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Tourist visas to India resume

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has announced it will grant fresh tourist visas to incoming foreigners via charter flights from Oct 15 and for all other flights from Nov 15. There will also be no capacity restrictions on scheduled domestic flights from October 18.

Nisha Verma

Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has decided to begin granting fresh tourist visas for foreigners coming to

ing into India by flights other than chartered aircraft would be able to do so only with effect from November 15, 2021 on fresh tourist visas. All due protocols and norms relating to COVID-19 as notified

the foreign tourists, carriers bringing them into India and all other stakeholders at landing stations. However, the move has come after MHA started receiving representations from several State Governments as well as various stakeholders in the tourism sector to start tourist visas also, to allow foreign tourists to come to India. Therefore, the MHA consulted all major stakeholders like the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Ministry of Tourism and various State

Considering various inputs, MHA has taken the decision to restart granting tourist visas

Governments where foreign tourists are expected to arrive. After considering various inputs, the MHA has taken the decision to restart granting tourist visas.



गृह मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF
HOME AFFAIRS

India through chartered flights with effect from October 15, 2021. Foreign tourists enter-

by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare from time to time, shall be adhered to by

of External Affairs, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Ministry of Tourism and various State

Projects galore

Ensuring that Indian Buddhist Circuit is promoted in the right way, MOT recently concluded a Buddhist Circuit train journey and conference in Varanasi.

Nisha Verma

The tour started from Delhi and went on to Bodhgaya, Nalanda, Rajgir and Varanasi. The conference was held in the Varanasi leg of the tour, which saw G Kishan Reddy, Union Minister of Tourism, Culture and DoNER, give a virtual address. The Chief Guest of the event was Neelkanth Tiwari, State Minister (Independent Charge) Tourism, Culture & Religious Affairs, Uttar Pradesh.

MOT has sanctioned 5 projects of Rs 325.53 crore for

Buddhist circuit development in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat and Andhra



Pradesh under the Swadesh Darsha Scheme. Works of ₹ 44.19 crore on three projects have been sanctioned under PRASHAD Scheme.

Reddy, in his address said that the Buddhist Circuit is

Contd on page 19 ▶

Industry for inclusivity

World Tourism Day 2021 theme of 'Inclusive Growth in Tourism' saw everyone in agreement, right from the ministry, government officials, association heads and industry stakeholders.



G Kishan Reddy
Union Minister- Tourism
Culture and DoNER

"In destinations like Ladakh, for tourism to develop community partnership is very important. There is a need to develop overall tourism along with focussing on creating a professional skilled workforce. Tourism can be a game changer for the country,

which can bring socio-economic revolution in the nation especially in the Northeastern states. Our Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision has been to use tourism as a tool for employment generation and inclusive development. The tourism sector has the highest job creating potential in the country among the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors."

"The revival of tourism plays an important role in the recovery of global economy. Tourism sustainability is relevant for both developed and developing countries for its impacts on the environment, economy, and socio-cultural aspects of global, regional, and local economies. by adopting responsible tourism practices. Tourism plays an important role in the upliftment and involvement of the local community with hospitality industry and government departments, leading to empowerment and development of the people in the area while sustaining eco-friendly tourism."

Contd on page 11 ▶



Shripad Yesso Naik
MoS, Tourism

VirtuallyYoursSouthAfrica

South African Tourism's first virtual roadshow titled 'VirtuallyYours-SouthAfrica' is slated to be held between October 20-22, 2021 and is expected to see participation from over 100 South African suppliers.

Hazel Jain

The three-day roadshow will include an exclusive CEO address to the top travel trade and corporate CEOs in India. It is also slated to host an exclusive industry panel discussion, breakout rooms for participants, photo booths, interactive maps and brochures as well as one-on-one access to select meetings and extensive corporate engagement.

Speaking about the 2021 virtual roadshow, Neliswa Nkani, Hub Head – MEISEA, South African Tourism said, "It is a testament



Neliswa Nkani
Hub Head – MEISEA, South African Tourism

of our unwavering commitment to the Indian market, especially in the face of a global pandemic. India houses massive potential when it comes to long-haul outbound travel. We are seeing

a huge uptake for travel with forward bookings showing an upward curve, especially in the FIT segment. We are, hence, excited to showcase the new, technologically evolved, cutting edge South Africa that still maintains its old world charm, natural attractions and warm hospitality. We expect mutually beneficial partnerships and impactful business conversions between South African exhibitors and Indian buyers to stem from our first virtual roadshow."

Emirates, Qatar Airways and Ethiopian Airlines have regular flights scheduled from India to South Africa. ▶

“Events have changed and so have we. Events will look and feel different from now on. We are better together and so we are coming up with a new tool called **"TOGETHER BY HYATT"**. A new approach to Events to help bring people together again with a deeper sense of trust, connection & Well being.”

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Vikas Chaudhary
Director, HYATT

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IATO convention in Gandhinagar

Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), has announced that its 36th IATO Annual Convention will be held in Gandhinagar in Gujarat from December 16-19, 2021. There will also be post-convention tours for attendees, keeping all safety protocols in mind.



Nisha Verma

The venue of the convention is The Leela Gandhinagar, shared **Rajiv Mehra**, President, IATO. The decision was made by the IATO Executive Committee, and Mehra announced the same by saying, "We planned to have our convention in Gujarat in September 2020 but had to postpone the same due to COVID -19".

The statement issued by IATO stated that since the situation is improving now day-by-day and vaccination is going in full swing, December would be the appropriate time to have the convention. The association explained that this will give time to the stakeholders to get their second dose, who have not taken it so far and be ready to attend the convention. All SOPs and norms would be strictly followed and all delegates who will attend the convention, will have to submit copy of fully vaccination certificate and based on that their convention registration will be accepted.



Rajiv Mehra
President, IATO

Mehra added, "The stupendous success of the previous convention has raised the expectations of the members and sponsors. More than 900 delegates are expected for the three-day event and the IATO convention is eagerly awaited by all".

IATO is going back to Gujarat after a gap of 10 years and it will be an excellent opportunity for the members to see the improved and developed infrastructure in Gujarat, claimed the statement.

Mehra also mentioned that industry is going through a very bad time and their focus would

be to have deliberations as to how they can revive tourism and bring it back to pre-COVID level.

There will be many post-convention tours, which would be of great interest for the members, claimed the statement. On the sidelines of the convention, there will be the travel mart, which



The last IATO Convention was held in Kolkata in 2019, which saw delegates from across the country coming together in capital of West Bengal.

Mehra, along with office bearers of IATO, including EM Najeeb, Sr. Vice President, IATO and Rajnish Kaistha, Hony. Secretary, IATO, visited Gandhinagar recently to finalise the venue and dates of the convention. Even Statue of Unity was being proposed as a venue for the convention.

After finalising the venue and the dates, the IATO team is currently working on deciding the theme of the convention, as well as the panel discussions & activities that will happen during the course of the 3-day event.

All delegates who will attend the convention, will have to submit copy of fully vaccination certificate

will be an opportunity for the exhibitors to showcase exciting and diverse range of destinations, conference and incentive venues especially by the state governments.

Exhibit A

Covishield

Highly advanced vaccine to tackle the pandemic of Covid-19 undergoing multiple manufacturing checks before it is made available to the public.

Exhibit B

the business travel magazine

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Rise like a Phoenix

The last few years have been rather interesting for Air India. While the national carrier has had its fair share of problems, its glory lies in its 130+ aircrafts, 4,400 domestic and 1,800 international landing and parking slots at domestic airports, as well as 900 slots at airports overseas.

While discussions this month have only been about Air India, its interesting to see private players bid for the carrier in times where the aviation industry has gone through some of its worst months. Globally, governments are bailing out private airlines but in India we do things differently!

68 years later, Tatas will retake control of Air India winning a ₹18,000-crore bid. While, Tata Sons already run two airlines in India - Vistara, in partnership with Singapore Airlines, and AirAsia India, in partnership with Malaysia based AirAsia, all eyes are on the turnaround they can show for the erstwhile national carrier.

Lets hope that they can make it ‘one of the most prestigious airlines in the world’ again!

Too late or early

India finally has opened its borders and resumed e-Tourist visa for foreign tourists after 18 months, much to the relief of the industry. Now, MHA has finally decided to drop its border restrictions amidst low COVID cases and high vaccination rates. While this has eased the pressure on the healthcare system, but health experts still warn of a premature opening.

The industry, on the other hand, is cheering. Both, the Government and inbound stakeholders are prepping towards the opening by putting in place all the required protocols to ensure tourist safety. However, would this be enough?

Right from marketing India as a safe destination, to walking the talk by ensuring steps are taken on ground, the stakeholders need to up their game, not just to attract the tourists, but to keep up to their expectations. It's anticipated that foreign tourist arrivals will start picking up by the end of the year once scheduled flights return in earnest. Thus, amidst all the frenzy and cheer around reopening, it is imperative to not let the guard down.

Travellers' frustration mounting

International Air Transport Association (IATA), in a survey of 4,700 respondents in 11 markets in September, has claimed that travellers are increasingly frustrated with the COVID-19 travel restrictions, and are ready to travel again.

The survey demonstrated that the risks of COVID-19 can be effectively managed and that the freedom to travel should be restored. 67% of respondents felt that most country borders should be opened now, up 12

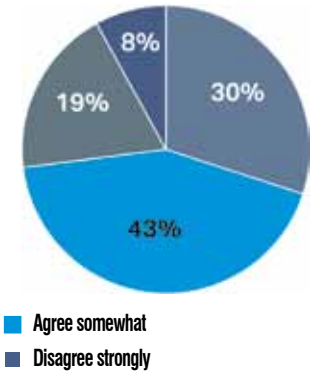
percentage-points from the June 2021 survey. 64% of respondents felt that border closures are unnecessary and have not been effective in containing the virus (up 11 percentage points from June 2021). 73% responded that their

quality of life is suffering as a result of COVID-19 travel restrictions (up 6 percentage points from June 2021). "People want to travel. 86% expect to travel within six months of the crisis ending. With COVID-19 becom-

ing endemic, vaccines being widely available and therapeutics improving rapidly, we are quickly approaching that point in time. People also tell us that they are confident to travel," Willie Walsh, Director General, IATA.

Travel restrictions and quality of life

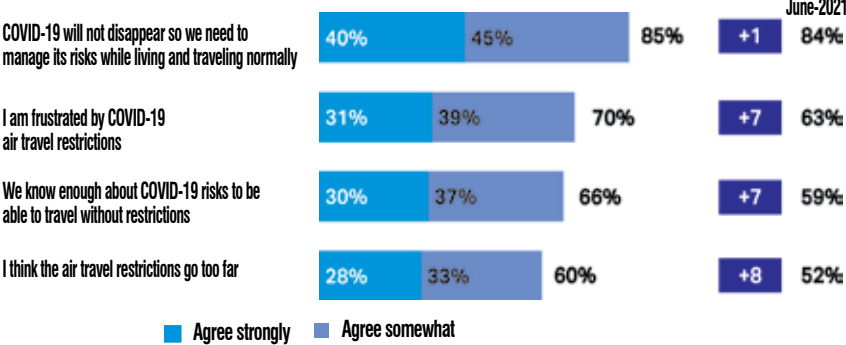
Quality of Life Has Suffered As A Result of Travel Restrictions



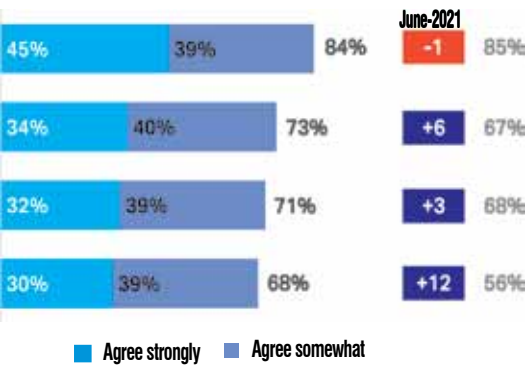
"People are increasingly frustrated with the COVID-19 travel restrictions and even more have seen their quality of life suffer as a result. They don't see the necessity of travel restrictions to control the virus. And they have missed too many family moments, personal development opportunities and business priorities. In short, they miss the freedom of flying and want it restored. The message they are sending to governments is: COVID-19 is not going to disappear, so we must establish a way to manage its risks while living and traveling normally," said Willie Walsh, IATA's Director General. With more markets starting to open, there is a need to address COVID-related travel rules & requirements.

More frustration with travel restrictions

Quarantine measures remain the biggest hassle. 84% of respondents indicated that they will not travel if there is a chance of quarantine at their destination. Increasing number of respondents support removal of quarantine if a person has tested COVID negative (73% in Sep against 67% in June) or a person has been vaccinated (71% in Sep against 68% in June).



More believe quarantine is of limited use



80% of respondents claim that vaccinated people should be able to travel freely by air. However, there were strong views against making vaccination a condition for air travel. About two-thirds felt it is morally wrong to restrict travel only to those who have been vaccinated. Over 80% of respondents believe that testing before air travel should be an alternative for people without access to vaccination. 85% are willing to be tested if required in the travel process, "There is a message here for governments. People are willing to be tested to travel. But they don't like the cost or the inconvenience. Both can be addressed by governments," said Walsh

India on the path of recovery

Tourism in India is going to be different post-pandemic. People are scared to travel and their demands are different from before, say inbound operators and experts. On a positive note, they seek vaccination overdrive for the travelling public & chart out new itineraries and destination.



Janice Alyosius

Tourists coming to India are now looking for something different. **Arjun Sharma**, Chairman, Select Group, believes that starting January 1, tourism in



Arjun Sharma
Chairman, Select Group

India should recover and inbound tourism should also start slowly. However, he says, "It's not going to be easy because we only have around 4-5 months of the season



Sanjeev Chopra
CEO, Aayan Journeys

left, and it will be a slow start. The industry needs it and even a slow start is good, rather than a no start. It's becoming more of an endemic than a pandemic and everyone is hoping that there is no third wave and things settle down. The numbers are decreasing. Hence, it's a matter of time when things get better. Let's hope this happens fast."

Sanjeev Chopra, CEO, Aayan Journeys, also shared that early

this year in March, they got some queries and even received bookings. "Due to the pandemic, the situation has worsened and most of the bookings got cancelled/postponed. Now, we have started getting feelers from our agents that they want to operate and start the business. They're looking for offbeat locations, which are less crowded and itineraries beyond regular tours," he adds.

Besides, **Navneet Arora**, Director, Vinstring Holidays, requests that the Government has to guarantee and confirm that at least 70-80% people have been double vaccinated, and only then we should talk about tourism to India. "Otherwise it's a futile exercise, people are scared and will not come. We need to increase the pace of vaccination in India. Also, 31st March deadline for free visas is too soon. We haven't started tourist visas yet. We are under



Navneet Arora
Director, Vinstring Holidays

10-day or a 14-day quarantine system with UK, which is one of the major tourism generators for India. India has responded back by similar 10-day quarantine for them. Tourists used to come for 28 days around 20 years ago. However, now it's almost three weeks, in which if they are going to be in quarantine for 10 days then it's not worth it," he claims.

Amit Chadha, Independent Tour Escort cum Guide, says that the new tourism is going to be

different. "Tourism in India before COVID was about exploring popular places. Now, tourists are going to be scared in visiting such places. We used to load buses to



Amit Chadha
Independent Tour Escort & Guide

full capacity, but now social distancing is mandatory. It's going to be a different scenario and we have to prepare ourselves. India should be 70% vaccinated and prepared to follow proper protocols. Only then will tourists have the confidence," he asserts.

Tourism Breaking News

■ MOT's Paris office being shifted to Moscow, promotions in France to be done via Frankfurt: Rupinder Brar

■ India to get its second Raffles property soon: Mark Willis

■ Tourism Malaysia participates as Platinum partner at Gulf Travel Show 2021

■ With right measures, governments could see jobs surpass 2019 levels by 2022: WTTC

■ 65-room Zone Connect in Darjeeling to open its doors soon

■ Baywatch Stayzz appointed India GSA for The Fern Creek

■ Over 85% respondents keen to travel between Oct-Dec 2021: Thomas Cook India & SOTC study

■ IRCTC to launch special tourist train for Northeastern states under 'Dekho Apna Desh'

■ Booking non-registered hotel will soon be considered illegal in Goa

VFS sells majority stakes

EQT Private Equity is set to sell a majority stake in VFS Global to Blackstone and retain a minority position. According to sources, the acquisition is estimated at over \$2 billion valuation.



TT Bureau

VFS Global is the industry pioneer and the world's largest provider of visa outsourcing services. It is 90% owned by Swedish private equity firm EQT and 10% by the Kuoni Foundation and founder-CEO Zubin Karkaria.



Blackstone. EQT Private Equity will retain a minority position in the Company alongside Blackstone and the Kuoni and Hugentobler Foundation following the closing of the transaction. **Zubin Karkaria** commented, "With EQT's trust and support – especially during the COVID-19 pandemic – we are in a much stronger position today and look forward to the next phase of growth together with Blackstone."

Matthias Wittkowski, Partner within EQT Private Equity's Advisory Team, said, "We are proud of the remarkable expansion of VFS Global's market position and substantial improvements in its independent governance, which we achieved together with the VFS Global team in the past five years during EQT's majority ownership. We are pleased to have found a

partner in Blackstone who will continue to support VFS Global in its strong future growth story."

Lionel Assant and Amit Dixit, Europe and Asia Head of Blackstone Private Equity, respectively, said, "We look forward to helping

We are in a much stronger position today and look forward to the next phase of growth together with Blackstone

the company capitalise on the global travel recovery, accelerate its digitisation journey, and expand into adjacent services." The transaction could close by Q1 2022.

MOT plans int'l promotions

Ravi Gosain, Vice President, IATO, has revealed that MOT met with inbound tourism associations to create an action plan for overseas promotions after the visa opening announcement by MHA.



Nisha Verma

While Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav will be the common theme for all promotions, MOT is planning to declare year 2022-23 as Visit India Year.

For Dubai Expo, all associations have been asked to give presentations on the sector they represent. **Ravi Gosain** said, "It's a two-week programme from the MOT, and the tourism minister will also go there. While IATO will give presentation on 'Luxury in India' as well as 'Heritage & Culture of India', ATOAI will be focusing on 'Adventure Opportunities', and ICPB will present on MICE. There will be one day each dedicated to all sectors of tourism. In addition, the government wants to make the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav and India@75 as the main brand for every promotion they are doing."

Gosain revealed, "MOT called industry representatives to take



Ravi Gosain
Vice President, IATO

opinions and suggestions on what we wanted in terms of promotions and how we can go about it."

The Ministry had also proposed in the meeting that they wanted to declare 2022-23 as Visit India year, starting from August 15, 2022. "However, we suggested that it should start from January 1, 2022. If they want Visit India Year to be successful and meaningful, they should provide some incentives to the tour operators or tourists who want to visit India. Otherwise, it'd remain just a slogan," he suggested.

On IATO's behalf, they proposed that there should be resumption of commercial flights at the earliest. "We also suggested that E-visa should be double-entry with 60-days validity because currently they

IATO will give presentation on 'Luxury in India' as well as 'Heritage & Culture of India'

have done it for only 30 days. Also, visa information should be circulated and get wider publicity so that at least there should be demand for the Indian market. We highlighted many more issues in our agenda shared with the MOT," he said.



Zubin Karkaria
CEO, VFS Global

EQT, in an official statement announced that the EQT VII fund (EQT Private Equity) has signed a definitive agreement to sell a majority stake in VFS Global to private equity funds managed by

Re-discovering South Africa

Expecting a change in Indian traveller behavior, South African Tourism is promoting newer regions, going beyond Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban. A large focus area for the national tourism board will also be to mobilize niche communities in India.



TT Bureau

This year, South African Tourism will be specifically targeting niche communities and promoting newer regions. It is therefore looking at introducing newer, customised experiences and itineraries for the FIT traveller segment, while expecting a demand for drivecations and flexible booking dates.

Discover adventure-filled Drakensberg

KwaZulu-Natal is home to the Drakensberg mountains in the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park, a natural and cultural World Heritage Site, owing to the mountains' rock art and natural beauty. Travellers can go to Drakensberg during the weekend, to indulge in activities like hiking, biking, hot air ballooning, helicopter rides and horseback riding trips into the mountains.



The Big 5 in Limpopo

Known for its huge rivers, splashing hippos and immersive culture, Limpopo is one of the most interesting provinces in South Africa. With seven of South Africa's 11 official languages being spoken here, travellers stand a good chance of meeting people from a majority of the country's ethnic

Park also has a thriving marine life and rich flora and offers the only Big 7 safari options in the world.

Chill out at the beautiful Coffee Bay

Nestled within the Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape Province is Coffee Bay – a beautiful coastal town that draws in enormous interest

explore bike trails through fynbos (small belts of natural shrub land), or visit the icy waters of Langebaan Lagoon for kayaking and sailing. Southern right whales can be viewed between August to November. A visit to the Rainbow Nation would be incomplete without a drive along the Panorama route.

by the fact that 12000 Indians jumped off the Bloukrans Bridge in 2017, making Indians the third-highest participating nationality for the activity.

Abseiling from Table Mountain, Western Cape

The 7th Natural Wonder of the World offers a spectacular view of the Mother City with its bustling city life and the blue ocean. Abseiling from the top of Table

Zulu-Natal Province of South Africa. Lowveld is full of adventure highs and Graskop's gorge swing takes the cake. Prepare to free-fall 68 m!

Hiking in Cape Town

Whether you like to hike up mountains, along rivers or through valleys, you're certain to find a perfect route. In Cape Town you're spoiled for choice when it comes to hikes – take your pick from Table Mountain's many routes, Lion's



Ostriches in Oudtshoorn

Inland from the Cape's famous Garden Route, travellers will find Oudtshoorn – popularly known as the ostrich capital of the world. The town is home to several interesting attractions like Cango Caves with its truly grand stalactite and stalagmite formations and Cango Wildlife Ranch, which offers crocodile-cage dives.

groupings. It also houses one of the country's highest population of rhinos and antelope species.

A slice of history at Port Elizabeth

Port Elizabeth houses South Africa's third largest national reserve where travellers can watch hundreds of African elephants roam around freely. The Addo National

from visitors due to its unspoilt beaches and rich, traditional Xhosa lifestyle. The Coffee Bay is also widely known for the Hole in the Wall, a geographical marvel that amplifies the sound of the waves onto the rock.

Indulge in water sports at Sodwana Bay

Sodwana Bay is located on the east coast of South Africa, in one of the most unique and unspoiled parts of the world. Sodwana's spectacular coral reefs in a national marine protected area are among the southernmost in the world, and are a scuba diving and snorkeling mecca. Note to all those keen about fishing: game fish abound.

Wonderful West Coast

A 90-minute drive from Cape Town, the West Coast is a local favourite for a restorative weekend away. Travellers can hike,

Adventure

South Africa, with over 3,000 adventure activities, is undoubtedly the adventure capital of the world.

Big Rush Big Swing, KwaZulu-Natal

It has been officially named the world's tallest swing by the Guinness Book of Records since May 2011. The aptly named Big

Mountain gives you a view of the city that you will never see without indulging in the activity. One can also opt for cable car or trek.

Shark-cage diving, KwaZulu-Natal

Great White Shark spotting is one of the biggest draws to South Africa. A trip to Rainbow Nation is incomplete without attempting

Head's popular and spectacular trail, walks in the various forests spread out below the mountain and beautiful coastal trails.

Hot air ballooning in Gauteng

A hot air ballooning adventure is a low-anxiety adventure which will take you to an emotional high. And tradition requires that a hot



Swing allows you to take the thrilling leap swinging out into a massive 220m arc where you soar into the center of the stadium.

Bloukrans Bridge Bungee, Eastern Cape

The highest commercial bridge bungee jump in the world at the Bloukrans Bridge has a 216 meter gorge below. It is one of the ultimate activities to feature on any adrenaline seeker's bucket-list while visiting South Africa. The growing popularity is evident

the hair-raising shark-cage dive. In fact, Indians are the top 3rd nationality to undertake Shark-cage diving in South Africa. KwaZulu-Natal is often credited as a hub for shark-cage diving, with shark cage-diving outfits operating out of Durban and from the stunning coral reef – Aliwal Shoal.

Gorge Swing, KwaZulu-Natal

The highest gorge swing in the world is located on a waterfall cliff in the Oribi Gorge in southern Kwa-

air balloon flight ends with a toast of sparkling wine.

Helicopter ride, Western Cape

South Africa also offers luxurious helicopter rides. Helicopter flips in Cape Town allow travellers the joy of a bird's eye-view of the beauty that the Mother City in South Africa is. Take a helicopter flip for a change of scenery and enjoy a view of the entire countryside in a single trip before choosing your drive-to destination. 📌



Maharashtra launches app

In preparation for tourism restart, Maharashtra's Department of Tourism recently launched a mobile app for tourists and a revamped website. The cabinet recently approved a budget of ₹250 crore for tourism development in the state.



Nisha Verma

Maharashtra Tourism recently launched its revamped website and a new mobile app dedicated to tourists. The new multilingual website is available in nine languages – English, Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Gujarati, Telugu, French, Japanese and Spanish. The user-friendly website comprises information on around 350 destinations bifurcated theme-wise. The website is also compatible for physically challenged (blind) users. The mobile app which is 20MB in size is compatible on Android as well as iOS devices.

This is all part of the tourism plan after the cabinet recently approved a budget of Rs. 250 crore for the development of

Directorate of Tourism (DoT), Government of Maharashtra had adopted the virtual guide training programme designed by the Ministry of Tourism (MoT), Government of India to become part of the burgeoning tourism industry to serve as high

quality tour guides at the state level. The World Tourism Day celebrations also included a heritage tour where MoUs were signed with Mumbai High Court and Mumbai University. With this MoU, tourists will be able to take a tour of the iconic high

court building on non-working Saturdays and Sundays while the Mumbai University will be open for tourists on Sundays and public holidays. The tour will be conducted by TOGA (Tourist Guide Association) guides. ➔



Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray at the World Tourism Day event in Mumbai



The website is in 9 languages – English, Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Gujarati, Telugu, French, Japanese & Spanish

tourism. The tourism department also launched an extensive publicity campaign to promote tourism at the domestic and international level. On the occasion of World Tourism Day, Minister of Tourism Aaditya Thackeray, inaugurated Konkan Tourism's new office in Navi Mumbai and six beautifully-painted tourism walls painted by local and professional artists at six locations in the state.

In order to ensure holistic development, Maharashtra Tourism had announced a unique 'Online IITF Tourism Facilitator Certification Programme (Guide Training)' in February 2021 for individuals who, as trained tour guides, could showcase the essence of Maharashtra to travellers.

So far, the programme has received over 700 registered applicants from Maharashtra. The

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On Cloud-9 after visa opening

The inbound tour operators are rejoicing after the Ministry of Home Affairs announced the re-opening of e-Tourist visa for foreigners and are ready to welcome them with all protocols in place. We speak to six experts who share their views on the industry needs to get ready for this influx and the future of foreign arrivals.

“I would like to thank Hon'ble Prime Minister, Home Minister and Tourism Minister for considering our request in resuming tourist visa which Ministry of Home Affairs has declared today announcing resumption of Tourist Visa for Foreigners coming to India through chartered flights with effect from 15th October 2021 and for others from 15th November 2021. This is very encouraging for the industry and we hope that inbound tourism will start to some extent.”



Jatinder Taneja
Vice Chair, Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) INDIA CHAPTER

“This step will help drive inbound tourism in the country. I would also like to extend our sincere gratitude to Arvind Singh, Secretary, MOT and Chairman PATA India chapter, for coordinating with relevant ministries to make this possible. The timing of the decision is ideal as vaccination rate in the country is high and we are observing a steady drop in cases. These facts induce a sense of security in travellers planning to revisit or explore India. This will help us revive tourism.”



Rajiv Mehra
President, IATO

“This has been the request from the tourism industry, especially IATO and FAITH for the last several months. This will give the right message to the world that India is ready to receive international tourists with COVID protocols. I am glad that the Govt has taken a positive step for issuing visas. But airline operations should also get back to normal. Then only can we expect international tourists to come easily. We hope that air connections will also be streamlined.”



EM Najeeb
Senior Vice President, IATO



Ravi Gosain
Vice President, IATO

“I would like to thank all decision makers who made this happen on the auspicious day of 1st Navratra. It's indeed a silver line in the dark clouds for millions of people dependent on inbound tourism and who were jobless for almost 18 months. I am hopeful, MOT will be quick in dispersing this information to all FTOs through their marketing and PR channels. Several countries are opening their borders for tourists, so we must be pro-active not to miss the opportunity to attract tourists to India.”

“This is indeed a boon for the tourism industry that has its vital linkage effect spanning across diverse sectors of our economy. We are grateful to the MOT for their support leading to the announcements. It is imperative now to tell the world that India is safe and ready to welcome tourists with all SOPs put in place by the stakeholders of tourism in India. Thus, marketing to augment the perceived value of India needs to be stepped up in the top 30 source and emerging markets.”



Sunil Mishra
Hony. Treasurer, IATO



Rajnish Kaistha
Hony. Secretary, IATO

“Opening of E-Tourist visas is the best news on tourism front for the inbound tourism industry, which was otherwise on-ventilator since Mar'20. IATO and all other tourism bodies worked very hard towards common goal of India opening. A word of thanks to MOT in conveying our message loud and clear that a lead time must be given, and November 15 gives us good 5 weeks to get ready with COVID SOPs in place. Our partners are equally excited to start selling India tours.”

Inputs by Nisha Verma



motivates members in capital

OTOAI members came together for a gathering at Shangri-La, where President **Riaz Munshi** greeted the members and asked them to gear up and get prepared. In his speech he talked about creating innovative products and to be step ahead of the requirement of the clients to deliver a better experience for them.



We must consider local communities

► Contd from page 3

“I am proud that our state has taken the lead in agri-tourism. The concept of 30% Krishi Yojana proposed by the Agriculture Minister Dadasaheb Bhuse for women farmers is highly commendable. More than 60% of the country's population engage in agriculture and it is crucial to link agriculture to tourism. Agri-tourism is instrumental for employment generation and economic improvement especially in these pandemic times when people have lost jobs. Agri-tourism has given us the opportunity to bring together the two major sectors: tourism and agriculture. The current pandemic offers an opportunity to grow agri-tourism in India. One of the safest ways to enjoy travel right now is to visit rural areas.”



Aaditya Thackeray
Minister of Tourism & Environment, Maharashtra



Arvind Singh
Secretary, Ministry of Tourism

“This year's World Tourism Day, with its theme Inclusive Growth for Tourism is at a critical moment, as counties around the world look up to tourism for driving economic recovery. It's time to look beyond tourism statistics and acknowledge that behind every number is a person. We, at MOT, invite everyone to celebrate tourism's unique ability to ensure that nobody is left behind as the world begins to open and looks to the future. Inclusiveness is the essence of the ethos with which we are celebrating this 75th Anniversary of our Independence Day and we are calling it as the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav India @75. Most of our activities going forward will be focused around this campaign, and we will make sure that it reaches worldwide.”

“One must consider local needs when it comes to tourism. In responsible or inclusive tourism, local people try to come out and enhance their skills to suit the needs of five-star properties in the area. In Kumarakom, Kerala for example, local self-help groups by ladies prepare fish and supply vegetables, linen, drinking water as well as coconut water to 5-star properties in the region. There are around seven 5-star hotels and over 200 hotels in Kumarakom and the supply chain management has been taken over by the local population. Local institutions and state governments have given this training to them. Hence, I insist that state governments should actively get involved into developing responsible tourism.”



G Kamala Vardhan Rao
DG, Ministry of Tourism



Rupinder Brar
ADG, Ministry of Tourism

“It's a good thing that UNWTO has recognised inclusiveness as the theme for this World Tourism Day. For a country like India, we are looking at tourism, travel and hospitality providing a huge amount of employment opportunities across the socio-economic spectrum. It's a wonderful opportunity for everyone to work with a strategic focus on creating inclusiveness in our sector because in India the experiential possibilities, in terms of magnitude and offerings, are immense. This provides all of us, including the government and the stakeholders of the industry, an amazing opportunity to work at the grassroot level to ensure community involvement and to make sure that there are many benefits that can flow back to society at large through inclusive tourism.”



Zurab Pololikashvili
Secretary-General, UNWTO

“Now is the time to recognise our sector's essential role as a vision of sustainable and equal development. With this year's theme, we highlight the value of everyone involved in tourism, both visitors and the visited. India has always seen tourists as a vital part of social-economic, cultural and environmental advancements. Tourism can help our societies to recover from the effect of pandemic and it can deliver hope to those who need it most. In many parts of the world, tourism has slowly started and the growth of tourism must benefit every sector from big airlines to small family business and from the largest cities to the poor communities. This is what it means when we say we will leave nobody behind.”



Rajiv Mehra
President, IATO

“First, we need to see when international flights and visas start opening. Tourists will decide whether they would like to come to India or not. Once that happens, inclusive growth will follow as tourists would not only focus on leisure but would also go to the eco-friendly destinations and there will be growth in those areas also. There will also be change in SOPs, which we are going to follow. However, overall once international travel starts we will have good growth. Government's help is required to do promotion and also in keeping the price controlled, so that there is growth in the tourism industry and we don't lose business to the neighbouring countries.”

“The focus of World Tourism Day this year has been inclusive growth and domestic tourism is the ultimate saviour for the tourism industry that has been deprived during the pandemic. No sooner the situation has improved, it was domestic tourism that came to the rescue of the stakeholders of the industry. Both central and state governments have now realised that only domestic tourism can save the industry upon its revival which has begun to catch pace. This has brought smile on the faces of the stakeholders, including tour operators, hotels, guides, transport operators, as they are getting business. Owing to the pandemic, both policymakers and stakeholders have realised what kills the industry and are working in tandem to bring a new normal, thereby providing the push to the growth of tourism within the state and across the country.”



PP Khanna
President, ADTOI



Ajay Prakash
President, TAFI

“Inclusive growth is a very necessary but also a very ambitious idea. As my friend Taleb Rifai has said, one cannot build a five-star resort in a two-star community. That phrase exemplifies what inclusive growth ought to be about. It is not inclusive if tourism degrades the environment; it is not inclusive if the women and children in a destination are exploited. These are the issues that the trade needs to consider. All of us need to be more alive and mindful of the environmental impact of our businesses – whether it is a tour operator, a hotel, an airline, a tourist guide or a driver. Each one of us has a responsibility towards the community and the local population, so that we can make our businesses more inclusive and look at how the host community can benefit from tourism and the business it brings with it.”

“I support the theme of this World Tourism Day. However, inclusive growth is not only meant for supporting the economies of the world, but it can support the tourism industry stakeholders too. It can bring back tourism to a very strong growing path and bring a lot of value to the travellers who are keen to go out and experience the world. I think it's a great thing to happen for all of us. Let's try to reach out to those sustainable development goals that the United Nations always talks about and I believe that the growth should be for all the economies of the world. It should be the growth for the economy of the travel and tourism industry, particularly the economy of our principals, which are predominantly airlines and hotels. I think in the long run, inclusive tourism will be the way forward for our industry.”

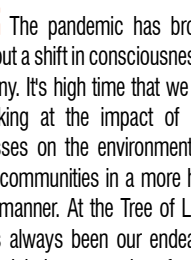


Sunil Kumar
President, UFTAA



Steve Borgia
CMD, INDeco Leisure Hotels

“India is already too late for inclusive tourism, but thanks to Corona, the travel and tourism fraternity is now talking about inclusive tourism. If tourism is not able to offer benefits to the local communities, then it's not fair tourism but exploitative tourism. While the world can talk about sustainable tourism or eco-tourism, India has a privilege of talking about regenerative tourism because we had it implanted in our community and day-to-day life, but we lost it. Hence, we need to regenerate and go back to where we were. INDeco Hotels established rural tourism way back in the 90s and we saw development. In Indian villages, rural tourism is a magic wand that can resolve many of our development issues. I strongly believe that it should be taken seriously, and we need to harness that maximum potential and see what we can do to make it effective nationwide.”



Sunil Varghese
Director, Dune Wellness

“The pandemic has brought about a shift in consciousness for many. It's high time that we start looking at the impact of businesses on the environment and on communities in a more holistic manner. At the Tree of Life, it has always been our endeavour to minimise our carbon footprint and improve the standard of living of our neighbours in the local communities at the destinations we operate in. We strive to make continuous improvements to this end. Also, we have completely revamped our SOPs at the operational department level to ensure that we are consistent with all safety and sanitation measures as advised by the Ministry of Health and WHO. We are also keeping a close watch on other global developments to ensure highest level of safety and sanitation across all our resorts.”



Akhil Anand
Director
Tree of Life Resorts & Hotels

“Inclusive tourism must be the way forward, especially after COVID. Currently, tourism only benefits a very small marginal section of the society and the community in large is totally left out. It's not just for COVID times, but for other times as well. There should be an inclusive approach, starting from the government, and I am sure it will have sustainability. For inclusive tourism, it's the people of the land who should be stakeholders in the activity of tourism, and not remain just menial employees. In fact, whenever a new destination is being developed, it would be the ideal space to work on this in the right earnest. Also, if all hotels localise their purchase, it would help the local economy. Hotels can do partnership with the local communities or help the local government where there could be activities, which would support the communities.”

Inputs by Nisha Verma

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Air India returns to TATA

Talace, a subsidiary of Tata Sons, has won the bid for Air India and has bought the national carrier at the value of ₹18,000 crore. It is now a wait-and-watch situation for the industry.

Nisha Verma

With this winning bid, Tata will own 100% stake in Air India, as well as 100% in Air India Express and 50% in Air India SATS. Not only will the new owners get 141 planes and access to a network of 173 destinations with 55 international ones, they will get the brands like Air India, Indian Airlines and the Maharajah.

"Talace has quoted an enterprise value of ₹18,000 crore. Of this, ₹15,300 crore is the debt component of Air India to be taken on by the winner, and the remaining ₹2,700 crore will be cash paid to the government," said DIPAM Secretary, **Tuhin Kanta Pandey**.



The Group of Ministers led by Home Minister Amit Shah approved the winning bidder in its meeting on October 4, 2021. The plan is to complete the transaction by December 2021, when the Government will transfer its shares and handover the airline to the new buyer.

Rajiv Bansal, Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, said, "The

government has addressed all concerns of the employees. The winning bidder will retain all employees for one year. In the second year, if anyone has to be removed, they will be offered VRS. They will be provided gratuity and provident fund benefits as per applicable law. Post-retirement medical benefits of those who have retired and those who will be retiring will also be taken care of by the government."

Pandey also revealed that the government will absorb the balance debt of ₹46,262 crore, which will be transferred to a special purpose vehicle set up by Air India Assets Holding.

Strong opportunity for Tata Group

"Welcome back, Air India. While admittedly it will take considerable effort to rebuild Air India, it will hopefully provide a very strong market opportunity to the Tata Group's presence in the aviation industry."

Ratan Tata
Chairman Emeritus of Tata Sons, said in a tweet

West Midlands & India cheer

West Midlands India Partnership (WMIP) has launched a new strategy aimed at strengthening links between the West Midlands and India. WMIP is the region's official engagement body.

Nisha Verma

Called Stronger Together, the strategy has been developed in collaboration by the West Midlands Growth Company (WMGC), PwC and the UK India Business Council. It identifies a five-year programme of activity to unlock mutually beneficial and sustainable economic



opportunities between the region and India, as both territories look to rebuild from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over 70 delegates were present at the event, while hundreds of others joined online. Many senior officials from the UK and international trade community and regional business leaders

were among those to endorse the strategy and its aims, including **Dr Shashank Vikram**, Consul General of India in Birmingham, and **Gerry Grimstone**, Minister for Investment. He said, "The region has a vast Indian heritage. We are working with our teams and our counterparts across India to strengthen UK ties further by establishing a Free Trade Agreement, that will unlock additional economic growth through trade and investment. The West Midlands India Partnership has seen fantastic success since launching in 2020, bringing together the most promising growth areas and delivering results for communities, and I've no doubt that its work supporting a vibrant business environment will continue our mission to increase exports, investment, growth and jobs between the UK and India."

The strategy outlines five key priorities for establishing closer links with India. These include: Promoting the West Midlands'

pivotal role at the beating heart of the UK's living bridge with India; Accelerating R&D innovation

We are working with our teams and our counterparts across India to strengthen UK ties further

through enhanced science and education collaboration; Increasing two-way trade and investment within the existing West Midlands-India corridor; Further investing in WMIP to boost engagement between the region and India; and Maximising economic potential of Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.

Will we get travel momentum back?

While vaccination drives, opening of borders and resumption of flights are making headlines, **Dr. Amit Sharma**, Vice President - Contracting and Product Development, Abercrombie & Kent and Expert (Roster), UNWTO, shares how revival and recovery may unfold in future for the global tourism, hospitality and aviation market.

Domestic travel is booming across the globe, staycation packages are high on demand alongside luxury hotels customising the offerings as per the expectations of discerning travellers.

In most parts of the world, domestic air travel is forecast to reach the pre-pandemic level by December 2021. With the opening of borders with few restrictions, international travel (outbound and inbound) will surge. Full recovery time is however dependent on various parameters and exact timelines from now cannot be drawn.

Most of the countries are still in the maze of the 'COVID surgency and recovery' cycle. Thus, travel demand is proportioning dramatically.

Undoubtedly, leisure-focused long-haul international vacation is

one of the most desired activities, but the opening of international borders depends entirely upon factors like caseloads and speed of vaccination at the country of origin and destination, earning

Traditional travel companies may need to rescale, upscale as per new requirement fulfilments

propensity of the potential travellers and few others.

In order to appeal more in the domestic arena, hotels are using various ways and means. Ease

of transaction by using digital methods, attractive cancellation policies till very last minute, date change possibilities without penalty and value additions could be few motivators for potential travellers to decide on the suppliers for the next itinerary.

In the recent past, International Air Transport Association (IATA) conducted a study in 11 countries with 4700 respondents, which revealed that 57 percent of them expected to be travelling within two months of the pandemic's containment, and 72 percent will do so as soon as they can meet friends and family.

The Challenge most of the service providers (Hotels/ transporters/ airlines et al) may face:

❖ How to sustain financially till the time recovery happens. There is a huge cash flow crunch in

big, medium or small companies associated with the tourism and travel sector.

❖ Traditional travel companies --may need to rescale, upscale as per new requirement fulfilments. The business forecasting and performance must be as per the new set of requirements/expectations of travellers in post-COVID era. More product innovation is required to supplement the core skill set of the company.

❖ Proactive government support: Government needs to be clear on entry requirement & SOPs well in advance. PCR test on arrival, quarantine/isolation requirements. The action plan- if guest/s found positive after having test in host country are few areas of haze currently.

❖ How to get the skilled labour back who have switched the in-

dustry after laying off!! Capacity building in the service industry is a lengthy qualitative task. After all "making or breaking" of customer experiences depends majorly on services delivered by them at ground zero (the intangible part). A service delivery failure can bring a bad name to the service provider, be it an airline or travel agency.

❖ How to build a "suitable future product" amidst changing consumer behaviour? New areas of interest like sustainable tourism, eco-tourism, wildlife tourism, niche tourism may take the front seat. Travel companies may need to optimise the cost of such products, whereas hotels and other service providers need to adhere to strict quality/ health & safety protocols to cater to tourist demand in the tourism sector.

Subject to COVID recovery stages across the globe, short-haul lei-

sure travel might be on the rise, while corporate travel may take time to recover. Airlines, hotels, car rentals may get most of the benefits. Putting safety protocols in implementations could be a tough task. The flip side is - one small negligence may have multiple adverse effects.



Dr. Amit Sharma
Vice President - Contracting and Product Development, Abercrombie & Kent and Expert (Roster), UNWTO
Visiting faculty for various tourism institutes and universities. Industry consultant

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



& TAT rejoice reopening

TravelBullz in Collaboration with Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) hosted an exclusive networking event in Chandigarh after a successful soiree in New Delhi. Thailand has re-opened its borders for fully vaccinated visitors starting from Oct 1, 2021, under its 'Sandbox' programme, and TravelBullz is geared with its new B2B travel marketplace to reach out to the Indian trade.



Year 2022 can be life-changing

After a gap of 20 months, Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) hosted a physical Members Meet. Everyone appeared positive and expecting increase in international travel and improvement in business in the coming months after the news of borders reopening.

“Indian market is one of the leading outbound markets of the world. I am confident that it will soon touch 100 million travellers and the main reason for that is the huge underlying demand for travel as people of all age groups, from seven to seventy five are waiting to undertake a holiday soon. Hence, the game is about to begin and we must all prepare ourselves to put our best foot forward. Let's be innovative and step ahead of our clients to tap this surge that's going to happen soon.”



Himanshu Kesari Patil
Vice President, OTOAI

“Travel industry is going through a bad patch. Domestic tourism has already started and we're hoping that soon international tourism will also start. We are in conversation with the government to start scheduled flights, so that at least outbound will start. Some of the European destinations are already open, and with less hassle we're expecting UK and US to start soon. We are also trying to promote outbound from India because inbound and outbound go hand-in-hand and our aim is to strengthen the association.”



Riaz Munshi
President, OTOAI

“We are meeting various airlines, hoteliers, embassies and association members and we are asking the members of OTOAI about the issues they are facing. Today, every country has a different procedure and rules to enter and we are on a continuous chase with the VFS team as well as with embassies to do webinars or physical meetings, so that all the agents should know what exactly they need to prepare before they send the customer to a specific country.”



Shrawan Bhalla
General Secretary, OTOAI



Samina Munshi
Director, N. Chirag

“The aviation and hotel industry have gone through a very difficult time, it is the worst affected industry due to the pandemic, but things are changing now as countries are opening up for travel and flights are resuming. People are getting vaccinated, countries are opening, domestically also people have started travelling. We see increase in the frequency of travel from two trips in a year to quarterly trips now. So, we are very positive about the industry and in a span of two months, we will see increase in international travel.”

“COVID has impacted the industry adversely. OTAs have still managed to retain their business and have in fact gained business. However, for offline travel agents, it is a problem. All the associations should focus on creating bigger platforms and getting new members. Though the borders are opening but still there are a lot of restrictions and this holds back a lot of travellers. Hopefully, by next year this will change with vaccinated drive.”



Ashwani Sharma
CEO, Sheraton Travels
Inputs by Janice Alyosius

GMJ Thampy, CMD, Riya Group gets Golden Visa from UAE

GMJ Thampy, CMD, Riya Group, has received the prestigious UAE Golden Visa for 10 years by one of the highest authorities in the UAE government—General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs. This visa, presented only to eminent entrepreneurs & personalities, allows Thampy multiple entries for 10 years. Otherwise, UAE offers a single-entry visa for limited days – 30 to 90 days. Thampy expressed his happiness saying, “I am extremely honoured for being able to establish a trustworthy footprint in the travel space in the UAE market and offer extraordinary services to its nationals and travellers. We have worked closely with Emirates Airlines for years and are delighted that they recommended me for the Golden Visa. I am extremely honoured for being able to establish a trustworthy footprint in the UAE market.”

Q&A with...



WTM London Exhibition Director, Simon Press

What is the theme for WTM London 2021?

WTM London is the leading global event for the travel industry.

WTM London was the last travel trade show to take place before the pandemic, and will be the first one to take place after COVID. These will be the first contracts signed after almost 2 years.

It aims to support the industry in recovering, rebuilding and reconnecting as quickly, efficiently and sustainably as possible after COVID-19.

With over 40 years of experience, we are considered a solid knowledge centre for the tourism economy and a reliable source of data and ideas for our exhibitors, buyers, visitors and media.

WTM London is the brand that unites the industry and facilitates businesses to build their businesses across physical and online platforms.

In essence, WTM London is a strategic partner supporting all members of the global travel industry to promote their assets and attract targeted travellers.

What is new for WTM London 2021?

So much is new for WTM London 2021. This year WTM London will be held for the first time in an innovative **hybrid format**.

The physical event will occur at ExCeL London on Monday, November 1-Wednesday, November 3, 2021, and will be followed by WTM Virtual – November 8-9, 2021.

I have already highlighted the recovering, rebuilding and reconnecting concept – essential for this year's show to help exhibitors get back on track reconnecting with the right buyers, suppliers, visitors and media.

Responsible Tourism is one of our core pillars. We'll run content sessions around the topic and host the Responsible Tourism Awards during WTM London on November 2. The awards recognise and reward businesses and destinations contributing to a more sustainable and responsible tourism industry.

Travel Forward, the travel technology event co-located with WTM London at ExCeL, will also take place physically from 1-3 November and virtually from 8-9 November. The show inspires the travel and hospitality industry with the next generation of technology.

Across the WTM Portfolio, **WTM Buyers' Club** has over 10,000 qualified international buyers, and as before, we will be focusing on quality over quantity. Representatives from more than 80 countries have signed up to WTM London's Buyers' Club.

Buyers from Jet2holidays, easyJet Holidays, Saga Holidays and British Airways Holidays are among the companies confirmed at WTM London's Buyers' Club

We are pleased to announce that we will be running our very successful buyers speed networking again – in person. This is where buyers and exhibitors have short meetings then hold longer meetings during the show open hours.

We understand the need for the industry to reconnect. We are anticipating a huge demand to gain access to speed networking from both exhibitors & buyers. The new formats deliver better connections and more meetings, all in a safe environment.

Connect Me is our networking and meeting tool that will help you find buyers that match your business needs so you can arrange meetings in advance of WTM London and WTM Virtual.

London Travel Week will be a seven-day travel celebration over the week of WTM London – taking place from 30th October - 5 November. It will allow the travel industry to come together and collectively shape the next 12 months of travel and tourism.

WTM London will have two seminar theatres and will live stream all content sessions during the physical event.

What is WTM London doing to ensure the health and safety of its attendees during the show?

WTM London and Travel Forward are working closely with local authorities, ExCeL London, Public Health England, and Transport for London to ensure attendees' highest possible levels of health and safety.

Registration is now open for the event

Visit: www.wtm.com/london/en-gb.html

Attendees will need to demonstrate their COVID-19 status by one of the following:

- Proof of vaccination
- Proof of negative test
- Proof of natural immunity

Visitors must not travel to ExCel, if they feel unwell.

Admission will only be for those who register in advance and visitors are encouraged to use WTM & TF's planning tools before they arrive.

Delegates can show their badge for contactless scanning, either on a smartphone or printout – and there will be no badge holders or lanyards.

WTM London will be a 'mask-friendly' event as delegates are strongly recommended to wear face masks, especially in enclosed or crowded spaces. Those using public transport will be required to wear a face mask on the Transport for London network.

Back in May this year, we organised a very successful Arabian Travel Market (ATM) in Dubai – the largest face-to-face travel and tourism event in the world since the pandemic. ATM also hosted a virtual show the following week.

What will the conference programme include?

At this year's WTM London physical show will bring two seminar theatres – WTM Global Stage and Travel Forward. We'll be live streaming all content sessions during the physical event, and those will be available during WTM & TF Virtual event.

WTM London 2021 will host a series of high-profile industry conferences that will formulate the future of global travel and help guide the industry after COVID-19.

Informative and fascinating conferences will take place, allowing delegates to get insights from industry-leading professionals.

Conference-goers will have the chance to hear from global ministers during our traditional **UNWTO, WTTC & WTM Ministers' Summit** on Tuesday, November 2; an extensive **Responsible Tourism** programme throughout WTM London also includes the **WTM Responsible Tourism Awards**.

The **International Tourism & Investment Conference Summit (ITIC)** is also taking place during the 3-day show. Investment in tourism will create new jobs and economic growth, and the ITIC event will facilitate vital financial and business partnerships that will pave the way for innovation and recovery.

At **Travel Forward**, we'll bring the Start-Up competition, Digital Marketing Sessions - in partnership with The Five Percent, content Payment Solution and many other topics.

WTM London and WTM Virtual – Don't miss out on:

£3.71 billion
in business deals

50,000
senior travel professionals
(physical and virtual)

10,000
buyers

5,000
exhibitors

3,000
media

180+
countries and regions

Show Dates and Location

WTM London & Travel Forward – Physical Events

- Monday, 1 November – 10:00-18:00 (invite only)
- Tuesday, 2 November – 10:00-18:00
- Wednesday, 3 November – 10:00-17:00

**Location: ExCeL London, Royal Victoria Dock,
1 Western Gateway, London E16 1XL**

WTM & TF Virtual – Online Events

- Monday 8 November 07:00-22:00
- Tuesday 9 November 07:00-22:00

Telangana prepares for revival

Before the 2nd COVID wave, there were bookings for both the tour operators as well as hotels in Telangana, but things changed after that. However, the business is returning, and industry stakeholders finally see light at the end of the tunnel, as queries come not only for leisure, but for MICE and weddings as well.



Nisha Verma

KRanga Reddy, Chairman, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Chapter, IATO, shared that after an initial surge post the 1st wave, business stopped when the 2nd wave hit the country. "Now bookings have increased to 5-7 per day," he said.

Manish Dayya, General Manager – Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre & Hyderabad International Convention Centre, agreed, saying, "There was a rise in business demand from domestic businesses and local corporate events before the 2nd wave."

Domestic is a saviour

Shobhit Sawhney, General Manager, Park Hyatt Hyderabad, claimed that they could achieve decent business recovery post nationwide lockdown was lifted during the first wave. "While international connectivity still was restricted, the hotel



K. Ranga Reddy
Chairman, Andhra Pradesh
& Telangana Chapter, IATO

Impact of 2nd wave

Dayya added, "Since domestic travel by local clients was not recommended to their employees, it impacted the meetings business. However, home delivery service from our all-day dining restaurant,



Manish Dayya
GM – Novotel Hyderabad Convention
Centre & Hyderabad International
Convention Centre

has seen month on month increase in domestic travel," he added.

Domestic business acted as a saviour for all, claimed **Sunil Kumar**, President, UFTAA, who is based in Telangana. "Domestic has become a need now. Everyone who is well connected with our organisation and who used to earlier take international tours is now preferring to go for domestic tours. I see a big change as they are focusing on unexplored parts of India and opting for repeated visits & long stays. It's a welcome change."

picked up during the 2nd wave. Vivaah at Novotel also helped us to maintain business continuity in the absence of conferences and events. From July 2021, the market in Hyderabad started showing



Shobhit Sawhney
General Manager
Park Hyatt Hyderabad

some positivity, with most hotels reporting decent occupancy levels. With vaccination drive increased footfall is seen in our restaurants and small and mid-sized events being organised." For Park Hyatt Hyderabad too 2nd wave was difficult. "The business faced a strong rebound mainly through staycations, weddings, film shoots and corporate activity," claimed Sawhney.

Moving forward

Reddy shares that they have queries, but out of 10, not even 2 are

getting materialised, because in domestic business, people negotiate but finally book online."



Sunil Kumar
President, UFTAA

Dayya said "With both the IT & Corporate sector welcoming fully vaccinated staff back to office, we expect some growth in business and MICE by 2021 end," he added.

State issue

Reddy believes that travel is not an essential part of Indian culture. Also, he says, "In many states, including Telangana,

tourism is not the priority. The budget allocation is limited for state-run hotels, staff, and their vehicles." However, hotels claim that Telangana as a state has been most forthcoming in supporting tourism in the state and developing more tourist destinations. "It is the only state that is encouraging corporations to come back to offices and start reviving the economic activity across sectors. Travel to the state of Telangana is also very accessible," added Dayya.

Sawhney shared, "The state government has taken measures to stabilise the economy. The recent launch of Pink book supported ease of doing business. Introduction of business hub in northern Hyderabad can act as a catalyst in growing economy."

Reddy argues, "It's the prime role of government to provide the funds for publicity." 📌

SITA alumni reunite in New Delhi

Ex-colleagues of SITA came together to cherish a nostalgic evening at Aqua, The Park, New Delhi, where they interacted and shared memories with each other. Opening up of borders for tourism and vaccination numbers were among the most discussed topics as India gets ready to restart and revive the industry.



Palladium in the process of recovery

The Palladium Hotel Group is already seeing arrivals from India at its hotels in Ibiza and even at its properties in Mexico since August this year. The hotel group also announces the opening of TRS Ibiza – a luxury hotel with an all-inclusive service only for adults – as well as its Bless Hotel Madrid.



Hazel Jain

India has been an important market for the Palladium Group of Hotels (PGH) and highlighting this is **Sandra Polo Canudas**, Commercial Director (Asia & ME) Palladium Hotel Group. She says, "Our properties specially the ones located in Ibiza, Spain such as Ushuaia Ibiza Beach Hotel and Hard Rock Hotel Ibiza are on top of the list for our Indian clientele. Now, with our new Bless Collection Hotels brand on board with presence in Madrid and Ibiza as well as our TRS Ibiza opening in 2022, we hope the market will love these brands and its experiences as well."

PHG is in the process of recovery. Canudas explains, "Our strategy might slightly vary, but we will remain the same in terms of



Sandra Polo Canudas
Commercial Director (Asia & ME)
Palladium Hotel Group

having a presence in the market. This period of almost two years of pandemic has not changed the way we stay connected with our Indian trade partners via our representation with Global Destinations. This also says more than anything to see how important India market has always been and will continue to be."

Regarding its offerings, PHG will from now on be communicating more about its Bless Collections

Hotels (LHW) and TRS brands which are still quite unknown in the India market.

Trade engagement

PHG has strived to maintain its visibility and communication in the market during 2020 and 2021. "We considered it important to maintain and keep the trade informed about what was happening in Palladium Hotel Group especially in terms of health and safety measures. Thanks to the collaboration with our representatives Global Destinations, we have continuously maintained the contact to the trade," Canudas says.

Year 2021 has been very dynamic for the hotel group, so it is planning activities according to the circumstances. "There are some actions, which are already planned for next year such as trade fairs. But we are still keep-

ing our options and plans open to changes if any," she says.

The hotels have already been opened this summer season and

We have seen arrivals from Indian clientele in our hotels in Ibiza and even to our properties in Mexico in August and September

all procedures have been tested successfully since it has had no closings nor cases within the

hotels. It has been a year of strict measures so hotels like Ushuaia Ibiza Beach Hotel or Hard Rock Hotel Ibiza and Tenerife could not operate with a normal activity in terms of events. But Canudas expects and hopes that by 2022, it will return with new events, shows and innovative scenarios which it will reveal in the market in time.

Arrivals from India

Canudas is happy to share, "We have seen arrivals from Indian clientele in our hotels in Ibiza in August and September in Ushuaia Ibiza Beach Hotel, Hard Rock Hotel Ibiza, Bless Hotel Ibiza and even our properties in Mexico. We have not seen any demands different from the usual. We do not really know about how the demand is going to be by 2022 because it will depend on the evolution of the pandemic. How-

ever, we expect and hope it will slowly increase for sure compared to these signs of recovery of 2021."

New offerings

TRS— one of the luxury PHG brands only present in the Caribbean currently, will be landing in Ibiza by summer of 2022. TRS Ibiza will be a luxury hotel with a premium all-inclusive service only for adults. Meanwhile, Bless Hotel Madrid will also reopen soon. There has been no official communication to the market about the opening date yet. "However, the Indian market has always been quite last minute. I can confirm with you now, and this is an official announcement, that Bless Hotel Madrid will open doors by December 2021. We expect to receive bookings in the coming months for this," Canudas adds.

MOT puts Buddhist circuit in limelight

► Contd from page 3

India's pride. "The important Buddhist sites currently receive approximately 6% of nationwide foreign tourist arrivals with Sarnath and Bodhgaya leading the pack."

He further added that the MOT is working with various ministries and organisations. "Our aim is to improve the hard and soft infrastructure to improve the tourist and pilgrim experience to all the sites. "In this very special year, which marks the 75th anniversary of our nation's independence we must introspect and pledge to do everything to make India the number one country for tourism. As we celebrate the various events nationwide through 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', I do request your support in maximising participation," he commented.

Dr. Neelkanth Tiwari shared that Uttar Pradesh has maximum 6 places related to Lord Buddha and rapid development work is going on at all these sites. "The interna-



Senior delegates at the Buddhist Circuit Conference light the lamp and kick-off the conference for participants

tional airport at Kushinagar is ready to be inaugurated. After the arrival of **Prime Minister Narendra Modi**, the condition of Varanasi has changed and work has been done on projects worth several thousand crores," he said and even shared details of the Buddhist Circuit and other religious tourist places.

A lot of information on ongoing and future projects on the Buddhist Circuit was shared by **Arvind Singh, Secretary, MOT**. "Under our flagship scheme 'Swadesh Darshan', which focuses on the inte-

grated development of theme-based tourist circuits, MOT has undertaken multiple projects as part of the Buddhist Circuits in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh," he added.

He added that under Uttar Pradesh Buddhist Circuit, Shravasti, Kushinagar, and Kapilvastu, projects have been undertaken for infrastructure development which will be completed in 2021. "The construction of a Cultural Centre at Bodhgaya, Bihar is also un-

derway. Under the PRASHAD scheme, MOT has sanctioned multiple projects in Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Sikkim. In Varanasi, projects worth Rs 9.5 Cr, focusing on the development of Buddhist structures, have been completed. These include a sound and light show at Dhamek Stupa and a Buddha Theme Park at Sarnath," he added.

In addition, he shared that in a ministerial meeting, the Prime Minister has said that at the launch of Kushinagar airport, he would like to invite some

Buddhist Circuit tour operators as well, so that they can get information about the circuit. Also, there will be 13 Buddhist countries' ambassadors, as well as airline operators, since the idea is to promote the Buddhist religious tourism in the region.

Apart from that **Rahul Chakraborty**, COO, IATO, also gave presentation on potential of Buddhist Circuit and Achyut Singh, Jt. GM, IRCTC, gave presentation on Buddhist Circuit Tourist Train and facilities being provided by IRCTC in the train which includes a mini library.

Other initiatives by the MOT include, "The upcoming International Buddhist Conclave is scheduled from November 17-21, 2021. Ministry has undertaken multiple projects under branding and promotion that are currently in the pipeline including a live virtual exhibition at national museum, web portal, annual events calendar, social media marketing, campaigns in key source markets like Vietnam,

Thailand, Japan, South Korea, Sri Lanka, etc."

In terms of capacity building, MOT's projects include Linguistic Tourist Facilitator training in Thai, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Chinese languages. 525 people have been trained in these languages between 2018

Under PRASHAD scheme, MOT has sanctioned multiple projects

& 2020, and 600 more will be trained between 2020 & 2023. This is especially important as Buddhism, has branched out to a large part of Asia, and 97% of the world's Buddhists are concentrated in East and SE Asia alone. Hence it is important to develop a linguistic connect with the tourists.

EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



OCTOBER 2021

Date	Event	Time
14-16	World Travel Expo	8.30 am
20-21	TTG Luxury Travel Summit	9.05 am
20-22	VirtuallyYoursSouthAfrica	11:00 am
25	Business Traveller & MICE Fair	1.30 pm
25 - 29	ITB Asia (Hybrid)	9.30 pm
26	ILTM- LATAM	9.00 am
28	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3.00 pm

NOVEMBER 2021

1-3	World Travel Market (WTM)	10:00 am
2	UNWTO & WTM Ministers Summit	9.00 am
4	International Conference on Hospitality and Tourism Management (ICOHT)	9.00 am
9	IMEX America 2021	10:00 am
9	Spain Tourism Webinar	TBA
16-18	IATA Ground Handling Conference	9:00: am
16-18	Adventure ELEVATE 2021	9:00: am

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

Road to revival via skilling

Focused on the resurrection of the tourism industry, IATO aims to encourage the stakeholders on acquiring skill set on responsible tourism. Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO, shares how they are helping members to hone their skills and prepare for the future.



Janice Alyosius

Skill development is the most important tool in reviving tourism. IATO is engaged in skill development in anticipation of the demand. Rajiv Mehra, shared that the association is focusing on health, hygiene and safety.

Revival will necessitate to spread positivity and motivate fellow trade partners chalking out plans for the required skill development post-COVID. IATO is communicating with the industry on adapting to the new normal, new technology, implementation of the nascent SOPs, educating the consumers about the destinations and its imperatives, encouraging stakeholders on acquiring skill set on responsible tourism and letting them know that skilling is an ever-evolving process with a very high obsolescence giving way to the new normal. This will motivate

Rajiv Mehra
President, IATO

the minds in the trade to take up the challenge that awaits.

Talking about IATO's demands from government, Mehra added, "Our one-to-one meeting with the Finance Minister is noteworthy, and first-of-its-kind, with the result on ground in terms of SEIS and border opening." Mehra mentioned three points regarding their demand from the govt.

❖ The association is expecting SEIS to come in real terms at the earliest, which will help IATO to

have some funds for marketing & revival of business.

❖ After e-tourist visa opening, their plea from the government is to open scheduled international flights.

❖ To get rid of TCS, which has been applied on foreign tourists for the overseas packages



Survival precedes revival. It is the fight for survival for our members, for the industry

COVID has impacted tourism sector badly. More than 10% of India's employment suffered due to it. The inbound tourism impact on the economy during last financial year till 31st March 2021 was over 95%, which means loss of almost Rs 2 lakh crores on a direct basis. On an indirect basis, the loss is of almost Rs. 6 lakh crores.

Tourism impacts almost 9 % of India's GDP assuming 75% loss of tourism business throughout the year, which would imply almost ₹15 lakh crore loss.

There is a revival of faith in



Not only has the member count of Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) shown an increase since July 2021 – with new as well as old members joining the association – the nine sub-committees that were formed, are beginning to reap results. The idea behind this move was to de-centralise the association work.



Hazel Jain

The good news, says Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI, is that the association has registered a number of new members who have joined since July 2021. "About 172 members paid up between August-October 2021 of which 23 were new. This is thanks to the Membership sub-committee. There were a number of members who hadn't paid their annual fees for a year or more. They have now paid up as well and have re-joined us. So it is looking very positive for us. There is a revival of faith in TAFI as an association," he affirms.

TAFI has also been conducting a lot of outreach for its members. Prakash shares, "We have conducted more than five chapter meetings since July where the MC or some members of the MC have attended to meet and interact with

Ajay Prakash
President, TAFI

the members in person. We have done Karnataka, Delhi, Mumbai, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Pune and Chennai. Our fortnightly newsletter has also been going out to our members regularly since the last few months."

Other than this, TAFI's Diplomatic Outreach committee has been working to establish dialogue with VFS as well as the Missions. "We recently had a meeting with VFS in Mumbai to discuss some of the pain points that our members are

facing such as non-availability of slots. We also met the CG of Sri Lanka. The destination is trying to do quite a bit of outreach in Indian market. Apart from that, we want to take up some issues with IATA and the airlines. But we have not made too much progress with that so far. But we are starting a dialogue with airlines to talk about the acceptance of airline credit cards, and doing away with individual capping by airlines which is a pernicious practice which seems to be confined to this subcontinent only. This doesn't happen anywhere else in the world so why should there be a different set of rules for a market which is the fifth or the sixth largest aviation market is really beyond reason," Prakash highlights.

The bottom line, he says, is to make TAFI much more responsive and responsible and more proactive, both with its members and the government. "The idea of

We are starting a dialogue with the airlines to talk about the acceptance of airline credit cards

forming sub-committees is to de-centralise. The idea is to empower different people. Give responsibility and the authority to the sub-committee. This is the only way of administering a pan-India association," he says.

Prakash shared his vision of a resurgent travel and tourism industry as vaccination drives pick up pace. "The one positive that has emerged out of the pandemic is that Indians have begun to discover India. I congratulate the Gujarat government on the addition of Dholavira to the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites. This underlines the need for responsible tourism, even more so in such ecologically sensitive sites," Prakash said.

During the NJC meeting, Ajay Prakash outlined his vision for a strong TAFI where the Chapters were empowered to take decisions for the betterment of the

of the National MC to visit every Chapter and interact personally with the members.

He also spoke about the higher paradigm of tourism – which was to connect people across boundaries and promised to send over the IIPT Credo of the Peaceful Traveller, which he urged every member to adopt and display in their office.

A key part of the NJC agenda was to understand the issues at the Chapter level and every Chapter Chairman was invited to report on their respective regions. As a part of this event, TAFI's Gujarat team was able to arrange a VIP visit to the Akshardham Temple after the meeting.

Urumuri, meaning 'light' in Rwandan, is one of five robots stationed at Kigali International Airport. Its job is to screen passengers' temperatures at a rate of between 50 and 150 people per minute.



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GRAND VICTORIA THE FERN RESORT & SPA

Panchgani

Grand Victoria- The Fern Resort & Spa, Panchgani, has appointed **NARENDRA BABU** as the General Manager. In his career of almost two decades, he has been overseeing The Oberoi, Four Seasons and Marriott International. He has also previously worked for six pre openings and gained experience across India covering Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and international exposure at Maldives for a period of more than two years.



LA-PAZ GARDENS BEACON, VASCO DA GAMA

Goa

La-Paz Gardens Beacon, Vasco da Gama, Goa, appoints **RAJESH KUMAR** as the General Manager. With over 22 years of experience in hospitality. Kumar has worked with brands like Grand Palace Hotel & Spa – Tamil Nadu, Arcot Woodlands Hotel – Tamil Nadu, Woods at Sasan Resort – Gujarat. He has Diploma in hotel management from IHM Madras and has done his MBA from the University of Pondicherry. His previous assignment was with La Villa Shanti – Pondicherry.



COURTYARD & FAIRFIELD BY MARRIOTT

BENGALURU

SHARIN JOSEPH is the new Director of Sales and Marketing for the dual branded hotel, Courtyard and Fairfield by Marriott Bengaluru. He joins the hotel with over 13 years of experience with International hotel chains like Marriott International, Hyatt, Wyndham. His last assignment was at Fairfield by Marriott Bengaluru Rajajinagar as Director of Sales, where he successfully repositioned the hotel. He will be responsible in strategically assisting the marketing roadmap for both properties.



DOUBLETREE BY HILTON CHINCHWAD PUNE

Pune

Double Tree by Hilton Chinchwad Pune announces the appointment of **SUPRIYA PANDITA** as their Human Resources & Training Manager. Supriya is a well-recognised industry veteran with almost 10 years of experience in the upscale and corporate industry. In the past, her work at Vikas Publishing House, Bliss Global English, Serendipity Infolabs, Reylon Solar private limited and Wright Hassall LLP has given her experience in varied fields, all of which have made her well equipped for her role as the Human Resources & Training Manager for DoubleTree by Hilton Pune Chinchwad.



IBIS MUMBAI VIKHROLI

Mumbai

ISHITA GANGULY has joined as the Director of Sales at ibis Mumbai Vikhroli. She will be responsible for positioning the 20th ibis in India and managing ibis Navi Mumbai in the same capacity. Her career spans over nine years, specialising in the Sales & Revenue functions of the hotel. With an aim to provide the best customer experience, food & beverage, and drive sales for ibis Mumbai Vikhroli, the appointment of these leaders will help ibis establish a stronger impetus for the brand's 20th ibis property in the country.



THE WORLD TOURISM FORUM LUCERNE

Switzerland

The World Tourism Forum Lucerne has appointed **ADEEB AHAMED**, Managing Director of Abu Dhabi based Twenty14 Holdings, to its Global Advisory Board. Ahamed, owns a slew of iconic properties across the world including the Great Scotland Yard in London, Waldorf Astoria- the Caledonian in Edinburgh, Pullman Downtown Dubai and Port Muziris in Kochi among others. He joins a select group of the industry's top stakeholders and decision makers, who will collaborate on solving future challenges in the travel and tourism industry.



RADISSON BLU HOTEL & SPA, NASHIK

Nashik

Radisson Blu Hotel & Spa, Nashik announces the appointment of **LALTLANPARI VARTE** as the Director of Spa & Wellness. Varte is an industry specialist with extensive experience of over 13 years in luxury spa operations. In the past, she has worked with several reputable hospitality groups across India including the Trident Hotels, Taj Hotels, Hyatt Hotels and Conrad Hotels & Resorts. As the Director of Spa & Wellness, she will implement hand-crafted signature spa and recreational experiences at the hotel's exquisite spa, salon and fitness center.



THE INDO-GERMAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE (IGCC)

New Delhi

The Indo-German Chamber of Commerce (IGCC) announced the appointment of **PUNEET CHHATWAL**, MD & CEO, Indian Hotels Company (IHCL), as the Chamber's new President. An experienced global business leader, Chhatwal takes over the reins from outgoing President, Kersi Hilloo. Chhatwal has almost four decades of global experience. Prior to this, he has held leadership roles in Germany, and Europe. He is also the President of the Hotel Association of India and the Chairman of the CII National Committee on Tourism.



GRAND MERCURE GANDHINAGAR GIFT CITY

Gandhinagar

Grand Mercure Gandhinagar GIFT City announces **RAHUL PANWAR** as their new General Manager. A seasoned hospitality professional with approximately 15 years of hospitality experience, Panwar has worked in India and International markets, with a range of prominent brands including Hyatt, Starwood & Radisson. He's been with Accor since 2015, having worked with the teams in China & Vietnam before joining Accor India team. In his recent stint, Panwar was Hotel Manager at ibis and Novotel Bengaluru. In his new role, he will be responsible for overseeing daily business operations.



TALKing People

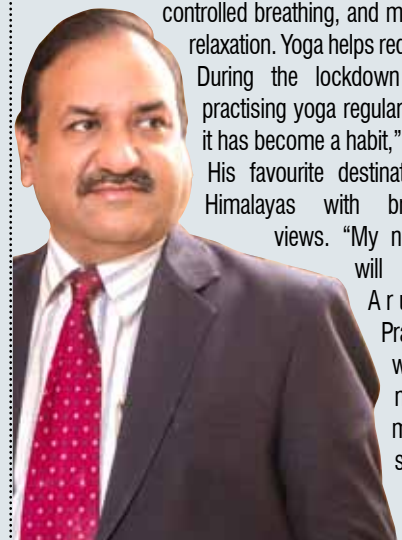
GOPINATH GOPALAN, General Manager, Radisson Blu Hotel & Spa, Nashik, enjoys beginning his day with a reviving trek or morning walk that helps him improve concentration, alleviate stress, and enhance mental wellbeing. "These early morning walks help create a deep sense of peace throughout the day bringing a certain sense of balance to our thoughts, activities, and emotions," he says. Speaking about life during lockdown, he adds, "From rekindling an old hobby to picking up a new skill, the lockdown has brought out the unknown artist in many of us."



A good chat with an associate and a humble meal with his family easily takes **SATISH KUMAR P**, General Manager, The Leela Goa, away from his daily work rigmarole. "Spending time with my 13-year-old daughter is a great stress buster for me. Moreover, in the last few one year, one skillset I learnt during the lockdown was digital marketing in this increasingly digital savvy world," he reveals. Sharing his idea of a holiday, Kumar adds, "My favourite destination in India is my hometown Kerala."



PRADEEP JAIN, AVP (Finance), Lords Group, does yoga and meditation every day to de-stress. "Yoga is a mind-body practice that combines physical poses, controlled breathing, and meditation or relaxation. Yoga helps reduce stress. During the lockdown I started practising yoga regularly and now it has become a habit," Jain adds. His favourite destination is the Himalayas with breath-taking views. "My next holiday will be to Arunachal Pradesh, which will nourish my mind and soul."



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Belted for a boost in travel

Neerja Bhatia, Vice President, Indian Sub-Continent, Etihad Airways, discusses traffic between India and Abu Dhabi, as the next few months will see UAE host many global events. She also highlights the airline's NDC adoption & emphasis on loyalty programme.



Hazel Jain

What Etihad routes, that see a lot of traffic from India, have been opened for Indian nationals?

Etihad Airways is gradually resuming services to more destinations across its global network. In the past, we have retained a pragmatic approach to network planning and our strategy remains. We are currently flying to over 60 destinations worldwide, across the Indian-subcontinent, Asia, Australia, Europe, Middle East, Africa and North America. We are currently operating services from eight Indian cities including Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi, Mumbai, New Delhi, and Trivandrum. As borders re-open globally, we are looking at supporting demand by gradually resuming services and expanding our global network, in line with entry and health regulations set by UAE authorities and those at the end destination.

Abu Dhabi has recently reopened for a quarantine-free stay to fully vaccinated travellers from India and we see it emerging once again as a preferred destination and an ideal getaway from India over the next few months. As a result of its optimised schedule of non-stop flights between the UAE and India, appealing to greater numbers of point-to-point business and leisure passengers, Abu

Dhabi has for long been the most popular destination for Indian travellers on the Etihad network.

We are prepared for the gradual resumption of international travel from the country, and our top priority remains the safety and wellness of our guests and employees. To that end, we have introduced several measures

Abu Dhabi has recently reopened for a quarantine-free stay to fully vaccinated travellers from India

for guests to travel with greater peace of mind with Etihad Wellness. To simplify the process of authenticating travel documents, we have established Verified to Fly in May 2021, a service where travellers can validate their documents before arriving at the airport. Further, all passengers travelling with Etihad receive complimentary COVID-19 insurance, which is valid for travel until March 31, 2022.

Etihad's NDC adoption

"Late last year, Etihad partnered with Verteil Technologies to expand its global NDC (New Distribution Capability) distribution with a particular focus on India, the home market of Verteil. The technology company provided Etihad with its IATA certified NDC distribution platform, Verteil Direct Connect. The objective was for this platform to enhance the digital distribution for Etihad and provide travel agents with more effective merchandising, access to rich content, and product personalisation. More recently, we signed a deal with Amadeus to introduce next-generation travel technology to guests.



Please share updated travel protocols required for Indian national tourists to enter and stay in Abu Dhabi.

All travellers will require a PCR test within 48 hours of departure, a test on arrival and retesting on certain days. As per the current guidelines, fully vaccinated travellers (with vaccines approved by the World Health Organisation) can arrive from all international destinations without the need to quarantine. As the protocols are updated regularly, we advise all travellers and partners to check the website for updated rules and travel requirements.

Abu Dhabi has been promoting itself as a long weekend getaway destination from India. What kind of traffic do you see for this?

We are prepared for a boost in travel to Abu Dhabi following the UAE government's announcement to remove the quarantine requirement for all vaccinated travellers arriving from abroad, including India. Abu Dhabi has been a popular destination for Indian travellers on the Etihad network for years. Due to Abu Dhabi's proximity to the country, we see it continuing to remain a preferred destination and an ideal getaway from India moving forward.

We believe that the news to welcome back travellers from India and the world to Abu Dhabi, has been per-

fectly timed since the next few months will see the UAE host several global events including EXPO 2020, and Formula 1 Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Grand Prix among others. We are expecting a surge in demand from tourists and visiting friends and relatives from India. With one of the world's leading public health programmes supported by an extremely high vaccination rate and tech-driven solutions, Abu Dhabi, the home of Etihad, continues to remain dedicated to ensuring the safety of its residents and visitors.



Neerja Bhatia
Vice President, Indian Sub-Continent
Etihad Airways



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