as many services as possible within a bouquet to serve our clients and increase our bottom line in the days and years to come because we can't survive on what we had in the past. We must have alternate revenue sources, and that's a big learning for us. In terms of revival, I believe, domestic has ignited basic travel. Only those with savings can expect to travel. Many people would first go to shorter distances and even if flights open up internationally, I don't think that before 2021 Diwali or Christmas, many people would start travelling.”

“At VFS Global, the challenge over the last few months had been to chart our road to sustenance and reopening operations with a primary focus on making the entire visa journey safe, seamless and digitally driven (or physically distanced) for our customers. As the travel ecosystem inches towards recovery, creating an agile service offering with customer health and safety considerations will be paramount. Technology and digital capabilities will assist in making travel an anxiety-free process, and will enable the travel community to bring back the promise in travel.”



Vinay Malhotra
Regional Group COO- South Asia, Middle East and North Africa Americas, VFS



Sabina Chopra
Co-Founder and COO, Corporate Travel and Head Industry Relations, Yatra.com

“In the last couple of years, there has been growth in the number of individuals planning their travel to various destinations and celebrate winter holidays around New Year's or Christmas with their friends or families. This year as well, the trend is picking up in demand as we have received a growth in booking enquires for the winter holiday season while comparing it to non-festive months. Travellers are being more selective. We have various offers on the platform as well as bank/wallet benefits to customers in order to help them plan their budget leisure trips.”

“We are glad that 2020 has come to an end. It has definitely been the worst year for the industry. Towards the end of the year, more so in December, we saw some light at the end of the tunnel with domestic travel kick-starting well. Destinations in North Bengal, Sikkim, Northeast, Goa and Rajasthan have been popular from eastern India. Maldives has been a hot destination for travellers going outbound from India. Three charters have flown to the island nation from Kolkata, too. We hope this trend continues in the next quarter as well, with more countries opening borders.”



Manoj Saraf
Managing Director, Gainwell Travel



Neeraj Gupta
Director, Peekay Holidays

“In 2021, I am really excited to bring out some new domestic products that our country has to offer, from boutique hotels to niche experiences like river cruising. I strongly believe that Indian travellers should travel domestically and see their beautiful country. Of course, international destinations like Dubai and Maldives have opened up and they have seen a boom. I believe, long-haul destinations like the United States and Europe might also open by March. Thanks to COVID, more and more people are now eager to travel after spending majority of time at home.”

“The turn of the year will bring about a lot of optimism because 2020 has been a very tough year for everyone. It's been a reboot year and we have learnt a lot of new things, but going forward, we are going to get more humane about how we experience this world and that's very important. We took this world for granted and a lot of things we were careless about, we will now be very careful with. Travel is going to become more meaningful. People are going to give a lot more thought in terms of why they are travelling, what are they going to get in return and what are they going to give to the destination.”



Sanjar Imam
Founder Director, Panache World



G Kamala Vardhana Rao
Chairman & MD, ITDC

“My mantra for 2021 is to be innovative and think out of the box. There is no denying the fact that the sector has been most severely impacted by the pandemic, but what is needed is a resilient approach and an eye for new opportunities. Tomorrow is created today, and we are doing just that. The biggest takeaway from 2020 would be that every crisis presents itself with an opportunity, provided you have the keen outlook towards converting it. Employees are your biggest strength, hence, organisations should focus on keeping their workforce agile and ready for challenges.”

“Year 2021 is exciting for us at Accor. It marks the launch of the first Raffles in India that we are all very excited about. We are cautiously optimistic for the New Year. I believe that continuing to be agile and thinking on our feet will be key for us. It will be imperative to drive consistency across the board to delivering a guest experience that continues to keep the guests' safety and hygiene at the helm. Every day, we will bring the best versions of ourselves by working smarter, driving performance, and continuously delivering quality service.”



Puneet Dhawan
Senior VP, India & South Asia, Accor



Pushpendra Bansal
COO, Lords Hotels and Resorts

“The coming of the new year gives us a clean slate, a chance to re-evaluate our journey, do better, go farther and apply our learnings from the past year. We are hopeful that our industry will regain lost ground in the post-vaccine era. An opportunity to capitalise on exclusive experiences lies head for us, as we build a strong brand presence across India and beyond. We are looking forward to 2021 as we expand our presence in North-east and southern India. May the coming year be a year of steady development, stability, good health and harmony for all of us.”

“The pandemic has really pushed the entire industry to innovate, transform and re-think how we do business. With the holiday season here, our hotels are running busy. We are excited that domestic leisure travel is picking up pace. We have re-opened 16 properties and all our leisure destinations are doing good business. We received many reservation requests for the New-Year weekend. However, with work-from-home imposed by most organisations, MICE and corporate events will take a while to revive. With the vaccine already introduced, this should pick up by mid-2021.”



Sarbendra Sarkar
Founder & MD, Cygnett Hotels & Resorts



Davinder Jui
GM, Eros Hotel New Delhi Nehru Place

“Actual revival could be seen in the next 12 to 18 months. Our focus will remain on achieving break-even and exploring all opportunities that will help us in sustaining ourselves. Safety and hygiene will remain at the forefront and we will ensure that our guests' and team members' safety is not compromised at any point of time. Staying on top of technology will 'wow' guests and would be a necessity. The biggest learning from 2020 has been that we should keep ourselves prepared mentally and financially, to deal with such unprecedented crisis.”

“We are bullish about 2021 and likely to come up with three to four new projects in Tier-II and III cities as niche hotels and resorts. From 2020, the biggest learning has been not to keep all eggs in one basket. The need for the future is to diversify and create multi-locational hotels and resorts, streamline costs, but not compromise on quality. There is a need to cautiously manage financial resources and create balance in one's credit and debit policy. At the same time, one should ensure that all compliances are followed through.”



Rohit Katyal
National Sales Head
Justa Hotels & Resorts

MDA, SEIS on IATO's agenda

IATO held its virtual interactive meeting recently, where members discussed the new MDA guidelines for promotion of domestic tourism and the impending SEIS dues.



Nisha Verma

In his opening remarks, **Rajesh Mudgill**, Hony. Secretary, IATO, shared that the new MDA guidelines for promotion of domestic tourism was good news. The revised MDA scheme would offer financial support to tourism service providers approved by MOT for promotion of domestic tourism.



Rajesh Mudgill
Hony. Secretary, IATO

Maximum three tours in one financial year, with only one tour to a particular state would be permissible for the service provider. One additional tour, apart from the three tours, will be permissible for visiting any Northeast state, J&K and Ladakh. In fact, service providers from northeastern states, J&K and Ladakh can avail the facility for as many as four tours in one financial year under the scheme. The financial benefits include 90% of Economy Class airfare or 2nd AC train fare for

participation in travel fairs and exhibitions, as well as 90% of cost of built-up or furnished stall, and participation fee. The upper ceiling for the cost would be ₹1,35,000 per trip (including GST & taxes) subject to actual (including air/train fare – ₹35,000, cost of stall or participation fee- ₹1,00,000),” he informed. Apart from that, Mudgill informed that the MOT had released revised guidelines for recognition of tourism service providers. Green Shoots, option to operate from home, and staff employment have been added.

Pronab Sarkar, President, IATO, shared that IATO had reached out to Special Secretary and JS-MOC and explained their

Service providers from northeastern states, J&K and Ladakh can avail the facility for as many as four tours

concerns to the department of SEIS. In its inputs to SEPC for the new guidelines for the next five years, IATO has proposed 10% SEIS during season and 15% in off season. ↴

E-learn about Abu Dhabi

‘Abu Dhabi Specialist Programme’ is an e-learning platform which will educate travel trade industry professionals with all destination-related information about the emirate through a series of online courses.



TT Bureau

The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi will roll out the programme in three phases and several languages across 17 markets, including India. The first phase is set to be launched on May 1, to be available to travel professionals on abudhabispecialist.com. It will



HE Saood Al Hosani
Acting Undersecretary, DCT Abu Dhabi

Abu Dhabi

equip travel trade professionals with accurate and relevant information about Abu Dhabi, supporting and encouraging them to promote the destination to consumers within their markets. It also aims to reach a wider audience of travel agents worldwide. DCT Abu Dhabi has already conducted a series of virtual workshops and meetings since the coronavirus situation unfolded. “This is a significant

step forward and through it we will be able to reach a larger number of travel trade agents across the globe, including previously untapped markets like Canada and New Zealand,” says **HE Saood Al Hosani**, Acting Undersecretary at DCT Abu Dhabi. “This training and education platform ensures that all participating industry partners have easy and quick access to the latest content on Abu Dhabi, thus making the destination promotion aspect of their job much easier.” The courses

encompassed in the programme cover information related to key attractions in Abu Dhabi, local events, accommodation options and much more. Additionally, it

This platform ensures that all industry partners have easy and quick access to latest content on Abu Dhabi

includes a rewards section with incentive programmes available for ‘Abu Dhabi Specialists’ – travel trade agents who graduate from the main programme. ↴

The agent-airline conundrum

Sunil Kumar, President, United Federation of Travel Agents’ Associations (UFTAA), in this in-depth exclusive interview with **TRAVELTALK**, shares key milestones of 2020 and its under-discussion ‘Zero Risk’ programme whose premise is to protect agent interests.



Hazel Jain

Sunil Kumar shares in detail issues that have kept the association on its toes, highlighting its new concept that the agent community can look forward to in 2021.

Allow access to Basic version

Outlining the refund saga, Kumar says, “Since most agents in India are on the basic version of IATA, they couldn’t access the refund authority. We had to make a lot of hue and cry with IATA at the Global Joint Council (GJC). Here, we brought up this conundrum – on one hand agents were cut off from the GDS and the airlines were asking us to file a refund through the BSP link. Our plea was to

enable refund authority to all IATA agencies through the basic version and this was activated.”

However, he explains that by default this refund authority went to airlines directly. “These were kept piled up by the airlines. Even today some of them are still pending! IATA cannot give credit till such a time that airlines confirm the refund authority. But, IATA paid some of it back and a large percentage of refunds are now adjusted (credit vouchers),” he says.

The Jet Airways saga

When asked if the IATA system is skewed towards airlines, Kumar says, “Should any agent go bust, the airline is protected. If an airline goes bust, is the agent



Sunil Kumar
President, UFTAA

protected? The answer is no! Jet Airways is a classic example. I can’t believe that the airline is trying to come back. We don’t want the new Jet Airways to be given IATA permission at all. If I as an IATA agent default, I can’t come back to IATA unless I pay back the money. So Jet Airways has to make good all their liabilities to the agents. We will take this up in a very big way,” Kumar explains.

UFTAA's 'Zero Debt' concept

We sympathise with the airlines but the scenario that is coming in is deadly, believes Kumar. The association has therefore initiated a concept of Zero Risk with IATA that can protect the agents and airlines from any future risk to either party. “The current scenario has reflected our unpreparedness to protect the monies of the stakeholders and the customers, owing to the challenges the agencies had to go through. In an evolving scenario, it is time that such a Zero Risk to either of the stakeholders is envisioned through IATA’s governing resolution and we be better prepared to handle such crisis, if it would ever come up in future,” he says. Towards this, all global federations of associations which are part



of IATA’s PAPGJC have come together and a working group is getting created involving representatives of airlines, agency associations and IATA, with terms of reference of the committee meeting the expectations of all. “This is anticipated to be finalised by January and thereupon the working group can deliberate to plan a great legacy for the future which does not pose any risk or threat to our customers or agencies. We eagerly look forward to this working group to be able to come up with a favourable solution for the industry and its stakeholders,” Kumar adds. ↴

In Memoriam



Ratan Marothia
(10.01.1949 – 22.12.2020)

Ratan Marothia, former President, FHRAI and former President, HRAEI, has passed away. Having started a successful business with interests in the logistics and steel industry, his entrepreneurial zeal and passion for hospitality soon made him venture into the hotel business about 30 years ago. Marothia, one of the founding members of FAITH, had always been extremely fond of travelling and enjoyed interacting with people from diverse backgrounds. He firmly believed that in a country like India, tourism could truly serve as a catalyst for economic and social development, and considered himself fortunate for having had the opportunity to make a contribution towards this goal. He will truly be missed.



Digital Offerings



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2021

Date Event Time (Virtual) / Location


JANUARY

7-9	Tourism Expo Japan	Tokyo
12	STB India Virtual Tradeshow 	South India
13	CAPA Live	08:30 am IST
13	TOFTigers Webinar- Wildlife Conservation	02:00 pm IST
15	STB India Virtual Tradeshow 	North India
17-23	ASEAN Tourism Forum 2021	Cambodia
18	UNWTO Executive Council (Hybrid)	Madrid
18	Penang Roadshow to India (Virtual)	Kochi
19	STB India Virtual Tradeshow 	West India
20	Penang Roadshow to India (Virtual)	Chennai
20	IATO Workshop on cost cutting	11:30 am IST
20	TOFTigers Webinar- Sustainability Awareness	02:00 pm IST
21	STB India Virtual Tradeshow 	East India
21	CII Medical Value Travel	02:00 pm IST
21	UNWTO World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism	03:00 pm IST
21	CAPA India Webinar	04:00 pm IST
22	Penang Roadshow to India (Virtual)	Delhi
25	Penang Roadshow to India (Virtual)	Mumbai
27-29	Europe + Asia Events Forum	St. Petersburg
29	IATO Workshop on Short & Off Season Itineraries	11:30 am IST
29	TOF Tigers Webinar- Travelife launch	03:30 pm IST
29-31	Gujarat Travel Fair	10:00 am IST

FEBRUARY

03	TOF Tigers Webinar- Marketing sustainability	02:00 pm IST
8-11	PATA Beyond: Travel Recovery Solutions	10:30 am IST
10	CAPA Live	08:30 am IST
10	TOFTigers Webinar- Sustainability Awareness	02:00 pm IST
12-14	TTF	Bengaluru
17	TOFTigers Webinar- Designing Wildlife Trips	02:00 pm IST
18-20	TTF	Chennai
24-25	HICSA 2021 (Hybrid)	Delhi
25-27	Travel Turkey Izmir (Digital)	TBA
26-28	TTF	Kolkata
TBA	Saudi Arabia Hotel Investment Conference	Riyadh

MARCH

1-2	Belgium Travel Expo	Ghent, Belgium
2-3	MRO- Middle East	Dubai
03	TOFTigers Webinar- Create your own forest	02:00 pm
4-6	TTF	Ahmedabad
6	IATO Election	Delhi
6-7	LA Travel & Adventure Show	Los Angeles
9-12	ITB Berlin 	Online
9-13	AAHAR 2021	Delhi

March Contd...

10	JTB Corporate MICE Show	TBA
10	TOF Tigers Webinar- Sustainability Awareness	02:00 pm
10	CAPA Live	08:30 am
15-16	Asia Travel Show (ATS) 	TBA
16-18	MITT	Moscow
18-21	Global Hospitality and Tourism Conference	Shillong
19-21	OTM	Mumbai
24	TOFTigers Webinar-Destination Northeast	02:00 pm IST
23-26	PATA Annual Summit 2021	RAK
24-25	British Tourism & Travel Show	Birmingham
24-26	SATTE	Greater Noida
24-26	UITT	Kyiv, Ukraine
31	TOF Tigers Webinar- Weaving Tribal Culture	02:00 pm IST
31-1 Apr.	Gulf Travel Show (GTS) 	TBA

APRIL

7-9	ITB India (Virtual)	TBA
12-14	COTTM	Beijing
27-29	MRO-Americas	Orlando
27-29	Germany Travel Mart (Virtual)	TBA
28-30	World Tourism Forum	Switzerland

MAY

7-8	ITB China Special Edition	Beijing
9-11	BIT Milano	Milan
16-19	Arabian Travel Market (ATM)	Dubai
17-18	ILTM Arabia	Dubai
19-23	FTUR 	Madrid
21-23	MATKA	Helsinki
25-27	IMEX	Frankfurt

JUNE

1-3	Digital Travel Virtual Summit	TBA
2-4	Routes Asia 2021	Thailand
2-4	ACE of MICE Exhibition	Istanbul
4-6	CMT China	Nanjing
8-12	Bali & Beyond Travel Fair	Bali
15-17	IATA Slot Conference	Vancouver
21	International Yoga Day	Pan-India
22-23	Aviation Festival Asia 2021	Singapore
24-27	Korea World Travel Fair (KOFTA)	Seoul

JULY

26-29	ILTM- APAC	Singapore
27	CLIA Cruise 360	Florida

AUGUST

3-5	IT&CM China (Virtual)	Shanghai
6-8	TTF	Kolkata
10-11	TTF	Hyderabad
13-15	TTF	Ahmedabad
19-21	OTM	Mumbai
23-24	BLTM	Delhi
23-25	ASTA Global Convention	Chicago
25-26	Civil Aviation South East Asia Summit	Bangkok
27	CLIA Cruise 360 Australasia	Sydney
27-29	TTF	Surat

SEPTEMBER

3-5	TTF	Pune
3-5	Philippine Travel Show	Philippines
8-10	Future Travel Experience Global	Las Vegas
2-0-23	ILTM- NAM	Mexico
20-23	Adventure Travel World Summit	Japan
21-23	MRO Asia-Pacific	Singapore
26-29	The Healthcare Travel Conference	Paris
27	World Tourism Day Celebrations	Worldwide

OCTOBER

1	Dubai World Expo 2020	Dubai
5-8	IFTM Top Resa 	Paris
6-8	UTM	Ukraine
10-12	World Routes 2021	Milan
13-15	TTG Incontri	Rimini
26-29	ILTM- LATAM	Sao Paulo
27-29	ITB Asia (Hybrid)	Singapore
29- 5 Nov	London Travel Week	London
TBA	ILTM China	Shanghai
TBA	Digital Travel Connect 2021	TBA

NOVEMBER

1-3	World Travel Market (WTM) 	London
9-11	IMEX America 2021	Las Vegas
15-18	IATA Ground Handling Conference	Prague
16-18	AdventureELEVATE 2021	Sedona, Arizona
16-20	IT&CM Asia	Bangkok
24-26	ITB China 2021	Shanghai
24-26	PATA Destination Marketing Forum	Sarawak, Malaysia
27-04 Dec	Athens International Tourism Expo (Virtual)	03:30 PM IST
30-02 Dec	IBTM World	Barcelona

DECEMBER

06-09	ILTM	Cannes
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For more details, contact: talk@ddppl.com

The dates shown on the annual event calendar are subject to change. Please refer to Event Talk in TravTalk to track the changes in dates.



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Collaboration is the future

The future of India's tourism sector, after a devastating pandemic that still continues to disrupt, lies in better collaboration between industry and state, and the implementation of more responsible, sustainable action.



Nisha Verma

Meenakshi Sharma, Director General, Ministry of Tourism, happy with the way tourism within the country has begun, says that the focus now needs to be on spreading the traffic around because right now, tourism is only concentrated in a few places. Amidst hope that things will be better with the vaccine on the horizon, she shares that the Ministry of Finance (MOF) has come out with some packages and relief, and that the state governments have also done their bit. Sharma adds, "MOT has started a conversation with MoHA and MEA on how to open up international tourism. Even if the D-day may not be known yet, we need to know how to go about it and what more can be done to make India an attractive destination again."

Sharing more details on MOT's international campaign, she says, "Our campaign says that we are COVID-proof and that we are ready to work when the international market is ready. The industry has also seen some drafts, and we should be ready with it in a month or so," and adds, "We need to have the travel industry come forward and be a part of hygiene protocols because none of them can be made mandatory by the government. I would request the industry to work with the state governments to see that the trade responds positively."

Domestic tourism stronger

Sharma, accepting that MOT has never really focused on domestic tourism for a campaign, says, "Domestic tourism is a very important sector for all of us and state governments were made responsible for promoting it. However, looking at the present crisis, diverting the outbound traffic towards domestic

We shouldn't be left behind whenever the international traveller is prepared to travel

tourism is the strategy change in the Ministry of Tourism's mandate. A huge number of Indians travel international every year. Even if we get 50 per cent of them, it will be very good. However, we should work towards making them a satisfied customer. It shouldn't be a one-off visit, they should be willing to go to a destination within the country."

Confidence is key

With traveller confidence back, the DG believes that now there will be no stopping for tourism. "Building confidence of international travellers is a global

concern. No country can solve them alone. However, we shouldn't be left behind whenever the international traveller is mentally prepared to travel. This is the challenge towards which Government of India, the state governments, and the industry must work together. It's easy to say 'let's open the sector,' but to do that there are many considerations that must be looked at," she asserts.

Earlier, the DG had also said that MOT was in dialogue with the industry about an insurance product that they hope will be a solution to regain the confidence of the international traveller at some level.

Learning from the crisis

Sharma says that there is talk of revising the criteria for Human Development Index (HDI), and that the new criteria, according to her, would focus on one's carbon footprint, sustainability and consumption pattern.

"Community participation is very important, and tourism

must now be considered a 'responsible' activity. We have talked about sustainable tourism, but we have not been able to bring it into practice. It is a challenge because we have a 'crowd mentality' and we are fast travellers. Now we seem to be becoming slow travellers, and this is one lesson that we have learnt. Another thing we have learnt is that this sector should also be prepared for a crisis. We didn't know how to handle the crisis well and the value chain wasn't very well defined; we need to work on that. We should have insurance provision; the social security net for this sector, which is very important, is also neglected to an extent," she concludes.



Meenakshi Sharma
Director General
Ministry of Tourism

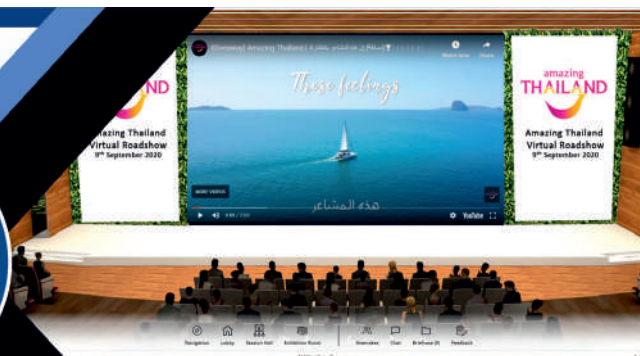
For the trade

"We have liberalised the definition of 'Marketing Development'. There is no need to get approval from MOT for such 'Assistance'. We are also willing to pick up the tab for promotions to some extent. This should help the industry in a small way." - Meenakshi Sharma



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