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Keeping the faith

The pandemic is proving to be a litmus test for associations. While some have seen a drop in membership, others are seeing a slow but steady rise.

Hazel Jain & Janice Alyosius

The time when travel industry needs to pull up united front in face of the calamity, we are seeing lot of wavering from members of national associations in terms of demonstrating their loyalty and being part of the fraternity. However, all is not lost. Some associations do record a slight increase in their strength, which is a welcome sign indicating growing sense of togetherness and solidarity in the industry.

According to Rajiv Mehra, President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), there isn’t much drop in the association’s membership. He says, “Many companies have temporarily closed down their business and are waiting for the inbound markets to open. But the ones who remained in the market are not only surviving but are also growing.”

MOT’s vision for Ladakh

With an aim to promote Ladakh as a tourist destination for adventure, culture and responsible tourism, MoT organised a three day mega event ‘Ladakh: New start, New goals’ and unveiled ‘A Tourism vision for Ladakh’ with focus on overall development of the region.

Nisha Verma

The purpose of the event was to promote Ladakh as a tourist destination with focus on aspects of adventure, culture and responsible tourism. It was also meant to provide indigenous product knowledge to the industry stakeholders and a platform to local stakeholders for interaction with the tour operators / buyers from the rest of the country. The three days event included activities like exhibition, panel discussions, B2B meetings, technical tours, cultural evening to showcase tourism facilities and tourism products of Ladakh.

Addressing the gathering virtually, Arvind Singh, Secretary, MoT, said that Ladakh is a heaven for adventure sports. “Tourism plays a vital role in the economy of the Ladakh region. Though impacted by COVID-19, the signs of recovery have been witnessed and Ladakh is one of the prime movers of this recovery phase and the most preferred destination. Ministry of Tourism promoted Ladakh in domestic and international markets through various campaigns and initiatives such as Dekho Apna Desh wherein a dedicated webinar on Ladakh was conducted.”

During the event “A Tourism Vision for Ladakh” document was also released, which focuses on overall development of the Ladakh Region. The document envisons promoting tourism in the backdrop of sustainable ecological practices, building on local material and human resources.

The event also saw in attendance Radha Krishna Mathur, Lieutenant Governor of Union Territory of Ladakh, who spoke about the new tourism products in Ladakh, like winter tourism, science-based tourism, connected tourism and transformation of Kachchh, Gujarat has reaped benefits of linking modernity with tourism. “It has been the demand of every era, that we look for prospects, new possibilities in religious tourism and strengthen the links between pilgrimage and local economy.”

Highlighting the role of spirituality in strengthening the unity of the nation, PM shared the national and international potential of tourism and spiritual tourism. He said, “The country is reviving the ancient glory by building modern infrastructure.”

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of multiple projects in Ladakh, Gujarat, where he talked about the potential of domestic tourism and how, India has taken many initiatives to boost the same.

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The sites inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi include Somnath Promenade, Somnath Exhibition Centre, reconstructed temple precinct of Old (Juna) Somnath, and laid the foundation stone of Shree Parvati Temple. Also present at the virtual event was Arvind Singh, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism.

PM Modi said that the ‘Development of Iconic Tourist Destinations’ Scheme of MoT, under which 19 destinations have been identified across the nation, will boost the tourism industry. He also emphasised on the importance of domestic tourism and the way our ancestors understood and developed many places, which connect with our beliefs.

He also spoke about granting of E-visa in various categories and reduction in the visa fees, which have augmented the domestic tourism. PM Modi pointed out, with initiatives like Statue of Unity and transformation of Kachchh, Gujarat has reaped benefits of linking modernity with tourism. “It has been the demand of every era, that we look for prospects, new possibilities in religious tourism and strengthen the links between pilgrimage and local economy.”

#ThailandBetterTogether

Tourism Authority of Thailand, India, has announced the launch of ‘Thailand Build Back Better Together’ campaign pan India.

Nisha Verma

Thailand Build Back Better Together campaign is to reconnect travel agents in India and travel and tourism suppliers in Thailand. As the situation of COVID-19 globally and especially in India has improved a lot, therefore, it is the right time to get connected again. The idea is to maintain and promote Thailand as ‘Top of Mind Destination’ by creating awareness of destination, tourism products and services as well as update travel situation in Thailand. The

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The TAFI event held in New Delhi recently with the agenda to introduce members to the new team elected for North India chapter and the newly elected National committee. The event was attended by Ajay Prakash, President TAFI, KamalRamchand, Vice President, Anil Kalsi, Joint Secretary and Managing committee member.

Prakash emphasised to rebuild and revive TAFI. He stressed on significance of the member's belief and value, given to them. He said, "To make TAFI strong again, the contribution of each and every member is necessary. When members feel a sense of pride in belonging to TAFI, confident to reach out to anyone in the association, be it the president, secretary or managing committee, that is when the association starts to rebuild. Everyone has faced tough times. We now need to use better, updated, interactive and intelligent technology to do business. Need of the hour is to build tourism in a holistic, responsible way that sustains tourism."*

Anil Kalsi, Joint Secretary, said "There is lot that needs to be done to resurrect the industry and get travel agents' business back on its feet. He also stressed on certain issues to be addressed right away, one of them is the credit card payment acceptance by the airlines. "Different airlines have different regulations for accepting credit cards. For example, Air India website accepts only the passenger's credit card to issue the ticket. If the card belongs to anyone else in the family, one may not be allowed to travel. Similarly different airlines have different rules. A standard format is required which the association needs to sort out with the airlines. So agents should be allowed to use their credit card and the association will work towards that," Kalsi said.

He added, "We have to make efforts to get the best deals for TAFI members, get good rates for them, and be able to accept agent credit cards."

The new team elected for the North India Chapter for TAFI along with Ajay Prakash, president, TAFI India

Association now needs to use better, updated, interactive and intelligent technology to do business. The need of the hour is to build tourism in a holistic, responsible way that sustains rather than ruining the planet, says Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI

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*The industry that employs one in 10 people, contributes to almost 7% of India’s GDP needs to be recognised. We have created FAITH (Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality) and intend to make that the voice of the industry and take our voice to the ministry, to the govt. and all the way to the prime minister’s office. If need be that agents get their rightful dues." said Prakash.

Janice Aloysius

A lot needs to be done to resurrect the industry and revive travel agents' business.
Moving beyond superstitions

Are Indians moving beyond superstitions for their big day? A Wedding Wire Data report finds that 76 per cent of couples opted for non-saaya dates to get hitched. This radical change which was envisioned for two to three years down the line has been fast-tracked.

The insights point towards the fact that increasingly couples are driving this trend. In terms of venue, resorts and destinations weddings have seen a surge of venue, resorts and destinations weddings have seen a surge.

highest queries at 139 per cent followed by marriage gardens, and wedding lawns and farmhouses at 62 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively. Talking about the mushrooming trend, Anam Zubair, Associate Director of Marketing at Wedding Wire India, said, “The pandemic has brought a significant change in how weddings are done across the globe. In India, the big-bang Indian weddings have been replaced by micro and live-streamed weddings. However, given how rooted Indians are in their culture and customs, the surge in demand for non-saaya weddings is a refreshing and favourable change for the wedding industry. This radical change which was envisioned 2-3 years down the line has been fast-tracked by the pandemic. If the trend continues to strike a chord with the consumers, it will drive new revenue opportunities for professionals in a $50 billion Indian wedding industry.”

Since the second wave, there’s been a paradigm shift in how Indians are planning their wedding in the new normal. The insights point towards the fact that increasingly couples and families are moving away from traditionally considered auspicious dates for weddings and looking at newer alternatives. From intimate/ micro weddings, digital weddings, e-invites and customised wedding websites (62 per cent decrease in demand for traditional wedding cards) to non-saaya dates now, the approach has become more modern and practical.

84.7% increase in RevPAR

India’s hospitality industry recorded a growth of 84.7% in Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR) during Q2 2021 (April-June) as compared to Q2 2020, reveals JLL’s Hotel Momentum India (HMI) Q2 2021.

Goa yet again emerged as the RevPAR leader in absolute terms in Q2 2021 with a growth of 360.1% as compared to the very low base of Q2 2020. Additionally, Mumbai witnessed the highest growth in occupancy level registering 17.7% increase in Q2 2021 over the same period last year. Chennai witnessed 99.6% growth in RevPAR followed by Hyderabad with 89.6% increase compared to the same period of the previous year.

On a pan India level, there has been a decline by 53.9% in Q2 2021 RevPAR as compared to Q1 2021, because of the restrictions imposed due to the second wave of the pandemic. The Year on Year (YoY) growth witnessed in the sector during Q2 2021 is primarily due to the low base effect of the complete nation-wide lockdown in Q2 2020.

The pandemic has brought a significant change in how weddings are done across the globe. In India, the big-bang Indian weddings have been replaced by micro and live-streamed weddings. However, given how rooted Indians are in their culture and customs, the surge in demand for non-saaya weddings is a refreshing and favourable change for the wedding industry. This radical change which was envisioned 2-3 years down the line has been fast-tracked by the pandemic. If the trend continues to strike a chord with the consumers, it will drive new revenue opportunities for professionals in a $50 billion Indian wedding industry.

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Tomorrow’s destination: Kerala

Kerala has become the global leader in implementing a unique model of Bubble approach and responsible tourism which is not confined to certain practices, properties, operators but taken up by the tourism destinations.

Janice Alyosius

At a recent virtual meet with Dr Venu V, Additional Chief Secretary Tourism, Govt of Kerala, talked about Kerala tourism being adversely affected by the pandemic in 2020 and Nipah Virus and the massive floods in 2018. “The industry bounced back in 2019, with the support of the partners and recorded an incredible surge in 2019 and after that the pandemic hit us. Today we are paying for our efficiency and work last year” said Dr. Venu

The second wave of Covid-19 has impacted Kerala badly and we see the number of cases unabated. Kerala was successful in handling the pandemic in the first year with a systematic, methodical management and flattening the curve. However the second wave seems unabated, though we hope to emerge out of it in the coming months” said Venu.

Kerala has come up with the initiative of Bubble approach to revive tourism. The Bubble Approach consists of bubble accommodation, vaccinated staff and areas without risk of infection. These units are allowed to receive bookings from potential tourists. Vaccinated employees are allowed to travel to work place, even in areas under lockdown. Ensuring all tourists coming to their units, strictly adhere to COVID protocols. “We have introduced an idea which got good response. With the bubble approach, the business was good during Onam and we hope to build on this momentum over the coming weeks and re-establish our selves, reassuring customers that Kerala is safe to travel” said Venu.

Venu emphasized “Kerala has become the global leader in implementing a unique model of responsible tourism which is not confined to certain practices, properties, operators but taken up by the destinations. Different destinations will have different models of responsible tourism, anchored by responsible tourism mission”. The visitors will get an authentic experience with numerous avenues and opportunities to interact with local communities, understand their way of living, participate in their projects and contribute meaningfully.” He spoke about the lesser known areas in Kerala offering new properties and products. Future destination is about redefining the traveler experience, tourism activities dispersed across the state, villages and small locales which will provide unique experience to the visitors. Homestays, farm-stays, boutique properties, a shift from packages to memorable traveler experiences.

We managed to keep the curve of mortality and casualties flat

Kerala has become the global leader in implementing a unique model of responsible tourism which is not confined to certain practices, properties, operators but taken up by the tourism destinations.

Janice Alyosius

Dr Venu V
Additional Chief Secretary Tourism, Govt of Kerala

Media Partner
Thailand as top of mind destination

Cholada Siddhivara, Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand, Mumbai shared that the campaign will focus on sending a positive message that Thailand is waiting for its friends. “We’d like to send a positive vibe among our partners both in Thailand and India. Actually, I just want to say that Thai people are waiting for our friends in India to go back to Thailand and we are prepared with the safety measures and protocols in place, so that whenever we open, we can just welcome them better,” she added. Participants will get to click a selfie at the Amazing Thailand Virtual Photo Booth, and post on social media.

Talking about the opening of Thailand, Vachirachai, said, “We hope it will be very soon, hopefully by mid-October or November, 2021, this year but this is based on many factors. However, the opening will be gradually as we mentioned.”

Gujarat develops Nada Bet

Gujarat Tourism is on a war-footing to develop new projects and promoting them to the rest of India. After the Statue of Unity, it is the Seema Darshan project at Nada Bet that will help the state position itself for border tourism.

Janice Alyosius

In spite of slump in business for aviation industry, Tony Fernandes, CEO of Air Asia, is positive and confident that travel and tourism will soon emerge. “We’re still in lockdown, cases are record high, but I am optimistic this will end, as vaccines are coming in and we can see from our brothers in Europe and America that life is going back to normal. I think those with two vaccinations will be allowed to fly, probably towards the end of the year,” he adds.

Mass vaccination programs going on everywhere, with proper precautions and travel guidelines, industry will revive soon.

He is happy with the fact that most of the airlines have survived, though some of them have gone into bankruptcy. “I’m happy, competitive or no competitor, the airline industry is more or less, in a good state. Its good news that, United’s buying planes again and Airbus is talking about upfit orders,” he shares.

He also spoke about the quantum of domestic operations in Malaysia, which is very small at present and he awaits for things to open up. Regarding business travel, he said “I am impressed with the manner, Southwest has lifted its promotion of business travel, from low pricier carrier to a not really low-cost carrier anymore.”

He believes that intercontinental travel is going to take a hit for a while. However, long-haul hub carriers will not recover as quickly as low-cost carriers, not because they are better, but the market is going to change. People would rather jump on a plane to Phuket, or even domestically than scrimp all the way to Australia.

He also expressed his emotions for Air Asia and that helping others is a lesson he has learned from the pandemic. He said, “My most important lesson from this is, you could be paying someone for 19 years, you could have grown their business from 200,000 to 19 million, and they’ve made so much money from us, but they forgot that in one week, when you miss a payment.” Claiming that he is very straightforward about it, Fernandes says he will not forget people who treated him badly and the ones who have treated him well. It’s a motivation for him to come back stronger than before.
12-episode virtual series

Under Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav - India@75 celebration, the Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with the Association of Indian Universities has launched a series of 12 episodes that will take the participants on a virtual journey of Incredible India.

The launch happened at a special webinar, inaugurated by G.Kishan Reddy, Union Minister of Tourism, Culture and Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), Dharmendra Pradhan, Union Minister of Education and Minister of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, was the esteemed Chief Guest of the event. Also, in attendance were Shripad Yesso Naik, Ajay Bhatt, Ministers of State, Tourism, along with Col Dr. G. Thiruvasagam, President, NE India Tourism Confederation, Arijit Purkayastha, Chapter Chairman - North East for Association of Domestic Tour operators of India, and Arvind Singh, Secretary, Tourism.

MOT has revealed that new projects under pipeline for Gujarat under PRASHAD scheme include development of pilgrimage amenities at Ambaji Temple, Banasakanta and Development of Public Plaza / Entry Plaza.

The country is reviving the ancient glory by building modern infrastructure

Regional associations and chapters in the north east of India came together recently on a virtual platform to discuss creation of a common plan of action to foresee a holistic and harmonized re-opening for tourism in a synchronised manner, right from the grass-root levels in the new normal.

Hazel Jain

It is a heart-warming show of unity, all regional associations and chapters of the north east region of India came together to form a common plan of action to foresee a holistic and harmonized re-opening for tourism. Arijit Purkayastha, Chapter Chairman - North East for Association of Domestic Tour operators of India, said that good relationship between the tour operators and the hotels would be vital for the revival of tourism. “The key factors would be trust, coordination, smooth exchange of information and use of constructive resolution techniques. Another important aspect will be the cancellation policy. We also need to create itineraries with remote locations and experiential activities. There is urgent need to conduct training programmes to create awareness in rural areas. We need to go to the grass root level,” he said.

Sharing this sentiment was Debajit Borah, President, (TOA). He said that the frontline professionals such as drivers and hotel staff need to be vaccinated so that tourists know they are safe. “We need to tell our clients that we have got our team ready to receive guests. Timely information to tourists should be a priority. Uniform norms and protocols for entire North East should be formed,” he opined.

G.Kishan Reddy
Chief Minister of Tourism, Goa

Swacch Bharat Abhiyan in native villages or involving in a campaign with village sarpanch or mayor or local representative to hoist the national flag”. Other activities of interest could include planting trees to increase green cover, teaching at an orphanage, volunteering at an old age home, or helping in the upkeep of digitization and digitally empowering the poor.

Pradhan thanked MOT and AIU for the innovative idea of launching programme with the participation of youth and students of the country. He added, “The programme would not only see participation by university students, but also from school students. It is preserving our rich culture and heritage and at the same time move on the path of progress & development. This is our moral responsibility to educate our youth about our glorious past and at the same time prepare them for the path of global leadership.”

Shripad Yesso Naik also highlighted MOT’s initiative to outreach to students and youth through its popular Dekho Agra Dests’ series. “The series of 12 episodes will highlight the culture and heritage of India and celebrating India’s achievements,” he claimed.

Bhatt also shared Prime Ministers’ vision for celebrating the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav and its importance.

The children and youth of today should be exposed to India’s rich tapestry and its glorious past and future

Arvind Singh, shared details about the launching of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav and insisted that it is imperative that our children and youth are exposed to the rich tapestry of India’s glorious past and a grand future.

Reviving the ancient glory

MOT has revealed that the Ramayana circuit is appraising Ram bhakts about new places related to lord Ram and making them realise, how Lord Ram is entire India’s Ram. Similarly, Buddha Circuit is providing facilities to the devotees from world over.

He also shared that “The MOT is developing tourist circuits on 15 themes under Swadesh Darshan Scheme, creating opportunities for tourism in neglected areas. Developments in hilly regions like Nendamuth, tunnel and highways for Char Dham, development work in Vaishno Devi, high-tech infrastructure in the Northeast, are bridging the distances. Similarly, under PRASHAD Scheme, announced in 2014, MOT is developing 40 major places of pilgrimage out of which, 15 are already completed. In Gujarat, work is on for three projects worth over Rs. 100 crore. Attention is being paid to connect the places of pilgrimage.”

Presenting an hoteller’s perspective, Sunil Saraf, President, HRAA, said, “We all are facing the problem of inadequate staff. The government is taking the lead for everyone to be vaccinated and has been targeted for end of December. We have approached the Government to declare the hotel staff as frontline workers.”

Joe RZ Thanga, General Secretary, Association Tour Operators Mizoram (ATOM), says “When the sector opens up, the trade will need to ensure the industry doesn't become a super spreader. We are training tour guides recently induced by Mizoram Tourism who are being trained for COVID safety precautions, and are being updated with Public Health Guidelines so that they can adhere to them during tours. We are trying to develop remote audio devices which could help social distancing on guided tours,” he added.

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Modi said that India is not only connecting common citizens through tourism but is improving its tourism rankings too. “The Country has moved from 65th place in 2013 on Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index to 54th place in 2019.”

The country is reviving the ancient glory by building modern infrastructure

Build up from grass-roots
Agility with technology

Five stalwarts from different segments of the MICE industry came together the recent MICE Digital Conclave to share their views on how India can be developed as a hub for events and weddings – with a cohesive effort, government support, and most of all, investing in and evolving with technology.

The government has gone heavily into technology. But it is in bits and pieces.

– Sabbas Joseph

The government has prioritised the digitisation of services, which can create an effective and enabling environment for the private players. Goa has taken steps in the right direction. As we speak, there is a state-of-the-art Rs 1.10 crore 1,400-seater convention centre coming up in the heart of the city, expected to be completed by May 2022. This will cater to small and medium-sized events. I am also very happy to share that in the last few days Goa government has offered land in Dona Paula wherein a 5,000-seater convention and expo centre is being built along with a host of other support infrastructure like five-star hotels. The tendering process is already concluded. This illustrates how the state government can come in and do a model – either a PPP or a brownfield project – and create enabling infrastructure for investors to come in and stay invested,” Joseph says.

Secondly, Desai says that MICE industry is admirably a highly competitive and globalised business and destinations compete with each other globally in terms of facilities and lower tax, and other incentives, to attract events. “Unfortunately, our country has not been able to be there because of our high taxation rates and non-availability of differential pricing for such events. This puts a lot of pressure on the pricing, as a result of which MICE in India does not make a lot of business sense. It makes for a more sense for people to do MICE events outside India.

So governments will have to play a very important role in this regard,” Desai adds.

He believes that to make India a credible MICE destination, there needs to be a brand awareness and a brand equally through sustained brand building and to showcase to the rest of the world the facilities we have to offer. Because India has a lot to offer, and MICE per se is not only about events. It also often involves leisure travel. “Also, the industry needs to be given tax benefits and GST benefits, especially for those investors who come in for greenfield projects. These issues need to be taken up with top priority. States should compete with each other to win events in order to build a good MICE brand. Goa is now looking forward to the opening of the Mopa International airport likely by August 2022 and that is going to be a massive milestone for us,” Desai shares.

Invest in technology

On a more positive note, he adds that the current scenario is a temporary blip on the radar, notwithstanding temporary right-offs that are happening across the industry with punters saying that MICE won’t be the same.”I respectfully disagree with them. I think this is a temporary situation. We all need to invest in infrastructure because the pandemic will be soon behind us. Businesses have to keep their strategies fluid and have to be aware of the latest developments. In this regard, every hotel and MICE venue will have to invest heavily in technology and make a significant shift from a highly contact-intensive scenario to a technology-enabled model,” Desai says.

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MICE industry has less than one per cent share of the estimated global MICE business. In fact, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, conducted a MICE study in 2019 which said that the Indian MICE market is actually sized at Rs 37,576 cr., 60 percent of which is attributed to Meetings and Incentives.

Nations should work closely

According to this year’s global survey by Expo 2020 Dubai, 88 percent of Indian respondents are of the opinion that nations should work closer together to solve global challenges such as a pandemic. The survey included more than 22,000 people across 24 countries.

The other aspect, Joseph says. “The role of governments, especially in India, has to be that they should support, and most of all, investing in and evolving with technology.”

Hazel Jain

The MICE talk Digital Conclave, powered by TRENDS India, on rebooting the Indian MICE landscape held on 25th August, 2021, brought together five great minds who examined ways in which India can be developed into a MICE behemoth with a little bit of ingenuity and effort from the stakeholders.

According to 2019 figures, approximately 22,000 exhibitions are held annually across the globe. Which means that at any given day there are close to 300 exhibitions opening in some part of the world. The Indian government has realised the long-term sustainability and benefits of this industry and has recently drafted a MICE Tourism policy. It says that the Indian MICE industry has less than one per cent share of the estimated global MICE business. In fact, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, conducted a MICE study in 2019 which said that the Indian MICE market is actually sized at Rs 37,576 cr., 60 percent of which is attributed to Meetings and Incentives.

Small has become big

The world that we operate in has changed, says Sabbas Joseph, Founder-Director at Wizcraft International Entertainment, “It is a world where you don’t want to touch and don’t want to be in large crowds. So small has really become big. Hence, we need to dive in that much deeper to deliver the same experience. How can you do small and still make a big impact, get larger audience? We are now in a ‘phy-gital world’ – a hybrid world,” he says.

Highlighting the role of the government in this, Joseph adds, “The role of governments, especially in India, has to be that they should support, and most of all, investing in and evolving with technology.”

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According to 2019 figures, approximately 22,000 exhibitions are held annually across the globe. Which means that at any given day there are close to 300 exhibitions opening in some part of the world. The Indian government has realised the long-term sustainability and benefits of this industry and has recently drafted a MICE Tourism policy. It says that the Indian MICE industry has less than one per cent share of the estimated global MICE business. In fact, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, conducted a MICE study in 2019 which said that the Indian MICE market is actually sized at Rs 37,576 cr., 60 percent of which is attributed to Meetings and Incentives.

Small has become big

The world that we operate in has changed, says Sabbas Joseph, Founder-Director at Wizcraft International Entertainment, “It is a world where you don’t want to touch and don’t want to be in large crowds. So small has really become big. Hence, we need to dive in that much deeper to deliver the same experience. How can you do small and still make a big impact, get larger audience? We are now in a ‘phy-gital world’ – a hybrid world,” he says.

Highlighting the role of the government in this, Joseph adds, “The role of governments, especially in India, has to be that they should support, and most of all, investing in and evolving with technology.”

MICE industry has less than one per cent share of the estimated global MICE business. In fact, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, conducted a MICE study in 2019 which said that the Indian MICE market is actually sized at Rs 37,576 cr., 60 percent of which is attributed to Meetings and Incentives.
ensure that they create the nec-
essary infrastructure to conduct
hybrid events so that the level of
engagements with clients can go
up. I think that is a task best left
to a private sector and the gov-
ernments can create an enabling
environment and infrastructure.
For instance, we will be having
a private player for our 1,400-
convention centre who can then
invest in technology and take
the service several notches
higher. Because it is an accept-

ed fact that the private sector
can offer much better services
and can be far better respon-
sive whereas the government
strengths are infrastructure and
policies,” Desai adds.

Virtual or physical?
Bringing some more ideas on
what the corporate clients would
want right now, Rajveer Bhat-
chatarya, Global Head (Travel &
Hospitality) & Business Head,
WAY2GO and GM, Global Travel
Services, Wipro, says that tech-
nology has its own limitations
back to offices. It’s just a matter
of time when physical events
will be back. At the same time,
the virtual will go hybrid and the
scheme of things will be very
different. Physical events will
happen, but the same events will
be viewed by thousands virtu-
ally. That is an opportunity both
for planners as well as hotels.
We are in a unique position to-

to-day. There are a lot of venues in
the world that are transforming
themselves into hybrid venues.
For two reasons – one there is
for people. At the same time,
there is also a need for us to
make people understand that
the consumption of experiences
will be different virtual and physical.
And we need to cater to both.

Technology will facilitate unity
Almost 56 per cent of Indians said that greater alliances between
communities have a part to play in building a better future. Meanwhile,
57 per cent also expressed that they believe technological inventions
will facilitate unity.

Technology has not happened. Even now, we are just waiting for flights to
return to offices. It’s just a matter of time when physical events
will be back. At the same time,

The need to meet people to do
different businesses will start to travel long-

Positive about technology & sustainability
The survey outcome shows that Indians have a positive outlook on


tools and planners where we can
provide both physical and virtual
event experiences,” Nagpal says.

A huge proponent of technol-
yogy, Nagpal also touches upon the
importance of data. He says, “Another aspect of business intelli-
genience is that, particularly in the
current scenario, the availability
of data, the business intelligence
– in terms of the occupancy
rates, what your competitor is
doing – this kind of intelligent
data has become absolutely
critical for hotels. This has be-

physically present at the venue
during the planning stage.

physical venues as well.

Infrastructure that supports green travel

Strongly inclined towards sustainability, the survey also showed that
seven in 10 trust that India will develop an infrastructure that supports
green travel, such as charging stations and electric vehicles (EVs) in the
villas. Supporting this finding, 34 per cent of Indian respondents
believe that eco-friendly local transportations such as electric-cars, bikes,
scooters etc. should be made accessible to all citizens of the planet.

If one demand rises, there is a
new segment that will take over.
Pre-pandemic, staycations in
summer were 1,000 happening out of
India on a particular day, there
were 1,000 happening out of
India. But that will change as
people are not going to take the
risk of travelling with family el-
ers. Even June-July last year,
there were no hotels in India
where there were no weddings.
Today, you look at destinations
like Goa and Kochi, we are back,” Patel adds.

He requests fellow hoteliers to
be flexible in terms of their can-
cellation and refund policies
as for designing and

Source: MICE-India, “MICE
is a nascent stage. But after the second
week, hotels in hill stations recov-
ered their RevPAR because of
this segment due to pent-up
demand,” he adds.

What the pent-up did is it got
business into hotels. “Now we
are seeing a direct correlation
between vaccination and peo-
ple taking flights. In hotels, we
are seeing in recovery that
upper-upsacle and luxury have
recovered faster than mid-scale
and economy. There are two
reasons for this: the price for
upscale hotels have come down
and there is higher brand reas-
surance for guests. The third
part, a large part of the Indian
outbound pre-Covid was incen-
tives and weddings. I don’t see
that demand going out of In-
da for at least another year.
These are people with dispos-
able income and companies
spending on experiences,” Patel says.

Hybrid is the new normal
To wish away and to say that
Hybrid is the new normal
is the truth. The pandemic has given us
this opportunity and we need
to start using that data from
the various sources and the
technologies that are available
to provide experiences. There is
no better time than now to be

Touchless technology
There are two aspects to touch-
less technology – one is at the
time of sourcing of venues.
Nagpal says, “There are now
technologies available that
based on social distancing
norms, you could actually do
a 3D diagram remotely and you
can collaborate with the venues
remotely and create an experi-
ence while planning the actual

While virtual meetings have
worked, it won’t replace physical
meetings.
– Rajveer Bhattacharya

Virtual events were always
there, they are now merging
with the physical.
– Sandeep Nagpal

While the pent-up demand is going to be huge. “You cannot expect a
corporation to do business for two years or not to organ-
ise meetings. In terms of wed-
dings, it is a USD 50 million
market growing at 25 per cent
CAGR. Weddings is ‘the’ event
in our society especially in cer-
tain communities. If there were
100 weddings happening in
India on a particular day, there
were 1,000 happening out
of India. But that will change as
people are not going to take the
risk of travelling with family el-
ers. Even June-July last year,
there were no hotels in India
where there were no weddings.
Today, you look at destinations
like Goa and Kochi, we are back,” Patel adds.

He requests fellow hoteliers to
be flexible in terms of their can-
cellation and refund policies.
“This will encourage guests to
take risks with us and go ahead
with their bookings. We will
bounce back! I see large-format
MICE events and national con-
ventions coming back by Q4
of 2022. We need to come to-
gerget and put in all resources
and ideas. It has to be a united,
cohesive effort,” Patel says.

MICE-India Regional VP, Sales & Marketing,
Hyatt India

Sandeep Nagpal
VP & Head of Marketing,
Cvent India

While virtual
meetings have
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replace physical
meetings.
– Arif Patel

Arif Patel
Regional VP, Sales & Marketing,
Hyatt India

Sandeep Nagpal
VP & Head of Marketing,
Cvent India

Be flexible with your
cancellation
and refund
policies to
motivate bookings.
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- The certification complies with international standards of WHO and national standards of MOT and FSSAI.

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India’s deal activity go up

According to a recent report by GlobalData, the digital deal flow in the travel and tourism sector in India increased by 12% in the first quarter of 2021 compared to the same period in 2020, driven by a surge in private equity deals and a rise in M&A transactions.

“While the overall deal activity remained relatively flat, the increase in private equity deals indicates a growing interest in the sector from investors who see potential for recovery and growth,” said GlobalData’s Saurabh Duggal, Senior Consultant for Travel and Tourism.

Key findings:

1. Private Equity Deals: The number of private equity deals in the travel and tourism sector in India increased by 26% in the first quarter of 2021 compared to the first quarter of 2020.
2. M&A Deals: The number of M&A deals in the sector remained relatively flat, with a slight increase of 6% in the first quarter of 2021 compared to the first quarter of 2020.
3. Deal Value: The total value of deals in the sector increased by 15% in the first quarter of 2021 compared to the first quarter of 2020.

“The rise in private equity deals is indicative of investors seeing opportunities for growth and recovery in the travel and tourism sector in India. This is likely to continue as the sector starts to recover from the pandemic and as more domestic and international tourists return,” said Duggal.

However, the outlook for the sector remains uncertain, with travel restrictions and uncertainty in the industry. Investors are likely to continue to monitor developments closely before making any major investments.

Ladakh tourism promotion

The Tourism Ministry of India has announced the launch of a new tourism promotion scheme for Ladakh, aimed at promoting tourism in the region.

The scheme, which will be implemented under the PRASHAD (Promotion of Rights of All Stakeholders in Heritage) scheme, aims to boost tourism in Ladakh by providing financial support to tourism-related projects.

Tourism in Ladakh is an important contributor to the region’s economy, with tourism-related industries accounting for a significant portion of the GDP. The new scheme is expected to further boost tourism in the region and help in its sustainable development.

Abu Dhabi invests in training

Abu Dhabi’s Department of Culture & Tourism has launched a new E-learning programme aimed at increasing awareness of Abu Dhabi’s offerings among travel professionals.

The programme, which is open to travel agents, tour operators, and other travel industry professionals, includes a range of modules and courses designed to help participants understand the unique attractions and offerings of Abu Dhabi.

“Abu Dhabi is a prime destination for those seeking a unique and authentic travel experience,” said HE Ali Hassan Al Shaiba, Chairman of the Department of Culture & Tourism. “We are committed to providing our partners with the tools they need to promote our offerings effectively.”

The programme is available online and includes a range of modules, including Abu Dhabi’s history, culture, and attractions, as well as practical tips for promoting Abu Dhabi to travelers.

The investment in training is part of Abu Dhabi’s efforts to increase awareness of the destination among travel professionals, as well as to support the local tourism industry.

Almost 50 per cent of Ladakh’s GDP depends on tourism. This place has its own unique character. The Ladakh tourism sector, this place has its own unique character. We will be hiring expert consultants for tourism policy and very soon Ladakh will have a tourism policy.
TAFI conducts chapter meetings

TAFI has been conducting a series of physical Chapter meetings since the new national team took over. It started with New Delhi, going on to Western India in Mumbai and Gujarat and eventually for the Karnataka Chapter in Bengaluru. The new team said, as promised, the TAFI MC is reaching out and touching base with members across the country.

Register with MoT, says TAFI WI

The Western India Chapter of the Travel Agents Federation of India has been guiding its members in this hour of need and advising them to register with both the MSME and the Ministry of Tourism urgently to reap long-term benefits. It recently conducted a physical meeting for its members to interact with the new national team.

The majority of global business travellers—68%—say they are pushing for a return to business travel, while just 32% feel their company is requiring them to do so, says the SAP Concur research on global business travellers.
Langkawi is not being called The Jewel of Kedah for nothing. Turquoise water surrounds the glimmering powdery sands making this spectacular island as one of Malaysia’s top holiday destinations.

Langkawi also has a duty-free status which means you can shop your heart out here! Not only it is a paradise for shoppers, but this island also has numerous kinds of other attractions that you can swing by. There is no shortage of activities if you are here in Langkawi.

Panorama Langkawi
Panorama Langkawi is a ‘must-try’ if you visit Langkawi. There are many attractions here, but the ones that you should try are the SkyBridge and SkyCab.

Go and ride a cable car using SkyCab to experience the panoramic view of the greenery while being 650 metres away from the land. Dangling amidst the lush green forests, with only the open blue sky right in front of you is something you should do at least once in a lifetime.

A tour at Kilim Geoforest Park will offer you some healing experiences. This park is full of a spectacular collection of geo-sites. Take a trip on a boat to appreciate the beauty of flora and fauna in the mangrove forests.

FactFile

- Langkawi is paradise for shoppers. The island also has a duty-free status which means you can shop your heart out here.
- A walk on the SkyBridge is one of the main attractions. So brace yourself and walk through a 125-metre-long suspended bridge.

One of the main attractions here is a walk on the SkyBridge. Yes! It is what it is, so brace yourself and walk through a 125-metre-long suspended bridge. The bridge is 100 metres above the ground, and the scenery is

**LANGKAWI**

A perfect place to unwind
breathtaking. Some even cry in awe of the beautiful sight, but most usually cry because of fear. The sky filled with silver clouds is just before your eyes with the breezy wind touching your skin. The sound of the wind intertwines with the echo of singing birds from the woods — this memory right here will last a lifetime.

The Top Station is located at the summit of Mount Mat Cincang. Just a short walk up the stairs from the Top Station, at an elevation of 708 metres above sea level, will take you to two viewing platforms, offering a spectacular 360-degree view of Langkawi.

The Top Station also provides access to the SkyBridge, which is the longest free span and curved bridge in the world, spanning about 125 metres in length and held by an 82-metre single pylon. The bridge gives every visitor a unique spatial experience of spectacular views along the curve.

Kilim Karst Geoforest Park
Nature has its magic where it can heal the exhausted souls. A tour at Kilim Geoforest Park will offer you some healing experiences. This park is full of a spectacular collection of geosites. Take a trip on a boat to appreciate the beauty of flora and fauna in the mangrove forests. On some lucky days, you can spot an otter or a dolphin in this emerald river!

Pulau Payar Marine Park
Do yourself a favour and visit Pulau Payar Marine Park. Explore the underwater life and enjoy looking at fishes swimming gracefully around the beautiful island. The marine park comprises of four uninhabited islands – Payar, Segantang, Kaca, and Lembu. The largest island is Payar, where the Marine Park Centre is found. You can go snorkeling, swimming, and diving at the marine park. Swim your way through all the shipwrecks, concrete blocks, old tyres that are home of many kinds of marine life. Dive in the deep royal blue water and feel the motions of marine creatures, welcoming you to their abode. Some even swim close to you while lightly brushing your skin, making you feel like you’re one of them.

Ride a cable car using SkyCab to experience the panoramic view of the greeneries while being 650 metres away from the land. Dangling amidst the lush green forests, with only the open blue sky right in front of you is something you should do at least once in a lifetime.
However, certain factors such as the fear of a third wave in India given the general population’s eagerness to travel. The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic can be overwhelming, but together we can overcome the challenges, bring our industry back together and see businesses growing again,” said Press.

Sanjay Ghare, Founder & CEO at Vervotech, shares his views on the scope of new travel technologies in the wake of the pandemic in India. He believes travel startups and new technologies introduced into the market will play a key role in the revival of the industry post COVID-19.

It is difficult to predict when this industry will truly be able to recover. However, certain factors such as, risk mitigation strategies, effective recovery plan and direct investments into the sector, will definitely help companies find their footing in the wake of the third wave. With ‘revenge travel’ becoming a trend and almost 28% of Indians planning to travel during August-September (as per a survey conducted by online platform, Local Circles), it seems the fear of a third wave is quite justified.

New standards in data distribution

This renders travel companies in a very precarious scenario – do they make the most of the renewed interest in travel and risk a third wave or do they play it safe and absorb their losses?

One of the main challenges faced by travel companies at present is managing their distribution channels and ensuring that the data being presented to their audiences are correct and updated. With many hotels and travel providers closing their shops in the wake of the pandemic, it was quickly recognised that there was a need for new standards in data distribution and management, a system that is able to identify, process and sort through large amounts of data quickly and without errors. It was also essential that booking engines provided their customers with additional information regarding local restrictions and laws, the policies of the hotel during the pandemic and other additional risk mitigation strategies so that the service for the customer can be made as safe and clinical as possible.

The leaps of innovation that was witnessed in the last two years are particularly striking. Travel agencies are now able to provide a plethora of information. This has not only helped consumers regain trust in the service and start-ups providing cheap, efficient and alternate solutions to these. AML and cloud-based services are fast, agile, and accurate and require minimal intervention in terms of monitoring.

It is still to be seen whether such advances will help in preventing the third wave in India given the general population’s eagerness to travel. However, these are at least making the environment safer for travellers.

Technology and the third wave

This year, the shows will be hybrid with physical events from November 1-3, followed by the virtual shows from November 8-9.

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

Sanjay Ghare, Founder & CEO at Vervotech, shares his views on the scope of new travel technologies in the wake of the pandemic in India. He believes travel startups and new technologies introduced into the market will play a key role in the revival of the industry post COVID-19.
The recent DDP Digital Conclave focused on hospitality revival and how it is thriving in the post-pandemic world. Titled, ‘The Post Pandemic Reset’, the conclave discussed the way circumstances have changed post second wave and how technology will play a major role in resetting the post-pandemic world.

Nisha Verma
While COVID brought sustaining businesses to its knees, hospitality companies had to rejig their strategies to sail through the pandemic. For Abinash Manghani, CEO, WelcomHeritage, the main focus is to stay afloat. “You must survive this entire episode and as business owners, the most important metric is the cash flow of the organisation, though generating profits is not possible. The biggest concern customers have is since phase 1 of the pandemic is safety,” he said.

Speaking about the scenario with restaurants, Vineet Wadhwa, Chairman & Managing Director, Fio Restaurants, said, “At this time the industry was glued to the top or bottom line as the main game. The pandemic has taught us to look in between. After the first lockdown, in October we saw a very slow rise and hit about 80 per cent of our rev- enues by March, until COVID hit us again. Surprisingly, in July we are seeing figures that resemble pre-COVID days. After the first lockdown, in October we saw a very slow rise and hit about 80 per cent of our revenues by March, until COVID hit us again.

Changes in second wave
Manghani shared that the second wave has made all players, who weren’t earlier taking adequate steps, to come into mainstream. “Today a major concern is for the destination or hotel to follow the safety norms. Travel plans can change owing to changing protocols at different places or some family member falling sick. Hotels must recognise and ensure that copsed up at home, has resulted in hotels within the cities also beginning to do better. However, the trend is the boutique, small, 3-4 hrs away, nature-driven or wildlife driven destinations, which will stay. Travel will not go down as hotels after second wave have adapted to the new customer and will do far better.”

Trends in restaurants
Sharing the post lockdown trends in restaurants, Wadhwa said, “Healthy and fresh eating is the way forward.” He believes that singular hotels can try and develop destinations, “If you are the only major player there, you should develop the destination before business comes to you. However, when there are multiple hotels and you think local state tourism bodies are not spending money in destination marketing, then it becomes your prerogative to come together with like-minded players and do something,” he added.

Hospitality ready for technology
Sharma claimed, “There is technology adoption in most restaurants with increasing digitalisation in processes. There is a need to look at things in terms of both bio safety and bio efficacy. If the industry could really put their might together, we can win consumer confidence and could be back to pre-COVID days. Many restaurants have adopted technology and tell the customers that they are in a safe environment as they were earlier.”

Sustainable recovery with pent up demand
Manghani believes that hospitality is a derive demand business. “Paradoxically, the whole business has become regulated because the government must clear travel, and if travel happens the derive demand comes to us and subsequently goes to restaurants or F&B facilities in those areas. In the mean time, hotels, destinations and tourism bodies will have to convert this whole game into a destination marketing game. If these destinations are considered safe and following stringent norms, as per the customers, I don’t see any major problem in demand. I only see that the rationale of travel is restricted in terms of RTPCR test and protocols being different everywhere.”

Technology to prevent COVID wave?
Sharma claimed that there is widespread use of technology to mitigate the risk. “We can sure help prevent the next wave and give confidence to business at large and people to have normal life. The incidents, if any, would be sporadic. Hence, we need vaccination, masks for closed spaces where you don’t know who you’d meet. You also need secure spaces, especially in retail, restaurants, schools and hospitals.”

Technology vital post-pandemic

In terms of technology, there are newer ideas like Shycocan, which is brilliant and we would like to experiment. Hence, new technology ideas are the way forward.”

Abinash Manghani
CEO, WelcomHeritage

Nisha Verma

Alok Sharma
CEO & Founder, Shycocan Corporation

The recent DDP Digital Conclave focused on hospitality revival and how it is thriving in the post-pandemic world. Titled, ‘The Post Pandemic Reset’, the conclave discussed the way circumstances have changed post second wave and how technology will play a major role in resetting the post-pandemic world.
W HOTELS

Goa

W Goa has promoted 
AJAY JAWAHAR Sharma to Director of B&F. A veteran of the hospitality industry, Jawahar has worked across reputed hotel chains such as Hyatt Hotels Corporation, Intercontinental Hotels Group and now Marriott International in his over 15 year stint in the industry. His mantra is that evolution is necessary with ever-changing market dynamics and mood matrix. This can be seen with the introduction of Sylvia – W Goa’s premier gin bar.

MARIGOLD SAROVAR PORTICO

Shimla

Sarovar Hotels and Resorts has appointed 
BK KAUSHIK as the new General Manager. He comes with an experience of close to 13 years in the hospitality industry and expertise in Sales, Marketing, Revenue Management, Hotel operations, Client management and Customer service. Prior to joining Sarovar Hotels and Resorts, Kaushik was with Radisson Hotel Agra as a Director of Sales & Marketing. With a humble career start as a Sr. sales executive over these years, he has worked with various brands in India including Radisson Blu Agra, Nadesar Palace; The Gateway Hotel, Varanasi and at Crystal Sarovar Premiere in Agra.

COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT

Bengaluru

Courtyard by Marriott Bengaluru announces the appointment of 
RAFI ANSARI as the Food and Beverage Manager. Ansari comes with a formidable experience of over 14 years in the hospitality industry that has seen him convert strategic visions into measurable results. He began his career in the year 2006 with JW Marriott as an F&B associate. Prior to joining Courtyard he was at Fairfield by Marriott, Lucknow as the Food and Beverage Manager. He will be responsible for heading and managing the Food and Beverage operations and will closely work with the hotels’ sales and marketing team to enhance brand visibility and drive revenue.

THE GAURS SAROVAR PORTICO

Greater Noida

Sarovar Hotels and Resorts appoint 
ANKUSH SHARMA as the General Manager, Greater Noida. He brings with him two decades of diverse experience that encompasses Operations Management, Sales & Marketing, E-Commerce, Liaison, Pre Opening and Project Management both in India and internationally. Before associating with Sarovar Hotels, Sharma was the General Manager at Ramee Rose, Bahrain and the General Manager for Clarion Collection, New Delhi. In the past, he has worked with brands like Taj Group of Hotels, Intercontinental Hotels Group, Radisson Hotels Group, etc.

THE LEELA PALACES, HOTELS AND RESORTS

Mumbai

The Leela Palace, Hotels and Resorts has appointed 
MEGHA AJGAONKAR as General Manager – Sales. In her role, Megha will spearhead and drive sales performance thus fortifying The Leela’s Sales and Distribution network and strategies. With two decades of diverse experience in hospitality and business development with brands like Taj, Starwood, and Marriott. She has been instrumental in the opening of multiple luxury brands like JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar and positioning the Ritz Carlton Pune. A strong advocate of a performance-driven culture, Megha is the recipient of multiple industry accolades.

IBIS

Jaipur

Ibis has announced the appointment of 
BALAGI SINGH as General Manager of Ibis Jaipur Civil Lines. In his new role, Singh will head the hotel’s overall management and operations. With over 18 years of experience in the hospitality sector, he has been a part of the Accor family for more than 13 years, performing varied roles across a range of hotels and geographies. Singh started with Accor as Assitant Manager Housekeeping at Novotel Hyderabad Airport and his last role was of the Hotel Manager of Novotel Chennai Sipcot.

MARRIOTT

Delhi

Marcin Holland has been appointed as 
BRAYDON as Senior Director Sales for Asia. Holland will be responsible for driving the sales strategy throughout the Asia region, including China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, India, Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. From Club Med to Conkids to Star Cruises to Genting Hong Kong, including his role in establishing the NCL brand in the region, Holland brings more than 28 years industry experience with travel brands to his new role.

STIC TRAVEL GROUP

Bengaluru

STIC Travel Group announced the promotion of 
ANJU WARIAH, from Senior Vice President of Alliances and Corporate Affairs to the position of Director – Group Business Development effective 1st September 2021. With a career of three decades, she is an aviation specialist and industry veteran. Wariah has held various positions at STIC and has successfully launched and grown multiple international airline operations in the Indian marketplace.

HYATT REGENCY

Mumbai

Hyatt Regency Mumbai has appointed 
GAURAV CHANDNA as the Director of food and beverage. A driven and skilled leader, Chandna is a Hyatt veteran who brings more than 17 years of experience in food and beverage service. He will be responsible for providing tactical guidance in the running of the department in line with Hyatt international’s brand standards. Prior to taking up the responsibility of F&B Director, he grew through the ranks at Hyatt Regency Delhi, gaining experience at their top restaurants.

NORWEGIAN CRUISE LINE

Hong Kong

NCL has announced the appointment of 
DHANANJAY SAWALKAR as Director of Tourism, Maharashtra Tourism, Government of Maharashtra, does vipassana meditation to de-stress himself on a daily basis. During the lockdown, he has even learned to cook the traditional Maharashtrian dish ‘kanda-poha’. Sawalkar also ensures that he takes a 10 to 15 days break annually to go on a holiday. “I recently visited Chikhaldara in Maharashtra, which has become my favorite. My next holiday will be Velneshwar near Guhagar in Ratnagiri,” he says.

For Dietmar Kielhoffer, Area Vice President, Hyatt West India and General Manager of Grand Hyatt Mumbai Hotel & Residences, reading a good book is always healing. He is also a fitness enthusiast, passionate about skiing and golfing. He loves to cook. He has circled three continents and worked in major cities such as Tokyo, London, Sun City – South Africa, Istanbul, Bangkok, Vienna, Mallorca and Zermatt. His favourite holiday destinations include Kolkata, Ladakh, Paris, Rome and Vienna. His next holiday will be to Uzbekistan (the Silk Road) or Tibet.

In his leisure, Venu Gopal, General Manager, ibis Hyderabad HITC City, researches and tries forgotten cuisines from the South. “This is the best way to de-stress for me. In fact, I picked up cooking during the lockdown and have tried many new recipes since,” he says. His favorite holiday destination is the Nilgiris. “I think our country has so much beauty, unexplored by many. I would now love to visit Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand,” Gopal shares. For AJAY JAWAHAR Sharma, his current favorite.My next holiday will be Velneshwar near Guhagar in Ratnagiri,” he says.

DR. GAURAV CHANDNA, Director of Tourism, Maharashtra Tourism, Government of Maharashtra, says, “This is the best way to de-stress for me. In fact, I picked up cooking during the lockdown and have tried many new recipes since.” He says, “My favorite holiday destination is the Nilgiris. ‘I think our country has so much beauty, unexplored by many.’” Gopal also enjoys his role in establishing the NCL brand in the region, bringing more than 28 years of experience with travel brands. His next holiday will be to Uzbekistan (the Silk Road) or Tibet.
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Mentioning that the Indian tourism and hospitality industry has suffered a lot, KB Kachru said “If they want this industry to survive, at least help us make some policy changes, which will directly and indirectly help the citizens and the industry at large. We made some suggestions to the new minister. We reiterated what we need to do to help our industry.”

He shared that currently, 40% of the inventory/hotels will close because they don’t have enough revenue to survive and pay for their loans and interest on principal. “Apart from this, we request the government to help us in operating them in a manner that such hotels can meet their justified expenses. Hotel industry has not been given infrastructure status, despite the same being given to automobile, manufacturing and other industries. Not many people know that 9% of the GDP and 9% of employment is generated directly by tourism industry.”

Kachru insisted that if the government recognises the industry as infrastructure, “then we will get benefits, which include electricity and power being given at subsidised rates, which is far less than the commercial rate we are paying. We will get locations and it will help us in creating new destinations. Today, to be part of infrastructure, we must be on the concurrent lists of the government,” he pointed out.

Another request he added was to give moratorium for a longer period. “Giving 2-3 months moratorium is not going to help anybody. Government is asking us to take loans, but why would somebody take more loans when they can’t even pay the interest of the loans previously taken by them. Govt has also initiated ECLGS, but it needs to be more practical. Hotels are unable to avail this. Hence, we are requesting them to have a policy on moratorium for 2-3 years and a long-term policy on principal and interest.”

Also, they discussed the service export issue with the minister. “The SEIS is due to hotels for FY 2019-20 and 2020-21. The government is just sitting with it and the minister promised to consider it immediately,” revealed Kachru.

Kachru believes that all these issues, if resolved, will support tourism businesses to adapt and survive. “It will promote domestic tourism and ultimately support the return of international tourism. We also need standardised RTPCR policy and vaccination policies in place. Hence, we should look at constructive steps like vaccine passport or recognising RTPCR test for a certain period,” he suggested.

Stressing that they want to work with the government, he said, “There is a need for a national tourism board which should govern and help development and marketing for India properly. Our suggestions have been accepted well and the government has promised to do it. We have also pushed for PPP model, which they are keen on adopting.”

On tourism minister announcing to talk about the inclusion of tourism in the concurrent list, Kachru said, “The intent is very good, and they have promised to process it as well. However, it will depend on a lot of specifics, and we are quite optimistic since it’s the first time this has been taken seriously.”

For KB Kachru, VP, Hotel Association of India & Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, it is imperative that the Government gives infrastructure status to the hospitality industry as well as offers tax benefits and policy changes, so that the industry revives from the pandemic.
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