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## Kerala invites new projects

A high-level meeting presided by the new Kerala Tourism Minister **PA Mohamed Riyas** has decided on revival of the state's tourism sector by rolling out new domestic tourism packages that encourage Indian travellers to visit destinations in the state.

Manas Dwivedi

In a bid to restart tourism in the state, **PA Mohamed Riyas**, Minister for Tourism & Public Works Department, Government of Kerala, has decided to finalise projects and implement them at the earliest so that people are inspired to visit the state and explore the wide range of offerings and regions there. "The initiative, which is being carried out considering that the pandemic will take time for authorities to promote international tourists, seeks to complete select tourism projects in the districts on a time-bound basis.



**PA Mohamed Riyas**  
Minister for Tourism & Public Works  
Department, Government of Kerala

Kerala Tourism will work in close association with allied departments by initiating sustained dialogues with all parties," the Minister said. The meeting was

also attended by **Rani George**, Principal Secretary (Tourism) and **VR Krishna Teja**, Director, Kerala Tourism besides top officials of Kerala Tourism Development Corporation.

"In a month, the various approval/classification schemes under Ease of Doing Business will go online. Authorities will draft new COVID-19 protocols for tourists arriving from other states. This will be done after tourism officials hold talks with their counterparts in the Ministry of Health," Riyas added. One of the new schemes is expected to lay stress on the Responsible Tourism (RT) mission. The measures adopted

under RT will be aimed at ensuring that the local population benefits from tourism while focus continues to be laid on their traditional and cultural values. The Department of Tourism also plans to work with the local authorities to determine how the people of the region can be empowered through tourism. A move in the direction is expected to be made by mid-June.

At the meeting it was also decided that senior functionaries and top officials will present project drafts that can help revive tourism in the state that has suffered a

Contd on page 16 ▶

## Abu Dhabi is a Buzz

The Department of Culture and Tourism Abu Dhabi has appointed Buzz Travel Marketing as its new India representative.

Nisha Verma

The Buzz-DCT Abu Dhabi three-year partnership will be aimed at supporting stakeholders and further enhancing Abu Dhabi's long-standing involvement with the Indian market. It will also focus on strengthening Abu Dhabi's trade and marketing strategies with a brand-new outlook, as part of the emirate's upcoming plans for the tourism sector.

**HE Ali Hassan Al Shaiba**, Executive Director of Tourism and Marketing at DCT Abu Dhabi, says, "To further this legacy, we are pleased to welcome



**HE Ali Hassan Al Shaiba**  
Executive Director of Tourism  
and Marketing, DCT Abu Dhabi

onboard Buzz Travel Marketing as our new partner in India. As we repurpose our strategy on the road to recovery post COVID-19, we look forward to

Contd on page 16 ▶

## Sectoral relief needed

**MP Bezbaruah**, Secretary General, HAI, believes the government should provide sectoral, comprehensive packages.

Hazel Jain

With extensive experience in both Indian tourism and hospitality, **Madan Prasad Bezbaruah** has seen both these industry grow and evolve over the past few decades. A retired IAS Officer and a Former Secretary at the Ministry of Tourism, Bezbaruah now focuses on hospitality and getting the industry its due, especially given how traumatic the past one year has been for it. "Of course, the industry has learnt a lot over the last one year. That learning I presume will continue. Because while from the health point of view, it is a second wave, for the industry it is a con-



**Madan Prasad Bezbaruah**  
Secretary General, HAI

tinuing misery. It is devastating for our business and psychologically very frustrating," he says. The industry has, of course, learned some lessons. "We have learned

Contd on page 8 ▶

## E-connect at Korea Travel Expo

Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), New Delhi office is set to organise its first virtual B2B event for India market - Korea Travel Expo - from June 22-24 this year. **Young-Geul Choi**, Director, Korea Tourism Organization, New Delhi office, shares what to expect at the event.

Nisha Verma

Over 15 regional tourism boards, attractions and DMCs of Korea are confirmed to exhibit at the Korea Travel Expo, including representatives from Seoul and Busan tourism boards, Jeju Convention & Visitor Bureau and Lotte World with its collection of theme park, aquarium and observatory.

Talking about the aim behind the event, **Young-Geul Choi** says, "In 2020, due to the unpredictable COVID situation globally, we were unable to organise any kind of B2B connect of our Korean



**Young-Geul Choi**  
Director, KTO, New Delhi office

exhibitors for the India market. Currently, as the second wave of COVID is getting under control and many countries have started opening up, we think this is the

right time to reconnect with the industry and introduce the latest products and offerings in South Korea, which is preparing itself to reopen for inbound tourism this year. We want Indian travel companies to start focusing on South Korean tour products for outbound travel in the future."

Commending the resilience the people of India have shown in battling the second wave of infections in the country, Choi adds that as people in the travel industry in India start getting back to their regular work life, Korea Travel Expo will be like a breath of fresh air, and will give

them something positive to look forward to. "And, they can start doing what they love, that is meet new people, make connections,

and make exciting tour packages & travel products for their customers," the Director claims.

Choi also believes there is pent-up business travel demand that will happen once the quarantine

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## IATO waives admission fee

As part of its special drive for strengthening the pan-India membership base, IATO has waived off the admission fee of ₹10,000 (plus 18 per cent GST) for applicants from certain states and UTs. The Association is also motivating existing members to get MOT-recognised.



Manas Dwivedi

To strengthen its membership base, the Indian Association of Tour Operator's (IATO) Executive Committee (EC) has taken some major and important decisions to increase membership in states where the association has fewer members, and also to encourage allied members across the country to change their status from Allied to Active.

**Rajiv Mehra**, President, IATO, says that the EC has decided to waive off the admission fee of ₹10,000 (plus 18 per cent GST) for applicants from some of the states and union territories (UTs) where IATO needs to encourage stakeholders to join the association to strengthen its membership base. These states and UTs include Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chandigarh, Chhattisgarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Ladakh, Lakshadweep, Puducherry, and the Northeast states. "The EC has gone beyond and



**Rajiv Mehra**  
President, IATO

has decided to give 50 per cent discount on the admission fee for the applicants from other states that are not mentioned above. There is no waiver/discount on the annual subscription and that is to be paid fully. This waiver / discount in admission fee will be for the applications received up to March 31, 2022," Mehra shares.

Earlier, the EC had decided to give relief to existing members in the category of tour operators, travel agents, transport operators and hotel representation companies. All these category of members, who have paid their annual subscription for the financial year 2020-21, their membership will automatically be renewed for the

financial year 2021-22 and they will not be charged the annual subscription for the financial year 2021-22.

Talking about the main objective of this membership drive, Mehra says that his team wants to make IATO a strong voice of the tourism and travel industry all over the country. "I request all



This waiver or discount in admission fee will be for all the applications received up to March 31, 2022

members to support the EC in the membership drive, encourage all their friends and other

stakeholders in the tourism industry to apply for IATO membership, and take benefit of waiver/discount in admission fee. We also want to encourage existing Allied members who are MOT-approved and have foreign exchange earnings of minimum ₹20 lakh during FY 2019-20, to apply for change of status from Allied to Active category. All help will be rendered by the IATO Secretariat, New Delhi, so that after they get MOT recognition, they will be eligible to change their status from Allied to Active category after completion of two years from the date of their getting MOT recognition. This will also entitle them to take benefits from MOT," he says.

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# TRAVELTALK

## VIEWPOINT

### In the doldrums but united

It's been more than a year since the first wave of COVID-19 set off a desperate bid for relief, both medical and financial, across the world and in India. In retrospect, year 2020 can easily be termed as the 'Year of Learnings'. It taught us to set funds aside for a rainy day, dig deep into the abyss of our imagination in a sheer bid to survive, not put all our eggs in one basket, and the list continues there on. Year 2020 was also a year of urgent appeals to both Central and state authorities to pull the sector out of a series of grievous consequences on business and livelihood in the travel & tourism sector. The national associations of travel & tourism and hospitality had made several representations to the government for financial aid and assistance in survival, then revival. But, the pleadings may have been slightly mismanaged and the tourism and hospitality bodies themselves were not sure-footed, having been faced by an event of such magnitude and with no end on the horizon.

If anything, year 2020 prepared us, to an extent, for the second wave of COVID, even though the devastating impact of the latter had not been foreseen. When business started picking up late last year, the travel industry was hopeful of a good year ahead. What ensued is for everyone to witness. But, this time around, even though the appeals to the government for relief and revival continue, the industry has learnt that united, they can face tough times and help each other out. Events so far have shown that the coming together of the industry as one big family has strengthened the resolve of everyone involved to fight the menace and survive! Miracles happen when people unite!

This approach will set the tone for the future of the travel & tourism industry as a whole. When every segment of the sector has its policies, procedures, protocols and communication in sync with the other, the flow of business and its impact become seamless. The shortcomings get ironed out and the industry, as a whole, becomes a force to reckon with.

And, while the industry still awaits some relief from authorities, it is better prepared to face whatever may come its way.

# Generating tourism demand

**Kingshuk Biswas**, who is on the UNWTO panel of Tourism Experts, delves into how the tourism industry can generate demand in such a dismal scenario, and offers some suggestions for 'creating' this demand post COVID.

According to a recent Booking.com research report, 86% Indian travellers will take more health and safety related precautions when travelling in the future. It also states that more than 70% Indians would avoid certain destinations altogether due to safety concerns. Seventy-seven per cent of Indian travellers will only book a particular accommodation if it's clear what health and hygiene policies it has in place, with almost 80% favoring accommodations that have antibacterial and sanitizing products. In the wake of COVID-19 second wave in the country the question the industry is asking is, "how does the tourism industry generate demand in such a dismal scenario?" Here are my few suggestions for 'creating demand' for the industry post COVID.

#### Market safety, hygiene and green practices (accommodation sector)

Interesting in the post-COVID scenario, I am seeing lot of hotels across India offering attractive packages focusing primarily on the 'price factor'. I wonder that as a customer is 'price' going to be the motivational factor for me to travel with family post-COVID? For customers' family & friends, health, safety, seclusion will be key motivators, not 'price' alone. Some results of a quick search of the major OTAs:

- ❖ Booking.com has a filter for hotel search for 'properties with 'additional health & safety measures'
- ❖ MakeMyTrip has a search filter exclusively for 'safe, hygienic stays'
- ❖ Expedia has a filter for hotel search on 'Enhanced cleaning - properties taking additional steps to clean and sanitise'
- ❖ Tripadvisor has a hotel search filter for 'electric vehicle charging station'

The point I am trying to make is that it is high time that hotels start promoting their (1) green/sustainable practices, (2) hygiene factors, (3) COVID-free environment, etc., rather than just offering price discounts. The entire marketing and

tions interesting sections like 'unique experiences' and 'outdoor activities'

Tour Operators thus are perfectly poised to promote and highlight the cultural identity of the destinations. This strategic

where customers can actually shop, for example in Janpath market in Delhi, and the goods can then be shipped directly to the buyers.

#### Promote community based tourism (CBT)

Destinations belong to communities and tourists are merely visiting the location. Community-based tourism is not something new but it gets more prominence post COVID-19. As such it was mostly the NGOs and a few passionate tour operators/boutique hotels who have been promoting community-based tourism till date. Post COVID-19, given the changing mindset of the tourists, they will look for more meaningful, responsible and immersive experiences. CBT experiences will boom.

#### Market sustainable luxury travel

The COVID-19 crisis has led to the behavioral change of social distancing and seclusion. Currently in India, boutique hotels/homestays away from the city are doing much better than city hotels. There is an emerging trend for booking the entire property just between family and friends, and customers are ready to pay for that privilege and exclusivity. Tour operators are experiencing more focus on customised travel itineraries rather than large group bookings. Customers want immersive experiences at one destination with guarantee of seclusion. Luxury travel has a new mantra of 'seclusion & privacy'.



**Kingshuk Biswas**  
Panelist, UNWTO Panel of Tourism Experts

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

Key Findings	Inference
<b>54%</b> of global travellers saying they want to go on one long trip to a destination that has all of their favourite activities and sights close together.	Customised itineraries will emerge strong in the post-COVID scenario
<b>71%</b> of global travellers say that eating locally-sourced produce is important to them when on vacation.	Go-local is the new mantra in the post-COVID era
<b>60%</b> of global travellers keen to have access to a service (app/website) that recommends destinations where an increase in tourism would have a positive impact on the local community.	Digitisation of tourism will accelerate at an even faster pace post-COVID
<b>61%</b> looking to take a longer route to experience more of the journey, such as the scenery.	Road trips, train trips, river cruises, etc: Slow tourism has a bright future

branding of the hotels in the post-COVID era should be on the lines of health, nature, discovery, rejuvenation, solace, going local, etc.

#### Create culturally immersive experiences

Having a cursory look at the social media platforms of the state tourism boards in India post COVID-19, it is evident that most of them have been aggressively promoting unknown/lesser known destinations. Again few findings from the OTAs:

- ❖ Thrillophilia, which is majorly into experiences and tours, has a separate section 'Away from the crowd'
- ❖ Viator, the international OTA specialising in tours, has amongst many sec-

and smart investment in creating new unique local experiences would go a long way in their recovery.

#### Explore virtual experiences & shopping

I strongly recommend that tour operators/tours guides in India take a leaf out of Intrepid Travel's foray into this area. Customers pay and sign up for an online experience led by someone in another country and spend an hour or two interacting, learning a new skill, asking questions, and learning about local culture and traditions. The virtual experiences would also provide tour guides in India with a new kind of product offering to help support economic recovery. The live virtual tours can be expanded to virtual shopping experiences,



# Linking agriculture with tourism

The recently-held 14<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Agri-Tourism brought together various experts in the field who shared their experiences on how this segment can be developed and the benefits it can bring to not just the local community but to the destination as well.



Hazel Jain

The Agri-Tourism Development Organization Baramati with the support of the Directorate of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra, recently organised an international conference on Agri-

ister Dadasaheb Bhuse for women farmers is highly commendable. More than 60% of the country's population is engaged in agriculture and it is crucial to link agriculture to tourism. Agri-tourism is instrumental for employment generation and economic improvement especially in these pandemic times

from 10 countries shared insightful information about scope and significance of Agri-tourism. Also part of the conference were **Pandurang Taware**, Founder, Agri Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC); **Valsa Nair**, Principal Secretary, Department of Tourism, Government



**Aaditya Thackeray**  
Minister, Tourism & Environment  
Government of Maharashtra



**Dr. Dhananjay Sawalkar**  
Director, Directorate of Tourism  
Government of Maharashtra



**Steve Borgia**  
Chairman & Managing Director  
INDeco Leisure Hotels

One of the safest ways to enjoy travel right now is to visit rural areas

We have recently approved the applications of 86 Agri-tourism centres

Rural tourism changes the way the villages are involved in Agri or farm tourism

tourism. This year's theme was 'Women Farmer Entrepreneurship Development' and brought together some of the prominent women entrepreneurs and experts in the field of Agri-tourism.

Sharing his view on this segment, **Aaditya Thackeray**, Minister of Tourism & Environment, said, "I am proud that our state has taken the lead in Agri-tourism. The concept of 30% Krishi Yojana proposed by the Agriculture Min-

when people have lost jobs. Agri-tourism has given us the opportunity to bring together the two major sectors: tourism and agriculture. The current pandemic offers an opportunity to grow Agri-tourism in India. One of the safest ways to enjoy travel right now is to visit rural areas, experience rural life and enjoy a clean environment."

The two-day conference was attended by 500 participants from 21 countries. About 30 speakers

of Maharashtra; **Dr. Dhananjay Sawalkar**, Director, Directorate of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra; **Dr. Harsh Verma**, Ex Technical Director, UNWTO, Spain; **Ashutosh Salil** (IAS), Managing Director, MTDC; and **D Venketesan**, Regional Director, Western and South Region, Ministry of Tourism. It also witnessed participation of national and international experts, researchers and farmers from various countries including

Italy, USA, Uganda, South Africa, Philippines, Scotland, Spain and Thailand.

## Planning underway

**Dr. Dhananjay Sawalkar**, Director, Directorate of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra, said, "Negotiations are underway with all the concerned departments with Agri-tourism and the administration is trying to streamline the process of setting up agri-tourism centres by issuing ordinances. We strive to implement this policy successfully with minimal administra-

known tourist destinations in the first phase, where it is difficult to get affordable accommodation. Maharashtra has over 1,000 Agri-tourism centres which are empowering farmers and rural communities to enhance their economic viability.

Also part of the discussion was **Steve Borgia**, Chairman and Managing Director, IN-Deco Leisure Hotels, who has pioneered rural tourism in the southern region of India. He said, "We have changed the face of some villages in Tamil

## Women in the field

The conference highlighted the initiatives taken by women to successfully run the Agri-tourism centres around the world, the development of these centres through their ingenious and innovative methods, thus empowering rural women around the world. Another interesting fact presented was that, because of successful Agri-tourism centres, many urban tourists of these countries are being able to indulge in nature and experience tourism at affordable rates. Some of them who addressed the



He also suggested that it would be more profitable to set up Agri-tourism centres in well-

Nadu where rural tourism has become a socio-economic tool. But why are we so slow in adopting farm or rural tourism? I believe rural tourism is the future for a country like India because it changes the way the villages are involved in Agri or farm tourism. We have to be so cautious today – we want to have tourists inside those villages and farms, but we don't want to take it away. Therefore, I also believe that tourism that does not offer benefits to the local communities is not fair tourism."

conference included Dr. Mira Gabor, Ex Principal Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Philippines; Ravazzoli Elisa of Italy; Lisa Chase and Jane Eckert from the USA; Maria Buryamujura of Uganda; Nanda Kasar from Pune; and Dr. Ashwini Kotkar from Thane. They shared their experiences, studies, and various reforms undertaken in their respective regions to promote agri-tourism. They narrated their experiences on how they went out of their traditional roles and started their own business, the difficulties they faced and how they overcame them. ↴



## Tourism Breaking News

■ Flybig starts flying between Pasighat, Guwahati & Kolkata

■ Shangri-La Group announces its family experience brand - Fam.ily

■ Singapore approves COVID breath test that gives immediate results

■ Crisis in Indian aviation sector at 'point of no return': CAPA India

■ Bahrain suspends entry of Indian travellers

■ Maharashtra govt seeks World Heritage tag for 14 forts

■ MPTB to launch 'Safe Tourism for Women' project at 50 destinations

■ Kashmir tour operators ask for revival package

■ OTOAI waives off annual membership fee for FY 2021-2022: Riaz Munshi

# 'We will tweak as per trend'

Austrian National Tourist Office that recently concluded its three-day B2B virtual roadshow – Virtual atb 2021 – is finely tuned to the needs and trends of the Indian market and will tweak its strategy only once cross-border travel opens up.

 Hazel Jain

 The Austrian Tourism Days (ÖTT) that was held from May 17-19, 2021 was dedicated to the return of travel, ahead of Austria's reopening on May 19. The three-day conference focused on sales, innovation, safe holidays and the future of travel to provide the industry with short and medium-term orientation. Part of this event was the atb.virtual – a B2B platform for the Austrian industry to present itself to international buyers, including 12 travel companies from India.

Speaking about the response from India at this virtual show, **Christine Mukharji**, Market Manager, India, Austrian National Tourist Office, says, "We had 12 travel companies participate in Virtual atb 2021. The response was very encouraging and enthusiastic with all agents



**Christine Mukharji**  
Market Manager, India, ANTO

looking forward to gaining further insight into Austria and its products to be prepared once travel opens. Since we have a limited amount of agents we could accommodate from each country at the atb virtual, we could not accept participation of any more Indian travel agents."

Speaking on the sidelines of the event was Austria's Minister for Tourism **Elisabeth Köstinger**, who said, "We are at the beginning of a big comeback in tourism. Our businesses' success

in attracting guests is never a coincidence, but the result of hard work. The Tourism Days are a strong sign of life from the industry and an internal and external signal that Austrian tourism is back –let's go!"

### Highlights of the B2B meets

Giving a peek into the main concerns of the Indian buyers, Mukharji says, "Given the current scenario, their only concern is the rules and regulations of each country once they open and most importantly when will Austria be open for Indian tourists to visit. People seem eager to travel and are waiting for travel to open up."

She adds that ANTO will continue to target B2B and B2C like it has in the past. "For now, our plan once we restart promotions will be to continue promoting all the destinations as previously and then tweak our promotions as new trends emerge. Getting latest research

 Austrian National  
Tourist Office

data and stats going forward will help in this to a certain degree for sure and we do refer to various available data. We are finely tuned to the needs and trends of the Indian market and work our strategies accordingly," Mukharji adds.

### Trade engagements

ANTO has already been engaging with its network of agents through various channels like its WhatsApp business group, social media like Facebook and Instagram and also through varied travel associations. "We have run numerous contests where we gave out gift packs and gift vouchers to agents which was a big hit. In addition, we have started our 'Visit Austria' App where agents can keep abreast of all developments in Austria and also renew/become an Austrian Certified Travel Specialist member," Mukharji reveals, adding that as per the latest update from the Austrian government, Covishield has been mentioned as one of the five recognised vaccines for its inbound travellers. 🇦🇹

 We have started our 'Visit Austria' App where agents can keep abreast of all developments in Austria 

# Liquidity is the biggest issue

► Contd from page 3

that winning the confidence and trust of the consumer is very important, and the industry must go out of its way now and proactively create that atmosphere of confidence to bring back guests. Most of the hotels that are well established have already gotten into AI and digitalisation, while ensuring that they don't make people redundant, which could lead to a serious problem. But a very small section of the industry can do this; almost 80 per cent of the travel and tour-

ism industry are SMEs so the main problem is with them," Bezbaruah adds.

### Level of impact

Unfortunately, no assessment has been made so far, he says, adding, "It is very important to make some sort of assessment, an estimate. In the initial months of the pandemic, a McKinsey survey revealed the hotel industry would be down by 70 per cent. At that time the hotel industry had estimated a revenue loss of ₹90,000 crore. HAI is guided by our char-



**Madan Prasad Bezbaruah**  
Secretary General, HAI

ter and it is not a financing institution, unfortunately. In time though, if we do have sufficient funds, we would like to extend financial help to our members. Our primary role is to highlight problems, create advocacy and create a platform for PPPs."

### Liquidity – the biggest problem

The biggest problem of the industry right now, no matter what the size of the hotel, is liquidity. "Payments are due but they have no income. So we have been talking to the RBI, requesting them to restructure these loans, give moratorium, and provide liquidity support and credit support to these



SMEs. The biggest problem for SMEs is payroll support for their people. Many have been retrenched because of this. We understand that government is thinking about the general economic recovery, benefits of which will come to tourism also. But it needs to think about this as well," Bezbaruah adds.

"We strongly believe that it is time for some sectoral, strong, comprehensive package. Our members are also trying to do their best, they just need a little support like relief for electricity bills, etc. We have also asked for benefits of social infrastructure to allow more hotels to reopen. Sooner or later, domestic tourism will restart in a big way and when that happens we will have to go beyond the metros for which we will need ready infrastructure there," the expert voices.

He clarifies, "Give what was due. For instance, the Service Export Incentive Scheme extended to the industry which we have not got as yet.

We have also talked about the Credit Guarantee Scheme which is a very good scheme but it has a lot of lacuna for which it may not be totally beneficial to the industry.

Many of the things that we have asked for in the first wave like deferment of payment have not come to us. They relate to the state governments

 What we are trying to say is that please do something comprehensive, don't do things ad hoc 

### Mutual support

The bottom line is, Bezbaruah says, the problem is not the MOT. It is only a facilitating ministry. "It cannot give the financial benefits that we have asked for. So we understand that. We have tried to strengthen the hands of the ministry and have requested that it should go stronger than it has done now, to focus on those demands and try to get them from the FM. We do see small developments and we have been told that the export benefits will soon come to the industry, and social infrastructure status will be extended to us. What we are trying to say is that please do something comprehensive, don't do things ad hoc," he explains.

### Strong PPP initiative

HAI has been emphasising on two things: the government must come out with a very strong PPP initiative. "We have to think seriously about the credit system for SMEs, build some sort of insurance or security cover for them. And we have to do destination development," he says. 🇦🇹

## Submission to the FM

- ❖ Need for Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS 3.0) customisation to include:
  - \* State Financial Corporations
  - \* Asset Reconstructions Companies (ARCs) and Debt Funds
  - \* Extension of moratorium
  - \* Capping of interest rate at 8%
  - \* Increasing of delinquency period
- ❖ Hotels with no borrowings also be eligible for ECLGS 3.0
- ❖ Allow hotels to utilise credit line for any business purpose
- ❖ Complete or partial waiver of statutory expenses payable by hotels
- ❖ Introduction of plan/policy where hotels can renegotiate lease rentals/licence fee



# Do you have a game plan?

A strategy worked out in advance can make the future of a business more robust in these challenging times. Industry experts bring into focus the need for frequent research and real-time data that can prove to be a magic wand for decision-makers, encompassing factors like traffic, traveller behaviour, routes and destinations, etc.

“The fundamentals of research and data has shaken since the pandemic. Companies can no longer rely on historical trends to predict future growth. Rather, companies now require to monitor real time trends more than ever. Be it passenger traffic, traveller behaviour, operational routes and destinations – every bit of the travel industry has been upended, and things are only going to get more complex in the short-term.”



**Abraham Alapatt**  
President & Group Head – Marketing, Service Quality, Value Added Services & Innovation Thomas Cook (India)

“Research and planning are inter-connected. To conduct proper research, we do need to plan considering the geographical locations, the travel trend and several other factors and draw a research design. Research has varied dimensions. As a tech support company for accommodation providers, we do the research on a broader scale according to our research design. After research, we plan the business strategy.”



**Nicholas Lim**  
General Manager (Sales) Asia Norwegian Cruise Line

“It is extremely important to adapt to consumer preferences. There is a repository of customer insights that we dip into while creating travel experiences for customers. We conduct research with an objective to understand and obtain insights of the leisure traveller and their travel behaviour. Our research is conducted across metros and tier-II & III cities that offer diverse perspective and insights. Findings help us customise our offerings.”



**Tomoyuki Okagawa**  
Managing Director, JTB India

“At JTB, we pride ourselves in the business of generating value to our customers and we believe that it is of utmost importance for us to study and conduct a research-based business plan. This is especially true in the current situation where the business trends are changing constantly. We ensure that a regular communication survey is conducted with our client base to develop a relevant business strategy which will also lead to the company’s evolution, development and growth.”

Inputs by Hazel Jain

“Research and data has been key to our foray into new markets/segments, launch of new products, services or innovation in technology or processes; equally in refining/upgrading our existing products and service delivery. Data analytics has proven invaluable. Our Holiday Readiness Surveys during the pandemic provided critical insights and several initiatives that we launched were basis this research.”



**Chetan Kapoor**  
Co-Founder and Chief Strategy Officer, Videc



**Binitha Sreejith**  
Business Development Head StreetGooser Tech

“Data has always been an important part of our planning, and it’s especially critical in the current environment, where funds need to be spent wisely. We start by looking at what we know through our own platforms and resources, like web visits and enquiries, but also regular check-ins to gauge the sentiment of our agent partners and past guests. Then we’ll look to fill in any gaps in knowledge through additional research. In today’s world, we have to be flexible.”



**Daniel D'souza**  
President & Country Head Leisure, SOTC Travel

## Quicker results will count

Wouldn't it be great if companies can get real results at a fraction of the cost and more than 70 per cent faster than traditional research companies? **Rahim Penangwala**, Founder, UserQual, shares more details about his start-up and how his product can help the industry.



**Rahim Penangwala**  
Founder, UserQual



Hazel Jain

**Tell us a bit about your product.** UserQual is a feature-rich product testing platform for digital product creators as well as consumer packaged goods companies to gain valuable consumer feedback. It has powerful video analytics and some mind-bendingly awesome AI tools, that can

give travel and hospitality companies real results at a fraction of the cost and more than 70 per cent faster than traditional research companies.

**Why is market research/data key in predicting market trends, especially in current times?**

Data can help you gain key insights and information about

your customer, product, competitors and market. Acting on this data will lead you to identify new opportunities for your business by creating delightful experiences for your customers. The mistake a company makes is assuming that they know their customers and building products that don't reach their full potential. Data gathering very often happens

### How UserQual is disrupting market research

- ❖ Interactive and feature-rich product testing platform with powerful video analytics, transcriptions, translations, and AI tools
- ❖ Offers feedback within minutes
- ❖ Allows remote mobile and desktop testing
- ❖ In-depth target audience selection and screeners
- ❖ Ideal for user engagement pre/post product launch
- ❖ Quick turnaround and increased conversion velocity
- ❖ Enables 15-min unmoderated video sessions to 60-minute moderated group sessions
- ❖ Ideal for website/app UI/UX testing and offline CPG product testing
- ❖ Provides in-depth analysis and richer insight
- ❖ Offers real reactions and honest feedback from users
- ❖ Sentiment analysis, wordcloud, net promoter scores, statistics

There will be process re-evaluation; companies may focus on a differentiator factor



post product launch in terms of heat maps, funnel analysis etc. But most of the time it is too late. An average customer takes less than 5 seconds to decide if she wants to spend time on a product. Once a customer deletes an App, you have to spend 3x the amount to get him to re-install your App. Hence, acquiring rich and steady data, pre and post

product launch, is key to keeping pace with market trends and keeping your competition at bay.

### How can your product guide travel and hospitality companies?

A customer's decision journey is divided into hundreds of micro-moments across devices and channels. With UserQual, your product ideation and creation will

be enhanced due to 360-degree feedback from potential customers. Post product creation, you can engage with customers throughout their journey by interacting with them at every micro-moment of booking a travel related activity, conducting A/B tests and incorporating all the feedback received to enhance a customers' product experience. This will be key in planning ahead given the current volatile times.





# Experiencing Spain

In order to ensure a continuous and seamless interaction with the travel trade in India, the Tourism Office of Spain – Mumbai has been conducting a series of webinars on fun and exciting topics which will spill into June as well. Attend all three of the upcoming webinars, participate in the educational quiz and stand a chance to win Amazon gift vouchers.



The Tourism Office of Spain – Mumbai organised a series of three webinars in April 2021 to engage and educate travel trade professionals in India. The National Tourism Office continues with its webinar series exclusively designed for the Indian travel trade with one-hour webinars in June-July on Thursdays.

## Webinars in June 2021 Reasons to Visit Valencia

Thursday, 10 June @ 3pm IST  
Valencia is a city worth taking time over, exploring every detail and discovering the places you might miss on a first trip. The famous City of Arts and Sciences and the Miguelete Tower are always great places to visit. But to see what really makes a city tick, you have to pause and enjoy the atmosphere in its sunny squares and its markets, discover the legends behind its monuments, explore restored neighbourhoods like Cabanyal, or see the light of the Mediterranean suffusing the landscape in La Albufera. If you're looking for intriguing, unusual activities that let you see the city in a different way, we suggest you to please attend the webinar on 10 June, 3PM IST.

## Following the way of Saint James during the Xacobeo Holy Year 2021-2022

Thursday, 01 July @ 3pm IST  
The Xacobeo Holy Year is an incredible experience that will delight you, a date that is eagerly awaited by pilgrims from all over the world.

The well-known Jacobean pilgrimage routes of The Way of Saint James (Camino de



Santiago) are full of events throughout the year: concerts, art exhibitions, conferences, talks, films, educational and academic activities, tourism, volunteering, cuisine, etc. It is for the first time, the celebration of the Xacobeo Holy Year will be extended over two consecutive years (2021 and 2022) because of the pandemic. Join our webinar on 01 July, 3PM IST to listen to experts share their experiences.

## How many of Spain's heritage cities do you know?

Thursday, 08 July @ 3pm IST  
Visiting Spain brings you into direct contact with the history of its civilizations. There are 15 stunning UNESCO World Heritage cities to be seen in Spain, each with its exceptional sights and unique scenes. Take the time to explore their local cuisine, learn about their customs, and take part in their fiestas for a complete experience and an unforgettable trip. The webinar scheduled on 08 July, 3PM IST will inspire you to plan a culturally oriented journey into the art and splendour of Spain.

## Webinars in April 2021

Starting with Sevilla, the webinar titled 'Returning to Sevilla' was conducted on April 8 and showcased MICE experiences in Sevilla. This webinar was conducted in collaboration with the Congress and Convention Bureau Sevilla and was attended by 513 persons.

The content of the webinar, presented by Sevilla Congress and Convention Bureau (SCCB) was a virtual visit in the form of a familiarisation trip. It included an artistic walk through the city and the Guadalquivir River, involving the protagonists who inspired the feat of the first return to the world from 1519 to



1522, with Seville as the origin and destination point. They also shared information on 30 new hotel projects that are about to open in Seville and the new works in San Pablo Airport which will double its capacity in the near future, both in terms of connections as well as passenger management.

The active participation from attendees in asking questions about Sevilla proves the desire to travel and to experience new emotions in a destination that motivates the Indian traveller in a special way.

## Costa del Sol-Malaga

The next in the series was focused on 'Costa del Sol-Malaga: The Real Gateway to Andalucia' that was held on April 15 and highlighted holiday experiences in Costa del Sol-Malaga.

Andalucia. Coming to Málaga and Costa del Sol means finding beautiful landscapes, fabulous beaches, delicious food, interesting customs and traditions. It means discovering a rich cultural heritage, amazing coastal areas, and charming white hinterland villages. A short presentation by the Tourist Office of Costa del Sol unveiled these aspects of the destination.

The answers from the attendees to the poll questions were very insightful, especially Costa del Sol as a venue for destination weddings from India.

## AVE Cities Network

The final webinar in April was titled 'I Travel Because It's My Turn' and it focused on holiday options using the wide network of Spanish trains. It was conducted in collaboration with the AVE Cities Network and was attended by 541 persons. AVE Cities Network offers a unique service providing clients with more than 500 products and experiences in Spain to suit all types of travellers and budgets.

The 33 cities that form part of the network and the experiences offered at the destinations are what make travelling by train in Spain so appealing. AVE

This webinar was conducted in collaboration with the Tourist Office of Costa del Sol along with their partners and 418 persons attended the webinar.

The webinar began with a message from the celebrated international actor and a resident

## Spain Specialist Programme restarts

After a gap of two years, Spain Tourism has restarted its Spain Specialist Programme (SSP), its e-learning platform designed by Turespaña to familiarise tourism professionals with Spanish culture, the regions of Spain, and its tourist attractions. The SSP is designed to give professionals the expertise they need to improve their relationship with their customers and increase their sales. All the SSP courses are free of charge and the travel trade can take it at their own convenience and earn a Spain Expert Certificate issued by Turespaña. Its online campus is available at <http://campus.spain.travel/en-in/>

of Malaga, Antonio Banderas, inviting everyone to visit and enjoy life in Costa del Sol/

Cities offers not just train journeys but a chance to

Contd on page 11 ▶





# Winners rejoice!

The Tourism Office of Spain – Mumbai announces nine winners who won Amazon vouchers on participating in all the three webinars that were conducted in April 2021. Those who missed out – worry not. The National Tourist Office will be organising another series of webinars focusing on interesting topics in June as well.

“The webinars were extremely engaging and informative. I particularly enjoyed the one on Costa Del Sol-Malaga. Though it is a small place, it has a lot to offer to visitors, like fabulous landscapes, beautiful beaches, a shopping paradise, amazing gastronomy, and the best place to party in Europe! The Spain luxury trains are also worth experiencing in order to explore a variety of places and attractions the country has to offer, easily and seamlessly.”



**Sonal Swamy**  
Managing Director, Syrisa Travels

“All the webinars conducted by Tourism Office of Spain - Mumbai in April were amazing! They were incredibly interactive, very interesting, had practical information that was useful for us, and were packed with great content. I enjoyed every bit of it, especially the one that focused on Seville. It brought back pleasant memories of my own trip around the coast of Spain. I can't wait to get back to Spain once cross-border travel resumes safely!”



**Mrunmayi Magare**  
Executive – Tours, JTB Travels

“I strongly believe that in such stressful times, these virtual workshops keep us motivated and reinforce in us the belief that the travel industry will rise again. Apart from helping us enhance our skills in preparation for the future, these virtual experiences are also thoroughly educational and very appealing. I enjoyed all three sessions and look forward to attending more of their similar workshops in future.”



**Gopesh Sharma**  
Director, PRAD Travels & Hospitality



**Priyanka Satam Kulkarni**  
Proprietor, WonderGlobe Holidays

“It was great to have native presenters for first-hand information. The destination videos were stunning, although English audio would help in easier understanding. I request Spain Tourism to try and cover these destinations in future webinars: Las Balears, specially Mallorca and Menorca, Cordoba, Tarragona, Salamanca, Zaragoza, Valencia, and experiences related to football, wine-tasting, adventure sports, and cultural workshops on flamenco or Spanish cuisine.”



**Jainendra Kumar Rai**  
Marketing Manager  
Magical India Journey

“All three webinars presented by Spain were really amazing! Through them they managed to introduce us to new dimensions of tourism in Spain. As a lover of Spain, I have a long list of destinations that I would want to learn about like wine culture with special focus on 'La Rioja' and 'Albariño', famous museums of Spain, the mystic life of the gypsies (los Gitanos) with a reference to their India connection.”



**Sachin Sata**  
Operations Manager  
Trailblazers Adventure Travel

“We thank Spain Tourism and DDP Webinars for organising these informative webinars. The series managed to introduce all the participants to the wonderful history, culture and experiences one can have in this beautiful country. Whether it is Seville or Costa del Sol or any other part of Spain, it was fun experiencing it and travelling virtually in the high speed AVE trains amidst the pandemic.”

Continued ▼

## Travelling within Spain

► Contd from page 10

discover and experience 33 interconnected destinations in Spain. [avexperience.es](http://avexperience.es) is the new portal to the AVE Cities Network, not only for the end customer but also for the travel agent, who have a direct access from the homepage, so they can purchase their trips and experi-

ences. Trips are tailored to suit all people, availability and tastes.

A representative from AVE Cities Network explained these features of the portal during the webinar. The webinar series from the Tourism Office of Spain – Mumbai concluded with an



Voucher, worth ₹4000 each, one had to not only have all cor-



ences in a user-friendly way. The portal also offers dynamic packaging, which enables the user to design their own trip, combining different journeys,

exciting educational quiz for the travel trade. Over 300 entries were received with over 100 all-correct answers. To qualify as winner for the Amazon Gift

rect answers but also be quick to submit the answers. The most important criterion was, of course, attendance at all the three webinars. ↴

## The excitement continues

“Attending the three webinars conducted by Tourism Office of Spain - Mumbai was a truly wonderful experience for me. The entire series added a lot of value to what I can now offer to my clients. Not only were they very educational, but were also one of the most enjoyable and informative webinars I have attended so far. I would like to thank Spain Tourism for organising them. I would also like to extend a very special thanks to the amazing speakers from Spain who took time out to share their knowledge and expertise with the India market! This definitely helps understand the destination better. Now, I look forward to another series of these webinars in the following month(s). I'm sure they will be also be as exciting.”



**Namita Sattre**  
Tour Consultant, MR Tours & Travel

“I thank Spain Tourism for organising such informative virtual sessions on Spain – the various destinations, things to do and, of course, how to get around Spain on AVE. The team at Tourism Office of Spain as well as the various destinations in Spain helped us reconnect with the destination and were effective in sparking my interest to explore different regions of Spain virtually. The knowledge I have gathered will help me in offering new and smooth experiences to my clients for their next holiday in Spain whenever international travel re-opens. I request them to continue organising such webinars at regular intervals so that we get an opportunity to enhance our knowledge, even if it is virtually, till such a time when international travel is permitted.”



**KD Singh**  
Director, Avtar Travels

“These webinars had a lot of valuable and practical information about various destinations in Spain. I found them to be extremely informative. All the speakers were very articulate and knowledgeable, and it helped that they were from Spain. Not only did I learn a lot but the entire experience was wonderful with a lot of practical information and guidance from the presenters. I would like to suggest some topics and destinations for the next Spain webinars. It would be nice if the team could cover some main tourist attractions, especially for budget travellers who can then travel within their budget while indulging in various experiences, and help manage the expenses as well.”



**Vipul Kumar**  
Tour Executive, Aastha Travels

Inputs by Hazel Jain





# reconstitutes its team

The Network of Indian MICE Agents (NIMA), on the occasion of its seventh Foundation Day, reconstituted its Executive Team, and has announced **Jagdeep Bhagat** of Vee Bee Tours, Delhi, as the National Coordinator for the second time and **Gajesh Girdhar** from Paryatan, Muzaffarnagar, as Chairman Emeritus.

 Nisha Verma

**N**IMA's new team, besides **Jagdeep Bhagat** and **Gajesh Girdhar**, also has **SanJeet** from DDP Publications as the Mentor for the Association, and **Vikas Khanduri** of Holiday Merchants as the Advisor. Talking about the new team and its agenda ahead, Bhagat says, "The Vision 2025, which was declared last year, remains the same. The new team is the extension of our agenda we had last year. With this restructuring, we are doing away with our state chapters or state coordinators and now we have constituted regional coordinators. Their role is to carry on our agenda, develop the states and strengthen the local state tourism bodies, align with the government bodies locally and develop the MICE segment in those states," he informs.




Jagdeep Bhagat  
National Coordinator, NIMA

With the new regional coordinators in place, NIMA is targeting at least 12 states on its MoU list by the end of this year, i.e. at least three states per region. "Currently, we have MoUs with five states, and we will be adding seven more states within this year. This is the immediate task of the regional coordinators—to fix up, coordinate, handhold, plan, strategise and get those MoUs done. We are not in a hurry to implement these things unless or until results are there," he adds.

### Clear objectives

Bhagat says that when the pandemic began last year, it took them time to see how things were developing. He adds, "Whatever interactions we had with our members, our focus was very clear—we wanted them to sustain and stay afloat. This was the basic agenda, which we passed on throughout last year to our members.

Whatever business our members could manage was good for everyone—them, the industry and livelihoods of so many who depended on all our members. The idea was that the pandemic gave us a different perspective of how the state will perform post-pandemic. This is what we had been preaching - that things have changed and one may not be able to go solo in all his ventures or what they were doing pre-COVID." 

## NIMA Executive Team (2021-2022)

Name	Designation	Company
Jagdeep Bhagat	National Coordinator	Vee Bee Tours & Travels, Delhi
Gajesh Girdhar	Chairman Emeritus	Paryatan, Muzaffarnagar
SanJeet	Mentor	DDP Publications, India
Vikas Khanduri	Advisor	Holiday Merchants, New Delhi
Rakesh Arora	Coordinator Administration & Finance	Nina Universal Tours, Sahibabad
Ritesh Joshi	Coordinator Membersh ip	Incentives & Conference Planners, Dehradun
Mukesh Jain	Coordinator Marketing	Sterling International Tours & Travels (P) Ltd, New Delhi
Tushar Jain	Coordinator – Northern Region	BTC Tours & Travels Pvt Ltd, Delhi
K. Vijay Mohan	Coordinator- Southern Region	Holiday World, Visakhapatnam
Vinay Agarwal	Coordinator- Eastern Region	Victoria Travels Private Limited, Kolkata
Aschok Jhaveri	Coordinator – Western Region	Pratamesh Events and Holidays, Mumbai
Dammanjit Singh	Member	Oberoi Tours, Raipur
Swaytank Maheshwari	Member	Rainbow Trade Fair Tours Pvt Ltd, Jaipur
Avinash Khanapur	Member	Avni Holidays, Hyderabad
Amar Kumar Sahu	Member	VWV Tourism Pvt Ltd, Bhubaneswar
SeldonTenzing	Coordinator	Education & Training Zing Reps, Delhi

# Being event-ready

Hilton Chennai's approach has been to offer flexible event solutions in an optimum pricing band, thus encouraging clients to feel confident to restart physical and hybrid events, even on a small scale to begin with, says its General Manager **Ruban Das**.

 Hazel Jain

### Do you see corporates booking for this year for their MICE needs?

At Hilton Chennai we are approaching 2021 as the year of road to recovery. Our focus remains to retain trust amongst stakeholders as a reliable, responsible hospitality brand known for our warm hospitality. We have started seeing green shoots in 2021. While we are far away from a fully active MICE segment till Q4 2021, we are definitely seeing an upswing when it comes to month-on-month actualisation in this segment which contributes to over 30 per cent of our total revenues. We also see our 'Hilton EventReady with CleanStay' solutions to be a true differentiator when it comes to delivering mindful & memorable safe events for all.



Ruban Das  
General Manager, Hilton Chennai

### What segment of MICE do you think is opening first and why?

Weddings and social events had started to take place early this year, though in a modified service design to suit the new normal, where less has become more. Our team of wedding specialists are seasoned team members who bring a strong understanding of social and religious wedding traditions of different communities in the city. So we have

been able to marry our 'EventReady by CleanStay' solutions with customer aspirations effectively while accommodating evolving health-related government advisories. Thus, wedding and social events have continued to stay active as a segment followed by hybrid events and small-sized corporate day meetings.

### Have your corporate clients begun planning for this year?

We have been in touch with our regular corporate client roster comprising of companies in manufacturing, SMEs, pharma, technology, BFIS and real estate segment to ascertain requirements and plans. Our approach has been to offer flexible event solutions in an optimum pricing

band thus encouraging our clients to feel confident to restart physical and hybrid events, even in small scale to begin with, and to help them with business continuity in a safe, mindful manner.

### How have you prepared your hotel for the future?

At Hilton, we quickly learnt that the MICE segment had been permanently impacted by the pandemic, hence, we launched the 'Hilton EventReady with CleanStay' programme in July 2020, to address the evolving needs of this segment. The 'EventReady with CleanStay' programme delivers event experiences that are clean, flexible, safe and socially responsible. The program provides curated solutions for every step of event planning. The process ensures

that guests are able to get the most personalised experiences. This is supported by a detailed playbook and event checklist. Another hallmark is the EventReady's extension, 'Hilton EventReady Hybrid Solutions'. The new suite of offerings continue to evolve and adapt intelligently to new meeting needs of

MICE has been impacted permanently, hence, we launched 'Hilton EventReady with CleanStay' in July 2020

customers, thus, directing event planners to Hilton's Hybrid ready hotels while also providing them with planning resources- including an expanded Hilton Event Ready Playbook and flexible customer offers. 





# Airline industry will be smaller

**Willie Walsh**, Director General, International Air Transport Association (IATA), has said that the global aviation industry will emerge smaller from the COVID-19 crisis, unable to recover all the capacity it enjoyed pre-pandemic, in 2019. He also believes that the sector should remain more cautious in the future.

 Nisha Verma

**T**he pandemic has badly affected the airline industry and as a result, many aircraft either remain grounded or continue operating at very low load factors.

**Willie Walsh** says that aviation will be a smaller industry. "We are not going to recover all the capacity. They cannot build back up to the scale of 2019. It will be a more cautious industry. I don't expect to see M&A (merger and acquisition) activity, principally because people will be guarded about the cash they have. It's just too risky to spend your valuable cash resources trying to acquire something at this stage. It'll be a smaller, more cautious industry, and I think that caution is justified, because nobody wants to survive this crisis only to fall

over when the recovery starts," he explains.

### Cash crunch

Walsh added that airlines are more likely to see a cash crunch when they begin ramping up operations. "For some airlines, the cash crunch is ahead of them, because they will face real challenge when they start trying to ramp up because they don't have the traditional cash reserves that you have from sales in advance of carriage. There's nobody selling tickets," he shared.

The Director General also added that the debt of international airlines, which has increased to \$220 billion, will continue to increase further as the carriers would continue to shrink and be more cautious. "A lot of costs such as not paying for fuel, salaries of employees and not paying airport charges, etc., have



**Willie Walsh**  
Director General, IATA

been eliminated. But, all these costs will ramp up very quickly once the aviation sector returns to normalcy. If airlines don't get the imbalance between cost ramp-up and revenue build-up right, the cash burn is going to be quite significant. Under-capitalised and cash-poor airlines have to be very cautious when they see evidence of recovery," he added.

And though there will be risk in spending cash for airlines,

Walsh believes that there will be consolidation through some airlines shrinking their operations and others failing. "It's going to take airlines time to repair their balance sheets. They will focus on strengthening their cash position and be in a place to survive what may be a couple of cold winter months ahead," he said.

### Return of demand

IATA has forecast global travel demand to return to 2019 pre-pandemic levels in 2024. Airlines that survive would fill the gaps left by those that fail. However, they would have to be careful how quickly they rebuild, he added. "Airlines are not going to be able to take the risk of operating unprofitable routes in the short term," he claimed.

Walsh is optimistic about air travel recovery in the second half, especially with the



speed with which vaccination programmes are being rolled out in parts of the world. "Most airline executives probably expected to see a recovery start-

Nearly 70-80 per cent of the population will be fully vaccinated and that really does provide the opportunity."

### Dealing with restrictions

The IATA head claimed that there is strong underlining demand, especially in major domestic markets such as China, the US and Europe. However, it is being suppressed by restrictions.

While he said that some restrictions have to be introduced, he requested the governments to not just blindly impose restrictions now as they did last year at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. He believes that the crisis has undermined airline business models such as those for regional or low-cost carriers among others. "Nothing has changed the competitive nature of this industry," Walsh concluded.

 **Cash-poor, under capitalised airlines have to be cautious when they see evidence of recovery** 

ing in the first quarter and certainly, we're optimistic about a strong second quarter. There are reasons to be optimistic when we looked at the second half.

# What procurement must entail

'Consolidated procurement strategies are the effective way forward to survive in post-COVID scenarios,' says **Dr Amit Sharma**, Vice President - Contracting and Product Development, Abercrombie & Kent and Expert (Roster), UNWTO. Dr Sharma has also been teaching in various management institutes and universities for the last decade as a visiting faculty.

**I**n the current crisis, tourism and hospitality companies are real-time examples of the Charles Darwin concept of "survival of the fittest". While many organisations may be able to sustain themselves, albeit with a deep hole in their pocket, the bigger question after the pandemic would be – What could be the effective business strategies to be back on track as quick as possible? For sure, there will be process re-evaluation and companies may focus on a differentiator factor (aka USP) as per their brand's value. The competition in the travel and hospitality industry, however, will be fiercer!

There will be pressure on maintaining price competitiveness along with delivering products as per the changed customer behaviour. In such



a scenario, the right procurement strategies can play a vital role to meet the short as well as long-term business goals of the organisation. While short-term goals give in-year impact focusing on the P&L statement, long-term goals promote resilience. For both scenarios, it is imperative to understand how the top management adopts different standpoints on procurement engage-

ments for decision making and business consolidation.

Different verticals may have varied subsets of requirements and operational parameters; the preferences may be piloted to centralised procurement centre for effective consolidation, as well as for best sustainable procurement practices. Effective service level agreements, green certifications, stricter

SOPs for vendors to be the key focus areas for contract management. At present, the world, where information, pricing, product reviews are readily available for all, customers have varied options to select a niche for their next holidaymaking. To meet expectations, the tourism value chain can be channelised to low-carbon and resource-efficient execution for best consumption practices, and can promote relevant products. In order to have these expectations fulfilled, a company that cannot manage its costs and high-value deliverables will not thrive.

Procurement professionals carry more responsibility than ever, not only to be pricing effective but also to carry out right-fit buying strategies that should be a win-win for organisations as well as sustain procurement practices. Later,

 **There will be process re-evaluation; companies may focus on a differentiator factor** 

this will help to maintain the supplier code of conduct for best practices at ground level. This will in turn help the former to establish itself as an effective value chain service provider and to be a global leader. There are enough evidences to mention that procurement has helped companies to survive various global predicaments before. According to a McKinsey study, in the five years immediately following

the 2008 global financial crisis, the total return to shareholders for companies with top-quartile procurement capabilities was 42% higher than for companies whose procurement operations were in the bottom quartile. Consolidated procurement strategies are the effective way forward to survive in post-COVID scenarios.



**Dr Amit Sharma**  
Vice President - Contracting and Product Development, Abercrombie & Kent and Expert (Roster), UNWTO

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



# The tough get going!

SpiceJet reinstated its flight from Delhi and Ahmedabad to Jaisalmer after an unprecedented airline-citizen partnership. **Manvendra Singh Shekhawat**, MD, Suryagarh and Founder, I Love Jaisalmer, who was instrumental in getting the travel community together, shares the success story.

 Nisha Verma

**T**he travel community in India's Golden City – Jaisalmer – came together early this year to give a bank guarantee to fill the losses that SpiceJet was suffering on the Delhi-Jaisalmer, Ahmedabad-Jaisalmer routes. The suspended routes were thus reinstated and flights began operating on February 12. Talking about the experience, **Manvendra Singh Shekhawat** says, "We were very confident that there cannot be a loss operating on this sector given Jaisalmer's brand value. SpiceJet operated over 82 per cent load on the sector and flights were profitable." Presently, while the Delhi flight is not part of the summer schedule, the Ahmedabad route continues to be in operation.

Shekhawat sees such an initiative as a positive change. "This shows how each stakeholder in the tourism community was able to pool intent and resources. This has given a whole new dimension and exposed people to the possibility that when everyone gets together, many wonderful things happen and we can take on large-scale challenges that are posed to the tourism industry. If we all join hands, we can do many wonderful things. There is reassurance that the success of this campaign will pave the way for many other things in the future," he hopes.

He adds that the entire tourism fraternity also got together on one platform, under the District Collector, and pulled off the Jaisalmer Desert Festival. "It was perhaps the most visited desert



**Manvendra Singh Shekhawat**  
MD, Suryagarh & Founder, I Love Jaisalmer

festival with all COVID norms in place. Within 15 days, they sought permissions from the government. They have planned a lot more things in the coming time, after the COVID situation becomes better. We will again join hands with the entire tourism fraternity and do some large-scale projects for the benefit of tourism in Jaisalmer," he claims. The idea would be to again convince airlines that the local community in Jaisalmer is

working proactively to promote the destination and making it more tourist-friendly. "If tourists come in and demand grows, airlines would have more incentive to connect Jaisalmer to the rest of the country. The community will come together and catalyse this," he adds. Shekhawat says that they are looking at expanding the Golden City's connectivity to other markets beyond Delhi and Mumbai, like Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai.

The 'I Love Jaisalmer' Founder also believes that there exists only a 'perceived' notion of loss. "In this initiative, there was no loss to anyone. Everyone who had contributed money for the initiative got their money back and all the tourists who had visited Jaisalmer must have spent on food, services and hotels. All of that was just additional revenue


for the city, which would not have been there, or at least the major part of it would not have been there, if there were no flights. We are, in fact, now proposing that the Government of Rajasthan underwrite some of the funds that have been allocated for tourism for such initiatives, where airlines have a guarantee that there is going to be business, or at least their loss is covered to some extent. Then they will continue and connect the destination to the rest of the country, which will indeed have a cascading effect on the local economy. The government is our 18 per cent partner in everything, so it's going to benefit them as well," he explains.

## Initiatives for 2021

Shekhawat says they were really hopeful of launching Jaisalmer 99—the summer programme at

Jaisalmer which is really making the destination open and accessible at night to all tourists, so that they can beat the heat and plan interesting activities at a city level that would have kept people engaged through the summer. "Also, because it's our shoulder period, extra revenue doesn't hurt. However, all these plans have slightly been postponed because of cities going under lockdown. We are going to review the situation in a month

 **We will again join hands with the tourism fraternity for large-scale projects for the benefit of tourism in Jaisalmer** 

and plan our next steps. However, I can assure you that in the next year, there are going to be a lot of community-led, city-centric interesting experiences that Jaisalmer is going to roll out," he concludes. 

# Korea: A good post-COVID option

 Contd from page 3

stay requirement is removed and it may happen this year itself. "However, realistically speaking, in the Indian context, I feel actual free travel will start from spring next year, i.e. March-April 2022," he says.

The format of the event is very simple, to mimic a real-life exhibition. "It is a three-day event, and the first day we have reserved for 'by invite only' buyers who we would be inviting personally. The next two days are

open for all Indian travel agents who want to meet our Korean exhibitors. The platform offers the option of both pre-scheduled meetings as well as on-spot meetings by visiting the exhibitor booth as you would do in a physical exhibition. While people wait for their meetings, we will also have an interactive fun page where people can get interesting Korea-related information, watch videos and participate in quiz/ activities to win exciting prizes. We have kept everything very practical and business-focused, and avoided having any



preloaded or live presentations or too many interactive features, which at times slow down the interface," Choi shares.

With tourism guidelines already being framed and South Korea expected to open its borders for inbound tourism this year, the expo is aimed to help reconnect Indian buyers with Korean suppliers so they can start preparing their tour products and packages for sale in the future. "The response we receive from this expo will set the tone for

the kind of marketing activities we will do in the rest of 2021," Choi says.


## Catering to Indian travel demands

Indians from different regions travel for different reasons, including business, leisure, VFR, etc., and they have different demands. To better serve the Indian clients KTO has devised ways to get analytical data post the event. "Firstly, we have kept a detailed registration page, through which we will be able to know what travel company, of which

size, from which region of India prefers or has done business to South Korea and of what nature & size. That will help us understand the type of demand in different parts of the country. Secondly, we have invited a lot of regional tourism offices who are experts in their region and have all the information of all unique things that their region has to offer. This way, when our Indian buyers meet the RTOs, they will get a lot of clarity on their queries. Lastly, we will be using the feedback that we receive from the expo and pass

it on to the rightful authorities so that they know Indian demands and expectations while framing revised tourism policies for the new era of travel," he explains, adding, "We are yet to frame revised policies for inbound travel and the incentives that we would offer to promote leisure, business and MICE travel to South Korea. Hence, for this expo, we will be treating all travel as a single entity and evaluating the demand in each category."

## Opening for tourism

While there is no official communication available on this subject, Choi feels that South Korea will open for inbound tourism by the last quarter of 2021. "Once that happens and COVID/vaccine guidelines are framed, we will conduct Fam trips if possible," he predicts. Requesting Indian travel trade to participate in the show, he says, "I would like to encourage Indian buyers to participate in huge numbers and show our exhibitors the strength and capacity of the Indian market, and why they should focus on it as their top priority." 

## Exhibitor profile

Currently, there are 16 confirmed exhibitors, says Choi. "My office will also have a virtual booth, so that makes it a total of 17 as of now. The exhibitors are a mix of regional tourism organisations (RTOs), DMCs and tourist attractions. Regions represented by RTOs are Seoul, Busan, Incheon, Gyeonggi, Jeju and Gyeongsangbuk-do. In DMCs, some of them are participating for the first time in the India market and are excited to meet Indian buyers. For tourist attractions, we have the famous Lotte World, which will have a three-people team and showcase their array of theme park, aquariums and observatory. They are also exhibiting in India for the first time. In fact, a third of the delegation is coming to explore the India market for the very first time or after many years," he adds.



# Scale up with technology

Adapting technology will help companies scale their business globally through greater market footprint, optimised cost and processes with great profitability and return on investment, thereby powering this sector with exponential growth trajectory. Where are you in the technology curve?



Hazel Jain

Technology has become the backbone of our business today. And with the pandemic, many businesses globally are feeling the heat, as they realise the need to use technology as an enabler in their business as one of the key requirements. A huge proponent of this is **Karthik Venkataraman**, CEO & Co-Founder, Sublimis Technologies, who feels that companies should adapt technology across their business and look to remodel their platforms to enable Virtual Systems, Automation of Workflow across the Value Chain, Product Setup, Distribution, Operations, Customer Service, Improving Customer Experiences and Anywhere Work Culture with an eye for secure,

thereby powering this sector with exponential growth trajectory." However, he cautions, it is important for technology to sync with the overall business vision. In today's competitive environment, businesses need to be agile and smart enough to use the benefits of technology such as convenience, speed, and accuracy. Only then can it be a great time and cost saver.

### Reshaping business model

Having the right technology in place is essential for travel companies to reshape their business model as the need arises. On the distribution supply side of the travel business – airlines have been traditionally constrained with 40+ years old legacy distribution technology that inhibits superior shopping and travel experience. **Jerrin Jos**, Founder



**Karthik Venkataraman**  
CEO & Co-Founder  
Sublimis Technologies



**Jerrin Jos**  
Founder & CEO  
Verteil Technologies



**Samarth Kholkar**  
CEO & Co-Founder  
BLive

uncover trends that would otherwise remain hidden, the use of technology will deeply affect how both industries grow post the pandemic," Mathur says.

### Enhanced communication

However, some technology experts feel technology played a key role even before the pandemic in terms of flight bookings, hotel reservations and exploring social media for marketing and lead generation.

**Arun Bagaria**, Co-founder, TravClan, says, "COVID-19 has brought about a change in the way things operate in every walk of life, and technology is now becoming the backbone of the tourism industry. Customers are seeking completely contactless service. This implies that right from the initial conversation to booking, payments and follow-up guidance has to be done through digital means. Customers are also looking for contactless check-in at hotels. As a result printed tickets, vouchers and passes are a thing of the past."

Bagaria sees strong signs that in the new normal, the new contact-less communications and processes will be preferred by travellers. "However, the role of travel advisors and in-person interactions that build trust will come back once people start

Adapting tech not only scales business but also helps control operating costs

Frictionless purchasing, inspirational shopping are spilling over into the travel market

For us, every part of consumer experience is by leveraging technology to the maximum



**Harsh Mathur**  
Co-founder & CTO, Upswing  
Cognitive Hospitality Solutions



**Arun Bagaria**  
Co-founder  
TravClan

to adopt technology platforms that can fulfil such expectations related to real-time updates, personalised offers, etc," Jos explains.

He also feels that travel companies struggle to keep pace with the constant flux in travel business due to the lack of agile technology platforms that can ensure real-time information updates, dynamic rendering of new product offerings. Verteil's raison d'etre is to promote NDC-based direct connect distribution technology for airlines which will unlock full range of air retailing possibilities. "We are in the driver's seat now helping airlines and travel companies adopt NDC technology to create a superior supply chain technology," Jos claims, adding, "Without doubt, this technology transformation will enable travel companies, irrespective of their business models, to adapt to the changing times and stay relevant."

### Technology an enabler

As an Electronic Vehicle experience platform, BLive offers immersive experiences on electric bikes. It's CEO and Co-Founder, **Samarth Kholkar**, says, "We wanted to introduce this in India and make it more sustainable. For us, every part of consumer experience is by leveraging technology to the maximum. Whether it is for acquiring customers online by deploying smart digital strategies or to manage our

customised e-bikes through an integrated back-end system which helps track the bikes, reduce downtime and makes asset allocation more efficient. We are also set to introduce AI/VR capabilities as part of the tour, which will make the experience more engaging for our consumer. Every travel business needs to keep innovating. Technology is an enabler for the same. Our e-bikes are also smart e-bikes, which help us track their move-

Co-founder and CTO of Upswing Cognitive Hospitality Solutions, feels that the pandemic has brought remarkable innovation and changes in the way the hospitality and travel industry has been operating. "The hospitality industry (and individual operators within the ecosystem) generates vast amounts of data. Industry participants are constantly seeking technology solutions, embracing latest concepts and technologies, to help

Pandemic has called for a serious understanding of anticipatory measures

It has become essential for the travel business to create digital presence

device agnostic (including mobile solutions) and stable platforms, without compromising on quality and on-time service to clients.

He says, "Adapting technology not only scales their business but also helps control operating costs. All mundane jobs should be automated, and people are needed to focus on core business and exceptions. Doing this will help companies scale their business globally through greater market footprint, optimise cost and processes with great profitability and ROI,

and CEO of Verteil Technologies, feels that existing legacy-based distribution technology generally lacks innovation in offering enhanced shopping capabilities that go beyond a simple cryptic fare or rate display due to its technology limitations. "As consumer expectations increase in the retail sector to include more choices, frictionless purchasing, inspirational shopping and other personalised services, these expectations are beginning to spill over into the travel market. Against this backdrop, it is absolutely paramount for travel agencies and other travel companies



ment and also help us achieve the best range to cover more distance!" he explains.

No matter the size of the company, innovation in technology affects the growth of business, operations, customer service, employee satisfaction and brand loyalty. **Harsh Mathur**,

them stay ahead of competitors and consumer trends. The pandemic has called for a serious understanding of anticipatory measures for every business, irrespective of their size. Whether it is the use of contactless mobile check-in systems at the airports and hotels or harness the power of big data with AI and

planning their holidays. At the same time, the level of access and communication will have to be enhanced and digital tools of communication such as WhatsApp and social media will make it happen. It has become essential for travel businesses to create and maintain a strong digital presence," Bagaria adds.



# LCCs to benefit post re-start

**Sir Tim Clark**, President, Emirates Group, has said that low-cost carriers would benefit when the aviation sector resumes in a post-COVID world, thanks to a strong domestic demand in the US, China and Europe. He adds that business travel will return in absolute terms, but airlines have to be ready to adapt to a changed nature of demand.

Nisha Verma

**S**ir Tim Clark is optimistic that the aviation sector will soon recover to 2019 levels. "The ideal situation is that the vaccine programme beats the virus by Autumn of this year, and we get some relief when demand comes back at a staggering rate. Low-cost (airlines) will benefit from intra-European travel, the US domestic market, China's domestic market and international travel will (also) return in large numbers. But, the problem (with this scenario) will be twofold: one, the ability of airlines to meet the demand when it comes and two, the conditionality of country access requirements," he said, speaking at Virtual Arabian Travel Market 2021.

Sir Clark further said that despite a pent-up demand, there may be



Sir Tim Clark  
President, Emirates Group

concerns about variant strains of the coronavirus. Giving India's example, he said that the situation is creating a ripple effect across the global economy. "It's a question of how we navigate the next six months and if we do it right with equitable vaccine distribution, testing regimes simplified and made cheaper, all of this lends to the theory that by the end of the year, we'll be back in business in some scale," he added.

## Future of business travel

Talking about business travel, he said, "Business travel will return in absolute terms, but segments will change. Airlines will have to adapt to the changing nature of demand. An a la carte menu for Business Class, which allows you to pick and choose products at various price points that go with it, is a smart idea."

In terms of a more long-term outlook, he added that the world will eventually overcome the pandemic, however, according to him, the most important thing is to "crack the problem".

## A word on Emirates

Claiming that Emirates is performing better than was initially expected, Sir Clark said, "We are a lot further on and much better than we would be at this time. I am not saying that's good. It is

just better than what we thought we would be when we looked at it in the Spring of last year. We activated passenger aircraft as soon as we could and cargo was always on."

That said, he dismissed the possibility of a merger with budget carrier flydubai, and claimed that the two airlines will continue to operate independently. "The brands would remain separate but, going forward, the airlines would operate far closer than they have perhaps done in the past. There will be a rationalisation of networks. Notwithstanding, the competitive issue is something that we have to be careful about," he said.

## Jets, jets & jets

Emirates is one of Boeing's biggest customers. Sir Clark has warned the American manufac-

turer that it would refuse delivery of 777X jets if they can't fulfil contractual performance commitments. "There are issues on that aeroplane, and I'm not

performing 100 per cent to contract, for the same reason they expect us to pay 100 per cent to contract at delivery," he shared.

Emirates has a fleet of around 140 Boeing 777-300s and 115 Airbus A380s. It has ordered 126 777X and 30 787s worth over \$50 billion at list prices with Boeing. Emirates was supposed to receive its first 777X last July, and now Sir Clark says that they have concerns that it will start receiving the jets by 2024 though Boeing promised them delivery in the backend of 2023. He also said that he has told Boeing to only start commercially producing a new aircraft once it had been fully tested and certified.

It's a question of how we navigate the next 6 months with vaccine distribution, simplified testing

entirely clear as to when we're going to get them. What I've said to Boeing is, we will not accept an aeroplane unless it is

Sir Clark has also said that it is not easy for Emirates to operate its A380s in the current scenario.

## A fresh outlook is key

► Contd from page 3

working with Buzz to increase the number of visitors and drive growth for Abu Dhabi's Indian operations across different target segments of leisure and MICE."



gerly look forward to working with DCT Abu Dhabi to implement their renewed strategy in the Indian market."



Nikhil Jeet  
Director, Buzz Travel Marketing

**Nikhil Jeet**, Director, Buzz Travel Marketing, delighted to represent DCT Abu Dhabi in India, adds, "I am confident that together we will successfully strengthen the destination's reach in the Indian market. With a widespread network and a team of dynamic professionals, Buzz Travel Marketing will ensure that Abu Dhabi's wide range of tourism offerings reach every travelling Indian. We ea-

The partnership with Buzz Travel Marketing is a strategic move by DCT Abu Dhabi to align with the new norms of travel behaviour and to bring a fresh outlook to offer the most memorable and safe experiences. India has seen incredible growth in recent years and remains one of the largest key source markets for Abu Dhabi, welcoming over 450,000 hotel guests from India in 2019. Abu Dhabi offers breathtaking landscapes, rich culture, and many offerings and experiences befitting the discerning traveller. These offerings range from the newly-launched Emirati Cuisine Programme, which is aimed at promoting Emirati culture through culinary experiences; Huda'yriyat Leisure and Entertainment District, which features a wide range of indoor and outdoor activities for families; Cove

Beach on Reem Island, a unique beach concept; Soul Beach on Saadiyat Island's coastline and the opening of Hilton Abu Dhabi Yas Island, a five-star hotel featuring 545 rooms.

We will ensure that Abu Dhabi's wide range of tourism offerings reach the travelling Indian

DCT Abu Dhabi has nine representation offices across the globe (Australia, China, India, Germany, Italy, France, Russia, UK and the USA). The offices work with global trade, aviation, consumer partners and brands to strengthen Abu Dhabi's position as a leading tourism destination by showcasing the emirate's unique proposition of Emirati culture and heritage, nature and adventure paired with modern cityscapes.

## Infrastructure to expand

► Contd from page 3

massive blow owing to the COVID-19 pandemic's recent second wave. Kerala Tourism will also coordinate the functions of allied departments to develop a tourism circuit, and infrastructure will be accorded a more prominent status with a focus on building efficient roadways. Another key focus for the state would be the fairly less-explored Malabar

In a month, the various approval or classification schemes under Ease of Doing Business will go online



region that has been on the state tourism department's agenda for some time now.

Officials are also exploring long-term projects that would benefit tourism in the long run. Riyas also recently held a meeting with stakeholders, assuring

them that the government will unveil various projects focusing on the revival of the vital sector, including special marketing campaigns, and will work closely with the industry. He hopes that 2022 will turn out to be a "COVID-19 Free Tourism Year."

According to Safe Travel Barometer's Safe Travel Score of worldwide LCCs for the month of April, India-based IndiGo and SpiceJet were tied with the same Score of 3.9 out of 5.0, matched by both JetBlue Airways and Southwest Airlines.



# Register for IITF e-course

More than 200 registrations have been received for the online IITF certification programme for tourist guide training in Maharashtra. More can still sign up as registrations are open.



In February 2021, the Directorate of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra had announced an online IITF (Incredible India Tourist Facilitator) certification programme for Guide Training designed by the Ministry of Tourism Government of India for citizens of India.

More than 200 registrations have been received from Maharashtra for the online programme because of the successful promotional campaign. Registrations are still open for the online programme for interested candidates who want to pursue career as trained tour guides.

The certification programme is for candidates who are looking to become part of the tourism industry to serve as high quality tour guides at the state level. The basic online course is

available on the <http://iitf.gov.in> portal in Hindi and English with seven modules.

The overall programme fee is ₹2,000, while the examination fee is ₹500. In order to encourage more candidates to pursue



the course, the Directorate of Tourism has decided to refund the programme fee of ₹2,000 to the first 1,000 candidates who successfully complete all the modules.

The eligibility criterion for the programme is: in the age group of 18-40 years should pass minimum twelfth grade. And, candidate aged above 40 years should have passed minimum tenth grade. They will be awarded an

Online Course Completion Certificate (OCC) once they successfully complete all seven modules of the programme, after which the candidate will be eligible to apply for the exam.

Post the exam, the candidates will have to attend seven-day behaviour skill training conducted by IITTM (Indian Institute of Tourism & Travel Management). Furthermore, the IITF Basic Certificate would be awarded to the candidates who successfully undertake the mandatory internship of seven working days with tour operators approved by Ministry of Tourism (MOT).

Successful candidates will be allowed to give guide services anywhere in Maharashtra as a Maharashtra Tourism Certified/licensed guide except at Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) monuments.

# Hybrid ATM sets bar high

Arabian Travel Market 2021 has successfully concluded both its in-person and virtual elements. The two exhibitions highlighted the need for collaboration and a growing need for being sustainable.



The in-person element of Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2021 was hosted from May 16-19 in Dubai, with the virtual exhibition being conducted later, between May 24 and 26. At the first event, exhibitors from 62 countries and travel professionals from over 100 countries were represented, and highlighted that collaboration at government level was crucial for tourism recovery. Another popular sentiment at the event was the importance of sustainability in tourism products and actions of stakeholders, a requisite that the COVID-19 pandemic accentuated in its wake. "Putting sustainability at the heart of the future development of the tourism industry will be crucial to meet the expectations of local and international visitors, who are now more socially aware and informed than ever before. The industry



Danielle Curtis  
Exhibition Director ME, ATM

has undoubtedly made huge strides in this area, with a range of initiatives across the sector positively impacting the environment," said Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market.

Pushing the agenda further, the three-day ATM Virtual event saw discussions on aviation, regional tourism, destinations and technology. Those unable to attend the in-person event this year had the opportunity to view sessions recorded from the in-person event, as well as participate in a range of webi-

nars, live conference sessions, roundtables, speed-networking events, destination briefings, as well as make new connections in one-to-one meetings. A key and relevant topic discussed during the exhibition days was exploring the changes afoot amid the rise



of online travel agencies (OTAs) and what this means for tour and attraction operators. Other interesting subjects discussed were 'Cultural Tourism for Growth' and 'Responsible Technology for Travel & Tourism'.

# 6 tech start-ups to watch for

We put the spotlight on six of the most innovative and exciting travel technology start-ups that the industry should look out for in 2021 who can together contribute to the industry's recovery and help people to feel confident enough to travel again. From more efficient booking systems to managing travel commissions, the travel tech world is brimming with ideas!



**Trip Ninja**  
Trip Ninja's technology increases agent efficiency by empowering them with the tools to construct complex itineraries in seconds. It's an all-in-one flight booking platform helping agents find more competitive itineraries, while their suite of

APIs helps online travel agencies augment specific aspects of their booking flow with machine learning.

**Airside**  
Proving who you are when traveling can mean repetitive and time-consuming manual checks of paper documents. Digital identities will help unlock travel

with safer, more secure and seamless journeys. Airside is a provider of privacy-based digital identity solutions, for businesses and individuals, helping them verify, share, and manage personal information, including COVID-19 lab results. Airside offers a privacy network that gives individuals complete control of their digital identity. It is an Amadeus Ventures investment.

**CitizenPlane**  
Finding extra sources of revenue and maximize airlines' load factor is more important than ever. CitizenPlane acts as a marketing carrier for distressed inventory of airlines. It re-markets airline's remaining air content on competitive routes to increase their load factor. It connects empty seats from airlines, tour operators and charter brokers to more than 120 distribution channels seamlessly.



**Sion**  
Sion's cloud-based web application is a perfect tool for travel agents. It claims to offer the simplest way to track and manage travel commissions. Its software tracks, manages, and processes commissions for the travel industry. Sion's system is a transparent tool between accounting, agents and contractors. Users can now use this software with a strong user experience to automate invoicing and easily filter reporting and GDS integration.

**TakeMe**  
Taking the burden out of cross-border payments isn't easy. TakeMe's solution connects numerous international

payment brands to each merchant in a simple format, allowing customers to make payments on their smartphones through a QR code. It supports more than 100 payment methods and works cross-border O2O (online-to-offline) with added value to SMEs.

**Travaxy**  
Have you ever had difficulties in planning a holiday that would accommodate the needs of travellers with disabilities and senior travellers? We bet you have! Travaxy's APIs solve the problem so that travel aggregators can provide accurate information on accessibility details and match the right service (flights and hotels) to the right disabled/senior traveller. It helps travel agencies offer disabled and senior travellers a worry-free holiday experience.





# EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



JUNE 2021

Date	Event	Time
1	IATA sustainable aviation restart Webinar	10:30 am
1	Digital Travel APAC Virtual Summit	TBA
1	PATA Youth IGLTA Webinar	01:30 pm
1-4	Routes Asia 2021	11:30 am
2-4	Ace of MICE Exhibition	Istanbul
3	IATA Cost Efficiency Webinar	12:30 pm
4-6	CMT China	Nanjing
7	Honoring Departed Soul- Prayer Meet	04:00 pm
9	CAPA Live from Seattle	09:30 am
10	Tourism Spain Webinar	0:30 pm
10	CAPA India Webinar	04:00 pm
10	UNWTO Asia-Pacific Recovery Webinar	01:30 pm
8-12	Bali & Beyond Travel Fair	Nusa Dua
15-17	IATA Slot Conference Online	TBA
17	PATA Spotlight Live Webinar	01:30 pm
21	International Yoga Day Celebrations	Pan-India
23-24	Virtual Korea Travel Expo	10:00 am
29	Tourism New Zealand Webinar	11:00 am

For more information, contact us at: [talk@ddppl.com](mailto:talk@ddppl.com)

## TK Jose re-elected Chairman

After a much delayed AGM and election, the Madhya Pradesh Chapter of Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) has now announced a new team which will be led by **TK Jose** as the Chairman. The association will now prepare to conduct its national election.

Hazel Jain

In an event conducted through e-voting, the Madhya Pradesh Chapter of Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) was finally able to announce its new team after a much delayed AGM and election. It was the last chapter to conduct elections. The national body of TAFI will now get ready to conduct its elections. Sharing the reason behind the delay, **TK Jose**, MP Chapter Chairman, TAFI, says, "Our election was delayed due to some legal issues. It had to be virtual because of the current lockdown in the state."

The following persons have been elected as the office bear-



**TK Jose**  
MP Chapter Chairman, TAFI

ers of MP chapter for the year 2021-2023: **Hariom Jhunjhunwala** as the new Secretary, and **Mandeep Singh Duggal** as its new Treasurer. "As the chairman of the chapter, I hereby assure my members that the new team will collectively work for the betterment of our chapter and will take up various issues faced by our travel fraternity with the

concerned departments and the airlines," Jose said.

Highlighting the agenda of the new committee members going forward, he added, "We want to work as a team for the betterment of the region. We will look at various key issues such as



coordinating with VFS and the embassies to open their office in Indore (Bhopal) for the convenience of the agents as well as passengers. We will coordinate with the tourism board of various countries for a presentation and roadshow in future. This will help educate our agents. Before

that though, we want to initiate discussions with various airlines to start a new direct international flight from Bhopal to Bangkok

We want to initiate discussions with airlines to start a direct flight to Bangkok and Maldives

and Maldives. We will coordinate with Air India to reinstate the Indore-Dubai non-stop flight once the situation improves. And most importantly, we want to work more actively with Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board to promote the state as a pilgrim & eco-tourism destination."

*The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has warned of potential airport chaos unless governments move quickly to adopt digital processes to manage travel health credentials (COVID-19 testing and vaccine certificates) and other COVID-19 measures.*

### IN MEMORIAM



Amit Suhas Pradhan

**Amit Suhas Pradhan** passed away on Saturday, May 29, 2021 after bravely fighting for his life in hospital. He was the General Manager for Products at Otilia International based in Mumbai. His wife, Aditi Pradhan, had started a fundraiser for a lung transplant and funds had poured in from all quarters. He was a well-known face in the industry and was well-liked by all. The industry came together to help as much as it could to save the life of a loved member of the travel fraternity. Pradhan had been with Otilia International for almost two decades, contributing to the company's growth.



## seeks help for trade

The Andaman Association of Tour Operators (AATO) has reached out to the Prime Minister, Finance Minister, Union Tourism Minister and the Chief Secretary of the Union Territory seeking help and relief for the island's travel trade. The second wave of the virus has been especially devastating.

Manas Dwivedi

In a letter to the administration, government and the Ministry of Tourism (MOT), **M Vinod**, President, AATO and President, IATTE (Andaman Chapter) first appreciated that efforts of the Andaman & Nicobar administration for adopting proactive measures in containing the menace of the COVID-19 in the second wave. However, he emphasised that the second wave has wreaked havoc nationwide and has caused double the damage to an already-crippled tourism industry of the islands that had barely revived in the beginning of this year.

"With bankruptcies, unemployment and closure of businesses around once again, the impact this time is so grave that without government intervention and urgent aid, the lone industry of the islands shall wither. In the face of

adversity striking us again, with folded hands, I, on behalf of the tourism industry, once again seek the urgent implementation of various measures to succour us. Prevailing circumstances is beyond anyone's control and



**M Vinod**  
President, AATO and President, IATTE (Andaman Chapter)

has rendered the whole industry helpless. The trauma this wave of despair shall leave will be long lasting," he said. The measures suggested by the Association include term loans and overdraft facility among others.

### Some suggested measures

- ❖ All EMLs be deferred for a period of 1 year. After a period of 1 year, all such loans may have their interest rates slashed to half the levied rate at the time of sanction of such loans.
- ❖ All travel & tourism-related businesses be exempt from GST for a period of 3 years till March 2024.
- ❖ All tourism establishments that have their government permits/ license renewals from Directorate of Tourism, PMB, DSS, Forest, PBMC, ZSI etc. be automatically renewed till 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 subject to an undertaking from the owner that all norms have been complied with. These renewals may kindly be put on fast track mode through single window system.
- ❖ Any and all fees/charges/ rents levied by the government bodies such as municipalities, panchayats etc on tourism establishments be waived off for a period of 1 year starting from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 for existing as well as upcoming establishments. The same may be done for the previous financial year due to the closure of tourism last year.
- ❖ Port charges be waived off for a period of 1 year starting from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 for all private boats operating in the islands under IV or MS Act. The same may be done for the previous financial year due to the closure of tourism last year.
- ❖ The technical Human Resource that are engaged in IV vessels/adventure water sports activities owned by private firms/ individuals that have their competency licences/certificates such as Power Boat Handling, Life Saving Techniques, First Aid, CPR, Parasailing master, SLST etc due for renewal in the next 1 year starting from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 may have their license renewal fees waived off.
- ❖ Registration certificates/ form 12/form 12A/form 8 of IV vessels be automatically renewed till 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.



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## OBEROI HOTELS

### New Delhi

**Sanjiv Kapoor** has taken over as President of the Oberoi Hotels and Resorts group. He is an aviation veteran who has worked as Chief Strategy and Commercial Officer at Vistara and Chief Operating Officer at SpiceJet. An alumnus of Wharton School and Dartmouth College, Kapoor has also worked at Bain & Company, Oracle and North West Airlines. In the new role, he looks forward to keeping the ethos of the Oberoi brand alive – that of quality, brand, operational & service excellence and above all, basic human decency.



## REGENTA SUITES ELEMENT ONE

### Gurugram

**Sujan Ganguly** has been appointed as Area General Manager at Regenta Suites Element One, Gurugram, by Royal Orchid Hotels. He was earlier based in Amritsar, taking care of Punjab as AGM. Ganguly has over 28 years of rich experience in the hotel industry, and is a turnaround specialist for operating hotels and establishing brands in new markets. In the new role, he will focus on expanding market share to maintain market dominance and aim for significant growth in topline and bottom line, implementing the standards and procedures to operate on minimum expenses.



## PULLMAN & NOVOTEL AEROCITY

### New Delhi

Pullman & Novotel New Delhi Aerocity have appointed **Vineet Mishra** as the Complex General Manager. A seasoned hospitality professional, Mishra brings on board an illustrious career spanning over 22 years and an exceptional network in the industry. He joins from Marriott International where he launched The Ritz-Carlton, Pune and offered strategic council for five other hotels of the brand, as a Cluster General Manager. In his new role, he will be aligning his efforts to strengthen the hotel positioning as the capital's premium hospitality brand.



## THE FERN BRENTWOOD RESORT & SPA

### Mussoorie

**Arindam Bahel** has joined as the General Manager at The Fern Brentwood Resort & Spa, Mussoorie, suitable for both nature and religious travel being conveniently located with easy access to major sightseeing attractions. He has completed his Diploma in Hotel Management from IHM Goa & has over 18 years of work experience in the hospitality industry with brands like Rodas-An Ecotel, Mumbai; Meluha The Fern – Mumbai; Amber - San Francisco; Rasam's IC Lounge – Sunnyvale; Concept Hospitality; Holiday Inn, Jaipur; Yak & Yeti, Kathmandu, etc.



## NOVOTEL INFOPARK

### Kochi

Novotel Kochi Infopark has appointed **Samit Kazi** as their new General Manager. A seasoned hospitality professional, Kazi comes with almost 18 years of industry experience in operations and sales while being based in various cities like Hyderabad, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune as well as Delhi-NCR. He has previously worked with hospitality brands like Taj, Marriott, Leela and Starwood. In the new role, he will focus on spearheading key operations for the 128-room Novotel Kochi Infopark and will supervise the hotel's growth and expansion.



**Pavan Kumar** is the new Director of Sales & Marketing at Pullman & Novotel New Delhi Aerocity. He will be heading the sales, marketing and brand communication mandate for the hotel and will take charge of driving commercial objectives as well as enhancing the brand positioning. He has worked with leading Indian and global players in the hospitality domain. Kumar recently completed 14 years with Accor. In his last role, he was responsible for developing and implementing sales strategy for 51 multi-branded hotels of Accor in India and South Asia. Kumar's experience in customer-facing hospitality is rich in sales, distribution and revenue management.



## ROYAL ORBIT THE FERN

### Jabalpur

**Megnath Padamlal Gautum** has been appointed as the General Manager at 111-room Royal Orbit The Fern, Jabalpur. He is a well-known Hotel Management & Catering Technology professional with level-three HACCP certification and 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry. Gautum has earlier held top management positions in hotels like Kamat Hotels, Hivision Foods, Victoria International Hotel in several countries, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and India. He brings with him advanced management techniques as well.



## HYATT REGENCY

### Chennai

**Anirudh Sanjeev** has been appointed as Director of Sales and Marketing at Hyatt Regency Chennai. He brings with him over 10 years of hospitality experience, and will be seen spearheading Sales & Marketing teams and laying focus on key account management, strategic planning and business development in the new role. Sanjeev joined Hyatt Regency Chennai as Sales Coordinator in January 2011 along with the hotel pre-opening team. He was responsible for soliciting market information and was instrumental in setting up the sales function.



## THE FERN RESIDENCY

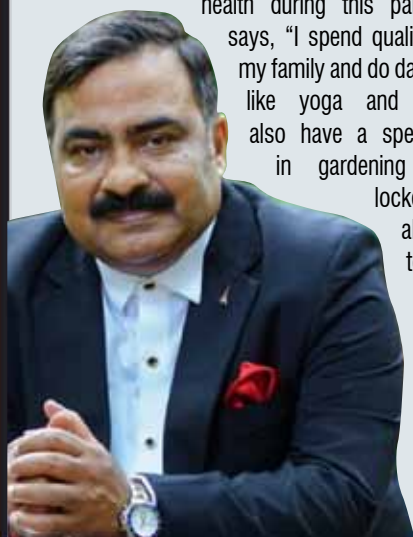
### Vijayapura

**Imityaz Ansari** has been appointed as Operations Manager at The Fern Residency, Vijayapura, the 67-room, centrally-located mid-scale business hotel that caters to both corporate as well as leisure travellers. Ansari brings with him over 10 years of work experience and a degree in Bachelor of Arts in English. In the past, he has worked with brands like Hotel Green Park, Chennai; The Lalit Grand Palace, Srinagar and Welcome Hotel Pine N Peak, Srinagar. His last employment was with Fortune Resort Heevan, Srinagar.



## TALKING PEOPLE

**Souvagya Mohapatra**, Managing Director (India, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka) of Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts, feels it is important for everyone to take care of their health during this pandemic. He says, "I spend quality time with my family and do daily exercises like yoga and walking. I also have a special interest in gardening and this lockdown has allowed me to spend time doing that. The lockdown has made many of us tech-savvy."



**Anup Manjeshwar**, Head - Sales and Distribution, AirAsia India, prefers to write out his to-do list and also encourages his team to do so. "It's simple, but it helps me de-stress. I love my lists! Since the lockdown I've started investing time to eat right and stay fit. Fitness helps me handle challenges and pressures without feeling burnt out," he says. Kerala is his favourite holiday destination. He adds, "Why bother taking an international trip when your own country has so much to offer."



For as long as he can remember **Subhabrata Roy**, General Manager at DoubleTree Suites by Hilton Bangalore, finds solace in the quiet of his room reading. "Since childhood, it was books that got me through challenges, helped me relax and took my mind off anxiety. Now, as a GM with stress levels at an all-time high due to the pandemic, reading is my real indulgence. It's guilt-free, calorie-free and a great way to soothe my mind." Roy loves travelling and he had planned to visit Galle in Sri Lanka in 2020.





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# Commitment can only grow

**Alex McEwan**, Country Manager, South Asia, Virgin Atlantic, says they are on their way to upgrading their aircraft on the India routes, ensuring more comfort and benefits for the end user. The airline will also work more keenly with the travel trade.

 Nisha Verma



Virgin Atlantic is presently operating five weekly flights from India to the UK, and **Alex McEwan** says that they want to operate more but there are constraints. India continues to be a crucial market for the airline and he adds, "We have been in India for 21 years, which shows how committed we are to this market. India was a very fast-growing market before the pandemic, but I still feel that it has a lot of growth potential for us. The great thing about the UK market for India is that it has a mix of traffic that includes business, leisure and VFR travel, which has been prominent for us since we started in September 2020."

**Dependence on the trade**  
For Virgin Atlantic, the travel trade has been a huge support for the last 12 months, claims McEwan. "It has allowed us to survive essentially as a business, because we don't have a large direct channel, so we are very dependent on our travel agents. Hence, with travel restrictions being very complicated for passengers and with things changing all the time and being very dynamic, it's been even more important for us to have that relationship with the travel trade and make sure that we can demystify and simplify some of these travel restrictions so that our customers fully understand what's required when they travel."

He shared that they have hosted webinars and conference calls for the trade. "We stay in contact with our travel agents over email and WhatsApp. We also have a dedicated trade portal called VSFlyingHub, and we encourage all our trade partners to sign up for that. It has all the important



information about the service, travel restrictions and any other relevant update. We are grateful to the travel trade for their support and look forward to working closely with them on recovery," he shares. And, with travel restrictions being plenty and varied, McEwan highlights how the importance of the travel agent has grown manifold. "With our relationship with the travel agents, we can push this message out to the custom-

 With travel restrictions being complicated and dynamic, it's even more important for us to have that relationship with the travel trade 

ers and make sure that they are prepared, because if passengers miss just one of those steps (travel requirements for travelling into the UK or back to India from the UK), they may be denied boarding and they may not be able to travel," he says.

**Making it work**  
Last year was one of the most difficult years financially in the airline's history, claims McEwan. "The most important step for us was to ensure that we secure the future of the airline, so we

delivered a refinancing package worth £1.2 billion as our recapitalisation plan, which was with the support of our creditors and shareholders to ensure to have the confidence. Besides steps to protect the business, we significantly reduced our costs. We had to take some very painful decisions. For example, we reduced our workforce globally from 10,000 people to 5,000 people," he shares.

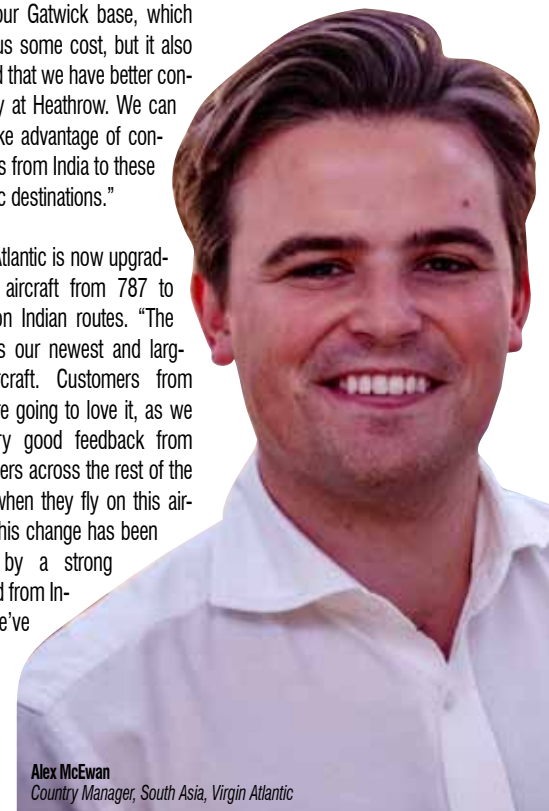
They also simplified the fleet. "We retired all our four-engine aircraft. This was already in our fleet plan, but we accelerated it both to reduce costs and to improve sustainability," McEwan says, adding, "We had to close down our Gatwick base, which saved us some cost, but it also ensured that we have better connectivity at Heathrow. We can now take advantage of connections from India to these fantastic destinations."

Virgin Atlantic is now upgrading its aircraft from 787 to A350 on Indian routes. "The A350 is our newest and largest aircraft. Customers from India are going to love it, as we get very good feedback from customers across the rest of the world when they fly on this aircraft. This change has been driven by a strong demand from India. We've

had full flights departing from India and the new aircraft would allow us to add extra 80 seats per flight, which is extra revenue for us. It also has customer benefits," he shares.

## Learnings from the COVID pandemic

According to McEwan, one of the most important learnings for every business and for every crisis has been that 'cash is king'. "Another thing for airlines to understand is that passenger behaviour has changed radically. We need to ensure that we reflect that in the offer that we give to our customers. It's important for us to offer a flexible booking process, something they would appreciate. We need to have some temporary measures apart from the long-term ones," he says.



**Alex McEwan**  
Country Manager, South Asia, Virgin Atlantic



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