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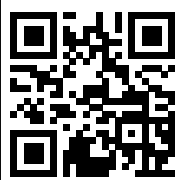
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## Upcoming Webinars

Self-drive - The Grand Tour of Switzerland  
Friday, 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2021, 3:00 PM IST

Rediscover MICE in Abu Dhabi  
Tuesday, 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2021, 3:00 PM IST

Swiss Travel System  
Thursday, 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2021, 3:00 PM IST

Reunite #InAbuDhabi!  
Tuesday, 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2021, 3:00 PM IST

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Date	Day	Webinar	Time
27th Aug 2021	Fri	Visa Section, Embassy of Switzerland	3.00 PM IST
3rd Sept 2021	Fri	Self-drive - The Grand Tour of Switzerland	3.00 PM IST
9th Sept 2021	Thur	Swiss Travel System	3.00 PM IST
24th Sept 2021	Fri	Jungfrau Railways	3.00 PM IST
30th Sept 2021	Thur	Interlaken Tourism	3.00 PM IST
6th Oct 2021	Wed	Zurich Tourism	3.00 PM IST

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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

At the time when travel industry needs to put 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



**Rajiv Mehra**  
President, IATO

much drop in the association's membership. He says, "Many companies have temporarily closed down their business and are waiting for the inbound

Contd on page 14 ▶

## PM's promotion for Somnath

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

Nisha Verma

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



**Narendra Modi**, Prime Minister of India

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 Kachch, 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 infrastruc-

Contd on page 9 ▶

## 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



**Arvind Singh**  
Secretary, MOT

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 envisions 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

Contd on page 14 ▶

## #ThailandBetterTogether

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

Nisha Verma

**Vachirachai Sirisumpan**, Director, TAT, New Delhi Office, shares, "This is 2<sup>nd</sup> campaign for travel agent engagement after a successful and well received 'Together Thailand' campaign last year. The objective of this year's 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



**Vachirachai Sirisumpan**  
Director, TAT, New Delhi Office

creating awareness of destinations, tourism products and services as well as update travel situation in Thailand. The

Contd on page 9 ▶



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## aims to rebuild

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



Janice Aloysius

**T**he 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

sary. 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

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 so that agents get their rightful dues." said Prakash.

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



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

National committee. The event was attended by **Ajay Prakash**, President TAFI, Kamal Ramchand, Vice President, Anil Kalsi, Joint Secretary and Managing committee member.

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."

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 neces-

"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

**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 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." 🐦

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

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# TRAVTALK

## VIEWPOINT

### Travelling cautiously

In the last few weeks, we have witnessed aggressive promotions around little known destinations. From Ladakh to Somnath, tourism promotions haven't just been limited to government officials but have seen a growing interest of the private sector as well. The erstwhile travel agent is back and how!

The important element to enable travel is to make it hassle-free. In a very welcomed announcement, the Health Ministry said that there shall be no restrictions on inter-State travel by air, rail, water, or road. This hopeful news brought about joy and cheer but for how long? While it's a wait and watch for the rules implemented by various States to ease travel, the real question arises to see if domestic tourism is ready to stand the test of time and compete with its foreign counterparts? Is the domestic luxury market continuing to grow? While restrictions to travel abroad under the present circumstances, make domestic holidays a clear choice, are we incentivising it enough to mobilise domestic tourism? The COVID-19 pandemic brought enough change to India's tourism sector and altered the way people travel. Travellers were not only open to the idea or exploring unknown destinations in India but were ready to pay the exorbitant price that came with luxury travel.

For years, the Indian outbound traveller has been extremely sought after by foreign destinations. Rules were changed and requirements were addressed, hotels added Indian food to their offerings and most destinations wooed us via Bollywood. As UAE, Sri Lanka and other short haul destination now prepare to restart, are they going to attract a majority of the Indian travellers? Dubai Expo 2020 with all its branding and marketing is ensuring to reach every household wanting to travel, their message is stronger than the marketing campaign of any tourism board in India. Time has waited for no one and India may be losing out on the flurry of travellers that some of the other countries might witnessed by opening their borders. Earlier we saw that Maldives gain was Andaman's loss, a message that shouldn't be forgotten. Now as we are on the cusp of an international restart, is domestic travel ready for the competition? Can Indian hospitality continue to attract the Indian travellers and make them feel same within the Indian borders? Let's wait and watch.

# 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.

TT Bureau

**W**edding Wire India, a subsidiary of The Knot Worldwide – an online marketplace for couples and wedding professionals, has released insightful statistics on how Indians are opting for non-saaya dates. The data reveals that there is a 76 per cent surge in the demand for non-saaya dates in first half of the year compared to last year.

The data further highlights that Bengaluru has the most demand for non-saaya weddings at 16 per cent followed by Mumbai (12 per cent), Jaipur (11 per cent), and Lucknow (10 per cent). Vendor availability and accessibility on these dates are driving this trend. In terms of venue, resorts and destinations weddings have seen



Anam Zubair  
Associate Director of Marketing  
at Wedding Wire India

highest queries at 139 per cent followed by marriage gardens, and weddings lawns and farm-houses 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 lane 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

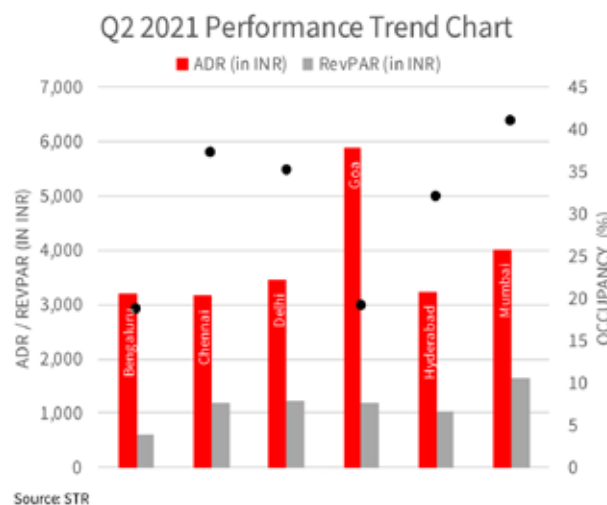
auspicious dates for weddings and looking at newer alternatives. From intimate/micro weddings, digital weddings, e-invites and custom-

There's been a paradigm shift in how Indians are planning their wedding in the new normal

used 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.



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 (Y-o-Y) 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.

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.

### Quarterly Hospitality Monitor

Key Hotel Market Performance			
Cities	Q2 2021		
	Change over Same Period Last Year		
	RevPAR Change (%)	AOB Change (ppt)	ADR Change (%)
Bengaluru	30.7 ↑	4.2 ↑	1.0 ↓
Chennai	99.6 ↑	16.9 ↑	6.4 ↑
Delhi	84.4 ↑	15.4 ↑	0.2 ↓
Goa	360.1 ↑	9.9 ↑	87.5 ↑
Hyderabad	89.6 ↑	15.6 ↑	0.8 ↓
Mumbai	53.9 ↑	17.7 ↑	16.0 ↓

Source: STR    RevPAR    ↑ Increasing    ↔ Stable    ↓ Decreasing



# 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

**A**t 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



**Dr Venu V**  
Additional Chief Secretary Tourism,  
Govt of Kerala

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

We managed  
to keep the  
curve of  
mortality and  
casualties flat

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, farmstays, boutique properties, a shift from packages to memorable traveller experiences.

## Tourism Breaking News

■ Sri Lanka Opens for Indian travellers once again with flight operations from 9 cities

■ TAAI discusses issues hampering tourism growth in Goa with state's Chief Minister

■ Health Ministry declares uniform protocol for domestic travel across India

■ Gujarat Tourism conducts physical roadshow for agents in Madhya Pradesh

■ Aviation ministry allows domestic airlines to increase capacity to 72.5% from 65%

■ SpiceJet launches mid-air cab booking via SpiceScreen for those travelling to Delhi

■ South Africa gets New Minister of Tourism as they plan for international tourism recovery

■ Vistara gets official approval for international flight operations to USA

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# Thailand as top of mind destination

► Contd from page 3

campaign will be a month-long activity with weekly promotions and contest on different themes, polls, articles, situation update, and will be hosted on TRAVTALK's media channels."

**Cholada Siddhivarn**, Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand, Mumbai shared that the campaign will focus



**Cholada Siddhivarn**  
Director, TAT Mumbai

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.



Hazel Jain

**W**ith only the Wagah border as one of the main spots for border tourism, there is plenty of scope to explore this segment for other states that have international borders. That is why the Seema Darshan project being developed by Gujarat Tourism, Roads & Buildings Department and the BSF holds so much importance. The project to be inaugurated soon, includes attractions such as Ajay Prahari Memorial, parade ground, exhibition Centre, and a museum.

One of the spots under this project is Nada Bet in Banaskantha district. **Jenu Devan**, MD, Tourism Corporation of Gujarat, said that the project inaugurated in December 2016 at Nada Bet has already started receiving 4,000-5,000 visitors the weekends. The tourism department is trying to promote Nada Bet on the lines of



**Jenu Devan**  
MD, Tourism Corporation of Gujarat

We will promote Nada Bet on the lines of Wagah Border

— Devan



**Rupinder Brar**  
ADG - Ministry of Tourism Government of India

The young generation needs to know India's history

— Brar

tourist facilities as well as tour arrangements and tour operators are more than willing to collaborate with us for these locations. The Gujarat State Transport has showcased interest in having their buses here, ensuring better road connectivity. A selected agency will manage these facilities for the next five years," Devan shared.

**Rupinder Brar**, Additional Director General – MOT, Government of India, said "The young generation needs to know India's history, culture and heritage. It is important to flag these places to them. To take this narrative to the children, we have started connecting with the association of Indian universities that have 850 universities under its wing." However, feedback from the tourist guides is that getting permissions to visit East Kutch and West Kutch is still a challenge. Perhaps Inner Line Permits like the North Eastern States will work here too. 🇮🇳

# We'll come back stronger

After 18 months of pandemic, travel industry is not in the best shape. However, Tony Fernandes, Group CEO, Air Asia, is very optimistic that with mass vaccination programs going on everywhere, proper precautions and travel guidelines, industry will revive soon.



Janice Alyosius

**I**n 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, people have started travelling. When asked about it, he said "I am impressed how efficiently vaccine is rolled out in Malaysia. We've



**Tony Fernandes**  
Group CEO, Air Asia

lived through AIDS, many other outbreaks, and this is the toughest for sure, but we'll come back stronger."

He is happy with the fact that most of the airlines have survived, though some of them have gone into bankruptcy. "I'm happy, competitor 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 uplift 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 priced carrier to a not really low-cost carrier anymore."

Comparing the present situation with 9/11, he said "After the incident, it was very difficult for people to travel to America with all the interrogation methods, however people didn't stop travelling. Similarly, people will get used to COVID testing methods and guidelines. People are robust, they can't wait to travel

again. They want to go on a holiday, want to meet their families and so many reasons. Every single person I meet, wants to get on a plane and travel."

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 schlep 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 forget 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

We've lived through AIDS, many outbreaks, and this is the toughest, but we'll come back

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.



Nisha Verma

To commemorate 75 years of Indian Independence and as part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebration, MOT, in collaboration with Association of Indian Universities (AIU), 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. Thiruvassagam**, President, AIU, and **Arvind Singh**, Secretary, Tourism.

Reddy advised the students to take out at least 75 hours in the next one year to do any one activity of their choice and involve themselves in nation building. This can be participating in



**G Kishan Reddy**  
Cabinet Minister for Tourism, GOI

Swacchh Bharat Abhiyaan 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 up-

take 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 of 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 Apna Desh 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

► Contd from page 3

ture. The Ramayana circuit is apprising 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 Kedarnath, tunnel and highways for Char Dham, development work in Vaishnavo 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 pilgrimages."

Modi said that India is not only connecting common citizens through tourism but is improving its tourism rankings too. "The Country has moved from 65<sup>th</sup> place in 2013 on Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index to 34<sup>th</sup> place in 2019."



The country is reviving the ancient glory by building modern infrastructure

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

# Build up from grass-roots

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

In 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 hoteliers 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



**Arijit Purkayastha**  
Chapter Chairman - North East for ADTOI

awareness in rural areas. We need to go to the grass root level," he said.

Sharing this sentiment was **Debajit Borah**, President, (TOAA). 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 pri-

ority. Uniform norms and protocols for entire North East should be formed," he opined.

### Community and nature

According to **E Banlumlang Blah**, President, NEITC and President, Tour Operators Association of Meghalaya, the trade needs to help the commu-



**Debajit Borah**  
President, Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA)

nity and support those in need. "Tourism service providers are left with no income. Circum-



**E Banlumlang Blah**  
President, NE India Tourism Confederation (NEITC) and President, TOAM

stances compel people to do different things, especially in the rural areas, people are destroying the environment, which is precious for us. Our tourism depends on the environment. We have to take the community into confidence and educate them to avoid shortcuts," Blah said. "As we share international borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh, we can consider them as potential source markets," he added.

Presenting an hotelier'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



**Sunil Saraf**  
President, Hotel and Restaurant Association of Assam (HRAA)



**Joe RZ Thanga**  
General Secretary, Association Tour Operators Mizoram (ATOM)

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 have hundreds of tour guides recently inducted 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 can help social distancing on guided tours," he added. 🐦



# 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.



Hazel Jain

The MICE talk Digital Conclave, powered by Cvent 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 32,000 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



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, es-

tors, etc because we complete the journey. It's the rest of us that can work with them to make that MICE opportunity real. And that collaboration factor is missing," Joseph says.

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

– Sabbas Joseph

## Nations should work closely

According to this year's global survey by Expo 2020 Dubai, 88 per cent 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.

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,

pecially in India, must find resonance in what our PM is talking about: Atmanirbhar! Never has it been more important to be self-reliant than now. We have now embarked on the right message with 'Dekho Apna Desh'. Explore India, Understand India, Visit India. With 1.3 billion people, we must give them that global experience within India, give them that high quality luxury experience in India."

He feels that governments often don't recognise the value addition that MICE is making to the local economies. "Failing to do so they do not provide them the support. That is where India's biggest failure has been. Goa recognised this long ago and began investing in MICE. Across the country, we require to see more and more of this. Second part – we need to see collaboration from the governments. They are not complete on their own. They must realise that they need to collaborate with event management companies, with hotels, airlines, tour opera-

## Collab through technology

The other aspect, Joseph brings out, is that the government has gone very heavily into technology. "But it is in bits and pieces. That technology must be made available to the MICE industry, be it with the Aarogya Setu app – collaborating with the MICE industry will help make events that much safer. We are already arriving in the world of digital passports globally. But I think there is a need for collaboration using Artificial Intelligence, understanding the consumer and being able to predict patterns and behaviour. From the government, I want infrastructure, technology-enabled solutions, transparency in collaboration is needed across the board. There is no recognition of event tourism nor wedding tourism. Invest in experiences. Finally, the government needs to get down to marketing



Nikhil Desai  
Managing Director, Goa Tourism Development Corporation

along with the industry, not on its own. So when you're marketing a destination, market everyone who provides services in that destination. So work with the hotels and airlines, joint marketing plans, joint marketing budgets," Joseph says.

## The government angle

With Goa as one of the foremost destination for MICE and weddings in India, it was imperative

**Every hotel and MICE venue in India will need to invest heavily in technology**

– Nikhil Desai

to get its perspective on this. Nikhil Desai, Managing Director, Goa Tourism Development Corporation, agrees that the entire strategy will have to be spearheaded by the government. "It

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 100 crore 1,400-seater convention centre coming up in the heart of the city, expected to be complete by May 2022. This will cater to small and medium-sized events. I am also very happy to share that in the past few days Goa government has offered land in Dona Paula wherein

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 equity 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.



Rajdev Bhattacharya  
Global Head (Travel & Hospitality) & Business Head, W/A2GO and G/M Global Travel Services, Wipro

Secondly, Desai says that MICE admittedly is 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 far more sense for people to do MICE events outside India.

## 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 pundits 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



Sabbas Joseph  
Founder-Director at Wizcraft International Entertainment



ensure that they create the necessary 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 governments can create an enabling environment and infrastructure. For instance, we will be engaging 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 accepted fact that the private sector can offer much better services and can be far better responsive 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, Rajdev Bhattacharya, Global Head (Travel & Hospitality) & Business Head, WAY2GO and GM, Global Travel Services, Wipro, says that technology has its own limitations

back to offices. It's just a matter of time when physical events will be back. At the same time,

**Be flexible with your cancellation and refund policies to motivate bookings**

— Arif Patel

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 virtually. That is an opportunity both for planners as well as hotels. We are in a unique position today. There are a lot of venues in the world that are transforming themselves into hybrid venues. For two reasons – one there are

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.

The earlier we realise this and the venues realise this, the better it is," Nagpal adds.

Virtual events were always there, what is happening now is that they are now merging with the physical. "And that is what the future will hold. Technologies are now available for doing this. We provide technologies to both ho-

**While virtual meetings have worked, it won't replace physical meetings.**

— Rajdev Bhattacharya

#### Positive about technology & sustainability

The survey outcome shows that Indians have a positive outlook on technology and sustainability and reveals that nearly 75 per cent of young Indians are hopeful about their future and exploring opportunities — versus the global youth response of around 50 per cent.

and right now that personal experience is missing. "My view is that whatever happens during the pandemic mindset, and whatever decision and predictions we have made during the pandemic has not happened. Even now, we are taking a lot of decisions with the pandemic mindset. While virtual meetings have worked, it will only be another medium added to meeting people. I don't think it will replace physical meetings. The hybrid model is here to stay. MICE will be in a different form and shape. So let us embrace the fact that things have changed. Let us see the opportunity of what we can be rather than bring back what it was. Whether corporates will start to travel long-haul, it's a function of business. I believe this is a temporary blip. The need to meet people to do business or events has not gone. Whether it is the UK or USA, we are just waiting for flights to come back," he adds.

#### Hybrid is the new normal

To wish away and to say that virtual events will take over is a myth, feels Sandeep Nagpal, VP & Head of Marketing, Cvent India. He says that we have learned to live with the pandemic. "And we are already seeing that people are starting to have meetings and going

thousands of people who can't make it to the event, the second is even at the venue people will

**Virtual events were always there, they are now merging with the physical.**

— Sandeep Nagpal

consume a lot of stuff virtually. So you will have to create a studio experiences. Therefore, the venues are transforming themselves into physical venues as well as hybrid venues. There are studios available now worldwide where they are creating hybrid experiences

tels and planners where we can provide both physical and virtual event experiences," Nagpal says.

A huge proponent of technology, Nagpal also touches upon the importance of data. He says, "Another aspect of business intelligence 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 hoteliers. This has become like a technological intervention that companies like us are providing. We are hopeful that hotels will start now using these services. I believe, we have taken a leap of five to seven years — from the perspec-

tive of technology adoption. We are seeing both from our planner side and the hotels side that the digital re-invention is happening. The pandemic has given us this opportunity and we need

as for designing and sourcing venues."

He feels that in the end, it boils down to safety — which is the new luxury. "Secondly, the industry needs to get tech-savvy. Start investing in digital re-invention that is required by the industry. We have been laggards when it comes to technology as an industry. But we need to start doing this now.

We also need to be agile, need to make decisions now and keep evolving," Nagpal points out.

#### A cohesive effort

Hybrid will be the new normal, feels Arif Patel, Regional VP, Sales & Marketing, Hyatt India. Sharing a hotelier's perspective, he says we are already seeing early signs of recovery.

ple taking flights. In hotels, we are seeing in recovery is that upper-upscale 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 reassurance for guests. The third part, a large part of the Indian outbound pre-Covid was incentives and weddings. I don't see that demand going out of India for at least another year. These are people with disposable income and companies spending on experiences," Patel says.

He believes that the MICE pent-up demand is going to be huge. "You cannot expect a company not to do business for two years or not to organise meetings. In terms of weddings, it is a USD 50 million market growing at 25 per cent CAGR. Weddings is 'the' event in our society especially in certain 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 elders. 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 cancellation 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 conventions coming back by Q4 of 2022. We need to come together and put in all resources and ideas. It has to be a united, cohesive effort," Patel says.



Arif Patel  
Regional VP, Sales & Marketing  
Hyatt India



physically present at the venue during the planning stage. So those kind of 3D diagramming

"If one demand rises, there is a new segment that will take over. Pre-pandemic, staycations in

#### 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 next decade. Supporting this finding, 34 per cent of Indian respondents believe that eco-friendly local transportation such as electric cars, bikes, scooters etc. should be made accessible to all citizens of the planet.

tools are now available. Second is check-ins. They are always a big problem for groups. That entire process has been automated and are available now as tools. This has always been around but the option has now been accelerated. Technology should be used now and a lot of hotels are already using it — both for check-ins as well

India was in a nascent stage. But after the second wave, hotels in hill stations recovered 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-



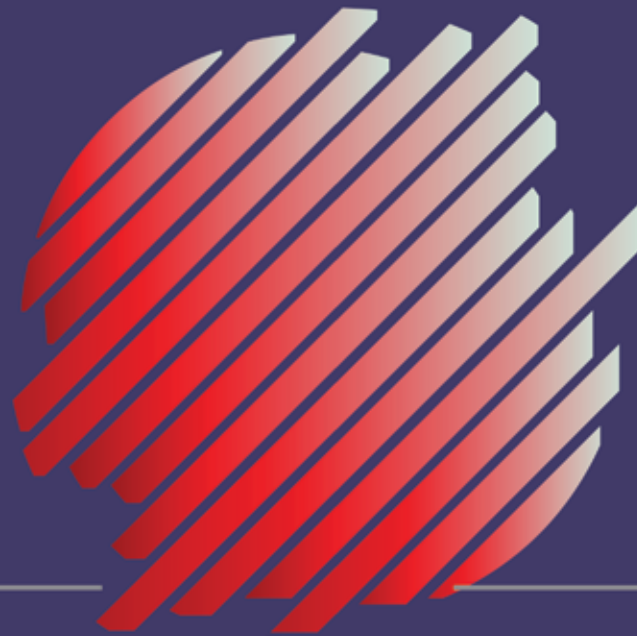
Sandeep Nagpal  
VP & Head of Marketing  
Cvent India



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## India's deal activity go up

A total of 69 deals that including mergers and acquisitions, private equity, and venture financing were announced in the global travel and tourism sector during July 2021, which is a decline of 6.8 per cent over 74 deals announced during the previous month, according to data and analytics company, GlobalData. **Aurojyoti Bose**, Lead Analyst at GlobalData, comments, "Deal activity in the travel sector still remains inconsistent. While June showed some signs of recovery following a decline during the past few months, the rebound in deal activity could not be sustained for long with July again reversing the trend. This could be attributed to prevailing travel restrictions and unfavorable market conditions for the sector in some countries."

Deal activity remained at the same level in key markets such as the US, the UK and China, while India and Australia witnessed an improvement. Meanwhile, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands experienced a decline in July.

► Contd from page 3

tourism to restart. Though most companies have temporarily closed and are working from home to cut operational costs. On the contrary, we have added 20 new members from April 2021 to July 2021, which is slightly lower when compared to the same period of the previous year. However, once business resumes, we are optimistic for growth similar to previous years."

Meanwhile, the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) has seen some drop in member numbers. **Ajay Prakash**, President, TAFI, confirms this and says, "Some members haven't paid their fees because their offices haven't been functioning. But we reached out to all our members and have extended our offer of 25 per cent reduction in annual fees for the current year - if they pay their dues before 30 September, 2021. We've had good response and hope to see a substantial increase in our membership."

**Jay Bhatia**, Vice President, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), shares,



Jay Bhatia  
Vice President, TAAI

TAAI has rebated annual membership fees by 40 per cent till 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2021

— Bhatia

There have been a handful of active members who have resigned due to relinquishing their IATA membership owing to the pandemic. However, TAAI has rebated annual membership fees by 40 per



Rajeev Jainapurkar  
Chairman, IAAP

Every business linked to amusement industry is suffering due to no demand

— Jainapurkar

cent up to 30 September, 2021. Also, since the benefits of being a TAAI member are plenty including participation in the TAAI-IATA JBG, nearly 80 per cent of active members have paid their fees. We have also added a few



Ajay Prakash  
President, TAFI

Some members haven't paid their fees because their offices haven't been functioning

— Prakash

members especially since the trade has seen the efforts of the Office Bearers during the lockdowns. Our representation to the government along with our efforts with the airlines and IATA, has shown tremendous results."

However, the outlook for the amusement parks industry seems a bit cloudy given the current scenario. **Rajeev Jainapurkar**, Chairman, Indian Association of Amusement Parks & Industries (IAAP), gives an update. He says, "Pre-pandemic, our membership had been going up uninterruptedly every year. Unfortunately, COVID-19 was disastrous for the amusement industry in India which has been closed for over 15 months now. Everyone connected to the amusement industry is suffering heavily due to no demand, both from leisure as well as MICE, because of which quite a few businesses have closed down or have moved to other ventures. Due to this, many national and international members did not renew their membership with us for the year 2020-21. As a result, IAAP's membership has now dipped by almost 15 per cent. Fortunately, due to our concerted efforts and discussions with the government, we have been able to retain our core members. We hope things will improve soon."

## Ladakh tourism promotion

► Contd from page 3

tourism etc. "The cultural and heritage tourism has enormous potential in Ladakh to offer to its visitors," he said and spoke about the carbon neutral path being followed in Ladakh. He was happy to mention that Buddhist Chanting has been identified by the UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage of Ladakh. Mathur also praised Ministry of Tourism for organising the event.

Even **G. Kishan Reddy**, Union Minister of Tourism, Culture and Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), addressed the mega-tourism event virtually. Other dignitaries present at the event included **Jamyang Tsering Namgyal**, Member of Parliament, Ladakh; **K Mehboob Ali Khan**, Secretary of Tourism & Culture, UT Ladakh; **G Kamala Vardhan Rao**, Director General, Ministry of Tourism; and **Rupinder Brar**, Additional Director General, MOT.



Arvind Singh  
Secretary, MOT

Reddy in his address said that the event is a platform that provides tour operators from other parts of the country and customers to interact with local stakeholders from Ladakh. "The Central government has also contributed Rs.23.21 Crore for Tourist Water Screen Projection Multimedia show and other tourist attractions and developing Chaukihang Vihara Project under the PRASHAD scheme. For tourism to develop in places like Ladakh, the community partnership

is very important," he added. He stressed on the overall tourism development along with creating a professional skilled workforce.

**Mehboob Ali Khan** mentioned, as per data, 50 percent GDP of Ladakh depends on

Almost 50 per cent of Ladakh's GDP depends on tourism. This place has its own unique character

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."

## Abu Dhabi invests in training

To celebrate the first anniversary of Abu Dhabi Specialists E-learning programme, the Department of Culture & Tourism – Abu Dhabi has introduced new modules and markets to this innovative training scheme.

TT Bureau

The Abu Dhabi Specialists E-learning programme was unveiled last year as part of DCT Abu Dhabi's response to the COVID crisis and saw all forms of physical promotional offers, workshops and training courses shifted onto virtual platforms. The idea behind it was to educate travel industry professionals, including front-liners, product managers, tour operators, travel agencies and home-based agents, about ways to promote Abu Dhabi effectively.

Launched in May 2020, the e-learning has been successfully rolled out across the markets in 17 different countries and in seven different languages. So far, 13,670 applicants have registered for the course and more than 7,000 have graduated as 'Abu Dhabi Specialists'. "We are really heartened by the strong support from the



global travel trade for this programme and, as such, we will be launching additional learning modules and expanding into new markets in Switzerland and Israel. Despite the last year being an extremely challenging period for the tourism sector, through this innovative programme we have still been able to connect with travel professionals around the world and help them understand why Abu Dhabi is such an extraordinary destination. As we open up to travellers from across the world once again, we are confident the programme has

increased awareness of Abu Dhabi's amazing offerings, which in turn will lead to increased sales activity and lengths of stay for visitors," said **HE Ali Hassan Al Shaiba**, Executive Director of Marketing and Tourism at DCT Abu Dhabi.

The investment in training and upskilling confirms DCT Abu Dhabi's commitment to support the travel trade in key source markets to provide quality advice and better service to customers considering Abu Dhabi as a travel destination."

A majority of 96% are willing to travel for business over the next 12 months, including 65% who are very willing. But expectations of their employer to protect their health and safety while traveling for business remain, as per a new research by SAP Concur.



# 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.

DELHI



MUMBAI

## 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.



Hazel Jain

**T**he Western India Chapter of the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) recently held its third physical meeting since the pandemic hit. This time it was held in Mumbai with the new national team of TAFI addressing the members for the first time since the elections. The event that was attended by almost 100 members, also saw multiple presentations on Europe with five airlines (Lufthansa, Air France, KLM, Indigo and Vistara) and twotourism boards (Switzerland Tourism and Atout France India) along with VFS Mumbai.

**Jitul Mehta**, Chairman, Western India, TAFI, who has been encouraging his members to register themselves with MoT and as MSMEs, said, "I have been talking about MoT and MSME since the last five years. We have also



Jitul Mehta  
Chairman, Western India, TAFI

I have been talking about registering with MoT and the MSME since last five years

— Mehta

conducted presentations on cybercrime and insurance. The next



Ajay Prakash  
President, TAFI

I request our members to come forward to join the committees at the national level

— Prakash

big thing the members need to understand is the IT policies of

India. It's a very detailed subject. These topics are very close to my heart and I shall continue to focus on them for our members."

He also explained the benefits in terms of the government schemes for accredited tourism entities and how MSME registration can help them obtain business loans at a lower rate with minimum documentation. Mehta elaborated that being registered as a MSME could also help to recover outstandings from corporates. He assured members that the Chapter committee would extend all the possible help to all Western India members.

Mehta added, "Now that some European countries have opened

up, we invited a few companies to talk to them about the protocols, procedures, and requirements for tourists. We have always made sure that TAFI WI every meeting is dedicated to a specific subject and theme. The national team has shared their vision for the future with members. In our following meetings we are thinking of addressing key issues such as TCS, GST. TCS is a burning issue right now and we are planning the meeting and get some good speakers."

Echoing sentiments of his president, Mehta says, "We want member contribution. They should feel like a part of the team, Only then will they start participating. This is what we want from

all our members." TAFI President, **Ajay Prakash**, also shared his vision of a rejuvenated TAFI equipped to cope with the ever changing new reality. He apprised members of the steps taken in the last month - a fortnightly newsletter, the meeting with MoS Civil Aviation, outreach to the membership, discussions at FAITH regarding the need for empirical data on the industry and the formation of various sub committees. The national team, he assured the members, was always available to every member to help and address their concerns. He also requested members to come forward to join the committees formed at the national level to handle various issues. 🐦

*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

## A perfect place to unwind



SkyBridge - Panorama Langkawi

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.

**L**angkawi 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

Go and 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

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.

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.

the open blue sky right in front of you is something you should do at least once in a lifetime.

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







Eagle Square



Payar Island

brehtaking. 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

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.

beautiful island. The marine park comprises of four uninhabited islands – Payar, Se-pulau Payar Marine Park. Explore the underwater life and enjoy looking at fishes swimming gracefully around the

ing, 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.





## EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



## SEPTEMBER 2021

Date	Event	Time
2	Thai International Travel Fair (TITF)	Bangkok
3	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00pm
3	Philippines Travel Mart (PTM)	Philippines
7	Rediscover MICE in Abu Dhabi Webinar	3:00pm
9	Switzerland Tourism Webinar - Swiss Travel System	3:00pm
14	Reunite#InAbuDhabi Webinar	3:00pm
15	ATOAI	11:00am
20-22	ILTM- North America	Mexico
24	Switzerland tourism Webinar - Jungfrau Railways	3:00pm
27	World Tourism Day Celebrations	Worldwide
30	Switzerland Tourism Webinar - Interlaken Tourism	3:00pm

## OCTOBER 2021

1	Dubai World Expo 2020	Expo
5-8	IFTM Top Resa	Paris
6	IFTM Top Resa	3:00pm
10	World Routes 2021	Milan

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

## WTM lays COVID-19 protocols

Organisers share details of the safety measures undertaken for the face-to-face events at ExCeL London. Exhibiting at WTM London may look a little different this year, but it will continue to be the place where ideas are generated and connections are made.



Janice Alyosius



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



environment in which to conduct business.



Simon Press  
Travel Forward exhibition director  
WTM London

The live events will be the first face-to-face gatherings for the international travel and tourism sector since ease of restrictions and the WTM and TF teams are drawing upon its global experience and expertise to deliver a secure

"We are eager to welcome visitors back to ExCeL as it is time for industry professionals to reunite in person as the sector recovers," said Simon Press, WTM London and Travel Forward exhibition director. All Secure Guidelines 2.0, have been prepared by AEO, AEV & ESSA in line with guidance published by DCMS/Government. To create an environment for business to thrive again, implementation of increased hygiene measures and medical safeguarding will be done. "The health and safety of visitors, exhibitors and staff will be our utmost priority and we will continue to issue updates to reassure delegates as we approach the show," added Press.

Advance registration before arrival is mandatory. Delegates can show their badge for contactless scanning, either on a smartphone or printout. For safety, it is compulsory to wear a facemask when using public transport, frequent use of hand sanitizer and elbow bumps are suggested as an alternative to handshakes or hugs.

The Excel Cleaning team has been specially trained to deliver new cleaning procedures before, during and after the event, including regular cleaning of all touch points. Catering facilities will open in line with the latest government guidance and cashless payments are encouraged. Exhibitors are reviewing stand designs to avoid enclosed meeting areas with open, ventilated space.

"All attendees will verify their COVID status, so delegates can conduct business with confidence. Exhibiting at WTM Lon-

don may look a little different this year, but it will continue to be the place where ideas are generated and new connections are made. We urge visitors to prepare in advance to ensure everyone knows

The health and safety of visitors, exhibitors and staff will be our utmost priority

about the new practices and follow the science-based guidelines to safeguard others and us. 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.

## Technology and the third wave

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

Risk mitigation strategies, effective recovery plan and direct investments, will help companies find their footing

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.

This led to an increased demand in newer technologies that travel start-ups were more than happy to provide. 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 providers but also pushed demand in these sectors.

## Need to be faster, more agile

As digital nomads are choosing to work remotely and staycations are becoming popular choice among patrons, traditional accommodation providers have adopted newer technologies to remain relevant. Services such as property mapping, content distribution, deduping, market analysis and predictions that historically depended on archaic systems witnessed a major overhaul with travel tech

startups providing cheap, efficient and alternate solutions to these. AI/ML 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.



Sanjay Ghare  
Founder & CEO at Vervotech

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



# Technology vital post-pandemic

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 the fore, 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 since phase 1 of the pandemic is safety," he said.

Speaking about the scenario with restaurants, **Vineet Wadhwa**, Chairman & Managing Director, Fio Restaurants, said, "All 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 revenues by March, until COVID hit



and staffing, and the revenues were depleted. The revival happened with ingenuity, ideas and concepts of luring the diner. Looking at July figures, it seems, we should be stepping into the thriving phase since competition has got controlled and the survivors are seeing the chapter of March returning."

Saying that the pandemic and viral attacks are going to be a way of

payments are returned to respective customers," he advised.

Wadhwa added, "The visible changes in dining include early eating habits and move to environment-friendly packaging. Everyone has learnt to work with a limited team and ensuring hygienic practices. This is a big change for India as they have learnt to queue up and not crowd up. There is preference

## Technology in MICE

When asked how technology would be used in future, Manghani added, "For all the people who are in the MICE business, it's going to be a hybrid game with a mixture of one-on-one and technology. Also, 70% of all bookings come from mobile, with everything, starting from search, selection and payments on the smartphone. Many companies internationally and in India are going mobile first because, if one can do entire process on smart screens then you don't need web development"

life forward, **Alok Sharma**, CEO & Founder, Shycocan Corporation, shared, "With the number of variants coming out, it seems the next pandemic could be 10 times worse. This means we need to be prepared. Several measures are being taken up in terms of hygiene and vaccination. Though at present technology must play the vital role. For this, a viral defence device is the technology that allows spaces to be safe. We believe that having a viral safety device will have to be a standard fitting in every area of all restaurants, just like air-conditioning and lighting."

## 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

for outdoor dining and local fresh produce."

## Building consumer confidence

Manghani revealed, "There is a clear shift towards branded hotels, whether it's within cities or outskirts. Reports show that innovative marketing practices and people being

cooped 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 on the rise. Highlighting the food sources on the menu has come as a suggestion. Every restaur-

ant will work on a new menu with limited choices and better understanding on digitalisation

having a viral safety device will have to be a standard fitting in every area of all restaurants

Alok Sharma

like QR menu. 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."

## Hospitality ready for technology

Sharma claimed "There is technology adoption in most

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," he explained.

## 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 meantime, 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."

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.

## Govt norms & technology

Sharma stressed that they cannot go against the government directives. "Our technology is an

## 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." Adding that Shycocan can work in outdoors to some extent, it is effective against mutants of virus as well. "It doesn't matter which variant is there because the shell will get neutralised with Shycocan," he claimed



Alok Sharma  
CEO & Founder, Shycocan Corporation

extra layer of protection and the chances of somebody transmitting COVID to another person is virtually negligible. However, in hotel industry one cannot go and control every guest. While nobody should go against the government norms, an extra layer

In terms of technology, there are newer ideas like Shycocan

- Abinash Manghani

of protection will help you even if somebody broke that norm, especially in restaurants where people do put down the mask to eat," he pointed out.

## Move towards homestays

Calling it a societal response to COVID, Manghani revealed that in tourist destinations, hoteliers are earning half of what homestays are earning because they are predominantly discreet and independent. "The entire homestay belongs to the guest usually and one can manage safety far better for small numbers. Hence, hotels with villas are doing far better than match-box structures and people are willing to pay the difference," he stressed.



Vineet Wadhwa  
Chairman & Managing  
Director, Fio Restaurants

The revival happened with ingenuity, ideas and concepts of luring the diner.

- Vineet Wadhwa

us again. Surprisingly, in July we are seeing figures that resemble that of March. We downsized, came out with limited venues



## 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.



## 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.



## 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 Asst Manager Housekeeping at Novotel Hyderabad Airport and his last role was of the Hotel Manager of Novotel Chennai Sipcot.



## MARIGOLD SAROVAR PORTIC

### 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.



## 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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

### Delhi

Hyatt Regency Delhi 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.



## 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 Juhu 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 hotel's sales and marketing team to enhance brand visibility and drive revenue.



## THE LEELA PALACES, HOTELS AND RESORTS

### Mumbai

The Leela Palaces, 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.



## NORWEGIAN CRUISE LINE

### Hong Kong

NCL has announced the appointment of **BRAYDON HOLLAND** 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 Contiki 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.



## TALKing People

For Dietmar Kielnhofer, 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 Hitec 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.

**Dhananjay Sawalkar**, Director of the Directorate 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 current favorite. My next holiday will be Velneswar near Guhagar in Ratnagiri," he says.





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# Inclusion in concurrent list

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.

Nisha Verma

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,



HAI delegation meets G Kishan Reddy, Union Minister of Tourism & Culture

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.

Hotel industry has not been given infrastructure status, despite being given to automobile, and manufacturing industry

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."

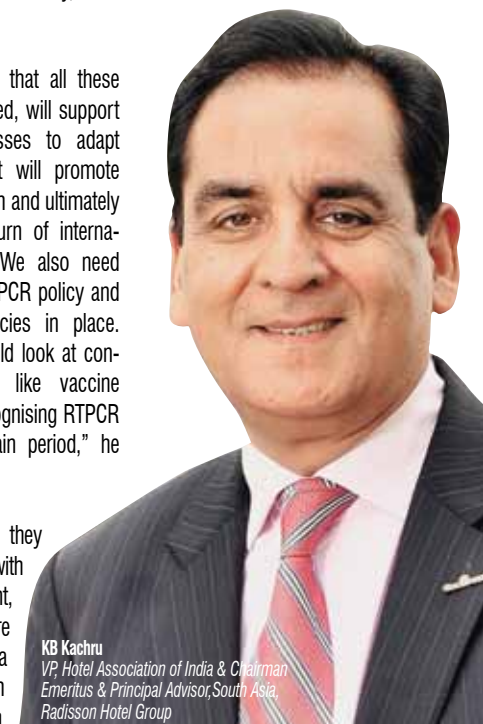
Also, they discussed the service export issue with the minister. "The SEIS is due to hotels for FY 2019-20 and 2020-21. The government is just sitting with it and the minister promised to consider it immediately," revealed Kachru.

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."



KB Kachru  
VP, Hotel Association of India & Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group

## Concurrent List

Kachru advised that people need to understand what infrastructure status is, and to get infrastructure status, tourism must be in the concurrent list. "Infrastructure status is country-wide, and you cannot have things going state wise. This means that there will be one law of the land. If you are on concurrent list, you cannot have industry status, which is a state subject. Some states like Maharashtra and Karnataka have recognised tourism as an industry. However, there are other states which have declared tourism as an industry, but the benefits have not come yet," he shared.



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