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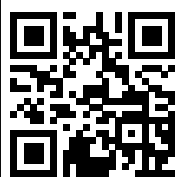
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# MOT techs-up with CHATT

**Prahlad Singh Patel**, Minister of State (I/C) for Tourism & Culture, recently launched the Confederation of Hospitality, Technology and Tourism Industry (CHATT) platform to empower the voice of smaller operators in the travel and hospitality ecosystem.

TT Bureau

**C**HATT is the result of combined efforts of Airbnb, Ease-MyTrip, OYO and Yatra, who came together to back and enable an industry association. Speaking at the virtual event, **Prahlad Singh Patel** lauded the efforts of the new-age technology, travel and hospitality companies who joined hands to promote the interest of the smallest and often under-represented operators and to work together with the government.

"I congratulate CHATT founding members who have come

together to put India on the global map. CHATT's formation is a landmark decision to boost India's robust domestic tourism market and support small hotel partners, homeowners, agents to expand their offerings catering to the needs of tourists. The Tourism Ministry is continuously making efforts to make the data available of hotels and homestays on the unified portal - NIDHI to benefit tourists and CHATT will play a crucial role in it.

The consolidated efforts by CHATT will be highly beneficial for SMEs, MSMEs, hotels, homeowners, partners, and I



**Prahlad Singh Patel**  
Minister of Tourism & Culture

welcome them to join the various government committees to represent the unified voice of the industry," he said. Patel also shared that they have sent nine memorandums to

UNESCO, out of which six were accepted. **Arvind Singh**, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism (MOT), Government of India, was also present at the event, along with **Rakesh Verma**, Joint Secretary, MOT and **Rupinder Brar**, Additional Director General, MOT. Singh added, "The efforts of CHATT are highly inclusive and once the impact of second wave subsides - a group like CHATT will present greater economic impact. Technology is at the forefront of many initiatives at the Ministry of Tourism and we look forward to closely working with CHATT to strengthen the sector."

# A Green roadmap

Ministry of Tourism has come up with the first draft of a national strategy and roadmap for sustainable tourism.

Nisha Verma

**Arvind Singh**, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, shared that the national strategy has been drafted by Joint Secretary, his team and other ministry officers. "It can be a starting point. We will share it with stakeholders and then we will take it forward and see how we can have this kind of mainstreaming of environment in our tourism policy.

The national strategy will include a certification scheme, capacity building and we are also thinking of a system of assessing the states and ranking them as we have done in



**Arvind Singh**  
Secretary, Ministry of Tourism

many programmes like 'Ease of Doing Business'."

Singh revealed that they have already developed a sustainable tourism criteria, giving indicators

Contd on page 10 ▶

# Weddings are waiting

Two wedding experts share their views on how they think the wedding segment will pan out over the next months.

Hazel Jain

**W**ill there be smaller weddings with bigger price tags going forward? It's too soon to tell say two wedding experts. But they share one thought - weddings will happen no matter what and families are only waiting for the lockdowns to ease.

**Jitendra Kejriwal**, CEO of Arika Tour & Travels and the recently-elected IATO Maharashtra Chapter Chairman for the term 2021-23, has been in this segment for decades. He says, "Weddings have been happening right now albeit with only 25-30 people.



**Jitendra Kejriwal**  
CEO, Arika Tour & Travels and  
Chairman, IATO Maharashtra Chapter

So the total expenditure has gone down a lot forcibly. But we are hoping that by July 15, 2021 - by which date most people

Contd on page 16 ▶

# Korea is just around the corner

More than 15 exhibitors are set to meet the Indian travel trade at the first virtual 'Korea Travel Expo' from June 22-24, 2021. **Young-Geul Choi**, Director, Korea Tourism Organization, New Delhi office, talks about the objective behind the event.

Nisha Verma

**Y**oung-Geul Choi says that currently as the second wave of COVID is getting under control and many countries have started opening, this is the right time to reconnect with the industry and introduce the latest products and offerings in South Korea. "South Korea is preparing itself to reopen for inbound tourism this year and we want Indian travel companies to start focusing on South Korea tour products for outbound travel in the future," he said.



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

Sharing details about exhibitors he said, "Currently we have 16 confirmed exhibitors. The exhibitors are a mix of Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs),

Destination Management Companies (DMCs) and tourist attractions. Regions represented by RTOs are Seoul, Busan, Incheon, Gyeonggi, Jeju, Gyeongsangbuk-do. Amongst the DMCs, quite a few of them are participating for the first time in the India market. For tourist attractions we have the famous Lotte World that will showcase their collection of Theme-Park, Aquariums and Observatories. 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."

While there is no official communication for when South Korea will reopen, Choi feels that they will open for inbound tourism by the last quarter of 2021.



"Currently, the planning is going on regarding the re-opening of tourism in South Korea globally and a roadmap is being prepared related to COVID vaccine passport to welcome the tourists again in the country," he said.



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## TAAI apprises PM on hurdles

**Jyoti Mayal**, President, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), recently discussed the matters highlighted in the open letter from the Association to Prime Minister Modi. Mayal also highlights the details of the APJC meeting she chaired.



Nisha Verma

TAAI recently wrote to the Prime Minister, asking for intervention in the way things are going within the industry, especially with the second wave of COVID turning out to be devastating for travel and tourism. Sharing details, **Jyoti Mayal** said, "In the open letter, we wanted to highlight the need of the hour, which is to save the livelihood and the survival of our trade, which is in doldrums right now. There is little hope that there will be a rebound, especially for domestic tourism and people travelling for VFR in the air bubble to particular countries. Also, we have asked the PM to look into the taxes because once travel and tourism starts opening we'd really need to look into the statutory compliances like PF, ESIC, professional tax, GST, Income Tax, TDS, and we want abolishment for TCS. Now, there is a dire need for tax free holidays to motivate people."

She added that they have also requested for moratorium for at



**Jyoti Mayal**  
President, TAAI

least two years and loans with government undertaking and guarantee. "I know they are coming up with schemes, but they were valid before February 20. This meant that if you had an outstanding before February 20, they will give you overdrafting loans, etc. Members who have never had to take loans, and to facilitate these members to do business, there have to be two ways: new loans and new support to get into a lot of technology. While MOT's MDA scheme gives a small amount for technology and social media, now with so many webinars and virtual platforms, the government should support travel agents who now want to get into a web platform and do

online bookings." Apart from that they have asked for rebates on digital payments, credit card payments. "We have also requested the PM to look into establishment costs, which are waivers of taxes on property, stamp duty, on water taxes, electricity charges, as well as the commercial licenses. Also we need a system that all



can come back into shape. This would be a great support for the industry since the offices have been closed since 1.5 years."

**We've asked the PM to look into taxes; there is a dire need for tax free holidays to motivate people**

our GST and taxes are on commercial establishments. So we need the Government to allow us to work from home and register it as our new office for the business, and may be after three years, if we shift back to a premises which are commercial, taxes

### APJC chair

Mayal also chaired the 59<sup>th</sup> Airline Passenger Joint Council (APJC) of IATA recently. Speaking about the matters discussed at the meeting, Mayal said, "We talked about neutral capping. Also, all airlines need to accept credit card, as RTGS and NEFT in the times of COVID is difficult to be processed when the staff is working from home. We discussed other issues regarding refunds: how the refund application should be processed through the GDS and how airlines should process them in a stipulated period."

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# TRAVELTALK

## VIEWPOINT

### A second chance

The COVID-19 pandemic has now been a reality that the world has been living with for more than a year. It has taught many a lesson, some bitter, some eye opening. A struggle for authorities, industries and individuals, the pandemic brought to fore not only the financial and medical needs of people, but also the inherent need of people to travel and simply get out of their house to not be mentally impacted either. As business got affected and people and industries struggled to survive, there came a ray of hope when the world started unlocking. While cautious in the beginning, as people became more comfortable with travelling, restrictions were eased, at times even to an extent that had great risk. But, with business picking up and travellers taking more to destinations that had fewer travel restrictions and absolutely no quarantine requirements on arrival did better than the ones that did not. But, with the growth in business came an increase in the number of COVID cases as well. Was this a lesson to be learnt? Could we have been more responsible in unlocking and travelling while bearing business loss? Probably, yes.

People will travel and over the past year, it has become more a necessity than a luxury. But, there are lessons to be learnt from the first unlock and its impact. While we must open business and the economy to survive, we must be more careful and cautious in the opening. An on-now, off-now model is not sustainable. If this is the new way of life, we must accept it and work accordingly.

This time around, state governments, too, have been more accommodating of the industry's needs. Policies are being relaxed to an extent and restrictions are being eased but within a limit, as the case should be. Some states have even accorded an 'Industry' status to their hospitality sector. We have the knowledge and the technology to make travel and tourism a seamless activity in India. Now, it is important to cautiously move ahead so that safe tourism can be a reality in the country and we can set an example for the rest of the world as well.

**I** think it will bounce back very swiftly. Clearly, the pandemic has affected all of us in the hospitality industry. No more so in India, at the moment where we had to shut all of our resorts because of the situation. And clearly, over the last year, at all times, the resorts have been shut down, resorts have been open. But when tourists can travel, resorts will be full, and we'll do very good business. As herd immunity comes in, the lockdowns and the closures will become more limited. So, there can be more of a normality of service from the hospitality industry. I think we're going to have roaring 20s. At the end of this, COVID will probably last a long time, but when we know how to deal with it, then people are going to want to travel in droves. People want to spend now; they want to go out and reward themselves for having been locked down. They

the Starwoods or Wyndhams or whatever are consolidating and they're consolidating for economy of scale and critical mass. That will continue to a certain extent, to the top ends. I think there's still enormous space for boutique hotels. I think the more that the mega brands homogenize and become more of the same thing, the more consumers want something a bit different. They want something that is a bit unique, a bit special, that's architecturally attractive, and that is responsive to the environment that it's in, and friendlier to the environment it's in rather than necessarily always going for the big consolidating. I think also people are going to like something that's a bit smaller, because of



like being a member or something which they can recognise, and they can guarantee quality. And we very much view it as a lifestyle. So, we don't see ourselves as a lodging company. We see ourselves as having a long-term, lifetime relationship with the clients and their fam-

cination strike raised at all our resorts. So, anyone coming to stay with us knows that all staff are vaccinated. We will, in time, be insisting all clients be vaccinated to come to our resorts. And so, we can be a pure COVID bubble. And I do strongly feel that that's the way hospitality is going to go. So, if you get on a plane or you stay in a hotel, you need to know that they are vaccinated and you're surrounded by other people who have been vaccinated.

#### India must take note

My advice to hoteliers is – don't panic. There's nothing we can do about the COVID outbreak in India. So, it's foolish to try and to be too stressed about it. When you can't affect change, don't try to. Try and change what you can. And the reality is, we're in a storm, and we have to bolt our hatches. A wise captain is looking beyond the storm. The most important thing at the moment is to keep yourself safe, your staff safe; to do testing as much as possible; and immediately isolate people who have it.



**John Spence**  
Founder and Owner  
Karma Group of Hotels

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

The general trend will go two ways: one, consolidation to the top end & two, more boutique hotels



COVID. I think people are going to be more reluctant holidaying in large five-hundred room hotels where they're sharing lifts and large breakfast rooms. So, hotels that have a low density, low impacts spread out. I think consumers like self-catering to a certain extent, and again, a lot of our resorts have cooking amenities and kitchens and what have you in there. And a lot of people like the luxurious space-two/three bedrooms-rather than just one hotel room.

I think the general trend will go two ways- one, consolidation to the top end, two, more boutique hotels, with low density, small number of rooms, more unique, combined possibly with self-catering. Of course, also, what I think is going to bloom is our 'club' concept. People

ily. That is also a trend I see increasing in the years to come.

#### Vaccination for frontliners

It's interesting about hospitality. Not being considered frontline, not getting vaccinations. It's not unique. There are some countries, like the UAE and the Maldives, for instance that took a view right at the beginning to vaccinate hospitality, let's get the industry back on its feet. There are some places like India, and England, to be candid, that didn't take that view. Clearly, absolutely, I think it should be viewed as a front line. I mean, we have vaccinated almost all members of our staff, on our own. We bought vaccines and vaccinated them ourselves in India. We also did the same in Indonesia. And I'm very very keen on having a 100% vac-

will also have a side element of fear that they might be locked down again in the future. So, all this is going to result in people travelling en masse. The only part of travel that might be affected is business travel. I think a lot of people have learnt to do business remotely. Companies would be tightening their budget, because of the losses they've made. So, they'll discourage all but essential business travel.

#### Consolidations in the offing?

I think so, I mean, what we're clearly saying is that the mega hotel companies, the Marriotts,

# FHRAI meets the ministers

The Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) has recommended a well-made sector-specific stimulus package that addresses the most critical aspects of reducing financial loss, mobilising loans and retention of employment. This includes complete waiver of interest on loans beginning March 2020.



TT Bureau

Senior delegates of the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) recently met the Tourism Minister **Prahlad Singh Patel** and Minister of MSME **Nitin Gadkari** to discuss the deteriorating state of the industry and to recommend immediate fiscal measures to save it from imminent collapse. The association submitted representations suggesting key policy changes for the revival of the sector. The FHRAI was represented by Vice President **Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**, Joint Secretary **Pradeep Shetty**, Treasurer **DVS Somaraju** and **Narendra Somany**, President, HRA Gujarat.

The representatives also met and submitted the representation to **Arvind Singh**, Secretary,



**Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**  
Vice President, FHRAI

Ministry of Tourism and Rakesh Kumar Verma, Jt. Secretary, Ministry of Tourism. FHRAI recently also held a virtual meeting with the Principal Economic Advisor, Ministry of Finance, **Sanjeev Sanyal** with recommendations specific to the sector.

The tourism ministry acknowledged the industry's concerns and assured that necessary help will be extended to support the hospitality industry. It has also reassured that sector's issues

and recommendations offered by the FHRAI delegates will be raised with the Prime Minister and the Finance Ministry. The tourism ministry is closely following up with the Ministry of Finance on the SEIS scheme and other concerns will be addressed on a one on one basis with the respective Ministries.

Kohli says, "In our meeting with the ministers, we recommended a well-made sector specific stimulus package that addresses the most critical aspects of reducing financial loss, mobilizing loans and retention of employment. The recommendations include complete waiver of interest on loans beginning March 2020 till business normalcy resumes, announcement of special measures for the industry and the interest burden of loans borne by the government for a fixed period, monthly basic

salaries paid directly to tourism, travel and hospitality employees who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic, provision of a moratorium of three years on the principal loan amount, work-

A sector-specific package addresses the most critical aspects of reducing financial loss

ing capital support at interest on fixed deposit rate plus 2% or MCLR rate, urgent release of SEIS pending payments, re-



moval of secondary condition in EPCG and introduction of a long term financing scheme for at least 10 years backed with a guarantee from Central Government to Banks and NBFCs."

Shetty says, "Since April 2021 the revenue hasn't even crossed 8-10%. Our right to conduct business was taken away but the right to recover loans and charge interest by our lenders is being allowed. The industry

is under tremendous cash flow pressure including payment of salaries, repayment obligations to banks and financial institutions, and funding its capital expenditure plans. We request timely payment of cash flows under the SEIS scheme and refund of income tax due to the sector. This will make a big difference to the ability of hotels to pay the workforce, meet the operational expenses and manage repayments."

## Must imbibe sustainability

While the talk of sustainability has been going on since long, COVID has put a spotlight on this aspect. Experts share how and why tourism should be a flagbearer of sustainability and how hotels, airlines and travel companies are making sure that being responsible is the way forward.

"There is a need for all stakeholders to come together. When MOT comes up with the national strategy and roadmap for sustainable tourism, it should bring together multitude of departments and ministries that impinge upon the tourism sector. It should also bring in other stakeholders and most importantly the tourism industry needs to play such a prominent role. I am heartened to see the kind of initiative that the industry is taking to bring the environment and tourism close."



**Atul Bagai**  
Head India Country Office  
United Nations Environment  
Programme (UNEP)

"Ajay Singh, CMD, SpiceJet, made a statement at the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in November 2018, during the climate summit, where he pledged that we should try and achieve 100 million passengers in domestic skies in India to be flying on sustainable fuel. We used the World Economic Forum platform to come with a blueprint of how we will achieve that in 2030. Using COVID as an opportunity to work on the same, we spent 11 months to develop a 70-page document."



**Kamal Hingorani**  
Chief Customer Service Officer  
SpiceJet

"We converted our hotels into hospitals, with facilities essentially taking care of COVID patients, and we had doctors, nurses, attendants. The hotel lobby was converted into a hospital reception and we had two ambulance parked outside. In an environment where the traditional hotel business is difficult to come by for the next year or two or more, it's the middle way that works very well—a hybrid model, in the next few weeks months and years, wherein hotels throw access to medical care."



**Ajay Bakaya**  
MD, Sarovar Hotels & Resorts



**Dipak Deva**  
Managing Director, Sita India  
TCI Distant Frontiers and  
TCI Go Vacations

"If we don't have champions around, if we don't have a certification programme, if we are not seen as a destination that is going to take us to the next level in sustainability, we would have lost a great opportunity after COVID because every destination is going to start from the same starting point. Is India the one who is going to take the lead? Is our Government the one who is going to make sustainability the most important pillar of their strategic initiative going forward? If yes, we have a very good chance."

"First, we need to understand the difference between tourism and sustainability. To be sustainable in the long term, we need to be responsible today. We need to understand how important scientific country planning is and hence we need architects and planners on board. We need to understand the impact of high number of people congregating at places and what it's doing to our resources like water, land, and forest area."



**Dr. Latika Nath**  
Chairman & Founder, Hidden India  
Safari & Lifestyle Experiences

Inputs by Nisha Verma

### Noida Airport receives ₹3,725 crore from SBI

Yamuna International Airport (YIAPL) has received the final credit sanction for ₹3,725 crore from State Bank of India (SBI) for the development of Noida International Airport (NIA). Zurich Airport International AG (ZAIA) is the main shareholder of YIAPL and is



injecting ₹2,005 crore into the development of NIA. The airport is being developed in close partnership with Government of Uttar Pradesh and Government of India. YIAPL now looks forward to the conclusion of UP government's resettlement and rehabilitation process and the start of construction of the airport. This partnership will bring progress to the state of Uttar Pradesh and will bolster Indian aviation's growth story.



**Breaking News**

- EbixCash progresses to prospective IPO in India
- Hyatt Regency Mumbai temporarily suspends operations amid fund shortage
- We have run out of words to describe the state of airlines in India: CAPA
- UAE suspends inbound from India till July 6
- Gujarat waives off property tax of hotels, resorts, restaurants and water parks
- Visa validity for foreigners stranded in India extended
- VFS Global starts accepting tourist visa applications for Croatia
- Kashmir opens for tourists as J&K government issues detailed guidelines
- Uttarakhand approves ₹29 cr compensation for tourism industry; 10k for agents & guides

# Airlines must brace for change

**Peter Harbison**, Chairman Emeritus, CAPA - Centre for Aviation, shares his perspective on what countries need to do to be able to open up quickly and what airlines can expect from the second half of 2021. He says the next 18 months will result in airline losses.



**W**e're 15 months into what has been a catastrophic period for the airlines, says **Peter Harbison**, adding, "The positive now is that we do see some green shoots, particularly in the US. But, there are many parts of the world where the same is not true. They've been much more risk tolerant than other parts, the big contrast being with Asia Pacific, where co-incidentally, there is now a new wave in many countries. It's very much a mixed story overall."

The critical thing though, he adds, for many is that the next 18 months, for various reasons, will result in airline losses. Harbison says, "Consolidation is something we talk about quite often. Consolidation's extremely difficult internationally, so it does tend to translate to

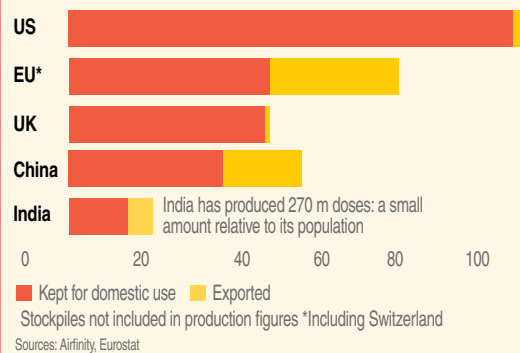


**Peter Harbison**  
Chairman Emeritus, CAPA

losses. So step one, we need to control COVID. There are lots of passports, the two biggest of course are coming from IATA and more recently, the Green Pass that the EU is developing with common standards, not necessarily commonly accepted yet, but the process is going to have to be with all of the different airline passports

## Why Asia won't be opening up quickly

**China and India lag behind in providing vaccinations at home**  
Vaccine doses produced per 100 people by origin



## Reforms for India: CAPA India Airline Outlook FY 2022

After taking into account the impact of the second wave, CAPA's proprietary forecasting model projects domestic traffic of 80-95 million airline passengers in FY2022, up from 52.5 million in FY2021, but well below the close to 140 million passengers in FY2020. This projection does not take into account a third wave.

International traffic is projected to be in the range of 16-21 million passengers, and again, based on current settings it is likely to be constrained towards the lower end of the

range because of border restrictions, market access and other strategic risks. However, international traffic will be particularly sensitive to discrete decisions taken by governments on such matters, which cannot be predicted.

Airlines are estimated to need closer to \$5 bn of recapitalisation in FY2022 just to survive, including requirements generated through the course of FY2021. Out of this it is estimated that around \$1.1bn is in the pipeline in the form of IPOs, QIPs and other instruments.

as well, and different commercial organisations, some travel agents, for example. They

do have to coalesce around perhaps the IATA passport or another." 🇮🇳

# Impact of Israel unrest mitigated

**Yossef Fatael**, CEO, Israel Incoming Tour Operators Association and Vice President, UFTAA, shares that the recent unrest in Israel impacted inbound tourism to the country only for a week, and that they are ready to receive tourists as they are the most vaccinated country in the world currently.



**Y**ossef Fatael claimed that the impact of the recent unrest in Israel was only for a week. "It may be hard to believe, but 'Operation Guardian of the Walls' affected incoming tourism for only one week. Fortunately, humans have an extraordinary trait - the tendency to forget. The current conflict disappeared from our lives as if it never occurred and thus, we are now experiencing a boom in the incoming and domestic tourism industry with a sharp rise in requests to visit Israel. As well, Israel still enjoys its positive status as the most vaccinated country in the world and a country that is safe for tourists, and so is working hard on a framework that will allow a wide entry of tourists to Israel very soon," he claimed.

In terms of the effect on businesses, Fatael shared, "Because there was no incoming tourism during 'Operation Guardian of the Walls', incoming tour operators suffered no damage to their businesses. It is also worth noting the brotherly spirit and empathy that characterises the members of our association. As an example, a rocket fell near the office of one of our colleagues, totally destroying it! Yet with positive energies and a quick recovery, restoration and reparation of the office and business began almost immediately."

Sharing that the countries from which the greatest number of tourists arrived on the eve of the crisis were from North America, Russia, France and Germany, Fatael revealed, "The Incoming Tour Operators Association is carrying out vari-



**Yossef Fatael**  
CEO, Israel Incoming Tour Operators Association and VP, UFTAA

ous activities and programmes in order to encourage tourists to come to Israel, including holding professional meetings, webinars and training for members. The Association makes sure to update its business partners from abroad, informing them about the latest developments about the regulations for the entry of foreign tourists to Israel. During the operation, the association also issued a call for 'Enough

Violence' and within this timeframe demanded a 'stop the violence and riots in mixed Jewish-Arab cities in Israel'. The Israeli and Arab members of the association showed a unified front and contributed to the fabric of good relations in the cities involved. As well, during this period the association held proactive meetings with the various offices of the Ministry of Tourism from which the tourists have been coming in order to comprehend the trends and intentions and readiness to come. All this was done in order to improve and make more efficient tourism packages offered and marketed in those countries.

Throughout the Corona crisis (from March 2020) when the last tourists departed from Israel and during the 'Operation Guardian of the Walls' crisis,

the members of the association made sure to stay in contact with their business partners abroad in order to encourage their return to Israel."

He claimed that the year 2019 was a record year for incoming

**We will see a significant increase in the number of tourists coming to Israel in 2022**

tourism, with over 4.5 million tourists and the expectation for 2020 was to break all previous records and reach the

5,000,000<sup>th</sup> tourist. However, he opined, "With a wave of the hand, Corona wiped out this forecast. I believe that it will take some more time for global tourism to make a rebound and will reach the 2019 numbers in about 2-3 years (in 2023-2024). As well, I am optimistic about the situation in Israel, considering the extensive vaccination campaign Israel was one of the first countries in the world to emerge from the Corona crisis. I also believe that we will see a significant increase in the number of tourists coming to Israel in 2022, with tourism organisers returning to full activity."

He pointed out that the State of Israel demonstrated to the whole world its amazing ability to deal with a global pandemic, and to be one of the first to beat it and to come out strong. 🇮🇳





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# Industry needs urgent attention

Hotel Association of India (HAI) has urged the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Finance to understand the plight of the hospitality industry and decide on what they need. He says that their advocacy is only that the government give a comprehensive package instead of small things happening here and there.



Nisha Verma

**M**P Bezbaruah, Secretary General, HAI, shared that the association has written to the Prime Minister office and the Finance Minister. "We have been trying with the PM Office and the FM to focus on a few issues, which the industry has been asking for and we are also in touch with all other sister organisations to see that we have a convergence of views on what we need as an industry. Hence, we are trying to help the MOF and MOT to focus on what the industry is suffering from," he said.

Talking about how the situation has been handled by the government and how they are working with members during this time, Bezbaruah said, "So far as we are concerned, we are telling our members the situation on



MP Bezbaruah  
Secretary General, HAI

the ground, in terms of what has been happening because of COVID. We have also been sharing with them the views on the global community about how tourism is likely to come back and when. How, everything will depend from country to country, to be different. The general perception in February was quite different from what it is now. In Jan-Feb, people were very optimistic, hotel bookings were picking up, and things were happening. However, suddenly

the second wave has come and there is fear of the third wave. The industry has been sensitised from our side. The important fact is that confidence will be the most important factor in the revival. It is not only that the government is putting COVID health protocols, but it is also the industry being able to convince the travellers and the customers that they are safe and that they are well looked after from health and safety point of view. Hence, that's the strongest message at this moment."

He added that the other message is that we must increasingly go for sustainability. "We have to change our way of working to make it a more efficient place. Apart from all the problems that they have, they are very genuinely concerned about the lives and livelihoods of the people who are dependent on them.

Most of the industry is trying to hold on without retrenching people, but there is a capacity

We are trying to help the MOF & MOT focus on what the industry is suffering from

up to which they can hold on. The smaller ones and medium enterprises cannot. Hence, these are the protocols and problems we are sharing with the indus-

try, trying to give them comfort to any extent possible from our side. We are trying to do advocacy with the Government to do something and that's how we are helping," shared Bezbaruah.

He claimed that it's a very difficult situation and one cannot have the last word anywhere. "Anything you do is so uncertain today, and the government holds the primary responsibility for the lives of people. However, the PM and the FM in the budget have said that they are aware about the livelihood concerns also. The PM is very sensible, and hence he has said that we'll not go for lockdown. Naturally, we are concerned about our own survival.

Hence, one must see that the industry doesn't become sick and they should be allowed to function while observing all operating procedures. MOT is also in touch with other ministries to provide small help like deferment of taxes etc. Some states have even given industry status that will give some benefit and lessen the burden. Giving the infrastructure status would encourage investments. These things are happening slowly. Our advocacy is only that the government should give a comprehensive package instead of small things happening here and there. Hence, it's time to have a comprehensive package in consultation with the industry," he suggested.

*According to a CAPA India report, fare and capacity regulation are expected to continue for a large part of FY2022 in the domestic market. But, removing caps may be more challenging than it was to introduce them.*

# Sustainability must be mainstream

► Contd from page 3

for the accommodation sector and tour operators, where they will work with the Responsible Tourism Society of India (RTSOI) for implementation through a certification scheme, which is also there for some other processes. "With the RTSOI, we are promoting a traveller campaign and we will see responsible behaviour by travellers. Once the tourism sector opens up again after this lockdown, we'll take this responsible traveller campaign further," he shared.

He added that under the strategy, they will also help the states in marketing, setting up safety standards, and also in



some cases work with the local government to develop the local destinations and products there. "In addition, the private sector and the community want to be roped in and all this has to be backed with a campaign for

responsible travellers as we have done with the RTSOI."

Saying that there is a special relationship between tourism and environment, Singh added, "Tourism plays a positive role and we all know that tourism can play a negative role also. Currently, our country is ranked very low on environment sustainability, while our rank in the overall world travel and tourism competitiveness is 34, under environment sustainability it is 128, which is a poor reflection on us. Most of our neighbouring countries do very well in this regard. There is no de-

nying the fact that more needs to be done for sustainable tourism. There is a need to mainstream the theme of sustainability in our policies, both at the national and the state level."

industry talk with them, because they are the ones who regulate the airlines. As far as the state governments are concerned, most of the states like Sikkim, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, and

public domain. We will encourage the states to frame policies, which are in line with this national strategy, so that sustainable tourism and eco-friendly tourism is encouraged in the states.



Talking about aviation, he shared that as far as airlines are concerned, it's a very serious matter because the use of fuel-inefficient aircraft and old aircraft lead to high toxic emissions. "We will take up with MoCA and support

Andaman have taken steps because sustainable tourism is their bread and butter," Singh said.

He concluded, "Once this national strategy and roadmap is there, it will be a document in the

Since all states are different, we will handhold and work with them once this national strategy is in place, by campaigns, capacity building, skill training and other soft skills that need to be developed in this case."

## Commerce & Revenue Secretary must release SEIS payments

**Arvind Singh**, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, has said that he has written to Commerce Secretary as well as Revenue Secretary to release 2019-20 SEIS payments on priority. "I also spoke to Principal Advisor in the Ministry of Finance for the same," he added. Inbound tour operators in the country have been pleading the government to clear their SEIS dues for a long time.



# AirlinePros, Dex Group join hands

Distribution and representation firm for airlines and travel suppliers, AirlinePros International has announced its partnership with Dex Group to significantly expand its presence in key cities across India. The partnership opens a immense amount of opportunities for the two groups, further strengthening their global as well as local reach.



TT Bureau

AirlinePros International is managed by senior aviation professionals and is headquartered out of Miami, Florida. Dex Group is an established name in India's travel and tourism industry, with over



complementary to our existing network and significantly expands our presence in key cities across India. As the aviation industry makes a slow restart, partnerships are key to ensure sustainable growth, to provide superior results in terms of increasing revenues and reducing costs for all our existing and potential clients."



**Achma Asokan**  
CEO & Director  
AirlinePros International

50 years of experience in Indian aviation. On this development, **Achma Asokan**, CEO & Director, AirlinePros International, commented, "This is extremely



**Linzi Barber**  
Senior VP Global Operations  
AirlinePros International

She further said, "Our vision to be the most trusted and innovative network for servicing the aviation industry involves global partnerships as the DNA that runs through our *raison*

*d'être*. Our local partners bring to AirlinePros International the opportunity to connect innovative ideas, cultural diversity, expertise and professionalism to add unparalleled value to AirlinePros, our global partners and clients.



**Ramesh Marwah**  
Director, Dex Group

"Aviation Restart and Resurgence Phase." Our India operations are particularly special due to the huge untapped potential that exists and the immense strengths of our partner, DEX Group, having been pioneers in the industry in India."

and globally recognised aviation network groups. As a long-established business with pan India presence, the opportunity to work with a global organisation is a perfect fit for us both. For Dex

Our India operations are special due to the huge potential

— Achma Asokan

This seemed like an opportune move as we share similar values and ethics

— Ramesh Marwah



We have been exceptionally fortunate to have continued our global expansion throughout the pandemic, adding many new relationships. So, our global teams are prepared and ready for the

**Ramesh Marwah**, Director, Dex Group, said, "We are proud to partner with AirlinePros and are extremely happy to join strengths with one of the most professional

Group to partner with AirlinePros seemed like an opportune move as our two organisations share similar values and ethics."

# Realistic margins for agents

**Chandan Pandey**, Co-Founder & COO, WB Hotels & Resorts, hopes that hotels will start doing well with at least 50% to 60% of occupancy by the beginning of October 2021 with the vaccination drive in full momentum. He adds that their plan for 10K keys by December 2022 is on track, and they have already expanded their team to other locations.



Hazel Jain

**Within a year, you have managed to add on more than 100 hotels on your platform.**

Yes, we launched our hotel brand WB Hotels & Resorts in October 2020 and we signed our first hotel in November 2020. As of today we have 100+ hotels under our brand in 17+ states and 35+ locations, with more than 2,100 rooms and growing. Technically we have added 100+ hotels from November to March – within five months only – as

April and May 2021 was a complete wipe out.

**How did you manage that?**

Our vision is very clear. Since I come with more than 21 years of leadership experience in hospitality, it helped me make all the right decisions at the right time. We have aligned our team accordingly and distributed responsibility to team leaders to reach our numbers. We are a people's company and people always come first for us. The team is always important to achieve a company's dreams.



**Chandan Pandey**  
Co-Founder & COO, WB Hotels & Resorts

In spite of so many challenges, we added more than 14 employees in our company. We believe in ourselves, our product and our team which is the key to our growth.

**What are some of the lessons you have learnt as a businessman over the last one year of the pandemic?**

We have understood that only a technology company can grow very fast. We will remain technology-centric and human resources company for standalone



hotels on a global level. In parallel, we are bringing India its first tech-based hotel brand which will work with four employees only.

**Have you received good response from the travel trade?**

We are in the final stages of developing the unique technology for the travel agents so that they can access our real-time rates for all the hotels which will be cheaper than the OTA rates. We are already having more than 3,500 active travel agent database. All travel agents will be requested to join our platform to access our hotel on pan-India level.

**What is your perspective on the hotel industry landscape for 2021-22 in India?**

Looking at the current scenario

and now every Indian is looking to get vaccinated, we are hoping that by beginning of October 2021 hotels start doing well with at least 50% to 60% of occupancy. By April 2022, the hotel industry

to the pandemic. When the industry is back with real occupancy levels, with fewer hotels in the market, it will boost the ADRs, ARR and RevPAR.

**Is your plan for 10K keys by Dec 2022 still in place?**

Yes we are very much on track. In fact, we have increased our Business Development team to other locations and in the coming month we will add more people to expedite these numbers.

**Your advice to travel and hospitality companies.**

We have to adapt the latest technology available. At the same time, we must also invest in people and nurture them. Cloning of leadership is very important. We have to remain positive and optimistic about hospitality, which will play a very important role for the development of our society at large."

When the industry is back with occupancy levels, fewer hotels, it will boost ADRs, ARR & RevPAR

will bounce back with 80- 90% occupancy with better ARR. We estimate that about 12% to 13% hotels closed down and hotels on lease model also got affected due

## About WB Hotels & Resorts

Launched in September 2020, WB Hotels & Resorts offers services to hotels, resorts, BNB, service apartments and townships. It offers co-branding services on an online platform, complete revenue management, centralised reservations, and account reconciliation. It offers software in a bundled package to asset owners, channel managers and cloud-based front offices. Technically, it runs hotels remotely and does not charge any upfront payment – it works on commissions only.



# Government can pull us through

Never before has the tourism segment had such a catastrophic experience as the COVID-19 pandemic. Hotels are almost defunct, tour operators have gone into oblivion and 90 per cent of travel agency staff is jobless. **Anand Singh**, Director, Earthen Experiences, believes it's time that hospitality and tourism need hand holding from the government.

**T**he finance and tourism ministries need to do fire-fighting. A stimulus package is just around the corner and the government is mulling the right time to come out with it. Travel agents are banking largely upon "government stimulus packages and interventions" to improve their productivity. For the next two years, the government should think of reducing GST from 5 to 1.8 per cent on a tour operator's full set-offs invoice. Further, for hotels, it should ponder on a GST of 10 per cent with full set-offs, in line with global trends. Schemes like LTA and income tax exemption on travel within India for expenses up to Rs1.5 lakh per year will boost domestic travel. Paying GST Credit and SEIS refund will bring liquidity in the business. Holiday on property tax, electricity and water can ease out operation costs of ho-

tels and help them sail through troubled waters.

## Awareness and confidence building

The Indian government is waiting for the opening of borders to resume its roadshows at source markets as well as participation in overseas travel fairs. In partnership with Indian travel agents, our overseas embassies and tourism offices should start planning familiarisation trips. Incredible India should host international tickets and visas, and Indian agents should host them while they travel in India. This is the best exercise to rebuild destination confidence. We should encourage travellers to upload their travel photos and videos. The government should first work towards restoring confidence of the travellers of UK, USA, Italy and France. These countries will be vaccinated

early and be ready to travel. For the outside world, a feedback from these nationalities is more acceptable. An App to feature real-time updates on safety and hygiene measures, disaster management, proximity of medical

They must facilitate opportunities for less-developed tourism spots to grow further

facilities and country preparedness on crowd management will be beneficial. The roll-out of the vaccination programmes across countries has brought much-

needed optimism. Inoculating a majority of the population, especially tourism employees, should be a key focus area. India, with its indigenous vaccine, can also coin vaccine tourism. Ministries of health and tourism should come out with health certification and accreditation programme to rebuild trust in Destination India. The government must also work on further simplifying the visa on arrival.

## High value, less volume

The government has to focus on a 'One India' policy. States need to synchronise their border policies towards seamless interstate travel. Key cities should be planned as safe tourism hubs with traffic management, hygiene, notified hospitals for foreigners, tourist police, separate in & out gates at ASI monuments, etc. The government and municipal corporations should work

towards providing an international standard infrastructure. The government should also come up with a 'One India' transport permit and taxation. For domestic tourists, the monuments fee should be around 50 per cent of a foreigner's ticket price or apply peak hour surcharge or hourly monument fee.

The government should also come up with slogans of 'Better trips of India' highlighting India's unique products. Incredible India has many such products to run a year-long campaign. Lake Palace, Golden Temple, Living Root Bridge, the Apatani tribe, Yoga, Ayurveda, naturopathy, luxury trains, cruises, rural tourism - the list is never-ending.

The tourism sector may end up evolving in a more sustainable way post-pandemic. The government should create a new

website for rural tourism. The involvement of local communities is going to be immensely critical in this journey. The 'better trips' should be focused on less-crowded places offering health staycations and green vacations. Traffic can be diverted to us if we share our tourism space with that of Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The government should allow unlimited exit & entry to them if the tour starts from India.



**Anand Singh**  
Director, Earthen Experiences

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

# New programme for agents

TOFT India has launched an internationally-recognised online programme for tour operators that focuses on driving more sustainable travel. Called Travelife, it gives members access to a range of online tools that they can use to start the journey towards greater sustainability in their own operations and in the tours they market and operate.



**T**OFT India, the nature-based travel trade alliance that focuses on driving more sustainable travel in South Asia has launched an internationally-recognised programme called Travelife to help drive up tour operation standards in India's tourism sector. **Ritu Makhija**, Manager Sustainability at TOFT India, says, "All TOFT's current DMC members will gain free access to a range of online tools that they can use to start the journey towards greater sustainability in their own operations, in the tours, they market and operate, and help in the destinations their clients visit. It all starts with making this commitment before full certification can be reached."

Increasingly, travellers and the tour operators and OTAs that

operate them, are demanding greater levels of environmental and social transparency with regards to the holidays they sell, especially the international market. The domestic market is also asking these questions. **Naut Kusters**, GM of Travelife for tour operators, based in the Netherlands, says, "This pandemic has helped highlighted the need for far greater sustainability in travel and tourism globally - and our certification for operators and DMCs will help drive the supply chain pressure faster towards more responsible, eco-friendly and fairer tourism across South Asia. We are delighted to be working with TOFT in India, helping to drive up standards in tour operation across the country."

Travelife for tour operators was developed in partnership with the European and global associations of tour operators and



**Ritu Makhija**  
Manager Sustainability, TOFT India

Members can use tools to start their journey towards sustainability

provides training, tools, and instruments to support tour operators and travel agencies in the integration of sustainabil-



**Julian Matthews**  
Chairman, TOFT India

We are ready to drive up eco-standards and work with destinations

ity in their company operations. The training and online tools are suitable for tour operators and travel agencies of any size and

cover all management aspects of the travel company business including office operations, the supply chain, destinations, and consumers.

The Travelife standard for tour operators and travel agencies is based upon the full Corporate Social Responsibility themes, including labour conditions, human rights, environment, biodiversity, and fair business practices. The management requirements are compatible with ISO 14001 and the standard has been recognised as in compliance with the UN supported Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria. Travelife for Tour Operators is a GSTC-Accredited certification programme. Achieving the GSTC-Accredited status means that a certification programme is following processes and procedures that have been reviewed and approved by the GSTC Ac-

creditation Panel. Companies certified by Travelife can also use the GSTC language and logo when they meet all GSTC criteria. Travelife is supported by more than 40 national and international travel associations, over 1000 travel companies in more than 100 countries.

Chairman of TOFT, **Julian Matthews**, says, "India's track record on travel and tourism sustainability is very poor, according to the latest UNWTO report 2019, far behind many of its competitors, including Sri Lanka. So being able to bring a respected international partner to India, together with our own accommodation certification programme, means we are now ready to drive up eco-standards and work with states and destinations to help them develop better ecotourism and more sustainable formats for tourism."



# Marketing Manipur

Manipur Tourism Forum is an association with a difference – one where its members as well as executive committee don't necessarily belong to the travel industry. Instead, they bring their own area of expertise to the table so that everyone benefits. **TRAVELTALK** finds out more about how this works.



Hazel Jain

**M**anipur Tourism Forum is the perfect example of people from varied fields coming together for a common cause. The members have been taking part in various events and exhibitions in their professional line and most of them were regular delegates in the one of the key business summit of the region – NE Business Summit.

Sharing more details of how this entity functions, and functions

well, is **Khuraijam Krishnan Singh**, its President. He says, "Various like-minded delegates felt the need to form an association with the main objective of promoting tourism activities in the state of Manipur considering the potential of tourism of the state. As emphasising and focusing on tourism will automatically promote other allied industry like handloom and handicraft, horticulture and human resources, through tourism members saw a potential game changer for the economy of the state.

The idea gave birth to formation of Manipur Tourism Forum in the year 2012."

Apart from the tourism professionals, the association has two leading doctors of the state, legal consultants, IT professionals, media, print and advertising professionals and social workers, who have keen interest in tourism and who were ready to volunteer for the promotion and development of tourism in the state. It is noteworthy that two of its members have now been elected to the Manipur Legislative Assembly one of them is a former IPS officer.

Singh elaborates, "As the members of Manipur Tourism Forum are from different professions (some of them leaders in their respective fields) with a common goal of promoting tourism, the diverse expertise across various



**Khuraijam Krishnan Singh**  
President, Manipur Tourism Forum

platforms come handy in identifying unique tourism products that have potential." The forum was registered in 2012.

## Activities

Manipur Tourism Forum has been organising various tourism awareness programmes, capacity building programmes, seminars and trainings. "Our effort is to complement the government as well as the tourism industry at large for promoting the true potential of Manipur's tourism, and

we have been working in close association with Manipur government for development and promotion of tourism," Singh adds.

Singh says that Manipur has tremendous potential in terms of arts and culture, scenic and virgin locations, handicraft, adventure tourism, eco-tourism, remembrance tourism, etc. The forum is working on a collaborative approach with the Tourism Department of Manipur for the development of tourism products, destinations, capacity building, etc.

"For long there has been a negative perception about Manipur as a disturbed area regarding the law and order situation. The negative perception has to be cleared in the mindset of prospective tourists through positive branding exercise. Infrastructure is also another important aspect of tourism which needs special

attention. In recent times, apart from improvement of the road connectivity and infrastructure, Manipur now is now becoming one of the most peaceful states. Being on the stride of the Asian Highway No 1 and 2, Manipur is the border state with Myanmar where there is tremendous potential for caravan, road trips, cross-border tourism," Singh elaborates.

The diverse expertise come handy in identifying products that have potential

Moreover, Manipur, with the largest convention centre in the entire NE region, is a great destination for MICE. "With proper marketing and festivals like Sangai Festival, Manipur's future in tourism is indeed a promising one. There is a constant support needed from the Ministry of Tourism, DoNER for the promotion of NE and Manipur through Expos," Singh shares.



# The Indian pyramid

Very little is known about the Charaideo district of Assam, which makes it a perfect hidden gem for travellers. Entrenched in history, it was the first permanent capital of the Ahom kingdom. **Sidheswar Kumar Mishra**, the Founder of Assam Tours & Travels, tells us more.

**I**n the long 600 years of Ahom ruling, royals constructed many architectural marvels which are time tested and still making their presence felt. Some of the architectural marvels are Rang Ghar, Talatal Ghar, Kareng Ghar, and many maidams. The ruins of these still attract visitors to witness its grandness. Ahom Maidam is one of them. Maidams are the mausoleum of the royals and aristocracy of the medieval Ahom Kingdom in Assam. The royal maidams are found exclusively at Charaideo district of Assam whereas many others are scattered in different places of upper Assam. Earlier it was under Sibsagar district but now a new district is created by the title name. Around 40 maidam of Ahom era are preserved on this hillock. Archaeological Survey of India is working hard to conserve the historical heritage of Assam. This maidam is situated on



Sibsagar-Sonari road and around 90km away from Jorhat Airport.

You will witness the historical maidams of Charaideo on the hillock. It is significant of all the maidams of Assam. The Charaideo Maidam as it is called is having the charm of its origin. Charaideo is a blend of three Tai words Che-Rai-Doi. Che means

Hillock, Rai means Shining and Doi means town. It literally means Shining City on the Hillock. Chaulung Shukafaa established his territory here in his initial years and later moved to the other part and established his capital in present-day Sibsagar town. But Charaideo remained the sacred place for Ahoms. It was the place of Ahom worships and subse-

quently, it became the place of ancestral Gods. This maidam are raised in pyramidal shape over the hillock with the help of earthen mounds. With an open pavilion at the peak called chawchali, these superstructures were constructed by an earthen mound that rises high above the ground. These superstructures consist of vaults and chambers covered by

Visiting Charaideo will be a lifetime memory. Come experience awesome Assam

hemispherical shape. The base of the entire maidam was enclosed with an octagonal dwarf wall.

Ahoms followed unique mortuary practice in which they buried kings and nobles' dead bodies in the coffin. After prolonging royal rituals and traditional practices these coffins were laid to rest inside these maidams or tombs. At the burial site earthen mound were raised in the pyramid shape. It is sacred burial ground of different kings and queens of

Ahom dynasty. On this hillock, many tombs are there. Every tomb is of different size and shape. This denoted the power and status of buried individuals of the royals.

It is also associated with Ahom ancestral god. Maidams are traditional places of offer worship to ancestors. Held annually on 31<sup>st</sup> January, tradition of paying homage is practised and this tradition is known as Me-Dam-Me-Phi. The maidams of Ahom kings in Charaideo has some similarity with the famous pyramids of Egypt. As both the structures were used for burial purpose, both the structures are made in a triangular shape, both the structures have very high social as well as historical values. Visiting Charaideo will be a lifetime memory. Come experience awesome Assam!



**Sidheswar Kumar Mishra**  
Founder, Assam Tours & Travels

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



# Tourism needs to be teched-up!

Many in the industry believe that both domestic and safe tourism are temporary phenomenon, and things will be back to 'normal' in not more than two years. What remains to be done, however, is improvement and streamlining of processes to enhance the touristic experience, says **Vipul Jain**, Founder & CEO, Gabbit Systems.

There is no doubt that tourism is one of the worst affected industries due to COVID-19. And though a lot has been written and discussed in various forums that post-pandemic tourism will be focused majorly on two aspects – domestic tourism and safe tourism – a few stumbling blocks need to be removed.

## Domestic tourism

Tourism is one industry where customer satisfaction depends on the combined efforts of multiple entities. Improving the tour-

ism experience needs a collective and collaborative approach along with strong support from technology, for which the following may be implemented:

- ❖ Gathering scattered information: This information should be collected and digitally stored in a central system as per the region, state and location. Access to this system should be given to the public using an interface such as a website or a mobile App.

- ❖ Crowd sourcing: People like to talk about the places they be-

long to or have been to. This behaviour can be used to get inputs from them using a mobile App or some other easy-to-use technology. The system can also gather information related to queue conditions, approachability and road conditions, etc., from multiple sources. Service providers can also register themselves. To make this genuine, certified service providers should be allowed to be part of this system.

- ❖ Use of technology such as Blockchain: There is a strong need for more involvement of technology in tourism to provide quality experiences to tourists, prevent ID theft of guests, provide optimised day-planners, and guide them accordingly. The system needs to be designed keeping in mind that it will be used by tourists and travel agents to create travel plans from the options available

## Safe tourism

Tourist safety has always been an issue. The current pandemic has only made us feel the urgency of it. In addition to COVID protocols of social distancing,

There is a need for more involvement of technology to provide quality experiences

hygiene and sanitisation, safe tourism is about having a proactive system that can find early signs before an emergency, alert everyone as per SOPs, help locate tourists in need of help, and provide timely assistance.

But, there is no mechanism to record the tourist count in a city or place. Since there is no count, there is no way to anticipate and prepare for overtourism and over-capacity. Instead of a proactive system to plan and manage, the state administration has to work in a reactive mode by controlling incoming traffic or diverting it when it is already too late. This sometimes makes the situation worse.

Locating tourists is also important when there is a need to perform contact-tracing, such as during a pandemic or an act of terrorism. Since the state administration has no information about them, locating a tourist in case of an emergency is very difficult. The following suggestions can help in such a scenario:

- ❖ There needs to be a system where tourists need to register

themselves for the duration of trip.

- ❖ Implementation of tourist registration can be made simpler. Instead of forcing it on tourists, some innovative ways can be thought of so that tourists are motivated and encouraged to register themselves.

- ❖ There needs to be a system that keeps monitoring a region based on different parameters.



**Vipul Jain**  
Founder & CEO, Gabbit Systems

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

## TAAI Kashmir convenes

TAAI Jammu & Kashmir Chapter held its bi-monthly meeting in Srinagar where the office bearers and members discussed issues faced by tour operators in the region and highlighted the problems faced by the travel trade in the region due to the hike in hotel rates and non-availability of rooms for local agents.





# Ready to welcome travellers

With Etihad Wellness, the airline is prepared to provide a travel experience that prioritises passenger wellness. **Neerja Bhatia**, VP, Indian Sub-Continent, Etihad Airways, shares more details on the several measures the airline has introduced for guests to travel with greater peace of mind.

The world has been battling a global health emergency for over fifteen months now, and like most industries across the world, aviation too has been severely impacted. We understand how difficult the situation has been for our guests and partners in India, especially over the last few months. While passenger flights to the country have currently been suspended in line with global guidelines and restrictions, we continue to extend support with special humanitarian charters carrying much-needed medical supplies and equipment.

to key Indian gateways as soon as current travel restrictions are lifted, offering seamless connectivity and convenient transfers via our home, Abu Dhabi.

We're ready to resume operations to Indian gateways when restrictions are lifted

Although the past year has been challenging, the impact of this pandemic will not deter our commitment to India, a country that Etihad has been serving for 16 years now. We are ready to resume operations

We are prepared for when international travel from the country gradually resumes, and our top priority remains the safety and wellness of our guests and employees. To that

end, we have introduced several measures for guests to travel with greater peace of mind with Etihad.

## 100% of Etihad's crew onboard has been vaccinated

In February this year, Etihad became the first airline in the world with all its operating pilots and cabin crew vaccinated to help curb the spread of COVID-19 and give passengers added assurance of safety. This has consolidated the airline's position as an industry leader in its response to the pandemic and in keeping its employees and travellers safe.

## Validity of Etihad's global wellness cover has been extended

If any guest is diagnosed with COVID-19 during their trip, they won't have to worry about medical expenses or quarantine costs when they fly with us. We have



introduced a global COVID-19 wellness insurance as part of our health and hygiene programme, Etihad Wellness, which is included with every Etihad ticket up to 31 September 2021

## A dedicated Wellness Ambassador on every flight

Etihad has introduced specially trained Wellness Ambassadors, a first in the industry, to provide essential travel health information and care.

They are available 24/7 pre-departure, at Abu Dhabi International Airport and on board every flight to offer reassurance by sharing advice on travel wellbeing and details of the health and sanitisation measures being

implemented throughout the guest's journey.

## Tech and digital-first solutions for a seamless journey

There has been an accelerated growth in digitising experiences and ensuring contactless travel for guests, with their safety and wellness in mind.

We have been working with a variety of different companies, some within the industry, some outside of it, to develop technology required for a global health certification system. Most recently, Etihad has partnered with the International Air Transport Association to launch the IATA Travel Pass for its guests. This offering, currently under trial, will help passengers easily and securely manage their travel in line with government requirements for COVID-19 tests or vaccines.

## Mandatory PCR testing before every flight

Etihad remains the first and only airline in the world that requires 100% of its passengers to show a negative PCR test before departure and on arrival in Abu Dhabi. We want to ensure travellers feel safe knowing every other guest flying with us has tested negative for COVID-19. As the national airline of the UAE, we have the advantage of the fact that two thirds of the world's human footprint is within a four-hour flight of Abu Dhabi. We are currently operating to 60 worldwide destinations across Europe, Middle East & Africa, North America, Asia, and Australia and are ready to welcome travellers from India as the scenario gradually improves.



**Neerja Bhatia**  
Vice President, Indian Sub-Continent  
Etihad Airways

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

# DigiTravel now has more reach

To support a resurgent business travel industry, DigiTravel Consulting (DTC) has announced an expanded global presence by adding consultants in India, Asia, the United States, as well as Canada. **Jyothi Varma** has been named as the Vice President for the India market.

Manas Dwivedi

Jyothi has held senior positions in organisations like Amadeus, InterGlobe, American Express, Carlson Wagon-lit, WWStay. She was the Regional Manager India and SE Asia, ACTE (Association of Corporate Travel Executives) before taking over this position.



**Jyothi Varma**  
VP - India Market, DigiTravel

Sharing her first reaction on her appointment, Varma sharing her expectations said, "I have almost three decades of experience in the travel and hospitality industry. I believe my connections and experience in the industry will help expand our reach in my new role as Vice President for the India market. For me personally, the new role helps in connecting with the global market and will add value addition to my knowledge curve while learning something new and also enrich

networking with international players." US-based DigiTravel Consulting provides next-generation consulting services to the business travel industry powering the omnichannel experience.

Sharing her immediate plans and goals with the new responsibility, Varma says that they have already reached out to some of the corporates to ensure their readiness to travel and handle the new norms of travelling. "Travel is never going to be the same now. The way things are,

we want to understand if corporates are ready to travel or not. How are they going to plan their travel keeping in mind safety, hygiene, sanitisation and duty of care. The goal is to identify what is the status of corporates resuming travel and what is the update in the market. We have slowly reached out to few clients and we have told them what all we are doing. The work is already in progress," she said.



Talking about the future of business travel in India in the new-normal era, Varma says that a lot of things will change in the way corporates and business travel in managed in India.

"Till now, it was the price war which was defining factor in the market. But going further, it will not be the only deciding factor, the value of the product will be much more important. The value

of the product is how much emphasis is given to hygiene, what are the things being done to take care of the clients, how resources for a company, which are the most valuable asset for a firm does not face any issue during their travel. So there will be a lot of emphasis on vaccination, wellness, health and the kind of food being served during the trip. It is going to be a huge difference in the way corporates and business travellers will travel. For corporates, if you are giving them services according to their need, they won't mind paying extra also," she explained.

Predicting the timeline for the full recovery of the MICE industry in India, Varma says that she personally is looking forward to consistent movement to start from the first quarter of the next financial year. "I wouldn't be able to predict how and when. We have just peaked

the second wave and we are third wave of COVID infections. Although, we have become smarter since the first wave.

Price war will not be the only deciding factor; the value of the product will be much more important

We have learnt a lot of things and realised the same things will not work in the second wave. So, if you ask me when the business travel is going to resume, no clear deadline," she concluded.



# adtoi lends a helping hand

ASSOCIATION OF DOMESTIC TOUR OPERATORS OF INDIA

ADTOI has formed a taskforce by its members and for its members in order to provide timely assistance through verified information about medical facilities on a pan-India basis. Besides this, the Association has launched a Facebook page for female members and is organising vaccination camps while reimbursing members for shots.



Nisha Verma

The Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India has formed a taskforce of members to offer timely medical assistance across the Association's membership in this hour of need, informs **PP Khanna**, President, ADTOI. "One of our members, Rajiv Arora, has been given the charge and responsibility for the taskforce, and he, along with some other volunteers, will be collecting and verifying the authenticity of information which will then be circulated to all members on a pan-India basis. Many of them faced problems in getting hospital beds, medicines and oxygen. The idea behind the taskforce is to provide them the right information," he said.

In another initiative, ADTOI has launched a Facebook page to



**PP Khanna**  
President, ADTOI

empower women in the tourism industry on a pan India basis and bring them forward. "Women just need a platform, a little bit of hand holding and someone who believes in them. The aim of this page is to provide a social media platform for all the lady entrepreneurs at ADTOI who, through this platform, will be promoting tourism as well as our CSR activities and initiatives. Hence, the basic idea is to form a women empowerment cluster and more women to join hands in ADTOI as woman

entrepreneurs and empower others," he informed.

The Association will also organise vaccination camps for its members. Khanna said that since many of their members could not get vaccinated owing to a shortage of vaccines, ADTOI has tied up with hospitals to organise vaccination camps for its members on a pan-India basis. "This will be provided to members at a special rate. To alleviate the financial burden on members, we have decided to give a subsidy to all primary members by reimbursing 50 per cent of what they spend on getting vaccinated, whether it's the first shot or second shot or both, to the maximum limit of ₹600 for each shot within a period. This would be subject to conditions of the states. As more of our members get vaccinated, post-COVID they will be able to serve

the tourists in the right perspective," he claimed.

With the second wave of the pandemic in India having been

The basic idea behind the taskforce is to provide the right information

devastating, people are staying home and not venturing out for travel. In this scenario, domes-

tic tourism, which was booming a few months back, has also come to a standstill and recovery needs to be worked out. Khanna says that while not much can be done in terms of inbound and outbound owing to restrictions, domestic tours can be opened. "Our members are asking us to talk to the states, hence, we have decided that once the cases will go down in some states, we can talk and request them to open for tourism. Already, there are many states where even the centre has ordered against taking RT-PCR test and a negative report is not mandatory. On the other hand, tourists are scared about travelling to those states where

the cases are very high. Hence, we are encouraging our members to send tourists to states which have a lower number of COVID cases. In this context, we have even written letters to a few states asking them when they are opening borders since the cases have come down. They can inform us regarding the same and we can start making the packages for our tourists," he informed.

In fact, Khanna pointed out that customers, too, are looking for offbeat and uncrowded places, which are going to be popular post-COVID. "People will be looking for safe, clean and beautiful places," said Khanna.

*Travellers are now feeling confident enough to make plans for later this year or next year. Sabre data shows that ultra-short booking windows have declined for the fifth consecutive month, while longer-term booking windows have increased at the same time.*

## SIHRA comes to the rescue



SIHRA, in a bid to vaccinate hotel workers considering they are also frontline workers, has been arranging several camps and writing to state governments of the region. Recently, more than 1600 people of the industry between the age of 18 and 45 years were vaccinated under the programme. SIHRA is also co-ordinating vaccination camps in Bengaluru.

## Etihad joins forces with UN



Etihad Airways has signed an MoU with the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme. The collaboration will strengthen volunteering globally and expand the reach to customers of Etihad. It was signed by Dr Nadia Bastaki, VP (Medical Services), CSR, Etihad Aviation Group and Toily Kurbanov, Executive Coordinator, UNV, remotely in Abu Dhabi.

## Shorter planning windows

Contd from page 3

would have taken the first dose of the vaccine – things will start to ease up. And by November-December, we can expect the wedding season to kick in. We are expecting this season to be very good. Weddings will be more or less local for now with nearby destinations and hotels being popular. But by December we are expecting nearby states like Kerala, Rajasthan and Goa to pick up."

His company has been getting inquiries for 150-160 room wedding parties. "We do expect last minute bookings for December as the situation is volatile. The booking time could be reduced to 20-25 days by families. In fact, even hotels aren't taking bookings beyond 15 days as they know things might change quickly," Kejriwal adds.

On the other hand, **Rajeev Jain**, Director, Rashi Entertainment, says that his clients are still waiting and watching. "April 2021 was one of the biggest seasons for weddings in India. But all of them were



**Rajeev Jain**  
Director, Rashi Entertainment

cancelled because of the lockdown. So 80% of the weddings are now waiting to happen in July 2021. But families are waiting to see how the situation is before they confirm. They are hoping that the lockdown will ease up soon," he says.

Jain says the wedding industry is very hopeful since the number of cases has gone down which could mean governments permitting a gathering of 100-200 people. He has written to the CM of Delhi to understand the situation. "People aren't planning much in advance except for the super auspicious dates coming up. But hotels are asking crazy amounts of money which nobody can think of

also: ₹75,000 only for rooms which is unrealistic! So the situation right now in the market is very tricky. I am hoping November-December will be a very heavy season for India for weddings as long as the third wave does not happen," Jain shares. He adds that almost 70

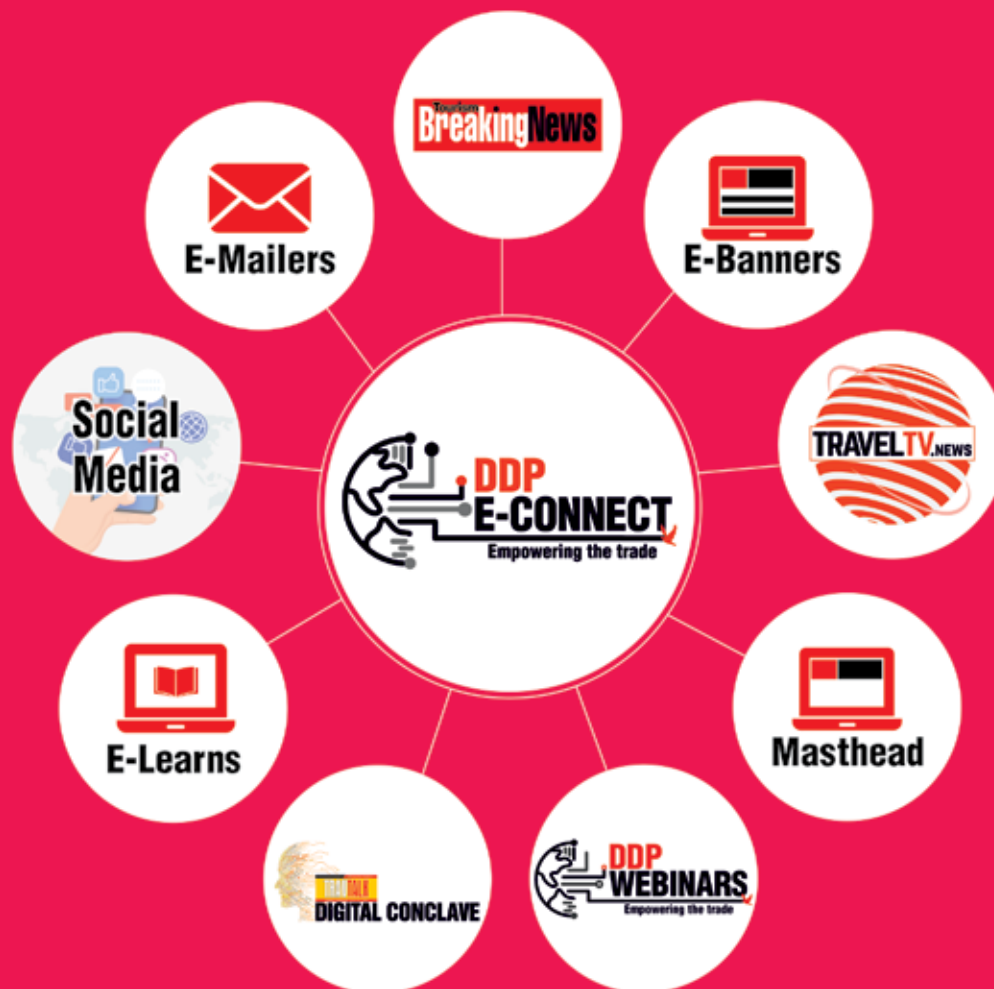
Hotels are asking crazy amounts of money which nobody can think of also – ₹75,000 for rooms which is unrealistic

per cent of the industry is closed right now since people could not sustain this kind of pressure after the second wave. "People will think twice before spending on weddings now because of the situation," Jain adds.





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# Re-start e-visas: IATO Maha

The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) Western region has requested IndiaTourism and the Ministry of Tourism to restart issuing e-visas for international tourists, in time for the upcoming season. During the session, they brought up some key points, including the question of e-visas for inbound clients.

Hazel Jain

The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, through IndiaTourism, has been conducting intensive workshops with the travel trade to encourage them to sign up for its E-Recognition programme for travel agents, tour operators and tourist transport operators. The recognition as an approved travel agent shall be granted by the Ministry of Tourism initially, for five years.

It recently conducted another one of its virtual sessions on this for the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) members. It was the initiative of IATO's western region and saw more than 50 members participate in this. **NS Rathor**, Chairman, Western Region for IATO, says, "The main focus of this educational seminar was to increase



**NS Rathor**  
Chairman - Western Region  
IATO

It is important  
our next steps  
are planned  
so tourism can  
open smoothly

our membership. We also want to increase their awareness and educate our members about



**Venkatesan Dhattareyan**  
Regional Director (West & Central)  
Indiatourism Mumbai

The MOT  
E-Recognition  
programme  
is a big  
marketing tool

how to become an MOT-certified service provider and avail the benefits of the various MOT

schemes and Market Development Assistance (MDA) for domestic tourism."

Rathor adds, "Some key points were also brought up during the session, including the question of e-visas for our inbound clients. Since international travellers start planning six months in advance, this would be the tight time to open up e-visas which would allow them to plan for the upcoming tourist season. It is important that our next steps are planned so that inbound tourism can open up smoothly and safely. We also brought up the issue of promoting India through so-



cial media by each and every members and how MOT can compensate us for that."

Sharing some of the highlights of this programme's benefits, **Venkatesan Dhattareyan**, Regional Director (West & Central Region) Indiatourism Mumbai

## For start-ups

Under the three categories that are eligible for this recognition, there is also a consideration for new organisations (proprietorship/partnership firm/company) which has just ventured into the tourism sector and has no previous experience in the field.

- Incredible India, Ministry of Tourism, says, "This is a stamp of standard by the Government of India. It is a big marketing tool as well and lends credibility to the service provider. We have received many queries from foreign tour operators and those from other states in India asking if a particular agency is reliable or not. We go back and check our database and give a go-ahead if they are in our database. This is where this recognition also helps. Agencies also automatically get a listing in the MOT website." He described how the government has relaxed guidelines to facilitate all new as well as experienced travel agents to register and be recognised by with the Ministry and also answered various questions asked by the participants. Dhattareyan also gave words of encouragement to participants, not to be disheartened by the scenario.

# ATOAI to create new chapters

**Vishwas Makhija**, President, Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI), has said that his association is finding ways forward to create new Chapters at the state level. His team has identified five states already and they will go forward with the detailed Chapter formation.

Manas Dwivedi

The Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) has been mulling creating new chapters to expand its reach. In fact, the Association has already identified five states where it would form such state chapters going forward. Besides, the adventure tourism body has also launched a series of Adventure Talks through its Saturday Members Meet. These talks are inspirational stories from near and far about journeys of our fellow adventurers, informs **Vishwas Makhija**. "We have tried to change the track. Instead of regular meetings, we are trying to get some more content for our members, more enthusiasm in terms of reviving members' morale and spirits. When they hear these stories from first-hand experience of



**Vishwas Makhija**  
President, ATOAI

people, it is really inspiring," he said.

"We are also trying to bring some relief to members in inner Himalayan states and villages. We are currently working on it to create a team on the ground in areas such as Spiti, Sangla, Kunoo Valley in Ladakh. This includes first response to COVID medicines," he further said.

Sharing his message for association members, Makhija urged



them to contribute to the COVID Task Force created by FAITH to provide authentic information during the pandemic.

"The communication has already been shared with our members and I request our members to come forward and provide information about the resources or professionals, and its confirmed availability in their respective city/area. I urge you to please provide a helping hand to the communities around us and everyone who needs our help right now. I say this is our time to demonstrate grace under pressure. The safety of all of us

is paramount. Stay calm, stay safe, follow the guidelines to minimise your exposure and the spread of coronavirus in your community and the communi-

We are trying  
to bring relief to  
members in inner  
Himalayan states  
and villages

ties you serve," he said. After announcing the format of the Women's Task Force on Inter-

national Women's Day, Makhija shared that the task force had convened two meetings so far. "It is work in progress. I am sure that good things will happen as COVID restrictions are lifted and destinations open up. ATOAI is trying to be more relevant and more focused towards its members to give more value. We want to be there for our members for best we can do in the current pandemic situation," he said. ATOAI has also submitted a proposal to the Tourism Minister of Uttarakhand to uplift the adventure tourism industry of Uttarakhand during the ongoing pandemic. The association has demanded to wave off 'rafting permit fee' for the upcoming

season (September 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022), facilitate trekking permits with greater lead time through a single window system with the forest department to enable better planning, reopen 'beach camp-sites' on the banks of the Ganga river to help infuse the popular beach camp product which remains unique across the globe, to reopen trekking and camping in the 'bugyal', to constitute Ganga Nadi Rafting Prabandhan Samiti (GNR) funds for planning of river put-in/pull-out access points and open up the Rishikesh-Haridwar section for July-August to lengthen the season and make it a year-round attraction.

*The shortest commercial flight, operating between the neighbouring islands of Westray and Papa Westray in Scotland's Orkney Islands, takes around one and a half minutes, with the fastest recorded flight taking less than 50 seconds.*



# Liquidity window of ₹15,000 cr?

Announcing additional measures to help ailing businesses, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced a separate on-tap liquidity window of ₹15,000 crore for contact-intensive sectors like restaurants, hotels and those involved in the tourism sector, among others.



Manas Dwivedi

**T**he Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced a slew of liquidity measures, including a ₹15,000 crore liquidity window with tenors of up to three years at the repo rate till March 31, 2022 for contact-intensive sectors like hotels and tourism. RBI has also increased the coverage of borrowers under the resolution framework scheme by enhancing the maximum exposure limit from ₹25 crore to ₹50 crore for MSMEs, small businesses and loans to individuals for business purposes.

Under the scheme, banks can provide fresh lending support to hotels, restaurants, tourism and tour operators, adventure and heritage facilities, aviation ancillary services (ground handling and supply chains) and other

services that include private bus operators, car repair services, rent-a-car service providers and event/conference organisers. The scheme will remain operational from June 7 till March 31, 2022.

Welcoming the decision, the travel trade expressed joy over the apex bank's decision. **Rajiv Mehra**, President, IATO, said, "We welcome the announcement by the RBI offering loans to the tourism and hospitality sector on easy terms and lower rate of interest. Hope tour operators who have had almost zero income for more than one year, would get some succour out of it. Also, we would request the government to announce SEIS (Service Export Incentive Scheme) which is now pending for the financial year 2019-20. Besides, we expect some grant for revival of the battered tourism sector and rationalisation of GST."



**Rajiv Mehra**  
President, IATO



**Aditya Agarwal**  
CFO, Cleartrip



**Pushpendra Bansal**  
COO, Lords Hotels & Resorts

Those with zero income for more than a year would get some succour out of it

According to **Aditya Agarwal**, CFO, Cleartrip, "The pandemic has adversely impacted the travel and travel-related sectors.

This measure helps alleviate stress in the sector, provides support

This measure by the RBI helps alleviate the stress in the sector, provides much-needed support to the industry participants,

I feel tenor of three years is not enough to come out of the crisis

and allows the industry to be well prepared to meet customer needs once the impact of the pandemic eases."

Representing the hospitality industry, **Pushpendra Bansal**, COO, Lords Hotels & Resorts, said, "We welcome RBI's decision of creating a special liquidity window of ₹15,000 crore with a tenor of three years. This is the first move of the government in infusing much-needed liquidity support to the crippled hospitality industry after the outbreak of COVID-19. However, I feel tenor of three years is not enough to come out of the crisis since hospitality industry was hit first and will recover last."

By way of an incentive, banks will be permitted to park their surplus liquidity up to the size of the loan book created under this scheme with the Reserve Bank under the reverse repo window at a rate which is 25 bps lower than the repo rate, or termed in a different way, 40 bps higher than the reverse repo rate.

## Need for stronger coordination

Outlook for the rest of the year remains cautious as the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) continues to call for stronger coordination on travel protocols between countries to ensure the safe restart of tourism and avoid another year of massive losses for the sector.



Hazel Jain

### Rebound travel in Q3 & Q4

The UNWTO has outlined two scenarios for 2021, which consider a possible rebound in international travel in quarters three and four. The first points to a global uplift in travel during July, which would result in a 66% increase in international arrivals for 2021 compared to historic lows of 2020. The second considers a potential rebound in September, leading to a 22% increase in arrivals compared to last year, while still trailing 67 per cent below the levels of 2019.

### Vaccination success

A number of factors could affect this rebound in international travel, most notably being a major lifting of travel restrictions by countries, their success of vaccination programmes, or the introduction of harmonised pro-



ocols such as the Digital Green Certificate planned by the European Commission. The latest survey of the UNWTO Panel of Tourism Experts shows prospects for the June-August period improving slightly.

### Improved coordination

UNWTO secretary-general Zurab Pololikashvili has said that the international community needs to

take strong and urgent action to ensure a brighter 2021. Improved coordination between countries and harmonised travel and health protocols are essential to restore confidence in tourism and allow international travel to resume safely. Tourism experts point to the continued imposition of travel restrictions and the lack of coordination as the main obstacle to the sector's rebound.

### Innovative experiences

The cultural diversity and knowledge of indigenous peoples can bring innovative experiences and new business opportunities for tourism destinations and local communities, and help them recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on this, the UNWTO has partnered with the World Indigenous Tourism Alliance on a set of guidelines, designed to ensure this type of experiences are led by the indigenous communities themselves.

### Remove travel restrictions

UNWTO expects a rebound in international tourism only in 2022, up from 50 per cent in

the January 2021 survey. The remaining 40 per cent see a potential rebound in 2021, though this is down slightly from the percentage in January. The worst hit region is Asia-Pacific, which recorded the largest decrease in international arrivals in the first month of the year due to its high levels of travel restrictions.

### Digital transformation must

The digital transformation that the tourism sector is undergoing to increase its competitiveness and resilience needs to be brought closer to the people who carry it out, and it is necessary and urgent to train them so that they can address these challenges, according to the UNWTO. For this

reason, more than 1,200 people were trained in digital skills and entrepreneurship in the UNWTO Tourism Tech Adventures forums. The aim is to leave no one behind in the digitisation process.

### Identify tourism news

The UNWTO has also underlined the importance of restoring trust in travel in order to restart tourism. Pololikashvili has said that identifying tourism-related news that will inspire and inform viewers and showcase the sector's importance to drive recovery and sustainable development for all. He added that there is a need to showcase tourism's unique ability to provide opportunity and drive growth.

*A report by JLL says, 'Post-COVID, we are likely to see a thinner future hotel supply pipeline with developers taking a more cautious approach to Greenfield development. This could possibly result in a stronger base for the industry going forward.'*



## EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



## JUNE 2021

Date	Event	Time
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

## JULY 2021

1	Spain Tourism Webinar	03:00 pm
2-4	Holiday Expo	Vadodara
6	Israel Tourism Webinar	03:00 pm
8	Spain Tourism Webinar	03:00 pm
13	Israel Tourism Webinar	03:00 pm

## AUGUST 2021

6-8	TTF	Kolkata
10-11	TTF	Hyderabad
19-21	OTM	Mumbai
27-29	TTF	Surat

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## Focus on regional tourism

The northeast states need to focus on developing and promoting regional tourism, says President of Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA) **Debajit Borah**, who is also the Director of Brahmaputra Cruise.



Hazel Jain

For the travel trade and tourism in the north eastern part of India to grow again, we will have to wait for the situation to improve further, says Debajit Borah, the newly-elected president of Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA). "The situation was getting better but what is observed that with the easing out on travel protocols, we were struck with a more stern and sudden outbreak of the virus. We will now have to wait for the situation to improve and, once the situation improves, we will need to be more careful on the travel protocols so that another surge in infections does not happen. In the meantime, we may need to focus on regional tourism keeping our boundaries tight especially in case of the northeastern states," he suggests.

However, Borah adds that although regional tourism does



Debajit Borah  
President, TOAA

not help the local tour operators much, it provides sustainability to the other stakeholders of tourism. "And considering the geographical and cultural trait of the region, travel within the seven states can be a big support to the tourism industry of the region. Till then we need to keep our fingers crossed and wait for the situation to improve," Borah adds.

Under his leadership, TOAA recently celebrated World Environment Day by going live on Facebook and has pledged to plant 10,000 saplings once the



lockdown is lifted. According to Borah, tourism and environment has to go hand-in-hand and TOAA members will always work on this path.

## Lessons learnt

Sharing his perspective on some of the lessons that have been learnt over the last one year, Borah says, "COVID-19 has changed the world in many ways. Not only the current surge in infection, but the one which hit us in March 2020 has forced people to have a different perspective towards life and without any doubt, businesses how small or big have changes in their strategies and functioning. Though it is also true that we have seen some shifts in trade to other

more lucrative trades considering COVID, most of the travel trade operators in Northeast are still in the travel business trying out new strategies for their survival. The industry is also hopeful that the respective governments of the state will come out with some practical schemes in support of



We may need to focus on regional tourism keeping our boundaries tight

the tourism industry so that the efforts put into in the last decade or so, in developing the region as the most sought-after destination does not go in vain."

## IN MEMORIAM



Ankur Bhatia  
(21.01.1973 – 04.06.2021)

The tourism industry has lost another stalwart in **Dr. Ankur Bhatia**. He was the Executive Director at Bird Group. Dr Bhatia passed away of a cardiac arrest. He was 48.

A prolific and outstanding leader, he led the group's strategic thrust to create multiple drivers of growth that made a significant and growing contribution to the company and industry at large. He also shaped and implemented blue ocean strategies that strengthened the overall brand proposition and accelerated a leap in core business value by

exploring new growth avenues for building untested market leadership. Dr. Bhatia brought in the Amadeus brand to the Indian subcontinent in 1994.

In its tribute to Dr Bhatia, Bird Group writes, "Ankur leaves behind a legacy of unparalleled services, world-class hospitality and trend setting standards, for which he has always been revered by the travel, aviation and hospitality industry. A prolific leader, true visionary and a wonderful human being – Ankur will be dearly missed." A firm practitioner of Corporate Social Responsibility, he institutionalised the concept of caring and giving at Bird Group. Dr. Bhatia has been affiliated with Sukarya, which strives to improve the health and well-being of members of marginalised societies. Enthusiastic, committed and a meritorious achiever, Dr Bhatia led the business of Bird Group on to a diversified portfolio, and successfully so.

## Get me 'Out of the Box'

Oh! What a nasty joke's been played on us by the quintessential Box!

Isn't a Box meant to keep things in?

But I am human & I always itch to do the opposite  
So, I kept crawling, leaping, bouncing, diving 'Out of the Box', until I landed in a soup  
While letting the box succeed in keeping me tightly shut, nearly gasping for breath

I still ponder though, incorrigible me; am I thinking inside the box or outside?  
Does the box really exist or does it not?

Entangled thoughts as I dangle somewhere in 'No Box Land'  
In a space where questions such as 'where you see yourself in the next 5 years' have become redundant

Where moods don't just swing but often pirouette & oscillate  
And I dread reading my 'horror scope' not wanting to ask 'Will my day be good? Coz I don't dare challenge destiny any longer

Awaiting the day when onions might cry for a change  
Just then the serious face of my wall clock, whose only purpose is to tick & tock,  
Tells me, I have 'free time' & I wonder, is that even true?  
Or am I losing touch & forgetting things to do

No schedules, no agendas, no deadlines; The mind suddenly has infinite space  
I decide to continue thinking of all those times when we thought & went 'Out of the Box'  
When one flight of my thoughts crashes & there are no survivors left, I simply board another I have resolved to remain friends with those like me who get high on coffee & just don't give up  
Who knows who is watching us in those Boxes called FB & Insta  
We ought to keep inspiring each other no matter what!

Doors might shut but I can still lift my hands & push open the window, can't I?  
Did you know that it takes 18 months to harvest sweet

sugarca; Around 24 months to harvest succulent pineapples  
And almost 60 months to get that first creamy avocado?

Waiting can be taxing, especially when that 'Tax Box' must be ticked  
But then isn't a slow cooked meal most delectable?  
I can sense abundance is coming, probably it was in the fattening house  
Its overweight form stuck somewhere in the tunnel momentarily blocking out the light  
Until it finds its way to us, let's devour those diet Boxes  
Let's stop counting our falls & instead count the number of times we have risen!  
Together let's wait for the day when we will have plans  
And really dress up completely & step out to celebrate

Till then let's hang in that safety Box  
Please don't ask me what I'm doing tomorrow,  
First let me figure out what I'll be doing today!  
I want to be that person who

ticks many Boxes on a 'To do List'  
But for now that list begins with "I want to sleep" because sleep heals!  
It's OK to let a day go by & get nothing done  
We will soon require all the energy that we can conserve  
Busy days are just around the corner

Believe in miracles  
Just like the 'Boondi' that transformed into a 'Jalebi' one fine day!; This time we are all inside the same Box  
And good things await us right there, 'Out of the Box'!



Renuka Natu  
Founder, Renuka Natu Travel Relations

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



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## EBIXCASH

### Delhi-NCR

EbixCash has appointed **SP Kothari** as a new independent director to the EbixCash Board. Professor Kothari has senior executive experience in government, academia and industry with expertise in strategic and policy issues, securities regulation, auditing, and corporate governance. He is a Gordon Y Billard Professor of Accounting and Finance at MIT's Sloan School of Management. Most recently, from 2019 to 2021, he served as Chief Economist and Director of the Division of Economic and Risk Analysis at the US Securities and Exchange Commission.



## THALES

### New Delhi

Thales has announced the appointment of **Ashish Saraf** as Vice President and Country Director for India. In this role, he will lead the company's India business and will be responsible for the strategic growth of Thales in the country across all of its markets, further strengthening local teams, collaborations and innovation. He succeeds Emmanuel de Roquefeuil who takes up a new role as the VP and head for Thales in the Middle East. Prior to joining Thales, Saraf served as the President and Head of Region for Airbus Helicopters - India and South Asia.



## THE LEELA PALACES HOTELS & RESORTS

### Mumbai

The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts has appointed **Gautam Srivastava** as Vice President - Corporate Human Resources. In this role, he will drive and implement the people strategy of the company, as it embraces the next new phase of its growth trajectory. Srivastava brings with him over two decades of rich and diversified experience in hospitality, ITeS, banking and insurance. Prior to joining The Leela, he spent close to a decade in the insurance industry with Max Life Insurance and Apollo Munich Health Insurance.



## SIGNUM HOTELS AND RESORTS

### Delhi-NCR

**Sonia Sharma** has been appointed as Associate Director – Talent & Culture at Signum Hotels and Resorts. A self-motivated human resource professional, she comes with over a decade of experience in hospitality. Sharma has previously worked with Hyatt Hotels, Conrad Bengaluru and ibis Gurgaon. In her last assignment, she contributed her expertise as HR Manager at Oblu Select at Sangeli, Maldives. At Signum Hotels, Sharma will lead the company's Human Resources, Learning & Development initiatives.



## WELCOMHOTEL BY ITC HOTELS

### Bengaluru

**Amandeep Kaur** is the new General Manager of WelcomHotel by ITC Hotels, Bengaluru. Earlier, as Resident Manager, ITC Gardenia, Bengaluru, she was responsible for the operations of the hotel including the front office, food & beverage, and housekeeping. Along with operational excellence, her core skills constitute excellent people management & team building skills while driving a result-oriented, passionate and ethical work culture. Kaur started her career at ITC Grand Central, Mumbai, as a member of the pre-opening team.



## THE LEELA BHARTIYA CITY

### Bengaluru

**Manvi Chopra** has been appointed as the Public Relations & Marketing Communications Manager at The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru. Chopra ventured into the hospitality industry with her last stint as the Public Relations Manager for Taj Coromandel, Chennai. After a strategic transition from healthcare to hospitality, she has been developing and executing winning communication strategies for multiple brands for over eight years. She now brings her expertise and vast industry knowledge to The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru.



## THE WESTIN

### Goa

The recently-launched The Westin Goa has appointed **Sneha Jha** as Director of Sales. An accomplished professional constantly striving towards excellent quality and enriching customer service, she aims to strengthen the dynamic of The Westin Goa by enlivening every guest experience and delivering quality work. Jha was previously also the Director of Sales for JW Marriott Mumbai, Juhu and brought to the table proficient expertise and immense knowledge in sales and marketing, hotel operations, customer service and business development.



## THE LEELA BHARTIYA CITY

### Bengaluru

With The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru, located in the sprawling 125-acres of SEZ in Bhartiya City, set to open its doors soon, the hotel has unveiled its recent appointments to senior management positions. **Anmol Pancholy** has been appointed as Director of Sales & Marketing, and brings on-board a rich experience of working with a diverse portfolio of hotels under brands like Taj and Accor group of hotels. His last stint at Novotel - Hyderabad International Convention Centre has inculcated in him belief in participative leadership and collaborative work.



**Amit Bhattacharjee** has been appointed as Cluster Procurement Manager at The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru. He comes with a vast experience in task force assignments to open new hotels across the country. Bhattacharjee has worked with five top brands of Marriott International, many of which have been during the pre-opening stage. He now brings his expertise to the 281-room The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru that is designed to cater to the needs of those who seek modern amenities woven around true luxury hospitality in urban locales.

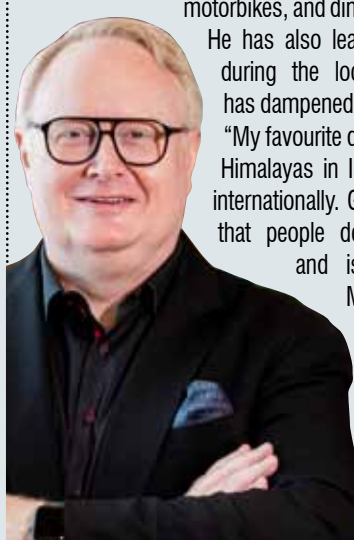


## TALKing People

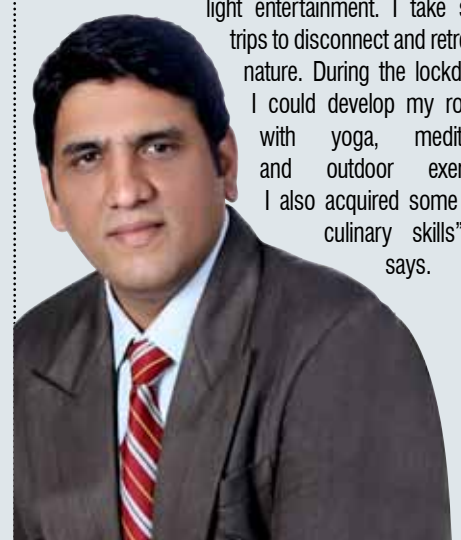
**Sumeet Suri**, General Manager, JW Marriott Kolkata, unwinds with a good morning workout which includes long walk, sports or yoga. "Having my daily cup of Americano and spending time with family and my pet Taffy also gives me a window to de-stress. And of course, watching movies once in a while!" he says. During the lockdown, Suri has managed to pursue his interest in sports such as cycling and tennis. Since he has recently moved to Kolkata, he looks forward to exploring the east of India.



**Chris K Franzen**, Area Vice President Hyatt Hotel Corporation and General Manager Grand Hyatt Mumbai Hotel & Residences, enjoys his cigars, motorbikes, and dining with friends. He has also learnt to meditate during the lockdown, which has dampened his travel plans. "My favourite destination is the Himalayas in India and Guam internationally. Guam is a place that people don't talk about and is next to the Mariana Trench, the world's deepest place – full of mystery!"



Meditation and exercise help **Aejaz Sodawala**, CEO at eZee Technosys, release pressure effectively. "I also enjoy cross-genre reading and spend time watching light entertainment. I take short trips to disconnect and retreat in nature. During the lockdown, I could develop my routine with yoga, meditation and outdoor exercise. I also acquired some nifty culinary skills" he says.







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## Exhibit A



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# India's new treasure: Manipur

A new destination for domestic as well as international travellers, Manipur has been arming itself with new tourism products to ensure that it gets noticed by the world at large. **W Ibohal Singh**, Director (Tourism), Government of Manipur, shares more developments.



Hazel Jain

**Has there been a change in strategy for Manipur Tourism for the domestic market given that traveller trends may have seen some changes?**

We have been lately expanding our target markets towards the eastern and western parts of India. Our promotional campaigns were initially concentrated in markets like Delhi and Punjab. We have been slowly taking our campaigns to states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. Post COVID, we also plan to connect with our target markets in the south.

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

We are reaching out to our travel partners who help us market our tourism products to the world. We reached out to the travel trade in Manipur in order to help them, and bring about a symbiotic effort towards a quick recovery of the sector. We took up relief measures in terms of a one-time financial support of ₹1,00,000 for all tour operators and agencies in the state recognised by the Ministry of Tourism. We plan to continue to support them and also to involve them in our promotional efforts once normalcy is restored.

**What are some of the lessons learned in the background of COVID over the past one year?**

The past one year has been quite challenging for the tourism industry of Manipur. We were not fully prepared for a crisis of this scale as we have never witnessed a situation like a pandemic before. We believe that it is inevitable for the global travel communities and authorities to come together if we are to bring about a quick and real recovery. We have to



stick to protocols for the new normal and replicate and adapt to new practices which have been proved successful in containing the spread of the virus.

**Tell us about any new focus on attracting new traveller segments from rest of India.**

We have been developing various destinations and circuits over the past few years in order to add new products to our portfolio. We plan to focus on our

We plan to focus on our strengths such as adventure, nature and our cultural heritage while looking to attract travellers

strengths such as adventure, nature and our cultural heritage while looking to attract travellers from other parts of India. Also, the MICE travel segment and wedding tourism is something we are yet to explore. Moreover,

we are taking up several projects to develop tourist attractions like the Dzuko Valley trek in Senapati District, heritage tourism at Yangkhullen Village in Senapati District, eco-tourism at Loktak Lake in Bishnupur District and cave tourism project in Ukhrul District.

**What is Manipur Tourism's main area of focus right now?**

Manipur is a new destination to many domestic and international travellers. Our main focus is to attract more travellers to our state through active promotion while leveraging on our strengths. We are also developing infrastructure as well as rural tourism to attract new traveller segments from across the country. We have been encouraging people to develop homestay facilities in their districts and a guideline for establishing homestays was released last year.

**Tell us about developing the war tourism site in Manipur.**

Manipur has been witness to several battles during the course of its history. The Battle of Khong-

jom is considered the greatest of all the battles fought during the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891. It brought to light the valour of the Manipuris and their stand against colonialism. A war memorial has been successfully constructed at Khongjom, Thoubal district, under the Swadesh Darshan scheme of the Ministry. Also, the events that conspired in the state during the course of World War-II makes it all the more important for us to put several war tourism sites on the tourism map of Manipur.



W Ibohal Singh  
Director (Tourism), Government of Manipur



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