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## India's youth must act

The Union Minister of State for Tourism and Culture ( I/C) has highlighted the role of younger generation and technology in promoting India's heritage on the international forum since they are adept at technology and have more resources at hand.



Manas Dwivedi

The Union Minister of State for Tourism and Culture ( I/C) inaugurated the first-ever online exhibition on Ramayana. The webinar titled, 'India's Heritage: Powering Tourism', organised by Ministry of Tourism highlighted the role of younger generation and technology in promoting country's heritage. He said that World Heritage Day has been celebrated since the last 39 years while our heritage is thousands of years old. Patel explained that India has a unique heritage which can't be found anywhere in

the world and protecting our invaluable inheritance is a collective responsibility which requires community participation and awareness in addition to the regulatory and administrative framework. "We now need to work seriously in the field of heritage. It is the responsibility of the younger generation to carry forward the task of promoting our vast heritage with facts and timelines. This can be done by them well since they are adept at technology and have more resources with the help of which they can trace history and events accurately. This should be taken up by them as a challenge," he said.



**Prahlad Singh Patel**  
Union Minister of State  
for Tourism and Culture ( I/C), GOI

The minister added that India's heritage sites and temples have not received their due at the global platform. It is essential to bring together our pool of quality human resource comprising

of conservationists, archaeologists and historians who can throw light on it and take it on to the world platform in a professional manner. It is also important to keep building this pool of human resource," he urged, adding, "We must have long term plans which will include systematic development of our heritage and showcase it at appropriate forums, with the involvement of the younger generation." Minister Patel said that spreading awareness on historic sites are the need of the hour. Experts from diverse cultures have helped preserve the intangible heritage for our younger generations. ➔

## FITUR is back

FITUR 2021, in its special 'Tourism is Back' edition, will be held from the 19<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> May at Feria de Madrid in Spain.



Manas Dwivedi

A major international event organised by IF-EMA, FITUR focuses on generating business and is adapting to the current context and to the needs of companies, countries and destinations that back FITUR as a platform for professional meetings and for reviving tourism.

FITUR will bring together members of the international professional tourism community who represent the entire chain of value regarding offer and demand in the sector, with the participation of destinations, transportation, accommodation, solutions



**Feria Internacional de Turismo**  
and services for the industry, as well as brokers, travel agents and tour operators.

Additionally, this year FITUR is adding FITUR LIVEConnect, a new digital tool that will expand the opportunities for contact and information exchange between all professionals involved in the chain of value of the international tourism industry. This is an advanced technological platform, accessible by website and mobile app, that

Contd on page 8 ➔

## On the path to revival

Hoteliers talk about their plans to revive business, new offers for guests, and the need for priority vaccination.



Neha Rawat

The signs of recovery shall be seen only when majority of the population is vaccinated, feels **Kush Kapoor**, CEO, Roseate Hotels & Resorts. "While our business will definitely be impacted, we are confident that this time recoveries will be sooner due to the aggressive vaccination drive. More importantly though, since hospitality staff is guest-facing, they are at a high-risk position to contract as well transmit infection. We therefore urge the government to consider priority vaccination for hospitality workforce," he says.



**Kush Kapoor**  
CEO, Roseate Hotels & Resorts

Kapoor adds that the industry continues to request the government for an industry status, lower taxes to attract more business, change in excise policy, one-stop window for approvals, online processes, short-term

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## MICE, interrupted

Just when business travel was starting to come back, things started to take a U-turn which has led to a reversal in the trend with events being deferred or cancelled. The good news is that events scheduled for second half of 2021 have so far not been impacted.



Hazel Jain

The MICE industry came to a standstill in 2020 leading to a huge dent in the structure, functioning and finances of many businesses. But when the lockdown began to lift slowly, hotels started to witness bookings, albeit with a significant shift in the nature of MICE business. However, amusement parks and theme parks have been one of the biggest industries to take a hit. **Rajeev Jainapurkar**, Chairman, Indian Association of Amusement Parks & Industries (IAAPI) and CEO of Ramoji Film



**Rajeev Jainapurkar**  
Chairman, Indian Association of Amusement Parks and Industries (IAAPI) and CEO of Ramoji Film City

City, says that the opening of MICE for his industry totally depends upon the second wave of COVID 19 in the country. "Major

states like Maharashtra and Rajasthan have already declared lockdown and other states are also monitoring the situation carefully. Given the overall scenario opening of MICE immediately looks difficult which we all were hoping for this summer season. Also, major corporates have adopted WFH for a majority of its staff and will likely continue to do so till end of the year because of which events like conference and exhibitions will be severely impacted," he adds.

Amusement and theme parks offer new and unique venues and experiences for MICE.

Amusement parks also give scope for the corporate groups' family and spouse to enjoy when they are busy in conferences. However, this sector seems to have been the worst hit so far. "MICE business would have increase the ability to soften the impact of seasonality for our industry. Our clients include corporate groups who organise training or conferences at amusement parks, theme parks, water parks for their staff and their families. Also, since amusement park are spread across large area it can always accommodate

Contd on page 6 ➔



## Emerald Cave, Black Canyon





## Goyal refuses to re-contest

Subhash Goyal hands over the baton to the new Secretary who will be representing IATO in FAITH as he chose not to re-contest either for IATO or for FAITH. As the outgoing Secretary of FAITH, he shared some recommendations for the future office bearers to consider.



TT Bureau

Sharing his gratitude for having been elected as the Hony. Secretary of FAITH, Subhash Goyal hands over the baton to the new Secretary who will be representing IATO in FAITH.



Subhash Goyal  
Hony. Secretary, FAITH

IATO now has a new President and EC. Sharing this update, Goyal says, "I had chosen not to re-contest either for IATO nor for FAITH as I have already successfully played my innings. Some of the achievements were possible only because of the team work and the complete support from each and every one of the team in-



cluding the Past and Present Board Members of FAITH. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Board for selecting IATO to Chair the India Tourism Mart." He had been associated with FAITH as a Founder Member since 2012. He has also chaired ITM-2019, ITM-2020 and the Virtual ITM-2021.

"In these marts, we gave lot of opportunity to the small and medium tour operators to interact with more than 250 top tour operators selected from thousands of applicants from over 60 countries. A lot of the achievements were also possible because of the immense support from each and every one in the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, and the present and previous ministers and Secretaries," Goyal adds.

### Recommendations to new team

Goyal also made some recommendations for the future office bearers to consider towards a more smooth and transparent environment. "I would suggest a one-time consensus be done with all member associations

Presidents of the Core Member Associations," he says.

Goyal added that the term of holding office shall be 24 months. Some other suggestions that he has made include applying the same yardstick to all office bearers of FAITH. The term of each Office Bearer shall be from October 1 of the year till September 30 of the next two years. The AGM shall take place once every year within a period of six months.

He further adds, "To formulate the budget of the Federation on an annual basis and implement the same strictly. I request the incoming Secretary to fix a date for the new Constitution to be adopted. We have already delayed the actions for more than a year, talking about the new proposed Constitution. If the new Constitution is taking time to be ratified then a date for the election should be fixed to hold the elections under the present Constitution so that the organisation of FAITH becomes more transparent and fully democratic."

I request the incoming Secretary to fix a date for the new Constitution to be adopted as it is now overdue.

for any amendments to the Constitution, following which we should only revisit changes at the AGMs and not on a periodic or need basis. Moreover, the management of the affairs of the federation shall be entrusted to the Board of Directors which comprises all the current

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# TRAVTALK

## VIEWPOINT

### Uniting for recovery

The last few weeks have been nothing short of a hurricane. From losing a loved one, to battling physical, emotional and financial fears, all of us have felt the pain brought by COVID. The world shifted, life changed very quickly and so did travel. Dreams of a beach holiday were long forgotten. The slight recovery seen earlier in the year plummeted and travel halted overnight yet again!

Despite this, our sector has remained steadfast in the face of adversity. The last few weeks also taught us compassion, adaptability, teamwork and most importantly synergy. Enemies become friends and everyone worked towards addressing the greater concern. From charters to emergency travel, there are solutions to every problem when great minds come together.

With coronavirus front and centre again, what all have we learnt in the last year? What can we do now to recover as swiftly as possible from this crisis? Travel evolved in 2020 and itineraries from 2019 were thrown out as we packaged new expectations. But have we prepared for the next shift? Are we ready to rise or waiting to be drowned yet again?

Widespread availability of the vaccine will be a game-changer for our industry. There will be renewed confidence and a desire for new beginnings. Have you identified the next 'Dubai or Maldives'? From communication to protocols, how are we gearing up to rebuild this relationship?

The fear of being infected or quarantined while travelling will fuel the desire to stay closer home. How can this sector capitalise on the resurgence of domestic travel? And no, repacking Goa and Kashmir is not the answer! Following global lockdowns and the rise of remote working, there is a demand for discovering new destinations or rediscover familiar ones but differently this time. Long-stay work visas are now offered by a few countries, but have we explored this yet? Promoting a month-long holiday from a hotel room will attract no one! Think differently and repack-age the 'dream destination'. With every new hurdle, there is an opportunity waiting to be identified. As the sector redoubles its efforts to provide safe travel while rebuilding confidence, let us work together and thrive again. Let us be each other's lifeboat.



TT Bureau

**N**ew research by Collinson, a leader in traveller experiences and medical assistance, has found that four in five business travellers have seen their job affected by a lack of cross-border business travel, and a third of respondents stated that not seeing clients face-to-face has negatively affected the way they do business. It is commonly thought that business travel recovery will be slower than that of leisure travel, due to businesses continuing to function during the pandemic without travel. As per global statistics, a third of business travellers are stating that the lack of travel has made their company less productive, while 38% of Indian respondents are saying that they have felt unable to do their job effectively. These new findings demonstrate the economic importance of cross-border business travel.

The survey results – which compare data collected from a total of 18,500 travellers in late 2019 (pre-pandemic) with data collected from 12,607 travellers in late 2020 (during the pandemic), demonstrate that while the majority of business meetings are now conducted via video call, there is a growing need and desire amongst a large number of business travellers to recommence travel.

#### Some key findings

- ❖ More than four in five (81%) business travellers have, despite video conferencing technology, seen their job negatively impacted by the lack of cross-border business travel
- ❖ 93% of Indian business travellers have been affected by a lack of cross-border travel, while 40% say it's made their business less productive
- ❖ 42% Indian respondents say not seeing their clients and prospects face-to-face has negatively impacted the way they do business
- ❖ Globally, one third of respondents said not being able to travel for business had made their company less productive, with 38% Indian respondents admitting they felt unable to do their job effectively as a result.



**Priyanka Lakhani**  
Commercial Director (Middle East & Africa)  
and Director South Asia, Collinson

From a business perspective, this has been the year of the Zoom call, with 93% of Indian business travellers affected by a lack of cross-border business travel (much higher than the global average of 81%), with 42% saying not seeing their clients and prospects face-to-face has negatively impacted the way they do business. About 40% also said not being able to travel for business had made their organisation less productive, while 38% said they'd lost deals because of it. It is clear that travel restrictions have impacted business travellers' roles significantly. However, as businesses consider restarting cross-border business travel, the challenge remains in making sure employees don't feel it comes at a cost to their health and wellbeing.

Post-pandemic, corporate wellbeing initiatives will be high on the agenda of companies globally. Employees that need to travel for work should be

able to do so with confidence, knowing that their company is providing them full support. More than half (51%) of business travellers interviewed in our pre-COVID survey said their employer expected them to prioritise keeping the cost

**Priyanka Lakhani**, Commercial Director (Middle East & Africa) and Director South Asia, Collinson says, "Like most of the world, our research shows that respondents from India are quite concerned with their physical, mental and emotional



of travel low over their wellbeing. Add to this that only half of business traveller's pre-pandemic knew their employer

wellbeing when travelling. In today's current environment, where business meetings are taking place over Zoom calls, many people have claimed that not seeing their clients and prospects face-to-face has negatively impacted the way they do business.

**42% Indian respondents say not seeing clients face-to-face has impacted their business**

had invested in some form of travel risk management (TRM) programme to assist them on the road, some 51% of those weren't sure what it meant or entailed. Of those who knew this was available to them, only a fifth felt confident using the services in the event of something going wrong abroad. Getting business travel back on the road is going to require a strong focus on ensuring that employees' wellbeing is prioritised and that there is not just adequate support in place, but that employees clearly understand what is available.

Despite this acknowledgement of the value of business travel, employees are wary of getting on the move without the right physical space and hygiene protocols. Travellers want assurances on social distancing measures, spaces to sit and relax in, and have hand sanitisers throughout the airport, for instance – and it's important that companies are aware of and responding to their travelling employees' expectations, while meeting Duty of Care requirements. Supporting responsible businesses with their TRM requirements – particularly in light of the soon to publish travel risk management Standard ISO 31030 – and continuing to help implement safe and robust testing protocols remains a key focus of ours to help get business travellers in the sky again. 📌



# Vaccination will boost outbound

With vaccinations opening for everyone above 18 from May 1, the enthusiasm for outbound travel will certainly rise in the coming months. With a pause in bookings currently, travel specialists feel that outbound travel will get a huge boost soon as they provide a sneak peak into the current trends.



**Riaz Munshi**  
Managing Director, N Chirag Travels

“Right now, there is a pause in outbound travel booking. It will take another two months to recover. Many countries will open up for Indian travellers like Israel. Sweden will start issuing visas, Turkey and Russia are also open. Some of the countries have put a temporary halt but many more will open up in the coming months. We have not seen much cancellations in booking, just about 5-10 per cent, because people are still travelling as it depends upon how they think.”

“People are travelling to different destinations apart from just Maldives. Russia has opened up, Greece and Turkey have opened borders for travellers. But again, these destinations are popular but a lot of restrictions and guidelines are changing every day. So it is difficult to say that many destinations are open today. Right now, it is tough to talk about trends. Domestic tourism is booming and people are travelling to neighbouring countries like Nepal also.”



**Himanshu Patil**  
Director, Kesari Tours



**Manish Kriplani**  
Managing Director, Baywatch Travels

“Frankly, we have been only getting travel queries for Dubai and Maldives. People are going to Andamans. There are some prick inquiries which come for other destinations, but when it comes to booking, none of the lead is getting booked. But inquiries are there for destinations. Yes, we have also seen cancellations since last one week due to rising COVID cases right now. Beginning of the month, we were busy booking and now we have seen rapid cancellations.”

“Russia has started issuing visas and we have also been getting some queries for travel and services. Like always, Dubai is popular and has been the preferred destination from North India and UP market. There are some other destinations also that are yet to open borders for Indians but we are getting queries for them. There are a lot of weddings planned in May, so traffic is expected to increase. We have also received a few queries for Ukraine and Seychelles.”



**SMA Sheeraz**  
Managing Director, Sheeraz Tours



**Neeraj Gupta**  
Director, Peekay Holidays

“The trend is the people are curious to travel but due to the current second wave of COVID infections, people are little hesitant to book ahead. They just want to take their time out before they process any booking. But the queries are coming through, people are keen and eager but just the confidence is not great to take the next step. Seychelles being a good competition to Maldives is getting popular, its a good change.”

Inputs by Manas Dwivedi

## Tourism Breaking News

- Mumbai to conduct all domestic and international flights through Terminal 2 from April 21
- Abhishek Narang is the new Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Culture
- Cordelia Cruises postpones maiden voyage schedule, new dates to be announced soon
- Turkey to vaccinate all its tourism employees by onset of summer season
- We are developing Khajuraho as a family destination: MP Principal Secy
- Mizoram Tourism to regulate and supervise tourism service providers in state
- UAE bans entry of Indian travellers for 10 days
- West Bengal forms 6-member tourism task force to tackle COVID surge

# 100 hotels signed in 2020

Signings were especially low in the first half of the year, due to the uncertain market conditions and challenges related to closing deals on virtual platforms. Only 100 new hotels with 9,757 keys were signed in 2020 as compared to 170 new hotels with 16,349 keys in 2019.



Neha Rawat

In the aftermath of the ongoing pandemic, brand signings by keys in India witnessed a year-on-year decline of 40% in 2020. Signings were especially low in the first half of the year, due to the uncertain market conditions and challenges related to closing deals on virtual platforms. As a result, only 100 new hotels (with 9,757 keys) were signed in 2020 compared to 170 new hotels (with 16,349 keys) in 2019. In addition to this, 35 hotels (with 2,676

keys) were rebranded in 2020 compared to 53 hotels (with 4,521 keys) in 2019.

### Domestic vs. international

Domestic hotel operators signed more properties (61% of the total signings by property) than their international peers, with an average key count of 82 keys during the year. In a shift in strategy, international hotel operators also showed a keenness in signing smaller properties in 2020, as they adapted to the changing market dynamics and looked at increasing their footprint in smaller cities. Conse-

quently, the average key count for international hotel operators declined to 108 keys in 2020 compared to 140 keys in 2019.

### Management contracts

Management contracts continued to be the preferred form of brand signings, accounting for 80% of the total signings by keys in 2020. However, franchising is steadily strengthening its position and accounted for 17% of the signings by keys in 2020 compared to 14% in 2019. Leasing and other forms of contract continued to lose their charm over the year.

### Brown vs. green projects

In the year marred with uncertainty, hotel operators preferred to sign projects that were less risky and had a higher chance of completion compared to greenfield projects. Several greenfield projects were also put on hold due to COVID.

### Rebranding likely to grow

Hotel rebranding or conversion is also gaining momentum in the country and accounted for 26% of the total signings by properties in 2020. Rebranding is likely to grow rapidly going forward as more and more in-

## Decline in brand signing



**Mandeep Lamba**  
President – South Asia  
HVS ANAROCK

Brand signings by keys witnessed a year-on-year decline of 40% in 2020 in the aftermath of the pandemic. During the year marred with uncertainty, 100 new hotels entered the branded hotels market, while an additional 35 hotels were re-branded. Domestic operators continued to sign more properties vis-à-vis their international peers, but in a shift in strategy, international operators were also keen on signing smaller properties, and looked at increasing their footprint in smaller cities”

dependent hotels seek brand affiliation to gain from the ‘safety’ shield perceived for brands by travellers.

commercial destinations continued to witness the majority of signings (49% of total signings by keys), leisure destinations picked up pace in 2020 as hotel companies renewed their focus on increasing footprint at such destinations in the post-COVID era. Approximately 41% of the total hotel signings by keys in 2020 were in leisure destinations compared to 30% in 2019.

Midscale segment is the most preferred segment in the country, accounting for 41% of the total signings by keys in 2020, followed by upscale (37% of total signings), economy (11% of total signings) and luxury (11% of total signings). Though

## Signings

Brand signings by keys witnessed a y-o-y decline of 40% in 2020. During the year, 100 hotels with 9,757 keys entered the branded hotels market, while an additional 35 hotels with 2,676 keys were rebranded.



By Keys

2020 12,433  
2019 20,870  
2018 16,132



By Properties

2020 135  
2019 223  
2018 201



# Expect sporadic demand

► Contd from page 1

a large number of visitors," Jalnapurkar says.

**Rohit Chopra**, Regional Director, Sales & Distribution, Accor India & South Asia, feels that business from weddings, social events and sports have replaced corporate MICE, incentives and charters, which used to be demand generators. "To encourage demand, one of the key factors will be flexibility on commercial terms. While we did see an increase in demand for MICE in February 2021, in the last two months we have also witnessed an increase in cancellation or re-scheduling," he reveals.

Chopra believes that business travel and MICE will be extremely slow and we can expect a revival closer to the festival season, in October, depending on the situation and the vaccination drive in India. "While we can expect sporadic demand in segments like weddings and sports, and industries like pharmaceuticals, electronics, automobile,

sports, manufacturing, movie production and white goods should witness a faster rebound Q3 onwards," he adds.

His hotels had confirmed a few MICE bookings for the coming months. "For India, we have been receiving some queries from corporates for 100-200 pax from Q3 onwards. But they are also keeping a keen watch on the developing situation. We have been observing queries for Q4 2021 for safer, long-haul destinations, and can expect similar interest for shorter-haul destinations from Q3 2021," Chopra says. He is confident that companies will eventually do in-person, socially distant meetings rather than continue conducting them virtually.

## Being event-ready crucial

Hilton Chennai has approached 2021 as the year of road to recovery. **Ruban Das**, General Manager, Hilton Chennai, says they have started seeing green shoots. "While we are far from a fully active MICE segment till Q4 2021, we are definitely see-



**Rohit Chopra**  
Regional Director, Sales & Distribution, Accor India & South Asia



**Ruban Das**  
General Manager  
Hilton Chennai



**Christopher Viegas**  
Associate Vice President - Sales - MICE, IHCL

We have been observing queries for Q4 2021 for safer, long-haul destinations

While we are far from an active MICE segment till Q4 2021, we are seeing some green shoots

Sectors that haven't been impacted as much have continued with meetings

ing an upswing when it comes to month-on-month actualisation in this segment which contributes to over 30 per cent of our total revenues," he adds.

The hotel has been in touch with its corporate client ros-

ter comprising companies in manufacturing, SME, pharma, technology, BFSI and real estate to ascertain requirements. "Our approach has been to offer flexible event solutions at optimum pricing band to encourage clients to restart physical

and hybrid events. Weddings and social events have continued to take place, though in a modified way. They have continued to stay active as a segment followed by hybrid events and small-sized corporate day meetings," Das shares.

## Events deferred/cancelled

Meanwhile, IHCL hotels have had a few events materialised since December 2020 with an increase in uptake thereafter. However, with the recent restrictions on travel, there has been a tapering of leads and events have been postponed for later dates, says **Christopher Viegas**, Associate VP (Sales, MICE), IHCL. "We had been seeing strong signs of recovery in MICE. But recent developments on the pandemic front have led to a slight reversal in the trend with events being deferred or cancelled. Events scheduled for second half of the FY have however not been impacted to the extent that we have seen for those scheduled in March-April 2021," he says.

He feels that certain sectors that have not really been adversely impacted as others have continued with their meetings and events, within the scope of guidelines set down by the authorities. These however, have been of smaller scale. "We have seen promising signs from the pharma and healthcare sectors apart from sports, insurance and banking. We have witnessed an increase in enquiries. However, we do see closures happening very close to the event date," Viegas adds.

# FDI reviving tourism industry

The government has been taking several strong efforts to build a supportive ecosystem which could forge and reshape the growth of tourism and hospitality in India. A slew of initiatives has already been announced including interest free loans to finance working capital, government stimulus packages & tax exemption for a fixed number of years.

Tourism and hospitality are the second largest contributors to the national GDP and employment growth among the various service sectors of the country. Together, they created 330 million jobs across the world in the year 2019. However, these are the two sectors which have borne the brunt of Covid-19 the most. Together, the two have experienced an economic loss amounting up to Rs 15 lakh crores since the outbreak of the unanticipated pandemic. Now, juggling for sustenance and growth, tourism and hospitality have been actively seeking support from the government and other bodies so as to get back on track and rebuild their lost sheen and strength.

The government too has been taking several strong efforts to

build a supportive ecosystem which could forge and reshape the growth of tourism and hospitality in India. A slew of initiatives has already been announced including interest free loans to finance working capi-

Currently, 100% FDI in hospitality & tourism is being allowed through automatic route.

tal, government stimulus packages, tax exemption for a fixed number of years, etc. A five-year tax holiday has already been announced for 2-, 3- and

4-star category hotels which are located around UNESCO World Heritage sites (apart from Delhi and Mumbai).

Various active steps have also been taken to boost investment in the two most lucrative industries. At present, 100% FDI in hospitality and tourism is being allowed through the automatic route. During the Jan - March quarter of FY20, the two sectors attracted FDI worth \$862.78 mn (Rs 6,390.06 crore), as compared to \$1,216.10 million (Rs 8,666.87 crore) in Oct-Dec quarter of FY20. Moreover, 'Invest India' has joined hands with the top global consultancy firms to chalk out a robust economic revival strategy.

With the doors of FDI opening up, the recovery signs are gradually appearing. Going



forward, these cash inflows can play a crucial role in pulling hotels and tourism out of their current dampened state, and put them on a speedy path to recovery. Together with domestic investments and other government measures, many opportunities can be created to reboot India's tourism and hospitality. This said, the chances of recovery clearly lie

in the infusion of investment, moratorium on loans, deferment of dues, measures like tax holidays, rebates, subsidies, etc.

Moreover, the industry is looking forward to the introduction of strong rescue packages, policies and intervention pertaining to foreign debts, loans and equities. The

current waves of turbulence can be subdued by rightly assessing the current challenges and then balancing all parameters and initiatives efficiently. Surely, it may take a few years till the two sectors regain their shine, and re-emerge as the key drivers of the country's growth. Recovery of these two prime sectors would clearly mean recovery of the economy itself.



**Vishal Yadav**  
CEO & Founder of FDI India, a privately-owned investment facilitation agency.

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



# No sector-specific stimulus

Six regional hospitality heads share their views on how the policy-makers have failed to consider and respond to specific problems of the hospitality sector where a majority of the businesses have been impacted by a host of external factors. The stakeholders are disappointed that not even policy changes have been made in these challenging times.



**Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**  
Vice President, FHRAI

“The impact of COVID-19 on our industry has been extremely disruptive. It had lost all its business after lockdown and the zero business scenarios remained for close to 10 months last year. But obligations such as rental and salary expenses, servicing of debts and statutory payments remained. This has led to mounting debts, threats of insolvency for a majority in the sector along with millions of job losses. As of today, 30 per cent of hotels and restaurants in the country have shut down permanently.”

“The Centre has not extended sector-specific relief to the hospitality industry. In the absence of such a stimulus package, at least 30 to 40 per cent restaurants and 20 to 30 per cent hotels in the country are facing imminent shutdown. Our expectations from the government this year include waiver in electricity bills, water bills, excise license fees and other statutory fees; industry and infrastructure status to hotels, resorts and restaurants across the country.”



**Sherry Bhatia**  
President, HRAWI



**Sudesh Poddar**  
President, HRAEI

“Restaurants must be given the option to choose a higher GST (12%) rate than now levied (5%), but with the right to claim refund of the tax paid on inputs. Restaurants are now levied a 5% GST, but they can't claim input tax credit against the tax they pay on raw materials and expenses like rent. Food service providers were sourcing close to half of their inputs from unregistered, non-tax paying suppliers to reduce cost. In other words, when ITC (input tax credit) is denied, it nudges a restaurant to go illegal.”

“We wish our government would study what other countries have done to ensure tourism is kept alive. Tax holiday for one year for hospitality and tourism establishments, waiver of property tax and other levies, and relaxation in electricity charges and excise fee are some relaxations which should be immediately announced and implemented to save the industry. Including hospitality and tourism in the concurrent list needs to be considered for a recovery.”



**Surendra Kumar Jaiswal**  
President, HRAHI



**K. Syama Raju**  
President, SIHRA

“Industry status for hospitality in Karnataka will help revive the hotel business. We expect the MoT to revise the guidelines of classification of hotels according to the current trend and getting the classification done in a simple and transparent manner. SIHRA continues to follow-up in Tamil Nadu and we got the funds of over Rs 300 crore released for the accommodation provided to frontline warriors in the state. Due to our consistent follow up with MOT we have got various hotels classified in Kerala.”

“Many families survive on the single income of delivery personnel. Many migrants in the state depend on food delivered to them from restaurants. There are several homes where all family members have COVID19 and are dependent on us. Allowing take-away and delivery services will help the industry to survive and will also ensure that the Government is not burdened with granting any major reliefs.”



**Narendra Somani**  
President, HRA Gujarat & Executive Committee Member, HRAWI

Inputs by Neha Rawat

## TAAI fee for '21 down 40%

Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) has reduced the renewal of its annual membership for 2021-22 by 40 per cent for its members in view of the current situation.



Manas Dwivedi

In a bid to help its member base in any way it can given the current situation, the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) has reviewed its annual membership subscription renewal for the year 2021-22. It has decided to reduce its renewal fee by 40 per cent for all its active, associate and allied members. The rebated annual membership subscription shall be only applicable if the same is paid and credited to the TAAI account latest by 31 May, 2021. Thereafter normal annual fees shall be payable.

**Jyoti Mayal**, President of TAAI, said, “The second wave seems to be spreading unabatedly and the travel and tourism business



**Jyoti Mayal**  
President, TAAI

has not seen major recovery. We understand the challenges, the pain and the frustration our members are facing during these difficult times. This is the time when we need to give some respite, especially amidst the second wave. So our leadership team decided to give 40 per cent discount to members on membership renewal. It's not a big amount but it's just a way to say that we are

there for our members. With rising infections, we are actually back to ground zero. There is limited business right now for members. We want to motivate our members, do more outreach with them so that we can support them. Educating



We want to motivate our members, do more outreach with them so that we can support them

the staff is really important. We will look forward to doing more webinars on how to cope up with the pandemic. We have to stay together at this time and move forward with positive thought process.”

	Normal Subscription + 18%GST	Rebated Subscription + 18%GST
Active Members	6000 + 1080 = 7,080	3600 + 648 = 4,248
Branch Associates	3000 + 540 = 3,540	1800 + 324 = 2,124
Allied Members	3000 + 540 = 3,540	1800 + 324 = 2,124

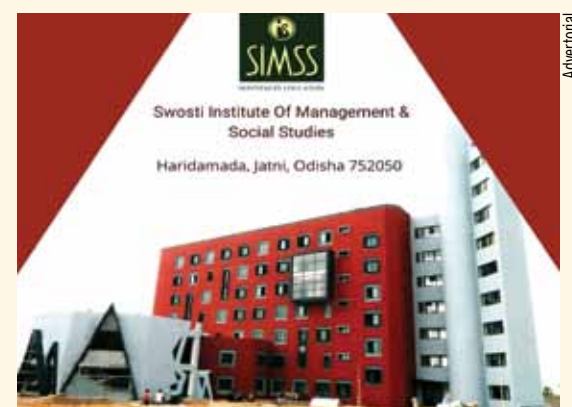
## Swosti plans new courses

Swosti Group's Swosti Institute of Management & Social Studies (SIMSS) that was established more than seven years ago now plans to introduce new courses for tourism and hospitality students.



TT Bureau

Swosti, a premium brand in the industry, has been promoting the hospitality and tourism potential of Odisha worldwide since 1981. In its endeavour to provide high standard services in hospitality sector and looking at the acute shortage of skilled manpower, Swosti Group's Swosti Institute of Management & Social Studies (SIMSS) plans to introduce new courses. **JK Mohanty**, President of SIMSS, says, “Apart from the ongoing courses we offer such as Master in Hotel Management, Master in Tourism & Travel Management, Bachelor in Hotel Management, Diploma in Hotel Management, Craft Courses in Food Production, F&B Services, Housekeeping, we plan to introduce new courses like Skill Development programmes, SPA management, Bar Management, MCA/PG Diploma in Computer science, SAP & Tally courses, MBA course/rural management, guide training, and foreign



language learning like French, German, Chinese, Italian and Spanish to provide livelihood and cater to foreign tourists visiting our state.” It now has its own campus at Jatani, near IIT Argul in a pollution free environment.

After 30 years of service in the field of hotels, resorts and travels, Swosti Group entered into hospitality education sector with SIMSS in 2013. Affiliated with Utkal University of Culture, Bhubaneswar, the institute has not only made tremendous progress in terms of infrastructure and academic ambience, but also it

goes much beyond education during a span of almost 7 years. “It is about building character through well-rounded training methods that makes every student successful in every facet of life and under any challenging circumstances and that's what differentiates SIMSS from the rest,” says Mohanty.

Backed by four luxury hotels as well as its travel arm Swosti Travels, SIMSS is dedicated to imparting quality education. For more information on the courses, students can write to [info@swostipremium.com](mailto:info@swostipremium.com).



# Flipkart to acquire Cleartrip

Flipkart will acquire 100 per cent of Cleartrip's shareholding, as the company further enhances its investments to strengthen its digital commerce offerings for customers. Cleartrip will continue to operate as a separate brand, retaining all employees while working closely with Flipkart to further develop technology solutions to make travel simpler for end customers.



Manas Dwivedi

Flipkart, India's home-grown e-commerce marketplace, has announced the proposed acquisition of Cleartrip, an online travel technology company. Flipkart will acquire 100 per cent of Cleartrip's shareholding, as the company further enhances its investments to strengthen its digital commerce offerings for customers. Under the terms of the agreement, Cleartrip operations will be acquired by Flipkart. Cleartrip will continue to operate as a separate brand, retaining all employees while working with Flipkart to further develop technology solutions.

**Kalyan Krishnamurthy**, CEO, Flipkart Group, said, "The Flipkart Group is commit-



**Kalyan Krishnamurthy**  
CEO, Flipkart Group

ted to transforming customer experiences through digital commerce. Cleartrip is synonymous with travel for many customers, and as we diversify and look at new areas of growth, this investment will help strengthen our range of offerings for customers. We welcome the Cleartrip team with their deep industry knowledge and technology capabilities to the Flipkart Group and look for-

ward to providing deeper value and travel experiences for customers together."

**Stuart Crighton**, CEO and co-founder of Cleartrip, said, "Cleartrip has been a pioneer in capitalising on technology to simplify the travel experience for our customers. This product-driven focus has enabled us to become the preferred travel



partner of choice for consumers in a wide range of markets in the region. We are delighted to be part of the Flipkart family and are excited about the positive impact this collaboration can have for our customers and the travel industry in general." The deal closing will be subject to applicable regulatory approvals.

The Flipkart Group is a digital commerce entity and includes companies Flipkart, Myntra, and Flipkart Wholesale. Started in 2007, Flipkart enabled millions of sellers, merchants, and small businesses to be a part of India's e-commerce revolution, with a customer base of

over 300 million, offering over 150 million products across 80+ categories. "Our efforts to democratise e-commerce in India, drive access and afford-

ment to our commitment to accelerate the growth of kiranas and MSMEs in India," the company's statement read. Meanwhile, Cleartrip has been introducing new industry-



**Stuart Crighton**  
CEO and co-founder of Cleartrip

ability, create lakhs of jobs in the ecosystem and empower generations of entrepreneurs and MSMEs have inspired us to innovate. The recent launch of Flipkart Wholesale, our new digital marketplace, is a testa-

We are  
excited and  
delighted to be  
part of the  
Flipkart family

—Stuart Crighton

first products such as Flexifly and TravelSafe to address customers prioritising flexibility and safety for their travel.

## A group tour to Egypt



Thomas Cook India and SOTC launched its GIT tours starting with Dubai in 2020 and now including destinations like Russia and Egypt. They undertook an 18-pax group in February 2021 and 24-member group in March 2021 to Egypt which included visits to the Great Pyramids of Giza, Sphinx, papyrus fair, Egyptian Museum, Khan El Khalili Bazaar, Luxor Temple, and even a Nile cruise.

## Special sections at FITUR

► Contd from page 1

is presented as a complement to in-person participation at FITUR. The LIVEConnect platform, developed with artificial intelligence technology, will offer all industry professionals the chance to be connected and an extra of special content, with a highly interesting programme

the section Travel Technology, that joins, with the proposals for products and services from technology providers, the content on innovation and digital transformation of the sections FITURTechy and FITUR KNOW HOW & EXPORT; FITUR WOMAN, a meeting point for awareness-raising, discussion

ism in our country, in collaboration with FEDELE, Spanish Federation of Associations of Spanish for Foreigners Schools.

This year there will also be specialised sections, as in previous editions, such as FITUR MICE, FITUR LGBT+, FITUR SCREEN, FITUR TALENT and FITUR FESTIVALS & EVENTS, extended this time to all type of cultural events, in addition to the new b2b CEAV area, for business meetings between travel agents and tourism providers.

Sustainability will also be the common thread of many of the FITUR proposals, as well as of the FITUR NEXT Observatory, this year with the challenge of positive impact of tourism for gender equality and female empowerment.

FITUR will be the first major safe international mobility experience in Spain. In addition to mandatory PCR tests at origin and on-site rapid tests, a protocol has been developed that contains all the measures necessary to order the influx of attendees and their mobility, establish capacity controls, and digital registration.



and a schedule for contacts that substantially increases the framework of professional and commercial relations that are initiated during FITUR.

FITUR will also have new elements in its content and specialised sections. Among these,

and dialogue that contributes to boosting the role of women in this industry, from the viewpoint of leadership and sustainability, with the collaboration of WOMEN LEADING TOURISM – WLT, and FITUR LINGUA, that will focus on the important value and opportunities of language tour-



# GPS Connect open for registration

Travel & tourism virtual networking hub, GPS Connect, a recurring platform for the tourism industry is now open for registrations for both buyers and sellers. It will allow access virtually to all registered attendees from May 1, 2021. GPS Connect is available through a mobile application as well, which will give users regular notifications and updates.



Manas Dwivedi

**R**egistrations for GPS Connect, a virtual networking hub for travel & tourism industry have begun and the platform will stand open from May 1 for buyers and exhibitors to interact, network and do business in one-of-its-kind format. Sharing more details about the concept and the event, **Harmandeep Singh Anand**, Managing Director, Global Panorama Showcase (GPS) says, "GPS Connect provides a unique opportunity for the travel trade to meet, network, negotiate, educate and conduct business with tourism



**Harmandeep Singh Anand**  
Managing Director  
Global Panorama Showcase (GPS)

providers, hotels, DMC's, technology providers, airlines, cruise companies, tourism boards and many more. All attendees are required to register once to gain year round access and opportunity to attend product presentations / educational webinars and interact with



global suppliers who are keen to showcase their tourism products and meet buyers not only from across India but also from other countries (Focus being on Indian buyers from over 800 cities of India)."

#### Who should Exhibit?

"Participation starts from as low as Rs1,500 and gives an opportunity to all sizes of businesses located anywhere in the world and interested in developing business from India to

exhibit and optimise their returns and stay connected year long. There are several sponsorship options which can be tailored," said Anand. Buyer registration is completely free

While buyer registration is free, exhibitor participation starts from as low as Rs 1,500

of cost. GPS 10X existing members and non-members can register as a buyer. The 10X members will get certain benefits and sharing details about the same, Anand said,

"To give you more time to network at your convenience and develop your business, GPS has designed a very attractive buyer program. GPS 10X Members have the opportunity to earn points for every successfully concluded meeting through the built in appointment system and also earn points for attending the educational and product seminars, both live and on demand. Owners, senior management, product & contracting, sales personnel from travel companies are invited to register as buyers. We are targeting qualified and vetted buyers."

#### Features & benefits

Explaining about the unique features and benefits of GPS Connect, Anand says, it is one of the largest marketing platform wherein buyers just need to register once and they

can modify their information in future. "So as a buyer, you can come and register at your own convenience. For exhibitors, we have given them various options to participate starting from a basic listing which is similar to a yellow or white page listing and they can have a lead generation option where they can appoint video calls with built-in features. The platform is made on Cvent, where various modes of partnership and sponsorship opportunities are available for various tourism boards, DMCs, etc. The platform is built in such a manner if someone wants to do a webinar, it can be made available for three months on demand after the event. The event is available through a mobile application, where you get regular notifications," Anand adds.

*Travellers now expect the brands they support to align with their values and are more mindful of booking with those who believe in fostering diversity and inclusion within the travel industry, finds American Express Travel.*



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# STB cruising towards recovery

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) recently held its CruiseWorld India 2021 event to share destination updates, rally the trade and share expert insights on how the travel trade can grow and recover their business when travel and cruising resumes.



TT Bureau

The event themed, 'Charting our Pathway to Cruise Recovery' was aimed to rally Indian cruise travel trade during the COVID-19 pandemic and re-connect with them to share destination updates, as well as insights on how they can recover and grow their business when travel resumes.

During the CruiseWorld India 2021 forum, STB shared a destination update, focusing on how Singapore has managed the COVID-19 situation so far. STB also highlighted Singapore's success in safely restarting cruises – More than 120,000 Singapore residents have set sail on seacations on approximately 90 sailings, with no reported COVID-19 cases on board. STB has launched a comprehensive CruiseSafe certification programme, which requires cruise ships to adhere to a set of mandatory health and safety protocols.

GB Srithar, Regional Director of India, Middle East and South Asia at STB moderated a panel discussion titled "Power up for a safe return to cruising in Singapore". The panel featured

well-known industry leaders such as **Naresh Rawal**, Vice-President - Sales and Marketing, Genting Cruise Lines, as well as **Varun Chadha**, Chief Executive Officer, TIRUN Travel Marketing (representing Royal Caribbean International) and two travel agents specialising in cruise – **Pradeep Saboo**, Managing Director, Guideline Travels and **Sanjay Kothari**, Founder and Managing Director, Just Holidays.

At the session, **Rajeev Kale**, President & Country Head – Holidays, MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India), also shared about how STB's Cruise Development Fund was pivotal in helping to develop more attractive and value-added cruising packages for Indian consumers. Thomas Cook is one of the early CDF adopters.

Genting and RCI shared that their work resuming operations in Singapore has been useful in sizing up and sharpening the 'seacation experiences for consumers, and they expressed optimism that Indian consumers would be keen on international cruise when the borders reopen.

Guideline and Just Holidays shared that there remains strong demand from segments such as MICE corporates, as evinced by how some of them have already started taking holidays in other destinations which have opened to India, such as the Maldives. They noted that Singapore remains a choice destination, given its proximity, convenience and strong confidence in the safety measures given by Singapore.

CruiseWorld India 2021 wrapped up on an optimistic note, with all speakers acknowledging the difficulties that the travel trade fraternity had endured during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also noting the Indian travel trade community's collective resilience in weathering crises, and this too shall be overcome.

## Feedback and Response

Sharing the response received from the travel trade on CruiseWorld India 2021, Srithar said that STB continues to actively engage Indian travel trade by organising outreach programs and participating in industry led events. "In January, STB India concluded its first virtual roadshows for 2021, themed 'Charting Our Pathways to Tourism Recovery'. We have

Families with kids is a significant target cruise segment for STB and this trend is expected to continue

since continued with these trade engagements to connect with our partner-friends and invite them to jointly prepare for travel restart when the time is right. We are keen to work with the trade to discuss how best we can support them and be prepared to receive Indian travellers when international travel resumes. With CruiseWorld India, we called for industry feedback and brought together industry leaders to offer insights on how to gear up for when cruising returns. We're pleased to have received good feedback for the show," he said.

The event was timely as Singapore continues to make steady progress with the safe resumption of cruises since November 2020 for Singapore residents. Singapore commenced pilot trial of "cruise to nowhere" itineraries with two



operators - Genting Cruise Lines and Royal Caribbean International.

"The industry stakeholders communicated a sense of optimism on customers opting for cruising as a mode of holiday and vacation when travel restarts. Agents shared that customers will prioritize factors such as health, hygiene, and safety of the cruising experience, and most travellers will prefer a mix of land-cruise holidays that lasts anywhere between 3 to 14 days," Srithar further said.

## Future of Cruising for Indian visitors from Singapore

Sharing the feedback the STB has received, Srithar said that there is strong interest in cruising from Singapore among Indian travelers and they will cruise again once international travel resumes. "They will be concerned with hygiene and safety measures on board the cruiseships. Singapore is well-poised to receive them, with cruise-lines adhering to our mandatory CruiseSafe certification program. In line with the safe and gradual resumption of economic activities in Singapore, a phased approach has been adopted for cruise sailings, with safe management measures in place. Currently, there are no ports of call, with round-trip itineraries and sailing at a reduced capacity of 50 percent or less, further minimising risk of transmission," he informed.

Talking about the target audience for them, Srithar said families with kids is a significant target cruise segment for them and they expect this trend to continue.

A poll conducted at CruiseWorld India 2021 showed that 'Families with Kids' segment ranked as the top leisure segment most likely to consider cruises at 50%. We also foresee the 'Early and Established Careers' emerging as a key segment from India,

who would likely to travel to Singapore and consider cruising as a holiday option.

## Supporting travel trade

On STB's efforts to support the Indian travel trade, Srithar said that STB India, which has two offices in Mumbai and Delhi and marketing represen-

Several of our cruise partners in India see CDF as a tool to enhance value proposition to consumers

tatives in Chennai and Bengaluru, has constantly been engaging with its partners since the start of COVID-19 to show its solidarity, update them on the situation in Singapore and

## Road to recovery

As international travel gradually resumes, Singapore has been named one of the top post-pandemic destinations that travellers in Asia would be likely to visit, according to a recent Blackbox Research study. Singapore aims to build on its position as a safe and trusted hub to pioneer leading standards in health, safety, and service. To do so, STB has established the Safe Business Events framework last year for business and MICE events. Larger B2B events in the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions (MICE) industry are allowed in Singapore with up to 750 attendees with effect from 24 Apr 2021. This is an increase from the current limit of 250 attendees and is in line with the safe and progressive resumption of economic activities in Singapore.

discuss how to make travel better, safer, and seamless as they plan for travel restart.

He said, "STB's key initiative in supporting the cruise industry is the Cruise Development Fund (CDF), which supports cruise industry players such as cruise lines, travel agents, charterers, and trainers in activities which build strong consumer demand for Singapore cruises. We are heartened that several of our cruise partners in India see the CDF as a tool to enhance their value proposition to consumers. Some of the

agents onboarded for this grant include Thomas Cook, Guideline Travels, FCM and Antilog Vacations. We see our partnerships and relationships with our stakeholders and partner-friends as critical to our success in the market. We will continue to engage our cruise partner-friends to discuss how STB can best support them on the road to recovery."

India was a major source market for Singapore - in leisure, MICE and cruise tourism. In 2018 and 2019, India was the top cruise travel source market for Singapore, and the third largest tourism market.

Sharing his outlook for future, Srithar said they understand and do not expect a quick rebound in visitor arrivals to Singapore, as it will take a while for positive global travel sentiments to return. But he feels, STB is prepared for the recovery, "We are prepared for recovery to be a slow, deliberate and cautious

process. And so far, while Singapore has made good progress in resuming tourism and business events for domestic audiences, we are some time away from larger leisure movements, including cruise holidays for overseas visitors. There's a general sense of cautious optimism to restart travel in 2021. Travel stakeholders are realistic that travellers will be concerned about safety, health check protocols and end-to-end travel arrangements. Our numbers will not climb back to pre-Covid levels anytime soon."



GB Srithar  
Regional Director of India  
Middle East and South Asia at STB



# Support the tribes of North East

North East India has a number of tribes and communities each with their own traditions and customs. This makes Community-Based Tourism (CBT) a promising segment for travellers looking for unique and authentic experiences, says **Arijit Purkayastha**, Chapter Chairman, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI) –North East.

Most of the earlier tourism development projects in India were applied more towards mass tourism. It has undoubtedly contributed to a large portion of the national income and generated huge employment opportunities. However, mass tourism does not benefit the local communities as such the benefits only trickle down to the communities that fail to encourage participation of the communities.

Community-based tourism is a promising segment as travellers are increasingly looking for unique and authentic experiences. For many tourists its quite appealing that villagers are living close to nature and have their own traditional and indigenous practices. Although communities have a right to make their own deci-

sions about their involvement in tourism, they need to be protected from the negative impacts of tourism in order to preserve their unique cultures. At the same time, they need to be benefitted. Tourists



North East India has a number of tribes and communities each with their own traditions

may discover that traditional communities often have far more to teach travellers about society. For many, there is nothing like bridging centuries of modern development



and making a connection with people whose lives are so very different to cities. Tourism will be accepted by the communities only when they see that it brings the benefit and when they have the decision-making power. The benefits might be in terms of both financial benefits and social recognition.

**Workshops for communities**  
Assam and the North East India

in general have a number of tribes and communities each with their own traditions, customs and practices. In North East India, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is a promising segment as travellers are increasingly looking for unique and authentic experiences. They are willing to spend more money on these activities, especially if this benefits local communities. But how do we

develop off-the-beat community experience for travellers? The most important fact is that we have to find the people who would be interested in community-based tourism. From our experience we feel that CBT will be successful for domestic repeat tourists. For first-timers, visiting the region may not be comfortable as dealing with the community is completely different because the language barrier and destination is totally different in terms of infrastructure compared to mainland India. At the same time, communities need to be prepared and trained for this as it can overwhelm them. This is best done by organising regular workshops.

## ADTOI plays an active role

ADTOI's North East Chapter has been very successfully both directly and indirectly associated with the adopted

village of Sonapur College named Dikchakand tour operators are prepared with CBT for the forthcoming season. Many tour operators in the region are actively involved in CBT through which communities are benefitted. However, care has to be taken not to turn such community-based destinations into mass tourism destinations or else its purpose would be lost.



**Arijit Purkayastha**  
Chapter Chairman, (ADTOI)  
–North East

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

# Adopt this, or die!

Sustainability and community-based tourism has become an important element in tourism. **Julian Matthews**, Chairman, TOFTigers, discusses how India's tour operators can arm themselves to face the future.

Covid-19 has been a mirror to the travel sector – highlighting both the good in tourism, but also the bad that we had got into a habit of accepting. Local communities in destinations have felt this directly.

We still see some activities and practices in India that are not sustainable. The elephant in any room is a numbers game – the sheer volume in any destination, whether it is to Taj Mahal as a sightseer, Leh as a traveller or to a mela as a pilgrim. Destinations cannot take the sheer volume of people and its necessary infrastructure. We are going to have to restrict numbers by clever regulation and ticketing ultimately.

## What can the trade do?

Tour operators can also contribute to developing sustainable tourism. They play a critical role in informing clients, in

highlighting places, working with destinations and indirectly clients to make informed decisions that ensure their clients are happy and the destination is the primary beneficiary.



One activity they can adopt is creating itineraries that are more region based, thereby reducing flying time

They can educate and inform themselves about this in order to guide their clients. TOFTigers runs a host of tutori-



als and events to encourage and incentivise best practice across the supply chain. But we need more training institutes and courses and workshops to spread the word and ensure governments and civil society understand the

essence of sustainability and actions needed to ensure it is embedded in policies.

TOFTigers has launched the globally-recognised 'Travelife' certification for tour operators recently to allow DMCs and

tour operators to upgrade their businesses and be recognised for their efforts, and better able to get contracts now with international tour operators who demand this certification.

It is important for tour operators today to update themselves on this. There is demand and pressure for change. The demand by the international travel sector is now



It's important for tour operators to update themselves on this as there is demand for change.

that are more region based, reducing flying time and endless transportation, and staying in special places for longer. Make a two-night stay a minimum, and a five-night stay in any one place an ideal.

## Government needs to respond

Unfortunately, the Indian Government and state tourism ministries have been far too slow to react to this change or even talk about it. Laws and policies are just not in place to make it happen, and this is why India at the very bottom of the world ranking for sustainable tourism (source: Euromonitor Research, March 2021). I would like to see more community-based tourism, for it to become a central feature of Indian tourism. This can only be done by catalysing local communities and villages to bring together their key assets and own them.



**Julian Matthews**  
Chairman, TOFTigers

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



# 47% Indians keen on intl travel

A study commissioned by Amadeus reveals that 47 per cent of Indian travellers are keen to book international travel within six weeks of restrictions easing, compared to the global average of 41 per cent. About 57 per cent stated they would be happy for a digital health passport to become the norm.

 Manas Dwivedi

**T**he study delivered by Censuwide revealed that 93 per cent of the respondents would be comfortable using a digital health passport for future travel. The international study that included over 1,000 respondents from India, indicates that there is enough incentive for authorities and businesses to accelerate plans for digital health passports. About 57 per cent stated they would be happy for a digital health passport to become the norm. As governments and the travel industry explore its benefits, the message from Indian travellers is clear: digital health passports can be a vital tool in opening up travel again.

The study further revealed that over the past three quarters, 79 per cent of Indian travellers



**Mani Ganeshan**  
Head of R&D, APAC, Amadeus

would be willing to store their travel health data electronically if it meant it will enable them to travel sooner.

Despite an overwhelming response to digital health passports, there are concerns about security and privacy such as 34 per cent of respondents are worried about data security risks with their personal information being hacked. 28 per cent respondents are concerned about lack of transpar-

ency over how and where their data will be shared. The highest scepticism around digital health passports was reported among Gen Z, with 12 per cent saying they would not be comfortable using it at all.

**Mani Ganeshan**, Head of R&D, APAC, Amadeus, says, "As businesses navigate out of the global pandemic, the future of travel looks optimistic. This



**Christophe Bousquet**  
CTO, Amadeus

help build the much-needed confidence for travellers both worldwide and in India."

**Christophe Bousquet**, CTO, Amadeus, comments, "This study reinforces the key role that technology will play in rebuilding travel. We've seen a

technology, crucial areas that will clearly strengthen traveller confidence. It's also very relevant to see that travelers are open to digital health passports and sharing their data as they move through the journey, once the right safeguards are in place. At Amadeus, we're committed to rebuilding a better industry, together with our customers and partners."

Even though receptiveness to sharing data is high, when asked about the technologies that would increase confidence in travel in the next 12 months, mobile solutions were highlighted as a popular option, with suggestions that include Mobile applications that provide on-trip notifications and alerts (51%), Contactless mobile payments (49%), Facial recognition technology (48%) and Boarding pass on mobile (47%).

**Innovations like digital health passports can catalyse traveller confidence**

— Mani Ganeshan

study offers a clear roadmap for the industry, by acknowledging the appetite for technologies that can address the concerns of travellers, whether it is better access to information or reducing physical proximity. Innovations such as digital health passports can catalyse both traveller confidence and the opening of international borders once again. With the world racing towards digital transformation unlike ever before, sophisticated travel-friendly apps will

**Travellers now place more focus on mobile and touchless technology**

— Christophe Bousquet

shift since our last survey, as travellers now place more focus on mobile and touchless

## Being event-ready is important

► Contd from page 1

interest free or low interest loans for rebuilding business and immediate transmission to all industry segments viz., hotels, tour operators (inbound, domestic), travel agents (online and offline) and any other ancillary entity that is supporting the industry on term loans and working capital loans. Besides, existing overdraft limits can be doubled for the industry and immediate cash relief must be extended to the hotels so that they can avoid mass lay-offs of their employees.

### Domestic market a priority

The new initiatives at Taj Hotel & Convention Centre Agra have yielded results. **Rahul Joshi**, its General Manager, says, "With a focus on domestic markets through strong performing offers, we will expand the outreach and our strategy in future will be to reach out to the markets which become more accessible by air. We continue to monitor the evolving situation. MICE has been a strong segment for our hotel; we hope

to see more recovery and confidence on this front."

The hotel has introduced new offers based on demand. "The growing demand for staycation and workcation in a safe, well serviced ambience, is clearly visible in the booking trends. A scenario such as the last year is also an enabler to innovate, to chart a new course and to implement new initiatives in a manner like never before. Technology will continue to play a very important role going forward," Joshi adds.

As the country enters into fresh restrictions once again and the vaccination drive continues, Kochi Marriott Hotel continues to evolve with fresh strategies to deal with the changing situations, which seem to be quite unpredictable. **Subhankar Bose**, General Manager at Kochi Marriott Hotel, says, "The vaccination drive has been steady across the country. However, the government directive clearly states that we need to be mindful even after vaccination by continuing to wear a mask,



**Rahul Joshi**  
General Manager, Taj Hotel & Convention Centre Agra

**Our strategy in future will be to reach out to the markets which become more accessible by air.**

observe social distancing and opt for regular sanitisation. We need to explore our business opportunities carefully keeping in mind the safety of both our guests, our employees and our associates. Safety would be our utmost priority and busi-



**Subhankar Bose**  
General Manager  
Kochi Marriott Hotel

**We need to be mindful even after vaccination by continuing to wear masks and sanitising.**

ness revival will depend on the situation and government directives."

The hotel is doing its best to safeguard the health of guests. "We still do not know the intensity of the second wave.



**Vivek Yagnik**  
General Manager  
Samode Palace & Samode Bagh

**We have re-assessed and re-planned our brand and service standards to ensure safety.**

Moreover, associates employed in the industry continue to provide services for quarantined guests, making them vulnerable to the infection. If the second wave is turning severe in nature, it would be ideal if hospitality associates are made

eligible for priority vaccination," Bose says.

### Flexible policies a must

With the second wave in India, Samode Palace & Samode Bagh is now gearing up to restart operations keeping stringent precautionary measures in place. **Vivek Yagnik**, General Manager, Samode Palace & Samode Bagh, says that a lot of study has gone into preparing his staff and hotels to welcome guests back. "We have re-assessed and re-planned our brand and service standards in preparation to ensure the highest level of guest safety."

He adds that their cancellation policies are flexible and date changes are provided to all guests. "We encourage guests for longer stays and all-meal plans so that venturing out of the property is avoided. However, we have seen a surge in cancellations and date changes. But with our flexible policies, we are hoping this is only momentary. The RT-PCR mandatory test for all ensures maximum safety," Yagnik adds.



# Start-ups in the time of pandemic

Creativity and ingenuity can often shine through when we least expect it. Despite the turmoil that our industry has been witnessing, we are seeing many start-ups being conceived and often take centre stage. Can we learn a few tricks of the trade from them? We put a spotlight on four of them.



Hazel Jain

## Sublimis Technologies

### What is it?

Brahmaandis a technology start-up co-founded by four individuals. It is an end-to-end travel booking platform that makes various processes, components, services and systems come together through real-time integration, giving users the ultimate holiday booking experience. It is for B2B as it only offers a platform – the partner can use it for either B2B or B2C or B2B2N. The platform is vertical agnostic. It enables all kinds of package options for a holiday business and offers an end-to-end capability to manage inventory and distribution, with advanced loading capabilities to manage any type of product, including accommodation, flights, rail, bus, cruise, car hire, transfers, insurance, tours, excursions, tickets, activities, etc.

### 'Technology is an enabler'

#### How important is technology in today's tourism business?

Technology is the backbone of the tourism business today. With the pandemic, lots of businesses globally are feeling the heat and they have realized the need for using technology as an enabler. Technology not only scales their business but also help control operating costs. All mundane jobs should be automated, and people to focus on core business and exceptions.

#### Was it tough to get funding for a travel start-up?

We are currently boot-strapped as our priority was to launch both our platforms in the market. With companies now understanding the need for automation and using technology across most of their functions, both our platforms has received good response. Getting funding is always a challenge, especially in the current scenario. It is a matter of being patient and believing in the vision.

How are you planning to reach out to the travel agents and tour operators?

Our distribution strategy to reach our target clients comprises using our own BD team and resellers for global markets. We also have partnerships with some technology service providers outside of India and will be leveraging the same.



Karthik Venkataraman  
CEO & Co-Founder, Sublimis  
Technologies

## Verteil Technologies

### What is it?

Incorporated in 2016 in Kochi, Verteil is driving technology transformation in the airline distribution space. Thanks to the launch of NDC standards by IATA in 2015, Verteil is disrupting this multi-billion-dollar industry by allowing airlines to distribute its content directly to travel agencies through its airline distribution and retailing platform. Using Verteil's universal API, travel companies can directly plug into reservation systems of the airlines and pull rich content of products, offers and extra services which were hitherto not available in the legacy platforms.

### 'Adopting tech platforms paramount'

#### How important is technology in today's tourism business?

Having the right technology in place is essential for travel companies to reshape their business model as the need arises. Moreover, consumer habits are pushing new tech norms in air ticketing. It is therefore absolutely paramount for companies to adopt technology platforms that can fulfil such expectations related to real time updates, personalised offers, etc. It is in this context, that IATA backed NDC program finds relevance. With the current situation, the relevance of NDC has increased considerably. We are in the driver's seat now helping airlines and travel companies adopt NDC technology to create a superior supply chain technology. Without doubt, this technology transformation will enable travel companies to adapt to the changing times.

#### What challenges did you face while procuring funding?

Obtaining sufficient funding is the biggest challenge for a start-up, especially for a first time entrepreneur. From the start, we have been fortunate to be working with investors who have endorsed our business plan and see value in the industry transformation that we are helping to drive. Even getting leads to investors for evaluating a start up's business plan and potential at an early phase is quite a challenge especially in this part of the world. Another challenge is to get access to investors. Specific to travel domain, investors were hesitant to put money in travel tech especially during the initial phase of the pandemic.



Jerrin Jos  
Founder and CEO of Verteil  
Technologies

## Dida Travel

### What is it?

Established in 2012, DidaTravel is a global hotel wholesaler based in China. Its hotel resource consists of more than 30,000 direct contract hotels, covering more than 200 countries. It recently raised hundreds of millions of yuan funding with Alibaba as the lead investor.

### 'Start-ups need to have confidence'

#### How did you manage to acquire another round of funding, especially during these times?

DidaTravel is one of the best companies in Global Hotel distribution industry, with a perfect layout in the supply chain and distribution channels. We have become the most trusted partner of each leading players in major markets, and our brand influence and value are obvious to all in the industry. In addition, DidaTravel has carried out its globalization strategy earlier than all of its Chinese competitors, we already have resources and distribution channels all over the world. Driven by this, we seized the opportunity in the post-pandemic recovery of domestic tourism under the normal state of COVID-19 epidemic prevention and control. As a result, it managed to significantly reduce the pandemic impacts on its business and ensure steady development.

We have tremendous value and growth opportunities despite the downturn in our industry. Our strategy is also a good match for the strategy and vision of our new shareholders, at the same time, based on years of steady development and a promising future, this investment is a natural fit.

#### What advice would you give other start-ups in travel right now?

First of all, you need to have confidence, because people's demand for travel will not disappear, and we always believe that the tourism industry will recover and enjoy greater development. Secondly, we should persist in doing valuable things. DidaTravel always adheres to the mission of "empowering the business of our tourism partners" to create value for partners, and insists on promoting the globalization strategy, so that the enterprise can make steady progress without being affected.



Rikun Wu  
Founder and CEO  
DidaTravel

## BLive

### What is it?

BLive is a travel tech platform that offers immersive experiential tours powered by smart electric bikes. It allows tourists to experience unexplored spots through tours that are powered by electric bicycles and scooters. In 2020, despite the impact of the pandemic, BLive crossed 10,000 e-bike tours and has launched operations in 15 locations across nine states, largely driven by the increase in domestic tourism post-pandemic, as well as its sustainable tourism model of promoting environment-friendly tours. BLive tours encourage small scale businesses among other things.

### 'We leverage technology to the maximum'

#### How important is technology in today's tourism business?

BLive is an Electric Vehicle (EV) Experience Platform and we conduct immersive experiences on electric bikes. EVs are growing across the world and we wanted to introduce the same to India and make tourism here more sustainable. For us, every part of consumer experience is by leveraging technology to the maximum – whether it is for acquiring customers online by deploying smart digital strategies or to manage our customised e-bikes through an integrated back-end system which helps track the bikes, reduce downtime and makes asset allocation more efficient. We are also set to introduce AI/VR capabilities as part of the tour, which will make the experience more engaging. Our e-bikes are also smart e-bikes, which help us track their movement.

#### What challenges did you face while procuring funding?

Fund-raising is never easy regardless of the sector that you are in. It all comes down to the basics and the key parameters that investors look at, which is market opportunity, scalability and uniqueness of the offering. In all parameters, our offering met the criteria set by the investors, and we were able to secure the investment from individual investors and renowned angel networks. One of the key concerns with regards to tourism business is the seasonality and how we would counter the same.



Samarth Kholkar  
CEO and Co-founder, BLive



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# MICE will regain stability

**Sherene Allaman**, Vice President (International Sales & Marketing), Sun International, shares her perspective on how MICE business will evolve when travel resumes. It is likely that revenue production obtained in 2019 may only be obtained by 2022 or even 2023. MICE business into South Africa will take some time to regain momentum.



Hazel Jain

**W**hat kind of feedback are you receiving from your corporate clients?

Feedback from our clients reflects an urgency to travel and the phrase 'revenge travel against Covid' is starting to surface. However, MICE business is projected to have a phased pattern hence securing any business in the short term is looking bleak with tough times ahead for the next six to nine months. It is likely that revenue production obtained in 2019 may only be obtained by 2022 or even 2023. MICE business into South Africa will



**Sherene Allaman**  
Vice President (International Sales & Marketing), Sun International

take some time to regain momentum and whilst we understand the dynamics placed on business due to effects of the pandemic and the uncertainty around travel, we continue to hold on to the positive aspects and our current pipeline.

**How do you think MICE travel will change and restart from now on, given that 2020 was a lost year?**

MICE business will definitely regain stability. It will start with smaller groups with health and safety being the number one priority. Flexible terms and conditions when booking is going to be a key determination for both destination and property choice. Companies may even make the decision to allow delegates to travel individually with the option of including their families and this will change the structure of their itineraries for these trips. There will also be a focus on wellness travel.

**Are your hotels ready for MICE from India when air connections resume?**

South Africa and Sun International are ready to welcome travellers. We have spent the

entrance of the hotel and clearly designated areas within the hotel to adherence of social distancing and great care has been taken with the serving, eye-appealing packaging and display of meals at our restaurants, sanitisation of rooms. Our staff has had a year of training so that guests have the assurance that their well-being will not be compromised.

immediate, the aim was to use this channel as an opportunity to listen to critical information shared by our partners and clients and use this market intelligence to enhance our product offering as well as to ensure Sun International is a first choice when selecting a hotel brand in South Africa.

**Can a virtual roadshow serve the purpose that physical meetings do?**

The spotlight at the moment is definitely on virtual roadshows and they certainly have a significant place in the times we find ourselves in. However, safety and comfort whilst still being able to network, elimination of travel costs and being able to engage with partners from all geographical areas are some advantages of a virtual platform.

The aim was to use this channel as an opportunity to listen to critical information

last year ensuring that our health and safety protocols currently in place are of the highest standards. Sanitisation stations are clearly visible from

**What was the idea behind participating in JTB India's MICE Engage 2021?**

Participation in carefully-selected roadshows gives us the opportunity to engage with long-term partners as well as securing and building new business relations whilst raising brand awareness. Understanding that a return on investment when participating in a roadshow is not necessarily

*American Express Travel booking data shows a rise in reservations for second-city destinations with requests for smaller cities like Porto (instead of Lisbon) in Portugal, and Wellington (instead of Auckland) in New Zealand.*

## Spree Hotels launches 3 new hotels



Spree Hotels recently celebrated the launch of three hotels - Zip by Spree Hotels Avishi Greens in Manali, Spree Hotel Kriday in Dehradun, and Zip by Spree Hotels The Claire in Gurugram, with the NCR fraternity in Gurgaon. The event, just like the Spree Hotels, was entirely Covid-compliant.

## ATM preps for hybrid event

The show will strictly adhere to the health and safety guidelines set by the Dubai government. Also, for the first time, a new hybrid format will mean a virtual ATM running a week later to reach a wider audience.

TT Bureau

**A**rabian Travel Market (ATM) reconfirmed that the 2021 edition of its annual showcase, will go ahead in-person at the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) from 16-19 May, as final preparations are being put in place, in particular health and safety.



**Danielle Curtis**  
Exhibition Director ME, ATM



India, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, Maldives, the Philippines, Thailand, Mexico and the USA to name but a few. Also,

In addition to Reed Exhibitions' Global COVID-19 'Safety Shows' Health & Safety strategy, ATM is working closely with the team at the Dubai World Trade Centre and with Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) to provide a safe, touchless and seamless experience for all.

Commenting, **Danielle Curtis**, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said, "Dubai is one of the safest cities in the world to visit with a range of precautionary measures in place to ensure the safety of tourists at every stage. More than 9mn doses have already been administered in the UAE.

The theme of this year's show is 'A new dawn for travel and tourism' and the spotlight will be focused on the very latest 'COVID' news from around the world - vaccine rollouts, social and travel restrictions and as a consequence, the current state of the industry and more importantly, what the future holds. It will also look at the emerging trends and how innovation can drive the industry forward.

In-person on the show floor, 62 countries represented by main stand holders and sharers will be participating this year. They include the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Germany, Cyprus, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Italy, Greece,

The spotlight this year is on global updates like vaccine rollouts and travel restrictions

for the first time, a new hybrid format will mean a virtual ATM running a week later to reach a wider audience than ever before. ATM Virtual, which made its debut earlier this year after ATM 2020 was postponed, proved to be a success.





# DIGITAL OFFERINGS



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# EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



MAY-2021

Date	Event	Time
1	GPS Connect	10:00 am
7-9	ITB China- Special edition	Beijing
9-11	BIT Milano- Digital edition	TBA
12	CAPA Live	09:30 am
16-19	Arabian Travel Market (ATM) Hybrid	Dubai
17-19	ATB Virtual 2021	01:30 pm
19-23	FITUR	Madrid
25	Israel Tourism Webinar	TBA
25-26	FTE Virtual Expo 2021	11:30 am
25	Israel Tourism Webinar	TBA

JUNE-2021

1	Digital Travel APAC Virtual Summit	TBA
1-4	Routes Asia 2021	11:30 am
2-4	Ace of MICE Exhibition	Istanbul
4-6	CMT China	Nanjing
8-12	Bali & Beyond Travel Fair	Nusa Dua
21	International Yoga Day Celebrations	Pan-India
2-27	Korea World Travel Fair	Seoul

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

## Don't give into unfair demands

The Travel & Tourism Association of Goa has urged the government not to give into monopolistic demands of the taxi lobby and demands that it implement the installation of taxi meters in Goa in accordance to the High Court order.



Hazel Jain

**N**ilesh Shah, President, Travel & Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG), has again spoken up against the unfair demands of the taxi lobby in Goa – a topic that has been a bone of con-



Nilesh Shah  
President, Travel & Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG)

tention since years. He says, "While we appreciate the state government's strong stand against the unjust demands of the taxi union in Goa, there



Travel & Tourism Association of Goa

should be healthy competition in any business and therefore TTAG would like to urge the government not to give into the unjust and monopolistic demands of the taxi lobby. These pressure tactics have gone on for long, adversely affecting the tourism sector and it is very important that the government does not succumb to it."

He says that the association has always stood firmly behind the government's decision to introduce Goa Miles as it believes that app-based aggregators are the way forward for a tourist state like Goa. "In fact, we would go a step ahead and say that other app-based aggregators like Ola and Uber should also be invited to set shop in Goa as that would only increase healthy competition amongst the operators and give the tour-

ists and locals more options," Shah adds.

Since the launch of Goa Miles, the industry has received positive reviews from tourists with regards to the transparency, service, pricing and discipline



Goa faces a lot of competition from neighbouring states and we will have to move with the times

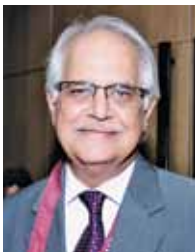


like to mention that all types of taxis, app-based, pre-paid or meter-based, have facilities at airports throughout the country to market their services and the airport authorities earn revenue from such counters. Therefore, these counters should continue to operate as they provide valuable service to travellers. Goa Miles has one such counter at the Goa airport it brings in transparency and affordability to tourists and locals. We therefore request the Government not to shut down the Goa Miles airport counter," Shah adds.

More so, TTAG demands that the government in accordance to the High Court order implement the installation of taxi meters at the earliest in Goa, Shah says. He feels that Goa faces a lot of competition from neighbouring tourism states and if the trade wants to make an impact, Goa will have to move with the times. 🐦

of the app-based aggregator. This has not only brought transparency and discipline in the taxi business but most importantly restored trust in Goan taxi drivers. "We would

### IN MEMORIAM



Vijay Thakur

We are deeply saddened to inform you of the sad demise of **Vijay Thakur**, President, India Vision Tours & Travels and Past President, IATO on 25 April, 2021.

### IN MEMORIAM



Shailendra Seth

**Shailendra Seth** left for his heavenly abode after giving 32 years of his life to aviation industry. He was the Country manager & Director - India at Chapman Freeborn Airchartering.

## New president at TOAA, Assam

The Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA) has chosen Debajit Borah, Director of Brahmaputra Cruise, as its new president along with a new EC team for the next term. The evening also saw a convention on the side-lines of the AGM.



Hazel Jain

**T**he recently-held AGM of the Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA) in Guwahati was marked by the formation of the new Executive Committee where Debajit Borah, Director of Brahmaputra Cruise, was

Nipan Sarmah as Treasurer, and Pranjal Bora and Sushmita Hazarika as Joint Secretary, along with 10 new EC members.

The outgoing President Ranjeet Das appealed to members to think and act anew. He stressed the need for members to innovate in order to revive and thrive. "The biggest challenge of the association was convincing the government on the plight of the first generation tourism entrepreneurs in the state through



various platforms. I appeal to the members to think anew, act anew and let not the present circumstances deter us from doing so," Das said.

The 11th Annual General Body Meeting was followed by an evening convention that was attended by Razvee Hussain, Commissioner & Secretary, Department of Tourism, Government of Assam and Deba Kumar Mishra, MD of Assam

Tourism Development Corp, along with SS Devbarman, Regional Director of India Tourism. The highlight of the evening was the felicitation of Padmashri Dr Anshu Jamsenpa for bringing glory to the North East for her achievements.

In the sphere of promotion, conservation, sustainable tourism and culture, many organisations were also felicitated for their contributions. These

include Rongmon Tourism Society, Manas Accommodation and Tourism Society, Kaziranga Development and Jeep Safari Association, and Green Trek & Adventure. Presence of representatives of Tour Operators Associations from Meghalaya, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Nagaland made the convention meaningful and showcased the bonding that exists between tour operators in the region. 🐦



Our all-time challenge has been to make Assam a 365-day destination for tourists.



Debajit Borah  
President  
TOAA, Assam

selected as the new President. Other new office bearers include Rajkumar Das, Mukul Medhi and Dipak Sarma as Vice Presidents, Kundol Roy as Secretary,



# 7 states in days

Three female bikers — from Assam, Nagaland and Mizoram — are on a road journey to promote tourism in the north east region. The trio who are promoting their trip on social media are touring all the 7 sister states of the Northeast Indian region within a span of 7 days.



Hazel Jain

Three young female bikers — Nirmali Nath from Assam, Onen Nenty from Nagaland, and Rosalynn Lushai from Mizoram — recently embarked on a road trip to promote tourism in the north east region. The trio — brought together by social media — toured all seven sister states of the Northeast Indian region within a span of seven days. Elina Satapathy, Partner, Seven Sisters holidays, which was the event and logistics partner for this event, shares her experience. She says, “The idea was to showcase the North East through the eyes of these bikers who will use this opportunity to break stereotypes and redefine the Northeast. They visited different places and showcased the local people and their hospitality which will definitely create an awareness about the region which is otherwise less explored.”

The ride was flagged off from Guwahati on 3 April, 2021 and was flagged in at Kaziranga on 10 April 2021. On the way, they touched Shillong before halting at Silchar. From there, they rode through Agartala, Aizawl, Jiribam in Manipur, before riding



Elina Satapathy  
Partner, Seven Sisters holidays

to the capital, Imphal. From Imphal, they headed to Kohima in Nagaland and then to Dimapur, the state's commercial capital. Onwards, they rode to Tezpur in Assam, before heading to the final Northeast destination in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh.

This event was supported by the local tour operators and associations who took out time to meet them and appreciate their efforts by felicitating them. To name a few are Tripura Tourism Development Forum, Manipur Tourism Forum, Nagaland Tourism Association and Arunachal Pradesh Tour Operators' Association.

Satapathy adds, “I, being a woman as well as a travel professional thought I could do justice by being associated with the event. So I decided



to go ahead and help these three young lady bikers to achieve the mission. The biggest challenge was the itinerary and the road conditions as our goal was to complete the ride to Seven States in Seven Days. If you go through the routing then you can see that on some days they had to ride more than 300 kms. Another challenge was they were only three women riding through the North East without any support vehicle, security or mechanic. Last but not the least, finance was a big issue. We tried to get sponsorships from various quarters whether Government or non-government agencies but we did not



get any. This may be due to less time in hand and it was the financial closing time for all.”

#### Protocols not an issue

She says that the SOPs riding through different state were not an issue at the time of the journey as they were riding within the North East and at most of the places they could move freely. They had their RT-PCR done wherever required. “Also, the Inner Line Permits are issued at the entry point in most states. So they did not face any problem. They had to go for online ILP in Arunachal Pradesh only,” she says.

Satapathy adds that most tours in the region are covered by road only. “We do not have proper air connection between

the states apart from few. So basically the North East tour is a driving tour. Regarding permits, it's not as difficult as you think. Most states are issuing permits online and some on arrival. If you book your tour through an experienced tour operator then they will take care of everything,” she explains.

#### Promoting domestic tourism

There were two aims in undertaking this journey. “If you do a survey outside North East, you will find that most of the citizens don't know much about this region. And some have negative perceptions about the people, safety and so many other things. This was an attempt to show the world how hospitable the local people

here are. If three ladies can ride through the terrain all by themselves then it is definitely safe for everybody. We also want to convey to adventure lovers that it's a heaven for bikers and self-driving experience,” Satapathy adds.

She adds that the North East region is also the least-infested area by Covid-19. “So right now when the lockdown has been lifted in so many states, people are willing to travel. But as international flight operations have not started, people are looking for new destinations within India and North East is on their wish list. Of course, lockdown has been imposed again in some

Whatever little has been written about North East isn't enough to create an awareness

states. But let's hope that this phase will also pass and people will start travelling freely again,” she says.

Whatever little has been written about the North East is not enough to create a positive awareness among travellers, Satapathy says. “We need to carry out campaigns in various places within India and abroad so that more and more people will come to know about the place and visit the region. At the same time we need to control mass tourism so that the region does not lose its splendour in the process,” she adds.





## HYATT REGENCY THRISSUR

### Thrissur

Hyatt Regency Thrissur announces the appointment of **Anish Kuttan** as the General Manager. He brings 18 years of hospitality experience and has progressively advanced through various leadership roles in acclaimed hotels. He offers his expertise in the areas of Hotel Operations, Sales and Marketing, Revenue Management, Food & Beverages and Guest Experience. Kuttan will oversee the strategic performance of the property along with ensuring highest standards of service. In his previous role he worked as the Director of Operations at Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty.



## THE FERN LEO RESORT & CLUB, JUNAGADH

The Fern Leo Resort & Club, Junagadh has recently announced the joining of **Saurabh Choksi** as the hotel's General Manager. Choksi has over 25 years of experience in the hospitality industry and has worked with multiple big brands across various segments such as Regent Seven Seas, Silversea Cruises, and DoubleTree by Hilton, Radisson Blue and many more. His previous experience was working as the Operations Head for Food & Beverages in Aamby Valley City. In his new position, Choksi will ensure the highest level of hospitality at the hotel in Junagadh.



## THE FERN KESARVAL HOTEL & SPA

### Goa

**Ajay Singh** has joined as the Operations Manager in The Fern Kesarval Hotel & Spa, Verna Plateau in Goa. He is an alumnus of 'IHM Mumbai-2002' and is an MBA with dual specialisation in HR as well as Sales & Marketing. He is also a certified SAP consultant (Sales and Distribution) from DUCAT Academy in Noida. Singh comes with a total 18 years of experience in the hospitality industry, having worked with brands such as IHCL, Carlson, HHI, Fidalgo and many more. He believes in excelling in the industry by having the passion and the willingness to serve.



## THE FERN DENZONG HOTEL & SPA

### Gangtok

The Fern Denzong Hotel & Spa has recently announced the appointment of **Amit Mishra** as its General Manager. Mishra brings with him more than 15 years of experience in the hospitality industry under various positions. As the General Manager to a 70-room relaunched hotel, The Fern Denzong Hotel & Spa in Gangtok, Mishra will ensure the highest standards of hospitality. He has previously worked with The Orchid Hotel-Pune, Sterling Resorts Valley View-Kodaikanal, etc. His last employment was with Mahindra Holidays & Resorts India Ltd at Baiguney (Sikkim).



## ATMOSPHERE GROUP

### Bhubaneshwar

Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts has announced the appointment of **Souvagya Mohapatra** as the Managing Director for India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan. This announcement signals significant growth plans, with a strong focus on the Indian Subcontinent. A veteran of the field, he comes with a wealth of experience of over 28 years in the hospitality and tourism sector and will be responsible for the overall business strategy and setting up new Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts in emerging destinations in South Asia. His career began at The Oberoi Group and then Mayfair Hotels & Resorts.



## NOVOTEL KOCHI INFOPARK

### Kochi

Novotel Kochi Infopark announces the appointment of **Samit Kazi** as its new General Manager. He comes with almost 18 years of industry experience in operations & sales while being based in various cities like Hyderabad, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune and NCR. He has had the opportunity to hold various sales and operational positions at several Accor hotels and at Accor India corporate office. In his new role, Kazi will be focusing on spearheading key operations for Novotel Kochi Infopark and will supervise the hotel's growth and expansion. Novotel Kochi Infopark is a 128 room's hotel in the Kochi IT Hub.



## INDIAN ASSOCIATION OF AMUSEMENT PARKS AND INDUSTRIES (IAAPI)

### Hyderabad

**Rajeev Jalnapurkar** is now Chairman of IAAPI from 1 April, 2021 to 31 March, 2022. He is Director and CEO of Ramoji Film City. Jalnapurkar has more than two decades of experience in industry. He was VC of International Relations Committee of IAAPI and is representative of APac Government Relations Subcommittee for International Association of Amusement Parks & Attractions of India (IAAPA).



## SIGNUM HOTELS

### Delhi

Signum Hotels has appointed **Inder Dev** as Director of Food & Beverage. A hotel management graduate from the prestigious IHM Mumbai, Chef Inder Dev is an award-winning food and beverage professional with three decades of culinary expertise. He is a certified hotelier having post-graduated in Hotel Management & Food Service Management from Japan in 1993. He is known for his novel food creations and for building unique menu concepts. At Signum Hotels, Chef Inder Dev will contribute his vast culinary mastery to lead the food and beverage initiatives.



## LORDS HOTELS AND RESORTS

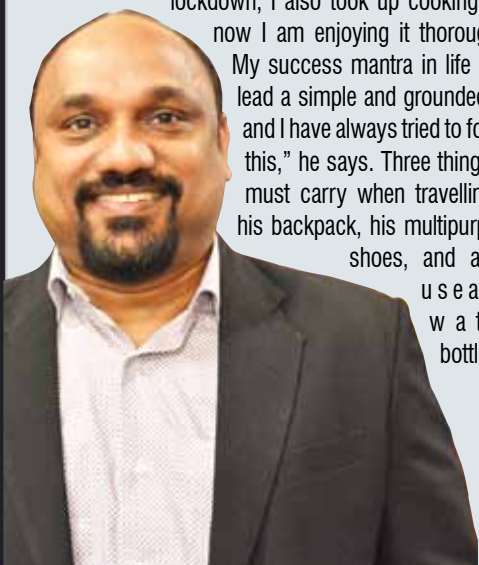
### Mumbai

Lords Hotels and Resorts has appointed **Ashutosh Vaidya** as General Manager – Sales at Corporate Office, Mumbai. Vaidya is a passionate hospitality professional with more than 25 years of experience. Prior to taking up the new role he was associated with Pride Group of Hotels' as Director of Sales at its corporate office. He will be responsible for business development, contract management and client servicing for Lords Hotels and Resorts.



## TALKING PEOPLE

**Clevio Monteiro**, CEO of Visa Lounge, de-stresses by doing yoga diligently everyday without fail. "During the lockdown, I also took up cooking and now I am enjoying it thoroughly! My success mantra in life is to lead a simple and grounded life and I have always tried to follow this," he says. Three things he must carry when travelling is his backpack, his multipurpose shoes, and a reusable water bottle.



**Emanda Vaz**, Head (Ultra Luxury Sales), Embassy Group, does a 60-minute gym workout or plays a sport to de-stress. "The lockdown gave me time and perspective on the importance of evolution and why one must always challenge themselves to learn new skills. So I learned golf. It was the one sport I always perceived as being slow-paced but one session later, I was hooked!"



**Stephen D'souza**, General Manager, Four Points by Sheraton Navi Mumbai, has found that the ritual of praying, routine exercises and spending time with his children very helpful in de-stressing in these challenging times. "Moreover, gardening has become one of my favorite activities during the lockdown when we got an opportunity to redo the entire garden at the hotel. I am looking forward to a trip to Europe as it offers lot to learn."







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# A new trajectory for tourism

The ever-evolving hospitality industry has seen some unimaginable ups and downs in the last year. What impact will this have on education and how have the opportunities evolved? **TRAUTALK** finds out more.



Neha Rawat

**S**ommet Education in collaboration with the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) hosted a virtual webinar titled 'Hospitality Education in the Post CovidWorld' with participation from eminent industry leaders from across the globe. It had **Adrian Artimov**, Regional Director South Asia, Sommet Education; **Suman Billa**, Director of the UNWTO Department for Technical Cooperation and its Silk Road Development Project; along with **Mandeep Lamba**, HVS President of South Asia.

Suman Billa explains how hospitality sector is shaping up in the post-COVID world. He said, "In the year 2020 we saw international tourists drop by 76% which means that 1 bn people have travelled less in that year. In terms of tourism exports, we are looking at 1 trillion dollars less, and 100-120mn jobs lost in the tourism sector. This sector is essentially unprecedented and tourism sector is hardest hit, we hoped for an early rebound in 2021 but that plan is also delayed until everyone is completely vaccinated. At this point of time, tourism has come to a grinding halt and as and when it starts rolling, it will have a new shape to it. Tourism has seen some significant shift in the consumer preferences, more sustainable, responsible, authentic and meaningful experiences. The mass market as we know which high volume is and low profit business is going to be reduced. We are also seeing a concrete debate among most of the governments that are channelling the changing consumer preferences in their policy frameworks and reconciliations.

For the first time, we are looking at countries that want to move at zero carbon footprint. We are looking at hotels and restaurants looking at the zero carbon footprints and zero food miles. We are looking at the industry, showcasing the community itself not as a means of tourism but also as a way to make the experience more authentic. The trajectory of tourism is going to be different from what it was before.



It is a great opportunity to hit the restart button and start moving forward to new beginnings

fore. It is a great opportunity to hit the restart button and move forward to new beginnings. It's a great chance for the Indian industry to reinvent its sectors."

Billa also outlines some of the initiatives undertaken by UNWTO to help the hospitality education sector. He said, "During the pandemic, we were aware that there would be wide-spread job losses and people would be furloughed or we would have a situation where people would be partially employed. So we looked at providing them with online courses in order for them to use their time and enhance their skills to compete in a hyper-competitive market. The second initiative we undertook was the hospitality challenge in collaboration with Sommet Education; this is to see how we can identify ideas and individuals who

can help in a faster recovery of tourism. The third element that is still underway is the Job Factory programme, which is a fair and free online marketplace for jobseekers and for their employers to short-list basis the skills they pertain. Basically to create a fair and easy market place that is being rolled out in conjunction with several governments across the world now."

Speaking on the trends that are shaping the current hospitality sector in the post-Covid world, Mandeep Lamba said, "The sector is severely impacted. We did rebuild some occupancy in the beginning of 2021, and we were hopeful of picking up as hotels were booked for 60% in many places though the rates were highly deflated. However, the second wave has dampened our optimism. We are hoping to see a rebuild in occupancy towards the end of this year once the vaccination drive is spread more widely. We anticipate that by next year occupancy levels should return to normal, but the rates shall recover only by 2023. In terms of trends, the world is talking of revenge travel, and therefore travel shall definitely take an upward trend post-vaccination."

Talking of how Sommet education responded to the changes in the hospitality sector due to Covid-19, Adrian Artimov said "It wasn't easy and it took everyone by surprise. We were quite fortunate, since we are a hospitality management institute, we were already equipped with the skills to deal with such a crisis: agility and adaptability. We quickly switched to an online model, keeping our students engaged and that strong community vibe alive. We developed new online programmes in record time. We invested in technology so that the product delivery was there, and we also revamped our facilities to make Covid-free areas. We are happy with the outcome although the journey hasn't stopped, and we need to continue together."



Suman Billa  
Director, UNWTO (Technical Cooperation & Silk Road Dev. Project)



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