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- Sports tourism, a great magnet08
- 'Play virtual and win actual' 16
- Recovery on the cards for tourism ...14
- Allow charter flights into Goa.....20

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India to open to APAC first

Arvind Singh, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, has said that India will partially reopen its borders for some regions by the end of 2021 and that Asia Pacific will be a priority.

Nisha Verma

Stressing on the fact that domestic tourism is growing manifold, Arvind Singh, in conversation with Mario Hardy, CEO, PATA, said that for international tourism, they will be following a gradual approach of opening. However, he indicated that India might open tourist visas first to the Asia Pacific region. "The discussion we have had with Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Home, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, and Ministry of Civil Aviation is that they favour a calibrated approach, which means that we open up for

certain regions and in that, Asia Pacific ranks high. They feel that the disease is under control in the Asia Pacific region and we might see a partial or some opening of the tourist visas for

Our system is ready and we don't have too much paperwork for inbound travellers



Arvind Singh
Secretary, Ministry of Tourism

this region first. Different dates are being discussed and once the vaccination programme establishes itself in the US, Europe and countries in the Western

Contd on page 8 ▶

'India ready for business'

Rakesh Verma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism (MOT), says that the industry conducting physical events has helped build confidence in people and that revival is not too far ahead.

Nisha Verma

Rakesh Verma has said that as tourism opens, the MOT must support the industry. "The MOT needs to support the industry in terms of new growth markets, putting the entire ecosystem in place, or digitalisation of different segments including attractions and destinations, because that will bring a lot of productivity gain and many benefits to both the industry and the Ministry. Hence, that will remain one of the focus areas," he shared.

Speaking on the sidelines of ITM Virtual 2021, he said that they



Rakesh Verma
Joint Secretary
Ministry of Tourism

have received good response for the NIDHI scheme. "We have around 38,000 units registered on the NIDHI platform. We are talking to OTAs and other part-

A thriving tourism industry is vital for India's journey towards being a \$5 trillion economy

ners that we can create a common shareable database with, so that it's a win-win proposition for everyone. Once we have this comprehensive database, it will give us a much better

Contd on page 15 ▶

SEIS on new IATO team's agenda

IATO concluded its biennial election recently, where Rajiv Mehra was elected as the new President and EM Najeeb was re-elected as the Senior Vice President of the Association. The office bearers and EC are a mix of new and old faces.



Rajiv Mehra
President

"I never believed that I would become the President of IATO, which is the leading tour operators association of the country. I am really overwhelmed with the result and the responsibility that has been bestowed upon me. There are a lot of things to be done and the time I am taking over is riddled with a lot of problems. The COVID-19 pandemic hit the industry hard and recovery will definitely take some time, so we will work in that direction to help our members. We have to work hard for the survival and revival of the fraternity and I will do my best to do that. First thing I have to do is to get the orders released for no subscription charges for next year. Then, we had promised an App within 7-10 days, and we will try to do that. Also, we need to follow up with the Ministry of Tourism (MOT) for the MDA reduction rates and SEIS, and then get after them to announce the dates for the e-visa and flights. These are some of the things which we will do as a team."



EM Najeeb
Senior Vice President

"I accept the mandate of the members. Currently, the industry needs a lot of support as it's in a very bad situation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The people are suffering and unfortunately, the industry's requests have not been favourably heard by the government either. Even our legitimate claim of SEIS is in cold storage. I think, we need to push that again along with all the other requirements and get this done. There is a lot that still needs to be done and with the industry taking a turn for the worse due to the pandemic, we will have to strategise on how we can work towards upliftment of the sector and our people. There are many things that we could not achieve in the last term, and now we can put forward the same. The idea is to work with the entire membership and revive the industry. So, our focus will be to work for the membership and help them improve their businesses."

Contd on page 11 ▶

Maha's three-pronged approach

Valsa Nair Singh, Principal Secretary (Tourism), Government of Maharashtra, says that their work in three verticals will surely aid the sector's revival.

Manas Dwivedi

Valsa Nair Singh says that revival of tourism can be in many ways. "One can be by providing concessional packages, second can be by infrastructural support from the government, and third can be by way of policies. So, these are the three verticals we worked on," she says, adding, "To get more investment in the hospitality sector in the state, we implemented two policy changes. One was to focus on the ease of doing business in the sector in which the post-operationalising licences were reduced to 10 from



Valsa Nair Singh
Principal Secretary (Tourism)
Government of Maharashtra

70, which makes things easier and everything is done online. The second was announcing

Contd on page 19 ▶

 IT'S MORE FUN IN THE
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'Meet in India' for MICE

Recognising India's immense potential as a MICE destination, Ministry of Tourism plans to launch its 'Meet in India' campaign starting from Khajuraho. The campaign will be a distinct sub-brand under 'Incredible India' to promote the country as a MICE destination.

 Manas Dwivedi

The Ministry of Tourism, in association with Madhya Pradesh Tourism and India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB), will be organising a MICE roadshow – Meet in India – in the heart of incredible India from March 25-27, 2021 at Chhatrasal Convention Centre in Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh. This event will be an effort under Aatmanirbhar Bharat and will focus on realising India's true MICE potential.

Ministry of Tourism will partner with ICPB in hosting 100 qualified buyers from Delhi and other cities at Khajuraho. These buyers and industry stakeholders will be provided transport, accommodation and F&B, and would experience the attractions of Khajuraho and nearby places as well. A state-of-the-art convention centre has recently been constructed at Khajuraho, which will be inaugurated on the occasion. The convention centre would



give added boost to Khajuraho as a MICE destination.

The event will also allow deliberations on the draft Master Plan being prepared by the Ministry to develop Khajuraho as an iconic destination. A number of hard and soft interventions have already been proposed to develop Khajuraho. The event will provide tremendous boost to the central Indian city as an iconic tourist destination, particularly its MICE potential.

For the roadshow, the Ministry will seek participation

of Ministry of Civil Aviation, Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Culture, ASI and other relevant Central government ministries and organisations. The Ministry is also inviting various state tourism departments and some of the select city governments.

Prahlad Singh Patel, Minister of State (I/C) for Tourism and Culture; **Shivraj Singh Chouhan**, Chief Minister, Madhya Pradesh and **Usha Thakur**, Minister for Tourism and Culture, Madhya Pradesh, will grace the occasion.

Also at the event, ICPB Madhya Pradesh state chapter's roadmap for promotion of MICE tourism and sub-brand 'Meet in India' under 'Incredible India' will also be launched. The event will comprise knowledge sessions, an exhibition, B2B meetings with exhibitors and buyers, city tours, post-event tours, etc. The roadshow will be an opportunity to focus on the government's initiatives in developing India as a MICE destination with suitable infrastructure and an ecosystem pan-India that will favourably place India amongst global competitors. 

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VIEWPOINT

Too early or too late?

Across the world, as in India, the vaccination drive is on in full swing. And while it has come as a ray of some much-needed hope, its positive impact on the industry is yet to be felt. The air has been abuzz with talks that travel & tourism, both domestic and international, will pick up almost revengefully once people begin to get vaccinated and gain the confidence to travel.

A key observation here would be that domestically, people began to travel as soon as state borders opened. Internationally, too, destinations like Dubai and Maldives witnessed a never-seen-before surge in travel from India owing to them opening for international tourism. The inoculation drive is an ongoing process and it will be a while before the country can boast of a fully-vaccinated populace. But, could tourism, even MICE, wait till then? There may be a need to revise norms of travel, and revise them quickly. It has repeatedly been said that India has everything to offer to travellers, but if borders don't open soon, it may well be a massive opportunity lost.

All talk and no action

Ever since the pandemic hit the travel and tourism industry and businesses were deeply impacted, there have been innumerable discussions on what the situation is, where it is headed, how the government must come forth to provide a helping hand to the sector, and how stakeholders must unite to help themselves and others to rise above the adversity. However, come election season, and priorities take a turn that's not for the better. Is that the message that opposing parties should send out at the time of a pandemic?

Shouldn't tourism's recovery and the betterment of the people in the industry be a priority for its leaders as they let differences in opinion take a backseat? Now more than ever, it is imperative that tourism leaders look at the bigger picture and learn to work together towards the revival of the sector, else all efforts would go down in history as all talk and no real action.

There's still room for hotels

In its recent report titled 'Room for Growth', HVS ANAROCK finds that while there is still room to build hotels in India, careful planning is needed to develop the right type of property in the right market.



Our major cities still lack the critical tourism infrastructure needed to boost hotel demand. India cumulatively has less organised hotel rooms (excluding aggregators) compared to its peers in Asia, especially when viewed under the lens of the country's population and its demographic profile. For instance, China, its closest comparison in total population, has nearly nine times more organised hotel supply. There is significant demand-supply gap even in our key cities such as Delhi-NCR, Mumbai and Bengaluru, which still have the lowest proportion of branded hotel rooms among the major Asian hotel markets,' says the report.

India's most developed markets still the smallest in Asia
The three key cities in India have the lowest proportion



heights driven by increasing demand in the pre-COVID era and the current crisis is just a speed-breaker in its path. As a famous adage goes, "in every crisis lies an opportunity", this

and economic factors have been driving the growth in the hospitality sector, with both leisure and business travel on the rise. However, the absolute inventory of hotel rooms

to IATA. The hotel sector relies heavily on the aviation sector from demand perspective. But, the penetration of hotel supply to passenger traffic is less than half of the closest international city in Asia.

HOTELS SECTOR VIS-À-VIS POPULATION



of branded hotel rooms compared to other major Asian markets. These three cities, the most mature markets in India, must combine their branded supply to match Singapore's.

Factors driving hotel room demand

The Indian hotels sector was poised to grow to greater

calamity can also be turned into an opportunity for the sector as this is perhaps an opportunity time to invest in hotels.

Factor 1: Population

India is the second most populous country in the world, with one of the largest working-age population globally. The favourable demographics

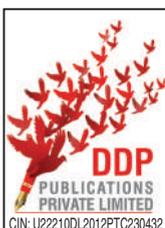
in India relative to market size (measured in this regard by the city's population) remains one of the lowest not only in Asia, but also the world.

Factor 2: Air Passenger Traffic

India is set to become the world's third-largest aviation market by 2024-25, according

Factor 3: Grade-A office stock

Another key catalyst for hotel demand is the size and the growth of the commercial office market as a large part of demand in major cities across the globe is led by corporate activity. India has witnessed significant increase in grade-A office stock in the past few years, driven by its robust economic growth and development of a thriving services sector, especially in the Information Technology (IT) and Information Technology Enabled Services (ITeS) industry. Despite the large commercial office stock, room density per million square feet of grade-A office stock in Indian cities is the lowest. Bengaluru, which has the largest grade-A office stock amongst these 10 Asian cities, has the lowest hotel room density per million square feet of grade-A office stock. Meanwhile, Delhi-NCR and Mumbai's room density by grade-A office stock is four times less than their closest peer, Jakarta.



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Breaking News

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- FHRAI empanels IRCTC as accommodation partners for members
- Curate tourism festivals & make them intellectual properties: Naveen Kundu
- Special Holidays launches new domestic travel portal, Ghumney.com
- BLS International to accept visa applications for Embassy of Thailand
- ASQ hotels now on TravelBullz, new opportunity for agents to earn
- Radisson Individuals debuts in India, first hotel in Imphal
- GPS Connect launched as 1-yr long virtual exhibition for all-India buyers

Sports tourism, a great magnet

The grand prize for the VisitBritain Cricket Carnival Season-1 is tickets to see India play against England at Old Trafford cricket ground in Manchester. Some top travel professionals in the country, who watched the India versus Pakistan World Cup 2019 match live at the venue, share their experience while also praising the contest.



Deepak Rawat
Senior VP, International Markets, MakeMyTrip

“It was one of the most exciting matches. What made it even more exciting was that India came out to be the winner. Even exploring the beautiful surrounding region starting from Manchester to the entire Lake District area and Windermere, is a memory to cherish. The VisitBritain Cricket Carnival is the best thing that could have been done for a cricket-crazy nation and to get more people engaged in a cricket event. It’s happening virtually, which would be very exciting.”

“The atmosphere both inside and outside the stadium was electrifying. VisitBritain is a great host and we were in the VIP enclosure. We had a few MICE groups there for the match as well, and I even took time out to meet some of our key customers. Coincidentally, when we went out post-match to a hotel, we saw the Indian team celebrating as they were staying there. I think the VisitBritain Cricket Carnival is a great way to mobilise and engage trade partners.”



Vishal Suri
Managing Director SOTC Travel



Sunil VA
Regional VP, ISC and APAC Oman Air

“It was a privilege to partner with VisitBritain to take our top trade partners to Manchester. Most of the people in the group were cricket enthusiasts, and the best part was that our hotel was very close to the stadium and we could watch the festivities outside. Inside, it was a full house and the atmosphere was electric. I think it is the perfect time to have the VisitBritain Cricket Carnival, and it’s a great start since there are many cricket enthusiasts in the trade who have gone through a lot.”

“I had a great experience when in 2019 I got to witness India play Pakistan at Old Trafford. I think the weather was ideal for watching cricket and the crowd was amazing. I witnessed it with my family and friends. I think it’s a must for everybody to watch cricket in the UK. The VisitBritain Cricket Carnival is definitely going to be exciting, especially because people can play it on an App, and technology is something everybody is used to today.”



Ankush Nijhawan
Managing Director Nijhawan Group



Sanjay Arya
Chief Executive Officer KFT Holidays

“I started watching cricket in England in 1983. The last match I saw there was the India-Pakistan one in Manchester in the 2019 World Cup, courtesy VisitBritain. It was an out-of-the-world experience and it was electrifying. I also participated and made my team in the VisitBritain Cricket Carnival contest and played the last game. It was interesting to see what was happening, although I didn’t win. I hope a lot more people from the trade be a part of it.”

Inputs by Nisha Verma

Testing capacity will need boost

► Contd from page 3

Hemisphere, they would be in the next phase of opening of international tourist visas.” That said, the Secretary added that any discussion regarding opening of land borders with neighbouring countries is definitely not on the cards right now. “For instance, Bangladesh borders are shut and

will remain so for some time. However, in terms of opening of air travel and easing of visa restrictions, it is being discussed that either the travellers should have a negative RT-PCR report 72 hours prior to departure or a proof of vaccination,” he shared. And, when Hardy asked if India would open its borders before the end of 2021, Singh affirmed,

saying, “Yes, there will be some sort of reopening. It all depends on the result of the vaccination programme in India and abroad. However, I am sure that at least there would be a partial opening to some regions of the world in this calendar year.”

Easier protocols

Sharing how easy it is to abide by the new protocols for international travellers, Singh said, “We have been working on it. As we open for visas and international travel, these procedures would need tweaking because numbers will go up, so testing capacity or processing capacity at the airports will need to be augmented. However, I think our system is ready and we don’t have too many glitches or too much paperwork for inbound travellers.”

Working with PATA

The MOT Secretary also said that they would like to work with PATA in the future. “As we open, especially for international travel, we have to create a sense of

Swadesh Darshan scheme to be recast

Speaking at the ICC ‘Travel India 2021’, Singh shared that they are revamping the Swadesh Darshan scheme.

“We are in the process of recasting the Swadesh Darshan Scheme and we may come out with a refined version shortly. If there are any suggestions by stakeholders for recasting the scheme, we will consider that as well. We have a focus on rural tourism and the Swadesh Darshan scheme has

been launched for the integrated theme-based development of tourist circuits. This is aimed at developing tourism infrastructure, including last-mile connectivity in the country,” he said.

Singh added that a national tourism award has also been designed in the category of ‘Best Rural Agri Plantation Project’ to motivate stakeholders in the tourism sector for implementing such projects. On the subject of development

of tourism-related infrastructure at Buddhist sites, he said, “A total of five projects for an amount of ₹353.7 crore have been sanctioned for the development of Buddhist sites under the Swadesh Darshan scheme. Projects for development of infrastructure have also been undertaken under the PRASHAD scheme, and a total of 30 projects for an amount of ₹918 crore have been sanctioned under the PRASHAD scheme.”

‘Vaccine is not the only solution’

“Health passports are not only about vaccination. Vaccination is not the only solution for travel recovery. Testing is also here to stay. It’s the combination of both — having the vaccine, having a way or mechanism to be able to track who is being vaccinated, when have you been vaccinated, what type of vaccine you’ve received, etc., and the same thing with testing. This is where the health pass is becoming critical for trans-border travel in the future.



Mario Hardy
CEO, PATA

My biggest fear or concern is that many countries and even private companies are now starting to create their own mechanisms. It’s important that moving forward, we have one standard protocol across the world for accepting testing. What type of testing is accepted is something that the countries have to decide.”

confidence among the travellers that all health and safety-related protocols are being followed by all the stakeholders in the tourism industry, be it the airports, taxis, hotels or guides at tourist spots. If there are some protocols or some expectations, we will work together to develop that kind of a message and have it generated throughout the country,” he claimed.

Supporting small business

When asked about supporting smaller business, Singh said that the only answer to that is more tourists.

“Smaller businesses are suffering more. On my recent trip to Kashmir, I saw that the smaller stakeholders are also getting smiles back on their faces because of the growing number

of domestic tourists. Essentially, we have seen the rebound in winter season in domestic tourism and if we have a good summer season as well, the pressure and pain on most of the other stakeholders will go down. In addition, we are working with the state governments and Ministry of Finance on lessening the burden on all stakeholders in this system,” he shared. ↴

Cricket a living bridge for India-UK

Alex Ellis, British High Commissioner to India and a cricket fanatic, says that the United Kingdom and India share a unique bond that's perfectly encapsulated in the passion for cricket in the two countries. 'I've played the game all my life and still do. I hope to be a part of the British High Commission team as well,' he shares.



Nisha Verma

Alex Ellis believes that there is a living bridge between India and the UK, and that apart from a shared history and trade ties, cricket plays a great deal in maintaining that.

"It was clearly visible with the 100,000 Indian fans who flocked to the UK for the 2019 ICC Cricket World Cup. At the moment, more than 600,000 Indian visitors come to the UK every year (not all for cricket!) but there are huge opportunities to increase that number and tourism will be very

important in continuing to further strengthen the people-people links between our two nations," he says, adding that 2021 is the year of UK-India cricket with the two teams playing multiple matches in each other's country.

Coming to how tourism can further strengthen the relationship between the two, Ellis says, "This living bridge is unique between the UK and India. It's driven by our shared history and a shared presence, and it must be an essential part of our shared future. There are over 1.5 million people of Indian heritage in the UK, which is



Alex Ellis
British High Commissioner to India

unmatched by any other country. The relationship between the two countries is strong, but could be much stronger and we can build on what we have already."

In order to attract more Indians to the UK, he suggests making all parts of the UK attractive to travel to. "It's great that Indians travel to Scotland, Northern Ireland, as well as to England and travel outside London. This makes me happy because it's a great country to visit with a beautiful countryside. We need

to make sure that the trade ties are thickening, and the investment ties are increasing. The flow of ideas follows the flow of people because we have to deal with some of the greatest challenges in the world, for example climate change and in the short term, COVID-19," he says.

Sharing a classic example of India and UK joining hands in the fight against COVID-19, Ellis says, "The Serum Institute is producing a large percentage of the world's vaccines, including the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine that is a combination of British thinking and Indian manufacturing muscle, and we need to combine these two things in many other areas as well. It's going to be about growth now. UK has left the European Union, and it has an opportunity with policies under its own control. Changes in immigration policy can make it easier for Indians to come to the UK, especially

working students. We see more educational ties, business ties and cultural ties between the two countries, in which cricket is a classic example."

Ellis also indicates that tourism businesses in India are important to push the message of the UK being 'the world's

ready to be more open. I will expect that to happen during 2021. The UK has vaccinated over 20 per cent of its population, and it's getting down to people between the age of 50 and 60. Hence, I believe that the UK is going to be open for tourism soon. Businesses across the UK are very mindful of people being comfortable and safe, and thus they have signed up for safety standards. Around 41,000 tourism businesses in the UK have signed up for safety standards to make sure that every tourist in the country feels comfortable and safe when they are in the UK. Hence, we need to build back from the extraordinary shock we've all had last year and I hope we'll include holidaying to the UK in that, whether it is to see India playing in the summer at the Lords or other great cricket grounds that we have, or to see the beautiful parts of our country."



Tourism will be important in continuing to strengthen the link between our two nations

most unexpected island', adding, "India and the UK have made great strides to make sure that both countries are

Players to look out for in India-England series

England	India
Ben Stokes	Rohit Sharma
James Anderson	Virat Kohli
Joe Root	Shubman Gill
Jack Leach	Cheteshwar Pujara
Jos Buttler	Ravichandran Ashwin

Campaigns helping resumption

Rani George, Principal Secretary - Tourism, Government of Kerala, says that the new tourism campaigns initiated by the state government are helping Kerala resume tourism. The department is also mulling a physical KTM later this year.



Manas Dwivedi

Sharing details on the new domestic campaigns of the state's tourism department, Rani George has said that the government has already rolled out its new domestic campaign around the theme 'A Change of Air' which has evoked good response from the market. The idea behind the campaign, she adds, is to position Kerala as a less-crowded and therefore safer travel destination.

"For the first time, the state has a novel campaign - Keralam Kanam - to inspire Keralites to explore Kerala. Also, with international travel restricted, the department has launched a special marketing campaign for honeymooners called 'Love is in the Air'," George shared, speaking at the virtual Kerala Travel Mart 2021.



Rani George
Principal Secretary - Tourism
Government of Kerala

The Tourism Secretary of the state also believes that Ayurveda, the ancient wellness system of India, can be an added attraction for arriving tourists.

"We are also seeking suggestions from tourism stakeholders in the state on how we can further promote domestic tourism in Kerala," she added. Listing a set of new heritage products, George specially invited tourists to visit the state's northern parts that have been given a fresh focus. She said that the

Malabar River Cruise project connecting seven rivers of the Kasargod and Kannur districts will unlock the tourism potential of northern Kerala.

Seeking to ensure welfare of tourism sector employees, an initiative called the Kerala Tourism Fraternity Social Welfare Cooperative Society (KTFCS) has also been launched in the state. "Although the government had many programmes to support the

tourism sector during the pandemic, KTFCS would be very helpful to those working in the sector," George said.

KTM & its future

Virtual KTM 2021 attracted 160 international buyers and around 550 domestic buyers. Around 300 KTM members also exhibited their products virtually as sellers. George shared at the valedictory session of the Mart that KTM Society and Kerala Tourism are planning to soon organise a physical KTM event later this year.

"While the virtual mart went off well and created another history for Kerala Tourism, the importance of a physical mart cannot be ignored. The department and the KTM Society will work together to hold a physical mart in August or September this year," she shared.



The importance of a physical mart cannot be ignored

Arun Kumar Singh joins FHRAI-IHM

The FHRAI Institute of Hospitality Management (FHRAI-IHM)

has appointed Arun Kumar Singh as its Director. An illustrious career spanning over three and half decades in Hospitality Management, Singh brings to FHRAI-IHM his expertise in institutional and academic administration. He will aid FHRAI-IHM's Research and Development and be a value-add to the institute's faculty. Prior to joining FHRAI-IHM, Singh served as the Principal of IHMCTAN, the Principal of Institute of Hotel Management of Lucknow and the State Institute of Hotel Management, Jodhpur. In his last stint, he played a pivotal role in obtaining a grant of ₹11 crore from Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, for upgrading the training facility at IHMCTAN Mumbai. In the recent past, he assisted the Maharashtra government in setting up the state's Institute of Hotel Management in Solapur.



Arun Kumar Singh
Director, FHRAI-IHM

"My tenure of 24 years in various Hospitality Management institutes has enriched my knowledge in the field. Over the years, I gained exposure to infrastructure creation and development, student empowerment and upgradation of knowledge and skill. Over the next five years, I aspire to lead FHRAI-IHM to become an institution of excellence in hospitality education by fostering knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurship. In this endeavour, I hope to make an impact on the industry," says Singh.

‘Must keep India agenda alive’

Rajeev Kale, President & Country Head – Holidays, MICE, Visas, Thomas Cook (India), believes that there is no better way to experience MICE than to do it by being physically present. To engage its corporate clients and understand their requirements, Thomas Cook (India) recently conducted the second leg of The Art of Travel roadshow, in New Delhi.

 Tripti Mehta

Rajeev Kale says that corporate clients have realised the importance of physical MICE events and though the world has warmed up to the idea of meeting virtu-



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

with, so we need to communicate better that we are ready for physical MICE. It is going to bounce back heavily and we need to be prepared. There is no alternative to a physical MICE event,” he said. Kale was speaking on the sidelines of The Art of Travel roadshow



ally, he believes that physical events will never go out of fashion even if they adopt a more hybrid approach. “It is very clear that when people are connected digitally,

there are technical problems. There is a need to get in front of the customers and communicate better with them. I think, physical MICE is going to stay forever. MICE is an art and this art needs to be experienced by travelling. Customers are ready, but there may be apprehensions that we need to deal

 It is important for tour operators and customers to realise the importance of what India can offer 

A balance between domestic & int’l MICE

“The corporate clients are very excited. They are asking questions, and that’s the first step. They want to travel to the countries that are allowing travel to happen. They’ve already got their itineraries prepared and there are general queries around what they could do with events, what they could do with MICE. Everybody is waiting for borders to open formally. In the short term, people are planning trips to Dubai and Maldives, and a lot of India is being requested as well. But, I think that in times to come, they will want to go to the West as well. We can’t predict what the numbers will look like, but I can tell you that it will be balanced - a lot of people are going to do domestic, a lot of people are going to do international. We have already done a few events which means that people are moving from fear to caution.”



Indiver Rastogi
President & Group Head, Global Business Travel Thomas Cook (India)

in New Delhi. The event included a panel discussion, a motivational session by model and actor Dr Aditi Govitrikar and table-top meetings. Various Marriott properties in India were part of this along with Tourism New Zealand.

This was the second city in a series, the first being Mumbai where the roadshow was conducted on similar lines.

Some amount of MICE movement has also already begun within the country, but once

international borders open, will domestic MICE movement take a backseat? Kale believes that in order to keep domestic movement alive, some work needs to be done. “It is very important for tour operators as well as customers to realise the importance of what India can offer. We also appeal to the tourism bodies in India to keep on making efforts in terms of promoting their own states. But, I don’t think domestic MICE movement will die out once international borders open. We, along with our hotel and airline partners, are there to work on this with support from state and central tourism bodies. We will have to keep the India agenda alive,” he asserted. Kale also informed that the roadshow will be conducted in other cities as well, including Kolkata, Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad. Dates are yet to be finalised. 

UNWTO marked International Women’s Day with the release of its Inclusive Recovery Guide for women in tourism that provides recommendations to policymakers & civil society actors for designing gender-responsive measures in response to the pandemic.

Making cruising great again

Waterways Leisure Tourism, that promotes Indian cruise liner Cordelia Cruises, is confident to provide a safe cruise vacation to its guests, right from getting on board to cruising and de-boarding. Besides Goa and Diu, this year the cruise liner plans to introduce itineraries for Lakshadweep, Sri Lanka and Maldives as well.

 Hazel Jain

Giving India its very own cruise brand, Waterways Leisure Tourism has been aggressively promoting Cordelia Cruises in the market. Sharing more details is **Jurgen Bailom**, President and CEO, Waterways Leisure Tourism, who says, “Waterways Leisure Tourism is more than just a cruise company – it is an entertainment company and we were looking at finding the right partner who understands India, understands hospitality and therefore we reached out to Sant Singh Chatwal who is a renowned name internationally and who understands hospitality and tourism well. We thought this would be a great partnership, and therefore we decided to go ahead with it.” Chatwal is the founder of the Dream Hotel Group.



Jurgen Bailom
President and CEO, Waterways Leisure Tourism

cabins and can accommodate 2,000 guests.

Coming to the most important point – health and safety – Bailom reveals that over the last 12 months, the team has worked with various ministries

 All travel agents can register with us online directly. The inventory is live 
– Jurgen Bailom

and port authorities to create an SOP which is of international standards. “Having said that, cruise ships already



Vijay Kesavan
Director - Sales & Marketing, Cordelia Cruises

make cruising synonymous with travel in India so our products will be available to every travel agent.”

Besides destinations like Goa and Diu, this year will see sailing to Lakshadweep and Sri Lanka with an itinerary for Maldives as well. “For west and east coast sailings, our home ports will be Mumbai and Chennai, respectively. We will also be sailing to the newly-launched cruise terminal of Kochi. Guests can choose from five-nighter weekday sailings and the two-nighter weekend sailings. This year we are also to introduce inter-porting and one-way itineraries,” Kesavan adds.

have high standards in terms of health and safety – it most probably took a bad rap during the pandemic,” he says.

Advanced B2B portal
Sharing details of the offers and itineraries travel agents can expect, **Vijay Kesavan**, Director - Sales & Marketing, Cordelia Cruises, says, “Our objective is to reach not just tier-I but tier-II and III audiences as well. The idea is to

Cordelia Cruises has launched special fares for its partners. Kesavan explains, “Along with an array of benefits like flex-

ibility to book with 25 per cent and to reschedule up to seven days prior to sailing date,

 Children up to 12 years can travel free on sailings until July 31, 2021 
– Vijay Kesavan

we have also introduced a special offer for families. Under this, children up to 12 years of age can travel free with us on sailings until July 31, 2021.”

Agents can register and avail these offers at <https://agent.cordeliacruises.com/login> 

Focus on more business for members

► Contd from page 3



Ravi Gosain
Vice President

“ I am thankful to all who voted for me. After months of hard work in connecting with members, it's good to see the result in one's favour. As the VP, my duties are membership development and overlooking convention and overseas seminars. Hence, I will try to build up a strong membership base, which would be my priority. Also, one of my dreams is to have a year-long convention, which would allow people to remain connected throughout the year, which is now possible through technology. I will discuss the same with the team and see how we can take it forward. We will conduct overseas seminars and we'll discuss how we can bring more business to members. ”

“ We look forward to working together and put the best for the membership and IATO forward, and work for the benefit of our members who have been suffering for the last one year. In the past year, the government has been taking care of various other sectors of the industry, but not tourism and its businesses. However, now is the time for tourism to take off. Hopefully, in the next few months, by the time Europe and most of the other tourism source countries get vaccinated, we will take it up with the government that they should support tourism in a bigger way. Now, if not survival, revival should come in a big way and we look forward to it positively. ”



Rajnish Kaisitha
Honorary Secretary



Sunil Mishra
Honorary Treasurer

“ I am there to work for the fraternity and I will do my best. The first thing I want to do as the Treasurer is to put a stop on unnecessary expenses after the pandemic. We want to give some benefits to the members. We want to waive off or give some discount on the annual fee of the members. We also have to make IATO stronger because in the last 38 years, we have only 352 members, and we have to increase this number. We can open a few other categories and include universities and states as our members. We want to increase the number so that members can have trust in IATO. Currently, we have around 700 members, including allied members. ”

“ I feel very happy that the hard work that we have put in since the last many months has finally been rewarded. We will try to request the new President to consider the points that we want to address, as we really want to change the constitution, which has been pending since a long time. We also want to request the President to reverse the previous law under which many of the Active members were demoted to Allied. We would also work for small and medium-size operators, for their interest, and since the tourism industry has been suffering for long, we would like to change our stance on how we talk to the government. ”



Harish Mathur
EC Member - Active

“ This is the first time I contested and won with highest votes in EC. I feel that since the IATO team now has members from two different contesting teams, the amalgamation of the team is very important. The most important factor is that we should try and fulfil the kind of words and promises that we have given to the fraternity. Whether it is the smallest or largest issue, we have to take them very seriously and cohesively decide on the same. We need to make sure that at the end of the day, an ordinary member, who does not have the so-called association support, starts getting that support or starts feeling good, especially after the pandemic. ”

“ We will try to work together and will try to address all possible immediate concerns that need to be worked on. The industry needs to revive business, which is critical. I hope we have full support of all the office bearers and Executive Committee members. We are committed to the members and we shall try our best to revive tourism as soon as possible and also get our benefits, which are due from the government, which should be declared soon. I hope we can work as a team for the industry, and that's our mission. I wish the new team works together as one to help the members in every way possible. ”



Deepak Bhatnagar
EC Member - Active



Manoj Kumar Matta
EC Member - Active

“ I am very happy to be elected into the new IATO team as an Active member of the Executive Committee, and in this role I will be working to serve the industry and the fraternity because we all have gone through a very tough time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the priority, according to me, would be to approach the government to start tourist visa as well as international flights. Without this, the tourism industry and our members will continue to suffer because their business has really taken a complete setback. Once this has been done, then people will have to look at going ahead with the marketing campaign. Also, we will approach the government to start international trade fairs, roadshows, etc. Besides that, SEIS is a crucial thing which will help people to work immediately in the industry. ”

“ This is my third term and I am grateful to the industry for giving me their blessings and support. We fought this election from two different teams, but in our manifesto there were a lot of common points that could be beneficial for our industry, and we aim to make a common minimum programme. That's what my effort would be and I am sure there would be no resistance to it. First and foremost is revival of business, getting SEIS and having it extended for a few more years. There are a lot of other things we fought on including transparency and inclusiveness, but as of now it's the question of our own survival, how do we revive our business, get e-visas introduced, etc. Maybe it's early for that, but we need to fight for SEIS, which should hopefully give some relief to our membership. ”



Tony Marwah
EC Member - Active



Vishal Yadav
EC Member - Active

“ I am thankful to all for supporting me. My basic priorities, excluding the manifesto that we had for our team while contesting, is to highlight and better represent the small and medium operators, because a lot of us have many issues post-COVID, which need to be highlighted in front of the government. I also want to work on some educational, language and knowledge forums for the betterment of our members as well as of their employees. Also, my focus would be to work on bilateral ties with other countries, thereby increasing business for our members. There is an urgent need for bridging the gap between the tourism industry and the academia in the country because post-COVID, everybody needs to support each other. We will also work with the Ministry to get an Industry status for tourism. ”

“ I am feeling wonderful that I have been selected for the second time in the Executive Committee. Members have given us a good mandate. We will be with the members and we will work for the members and support them at any given point of time. I want to thank all members who have voted for me, and came down to wait with us for the results and spent the whole day participating in the electoral process. I thank them from my heart for being with us. It's a very good feeling and we will be actively working for the members' benefits and helping them during this time of crisis, as this is the time they need our support the most. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the industry hard and now it is up to each one of us to work towards improving the situation being faced by all of us. ”



Zia Siddiqui
EC Member - Allied

“ I am very happy for being elected again and will restart my work and complete the unfinished tasks that I had started in my previous term. My passion in IATO was education and skill development. I would like to extend this to the micro and medium tour operators and will keep them ready to face the competition that is coming tomorrow after COVID-19. At that time, maximum work would be on the virtual platform. Hence, I will strengthen their knowledge on a virtual basis. My second passion is to get MOT approval for the micro or small tour operators. We will do that on a pan-India basis and the first year, I will help around 500 tour operators to get MOT approval and again next year, we will try for 500 tour operators and that's my priority. ”

“ I am very happy to be elected. My focus for my term in the Executive Committee in the 2021-2023 team of IATO will be to make sure that all the state tourism policies and issues should reach the Central government level. I will try my best to do that by making sure that most of the states remain connected to the centre, and there is an understanding between the two. This would allow smooth functioning and better resolution of issues at the state level and benefit members in every part of India. It will also facilitate a faster and more comprehensive revival of the business of tourism that has been affected severely due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The industry has gone through a lot, and it's time that we, as a team, help them revive their businesses. ”



Ashok Dhoot
EC Member - Allied



P Vijayarathy
EC Member - Allied

Inputs by Nisha Verma

Introducing

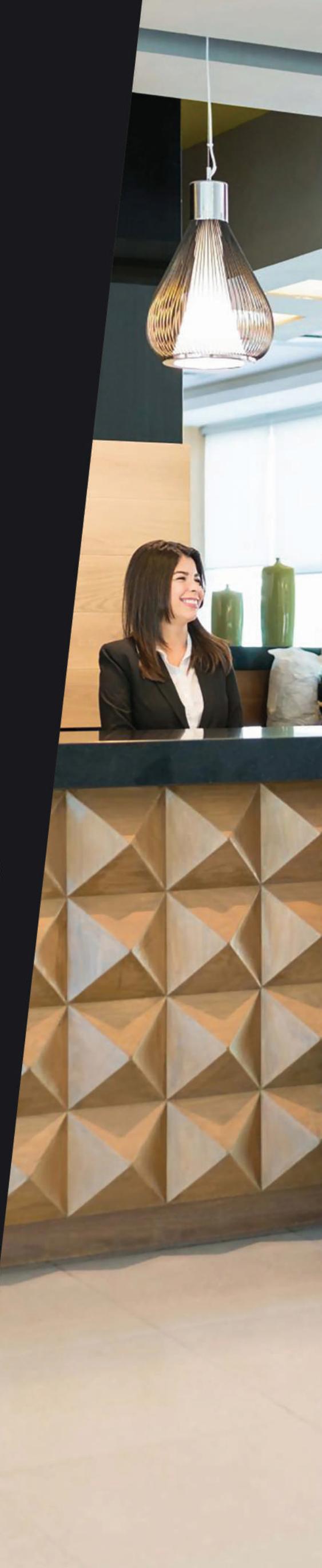
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Government of India



**Ministry of Commerce
& Industry**



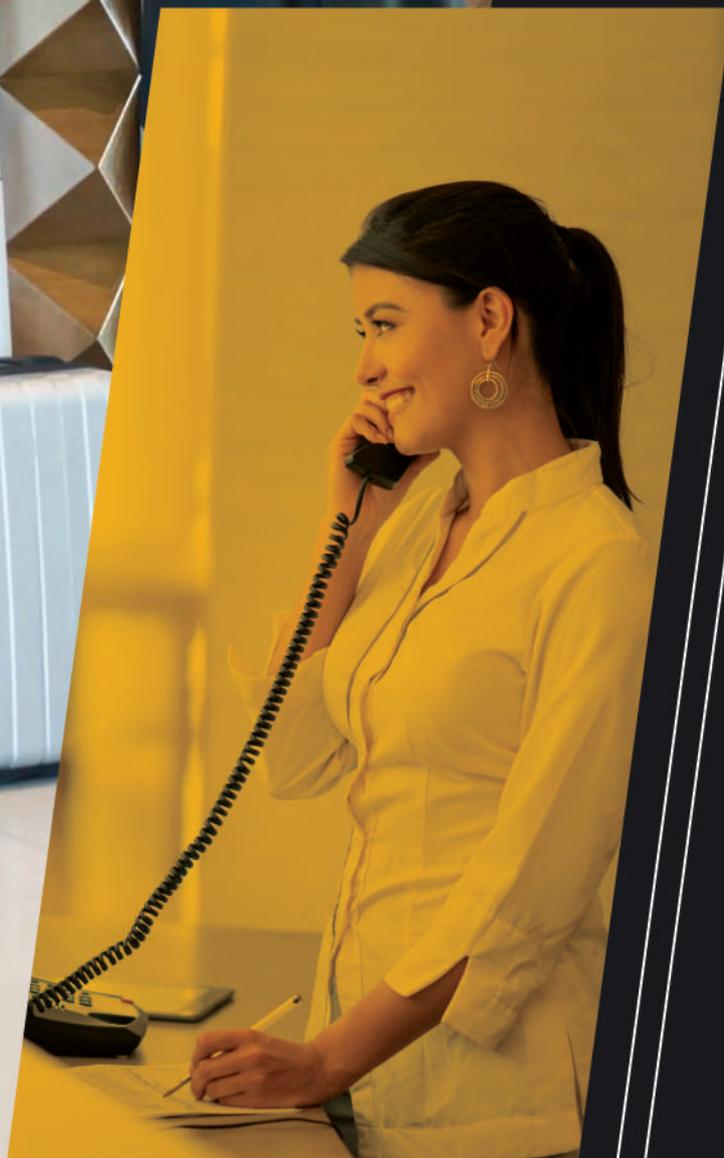
**QCI
Quality Council of India**



**NABCB
National Accreditation
Board of Certification
Bodies**



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Recovery on the cards for tourism



Findings of a global survey of travel advisors by leading marketing network, Travel Consul, shows that widespread vaccinations, free COVID testing and less restrictive quarantines are fuelling a travel recovery.



Vaccination, immunity passport key

Two-thirds of respondents agree that destinations and suppliers requiring immunity passports or e-vaccination certificates for international travel would likely boost bookings in 2021, while 44% of respondents agree that widespread vaccinations will also contribute to an increase. A third of travel executives believe that other factors such as destination health certifications, reducing quarantine requirements or offering free COVID-19 testing will have more impact on their business than widespread vaccination.

Comfort in rebooking

In a positive sign for recovery, 54% of clients are choosing to postpone their trips, as opposed to 35% who are cancelling. Of those clients who are postponing, 50% are looking to go where they had originally booked, with this figure going up to 55% in North America. Asian travelers who postponed trips have the highest rate of changing destinations at 30%.

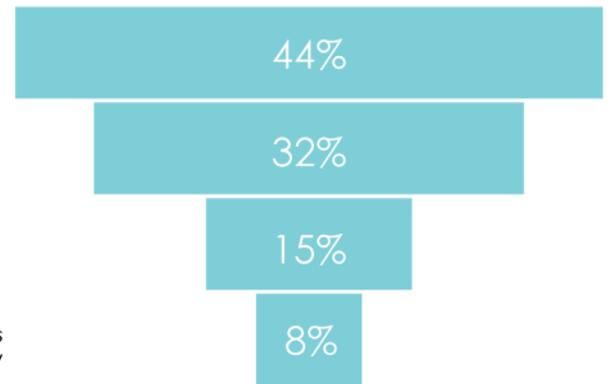
Widespread Vaccinations Will Stimulate Bookings

We expect a higher no. of bookings only when vaccines are widely administered

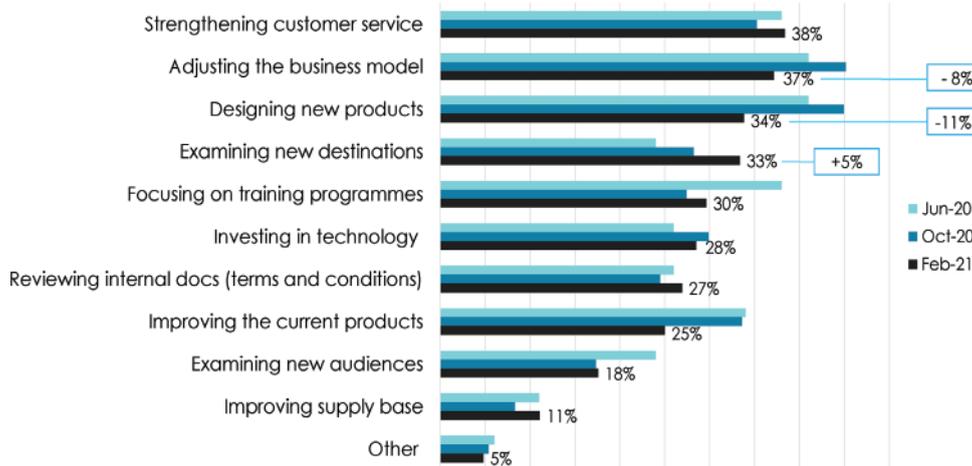
Other factors (e.g. destination health certificate, reducing quarantine, free covid-19 test) will have more impact

Our clients have not changed their booking patterns yet

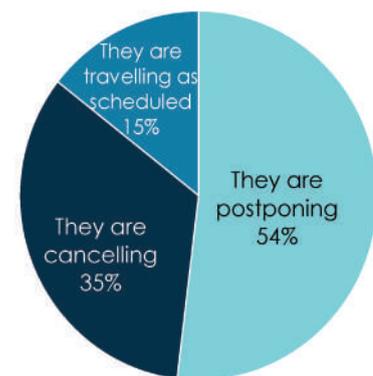
We are already seeing higher bookings with the news that a vaccine is on the way



Searching New Destinations Records a Consistent 5% Increase



Globally, Over Half Are Postponing Their Trips



Price & Access To Healthcare Systems Are Growing Client Considerations



Clients seek safe destinations

Consistent with 2020 results, clients are still concerned with destination health/safety certification as the primary factor when deciding on a final destination. Price and access to quality healthcare systems are also two growing considerations. Travel advisor respondents are seeing increased demand for solo travel, all-inclusive hotels and resorts as clients seek safe destinations to travel to, with 41% reporting high interest in this survey (an increase of 8% since the October 2020 survey). There is a huge jump in inquiries for all-inclusive hotels and resorts. Interest in all-inclusive resorts leapt from 16% in October 2020 to 39% in Q1 2021, while interest in hotels and resorts rose from 14% to 38% over this time period. These top three products are followed in popularity by small groups (22%) and fly-drives (21%).

Europe a favourite

Europe was ranked number one among the favourite continent or region to travel to in 2021, with 35% of the total of 1,292 respondents opting for this. Over 40% of clients, who are rebooking or showing some interest in travelling, said they plan to go to the destination they had originally booked. However, the largest percentage of 46% are waiting to see how the situation evolves before making a decision. When asked how best DMOs can help these travel agencies in recovery, the number one answer was 'introducing health and safety certificates for agents to feel sure the destinations are safe to send their customers with two out of three participants requesting help from these destinations. The next top three answers included marketing campaigns, presenting useful and timely data, and industry and media updates.

Favourite Continent/Region To Travel In 2021



Exploring 'Journeys in Arabia' with STA

Saudi Tourism Authority (STA) is in the process of building a network of international offices responsible for both trade and consumer marketing activities, to expand the reach and relevance of Saudi's tourism offer. Each market will be tasked with developing a tailored, strategic approach to most effectively engage with their target audiences.



Hazel Jain

What prompted it to promote Saudi Arabia as a leisure destination in these times?

We aim to achieve 100 million annual visits to the Kingdom by 2030, made up of both domestic and international travellers. To achieve this goal, we have developed a comprehensive strategy to drive the number of visits, increase spend and to build a leading tourism brand for Saudi. We have identified 15 priority leisure source markets spanning the GCC region, Asia, North America and Europe.



This is broken down further into three target segments: leisure, MICE and spiritual travel.

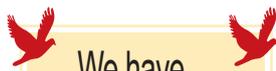
Since opening its doors to leisure tourism in September 2019, STA has unveiled many new destinations and experiences for audiences

from home and abroad. The campaigns highlight what Saudi has to offer today – its rich culture, deep heritage, diversity of landscape and unparalleled hospitality. It is the authentic home of Arabia: a place of exploration, of unique experiences. This is what we want the world to discover about Saudi.

What traveller segments are you targeting?

Saudi has a diverse and exciting offering when it comes to culture and heritage. The country is home to five UNESCO World Heritage

once the southern capital of the Nabataean kingdom, officially opened to tourism in October 2020. Located in AIUla, there are several exciting infrastructure projects in the pipeline, such as French architect Jean Nouvel's luxury resort in the Sharaan Reserve and Singapore luxury hotel group Aman's three eco-



We have identified 15 priority source markets, broken down into three target segments of leisure, MICE & spiritual travel

focused resorts. Diriyah, the birthplace of the Saudi state, aims to become one of the region's foremost destinations for historical and cultural knowledge-sharing activities and international events.

What are some of the new offerings that Indian leisure travellers will be able to enjoy when travel resumes?

In alignment with the Ministry

of Tourism, STA is rapidly laying the foundations for a thriving tourism ecosystem that will drive economic growth, create inclusive and sustainable employment and attract investment, while preserving the environment and the livelihood of local communities. Our approach is rooted in an understanding that the tourism sector needs to safeguard the environments, cultures and communities that underpin its appeal. All tourism developments are being examined through the lens of sustainability. The destination initiatives like the Red Sea, NEO, Qiddiya, Amaala, AIUla and Diriyah have sustainability at the core and are setting new global standards in managing the relationship between tourism and the environment.

Please share some on-ground updates for travel agents in terms of COVID protocols, requirements for travellers, and possibility of air connectivity resuming in the near future.

We continue to work closely with the Ministry of Health on health and safety standards. The Ministry has put in place comprehensive protocols for establishments to provide visitors and their families with a safe experience, which are aligned with the guidelines recommended by the WTTC.



❖ Free healthcare is provided to anyone in Saudi Arabia (citizens and visitors alike) affected by COVID-19

❖ Tracking and testing Apps have been introduced to help people assess their health and manage any and all quarantine requirements

❖ The Saudi tourism e-visa process is 100% digital, ensuring the reduction of touchpoints ahead of travel and upon arrival

What is the strategy that STA will have to promote and market the destination?

We are investing in developing strong relationships with key partners in the travel trade sector in all of our priority source markets. We are in the process of building a network of international offices, responsible for both trade and consumer marketing activities, to expand the reach and relevance of Saudi's tourism

offer. Each market will be tasked with developing a tailored, strategic approach to most effectively engage with their target audiences, be it workshops, roadshows, training & marketing campaign, or Fam trips.

What will be the visa process for leisure tourists into Saudi Arabia going forward?

The launch of the e-visa was a significant milestone in the opening up of the Kingdom. From September 2019 to March 2020, we had issued more than 400,000 tourist visas, and we are confident that we will exceed this target once borders reopen. Visitors from 49 countries are able to apply for the visit visa online, while other nationalities are able to apply for the visa at the Saudi embassy or consulate in their home country. ↴

Suggestions will be heard

▶ Contd from page 3

picture of and insights into the industry. This will help us in making those policies that can

help promote hospitality and develop this industry. I think it was a long-felt need and we have been successful in mak-

ing a good beginning. The MOT is also going to carry out an exhaustive survey of units. Hence, all information will get validated. It will be a very good platform for us to help the industry develop further," Verma added.

And, with the success of ITM in building trust and confidence, he said that India is back in the game and business. A physical ADTOI convention in Gujarat has also helped build confidence further. Concluding, he said, "A thriving tourism industry is vital for India's journey towards being a 5 trillion-dollar economy. With the mantra of 'Vocal for Local', India seeks to be 'Atmanirbhar'." ↴

Acting on recommendations

Talking about the KPMG report shared at ITM, Verma said that there were a lot of areas where the sector needed improvement through new policies and initiatives. "KPMG interacted extensively with FAITH associations, MOT, and other stakeholders in preparing the knowledge report. The report looks at the global scenario, Indian scenario, the critical success factors, impact of the pandemic, and way forward for various segments of tourism. I am sure that the knowledge report and the deliberations during the sessions would benefit Indian tourism immensely. There are lessons both for the industry and for the government. From the government side, the MOT would like to take these recommendations forward with other ministries and stakeholders in ushering new policies, programmes and initiatives for development and promotion of the tourism sector. We will be working on all the recommendations."

TAT updates trade on products



Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), New Delhi Office conducted a product presentation followed by networking lunch at The Oberoi Grand, Kolkata on March 5, 2021. Guests, which included travel agents as well as wedding planners, were also updated on the prevalent situation in Thailand owing to the worldwide pandemic.

‘Play virtual and win actual’

Speaking about the VisitBritain Cricket Carnival - Season 1, **Shuja Mehdi**, B2B Manager - India, VisitBritain, shares that this is the first time that it has launched a cricket-themed contest for travel agents across India, which would allow them to ‘play virtual and win actual’.

Nisha Verma

The focus is to use cricket for promoting the destination, says **Shuja Mehdi**, and adds, “The ongoing England-India series is a great opportunity for us to connect with the travel trade and to use that as a platform to engage with them. In partnership with TRAVTALK, we want to enrol travel agents into the contest and get them to play virtually. The second part of the campaign is engagement and education.



Shuja Mehdi
B2B Manager - India, VisitBritain

Here, we will be introducing quizzes on a weekly basis and sharing them with the travel trade. Even those who are

not taking part in the ongoing matches can still be a part of the quizzes, answer them and win exciting prizes. Engaging with the travel trade is a focal point of what we do in India”

The biggest appeal of the contest, according to him, is that it’s a fair competition. He also believes that though cricket binds the two nations together, sports tourism, in general, is always very big, be it cricket, lawn tennis, football or any other sport. As the tournament progresses and Season 1 goes on, Mehdi expects an even better response from the travel trade. “We are also generating a database and even after the series is over, we will engage with those who had put up their teams during the contest, to understand how we could improve the subsequent season of the campaign when we launch it,” he informs.



Gaurav Seth
Head of Trade Sales, India Outbound
Merlin Entertainments Group

“We, at Merlin Entertainments, are excited to partner with VisitBritain on this campaign and we will be giving two tickets to the winners for London Eye, the most iconic structure of London and two tickets to the Madame Tussauds Wax Museum, which is where it all started. It is one of the most historic wax museums around the world with over 250 wax figures inside it. These two are amongst the top things to do in London. Hence, we want the winner to at least experience this along with their partner.”

“With the India-England test match going on, it gives the audience a fantastic opportunity to build their fantasy team as part of the platform. The lucky winner of this contest will get a special hospitality package for one full day at the Century Lounge. The winner can enjoy a relaxed atmosphere and also enjoy the test match from an elevated balcony viewpoint or a reserved seat in the grand stand below. The official cricket hospitality packages are doing well.”



Dan Whitehead
Senior Business Development
Manager, Premium Ticketing and
Corporate Accounts, LCC



Zuheeb Hasan MZ
Founder, Travel Bee

“I won the third test match, which is incredible. This is a great initiative and can be extended beyond sports with travel quizzes as well. I used to play cricket at the state level but had to discontinue. However, I know the game and hence I chose players I thought would perform better. I am excited about the grand prize and participating in all games. Right now, I am concentrating on the games and how all the players are performing so that I can select a better team.”

Prizes to be won

“We have a whole bunch of prizes, from shopping vouchers to trips to the UK, which includes stay in hotels across Lake District as well as in other parts of North England. The grand prize is actually watching a live match in England. It will be two tickets to watch India vs England in the city of Manchester, in the hospitality lounge of the Old Trafford Cricket Ground, when India tours England in the summer,” says Mehdi. Winners of the third match have already been announced, and they had very good scores. The first winner will also enter the draw of the grand prize.

TAAI convenes in Kevadia



Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), in association with Gujarat Tourism, organised the TAAI Tourism Conclave at Statue of Unity, Kevadia, from March 9-12. The Conclave aimed to bring members together and brainstorm on the importance of domestic travel and new ways and opportunities for the industry.

Domestic bookings on Ghumney

Venturing into the domestic market, three-time National Award winner Special Holidays has now launched Ghumney.com — one of India’s domestic-only holiday travel portals.

Nisha Verma

Sandeep Jain, Director of Special Holidays and the newly-launched Ghumney.com, shares that with this initiative, they are following the Hon’ble Prime Minister’s vision of Dekho Apna Desh or ‘See India First’. “Ghum-



Sandeep Jain
Director of Special Holidays
and Ghumney.com



trips with instant assistance and confirmation.



ney.com is a platform that offers unique experiences and bespoke travel for wanderlusts who wish for conscious, green and sustainable tourism,” says Jain.

According to him, what makes the portal unique is its AI feature. “The AI guide assists and navigates to help you book instantly and set your special holiday in this new world of travel. Ghumney.com offers a unique blend of packages, hotels and activities to choose from, powered by

Ghumney.com
simplifies lengthy
travel logistics

Artificial Intelligence (AI) that guides and assists you in real time to help you design your dream vacation,” he shares.

The Ghumney App will also be launched within two weeks, enabling travellers to book their offline and online

Jain adds, “Ghumney.com simplifies lengthy travel logistics and assists fellow Indian travellers realise their wildest travel aspirations, and provides exciting and enriching travel experiences to further the mission of Incredible India. There is something for everyone at Ghumney.com, which is uniquely and exclusively Indian.”

Launch alert!

Ghumney.com and Special Holidays will unveil a new travel initiative on March 24 at SATTE Booth No. A-08.



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MICE ENGAGE 2021

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JTB India's 1st virtual MICE roadshow

JTB India's MICE Engage 2021, that will be held on April 28, 2021, will be a virtual platform to connect NTOs and hotel chains directly with key corporate clients. The show is also open to airlines, cruises, attractions and theme parks, and will focus on restarting travel post COVID-19 and discovering new business avenues.



Hazel Jain

With MICE travel from India slowly gaining momentum, JTB India will host a unique B2C virtual platform dedicated to MICE travel, slated to be held on April 28, 2021. JTB invites National Tourism Offices (NTOs) and global hotel chains to participate in this in order to take advantage of its wide corporate network.

The event will see attendance from top corporate companies in India that exhibitors can connect with directly on this platform. This will be JTB India's

first virtual MICE show ever. JTB is one of the leading travel service providers in the world, represented in 41 countries across



Perfect moments, always

the globe. It engages in five core businesses including outbound travel from India to overseas. It also specialises in domestic MICE within the geographies of India. JTB India's Strategic Meetings Management business provides a contracted programme for corporate customers. It is also an expert in arranging inbound travel from around the world into India. Finally, its education business focuses on organising international study trips for students from schools, colleges and educational institutions.

What is MICE Engage 2021?

MICE Engage 2021, with its proprietary exhibition software, will help NTOs and hotel chains recover, rebuild and innovate relationships and products. Although this is a virtual event, the goal is the same as live events – to introduce exhibitors to buyers, help grow the brand during these challenging times, and re-build long-term profitable business connections.

How will it help exhibitors?

JTB India's MICE Engage 2021 will focus on restarting travel post COVID-19 and discovering new business avenues. The show provides an opportunity to grow your network and engage with the key MICE player. Around 30 key exhibiting opportunities are currently available and the event expects more than 80 focused corporate attendees to be present during the show.

Why participate?

COVID-19 made 2020 very unpredictable and so it is important to start 2021 by rebuilding long-term business connections and relationships. At this show, exhibitors can build long-term connections with corporate clients. They will also get to meet decision-makers from companies. Buyers are handpicked for this event and the aim is to invite only the decision-makers. All exhibitors will have the option of pre-scheduled meetings.

Since it is only a day affair, the meetings will be focused and productive, with access to quality buyers within a short

span of time. The show has been scheduled in April with a focus on corporate travel trends and this will be the ideal platform to discuss budgeting for the year.

How does MICE Engage 2021 work?

All exhibitors and buyers will log-in to the MICE Engage platform from the comfort of their home. Each exhibitor will be given their own private virtual booth with branding, videos and document broadcast facilities. These can be customised per their requirements. Buyers can visit the virtual exhibition and individual stall of all exhibitors. This show is open

to National Tourist Offices, hotels and resorts, airlines and cruises, attractions and theme parks. They will have access to pre-scheduled meetings with corporates who attend the event. They will also be able to make one-to-one video meetings with them as well as chat with them to build a better rapport.

The platform will provide them with detailed analytics on the buyers, download patterns and meeting successes. They will have a dedicated 'Project Manager' to help resolve any issues they may face before or during the show, and ensure buyers visit their booth. Since this a virtual show, exhibitors will be able to provide product and COVID-safety briefings to an audience from all over the world. On the sidelines of this show will also be a dedicated thought leadership opportunity and conference.

Contact JTB India

For more information, contact Kritika Kunden at kritika.kunden258@jtb-india.com or Deepali Gupta at deepali.gupta040@jtb-india.com

How can exhibitors sign up?

- ✓ Contact JTB to book a space
- ✓ Set up the virtual booth with documents, videos, etc.
- ✓ Attend training sessions with staff
- ✓ Start match-making and book appointments with buyers
- ✓ Build relationships

Offbeat destinations leading the race

Sandeep Gupta and Gopal Kapoor, Directors, Dook Travels, share how in the post-COVID world, offbeat destinations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia will be the forefront of the global travel landscape. And though some of the CIS countries share a border with China, most experienced a far lesser impact than European and American countries.



Nisha Verma

For Sandeep Gupta and Gopal Kapoor, the COVID-19 pandemic brought about an unprecedented collapse of economic activity and severe restrictions on the movement of people. However, they share that despite some CIS countries sharing a border with China, most experienced a far lesser impact than European and American countries.

"Except for Russia, COVID-19 cases within CIS countries remained relatively low throughout the pandemic. However, the economic fallout that accompanied the virus hit the region hard. As the number of international tourists dwindled, countries like Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, where tourism forms a major block



Sandeep Gupta & Gopal Kapoor, Directors, Dook Travels

of the economy, were especially affected," says Gupta. Kapoor adds, "To revive their economies, many countries in the CIS region and Eastern Europe were the first to open their borders to international tourists. Though most countries have only opened partially, and certain restrictions like mandatory RT-PCR test reports persist, these offbeat destinations sparked the spirit of travel and adventure right after humanity was devastated by an unseen foe."

"Serbia was the first to open for tourism post COVID last year, when the EU announced a gradual easing of restrictions," Gupta points out, adding, "Since then, Serbia has been welcoming tourists with a negative RT-PCR test without quarantine. Ukraine soon followed suit and opened its borders in late September and Uzbekistan lifted restrictions in early October, allowing entry and unrestricted movement of foreign travellers with a negative RT-PCR test. Kyrgyzstan,

another CIS country dependent on tourism, opened its borders in mid-December, allowing tourists with a negative RT-PCR test to travel freely." However, Armenia particularly faced exceptional hardship, with economic decline and political instability shaking the country to its core, reveals Kapoor. "Eventually, Armenia moved on and opened up for tourists in early January of 2021. Again, a

negative RT-PCR test is all it takes to freely explore the kingdom. Russia faced a high number of infections and economic deterioration during the months of worldwide lockdown," he adds.

As the number of cases steadily declined and the first trials of the Russian vaccine 'Sputnik V' yielded successful results, the country opened its borders to the world. "Russia resumed all scheduled air traffic with India from February 14, 2021. A negative RT-PCR test remains mandatory for entry into the country," says Gupta.

With India already having mutual air bubbles with Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Russia that ensure direct flights for Indian travellers to these countries, Kapoor says, "Indians can

also travel to other destinations like Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Serbia, and Belarus via a

Indians can travel to Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Serbia and Belarus via a layover in Dubai
— Gopal Kapoor

layover in Dubai. Travellers can also journey to Belarus through connecting flights from Kyiv and Tashkent. Russia has also initiated an e-visa process for travellers from 54 countries, including India, making visa acquisition more streamlined and hassle-free."

Except for Russia, COVID cases within CIS countries remained relatively low
— Sandeep Gupta

New initiatives by Etihad Airways

For Etihad Airways, it is imperative that a guest's journey is planned as seamlessly as possible.



Planning international travel in a post-pandemic world surely is a different experience. The situation remains highly dynamic, as countries have different restrictions, various quarantine measures are in place and guidelines are constantly updated by governments and regulatory health bodies as the scenario changes. To make this pro-

cess easier, we have identified recent initiatives by the airline that you must know about, to manage your guest's bookings with ease while also ensuring they can travel with greater peace of mind.

100% of Etihad's crew on board has been vaccinated
Last month, 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



with COVID-19 during their trip, they won't have to worry about medical expenses or quarantine costs when they fly with Etihad. The airline has introduced a global COVID-19 wellness insurance as part of its health and hygiene programme, Etihad Wellness. This is included with every Etihad ticket up to October 1, 2021. The insurance is automatically effective following the first flight outside of the guest's home country and is valid for 31 days, or upon return to their home country if earlier.



and give passengers who travel with the airline added assurance of safety. This has consolidated Etihad's position as an industry leader in its response to the pandemic and in keeping its employees and travellers safe. Recently, Etihad was also awarded Diamond status for ensuring the highest standards of cleanliness and sanitisation in the inaugural 'APEX Health Safety, powered by SimpliFlying' audit.

Tech-first solutions by Etihad
Etihad leads the industry in creating, testing and implementing technologies that make travel safer, more sustainable, more enjoyable and with passenger wellness as the priority. The airline has also 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, it 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

Guests are insured for COVID-19 within the cost of the flight ticket
If any guest is diagnosed

Etihad offers charter flight services
Etihad has expanded its business with the launch of charter and special flight services. Fully customisable, business and leisure guests can choose from a variety of flight options including a dedicated passenger service, cargo-only flight or a combined passenger and cargo package.

Developing Konkan a prime focus

► Contd from page 3

PPP for investments." They are also believed to be in the process of working out a MICE board in Maharashtra which will lobby along with the private players to have more MICE events in the state. Singh says that they have developed Nashik as a good medium-segment MICE centre along with a new MTDC resort and grape wine park. In fact, she adds, "Banquet licences for hotels have been made into an annual process now. Electricity rate, electricity charges, water charges, property tax, development tax, increased carpet area ratio and non-agricultural tax shall be charged at industrial rates with effect from April 1, 2021, from the hotel entrepreneurs registered with the tourism ministry of the central government."

The state's 720-km-long coastline is also rapidly emerging as a prime destination for those seeking water sports and adventure tourism. As a result, the Maharashtra government has been



Valsa Nair Singh
Principal Secretary (Tourism)
Government of Maharashtra

pursuing multi-faceted initiatives to boost tourism.

Sindhudurg, centre of focus
Singh puts spotlight on promoting, developing and harnessing the potential of coastal and beach tourism, and emphasises on growing the Blue Economy in a sustainable and inclusive manner in Konkan. She also highlights some of the achievements and initiatives undertaken by Maharashtra government towards sustainable coastal tourism in Konkan. "Maharashtra state ranks number one in India in tourism. The 'Industry' status has been granted to the

hospitality sector recently and will be implemented from April 1, 2021. The first tourist district in the country lies in Konkan, i.e. Sindhudurg district. We have provided special incentives to the Special Tourism District under the Maharashtra Tourism Policy. We have also formed a public-private partnership model for MTDC resorts and open lands," she says.

The Maharashtra government also recently announced ₹3,000 crore investment MoUs this year. Investment MoUs were signed in Sindhudurg with Taj group, at Shiroda, Velgar and Fomento Resorts at Aravali Beach. A scuba diving centre, namely the Indian Institute of Scuba Diving & Aquatic Sports (IISDA), is already operating in Tarkarli, Sindhudurg. Moreover, MoU investments have been signed for resort and golf course under the tourism policy to Morve and Munge in Devgad – all in the Konkan region. Singh also highlights the initiatives undertaken to promote

tourism in the Konkan region, including beach shacks and other facilities, Swadesh Darshan Scheme and RTDS Projects in Konkan. The Beach Shack Policy will allow setting up of

environment for approval," says Singh. Under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme, development of theme-based Sindhudurg Coastal Circuit is expected to be fully completed by May 2021.

Other policies

❖ **Caravan Tourism policy:** The current trend is to avoid using public transport and taking shorter vacations. Singh says, "We have announced the Caravan Tourism Policy, which will take time to gain momentum and in a couple of years, will take off and be as popular as it is in the West. We have caravan parking bases as part of the policy. They can also tie up with hotels for parking. MTDC can collaborate with any caravan operator, and resorts with open spaces can also be used for caravan parking. We have incentivised caravan tourism and also partnered with certain resorts."
❖ **Agro Tourism Policy:** The Agro Tourism Policy has not been limited to farming and includes other activities like

wine-making, fisheries, etc. "We are providing incentives for that and have partnered with various ministries. We have planned a lot of activities around it, such as strawberry picking. We may also host an Agro Tourism Summit virtually, tentatively around May-June this year," she says.

❖ **Vacation Home Rental Policy:** According to Singh, this is the new USP for Maharashtra. "Almost 8,000 rooms are available, which are not part of hotels in the state. The credit for vacation revival in Maharashtra in the last couple of months should go to various vacation rentals that have come up in the state post COVID. This trend was pushed by homes of the rich and the famous. They have now opened their houses as vacation rentals. We are coming up with a policy for the same which will make the process of setting up vacation rentals easier, and we would try to ensure that licensing is limited and is more of a self-certification," Singh shares.

We have formed a PPP model for MTDC resorts as well as open lands

10 temporary beach shacks on each beach along the Konkan coast. Eight beaches were identified during the first phase of implementation of this policy. "The Beach Shack Policy will take off next year; it is permissible under the new Coastal Zone Management Plan that is pending with the ministry of

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17	STB Webinar for Sri Lanka trade	11:00 am (SLST)
18-21	Global Hospitality and Tourism Conference	Shillong
23	New Zealand Webinar (Northland)	11:00 am
23-24	ATTA Adventure Elevate	4:15 pm
24	TOFTigers Webinar-Destination Northeast	03:30 pm
23-26	PATA Annual Summit 2021	RAK
24-25	British Tourism & Travel Show	Birmingham
24-26	SATTE	Greater Noida
24-26	UITT	Kyiv, Ukraine
25-27	Meet in India MICE Roadshow	Khajuraho
30-31	IITM	Chennai
31	TOFTigers Webinar- Weaving Tribal Culture	03:30 pm
31-1 April	Gulf Travel Show (GTS)	TBA

APRIL 2021

6-10	AAHAR	Delhi
8-10	AITF	Baku
15	CAPA Live	08:30 am

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

Allow charter flights into Goa

Members of the Travel & Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG) met Goa CM Pramod Sawant to share suggestions for the upcoming Goa State Budget 2021 and request him to allow international charter flights to land in Goa.

Hazel Jain

In order to help stakeholders in Goa recover from the after-effects of the pandemic, the Travel & Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG) recently met up with the state CM Pramod Sawant to share a detailed document regarding the upcoming State Budget 2021. On top of the list is a 50 per cent reduction in the Excise Licence renewal fee for hotels, restaurants and bars in



Nilesch Shah
President, TTAG

Goa. The TTAG delegation was led by President, Nilesch Shah, along with committee members



VP Githry Velho, Sairaj Dhond, Vincent Ramos and Ernest Dias. The Budget session of the Goa Assembly will be held between March 24 and April 16.

We need to waive landing & airport fees for 12 months for foreign airlines & charter operators

The association also requested Sawant to allow charter flights to land in Goa from safe destinations such as Russia, UK, Poland, Ukraine, Finland, Kazakhstan and CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries by forming a

bubble. Shah says, "We need to provide incentives to foreign airlines and charter operators who bring tourists into Goa via charters by waiving landing and airport fees for them for the period of 12 months starting March 2021. We also request a 100 per cent reduction of visa fee to be given on all visas for the same period starting March 2021 through the tourism promotion and marketing budget. This will help the industry revive itself by competing with other neighbouring tourist destinations as well."

The TTAG memorandum that was submitted to the Goa Chief Minister also mentioned that a budgetary provision needs to be made for the approval and implementation of the Goa State Tourism Policy with installation of the tourism board as per the recommendations of KPMG with inputs from TTAG.

Mamta Pall launches Footprints Worldwide

Mamta Pall, with almost two decades of experience in the industry and having worked with some top travel companies and well-known hotel brands, has launched her own venture, FootprintsWorldwide. The



Mamta Pall
Founder & CEO
FootprintsWorldwide

company will not just offer end-to-end sales, marketing and PR solutions to boutique resorts, hotels and brands in India and overseas, but will also establish hotel products into the market from scratch and position them on the basis of their unique features. Pall soon plans to add international brands into the range of products as well.

Wildlife beyond just animal spotting

Nirmalya Choudhury, Executive Director – Operations, JTI Group and Chapter Chairman (North East States) for IATO, believes that wildlife tourism encompasses learning about flora, fauna and understanding local communities as well.

Now that the extended lockdowns and travel restrictions caused by the pandemic in India are slowly easing in many areas, a lot of people are already travelling or planning to travel in the near future. But, in a world yet to fully recover from the pandemic, the value for destinations with wide-open natural spaces

Wildlife tourism has been on the rise in India for quite a few years now, but it is becoming a more attractive option for a lot more travellers in these unique times we are living in. Wildlife tourism in India is a great option for travellers in the current scenario as the experience of visiting a national park or a wildlife sanctuary is now not just about getting

about appreciating the wildlife parks with their vast outdoors and the wildlife, birds, butterflies and forests but also enjoying interactions with the local communities living on the periphery

to visit and hopefully, we shall see more travellers thinking of a wildlife getaway when planning their next holiday. The only challenge is to ensure that all, and not just a few, famous wildlife parks receive a fair share of visitors.

Wildlife tourism has been on the rise for quite a few years, but is becoming a more attractive option for travellers



away from bustling crowds and travel and accommodation facilities with a more environmentally conscious approach are proving to be more appealing for travellers.

away from a busy life in cities and urban centres, but also being able to appreciate nature in a new light after having to coop up in close confines for months on end. Wildlife tourism is not only

of the wildlife sanctuaries and learning about their traditional nature-conscious ways of living, the local handicrafts and weavings, and the local cuisines. Wildlife tourism destinations in India are some of the safest plac-



Nirmalya Choudhury
Executive Director – Operations, JTI
Group and Chapter Chairman (North
East States), IATO

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

Form - IV

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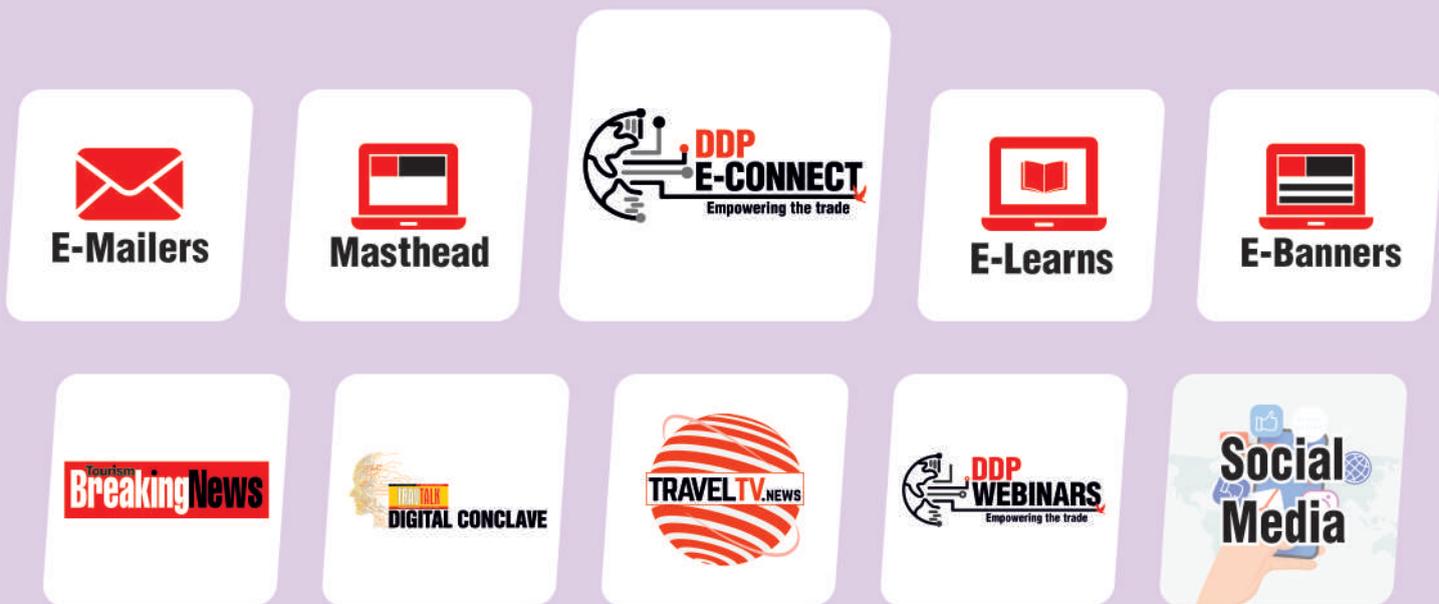
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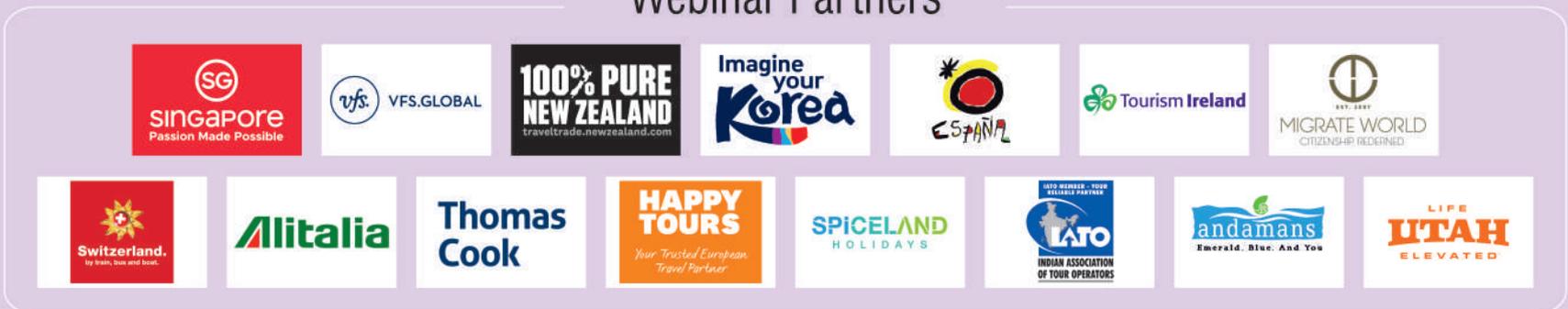
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STIC TRAVEL GROUP New Delhi

Isha Goyal has been appointed as the CEO and Executive Director of STIC Travel Group. Serving as a Director and key management committee member since 2004, Goyal takes over the new role after having worked in STIC for over 15 years. She has worked at the company in a cross-functional capacity with various stakeholders towards improving sales processes, re-engineering service delivery, and streamlining cost centres. Goyal, who has navigated the organisation through the pandemic, will continue to be an Executive Director on the Board.



FAIRMONT Jaipur

Fairmont Jaipur has appointed Indu Khatri as Deputy Director – Sales and Marketing. With this, she returns to the palace property after a break of one year. Prior to this stint at Fairmont Jaipur, Khatri worked with DoubleTree by Hilton, Amer, in the same neighbourhood and was responsible for all sales, marketing and distribution-related tasks in the hotel's opening, as Commercial Head. In the previous 15 years of work, she has gained experience through her roles with hospitality chains such as The Oberoi Group, Leela Palaces Hotels & Resorts, and InterContinental Hotels Group.



DOUBLETREE BY HILTON PUNE - CHINCHWAD Pune

DoubleTree by Hilton announces the appointment of Vinay Nair as their new General Manager. A veteran with more than two decades of extensive hospitality experience. Nair has been a part of global brands such as Hilton, Marriott, IHG, Accor, Taj Hotels, Resorts & Palaces, Guoman & Thistle Hotels, Menzies Hotels, etc. Passionate about talent development, he has mentored many industry leaders in his tenure, and received many award in hospitality. In his new role as the General Manager, Nair will be responsible for curating strategic initiatives for the hotel.



IBIS CITY CENTRE Kochi

ibis has appointed Sita Lekshmi as the General Manager of ibis Kochi City Centre. She comes with over 15 years of hospitality experience, including six years with Accor India. After spending seven years in hotel operations, she joined Accor in April 2014 as Sales Manager for Novotel & ibis Chennai SIPCOT, and eventually handled the role of Associate Director of Sales for these hotels. Lekshmi then joined the pre-opening team of Novotel Chennai Chamiers Road as Director of Sales in January 2018. She comes with a strong operational experience in her initial career journey before moving to Sales.



IBIS VIMAN NAGAR Pune

Pranjali Dhotre has been promoted to the role of General Manager at ibis Pune Viman Nagar. She has been part of the Accor family for a decade now, and brings with her over 12 years of overall hospitality experience. Dhotre has successfully handled multiple assignments across Accor's network and navigated the property through the pandemic while leading from the front. Her appointment is testament to ibis' belief in women leadership. In the new role, Dhotre will be responsible for the hotel's operational success and overall management.



HARD ROCK HOTEL Goa

Tanuj Arora is the newly appointed Hotel Manager at Hard Rock Hotel Goa, and can best be described as persistent, proactive and a go-getter. With his immense knowledge in rooms division and expertise in the business of hotel operations, Arora will be the driving force behind new innovations, revenue strategies and business development at the hotel. Prior to joining Hard Rock, he held positions at some of the most acclaimed hotels across the globe. He has been instrumental in the launch of many successful hotels in India.



MP's jungle safaris an experience

Hemendra Singh Jadon, Chapter Chairman, Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh Chapter, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), narrates his experience of a three-day familiarisation trip sponsored by Jehan Numa Hotels and what it means to go on a wildlife safari.

We were recently invited by Jehan Numa Hotels on a three-night familiarisation tour to showcase their two properties in Madhya Pradesh – one is a premium luxury property located close to the Satpura National Park and Tiger Reserve called Reni Pani Jungle Lodge, and the other is Bori Safari Lodge located near the Bori Wildlife Sanctuary near Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh.

Both properties are following good practices for responsible tourism and have also been certified by TOFTigers.

The group included nine agents, all from Indore. The Bori Safari Lodge has just reopened after the lockdown and it is about a seven-hour drive from Indore. In the evening, the hotel arranged for a beautiful sun-downer next to Tawa River. Early the next morning, we left

for the jungle safari. We sighted a lot of indigenous animals including a tiger, wild boars, sambar deers, crocodiles and the unique giant squirrels which are only found in Bori in India. Bird-watching is also a superb experience here since there is a huge water body close by. Agents must therefore realise that jungle safaris are not just about the Big 5 but more about the native flora and fauna, which is unique to that

region. This must be communicated to our clients so that not only do they return with a wholesome experience but also don't get disheartened if they don't see a lion or a tiger.

Water activities on Tawa River

We later moved to Reni Pani Jungle Lodge via the Madhai forest, spending the night at this luxury lodge. The next morning we left for Tawa River to indulge in some water

Agents must realise that jungle safaris are not just about the Big 5 but more about the native flora and fauna

making potential travel agents experience the property first-hand. After the lockdown, clients are more interested in travelling to drivable distances and to experience greenery, nature and wildlife. These two boutique properties are not just ideal for tourists from Madhya Pradesh, but also from other nearby states like Maharashtra. In fact, there was a Bollywood shoot going on in one of the properties, with actors Kangana Ranaut and Arjun Rampal, just before we arrived.



sports. It also provided a good opportunity for bird watching. We stayed one night at this lodge and returned to Indore the next morning.

This was the first agent Fam the hotel group had arranged for Bori Safari Lodge. Bori Wildlife Sanctuary is still an unexplored wildlife destination in Madhya Pradesh. The aim was to attract more domestic tourists to this destination by



Hemendra Singh Jadon
Chairman, Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh Chapter, TAAI

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



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New policies to boost tourism

Maharashtra has been using the time well and is developing new tourism spots in the state for travel agents to sell. **Dr Dhananjay Sawalkar**, Director, Directorate of Tourism, Maharashtra, tells us more.



Hazel Jain

In a bid to promote tourism, the state's tourism board has decided to develop seven properties of Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation by private parties. In the first phase, MTDC's resorts at Ganpatipule, Matheran, Mahabaleshwar, Harihareshwar and Mithbav, and vacant plots at Tadoba Tiger Reserve and Furdapur (Aurangabad), will be developed in partnerships with private players. "To promote this, we have been constantly engaging with travel agents through various activities and events. We were planning to organise a familiarisation tour for the trade in March to showcase Wai's film tourism. But due to the current scenario, we have postponed it," says **Dr Dhananjay Sawalkar**. Wai is one of the prominent tourism destinations in the state, and has been featured in more than 250 films and television shows including Bollywood, Marathi and Bhojpuri films.

Maharashtra Travel Mart

In terms of increasing tourist arrivals in Maharashtra from other states, he says his team is focusing on two things – publicity and promotion. "Apart from aggressive promotions, we have thought of arranging Maharashtra Travel Mart, where we will invite outbound tour operators from all states who could be potential buyers of Maharashtra's tourism products. We will showcase our products to them and arrange B2B meetings between the outbound and inbound tour operators of Maharashtra," Sawalkar adds.

The state government's tourism department has also announced 20 mini festivals across the

six regions of Maharashtra, i.e. Konkan, Pune, Nashik, Aurangabad, Amravati and Nagpur, to boost tourism. The idea is to help tourists explore the state and celebrate its cultural heritage. "However, in light of the current situation, we are looking at postponing a few of these festivals to maintain the overall well-being of travellers," Sawalkar reveals.



We have planned to revamp the historic and iconic Gateway of India



He adds that the focus right now is to spread awareness about lesser-known places in the state, especially for travellers who are seeking less-crowded locations. "We are collating data of such stand-alone destinations that can be visited as weekend getaways and larger theme-based itineraries for longer duration holidays. Domestic tourism is surely making a come-back," Sawalkar adds.

Policy changes

The Maharashtra tourism department has approved several major policy decisions to boost tourism. "This includes the 'Beach Shack Policy' which will encourage locals living on the coastline of Maharashtra to open beach shacks, serving as local hangouts/eateries for tourists. The 'Agri-Tourism Policy' will facilitate homestay in farms and encourage

villages to open their lands to tourists who want to engage in organic lifestyle experiences like strawberry-picking and mango-picking. In addition, the tourism department also sanctioned the 'Caravan Tourism Policy' which is aimed not only at providing a different experience to travel enthusiasts but also promoting tourism in the state's remote areas and create job opportunities. We will soon be announcing initiatives to promote wellness tourism for a holistic wellness sojourn in the state, and adventure tourism by highlighting locations that are replete with adrenaline-pumping activities," Sawalkar shares.

Mumbai as a destination

We want to promote Mumbai as a top destination in the country, Sawalkar says. "Under the guidance of Tourism Minister Aaditya Thackeray and our Principal Secretary Valsa Nair, we are trying to open up the colonial heritage structures which weren't accessible to tourists earlier.

For instance, we recently opened up the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) heritage building to tourists. We are also going to open Wankhede stadium, the General Post Office building, High Court building, Vidhaan Sabha, etc. These are all iconic structures," he adds.

In the past, Maharashtra did the illumination of the world heritage building - Chhatrapati Shivaji Railway Terminus. "We have now planned something similar for 10 iconic structures of Mumbai. We have also planned to revamp the Gateway of India and showcase various forts of Mumbai like Bandra Fort, Sion Fort, Sewri Fort, Mahim Fort, and Worli Fort," Sawalkar says.



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