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SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY

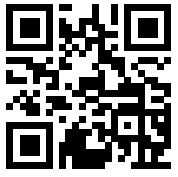
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A new era unfolds

Ministry of Tourism, after a reshuffle of the cabinet advised by PM Narendra Modi, has got three ministers taking charge of the tourism industry in what could be a new era for the sector.

TT Bureau

The new Cabinet Minister for Tourism & Culture is **G Kishan Reddy**. He takes over from Prahlad Singh Patel who was at the helm of the portfolio since May 30, 2019. Reddy, an MP representing Secunderabad (Lok Sabha constituency) since 2019, has also been appointed as the Minister of Development of North-East Region.

Taking charge alongside him is **Shripad Yesso Naik**, who has returned as the Minister of State, Tourism. Naik had a stint as Minister of State for Tourism



Shripad Yesso Naik, G Kishan Reddy & Ajay Bhatt take charge from PS Patel

earlier in 2014 for a brief period. Prior to the new appointment, he was the Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) in the Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) and Minister of State for Defence.

Apart from Naik, **Ajay Bhatt** also has been given the portfolio of Minister of State, Tourism. In the past, Bhatt has also held portfolios like Parliamentary Affairs, Health, Disaster Excise as Cabinet Minister in Uttarakhand Government.

Strengthening BRICS

G Kishan Reddy, Cabinet Minister for Tourism, has stressed on the need for greater intra-BRICS tourism cooperation, sustainability and infrastructure development.

Nisha Verma

G Kishan Reddy recently addressed the BRICS Tourism Ministers' Meeting as the Chairperson through video-conferencing, which saw in attendance tourism ministers of all BRICS countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

The meeting saw review of the intra BRICS Tourism cooperation and adoption of the Ministers' Communique, an outcome document on cooperation and promotion of tourism between the BRICS countries. The Ministers' Communique recognised



G Kishan Reddy
Cabinet Minister, Tourism & Culture, GOI

that the COVID-19 pandemic has severely endangered public health and has presented immense challenges to the implementation of sustainable development goals.

In his address, Reddy pointed out that the pandemic has brought many challenges for the global tourism sector. "We all need to support our tourism business and face this unprecedented crisis to save jobs and restart tourism. Apart from immediate measures we need to learn lessons from the crisis to prepare comprehensive tourism recovery plans. The crisis presents an opportunity to reshape the tourism ecosystem for a more sustainable restart in future," he said.

Saying that tourism sector is a major source of economic

Contd on page 8 ▶

A plan is needed

Ajay Bhatt, the newly appointed Minister of State, Tourism, speaks to **TRAVTALK** about his role in taking the sector forward.

Nisha Verma

For **Ajay Bhatt**, priorities are already fixed. He says that he will work towards bringing the tourism sector on top. "We will take briefings and understand things clearly. Only then will we have clarity on issues, so we can deliberate and come to a solution for them," he claimed.

He added that stakeholders, both directly and indirectly employed with the tourism sector, have also suffered immensely. "The hotel industry has come to a halt and small shops around tourist sites have been badly



Ajay Bhatt
Minister of State, Tourism

impacted. This includes locals, rickshaws, taxis, guides, daily wagers, etc. Now that the situation is improving day by day, we hope to soon come back to the old levels of tourism in India," he concluded.

SEIS payment release soon

Arvind Singh, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, shares that in addition to the relief measures recently announced for tourism stakeholders, SEIS payments will also be released soon. MOT is also planning to extend financial incentives to foreign tour operators.

Nisha Verma

After the Finance Minister's announcement of relief measures for tourism, **Arvind Singh**, believes that it is a start for things to come for the sector. "The scheme that they have given under the Credit Link Guarantee Scheme of providing loans to the tour operators, will provide some relief to the person whose revenues have dried up because of COVID-19. I think that's an opening that has started for the tour operators and the tour guides. Details of the schemes will be worked out in coordination with NCGTC and



Arvind Singh
Secretary, Ministry of Tourism

in consultation with Ministry of Finance. It will ease the financial constraints faced by them due to COVID-19 pandemic. This will help them in discharge of their

liabilities and restart their business impacted due to COVID-19 pandemic," he says. He adds that the announcement of first five lakh tourist visas to be issued free would give boost to the tourism sector.

Engagement with industry

Singh claims that MOT is in talks with the industry on what relief measures they further want to protect job losses. "In our meetings with the industry, we analyse things that stakeholders have been demanding, including certain benefits, incentives, etc. We have been in dialogue with various ministries of the gov-

ernment, like Finance Ministry and we are taking up both short-term and long-term measures required for the revival of the industry," he claims.

"Besides the above, Ministry of Tourism under the Scheme of 'Incentive to tour operators for enhancing Tourist Arrivals to India' will extend financial incentives in the range of \$30/ \$50 to Foreign Tour Operators (FTOs) and inbound tour operators approved by the MOT for bringing 100 tourists per quarter from the identified markets. This scheme will be operationalised on a pilot

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election on July 24

The Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) will conduct its national elections via e-voting on July 24, 2021 along with its AGM and EOGM through an online platform. While 10 chapters had completed their election in January, the MP chapter election was delayed.



Hazel Jain

The Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) will finally hold its much-delayed national elections on 24 July, 2021 via e-voting conducted on the National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL) platform. Its 27th Annual General Meeting will be held at 09:30 am followed by the Extra Ordinary General Body Meeting at 10:30 am. It shall be conducted online.

The following nine posts are open for election: President, Vice-President, National General Secretary, Treasurer and five posts for Managing Committee Members. The TAFI Secretariat will send the procedure for registering the members for this voting process.

Only chartered and active members are qualified to stand for elections after being duly proposed and seconded by other qualified active and chartered members. Only chartered



Pradip Lulla
Acting President & VP, TAFI

and active members will be allowed to vote. Qualifying candidates will need to submit their nominations to the TAFI office in the prescribed form on or before 12:00 hours on Saturday, 17th July 2021.

Pranav K Kapadia from Global Destinations, Independent Returning Officer has been appointed by the existing Managing Committee to scrutinise all the nominations received. Nominations may

be withdrawn by the candidate on or before Tuesday 20th July 2021 by 16:00 hrs via e-mail. Results are likely to be announced at around 17:00 hours on 24th July 2021 through an online platform.

The association's national elections were delayed because of various factors in-

TAFI, says, "We had completed 10 chapter elections by January 2021, and the last one which was the Madhya Pradesh chapter election was held only in February 2021 after much delay because of a technical problem of the chairman not being available."

Lulla adds, "In TAFI, we are asking people to revive and support domestic tourism. We have been doing webinars along with MOT towards this. During Diwali, Goa will open, hotels have started the basic activities, bars and restaurants are open with norms and guidelines. Due to this pandemic, our association extended 25% discount to the membership on the annual subscription fees. Moreover, we haven't had a convention for the last two years and still it looks far off." 🐦

In TAFI, we are asking people to revive and support domestic tourism

cluding a delay in its Chapter elections. **Pradip Lulla**, Acting President and Vice President,

A report jointly presented by UNWTO and UNCTAD says that international tourism and its closely linked sectors suffered an estimated loss of \$2.4 trillion in 2020 due to direct and indirect impacts of a steep drop in international tourist arrivals.

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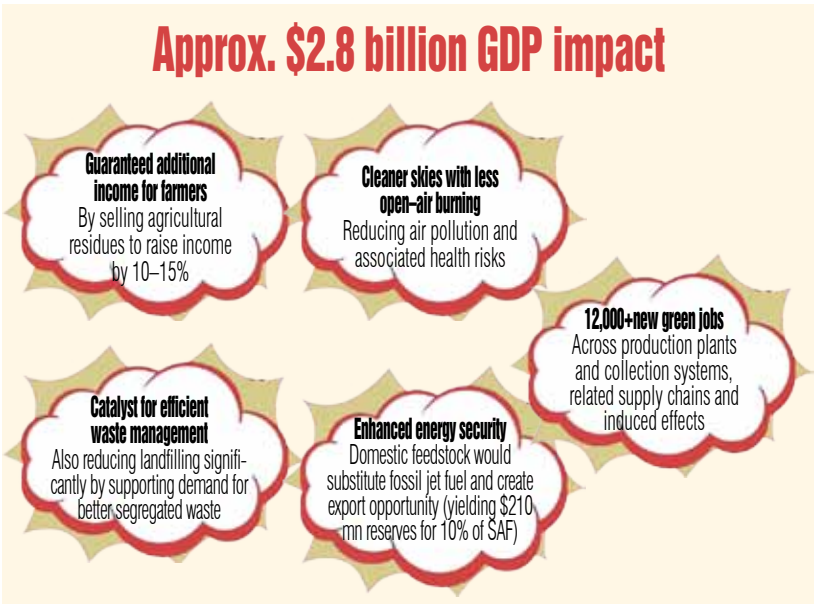
Fuelling a difference

India is working with leaders around the globe to decouple GDP growth from emissions of CO2 and other greenhouse gases (GHGs). A report by McKinsey & Company and World Economic Forum reveals India is well placed to stay ahead in technology development.



While the aviation industry contributes less than 1% of India's total emissions today, aviation is among the fastest-growing sectors of the economy. Indeed, India is on track to become the world's third-largest aviation market by 2024, up from eighth place today. Aviation's share of total emissions in India may increase significantly even if power, road transport and other industries make little progress in decarbonisation.

Through the Clean Skies for Tomorrow (CST) initiative, the World Economic Forum has convened an Indian SAF (sustainable aviation fuel) community of private and public institutions with the shared vision of transporting 100 million domestic passengers in India on SAF by 2030 on a 10% blend, which translates to 360,000 metric tons of SAF. India's total expected domestic need for jet



fuel is estimated to be approximately 8 million tons by 2030, flying an estimated 190 million domestic passengers a year.

To be an effective emissions reduction measure, SAF producers must adhere to strict sustainability criteria for feedstock and energy inputs, incorporating strong

Economic and social benefits of SAF use

- ❖ Additional income for farmers
- ❖ Cleaner skies with less open-air burning
- ❖ Green job opportunities
- ❖ Enhanced energy security
- ❖ Catalyst for efficient municipal solid waste management

and transparent certifications throughout the feedstock

of otherwise unsustainable practices or products. Overall, the CST community takes a nuanced yet pragmatic view of viable feedstock sources in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and sustainable biofuel authorities such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB) and International Sustainability and Carbon Certification (ISCC).

India has a wealth of natural resources and bio-based-feedstocks and it is already a low-cost producer of solar and wind power at global scale. The nation is well placed to become a global leader in bio-fuels and e-fuels and to stay ahead of the curve in global technology development.

DID YOU Know?

SpiceJet operated India's first domestic biofuel test flight on a 25% blend of SAF in 2018.



In the short term, four SAF feedstocks and production pathways are most feasible in India

- ❖ Hydro-processed esters and fatty acids (HEFA), mostly from used cooking oil (UCO)
- ❖ Alcohol-to-jet (ATJ) using agricultural residues and surplus sugar streams such as cane molasses and syrup
- ❖ Gasification/Fischer-Tropsch (GAS-FT), using municipal solid waste and agricultural residues
- ❖ Power-to-liquid (PtL) in particular could be feasible based on hydrogen technology and access to point sources of carbon in the chemical, steel and cement industries

supply chain. This should include crop-choice and land-use impacts for agricultural feedstocks as well as equity and income considerations for farmers, waste management workers and other stakeholders. This should also include careful consideration of waste, residue, and surplus agricultural feedstocks such that any use does not in turn incentivize production

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TRAVTALK

VIEWPOINT

Is this Tourism 2.0?

Rising to the challenge of reviving a devastated tourism and hospitality sector, the new ministerial team at the helm will have a magnanimous task at hand. Over the past year, the industry often voiced its grievances and brought them to the notice of the tourism ministry as well as the Prime Minister. While some of them were addressed, some others were not, leaving the industry still hanging by a thread and concluding that while some steps were taken, they weren't enough to truly pull the industry out of the rut that it was in.

Now, with the pandemic having altered the way people travel, the industry's expectations from its government and associations and the cabinet re-shuffle, we hope that India enters into a phase of Tourism 2.0 that is more driven, more open to policy amendments and more attractive for everyone involved.

A responsible citizenry

The recent images of tourists flocking to Indian states that had considerably relaxed travel restrictions and flouting COVID norms have been disturbing. Not only do they fuel the possibility of a third wave, they are also a setback to the tourism industry that was keen on seeing states open to domestic tourism in a bid to revive business and livelihoods. Tourism, besides the responsibility of stakeholders and the government, is the responsibility of the tourist as well. Be it keeping the places we visit clean or respecting the cultures and nuances of the populace, tourism calls for both responsibility and accountability.

The administration may now have to think of steps that would possibly curb the number of tourists entering the state or tourist spots, such as mandatory pre-registration on state website, keeping tabs on number of entries to tourist hot-spots, accountability of tourists flouting COVID norms, etc. It is time we built a safer country for travel if we want to really see that light at the end of the tunnel.

Know your ministers

Right from the Ministry of Culture to the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Ministry of Railways, there's been a shuffle of authority with the new Modi cabinet being announced. The appointed ministers must now be a formidable force that takes the travel and tourism sector out of the rut that it has been in for the past year.



Jyotiraditya Scindia
Cabinet Minister, Civil Aviation

Jyotiraditya Scindia has been appointed as the new Minister of Civil Aviation. He takes the charge from Hardeep Singh Puri who had been at the helm of the Ministry of Civil Aviation since 2019. Scindia was a Minister of State with an independent charge for Power in the cabinet of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh from October 2012 until May 2014. Coming from an illustrious royal lineage, he has been in the public eye for over two decades. He has an MBA from Stanford University and a BA from Harvard University.



A delegation of senior tourism members met with **G Kishan Reddy**, Cabinet Minister, Tourism, to welcome him on board.

Arjun Ram Meghwal has been handed over the charge of Minister of State for Culture. He was the Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs in the second Modi cabinet. A Member of Parliament from Bikaner, Meghwal formerly served as Chief Whip and Minister of State for Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises. He was first elected to the Lok Sabha in 2009 representing the Bikaner constituency, Rajasthan. He was awarded the Best Parliamentarian in 2013.



Arjun Ram Meghwal
Minister of State, Culture

Another Minister of State, Culture, is **Meenakshi Lekhi**, who has been a Member of Parliament from New Delhi parliamentary constituency in the 16th and 17th Lok Sabha. She is also a lawyer in the Supreme Court of India. Lekhi has also taken the oath as a Union Minister of State for Ministry of External Affairs. The 54-year-old law graduate has taken up various important issues such as permanent commission for women officers in the armed forces, as a lawyer. She was appointed Vice President of the BJP's Mahila Morcha in 2010.



Meenakshi Lekhi
Minister of State, Culture



Ashwini Vaishnaw
Cabinet Minister, Railways

BJP Rajya Sabha MP from Odisha, **Ashwini Vaishnaw** is the new Railways Minister. He has taken over the charge from Piyush Goyal. Vaishnaw will also head the Ministry of Electronics and Information & Technology Ministry apart from Ministry of Communications. He is a former IAS officer holding degrees from IIT Kanpur and Wharton Business School. Since June 28, 2019, he has been a member of the Parliament of India representing Odisha State in the Rajya Sabha.



Danve Raosaheb Dadarao
Minister of State, Railways

BJP Lok Sabha MP for Jalna, **Danve Raosaheb Dadarao** has been made the new Minister of State for Railways post the latest cabinet reshuffle by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He was a Minister of State in the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution in the Modi 2.0 government formed on May 30, 2019. Dadarao won the Jalna Lok Sabha seat for fifth straight time in the 2019 general elections. Earlier, he has been a general secretary of Maharashtra BJP, and twice the vice president. Danve has been renowned as a leader with rural roots. He started his journey as a Sarpanch, and later became a MLA in 1990.

Darshana Vikram Jardosh has also been made the Minister of State, Railways. She is an Indian politician and current member of the Lok Sabha representing the Surat constituency in Gujarat. A member of the Bharatiya Janata Party, she was elected to the 15th Lok Sabha in 2009, followed by 16th Lok Sabha in 2014 and 17th Lok Sabha in 2019. She was re-elected as the Member of Parliament in the 2014 elections to the Lok Sabha from Surat. Jardosh won with a historic margin of 5,33,190 votes. She won with a 76.6% vote share which is a record for the 2014 elections.



Darshana Vikram Jardosh
Minister of State, Railways

General Vijay Kumar Singh has become the new Minister of State, Civil Aviation. Since May 30, 2019, he had been serving as the Minister of State for Road Transport and Highways in the second Modi cabinet. He previously served as Minister of State for External Affairs in the first cabinet of the PM, and as Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Development of the North-Eastern Region. After his retirement from the military, Singh joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014 and was elected MP Lok Sabha for the Ghaziabad constituency. During his military career, Singh served as the 23rd Chief of the Army Staff from 2010 to 2012.



General VK Singh
Minister of State, Civil Aviation

Tourism Breaking News

■ Etihad and EI Al likely to extend codeshare partnership to include Indian destinations

■ Aug 10 last date for entering National Tourism Awards

■ Asian borders will be much more carefully guarded until at least 2022: CAPA

■ MoCA allows 15% more domestic flights till 31 July

■ Karnataka to develop 46 heritage places at cost of ₹223 crore

■ IRCTC to operate special trains for Char Dham Yatra

■ Dr V Venu comes back to Kerala Tourism, appointed as Additional Chief Secretary

■ Scindia announces 8 new air routes for MP starting July 16

■ Odisha to upgrade ecotourism destinations with houseboats & water sports

Record meetings for

Imagine
your
Korea

Korea Travel Expo, which was held from June 22-24, recorded a total of 900 meetings and on average 160+ B2B engagements per exhibitor from South Korea, shares **Young-Geul Choi**, Director, Korea Tourism Organization, New Delhi office.

Nisha Verma

The delegation, led by Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), for the Korea Travel Expo consisted of representatives from around nine DMCs, six regions and one attraction. Sharing how successful the event was, **Young-Geul Choi** said, "Overall, our first digital event in India market was very successful. We had our 17 Exhibitors meeting over 900 attendees over 3 days with an average of 160+ B2B engagements per exhibitor over video calls, voice calls and chat discussion. We received extremely positive feedback from our partner exhibitors post event with almost 40% of exhibitors claiming this virtual event experience better than any other online events they have attended so far and 75% of them confirming their interest to participate again."



Young-Geul Choi
Director, Korea Tourism
Organization, New Delhi office

In terms of the experience of the participants, he said, "From the exhibitors' side, they appreciated the simplified platform, their vibrant and colourful virtual booth designs and almost lag-free meetings & interaction experience. The general feedback received from the buyers is also very positive. Almost half of our exhibitors were participating in India market for the first time or after a long time. Hence, our Indian travel agencies were happy to make new connections."

We had some fun games and a virtual photobooth experience, which saw overwhelming response and participation from the buyers' side."

However, Choi said that until the borders open, it is always very difficult to quantify B2B meetings into direct business conversions. "However, the main aim of the event was to ensure that South Korea keeps fresh in the minds of the Indian travel agents and they are able to forge new partnerships and connections for 2022, which is when we are targeting for genuine tourism to begin between our two countries. I can happily say that our main objective of the project has been fully achieved," he added.

I can happily say that our main objective of the project has been achieved

Sharing the buyer demands/ requirements which came to the fore from agents during the virtual event, he said, "Currently, most of the enquiries revolved around

the tourism reopening dates and travel guidelines. However, from the MICE side, we saw an interest from Indian buyers to consider South Korea as a genuine destination for attending exhibitions. From leisure and FIT side, there were increased enquiries beyond Seoul city."

Praising the partners, Choi shared, "I would like to commend the efforts of our virtual expo partner DDPPL and their team for delivering a successful event. Like in any other project, there are obviously learnings, which we will try to improve upon. Our event was designed to emulate an actual exhibition where sellers experience walk-in crowd."

Thomas Cook India & SOTC's Third Holiday Readiness Report (June 2021) reveals that over 69 per cent of Indians are keen to resume travel in 2021 (54 per cent opting for domestic; 46 per cent preferring International holidays).

GPS: Connect, empower, motivate

Harmandeep Singh Anand, Managing Director, Global Panorama Showcase (GPS), says that the second wave of COVID-19 made them realise that a majority of agents had been affected and many had got into hibernation. This made them take all possible steps to connect, empower and motivate the industry, thus initiate several measures.

Manas Dwivedi

Talking about his latest initiative, GPS Connect, **Harmandeep Singh Anand** says that the platform is based on an ongoing subscription model where buyers and sell-



Harmandeep Singh Anand
MD, Global Panorama Showcase

ers can meet to understand each other's products and services. "It's like a more organised virtual marketplace, which we launched

in the first week of May. We have been at the forefront of connecting, empowering and motivating the travel industry over the years. It is not only the tier-II and tier-III markets, we are also targeting tier-IV and tier-V cities as well as tour operators across India with GPS Connect. We realised that due to the second wave, 65-70 per cent agents were hugely impacted, so we started revisiting the database, connecting with the fraternity, and found out that there was a huge gap in the number of agents that existed and those that had gone into hibernation. We are expecting business to start picking pace in the last quarter of this year or early next year. Over 200 agents have so far registered for GPS Connect," he said.

GPS Physical 2022

Moving forward, the GPS team is planning to resume its flag-

ship city-based buyer-seller networking exhibition. Sharing details, Singh said, "By the end of this year or early next year, we are planning to organise the GPS physical exhibition, starting with GPS Nagpur. Within GPS, we have started appointing our representative partners across all states and Union Territories, wherein we have an exclusive partner club where our partners will be able to represent and market all the products and services that GPS is bringing to its fold for the trade. We have till now appointed one partner

each in four states and looking forward to enrol more partners. We are working continuously to bring business back to normalcy and get the trade to interact, network, work together and take the industry forward in the best possible manner. Every solution GPS brings is to empower the fraternity."

Partnerships

GPS has partnered with Oyo Hotels and Homes, and has been appointed as GSA in specific markets to service travel partners and corporates. "Oyo

has a huge inventory of more than 11,000 properties across the globe. We have partnered with them for four states - Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat. Our team will assist all travel agents

He also said that the GPS team is working with some New Distribution Capability (NDC) aggregators, where several airlines can be brought on to a single tool in a cost-effective manner. "This can be the solution, and change the way the airline industry has been working for over 30 years now," Anand commented.

Mantra in a pandemic

Sharing his message for the travel trade, Anand said, "If we look at the current situation, it is revival amidst survival. You have to revive your business while you are surviving. You have to adopt the technology, you have to evolve, and you have to come out of your shell and change what you were doing in the past. I personally feel that if people start evolving, they will definitely excel."

By the end of this year or early next year, we are planning GPS' physical exhibition

to on-board on to the OYO Super Agent portal and service them with immediate effect," Anand revealed.



Tourism from India to resume

In an exclusive interview with **TRAVTALK**, **Sammy Yahia**, Director of Tourism (India & Philippines), Israel Tourism, discusses what measures his country has been taking to reopen its doors to vaccinated tourists and when can Indian passport holders expect to visit Israel.



Hazel Jain

Is Israel open to travellers from India on tourist visas if fully vaccinated?

I am very optimistic that tourism between India and Israel will resume soon, with changes to the quarantine requirements as currently only select groups can enter Israel. According to a statement released by the Ministry of the Interior in June 2021, vaccinated foreign nationals will be able to enter Israel beginning July 1, 2021. We are expecting to receive additional directives, including the list of countries from which tourists will be allowed into Israel, and which vaccines will be accepted.

Is Israel looking at increasing flight connectivity from India?

Before the spread of COVID-19 caused a nationwide shutdown



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

in India, The Israel Ministry of Tourism's India Office had started discussions with some Indian commercial carriers to consider a new route to Israel - connecting Indian cities to the resort city of Eilat in southern Israel, known to the India market for MICE movements. In recent years, Indian travellers have become familiar with the cities of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and now we want to introduce them to the



resort city of Eilat, on the shores of Red Sea. So we want to make progress with potential flight routes when the demand comes.

Has there been a change in strategy for Israel Tourism for the India market?

India has been a 'must watch' market for the world for its

requirements and always evolving. Over the years we have noticed changes in the traveller trends. Bleisure travel has been increasing among business travellers, who extend their visits to include a few days of leisure. There have been changes in the group travel as well with more families travelling

together and not as part of organised tours, holidaying with friends, bachelor/ bachelorette trips, as well as an increase in solo trips. In addition to continuing our focus on leisure travel, MICE, faith-based tours and other group travel, we have increased focus on edu-tourism, sustainable travel and LGBT focused travel.

What developments have happened in Israel over the last year in terms of infrastructure?

In the next two years, new hotel brands including the world-renowned Nobu, Soho House, Mandarin Oriental and Six Senses are expected to open in destinations like Tel Aviv, the Dead Sea Region, the Negev and Jerusalem. During the lockdown, many tourism sites were upgraded and new features were added.

A new addition is the Emmaus Trail which begins at the village of Abu Ghosh, about 10kms west of Jerusalem, and is set against the background of the

We have increased focus on edu-tourism & LGBT-focused travel

Judean Mountains and their foothills. The Tower of David Museum has also been making upgrades by revamping the permanent exhibition as well as building a new entrance.

Tourism will flourish now

Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO and Hony. Secretary, FAITH, along with a delegation of tourism association representatives, met the new Tourism Minister **G Kishan Reddy** and apprised him about the trade in India. Mehra believes that the trade will now be able to voice its matters even better.



Manas Dwivedi

Sharing details about the meeting, **Rajiv Mehra** said, "On the first day when the new ministers took charge, we met Minister Reddy. I was representing IATO as President as well as FAITH as Hony. Secretary along with its Chairman, **Nakul Anand** and IATO Vice President, **Ravi Gossain**. The delegation also included **Jyoti Mayal**, President, TAAI and Vice-Chairperson, FAITH and **PP Khanna**, President, ADTOI and Board Member, FAITH. We had a very good discussion with the minister. We apprised him about the associations that look after the tourism trade in India. He talked about a lot of things and said that the next most important task for the ministry would be to work towards opening up international

borders for tourists. The minister also said that once he assumes full charge, he will call up a meeting with the trade to discuss the problems the associations are facing and



Rajiv Mehra
President, IATO and Hony. Secretary, FAITH

have them sorted out. To us, he seemed very positive about our issues. We were in touch with him before as well when he was the Minister of State for Home Affairs. I think, under his guidance, the Ministry

of Tourism as well as tourism in India, once international borders open, will definitely flourish. I hope he will listen to the trade and help us in the best way possible. As far as the two other Ministers of State for Tourism are concerned, we have not met them yet but we will soon call on them and fix a meeting."

On how three Ministers looking after tourism will impact the working and dialogue with trade, Mehra said, "Now with three ministers at the helm of affairs at the Ministry of Tourism, I think we will be able to put our voice more strongly and I am hopeful that things might move faster. Only time will tell."

New Sub-committees formed

Talking about IATO's activities, the President said,

"We are going around with lot of letter writing to the various ministries for relief measures weather it be SEIS or other issues. We are in touch with Ministry of Commerce, SEPC and Ministry of Finance day in, day out. Regarding the functioning of the association, most of our regional chapters have had their first meeting with members in the respective regions in each state."

He also informed that IATO has made new sub-committees. "We have also made different sub-committees to look after different issues and to recommend to IATO Executive Committee on varied matters. Their meetings have also started and five out of 12 sub-committees have already held their first meeting. As the IATO President, I was also called to give

a presentation for the BRICS Tourism Ministers Meeting. Moving forward, our next target is now to get over the prob-

The minister said that once he assumes full charge, he will call up a meeting with the trade

lems faced due to TCS as it should not be levied on foreign tourists and also look into the aspect of starting scheduled international flights as soon as possible. We are working on these issues with the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Health

and Ministry of Home Affairs," he informed.

International Marketing

On international marketing strategies of MOT, Mehra said the first campaign will be starting from July 17. "I think it's better if the Ministry of Tourism officials reveal more details about the exact programme, but it is a good sign that tourism promotions are starting in the overseas markets. India should remain in the mind of people and as soon as we lift the ban on e-tourist visa and international scheduled flights are commenced, we should see travellers ready to visit India," he stated.

Mehra has also requested that the requirement for RT-PCR test for fully-vaccinated travellers be removed for interstate travel.



SIGMUND: An open source for ideas

Alan Elliott Merschen, Founder of The SIGMUND Project, explains the ethos behind his free, open-source hub created for sharing ideas and innovation with the goal of fostering interconnectivity and finding new solutions to the challenges facing the travel industry today.



Hazel Jain

Tell us a little bit about this new platform and how the tourism sector in India can benefit from being a part of it.

SIGMUND is a free, open-source hub for the sharing of ideas and innovation with the goal of fostering interconnectivity and finding new solutions to the challenges facing the travel industry today. Visitors are encouraged to present ideas and collaborate with others on The OPEN • SOURCE Platform, find inspiration and resources at The LOOKING FORWARD Journal, and take their ideas to the next level through SIGMUND's INVESTMENT GRANTS Program.

SIGMUND is open to anyone involved in the tourism industry (or who wants to be), globally, from university students to small tour operators to large travel



Alan Elliott Merschen
Founder, The SIGMUND Project

wholesalers. Our only ask is that you are open to collaboration. We believe that we are more creative, more adaptable, and more successful when we are connected. A great first step for your readers would be to submit an idea to SIGMUND OPEN • SOURCE. Once their idea is live on the site, they can collaborate with others.

How can it help with funding?

Although SIGMUND may lead to potential funding, its main purpose is to connect innova-

tors with collaborators who can offer advice, tools, partnerships and paths ahead. That said, our investment grants programme will launch in 2022. It will be open to two or more individu-

We are in the position to offer this platform free of charge. Our only currency is collaboration

als or entities who have met through the SIGMUND platform and are now collaborating on an idea that can reshape the global travel industry. We are not mi-

cro-financing. We are not a VC incubator. We are looking for ideas that have a strong triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit. With all investment grants, The SIGMUND Project will take an interest in the company. All proceeds will then be reinvested into more ideas.

Has anyone from India signed up yet?

This is our official launch into India and we anticipate great traction as India is home to some of the most innovative and creative entrepreneurs in tourism we have met!

Current user-submitted ideas include: a safety-oriented app for solo women travellers, a dynamic pricing model for museums to encourage visitation during slow periods, and using noise pollution data to create 'quiet travel' tours for those suffering from PTSD.



How will you choose your future collaborators?

Our criteria is relatively simple. SIGMUND is open to anyone who has a great idea to advance the tourism industry. We believe that can come from anyone, from anywhere, at any time. Anyone who submits an idea to SIGMUND OPEN SOURCE is able to request a 14-minute intro call with the SIGMUND team. This is a great first step

in refining the idea, discussing how to best position it on SIGMUND to get the right collaborators interested, and we highly recommend everyone to take advantage of this offer. We also believe in the power of a one-on-one phone call, to hear directly from the innovator, understand their idea as well as the challenges they face, and see how SIGMUND can be of service. 🐦

Sustainability must be mainstream

► Contd from page 1

growth and provides one in 11 jobs worldwide, he added, "I am pleased to note that prior to the pandemic, BRICS countries continued to be a major source market for inbound tourism to India. Tourism plays an important role in building bridges between societies and benefiting visitors and local communities."

Reddy informed that India has taken various physical and financial measures to support travel and tourism industry, particularly micro, small and medium enterprises; self-employed tourist guides and other such segments. "India has taken lead in vaccinating its people, and putting in place measures for promoting health, hygiene and COVID appropriate behaviour to contain the pandemic. Domestic travel now is fully open in India and domestic travel has shown strong recovery and India is now looking forward to a calibrated opening of international travel for tourists. In order to encourage international visitors, India has announced



G Kishan Reddy
Cabinet Minister, MOT

five lakh free visas for tourists till March 2022," he shared.

To address the challenges arising out of the pandemic, Reddy said that India has proposed synergised efforts for sustainable recovery for travel and tourism to ensure its contribution for global economic recovery through BRICS alliance for green tourism. "It's time to mainstream sustainability in tourism sector and align tourism towards achieving sustainable development goals by 2030. BRICS alliance for green tourism can catalyse action on many fronts, promoting greater use of renewable sources of energy, supporting businesses in green tourism, skilling our youth

for new jobs and a renewed focus on nature, wildlife, eco and adventure tourism," he stressed.

Highlighting the need for tourism cooperation between BRICS countries, Reddy said, "Each BRICS member country offers unique tourism products to encourage further growth of intra-BRICS tourism flow. It's important that we all have a good understanding of each other's tourism products and offerings. We must fully promote and market our rich tourism resources and attractions, ranging from historical and diverse culture and friendly people, combined with other activities such as conferences, business opportunities, etc. Each country can also make these products more accessible to the visitors from other member countries. There are common tourism products in BRICS countries, such as culture tourism, nature, wildlife, ecotourism, etc, which present an opportunity for greater cooperation and exchange of information and best practices. During this crisis, there is utmost need for member coun-

tries to come together to support recovery of travel and tourism, as well as strengthen cooperation in these areas of promoting responsible and sustainable tourism, investment in tourism infrastructure, close interaction between tourism enterprises and human resource development etc."

BRICS alliance for green tourism can promote greater use of renewable sources

Talking about the Ministers' Communique in his closing remarks, Reddy proposed to adopt and recognise that BRICS alliance for green tourism. "This can accelerate action in mainstreaming sustainability and achieving sustain-

able development goals. I strongly believe that there is an immense scope for collaboration among the BRICS countries in the field of tourism. Our continued cooperation will help in strengthening our strategies for recovery of travel and tourism sector," he suggested.

Addressing overtourism in India

Commenting on tourists flocking different domestic destinations and raising concerns of COVID and over-tourism, Reddy said that it is vital that tourists cooperate in controlling the spread by following protocols. "The state governments are responsible to control the spread, and they have been given advisories to follow COVID protocols. However, that cannot be done without the co-operation of the people and tourists. COVID protocols are simple to follow and tourists must make sure to avoid too much gathering. On behalf of Government of India, I would like to say that they need to learn from our recent experience of COVID and what we have seen in the past. If we want COVID to be out of India, the 1.3 billion people of the country must

become warriors and volunteers to beat it. Of course, the Central Government, State Governments, district and local administrations have the responsibility and they are working on it, but people's cooperation is needed to make it happen," he said.

He added that although in our country the infrastructure is less, but compared to the rest of the world, we are better in many things and are doing good work. "Currently, the biggest vaccine drive is underway in our country. I would request tourists going to different destinations in the name of revenge tourism, to keep in mind their family, neighbourhood and society, and maintain protocols wherever they go," he suggested.

When asked about opening borders, he shared that till July 31, it has already been announced that international flights will not operate. "The Government doesn't want to deliberately stop tourists, but we can't put more lives at risk. When things get better, we will announce," said Reddy. 🐦

'We want industry to be healthy'

Sunil Kumar R, who has been re-elected as the UFTAA president, discusses the team's key focus areas which includes appealing to the governments of the world to give priority to 'vaccine equity'. It also urges them to encourage the industry by introducing a 'travel friendly policy' for vaccinated travel.



Hazel Jain

The United Federation of Travel Agents Association (UFTAA) held its Annual General Assembly – Virtual in June where **Sunil Kumar**, Immediate Past President of TAAI, was re-elected as President of UFTAA. Speaking in an exclusive interview with TRAVTALK, he says, "We see a big agenda on hand for the incoming year and therefore we had to take on very active members on board this year. We want the industry to be healthy. Some parts of the world have opened up now. But each country can't have their own laws pertaining to vaccinated travellers. There has to be a 'vaccine equity'."

This relates to a uniform policy for travel formalities. The introduction of complex procedures by few governments, in the



Sunil Kumar R
President, UFTAA

opinion of UFTAA can delay the most required turnaround of the tourism industry to its previous robust levels. In the opinion of UFTAA, the international cooperation that exists in the development of vaccines must also be reflected in the setting of international standards for the management of passenger traffic between countries.

Kumar adds, "Unless the governments are able to collaborate and create a uniform travel

policy, it would not only create confusion but also deter potential passengers from undertaking travel. We seek a 'uniform policy' in comparison to each government creating their own policy. We have unanimously resolved to appeal to the governments of the world, along with sharing a document on 'vaccine equity'. Unless there are adequate opinions voiced, demanding a uniform travel policy related to vaccinated travel, the attention on this subject may not be a priority." Vaccine Equity is in two specific areas: Equitable distribution of vaccines worldwide, and uniform travel related policy linked to Vaccine Equity

Prepare yourselves!

Travel agents and tourism operators need to prepare themselves, says Kumar. "The marketplace is not going to be the same anymore. The approaches to

marketing will be different. The expectations of the customer will be different. There has got to be an online access all the time. The traditional way of running a travel agency will not work well in the post-pandemic era which will start sometime later

Unless opinions are voiced, the attention on this subject may not be a priority

this year. They must evolve," he says. UFTAA has also reduced its membership fee by 50% or more for the 2020-

New team at UFTAA

President: Sunil Kumar Rumalla (TAAI) – India

Vice President and Chairman Air & IATA Matters: Yossef Fatael (IITOA) – Israel

Vice President (Finance): Trevor Rajaratnam (TAASL) – Sri Lanka

Vice President (Tourism): Cetin Gurcun (TURSAB) – Turkey

Director: Mohammad Wanyoike (KATA) – Kenya

Director: Varsha Ramchurn (MAITA) – Mauritius

Director: Joe Olivier Borg – Malta

Director: Adriana Miori – Italy

Director: William D'souza – Canada

Director: Richard Lohento – ATOV, Benin

Director: Guizhen Sun – CATS, China

Board Invitee: Achyut Gurgain – NATTA, Nepal

2021 term. **Jet Airways saga** Commenting on the development on return of Jet Airways, Kumar says, "If agents fail to make payments to airlines, it is terminated from IATA. But in this case, airlines continued to be IATA members. Should any agent go bust, the airline is protected. If an airline goes

bust, is the agent protected? The answer is no! Jet Airways is a classic example. 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."

Ministerial shuffling raises hope

Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI, is positive that the new ministers would accelerate decision making and that with cooperation between government and industry, a lot can be achieved. She also hopes that the Ministry's focus shifts from Air India to the plight of the industry ever since the virus entered our borders.



Nisha Verma

Now that Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Civil Aviation have got cabinet ministers, the industry is pinning hopes and expecting faster decision making. Jyoti Mayal has said that by appointing three ministers for tourism (including one cabinet minister), three ministers for culture, and two ministers in civil aviation, the Prime Minister has given a heavy-weight focus to tourism. "We always had a lot of expectations from MOT, but now being given a cabinet berth, we expect quicker decisions. This is because the government is looking at tourism as the industry which would quickly revive the economy; else, the PM wouldn't have put so much of manpower into it," she said.

She also pointed out that giving tourism a cabinet berth was one



Jyoti Mayal
President, TAAI

of the points mentioned in their open letter to the PM. "Also, we requested for MOT to have a helpdesk, which will coordinate all decisions after taking inputs from concerned ministries. I think, that will be done by the newly constituted Ministry of Cooperation, so that this industry develops much more," believes Mayal.

Changes at MoCA

The TAAI President also shared that even at MoCA, it's wonderful to have two ministers,

with one being cabinet minister Jyotiraditya Scindia. "Over the last one year, we have noticed that the focus was a lot on Air India and we were not given the same importance despite having many meetings with them. I think it's time to move forward and look into the issues that we are advocating as an association because we feel there is lot to be done, including protection of our money from defaulting airlines. We need a very efficient statu-

I think it's time to look into issues we are advocating as an association

tory body as well as our remuneration back. It should be like MRP on any other consumer product, and we should be



Women empowerment

Mayal recently launched Women in TAAI and Travel (WITT) platform, which is very close to her heart. Sharing details on how they will be working in this regard, she said, "We have started working closely and we will roll out a plan for the next six months at WITT. We are very excited about how to take this forward. I have been also making a document or White Paper for the plan forward. We need to focus on a few things immediately, which includes development of tourism for the women in this country and side-by-side skilling, which we have started since I am the Chairperson of THSC. We'll soon be rolling out for the entire industry a quality pack as a small course, through which they can learn skills and upskill more. We are also taking inputs from the industry, in terms of what would they like to be skilled in."

protected and move forward. There should be many different policies, which will be coming with more deliberation and more interaction with the industry," she said.

SEIS payment

While the Secretary has spoken about SEIS payments being underway, Mayal said that SEIS is the right of the travel and tourism operators. "The government

should have paid back this money much earlier and there shouldn't have been any need for different states to go to court. I believe, mutual cooperation is needed in such cases. MOT has worked towards it and I know the Secretary has been working diligently on this. We have got the news that the money has been granted for SEIS, but I only hope that it happens in the best way and is distributed without any gaps," she asserted.

The future is suddenly closer

Neliswa Nkani, Hub Head – MEISEA, South African Tourism, discusses the NTO's tweaked strategy with some new focus areas as well as its renewed attention to bring in e-visas. South African Tourism is also playing an active role in ensuring that the costs to visit the country remain realistic despite the pandemic.



Hazel Jain

Has there been a change in strategy for SAT for the India market?

Yes, the pandemic has changed the way we view and sell travel. It has forced us to become more digitised, more streamlined, and has essentially accelerated the future. This year, a huge focus area for us will be mobilising niche segments in India such as biking groups, runners, travellers who want to do self-drives, etc. The fact that Indian licenses are valid in South Africa is a huge bonus!

We will also be promoting new regions and offbeat destinations with safe experiences. We anticipate that South Africa's new regions and geographies will be a hit with Indian travellers in the second half of 2021



Neliswa Nkani
Hub Head – MEISEA
South African Tourism

as well as in 2022. For the next couple of months, travellers can enter through cities that have restored international connectivity. Which mean they can either enter through the Mother City – Cape Town, Johannesburg or Durban, and use these cities as a gateway to the rest of the new regions, including the stunning and relatively unexplored Port Elizabeth, Robertson, West Coast, Drakensberg in KwaZulu-

Natal, Panorama Route (Mpumalanga) and Garden Route.

Will visiting South Africa become more expensive now?

We are aware of the effect the pandemic has on the global economy, and have been re-packaging accordingly, with the intent to offer consumers' excellent deals and discounts. Safety measures are transparent and

well-communicated, and have been factored into overall packages, so that there is no surprise or extra-cost to travellers. We are also in conversation with several airlines to figure how we can best optimise and reduce travel costs.

How have you engaged with the travel trade in India over the last year?

We have been constantly communicating with key travel agents and tour operators directly through two-way knowledge exchange webinars, while also conveying timely and focused destination updates. South African Tourism India been invested in virtually training over 150 trade each week – across all travel verticals. SA Specialist, our interactive online learning programme, has witnessed an increase in the number of Indian travel trade undertaking

the training, as trade agents are using the pandemic period to upskill and reskill themselves. At present, we are in the process of setting up a platform for the

South Africa
is open to
travellers from
across the
globe, including
India

to ensure consumers get value-driven packages.

Is South Africa open to travellers from India on tourist visas?

South Africa is open to travellers from across the globe, including India. Presently, all travellers intending to visit the country will be required to produce a negative PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test, not older than 72 hours from the time of departure from the country of origin to South Africa.

Tell us about the new focus on film tourism from India market.

Even before the pandemic we were looking at leveraging film tourism, and have been in talks with big banners in India. We look at assisting our partners with securing easy shoot permits as well as advantageous and competitive pricing.

We are setting
up a platform
for the Indian
trade to interact
directly with
the provinces

A breed apart

'There are some traits of a travel industry professional that other industries can learn from. Here are three learnings,' says **Abhik Dutta**, Director, The Wanderers, Outdoor Wilderness & Learning and Colour Purple Events.

I left a PSU job in 1998 to follow my passion for travel by co-founding The Wanderers. All we had to do was suggest clients a unique destination, offer them interesting activities, recommend good resorts, top it up with a good offers and close the sale. And, in the bargain, get to travel. In these last 23 years I have done all of

the above and much more. It's the 'much more' that I will elaborate here. Here are three learnings from my time in travel which is quite unique to our industry.

We take trust very seriously

It is perhaps the only industry where you make a client pay a very large sum of money for a product that he can't see

or touch. And one that will disappear within days. To give an example, in ₹7 crore you can buy a luxury Villa in Goa or a chic New York City apartment in SoHo, or a Tiffany yellow diamond pendant. On the other hand, a corporate client plans a ₹7 crore trip to Slovenia for its 500 employees. They can't see how the experience will unfold before placing the order. They see a brochure, a PPT and a video of Slovenia. And they book. In four days what they have bought is over. All they have is a visa stamp, baggage tags and a pen-drive full of memories.

So, if the client didn't see or feel the product, what did they see? They saw sitting in front of them a person they could trust. Blindly. A brand that would deliver, no matter what. It may have taken a month to close the deal, but it took us years to come to that point of trust.

Build relationships with people who can save your life

Clients go on a high altitude trip to Nepal and fall sick. Possibly High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE). They are unconscious, they could die. What do we do?

It is where a
client pays
a large sum
for a product
he can't
see or touch

We call the expedition leader on a Sat-phone, a sherpa. We ask him for advice. He says "Saab ji, I have to get her off the mountain, or she will die tonight. Please call the chopper." We call the owner,

a person we have done business with for 20 years. He arranges the chopper and pays the amount upfront even though the insurance company says "we will cover the emergency evacuation cost only after seeing the patient". This will need 2-3 days. We tell the company it will be too late but insurance company doesn't relent. We take the call to send the chopper and get the lady to a hospital. Docs say it was a good call by the sherpa. I thank my friend for helping us out. We will meet in Kathmandu for his daughter's wedding next spring.

Research till the cows come home

A client wants to go on a holiday with a family of four with varied interests. He wants to go to New Zealand in July. Just 20 days away. Daughter wants to go for hot air ballooning. It's a stunning country but July isn't the best time to go there as its winter, we advise. They say how about Egypt. Too hot. How about USA? Great weather in Alaska in July, Denali National Park is a great place to see Alaska's big 5. But interview dates at the Consulate are extremely difficult to get in next 20 days. Why not Kenya, we say? Great time for watching the Mara crossing, Big game everywhere, daughter gets her balloon-

ing trip in Masai Mara. Visa on arrival for Indians. They want hotel options over phone. We know the information and give them lodge options. Deal is settled. From New Zealand to Egypt to Alaska to Kenya, we know our geography, history, commerce, weather patterns, the best hotels.

Each time we travel, we learn, unlearn and relearn. A concierge in New York who could put Google to shame, a hotelier who gives us an insight into the business in Colombia, a tourism board official who reminds us why passion is so important in our business. We meet clients who drive us to give our best so that they can get the best. As a wise man once said, "Don't tell me how educated you are, tell me how much you have travelled."



Abhik Dutta
Director, The Wanderers,
Outdoor Wilderness &
Learning and Colour Purple Events

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



TRAVELPORT leaps into retailing

Travelport recently entered a strategic, long-term collaboration with Amazon Web Services (AWS) to use advanced cloud technology to accelerate the digital transformation of retailing in the travel industry. The move aims to make the travel booking process simpler and more modernised.



Nisha Verma

This collaboration will focus on optimising Travelport's recently launched next-generation platform, Travelport+. In addition, it will drive innovation in travel merchandising with the launch of a new accelerator program that will incorporate talent from the tech start-up community. The collaboration was followed by a virtual event titled 'Hello Modern Retailing', which saw senior Travelport officials speaking on modern retailing as well as sharing insights into the Travelport+ platform.

Gregg Web, CEO, Travelport, shared, "AWS's retail heritage makes them uniquely qualified to optimise digital retail platforms, simplify complex environments, and enable game-changing innovation in



Gregg Web
CEO
Travelport

the travel retailing space. With AWS as our preferred cloud partner, we are going to create a simpler, smarter, and better future for travel retailing. We have formed a long-term partnership with AWS to both optimise the Travelport+ platform and drive innovation in travel merchandising. With 20 years' experience, powering the world's most sophisticated retailer, there is no better partner than AWS to



Adam Selipsky
Incoming CEO
Amazon Web Services

achieve our vision of modernising travel retailing."

Adam Selipsky, Incoming CEO of Amazon Web Services, shared that Travelport is using the flexibility, scalability, and reliability of the world's leading cloud to provide the speed and insights needed to put the customer first. "By leveraging the broadest and deepest set of cloud capabilities and AWS's proven global



David Peller
MD, Travel and Hospitality
Amazon Web Services

infrastructure, Travelport can enhance the performance of its platform and continue to develop new ways to simplify the travel booking experience."

Speaking at the virtual event, **David Peller**, MD, Travel and Hospitality at Amazon Web Services, said, "The collaboration will focus first on optimising Travelport+, leveraging high performance compute from AWS

to scale travel search processing capacity, while maintaining superior performance. Additionally, Travelport+ will leverage AWS' global network to catch content

Pellerr added, "While many technical factors played a role in the collaboration between Travelport and AWS, what really brought us together was

Reinventing travel

"With growing demand for and application of digital, especially in the unprecedented times, this collaboration with Amazon Web Services shall certainly bring long-term advantage to our customers. Hyper-personalised retailing in the industry has been a rather futuristic goal for many but not anymore. Travelport is indeed reinventing travel retailing as promised."

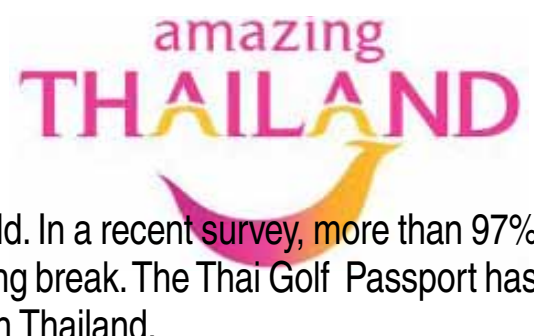


Sandeep Dwivedi
COO, InterGlobe Technology Quotient

at the edge speeding up content delivery by bringing it closer to users. Travelport's migration to AWS will also enable them to improve personalisation with machine learning and advanced analytics," he said.

our shared culture of innovation. Working with Travelport, we see an organisation that, like us, is committed to inventing on behalf of customers. Travelport's shift to the AWS cloud is a key pillar of its reinvention." 🐦

If it's golf, it's definitely



Thailand continues to be a dream destination for golfers from all around the world. In a recent survey, more than 97% respondents reveal that they rate Thailand as a top-quality destination for a golfing break. The Thai Golf Passport has also been launched in India to offer Indian golfers a seamless golf experience in Thailand.



TT Bureau

The top-quality golf courses ideally located throughout the country, with world-class facilities, reasonable green fees, friendly caddies and many other attractions continue to attract golfers to visit Thailand. A recent survey reveals that most golfers - a whopping 97% of those surveyed - rated Thailand as one of the best golfing destinations. The surveyed sample group was made up of 1000+ golfers from all over India and consisted of 4.49% below the age of 35, 10.45% aged 35-44 years, 26.23% aged 45-54 years, 35.11% aged 55-65 years, and 23.72% aged above 65.

Vachirachai Sirisumpan, Director TAT, New Delhi, says, "Thailand wins hands down when it comes to catering to golfers who are spoiled for choice when

Why Indian golfers choose Thailand



it comes to golfing destinations. Keeping in mind the quality of the golf product and hospitality on offer in Thailand, it is expected that Thailand would be the first destination where the

majority of the golfers would travel for their first golf holiday post two years of COVID-19, especially as all courses have not only been working on health and safety, but also ensuring a



Golfers willing to travel

68%
fully vaccinated

26%
taken first dose

memorable experience for the golfer of playing golf in Thailand."

The Thai Golf Passport has been launched in India to of-

fer Indian golfers a seamless golf experience in Thailand.

Indian golfers can now be a part of this rewarding loyalty programme whenever they tee off in Amazing Thailand and redeem their points for products from more than two hundred leading brands. 🐦

New minister, more focus on NE

PP Khanna, President, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI), talks about working in coordination with the industry, the Ministry of Tourism, as well as other associations to boost domestic tourism. He also believes that the ministerial change for the Northeast would help promote tourism in the region.



Nisha Verma

While the restart of domestic tourism shall rejoice the industry, there are concerns at the same time as revenge tourism might result in inviting the third wave. Agrees PP Khanna, "As expected, because of relaxation in protocols after the second wave, people started travelling. Many domestic destinations saw a lot of travellers owing to restrictions in outbound and inbound. However, there were complaints that not only



PP Khanna
President, ADTOI

the travellers, but also the hotels and other service providers were not adhering to the SOPs and protocols. While we agree with

the excitement with the return of business, we need to be responsible. Hence, we have written to all the hotel associations like HAI, FHRAI, IHHA, etc. to request the hotels to look into it seriously and to ask hotel chains to follow the SOPs.

MOT registration

Sharing that in his meeting with the MOT, he urged the officials to approve tour operators despite them not having certificates from hospitality/ tourism institutes, Khanna informed, "We have many members with 5-20 years of experience and want to register with the MOT. Unfortunately, they don't have any certificate from IHM, IITM or AICTE, which is required for at least one person in a company for registering under MOT. We have met with Rupinder Brar, ADG Tourism, and she said that they would look into it and they understand that those



having good experience shall be considered for registration."

Hotels in MDA

He also discussed with MOT that they appreciate the govern-

ment's move to have domestic tour operators under MDA scheme and give the assistance to them four times in a year, up to Rs1.35,000. He said, "When the draft came to us for verification, it mentioned that for digital marketing or attending any travel mart across India, this money would include cost of stall, air fare/train fare and also the hotels. However, in the final draft hotels were not included. Hence, we have requested the ADG to include hotels, even though the amount is not increased. MOT has been very positive & cooperative about it and they consider our requests to work on them speedily."

Relief measures by Finance Minister

Praising the Finance Minister for the recent relief measures, Khanna said, "It is the first time in history that the Finance Ministry has recognised the tourism industry. We were in talks with them, as well as with Min-

Election update!

ADTOI is working towards holding its elections, which were scheduled last year in August and have been delayed since.

istry of Commerce, NITI Aayog and MOT regarding bailout package for tour operators post COVID, but nothing happened. However, now the package they have announced is only for MOT recognised tour operators, which is only around 900. Also, for them, the loan amount is only up to Rs 10 lakh on 100% guarantee, and that too at almost 10% interest. This is disappointing as by having good relations with a bank can get us less interest rate than that. We are requesting the Finance Ministry to lower the rate of interest, so that we are able to revive our business."

Hopes pinned on new NE minister

"It's good that he has been given the responsibility for the Northeast also. Lately, we have also discussed with the MOT that we want to promote the Northeast and want to do our next convention and B2B meetings there. I think it's a good move from ADTOI to promote the Northeast and I am sure the Minister would definitely like our proposal for doing the convention there."

- PP Khanna

We are excited about return of business, but we need to be responsible

Safety must clearly be expressed

► Contd from page 1

basis in 17 short-haul, medium-haul and long-haul markets - Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Portugal, South Korea and Spain," he adds.

In addition, MOT has extended the validity of approvals/classification certification of accommodation units till 30th September 2021. "MOT has framed guidelines which have been issued to State Governments and industry stakeholders in order to handhold unit owners to ensure safety and security of tourists. The Ministry has also requested IHMs to conduct short term courses for those engaged in providing service at accommodation units," he mentions.

Domestic strategy

For domestic promotions, MOT will work with domestic tour operators. "We will take on board their suggestions regarding tweaking our strategies and act accordingly," says Singh.

In fact, he shares that with both inbound and outbound operators having ventured into domestic tourism today, promotion of domestic tourism is the thrust area now. "In order to help them to take the leap and grow in their business, the MOT and the regional Indiatourism offices are regularly communicating with the travel industry (both inbound and outbound operators), on issues related to opening up of tourism sector, handling of tourists, protocols of safety and security, service standards etc. MOT has also been in coordination with the stakeholders and states/UTs for promoting domestic tourist itineraries to nearby destinations from the major cities," he adds. However, on some well-known

destinations getting crowded, Singh says, "We are working with the states, to ease the restrictions or have some more restrictions like having no vehicles zones or only green vehicles plying in the area. This is an ongoing process and results will be seen in some states."

SEIS

Commenting on the status of SEIS payments, Singh shares, "Several industry stakeholders had flagged appeals to the government to release SEIS Scripts for 2019-20 and DGFT had put up a detailed proposal for allocation for SEIS for exports made during FY 2019-20. Taking all the circumstances into account, the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance



Arvind Singh
Secretary, Ministry of Tourism

has given concurrence to the proposal of Department of Commerce for continuation of SEIS for 2019-20 with a financial allocation of ₹2061 crore subject to the condition that the amount will be provided through the Expenditure Budget following the procedure of providing a New Minor Head under the MH 2037 -Customs. This will be opened under the Demand No 35- Indirect Taxes. Expenditure will be incurred when the scrips are issued. An amount equivalent to the scrips issued will be debited from the above head and will be credited to the Public Account. In the Public Account a new minor head to be opened under MH 8012- Special Deposit and Accounts. As and when the scrips

are utilised for paying customs duty, these amounts are debited from the public account and credited to the MH-0037 Customs under a minor head to be created for the SEIS."

However, he insisted that the good news is that the hold on SEIS that was there since 2019-20, has been lifted by the Finance Ministry. "This means that it is one step forward, and now the formalities must be worked out and then the amount will be reaching the beneficiaries," he mentions.

International marketing strategy

Insisting that they are working towards opening international borders and how to welcome international visitors, he shares, "One definite message that we'll have to give is that we are a safe and secure place to visit. Hopefully by then, most of the people operating in the tourism industry would have been vaccinated. I have also written to the chief secretaries of all the states to incentivise and prioritise vaccination for tourism stakeholders. It will be very important to build the confidence of foreign

visitors. In the next phase, we will be gradually talking about the richness of India's tourism, cultural heritage or culinary tourism, etc."

Although the strategy in terms of incentives, promotions and media campaigns will be similar, Singh says, "One added change will be from 15th August, when we'll move into the 75th year of our Independence."

Swadesh Darshan and PRASHAD

Sharing the status of Swadesh Darshan and PRASHAD schemes, the Secretary says, "Swadesh Darshan scheme is under review, and we have not been taking any new projects since 2018-19. Currently, we are only continuing with the older schemes and not sanctioning any new projects. There have been delays. In some states, it has taken 3-4 years because of local problems and the pandemic in the last 18 months. However, I believe that majority of the work will get over in this financial year. As far as PRASHAD is concerned, it's progressing smoothly."

Other measures taken by MOT

- ❖ Funding routes under UDAN scheme to connect tier-I and II cities
- ❖ Facilitating the use of seaplanes
- ❖ More routes on the cards for fixed-wing aircraft, seaplanes and helicopters
- ❖ Sixteen routes identified by MOCA for seaplanes
- ❖ Possibility of helicopter routes in the Northeast, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh

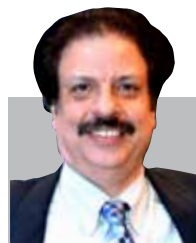
A change of track for agents

Necessity is the mother of all inventions and it was this necessity that prompted many an outbound travel agent to branch out into domestic holidays. Fortunately, it was largely a smooth transition for many, with some help from Indiatourism, which is actively reaching out to this segment to promote India.



Hazel Jain

It helps not to keep all the eggs in one basket, as many outbound travel agents and tour operators realised over the last one year. While some found it challenging to branch out to domestic holidays, others were more fortunate because they were already doing some India-centric business, albeit in small proportions. **Manish Kriplani**, Chairman, OTOAI (Southern Region) and MD of Baywatch Travels, has shown his entrepreneurial skills. He says, "We have been doing extensive outbound all these years but during the lockdown we were determined to offer similar products to our clients right here in India since they couldn't travel abroad. So we started aggregating super



Burjis Mehta
CEO, Skyworld Tours n Travels

We were already selling packages in the ratio 50:50 for domestic and international holidays



Venkatesan Dhattareyan
Regional Director, India tourism Mumbai - Incredible India, Ministry of Tourism

It gives even the outbound tour operators a chance to learn something new

current demand and domestic holidays and weekend getaways are what keeps us alive, not only in the form of business but also keeping us engaged with work. New verticals like villa stays with private pool are in great demand. The transition did not seem as challenging as it would have in previous times because this is all we had to sell and hence we had to know everything about it. These holidays are also more client friendly and based on customi-

—almost 80 per cent was international business. "But as borders for many countries are closed, we have tried to concentrate more on domestic offerings and India. We were doing domestic previously also so we didn't face any challenge as such. However, we are learning more and more about destinations in India and are enjoying selling our country to fellow Indians," he explains.

Association of India (OTOAI) which Dhattareyan says is quite historic. "They traditionally promote destinations outside of India. But they have now come forward to learn about



Manish Kriplani
Chairman, OTOAI (Southern Region) and MD, Baywatch Travels

With immense outbound experience, it was very easy for us to move to this model

of exclusive villas and apartments across key domestic and international tourist destinations. Hence, we were already selling packages in the ratio 50:50 for domestic and international holidays even before the pandemic. Post pandemic, it has only been domestic holidays and our past experience has helped us. I seriously think that India has huge potential for tourism and domestic holidays will be the trend for a long time," he adds.

Another feather in cap

An ever optimistic operator, **Pradeep Saboo**, Partner at Guideline Travels, says that India's domestic circuit is a huge landscape and to master it one needs to have the right focus and time on hand. "Since we had the time now to explore this segment, we have now successfully been able to stir good response from our existing clientele. It was a smooth and hassle-free transition and it was a very natural move having spent almost two and half decades in the industry. The biggest advantage of this move has been the addition of one more skill set to our existing repertoire as we have traditionally been known for our international tours," Saboo says.

Despite being an outbound agent, **Dharmesh Advani**, National General Secretary of ETAA and Director, Bombay Travels, has now started selling domestic holidays. Explaining this move, he says, "It is the



Pradeep Saboo
Partner, Guideline Travels

The biggest advantage has been the addition of one more skill set to our repertoire

sation so the search from the beginning was keeping in mind the clients requirements."

Smooth operator

Even **Hemendra Singh Jadon**, Chapter Chairman (MP & CG Chapter), TAAI and Director, Overseas Travels, used to sell a lot of international holidays in the past



Dharmesh Advani
National General Secretary, ETAA and Director, Bombay Travels

It is the demand for domestic holidays and weekend getaways that keeps us alive

IndiaTourism taps outbound

Sharing an interesting development from the Ministry of Tourism, **Venkatesan Dhattareyan**, Regional Director, India tourism Mumbai - Incredible India, Ministry of Tourism, says that he and his team have been busy reaching out to outbound agents now to promote India. He reveals, "Indiatourism has also conducted a session with the Outbound Tour Operators



Hemendra Singh Jadon
Chapter Chairman (MP & CG Chapter) TAAI and Director, Overseas Travels

We are learning about destinations in India and enjoy selling to fellow Indians

India. They will need product-specific destination information from experts – so that they can also understand the potential of Chhattisgarh or Jharkhand. It gives even the outbound tour operators a chance to learn something new. This is another avenue that we are trying to explore – outbound operators."

Confirming this is **Riaz Munshi**, President, OTOAI and MD, N. Chirag Travels, who says, "For most of us, domestic travel has always been a part of our portfolio. We had been selling domestic flights, hotels and packages in India even before,

so this isn't something we added due to the pandemic. But yes, with the changing nature of demand since last year, most of us started focusing more on domestic travel and have further



Riaz Munshi
President, OTOAI and MD, N. Chirag Travels

Our members have taken this time to build relationships to add to their offerings

expanded our domestic travel portfolio. Our members have taken this time to build relationships across the country to further add-on to their offerings. It wasn't a pandemic-based transition for most of us. It just allowed us to discover a lot more that India has to offer and we now work with more hotels and experience providers that we didn't work with previously."

Similarly, **Burjis Mehta**, CEO, Skyworld Tours n Travels, had already been selling a lot of domestic holidays. "But we had diversified into short-stay holidays five years ago with a chain

3 experts partner to launch Iskra

Iskra, which literally means spark or sparkle, has been founded on the principle of creating a spark for every event planned. Co-founded by three industry experts well-known in India's events and hospitality industry – **Birju Gariba**, **Hema Hariramani** and **Sunaina Singh** – Iskra promises to shine ever so brightly.

Hazel Jain

It is time to ring in the new and to bid goodbye to the old, as the new world order slowly takes over. **Birju Gariba** who was part of the founding team at Platinum where he spent almost 18 years, has now launched a new venture along with two other co-founders. The Founder and CEO of Iskra Events & Celebrations, Gariba says, "The pandemic forced many to get more creative in doing business. That's when I felt it was an opportune time to start my own venture that would ensure a healthy balance between MICE and social events such as weddings," he says.

The new company was established in March 2021 and it will focus on organising social events and MICE globally. Iskra, which literally means spark or sparkle,



Birju Gariba
Founder & CEO, Iskra Events & Celebrations

An opportune time to ensure a healthy balance between MICE and social events



Hema Hariramani
Founder & Director, Iskra Events & Celebrations

Larger-than-life events always inspired me to bring to life novel concepts



Sunaina Singh
Founder & Director, Iskra Events & Celebrations

My objective to team up is to expand my reach within India and internationally

are never done by one person alone but a group of motivated individuals with skill sets that compliment yours. The idea of having Hema Hariramani along with Sunaina Singh made for a formidable team that would ensure we are able to cater to the diverse needs of our clients."

Commenting on this new venture, **Hema Hariramani**, Founder & Director, Iskra Events & Celebrations, says, "I have had an enriching journey with Marriott for over two decades. It was always my dream to create and establish my own venture one day. When I got to know about this exciting new journey which Birju Gariba and Sunaina Singh were starting, it provided me an opportunity and a platform to fulfil my own aspirations. The icing on the cake is that it is with two reputed industry professionals as both are established brands in the event

space. The events industry, for a hotelier, is not something new but it still remains a mystery. When I witnessed larger-than-life events, it always intrigued and inspired me to bring to life novel concepts and ideas. To be on this side provides me, as an individual, to reimagine, explore the unexplored, conceive ideas and turn them to reality!"

Meanwhile, **Sunaina Singh**, Founder & Director, Iskra Events & Celebrations, is an expert in design and décor and this experience of hers has led her to realise that with added expertise there is a huge scope to expand her horizon. "I have been passionate about what I do and my objective to team up with Birju and Hema is primarily to further expand my reach both within India and internationally. In a way of sorts, the three of us work as a springboard for each other."

Pack your bags but stay safe!

The pandemic and its second wave have had a huge impact on the travel and hospitality industry. From social distancing in flights, localised lockdowns to contact tracing Apps, COVID-19 has indeed transformed the world of travel. Yatra.com enlists some of these trends.

Over the years, the reasons for travel have evolved and are now an integral part of our lives. Travel is no longer considered a luxury, but a necessity. It allows people

to experience new cultures and traditions, discover new places, lifestyles, cuisines, etc. It is a stress buster for some, a recreational activity for others, and a self-discovery trip for many.

Brands and stakeholders need to listen to consumers

boosted this confidence, and travellers are making informed decisions leading to an uptick in travel demand in the past weeks.

At the moment, travel is recovering in stages — first locally, then domestically between re-

gions, and international travel is surely going to be the last. In addition, there are multiple factors that will influence travel, such as differing quarantine and entry requirements from country to country, vaccine roll-outs, and the recognition

of different brands of vaccine, to name a few.

The coming in of vaccines, shift in consumer behaviour, stringent safety measures, digital boost, innovative communication strategies, government intervention to create 'travel bubbles', and measures to contain the virus will drive the travel and tourism demand in the post-pandemic era. There is absolute and utmost confidence that the love and passion for travel will reignite among people. Though this will be a steady progress, the transformational changes will set the path for the future of the tourism industry. The possibilities are endless, and all brands and industry stakeholders need to listen to consumers, embrace spontaneity and secure confidence.



The pandemic and its second wave, though, had a huge impact on the travel and hospitality industry. People around the globe were advised to stay home, and airline operations came to a complete standstill. Hotels, too, were turned into hospitals. With domestic operations opening up due to a decrease in the number of cases coupled with easing of lockdowns and introduction of vaccines, the confidence among travellers in the country has improved. Several initiatives introduced by the government and key stakeholders have further

Pandemic-induced travel trends

- ❖ Trips and getaways being planned in an attempt to 'revenge' travel
- ❖ Saturdays are peak days for staycations followed by Fridays and Sundays
- ❖ Occupancy patterns have reversed between weekends and weekdays for premium 5-star hotels in metros
- ❖ Rise in workcations
- ❖ Shorter booking windows, closer to travel date
- ❖ Travel to drivable distances being preferred
- ❖ Consumer preference for hotels with stringent safety and sanitisation processes has increased
- ❖ Businesses are exploring new technologies, both to drive bookings and to facilitate safe travel
- ❖ The desire to travel more sustainably has become more prevalent
- ❖ Travel to and from tier-II cities has seen an uptick in demand



Sabina Chopra
Co-founder & COO, Yatra

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

Tech-enabled tourism on the rise

Evident from the recent advent in smart, automated systems, technology will have a key role to play in the restart of tourism across countries, and we already see some green shoots with the digitalisation of tourism services. Here are seven technologies that offer hope to our industry.



Hazel Jain

3D scanning

The hassle of removing laptops and liquids at airport security is set to end at London Heathrow thanks to the implementation of futuristic 3D bag-scanning technology. The airport has invested in next-gen bag scanning tech that will allow passengers to pass through security without the tiresome exercise of removing liquids and laptops from hand luggage. Heathrow has invested in £50 million of state-of-the-art CT scanners from engineering experts Smiths Detection, which uses 3D images and advanced explosives detection. The first machines are expected to be installed later this year. Amsterdam's Schiphol will follow suit.

Airline distribution

In response to IATA's NDC standards, India-based Verteil

is disrupting the multi-billion-dollar airline distribution industry by allowing airlines to distribute its content directly to travel agencies through its airline distribution and retailing platform. Using Verteil's universal API, travel companies can directly plug into reservation systems of the airlines and pull rich content of products, offers and extra services which were hitherto not available in the legacy platforms.

Vaccination status

The UK's National Health System App now displays people's vaccination status for access to foreign countries and large-scale events. The app now displays vaccination status as well as medical records that were previously only available on request from GPs. It is expected that this information will be supplemented by COVID test results. Not only can the app be



used as a 'vaccine passport' for cross-border travel, but for accessing mass events that require proof of COVID status.

Facial recognition

Advances in biometric authentication suggest that facial recog-

nition tech could be used in lieu of a vaccine passport for entry to venues or for international travel. Technology firms, iProov and Mvine, with government funding are developing software to allow customers to be scanned when they enter ven-

ues and have their coronavirus data checked. Eurostar has announced it would be trialling facial recognition technology in order for passengers to travel between the UK and Europe without a passport.

Carbon footprint

Now that sustainable tourism has been gathering huge momentum the world over, there is much focus on calculating one's carbon footprint while travelling. A new AI-powered app called Aerial measures the carbon footprint of flights, taxi and train journeys so travellers can pay for offsets. A new iOS app, launched in mid-October, allows users to calculate their net carbon footprint at the touch of a button. The app links to Gmail and scours past emails for flight reservations, rideshare receipts, and train tickets to estimate carbon emissions, in kg, per trip.

Live-streaming experiences

After nearly a year of social distancing, the world is now used to all things virtual, and Amazon Explore is riding the wave. It offers an interactive live-streaming service where customers can book live, virtual experiences led by local experts all over the world. These experiences may be focused on DIY skills, virtual tours, creative arts or boutique shopping.

Smart tourism

Spanish telecommunications company Telefónica is promoting smart tourism based on digitalisation and the incorporation of innovative technologies. This includes a simultaneous translation solution for more than 80 languages, providing 5G coverage for events or large congresses where network capacity is guaranteed, and recreating historical scenes in iconic places. 🐦

A unique segment: Students

The ETOAI (Education Tour Operators Association of India) makes a sincere appeal to all the tourism boards, airlines, and tourism service providers to associate with them to take advantage of the potential this very unique and untapped segment provides with very high volumes of business.



Hazel Jain

The ETOAI (Education Tour Operators Association of India), established in 2015, is one of the lesser-known associations in the travel trade. But its president, **Prashant V. Andhalkar**, is determined to change that. The association has recently conducted webinars with Esselworld, Kokan Paryatan, Dekho Apna Desh series by India Tourism, as well as Maharashtra Dekho web series.

It has also recently signed an MoU with Korea Tourism Organization to promote educational tourism for students with the added facilities such as students group visa under single application, visits to the local universities, and industry visits, along with a familiarisation trips for its members. Andhalkar says, "We



Prashant V. Andhalkar
President, ETOAI

appeal to all the tourism boards, airlines, tourism service providers and GSAs to associate with us for a very unique segment that can give them very high volumes of business. We are the only association in India that has its members who are educational travel agents and tour operators who organise tours for educational institutions only. Activities are related to the educational curriculum and tourism. Our members conduct activities

such as educational field trips, factory visits, hikes, international tours, etc."

He says his association has more than 200 members handling more than 7,000 educational institutions and catering to more than 20,00,000 students across India, mainly Maharashtra. "Our Delhi, Chandigarh and Bengaluru chapters will be active in about two months. Our members are well scrutinised as per association

policy with proper documentation viz. Aadhar card, PAN card, bank accounts, etc. and updated from time to time," Andhalkar explains.

ETOAI is a registered body and as per the norms of the association. It conducts monthly committee meetings, AGM and regularly organises awareness programmes and webinars for members. But things have been pretty challenging since March 2020. "Few of our members' funds have been blocked with hotels and airlines that were paid as advance up to around second week of March 2020. Many hotels and resorts have not still refunded the amount. Some have given credit note up to a short period which will be impossible to use considering the current situation," Andhalkar explains.

These members are facing customer queries regarding their

refund but many hotels and airlines are not bothered to reply even with a credit note, Andhalkar says. "Many schools and colleges have given a deadline to ETOAI

Our members
are well
scrutinised as
per association
policy

This unique
segment can
give them very
high volumes of
business

pandemic to safeguard interest of its members. It has provided COVID-19 interest-free loans of Rs. 30,000 for four members who suffered with the infection. It has also conducted several online webinars within GSA members of ETOAI for product knowledge, destination awareness, and grievances of service providers. Webinars were also done with the MoT, Maharashtra Tourism, and other associations.

Andhalkar adds, "We conducted a learning session with India-Tourism for our members where they learned about the process of being registered under the MoT. Many of us now come under the 'Experienced Tour Operator' category and almost 70% of members are in the process to get registered with the MoT. The remaining will be registered under the 'Green Shoots' category." 🐦

Hybrid weddings beyond borders

Crowne Plaza Chennai Adyar Park has come up with a national campaign #Celebrationsbeyondgeographies, offering a hybrid weddings and socials experience for couples and their loved ones. The Crowne Meetings Team will be in tow to extend both on-ground and virtual assistance.

 Nisha Verma

Crowne Plaza Chennai Adyar Park, along with its technology partners, is providing couples with the tools and support needed to have an unforgettable experience as they tie the knot despite current circumstances. **Jit Bose**, Area Director South India, IHG Hotels, says, "Live streaming of events - be it for a wedding, milestone celebrations birthday party, baby shower to Aruvadham Kalyanam - hybrid events, are here to stay. As a part of our hybrid events solution, our Crowne Meetings Team will extend on-ground and virtual assistance for our guests by conducting site inspections, guiding with the researched list of wedding planners, technology providers, coordination for end-to-end menu planning & manag-



Jit Bose
Area Director, South India
IHG Hotels

ing delivery logistics of gourmet boxes for outstation guests of the wedding party."

The Hybrid Weddings solution will make it easy for families with a safe way to express their love through the ability to engage in a custom wedding experience, which will be as close to a live in-person event as possible. The offering includes on-venue celebration for close family mem-

bers; event live streaming with exclusive digital service provider for up to 1000 guests to join from locations across the world; designation of 15 speakers and

from its celebrated restaurant Dakshin which will consist of traditional sweets and savoury items that can be delivered by the Hotel to the guests staying

Noida, Mumbai, Chandigarh, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Jaipur, Kochi, and Chennai.

with all the wedding planners to make this an offering for their pitch. We are the first hotel to offer an extremely compre-



officials; two social media live streaming, as well as capturing and archiving the event as a keepsake for couples and their guests. In fact, the property has curated give-away hamper boxes

in key cities of India. For attendees looking for a more realistic experience, customised lunch and dinner gourmet box delivery can also be arranged in locations - Delhi, Gurugram,

Saying that they have been successful in executing hybrid weddings since the beginning of this year, Bose shared, "In the last few months, this is gaining momentum. For almost every event, there has been some amount of Hybrid element in it. Our technology partner is equipped to make every event a success."


To promote the event they have a global programme called IHG Meet with confidence (<https://www.ihg.com/content/us/en/deals/b2b/meet-with-confidence>). "We work closely with wedding planners and the entire weddings B2B fraternity to offer this to our clients apart from directly reaching out to our guests. We are working closely

We are the first hotel to offer an extremely comprehensive plan for hybrid events

hensive plan for hybrid events, which is very well appreciated. The planners are very happy that they don't have to reach out to multiple vendors, and our hotel can arrange this for them," he added.

Trust is key to business recovery

Trust levels in travel suppliers and travel agencies in India will directly influence the speed and significance of the local travel industry's recovery, according to a new independent research commissioned by Travelport. The research also reveals three key areas that travellers in the country say have the biggest influence over their trust.

 TT Bureau

The study of 11,000 travellers across 10 countries, including 2,000 in India, was conducted by Edelman Data & Intelligence (Dxi). It uncovered clear evidence that in India, trust directly



influences traveller purchasing behaviour. Due to COVID-19, for example, half (50%, versus a global average of 46%) of

travellers in the country said they prioritise trust over all other factors when choosing a travel supplier (such as an airline) - one of the highest proportions amongst the countries studied. Many travellers in India also stated,

Trust in sources of travel information

Parameters	Total Global	Total India	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers
Reviews / word of mouth (Family and friends)	58%	55%	50%	61%	62%	58%
Tourist board/official tourist information offices	49%	51%	39%	51%	52%	51%
Travel companies	45%	49%	38%	49%	48%	41%
Traditional media (TV, magazines, newspapers)	38%	48%	32%	43%	42%	31%
Celebrities and social media influencers	27%	42%	29%	35%	25%	9%

Trust-building factors

Parameters	Global	India
No hidden costs	55%	36%
Offering fully flexible or refundable products	45%	29%
Has implemented COVID-19 H&S measures	44%	42%
Long-term safety track record	39%	37%
Consistently meeting expectations	39%	24%

when trust is in place, they will consider purchasing multiple travel-related items (47%), upgrading their package (47%), or buying non-travel-related items

such as credit cards (42%). The three key trust-building areas are COVID-19 health & safety, price transparency, and information credibility.





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Will the GDS model be replaced?

Jerrin Jos, Founder & CEO, Verteil Technologies, explains how disadvantageous it can be for travel agents as well as their clients to continue using the GDS to book air tickets. He underlines major problems posed by the GDS including lag in rich data and lack of dynamic pricing.

Even today, 70%-80% of the US\$ 700 bn worth airline content distribution happens using legacy pre-internet era technologies – the Global Distribution Systems mainly operated by Amadeus, Travelport and Sabre. The technology is housed in the GDSs and the airline's control over the offer is limited with no scope for dynamic pricing or personalisation or merchandise of ancillary products. Crowded with several intermediaries to execute the process, the distribution cost of airlines is phenomenally high (as high as \$30 per ticket).

Problems with a GDS

If you look at the current GDS landscape, GDS is a 40-year-old legacy mainframe system which sits in between the airlines and the travel agents. When travellers search on an OTA or a travel agent performs a shopping task

(e.g. BOM-LHR), the offers, the flight information and the fares are coming from the GDS and not the airline. Infact, there are other systems which synchronize the flight and fare data between the airline's reservation system and the GDS. Airlines around the world upload their flight schedule information to a system call OAG (Official Airline Guide). GDS then downloads this information from OAG to its database for synchronising the flight data. Similarly, there is another company called ATPCo (Airline Tariff Publishing Company). Airlines upload all their fare information to ATPCo

and GDS downloads this information from ATPCo. It could take a week to two weeks for all this flight and fare information to get reflected in the GDS from the time airline defined and uploads it into these systems.

So, none of the information you, as a travel agent, see in shopping results on a GDS is in real time. This is problem one!

Technology limitations in GDS

The availability or inventory data is synchronised using offline messaging techniques, there are two types of messages, AVS/

NAVS (Availability Status/Numerical Availability Status) messaging between airline and GDS system. GDS uses communication protocol called EDIFACT for all its com-

numbers. This is a reason why all the information in GDS terminal is displayed as just characters and number and airlines cannot push any rich media or additional ancillary services to the GDS. For instance, when we fly the economy class of an airline, we are given a standard meal option. This is again because of the limitation of the EDIFACT protocol. There are only a handful of pre-defined SSR codes which are defined in EDIFACT protocol implemented by the GDS years back. Because of the technology limitation of the GDS, airlines are not able to push any new ancillary products or services to GDS and to the travel agents. This is problem 2. Ancillary sales could push the billion dollar industry to a trillion dollar industry easily.

No dynamic pricing

Another issue with EDIFACT based GDS technology is that air-

lines are only able to push RBD based pricing. As you know, airlines defined RBDs as k(kilo), l(lima) etc. to defined pricing.

As there are only 26 alphabets, airlines can define only 26 price points. So, there is no possibility of personalised pricing, dynamic pricing which are so fundamental in any e-commerce sector. Pricing is quite static.

None of the information you, as a travel agent, see in shopping results on a GDS is in real time

munication with the airline. EDIFACT is a World War 2 protocol. Due to its secure nature, EDIFACT is a highly cryptic protocol and the amount of information which can be transmitted using this protocol is limited to characters and



Jerrin Jos
Founder & CEO, Verteil Technologies

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

Net result

Airline fares under the NDC channel will be much lower than the GDS channel; Airlines will get full control over its offerings allowing them to follow a host of retailing strategies, product and sales innovations, enabling airlines to be on par with general e-commerce industry practices, trends, and innovations.

The rise of private jets

Private aviation is now being seen as more of a necessity than a luxury due to its safety provisions and greater control over the customer environment. Here are few reasons why private jets could take off in 2021-22, with particularly strong demand from high net-worth individuals both for leisure and business.



Hazel Jain

More first-time flyers

The pandemic has reshaped perceptions towards safety when it comes to flying and travel. Private aviation is now being looked upon as a safer alternative, avoiding cramped commercial flights and avoiding queues caused by testing requirements at airport terminals. This has drawn several first-time private jet users to the market, especially clients who previously travelled in first or business class on commercial airlines.

Sanitation a priority

Along with testing and temperature checks, private jet operators prioritise cleanliness in their aircraft interiors and facilities. Intensive cleaning practices using heavy-duty sanitizers were already in full swing in 2020 and will continue into 2021. Additionally, private operators also

tend to conduct more vetting of their ground transportation partners to ensure they're following safety practices.

Multi-leg itineraries

Travellers will seek to make their trips count more – with longer and once-in-a-lifetime trips on the agenda for private jet users, including multi-leg itineraries. Lesscrowded, remote destinations will continue to prevail over crowded cities, while hygiene and health will remain top priorities, even after the risks from COVID-19 have subsided.

Carbon conscious

As we rebuild from the pandemic, private jet companies will likely put sustainability front and centre of their proposition, as customers will increasingly demand sustainable travel options. We can expect the powering towards developing electric aircraft to shift up a gear in 2021.



Private aviation is well-placed to lead the rest of the aviation industry in this area and is hopeful that some of the leading concepts will take major steps forward in the coming year.

Business jet use

While travel trends might change, business travel will still be a necessity and it's a question of when, not if it will return. We may well see that business

travel changes, and a 'new normal' will emerge when flying is no longer limited by border closures. From the perspective of corporate jets, however, that might mean there's more, not less demand. We might possibly see executives share corporate jets with less senior colleagues.

Fewer 'unknowns'

The main appeal of private charter is that many of the 'un-

tancing measures, and existing security checkpoints. By being able to access a private aircraft from a private terminal, not only are points of contact with others reduced, there are valuable timesaving that customers will appreciate by avoiding the hassles of flying commercial.

For big events, celebs

Major sporting events, film productions and live shows this year will be made possible with private charters. Private travel has been popular for its obvious benefits around security, privacy and flexibility. The TV and film industry are expected to rely more on it, giving producers and performers peace of mind. Private flights have typically benefitted production schedules and travel logistics for talent, as well as transporting equipment for music and film. Upcoming music tours will likely rely on private air charter to fly artists. 📌

Cautious opening: Utmost safety

An end to the COVID-19 pandemic seems far beyond the horizon, but the tourism industry of the Philippines is dedicated to ensuring a phased reopening of the islands to offer utmost safety and hygiene to potential international travellers through the GREEN Corridor initiative.



TT Bureau

Department of Tourism (DOT) Philippines has developed the GREEN Corridor Initiative (GCI), its flagship domestic programme to spur tourism recovery and response.



Bernadette Romulo-Puyat
Secretary-Tourism, DOT Philippines

silience opportunities, protecting heritage and culture, and supporting the jumpstart of the economy to restart tourism activities in the new normal. "The creation of travel corridors has been a key component in the resumption of tourism in some of the country's destinations," says Tourism Secretary **Bernadette Romulo-Puyat**. The programme has been implemented in several of the archipelago's islands.

country's objective to keep tourism safe and allow travellers to be confident of safety & hygiene when touring the country.

Puyat adds that while the operational guidelines for the GCI are still being ironed out, the identified tourism products will be based on their readiness and quality, guided by the development standards espoused in the National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) 2016–2022 and the Tourism Rapid Assessment (TRA).

The development of green corridors plays an important role in maintaining regional biodiversity, improving environmental quality, offering economic re-

While the Philippines is presently opening the country for tourism only to its domestic populace, this staggered approach to re-opening is only a surety of the

A bottom-up or participatory approach will also be used in identifying the areas of development in the project. "The



technology will be able to assess the carrying capacity of identified tourism sites and attractions. In effect, tourists will easily be informed about tourist flows using this digital platform, which will alert them whenever the chosen tourism site is al-

ready available to accept tourists," she says.

The Philippines, still closed to foreign tourists, is preparing for a well-tested opening. Presently, arriving fully-vaccinated nationals are required to quarantine

only for seven days instead of 14, and not required to undergo the RT-PCR or swab test. All hurdles in the system will be ironed out before the country opens to tourism, ensuring foreign tourists are confident of travelling to the Philippines. 🇵🇭

Google tried to create an airline reservation system called Google Flights in 2012. Google used algorithms developed by a travel technology company IATA to create a competitive booking meta-search engine that would facilitate reservations via third-party suppliers.

Vaccine approval awaited

So far, only SII's Covishield has been approved in eight European Union countries and Switzerland amid a row over travel pass. This has some outbound agents worried.

"This is a welcome announcement overall. However, unlike Switzerland which has announced that all types of visas will be accepted including tourist visas, a similar announcement is awaited from these eight countries. For outbound tourism to make headway into any of these countries, the first step is to process tourist visas for Indian travellers. Parallel step is for airlines to open up with direct or one-stop convenient schedules at moderate prices. Each of these countries are firm favourites with the Indian outbound. The world needs to open up completely."



Mahendra Vakharia
MD, Pathfinders Holidays

"If WHO or EMA does not accept Covishield and Covaxin, it surely will be a challenge for Indian travellers. Clients have already called to enquire about this news and are concerned and upset with the reports. Holding a valid double shot vaccine certificate of a dose approved by WHO as well as most of the international countries will be mandatory document for international travel. I urge the government to take this matter up seriously and immediately with the appropriate global authorities on behalf of travellers (students, businessmen, family and friends) to ensure vaccines given in India are accepted for globally."

"Our governments took a tough stand and warned the EU over the denial of Green Pass to the beneficiaries of Covishield. It was made clear that EU's Digital COVID Certificate shall not be accepted unless Indian vaccines were included for Green Pass. This forced the EU to allow the member countries individually to accept the beneficiaries of Indian vaccine jabs. The countries will understand the potential of Indian tourists which ultimately adds to their economy. The bottom-line is that Indians can no more be ignored or taken lightly."



Abhik Dutta
Director, The Wanderers



Sunil Satyawakta
Director, Civica Travels
Inputs by Hazel Jain

SOTC moves to new HQ in Mumbai



Team SOTC has moved into its new owned premises at Marathon Futurex building (13th floor) in Lower Parel. **Vishal Suri**, MD, SOTC, said, "We have seamlessly shifted to our spacious new office premises and have hit the ground running as we leverage on India's pent up travel demand. The location is owned by our Group."

A helping hand



Since late March 2020, Team VIA World, with the support of We Together We Can Foundation of Kolkata, has been carrying out COVID relief work. They have helped travel agents and their families by providing monthly ration and emergency medicines. Besides the travel fraternity, VIA World has helped more than 5,000 people.

EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



JULY 2021

Date	Event	Time
15	Virtual Digital Focus Summit on Entertainment & Film Tourism	11:00 am
15	CAPA India webinar on Airport slots	04:00 pm
20	PATA India Update & Outlook Meeting	12:00 pm
24	TAFI National Elections via e-voting	TBA
29	CAPA India webinar on Aircraft Financing	04:00 pm
29-30	SITE India Incentive Summit 2021- (Virtual)	10:00 am

AUGUST 2021

5-6	Virtual Travel, Tourism & Hospitality E-Conclave	11:00 am
13-15	Holiday Expo	Vadodara
18	Experience AIUla webinar	03:00 pm
20-21	Global Travel, Tourism & Hospitality Summit	Delhi
23-25	Global Youth Tourism Summit	Sorrento, Italy
26	CAPA India webinar on India-ME Aviation	04:00 pm

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

IATO UP Chapter's hybrid meet

Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) Uttar Pradesh Chapter organised its hybrid meeting on July 9 in Varanasi at Hotel Clarks, under the chairmanship of **Prateek Hira**, Chairman UP Chapter and **Vikram Singh**, Co-Chair of the chapter.



Manas Dwivedi

This meeting was supported by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and was attended by about 50 members including IATO's Regional Chairman of North India, Sunil Gupta who spoke about all the efforts that IATO has made in the past few months to ease the pain of the industry. Anil Orav, Regional Director - North, Ministry of Tourism also joined the meeting and assured the members of Ministry's support for early revival of tourism in India.

The agenda of the meeting was to discuss the road map of tourism in Uttar Pradesh and Prof Pravin Rana of Banaras Hindu University delivered a talk on the topic 'Reinvent to Rebound'. A power point presentation by Prof Rana set the tone of discussions and deliberations that followed.



Sharing his thoughts, **Prateek Hira** commented, "It is very important that as tour operators, we reinvent ourselves and look at other revenue heads than just the traditional ones, in order to rebound much earlier, when things start falling in place".

"I personally believe that operators in Varanasi need to think beyond just the ghats and similarly operators of Agra need to

think beyond Taj Mahal. IATO as an apex body of tour operators has not only been doing its best to help its membership keep afloat in these most difficult times but is also educating its members so as to aid a faster rebound of tourism Industry," Hira further added.

Co-Chair of IATO UP Chapter, **Vikram Singh** said, "We need to come out of our comfort

zones and explore new areas and that is the reason that operators are touring nearby towns to expand the potential of Varanasi."

IATO is conducting meetings all over India in its different chapters. The idea is to handhold all its members in these most difficult times and work towards an early revival of the battered tourism industry. 📌

COVID protocols for India outbound

SWITZERLAND
RT-PCR: Not required if vaccinated
Vaccination: Fully vaccinated (Covishield)
Quarantine protocol: If not vaccinated, 10 days mandatory quarantine

RUSSIA
RT-PCR: Required 72 hours prior
Vaccination: Not required
Quarantine protocol: No compulsory quarantine

TURKEY
RT-PCR: Required 48 hours prior
Vaccination: Not required
Quarantine protocol: No compulsory quarantine

EGYPT
RT-PCR: If fully vaccinated, RT-PCR not required; else, 72 hrs prior
Vaccination: Not required
Quarantine protocol: No compulsory quarantine

MALDIVES
RT-PCR: Required 72 hours prior
Vaccination: Not required
Quarantine protocol: No compulsory quarantine

SOUTH AFRICA
RT-PCR: Required 72 hours prior
Vaccination: Not required
Quarantine protocol: No compulsory quarantine

UKRAINE
RT-PCR: If fully vaccinated, RT-PCR not required; else, 72 hrs prior
Vaccination: Not required
Quarantine protocol: No compulsory quarantine

SERBIA
RT-PCR: Required 48 hours prior
Vaccination: Not required
Quarantine protocol: 7 days compulsory quarantine

UZBEKISTAN
RT-PCR: Required 72 hours prior
Vaccination: Not required
Quarantine protocol: No compulsory quarantine

ETHIOPIA
RT-PCR: Required 120 hours prior
Vaccination: Not required
Quarantine protocol: No compulsory quarantine

The information provided above is subject to change. Please check updated guidelines before travelling.



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IHCL

Mumbai

Indian Hotels Company (IHCL) has announced new strategic leadership roles that will sharpen focus on customer centricity, drive diversity and inclusion, and institutionalise owner/partner engagement. With personalisation defining the future of customer engagement in the hospitality industry, **Ritika Gupta** will be responsible for creating business value through customer centricity and relationship management. With close to three decades of experience, Gupta brings the right mix of customer focus and relationship orientation.



Mumbai

In order to further promote IHCL as a diverse and inclusive organisation, **Rakhee Lalvani** will take on the new role of Diversity Head and will be responsible for developing and implementing best practices to promote diversity and inclusion in the organisation. A senior leader with close to 30 years of experience at IHCL, Lalvani is well positioned to spearhead this strategic initiative. She will drive this important imperative while retaining their current role and responsibilities in the organisation.



NORWEGIAN CRUISE LINE

Southampton, UK

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL), the innovator in global cruise travel with a 54-year history of breaking boundaries, is strengthening its sales strategy with the appointment of **Eamonn Ferrin** as Vice President of International Business. Ferrin will oversee NCL's sales efforts outside of the US and Canada, and grow the company's international footprint by deepening existing travel relationships, reaping new business and further integrating international source markets into the company's global business plan.



HAHN AIR

Germany

Hahn Air has announced the appointment of **Christoph Althoff** as Vice President Airline Business. The industry professional joined the Hahn Air team on July 1 and will be in charge of an international team of experts managing the partnerships with Hahn Air's more than 350 partner airlines worldwide as well as acquiring and implementing new partner carriers. Althoff is taking over from Steve Knackstedt who has been in this role for more than 13 years and who will retire at the end of 2021.



THE LEELA BHARTIYA CITY

Bengaluru

The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru is expanding its senior management team and bringing in talent with global expertise. **Bhavana Menon** will be taking on the role of Director of Sales at The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru. She comes with over a decade of experience working with some of the prominent brands under Marriott group of hotels. Menon has a proven record of client acquisition and development, deploying successful marketing campaigns and managing revenue streams. She is an adapting and forward-thinking sales leader.



CROWNE PLAZA

KOCHI

Crowne Plaza Kochi has appointed **Dinesh Rai** as General Manager. With over two decades of experience in operation and business development, Rai is known for his leadership qualities complemented by diverse work experiences. He has worked with leading brands such as Marriott, Accor, IHG and Taj Hotels during his previous assignments. In his new role, Rai will be responsible for the continued success of the hotel by combining cutting-edge hospitality with innovative experiences for the guests.



THE WESTIN

Goa

The Westin Goa has appointed **Devidyuti Ghosh** as Director of Rooms. An experienced professional with a broad spectrum of knowledge, Ghosh will be responsible for the overall functioning of the 171 rooms, recruitment, and training. Ghosh will also lead operations for the front office, housekeeping, recreation, the spa, and health club. Prior to this, she was associated with JW Marriott Kolkata and Mumbai, where she was responsible for the front office and the hotel rooms.



HOLIDAY INN CITY CENTRE

JAIPUR

Harpal Singh has been appointed as the new Director of Finance & Business Support at Holiday Inn Jaipur City Centre. He is an industry veteran with roughly 15 years of experience in the hospitality industry, having previously served as Financial Controller in Crowne Plaza Today, Gurugram. He has also been associated with brands like Kingdom of Dreams Gurugram and Radisson MBD Hotel Noida. Spearheading the hotel's business strategy, Singh will continue to evolve innovative finance structures, processes and effective controls, further strengthening risk management practices.



FOUR A LORDS RESORT

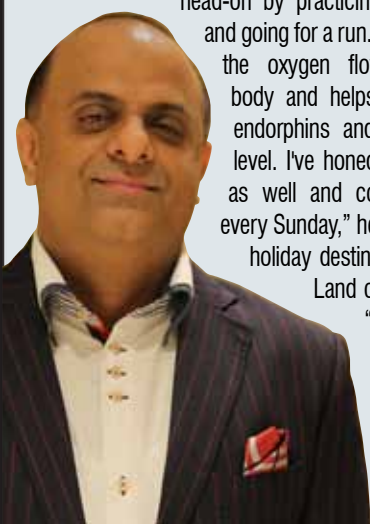
JAMMU

Lords Hotels and Resorts has appointed **Vikas Mahajan** as Operations Manager for Four A Lords Resort at Birpur in Jammu, the group's second hotel in the city. Mahajan is a seasoned hospitality professional with over 21 years of experience. He will be responsible for operations and also for achieving the hotel's commercial objectives. His last assignment before joining Lords was with Radisson group of hotels as Executive Chef.



TALKing People

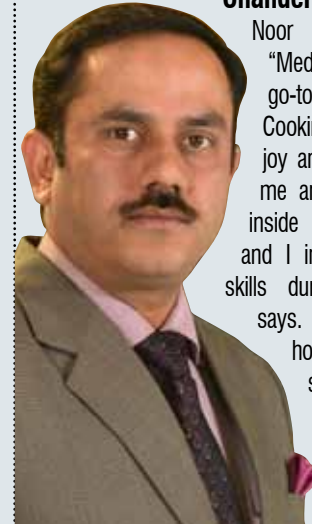
Mehul Sharma, Founder & CEO, Signum Hotels & Resorts, believes that if we let stress get the best of us, it can reduce our unicorn ideas to donkey fodder. "I address it head-on by practicing meditation, yoga and going for a run. This helps increase the oxygen flow throughout the body and helps the brain release endorphins and increases energy level. I've honed my cooking skills as well and cook for my family every Sunday," he says. His favourite holiday destination in India is the Land of Lamas – Ladakh. "Internationally it's the city of diversity and dynamism - New York!" Sharma adds.



Melanie de Souza, Executive Director, Destination Marketing, The Royal Commission for AIUIA (RCU), unwinds with a movie or a good book. "And when in Australia, I wash it down with a glass of Shiraz! During the lockdown, I have learned to remind myself of all that I should be grateful for," she says. Zeroing in on a favourite holiday destination she says is tough. "I have so many favourites. I love Rajasthan and Kerala, and internationally I would have to say Africa," de Souza adds.



One would think that a hectic workday in the hospitality industry is stressful. But staying away from work during the lockdown was more stressful for **Chander Shekhar Puri**, GM, Noor Mahal Palace Hotel. "Meditation and yoga is the go-to for me to de-stress. Cooking always gives me joy and the lockdown gave me an opportunity to step inside the kitchen again and I improved my cooking skills during this time," he says. Sharing his favourite holiday destinations, Puri says, "Kashmir and London are two places I can visit again and again."





BE PART OF THE FUN



NIDHI+ platform on the anvil

Rakesh Verma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, shares that they are taking the NIDHI scheme to the next level. He also insists that MICE will be a sector in focus as the ministry moves forward with its plans.



Nisha Verma

After launching NIDHI platform last year, Ministry of Tourism is now taking it a step forward. "We are consolidating on what

well as to help our tourism service providers get listed on OTAs and Incredible India website. The 4th pillar is working with the ministries of MSME and FRRO offices, because they also have database of hospitality units

wave, he believes that MICE has been a sector which has been greatly impacted. Talking about the Champions Sector scheme for MICE, he said, "The scheme we had launched, so far has remained a non-starter

ministries, state governments and also at the city level to ensure that right kind of support is given for MICE sector, so that we can organise events in a better form and could aggressively target some international events to be held in India. In fact, it's a good thing that so many convention centres and MICE facilities have been created across the country in the recent past."

MICE advantage programmes

To strengthen the MICE sector, Verma said that they have a strategy in place. "We are planning to give MICE advantage programmes, because most of the cities internationally provide various incentives for international events. Thus, we have also advocated a similar programme to the states, and we are hopeful that it will have a positive impact," Verma suggested.

Sustainability is the future of tourism

Verma believes that this is the time that we should look at sustainability in a more serious way. "We should accept that sustainable tourism is the future of tourism. We have an agenda 2030 of sustainable tourism, where we have mapped out goals to be achieved. It's important to note that it aligns with multiple fronts. We must realise that this is a goal worth pursuing. Secondly, we should recognise that we are very poor or underperforming in sustainable tourism, which is visible in our rankings for adventure or ecotourism. This acceptance of reality is important to put together required efforts.

Thirdly, things will change only with policies, programmes, and strategies, which are put into practice. That's where our national strategy is driven, and we hope that all states align themselves to specific policies and strategies. Another important aspect is to measure how effective these policies and strategies are. That's where the sustainable tourism criteria of India arise from. Whether it is tour operators, hotel industry or a destination; a continuous measurement will make us realise where is the gap, where we stand and where is future aspiration," he explained.

Talking about the fifth aspect,

he said, "The industry must be enthused about sustainability. Hence, we need to make sure that it's a win-win proposition for government, industry and people at large. We must look at making the industry a partner and ensuring that they are equally enthused about pursuing this goal. Last aspect is the responsible traveller campaign. Unless people start demanding and start valuing it, the supply side—government and industry, would still be laidback and complacent. Hence, how quickly do we galvanise people and they get aware about it, start demanding it, and start paying for it, is very important."

we had built as a platform and building SAATHI framework for other quality certifications also. NIDHI+ looks at four elements. One is the registration of units, which could be hospitality units, tour operators, travel agents, and all kinds of tourism service providers. Second is consolidation of quality certification. Earlier, we came up with COVID-19 SOPs, and SAATHI was initially built for the same. Now, we are bringing star classification also in the same framework. We are also working on sustainability certification and adventure tourism certification. In addition, we are working with OTAs for integrating database and trying to build a unified database, as

and MSME units, which would allow us to remove duplicity and help build one unified database," he adds.

MICE & Champions Sector

Verma said that while they have already seen physical events starting before the second

because of the lockdown. As things open, I am sure that national and international events are going to come back, and this sector will also grow like others. We have a strategy in place for promoting MICE tourism, and hence we are working with other

We are planning MICE advantage program; most int'l cities provide incentives



Rakesh Verma
Joint Secretary, MOT



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