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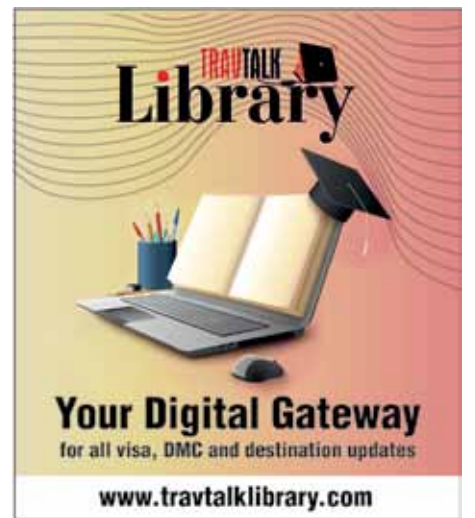
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## Visa concerns on, but agents hopeful

Travel agents, getting sleepless nights due to visa delays, urge governments to hasten visa processes and remove ambiguity over the issue through clear communication. In the current scenario, clients are forced to change their destination to the ones giving quick or on-arrival visas, they say. Are the Missions listening?



Hazel Jain

When countries started announcing opening of borders one by one, the travel trade rejoiced, but little did they expect that a visa jam could force their clients to change their holiday destination.

**Ajay Prakash**, President, Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI), feels that it's not just the traveller and the travel trade suffering due to the visa delays, but destinations are also facing problems. "If you have 11 million people travelling into the country, there are three times of that travelling out. And a number of our members are serious outbound players. But their

businesses have been hampered by the current visa challenges for almost every country. Therefore, it is easier to look at an Asian destination. We have written to all the consulates and have even got replies from some embassies saying they are working out this issue, as there is huge demand from Indian travellers," he said. "It is in everyone's interest to get this (visa issue) back on track. The easier countries make the visas and quicker they do it, they will have the first-mover advantage," he added.

Another veteran from the industry, **Hutokshi Marker**, CEO, Trail Blazer Tours India, feels that some countries that were easy to get vi-



**Tina Bathija**  
Director, Bathija Travel

sas for have become difficult now and vice versa. "The bottom line is that visas have become a big challenge for us. Having said that, it is also a revenue-earning facility for us because while clients do their bookings online, they can't



**Hutokshi Marker**  
CEO, Trail Blazer Tours India

do the same for visas. It must be done via the travel agent. And that is where we have tried to take advantage of the situation because we need to earn somewhere. The biggest one that is giving us sleepless nights is the Canadian

visas. People who have submitted their biometrics in October-November are still awaiting their visas. On the other hand, those who have submitted in April have got their visas. So, we as travel agents feel incompetent because we are unable to give our clients a clear answer," she says.

### Just a matter of time

While this season has picked up for **Anshu Tejuja**, Managing Director, Ashoka Dream Holidays, the flip side is the visa delays, especially the European and UK visas. "It has been very difficult to get appointments. Even getting the appointments once the visa application is lodged is taking a long time. Many of my clients

have been affected by this and have had to change their travel plans. I had a client who had applied for a UK visa on April 13 and till July first week the client had not got the passport. The client finally had to go to Thailand," she says.

**Tina Bathija**, Director, Bathija Travel, feels it's just a matter of time before things get better. "In fact, just recently, the French, German and the Malta consulates announced they have started opening appointments slots. Even the Spanish consulate is giving visa appointments openly by July end-August first week. In a fortnight from now we will all be a little more relaxed," she says.

## Big relief for industry: FHRAI

Delhi HC's order granting a stay on the CCPA's recent guideline barring restaurants to levy service charge on customers come as a major relief to the hospitality industry. FHRAI had filed a writ petition in the matter.



TT Bureau

Restaurants are no longer barred from levying service charge, which comes as a big relief for the industry. It came about after the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) and other industry associations filed a petition in the Delhi High Court. **Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**, Vice President, FHRAI, says, "It was curtailing hospitality establishments' right to conduct business in the manner suitable to them. As per the new order, all directions under the guidelines in para 7 have been stayed subject to no service charge to be levied on takeaways, and all restaurants shall prominently display in the restaurant that Service Charge



**Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**  
Vice President, FHRAI

shall be levied. FHRAI stated that it is entirely the prerogative of a hotel or a restaurant to decide on the structure of the menu and its pricing. Further, hotels are bound by wage contracts with employees, which specify benefits of service charge. The new guidelines are

against the very grain of practicing business in a fair environment and erroneously proceed on the basis that Service Charge is akin to a tip and therefore optional. We are glad our employees shall continue to avail agreed benefits under service charge."



Industry players speak out too. **Pranav Maheshwari**, Co-founder of StayVista, feels that service charge is essentially a part of the product or service a consumer has received and

Contd on page 15 ►

## IATO amends constitution

IATO EGM unanimously passes all amendments in the Memorandum of Associations (MoA). Changes, coming after 26 years, will be applicable for next 10 years, says Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO.



Nisha Verma

**Rajiv Mehra**, President, IATO, has announced that they had to call off their Bengaluru convention, scheduled from 15-18 September 2022, owing to withdrawal of support by the Karnataka Tourism. "All arrangements made for the convention in Bengaluru have been cancelled in spite of giving written confirmation for hosting the convention by Karnataka Tourism. IATO had booked 400 rooms at Hotel Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn and the convention hall but had to release all bookings," he informed.

### New convention host

However, he shared that they are now looking at an alternative des-



**Rajiv Mehra**  
President, IATO

tinuation and venue for the convention, which would be most likely held in December now. "Now, we are in touch with Rajasthan and very soon we can give positive news on the status. If the convention happens, it will be around middle of December. Some other

states have also approached us for hosting the convention, but since we have written to Rajasthan already, we will concentrate on the same and then move forward," he informed.



### MoA changes

The IATO Extra Ordinary General Meeting (EGM) was held recently, where the IATO General Body unanimously approved all the amendments in the

Contd on page 16 ►

## Where's int'l marketing?

The country waited for international borders to open and foreign travellers to flock India with bated breath, but it takes a little more than that to attract the international travellers. Since the pandemic, not much international marketing has taken place. While other NTOs, kept on marketing in India with virtual shows, webinars and training programmes, not much interaction took place to showcase India to the world.

In March 2022, the Ministry of Tourism launched a welcome back 'Namaste World' campaign, but did it bring back the foreign tourists this summer? Are the monuments bustling with foreigners? What else do the foreign tour operators need to rebuild confidence? Again, the Ministry of Tourism is working on webinars in key international markets, but where is the connect with the private sector?

Recently Arvind Singh, Secretary, Tourism, said that India has always been a traveller's paradise and we couldn't agree more. India's vast experiences and variety of offerings are unmatched. From 40 UNESCO World heritage sites to intangible heritage, India has a plethora to offer.

MOT's 'Dekho Apna Desh' campaign did showcase 'rare gems' of India, but this was focussed on the domestic market. Again, the question remains what are we doing for the international markets? Have the private sector and Indian DMCs forgotten foreign shores?

While writing this column, I have constantly recapped the central government's initiatives to attract more international travellers, but what has been missing in the interaction between the foreign and Indian private sector. We are missing the roadshows, exhibitions, and international workshops.

While a few State tourism authorities have conducted roadshows abroad, but they are far to less to create the impact. International exhibitions this summer also showcased a poor impact with limited participation and nothing new for Indian exhibitors to showcase. Let's hope that every State tourism authority participates in international exhibitions with its private sector to make sure that there isn't a slip between the cup and the lip.

# Hotels on course of recovery

Demand recovery has been sharper than expected aided by domestic leisure, transient passengers, MICE/ weddings and a gradual pick up in business travel and FTAs. Pan-India premium hotel occupancy likely to be at 68-70 per cent in FY2023, says a report.



TT Bureau

Notwithstanding the impact on demand with further COVID-19 waves, if any, ICRA expects the industry's revenues and margins to return to pre-pandemic levels in FY2023. The demand is likely to stem largely from domestic leisure/transient travel, although there will be gradual recovery in business travel and foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs).

ICRA expects pan-India premium hotel occupancy to be at 68-70 per cent in FY2023, while the average room rate (ARR) is expected to hover around ₹5,600 to ₹5,800. The improved operating leverage along with sustenance of cost-optimisation measures will support margins.

Vinutaa S, VP and Sector Head, ICRA said, "The industry witnessed a healthy start to FY2023, with 56-58 per cent occupancy in premium hotels in Q1 FY2023. It was up from 40-42 per cent in FY2022 and closer to pre-COVID-2 occupancy of 60-62 per cent in Q1



FY2020. Pan-India ARR stood between ₹4,600 and ₹4,800 in Q1 FY2023, as against ₹4,200-4,400 in FY2022. It still remains at 16-18 per cent discount to pre-COVID-19 levels on an average, although a few high-end hotels and leisure destinations witnessed ARR's spike to higher than pre-COVID-19 levels in the last few months. The demand recovery was aided by leisure, transient passengers, MICE/ weddings and gradual pickup in business travel and FTAs.

"While leisure destinations and gateway cities witnessed

healthy occupancy, cities dependent on business travellers such as Bengaluru and Pune will take a few more months to

**11 listed firms reported a 38% growth in revenues on a y-o-y basis in Q4 of FY2022, better than ICRA's estimates**

recover. Although Q1 FY2023 was among the best quarters since the pandemic outbreak, the revenue per available room (RevPAR) remains 20-22 per cent lower than pre-COVID-19 levels. For midscale hotels, the recovery has been slower due to the dependence on business travel. Furthermore, cost inflation has a bearing on mid-scale

hotel demand," she said. ICRA expects debt metrics to go back to pre-COVID-19 in FY2023 supported by better accruals. While some companies have raised funds, more announcements on fund raising can also be expected for deleveraging. Nevertheless, RoCE is expected to remain sub-cost of capital at least for the next four years.

Vinutaa added, "Our sample of 11 listed companies has reported a 38 per cent growth in revenues on a y-o-y basis in Q4 of FY2022, which is better than ICRA's estimates. While it remained weaker on sequential basis compared to Q3 FY2022, it was one of the best quarters for the industry since the onset of the pandemic. The operating margins were healthy at 16 per cent in Q4 FY2022 (vis-a-vis an operating loss in Q4 FY2021)."

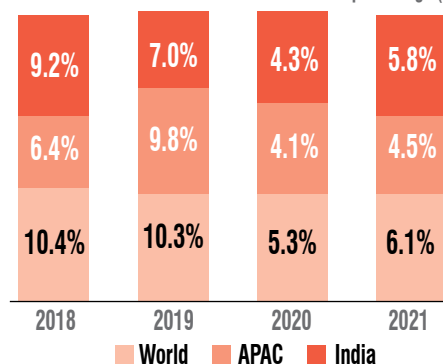
Hoteliers are expected to report stable performance in Q1 FY2023, aided by a strong leisure segment, and improvement in business travel and FTAs.

## Important Highlights

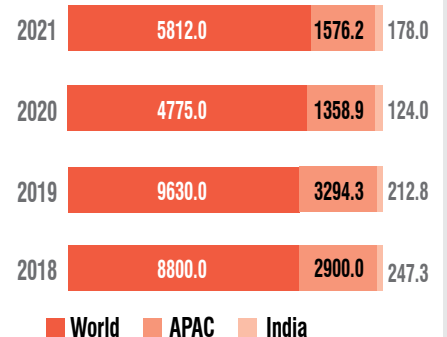
- ❖ Cities dependent on business travellers such as Bengaluru and Pune will take a few more months to recover.
- ❖ Average room rate (ARR) is expected to hover around ₹5,600 to ₹5,800.
- ❖ Revenue per available room (RevPAR) remains 20-22 per cent lower than pre-COVID-19 levels.
- ❖ Hoteliers may report stable performance in Q1 FY2023, aided by a strong leisure segment.

## Contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP - World vs APAC vs India

Total contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP in percentage (%)



Total contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP in USD \$ Billion (Bn)



Source: WTTC Annual Research INDIA



# 'Lack of support from States'

TAFI convention will be held in Kuching in Sarawak, Malaysia, from 20-23 September 2022. The convention, originally planned in India, could not be organised in the country because of high cost of airfare and hotel rooms, as well as lack of support from state governments, says Ajay Prakash, National President, Travel Agents' Federation of India.



TT Bureau

The upcoming convention of Travel Agents' Federation of India (TAFI) will be held in Kuching in Sarawak, Malaysia from 20-23 September 2022. But TAFI had originally announced India as the venue for its convention. So what changed?



**Ajay Prakash**, President, TAFI, said, "We had originally planned to do this event within India. But we could not do it as planned because the domestic air fares and hotel rates were high. And honestly, the support that one receives from a global destination is far more than any state government is normally willing to offer. Having said that, we will definitely do a conclave or an event in India later this year because I think it is important to do something in the country."

## Why Kuching?

Kuching is in Malaysian Borneo, which is different from peninsular Malaysia, said Prakash. "For one, they are much greener, the forests are more vibrant, animal



Ajay Prakash  
President, TAFI

life is also interesting. Therefore, Kuching has been promoted as an eco-tourism destination. The venue will be the Borneo Convention Centre, which is quite spectacular and it is on a single level. It can accommodate 5,000 people and has Wi-Fi capability (8,000 connections)," he elaborated.

## Sustainability key focus

The theme of the convention is 'Build Back Better'. Sharing the thought process behind this, Prakash said, "It is an important part in defining the content of the convention. As we look to revive tourism, there are some things that we must not for-

**Tourism is dependent on nature. So, when we look to regain profitability, it is equally important to look at sustainability**

get, things that COVID-19 has taught us. Nature has a way of striking back when you abuse it. The indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources will lead to

a blowback from nature. Since tourism is dependent upon nature, it is critical that we nurture environment. As we look to regain profitability, it is equally important to look at sustainability. And that is what this convention is about – about rebuilding tourism in a much more intelligent and responsible manner. The new generation is aware of these issues as well as the ecological impact of their travels."

Apart from business sessions, TAFI will conduct awards for outstanding women from India and Malaysia at the convention this year. "The rest of the agenda is coming together. The biggest supporter for this is Tourism Malaysia, Sarawak Tourism Board and Business Events Sarawak. Also, Malaysian Airlines, Malindo or Batik Air and Air Asia have offered us special fares. Unfortunately, none of the Indian airlines are flying into Kuching. Charters could be expensive, but it can



be worked out, we would love to do charters," Prakash added.

"Tourism is now expected to be more sustainable, responsible and sensitive and will be a force for bringing people together. Automation and optimization in technology are very important

and can help. We must keep ourselves abreast of the latest technology available and use it to our best advantage to build a better travel and tourism industry. We need technology, tools and a change of attitude with which we do business." Prakash further added.

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# Brand India strong on emotions

Steve Borgia, CMD, INDeco Leisure Hotels, dedicates the success of his hotels during the pandemic to domestic demand and suggests that brand India should also be propagated for its heritage and emotional quotient, as there is a big market to explore.



TT Bureau

**S**teve Borgia, CMD, INDeco Leisure Hotels, claims that even during pandemic INDeco didn't take any beating because of domestic demand. "We recorded the highest occupancy at the time. Later, after the intensity of the pandemic reduced, we had to work hard to prepare ourselves to catch the outburst of domestic tourism," he said.

## Neighbourhood boon

Apart from the domestic tourism, INDeco had to prepare itself for neighbourhood tourism. "People around the neighbourhood started travelling into hotel. Earlier, INDeco Swamimalai always had people from France, US and Germany. We didn't have people even from Bengaluru and Mumbai. Now, people of neighbourhood started coming into the hotel. That was a big segment and today we are full on weekends and weekdays. We do about 60-70 per cent occupancy without the inbound traf-

fic. We used to be a 100 per cent inbound hotel three years ago."

Secondly, he said, "ARRs also saw a new high during COVID. Earlier, we used to be ₹4,500 with the inbound traffic. Today, it is ₹6,500 to ₹7,000. Thus, we had to quickly



Steve Borgia  
CMD, INDeco Leisure Hotels

upgrade our rooms for Indians. They asked for Palatial Suite, Maharaja Suite, room with a pool and pool villa. It was big learning for us and they were willing to pay as much as ₹30,000-₹50,000 per night. All our tariffs got jacked up because we had put the amenities

inside. This was a great learning, and people came and they mostly wanted to enjoy the outdoors. People would come into the hotel and call their friends and the occupancy would increase from one room to four rooms," he said.

## Partnership with Blusaz

Almost a year back, INDeco joined hands with Blusaz Hospitality. When asked about the same, he shared, "We are just a little below a year and it is early to judge that. Adapting to INDeco culture, the way we operate and our values is not very easy."

## Weddings galore

Borgia shared that INDeco Swamimalai is becoming a busy wedding destination. "We do wedding from 500 people to 1,200 people in a responsible manner involving local community. This boosts the sale of local products, which, in turn, increases their per capita income. Hence, we have translated weddings business as a major revenue not only for the

hotel, but also for the local community," he informed.

## The Last Resort

When it comes to expansion and building the brand, Borgia said, "I'm trying to develop a hotel prod-

**Earlier, we used to be ₹4,500 with the inbound traffic. Today, it is ₹6,500 to ₹7,000. Thus, we had to quickly upgrade our rooms for Indians**

uct with no buildings, and I want to call it The Last Resort, built in a beautiful mountain river area. It will be in 100 acres, with 30-40 hotels, very sensitive, ecological and sustainable. I'm planning to start this project in three months.

We have just acquired the land for the same." He claimed that they have always been a trendsetter. "After pioneering rural tourism, we want to tell people that there is a big market in not just experiential tourism, but in emotional tourism as well, where after visiting our properties people would call their close friends and near and dear ones too. This happens to 20-30 per cent of our visitors," he claimed.

## Way forward

When asked about how to attract inbound now, Borgia said, "We need to start focused marketing. India has big potential. India is the only country, which can sell experiences, and now we are moving from experiences to emotions. We are the only country in the world that can sell emotions. We should be to the world a heritage country. We can put people in palaces and make the royals sit next to them. The world has enough money to pay, and India has enough to show off."

# Catching the industry's pulse

With a view to know what stakeholders in the tourism business are feeling right now, what is impacting their business, and overall outlook of the industry, PATA India has launched the first ever PATA India Tourism Impact Contest. Three winners of the contest will be given cash prizes up to ₹25,000.



TT Bureau

**P**ATA India has launched the first ever PATA India Tourism Impact Contest, which aims to bring into focus what industry stakeholders feel, impacts their business growth, development and outlook. To enter the contest, participants have to prioritise issues impacting their business and share one new and innovative BIG Difference IDEA. Three winners will get cash prizes up to ₹25,000. The contest closes on 15 August 2022.

## Win big with PATA

Sharing details about the contest, **Runeep Sangha**, Executive Director, PATA India Chapter, said, "The thought came from the fact that we have a variety of stakeholders at PATA, including tour operator, travel agents, hotels, aviation companies, media and educational institutes. We felt that there was an opportunity for all of them to participate in the growth and development of tourism to India and

share their views and thoughts on what was impacting their business. COVID has had its toll, but other than COVID there has been impact on everybody's business owing to various reasons. Hence,



Runeep Sangha  
Executive Director, PATA India Chapter

we have put together 10 areas of concerns, issues or challenges, and we asked the entire industry to participate by prioritising which of these factors impacts them the most. This should help us get a focus on the key issues that the industry is facing, which we could eventually share with the Ministry

of Tourism." He claimed that the MOT will recognise the issues that the trade feels are paramount for their growth and support them. "Post prioritisation of these issues, we have also invited our stakeholders from the industry, irrespective of whether they are PATA members or not, to share with us an idea that they may have, which would make a big difference to the growth and development of tourism. We have set up a jury for the BIG Difference IDEA, which will go through the ideas that are submitted," he elaborated. "We believe that this should kindle some interest among the travel professionals in India and bring some new innovative thoughts about how we can help tourism grow," he added.

## Webinars galore

PATA India is conducting a range of webinars for the travel trade. "Webinars have become one way of communication and operation for most associations and participants of the trade. PATA has

identified three categories of webinars. Firstly, we have the Update and Outlook Meeting, which helps to share with us what has been going on in the industry and what is foreseen for the industry going forward. This year we have held

**We believe that this should kindle some interest among the travel professionals and bring some new innovative thoughts**

three such webinars. One was with the MOT, which was addressed by **Arvind Singh**, Secretary, Tourism. This was followed by an analysis on visitor arrivals in India and in the region, conducted

by **Liz Ortiguera**, CEO, PATA and PATA consultant Professor **John Koldowski**. More recently on the 14 July, we conducted a webinar, Update and Outlook Meeting with IRCTC to share information on the development and future of their luxury trains - Deccan Odyssey and Maharaja Express, as well as their deluxe tour programme of the Buddhist tourist train."

The second type of webinar, explained Sangha, is "Incredible India, Believe It or Not. We did one in May, where speakers covered topics like walking tours and Himalayan trekking trails. We will soon have another in August, which will cover heritage hotels. We are also looking at covering Ayurveda and wellness in that webinar."

He added, "The third series of webinars we commenced is called Jewels of India. Our approach is to get state government tourism bodies to tell our membership

and the travel professionals about what has happened over the last two years; what is new, and how they have secured the well-being of foreign tourists when they visit



India, among the many other developments that have taken place. The first such webinar was done with Kerala tourism, which met with a significant response. The next one coming was with Maharashtra tourism and then we would go forward with various other state bodies."



# EXPERIENCE A WORLD BEYOND



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# Shop luxury in Europe with McArthurGlen

McArthurGlen, Europe's major designer shopping outlet chain present in 26 locations across 10 countries, aims to woo more and more Indian travellers. Mathias Sinner, Manager, Senior International Markets, McArthurGlen Group, was in India recently to do just that and meet key Indian travel trade.



TT Bureau

Shopping is one of the most popular activity by the Indian traveller. Diverse brands, great quality, attractive deals and no duty make shopping abroad an appealing proposition for Indians. That is why McArthurGlen – a chain of designer shopping outlets present across Europe (as well as in the UK and Canada) is keen on the Indian market. **Mathias Sinner**, Manager, Senior International Markets, McArthurGlen Group, was recently in India visiting key travel partners in New Delhi, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Chennai and Bengaluru. He says, “We wanted to cover every key part of the country to get a good overview of the market, meet select agents and partners in each of these cities to understand the market better and how we can support them in sending customers to our outlets.”

Sharing some key highlights of the product, Sinner says, “If you look

at our brand assortment, we offer everything – from luxury brands like Gucci and Prada that are very popular with Indian shoppers, to sports and premium brands. We



**Mathias Sinner**  
Manager, Senior International Markets, McArthurGlen Group

have a range of brands that appeal to every traveller type. They are located in attractive destinations that are largely popular with Indian travellers. Italy is one of them where we have five outlets. The most popular one with Indian visitors is the one in Serravalle, which is just 45 minutes from Milan. Even Austria is very important for us when it comes to the Indian

market. Our outlet in Parndorf, which is close to Vienna, is highly favoured by the Indian travellers.”

## Indians love shopping

He sees huge potential in the Indian market when it comes to shopping. “We know that Indians love to shop while they travel; it is an important activity for them. They also like a good deal and look for discounts while shopping. That is why we believe our brand and our product fit well with this market and there is a lot of attractiveness for the Indian travellers when they come to Europe. We offer any-

thing between 30 per cent and 70 per cent off on the normal retail price – that is standard across



all our outlets all year round. But obviously we also have the sale season where you get even more discounts. We also know how important VAT refunds are

for Indian travellers. Our biggest outlets, especially those favoured by Indian travellers have in-centre tax refunds. Getting these refunds at the airport is tedious and time consuming. So, we try to offer these services at our outlets to ease that pain,” Sinner shares.

While the destination is the main draw, travellers do like to indulge in shopping as an activity if they are in a place for many days. They want to do something different other than sightseeing and culture.

“That’s when the shopping outlets such as ours fit in well in their itinerary and add to the local economy. So, it benefits the destination as well. We work with many international tourism boards in the Indian market – we have a good working relationship with Austrian National Tourist Office, German National Tourist Board, Italian National Tourist Board ENIT, Tourism Office of Spain – in Mumbai, so essentially every destination we have an outlet in that operates an office in India,

we try to partner with them to position our outlets as part of the destination,” he adds.

## MICE is also key

He says that while interacting with travel agents and tour operators in India, he is frequently asked about the discounts avail-

**We know that Indians love to shop; it is an important activity for them. They also like a good deal and look for discounts**

able at the outlets and how to reach them. “Since our outlets are located a bit outside the city centres, we offer shuttle busses from the main city centres to our outlets,” he says.

# ‘Passenger safety priority for cruises’

Naresh Rawal, Vice President, Sales & Marketing (India), Resorts World Cruises, and a cruise industry veteran, talks about developments at the new cruise line. From October 2022, it will expand its destination with cruises to Phuket in Thailand and North Bali in Indonesia, Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia.



Harshal Ashar

**What is the product segmentation for Resorts World Cruises? Where does it feature from the other Asian cruises?**

I am happy that I have joined Resorts World Cruises, a new Asian luxury and dynamic lifestyle cruise brand headquartered in Singapore, affiliated with over five decades of global experience in both hospitality and cruising. Recently on 15 June 2022, we had officially launched Resorts World Cruises to the world with the inaugural cruise of the Genting Dream from Singapore. Resorts World Cruises’ ‘Resorts Cruising At Sea’ aims to position itself as the leading cruise line in the region for Asian and globally sourced passengers, providing diverse experiences with a personalised cruising lifestyle experience. India is an important source market for the fly-cruise

sector and we are confident that our brand will resonate with travellers from India and also across the region.



**Naresh Rawal**  
VP Sales & Marketing (India) Resorts World Cruises

**Please share your perspective of how the cruising industry is going to evolve?**

The cruise sector will continue to evolve in several aspects and safety will remain a priority for consumers as well as the cruise lines. The pandemic has brought about drastic changes on how we operate cruises and the im-

portance of implementing an enhanced preventive measures to safeguard guests and crew. Besides, consumer behaviour is also changing and personalised cruising experience will continue to grow as travellers seek cruise experiences that cater to their personalised needs.

**What exciting itineraries can the travel trade expect to see?**

We are pleased to announce that Resorts World Cruises will be the first to sail from Singapore to Indonesia with the exciting two-night Bintan and Batam Island cruise, starting 1 July 2022. Subsequently, we will also cruise to Malaysia to both Kuala Lumpur and Malacca (via Port Dickson) and Penang. From October 2022 onwards, we will also expand our destination cruises to Phuket in Thailand and North Bali in Indonesia towards year-end. Singapore is a popular destination for many Indian travellers and with these



extended destination cruises, travellers will be able to enhance their overall travel and holiday experience aboard the Genting Dream to these popular destinations in neighbouring countries.

**Where does this product feature for MICE and weddings?**

MICE events at sea are gaining traction, and are increasingly be-

coming popular as many discover the convenience and benefits of organising events on a cruise ship. MICE organisers or wedding and party planners can plan the activities and accommodations easily on a cruise ship. At Resorts World Cruises, our venues and onboard activities are converted to fit any MICE requirements. A cruise ship is also a perfect venue

for MICE participants to truly interact, while cruising to new destinations. On the Genting Dream, they can enjoy a water theme park with six slides, amazing international and Asian cuisine, including certified halal and Jain offerings, spas,

**India is an important source market for the fly-cruise sector. We are confident that our brand will resonate with Indian travellers**

shopping, bowling, Zouk Beach Club, international performances at the 999-seating capacity Zodiac theatre and more—all while at sea cruising to new destinations.





## Experience safe, sustainable and responsible tourism in

# Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh understands its responsibility not only toward its tourists, but also to those who have maintained the beauty and preserved the ancient culture of the state.

**A**re you a woman traveller and want to explore many beautiful places and adventure activities without fear? Are you the one who wants to witness the making of beautiful keepsakes with locals and take it with you as a memory to cherish? Or are you a person who wants to soak into the tribal or rural culture? Then Madhya Pradesh is the place for you.

To experience what has been mentioned above, it is important to keep these places safe, friendly, and beautiful along with preserving their culture and traditions. All these responsibilities are being done by the natives for ages. Hence, Madhya Pradesh understands its responsibilities not only to its tourists but also to the local people who have been preserving the beautiful ancient culture of the state.

Madhya Pradesh Tourism is intensely working on its Responsible Tourism Mission, which is being run with an aim

to preserve the natural and cultural heritage of the state. The mission aspires to provide an additional income and a better livelihood to locals, traditional artisans, and marginalized people along with creating social and environmental stability.



Responsible Tourism is a vital part of a state to maximise the benefits to local communities and minimise negative social or environmental impact, helping local people to preserve fragile cultures and habitats.

For this, the state tourism department has signed MoU with Responsible Tourism

Mission - Kerala, international centres for responsible tourism UK and UN women.

The major components taken under the umbrella of Responsible Tourism Mission are community development, economic development, cultural protection and exchange, conservation of environment, promotion of arts and crafts, empowering human capital and building talents through skilling and training, public health and hygiene, peace building and happiness, stakeholders promotion programmes etc.

There are many projects being implemented under this:

- ❖ Rural Tourism
- ❖ Safe Tourism Destinations for Women in Madhya Pradesh
- ❖ Responsible Souvenir
- ❖ Solid Waste Management - Clean Destination
- ❖ Project Humsafar - Accessible for all
- ❖ Skilling of Youths

**Let's have a look at a few projects:**

**Rural Tourism:** Madhya Pradesh Tourism (MPT) brought together gram stays, farm stays, and homestays as safe and culturally rich stay options. It is being run with the objective of economic development and social development of the local community associated with the tourism sector. This project is being implemented in 100 selected villages of Madhya Pradesh that represent the culture of various parts of the state. The major components of the project are a convenient stay in the village, local excursions, local cuisines and culture, art and crafts, and skill and training. The department has initiated work in 60 villages by partnering with some NGOs. The department is also focused to benefit the rural communities by holding their hands for agri-based tourism. The aim of this project is to provide direct and indirect livelihood opportunities to 10,000 families. Six villages have already started hosting the guests.

**Responsible Souvenir:** Madhya Pradesh is not only a state to explore its heritage, culture, adventure, wildlife, spiritual, food, rural, and wellness destinations, but it is also a hub to experience amazing arts and crafts. To prepare such beautiful souvenirs, MPT is promoting the local artisans by developing handloom and handicrafts through responsible souvenirs development projects. MPT has also supported the artisan



for designing and is developing market linkages for them. Two art and craft centres have

**Responsible Tourism is key to maximise benefits to local communities and minimise negative impact on society or environment**

already been started in Madla and Dhamna villages, where the community learns and produces new crafts at fair prices.

**Safe Tourism Destination for Women in MP:** This vibrant state offers destinations where travelling alone is not just com-

fortable but one can also get to taste of freedom and fun without fear. With an aim to create women-friendly environment, especially at the tourism destinations, with the support of the local community, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is implementing the project 'Safe Tourism Destinations for Women in Madhya Pradesh'. The main objectives of this project are co-ordination among stakeholders for developing women-friendly public infrastructure, community participation and awareness of women safety and building community-based institutions. As many as 50 districts are being focused under this project. To make tourist destinations women-friendly, the state tourism body is maximising women participation through trainings in e-riksha or taxi driving, scout leader, city explorer, location manager, security guard, cook etc.





# India to have 200 airports by '24

Usha Padhee, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Gol, shares that the govt is working on improving air connectivity; the number of airports in the country will be increased to 200 by 2024 from current 140.



TT Bureau

**U**sha Padhee, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Government of India, said that the government is focusing on improving air connectivity, which will help the tourism sector. "Aviation and tourism are complementary sectors," said Padhee, while addressing the 7th National Tourism Investors Meet 2022, organised by the FICCI in New Delhi recently.

Talking about the Indian aviation sector, Padhee said that India is the third largest aviation market and growing exponentially. "The number of airports (in the country) has increased remarkably. We have 140 airports today and by 2024, the number will reach 200. Number of aircraft are also increasing despite the hike in ATF prices; airlines are able to provide the required services and we hope that they will get some relief soon and be able to expand their capacity."

Highlighting the effect of the pandemic on the travel industry, Padhee said, "COVID-19 was one disruption, but structurally we need to know what our responsibilities are. Our



Usha Padhee  
Joint Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Government of India

challenges are not limited to a post-COVID era but will continue for some time to come. People have started to travel, and it is good news that the tourism industry is recovering. We have to be resilient and wiser. The pandemic has taught new practices that we call the new normal. And that is the way forward."

She emphasised on improving connectivity, infrastructure, management, and tourism practices. "Sustainable and responsible tourism is what we need to focus on. We need to keep working on all those issues which have been present before COVID-19 and still

**We have to be resilient and wiser. The pandemic has taught new practices that we call the new normal. And that is the way forward**

exist and move forward based on what we have learned," she said. "The government is working to connect the North-Eastern states with more global flights. Coordination between the stakeholders is critical in this," she added.

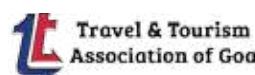
# App-based taxis need help: TTAG

App-based taxi services in Goa is much needed, says Nilesch Shah, President, Travel & Tourism Association of Goa, adding that govt should take a strong stand against local taxi unions resorting to hooliganism.



TT Bureau

**T**ravel & Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG) strongly commends the Minister of Transport, Mauvin Godinho, for supporting the app-based taxi services in Goa. **Nilesch Shah**, President, TTAG, is of the opinion that if technology is being used in the field of passenger transport all over the world, then why not Goa? "App-based taxis have become



popular and have transformed the transport industry in a seismic manner. They bring about transparency, convenience, are more price efficient and give the consumer greater freedom of choice. This has resulted in the market being more efficient. TTAG fully supports the introduction of app-based taxis in Goa. Goa Miles is a company in the same field of app-based services and over the years has incorporated over 1,500 taxis in

their system. This has resulted in local employment improving with taxi drivers from the interior of Goa also getting jobs. However, their operations have been hampered by hooligan-



Nilesch Shah  
President, TTAG

ism and physical force adopted by some local taxi unions with political backing. The government should take a strong stand against such behaviour and fully support everyone's right to free business," he says.

Shah said that Ola and Uber should be allowed to operate in Goa with full police protection

for their operations. "However, certain unethical practices adopted by such app based taxi operators such as under-pricing and over-pricing during certain periods should be regulated," he added. TTAG would also request the government to do an audit and find out how many Goans have individual taxis, how many drivers from outside

**The government should take a strong stand against hooliganism and fully support everyone's right to free business**

the state are employed, and how many family members of any government department own a taxi, to expose any hypocrisy in the system.

# 1,000 new buses to boost T'gana tourism

Telangana State Road Transport Corporation and Telangana State Tourism Development Corporation recently held a meeting with tourism committee of Federation of Telangana Chambers of Commerce and Industry, where they discussed the way and means to go forward and work together to strengthen tourism.



TT Bureau

**V.C. Sajjanar**, Managing Director, Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC), said that the session with tourism stakeholders of the state and Telangana State Tourism Development Corporation (TSTDC) would help them to work constructively towards getting more tourist footfall in the state. There was a presentation by TSRTC about the initiatives they are taking to enhance road connectivity in Telangana. The objective was to leverage the fleet of the TSRTC, strength and cutting-edge infrastructure for giving an impetus to tourism. Sajjanar took inputs from service providers and stakeholders to take an overview of the situation, and work along with the industry to move the state up the Indian tourism ladder.

"In the past seven to eight months, we have increased our services. We have 10,000 buses



V.C. Sajjanar felicitates Uppala Srinivasa Gupta alongside Valmiki Harikishan at the event.

running in Telangana, and we are going to get another 1,000 buses. We will shortly be starting bus services to Yadagirigutta, Tirupati and Shirdi. We cater to around 37 lakh passengers per day. Telangana is a vibrant state and it has many places to visit, which are still unexplored by tourists. We would like to take tourists to the unexplored plac-

es. We want the industry's suggestions because many people come to Telangana, but do not know where to go. We would like to know the types of facilities/amenities for tourists, in terms of advance package system or some information. We are tying up with the TSTDC to boost this sector. We want to play a key role in tourism promotion. It is a

big vertical and we would like to explore it, for increasing the revenues of TSRTC and TSTDC," he claimed.

**Valmiki Harikishan**, Chairman, Tourism Committee, FTCCI Tourism Committee, shared his inputs on how tourism can be promoted along with TSRTC. "We are planning to come up with

a single window system. The TSTDC is trying to showcase Telangana to those who come to Hyderabad and the state through packaged tours. The TSRTC is the first road corporation in India that has introduced tours out of Telangana. I hope in the future we can look at having hop-on hop-off buses in Hyderabad. Furthermore, a single pass for all public transport should be introduced," he felt.

He also asked the TSTDC and the TSRTC to work hand-in-hand, so that the industry and both the PSUs can generate revenue. Other FTCCI members also discussed issues and gave their suggestions.

**Uppala Srinivasa Gupta**, Chairman, TSTDC, said, "Both the corporations have common synergies and they are working towards making sure that the state's tourism potential is explored like never before." Calling the meeting a great initiative, he

promised all the support needed by the TSRTC and the industry for creating long and short-term strategies in attracting domestic and global tourists to the state.

**The objective was to leverage TSRTC fleet, strength and cutting-edge infrastructure for giving an impetus to tourism**

After intensity of the pandemic reduced, people are enthusiastic to travel and so, the TSTDC is operating buses to gated communities where a huge number of passengers are willing to travel. Meanwhile, Haritha Hotels, a subsidiary of TSTDC, will be expanded to meet the needs of road travellers in the state of Telangana, said Gupta.



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# Why NDC matters now, more than ever

New Distribution Capability (NDC) made its debut a decade ago. But what exactly is it, and what role does it play in the growth of the travel industry of today and tomorrow? Kathy Morgan, Vice President, Channel Delivery at Sabre Travel Solutions shares her perspective on the subject.

NDC is no longer the new kid on the block, having been introduced in 2012. But nor is it yet fully established in the industry. So, what do we mean when we talk about NDC today? And, why is it important as a catalyst to create further recovery and growth within the travel ecosystem?

Let me start with the why because this is the most important part. The whole travel industry is looking to do two things – and those two things aren't always compatible – first, to meet and exceed ever-evolving traveller expectations, and the second, to increase yield and revenue opportunities. Bringing those two together is where NDC comes in.

## What do we mean by NDC

Before moving further into the why, let's address what NDC is. Standing for New Distribution Capability, NDC is essentially an XML Standard created by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) to enable airlines to



take control over offer management and deliver rich content, personalised offers and ancillaries to their customers.

However, we call our NDC program at Sabre Going Beyond NDC because it's about more than what the NDC technical standards enable, or ticking boxes on a requirement list. It's about thinking bigger, thinking beyond to ensure airlines are able to sell the products they want to sell, in the manner they want to sell

them, and travel buyers are able to access and manage that content in an integrated, operationally efficient manner that still enables the comparison shopping they require. To us, NDC isn't a destination but an important leg of a journey towards travel retailing.

## Why now?

It's clear COVID-19 had a significant impact on the travel industry and required many constituents to focus on survival, rather than looking ahead at opportunities. However, even in the midst of

this challenging environment, we haven't taken our foot off the NDC accelerator and nor have our key airline partners. For example, we have recently announced an ac-

**Retail Intelligence suite can enable airlines to create offers more tailored to their business model and their passengers**

celerated NDC rollout with Qatar, a new NDC deal with Finnair, and an enhanced relationship with Cathay Pacific to include NDC content.

With the travel industry recovery gaining strength and airlines looking to the future, there is a renewed focus on NDC. One of the

biggest reasons for this heightened interest in NDC is the end traveller. As consumers, we have higher expectations than ever before, and the pandemic has only exacerbated this as we encountered increasingly personalised online retail experiences. As we look to current market dynamics, there is an increased need for better technology and a focus on personalised retailing for the traveller.

This starts with offer creation and this is the reason behind our revolutionary new Retail Intelligence suite which can enable airlines to create offers more tailored to their business model and their passengers. Our Retail Intelligence product suite is a scalable solution that uses real-time industry insights and advanced machine-learning models to test-and-learn in the moment in order to create smart, personalised bundles and present them the right offer to the right traveller at the right time, enabling airlines to differentiate their products and services.

Once an offer is created, airlines need the ability to distribute it in the way they want it to be seen, across all channels, and that is why they are turning to NDC. Airlines are leveraging the Sabre travel marketplace to distribute this content.

It's a win-win-win for airlines, agencies and travellers with opportunities for increased revenue, better conversion, an elevated booking experience, and a truly personalised travel experience.



**Kathy Morgan**  
Vice President, Channel Delivery  
at Sabre Travel Solutions

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

# Mauritius shines on MICE, weddings

Now that COVID restrictions have been completely removed with no limitation on the number of gatherings in Mauritius, its tourism board has a renewed focus to tap the MICE and wedding segments from India. To stimulate demand, it has also introduced an attractive incentive scheme for the segments.



TT Bureau

**Arvind Bundhun**, Director, Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA), was recently in India to promote the destination but also to introduce its new incentive programme for the MICE and the wedding segments. He says, "Mauritius opened its borders for tourists from October 1. We have now reached a milestone of attracting half a million tourists already. As of July 1, 2022, the government has reviewed the sanitary protocols, bearing in mind vaccination roll-out campaign is extremely successful and the rate of infection is really low, almost negligible. That brought us to the idea that the sanitary measures should be eased. We also no longer have a restriction on number of people gatherings. While we are promoting the entire island of Mauritius to different segments in India, our objective now is also to

promote it to the MICE and wedding segment. We are here to announce the new MICE incentive we are now offering to the market in order to capture this segment and stimulate demand."



**Arvind Bundhun**  
Director, Mauritius Tourism  
Promotion Authority (MTPA)

The tourism board had recently conducted a roadshow in New Delhi. To encourage MICE movements in Mauritius, we are supporting VAT refund of 15% for groups of 50 persons or more, travelling together and staying for a minimum three nights in

Mauritius. Moreover there is a plan to offer MICE cash incentive for group of minimum 50 pax traveling together in same flights. The incentives, which will be rolled out in a few days, will be worked out on a case to case basis. MTPA is also facilitating access to duty free shops for large wedding groups. We have few other incentives that are being worked upon.

Bundhun adds, "We have few weddings in pipeline – seven weddings already confirmed until December 2022. As from July, the vaccination status for visitors doesn't hold any more. That means that whether they are vaccinated, or unvaccinated, they don't have to do any tests prior to arrival, upon arrival. They just stay in Mauritius, and at the end of it, they just fly back. In case they are positive in the course of their stay they just have to self-isolate."

In this calendar year from January to December, MTPA has an objective of attracting one million tourists bearing in mind that

**Our objective now is to promote Mauritius to MICE and wedding segments. We are here to announce the new MICE incentive**

prior Covid, the destination used to welcome around 1.3 million tourists. "Pre-covid, the percentage of tourists which came from India was around 8%. And this year, as we re-open we expect to welcome around 70,000-80,000 Indians to Mauritius. It

## Odysseo - the oceanarium

With its 5,500 square metre of visiting domains, the oceanarium will showcase some 45 different aquatic habitats comfortably hosted in 2000 cubic metre of pristine water. Visitors will encounter some 200 species (3,500 specimens at the opening) of the Indian Ocean. With Odysseo, the Mascarene region is ready to welcome its largest oceanarium ever and also the first of its kind in Mauritius!

has been two months since India re-opened its borders to Mauritius completely. For the past two months, we have seen a certain pent up demand. Right now it's extremely stimulating for us to see that the percentage of recovering is around 55 per cent," he says.

## Trade activities

He says that MTPA has activated all trade promotions, with presence at key trade shows in India. "The purpose of our visit is to stimulate the trade and we have been meeting all key tour operators. We have been engaging with

them in joint marketing initiatives so that we stimulate demand for the destination. It is worth noting that for the past few years when we were closed to tourism, local operators supported by various grants offered by the government have been engaging in refurbishment projects. There are a lot of projects and hotels that have been refurbished, there are new properties that have opened. We also have 4-5 new projects in the pipeline," Bundhun reveals. New attractions include Odysseo – the island nation's first oceanarium which has just opened close to the capital in Port Louis.



# Paradigm shift in travelling trends

Researches have shown that travellers' behaviour has changed when compared to the pre-pandemic times. Their intent for 2022 demonstrate that they are now avoiding busy and over-visited destinations and looking for unusual and off-beat destinations. Not just that, they are willing to spend more for experiences.



Janice Alyosius

The pandemic has made people realise the value of travel. They are raring to go out, but with safety. In a recent survey by Saber, two-thirds of travel leaders surveyed said they

industry needs to understand and take advantage of.

## Change in travel preferences

Travellers are now avoiding busy and over-visited destinations and looking for unusual and off-beat destinations. According to a re-

nature surrounded hotels and resorts are attracting a huge number of tourists. "Smaller, curated, personal tours or holidays for two or three people will be a trend this year. People want to know in advance about their trip, they want to know who they are travelling

## Emerging trends

- ❖ In 2022, less populated and less popular destinations are at the top of travellers' lists.
- ❖ Smaller curated, personal tours or holidays for two or three people will be a trend this year.
- ❖ Travellers now choose to explore a single destination with detailed itineraries instead of exploring several on a trip.
- ❖ High number of Indian travellers are opting luxury segment; this segment has grown by 25-30 per cent.

ing. About 46 per cent of travellers around the world stated that they had stayed in sustainable accommodation over the past year.

## Leisure travel on the rise

A good number of Indian travellers are opting luxury segment. "The luxury travel market has grown by 25-30 per cent. This segment of the tourism industry is booming due to the large number of Indian tourists, who want to travel despite the hike in airfares and hotel rates," reveals Munshi, adding that this has pushed the luxury hotel prices in India to their highest levels.



Ali Barter  
Founder  
Trunk India



Riaz Munshi  
President  
OTOAI



Tanes Petsuwan  
Deputy Governor for International Marketing -  
Asia and the South Pacific, Thailand Tourism

with accommodation providers in these destinations to help them progress on their sustainable journeys and turn to highlight more sustainable options, as well as to help consumers discover alternative times and places to take their trips, without sacrificing on experience," Barter adds.

tions, the number rose to six and a half days per trip. The reason could be the pent-up demand of two and a half years," he says.



## Increase in length of stay

Compared to 2019, travellers are now choosing more relaxed and more detailed itineraries. "Instead of exploring four or five destinations on a trip, they now choose to stay longer and explore a single destination in one trip," reveals Riaz Munshi, President, OTOAI.

Tanes Petsuwan, Deputy Governor for International Marketing - Asia and the South Pacific, Thailand Tourism, reveals that the length of Indians stays have increased post pandemic. "Indians used to stay in Thailand for an average of five and a half days per trip pre-COVID, but after easing of the travel restric-

## Increase in sustainable stays

Awareness and visibility of more sustainable stays continues, with 40 per cent of global travellers confirming they have seen a sustainable accommodation on an online travel site over the past year and 38 per cent indicating that they actively sought information on the sustainability efforts of a property before making the book-

## Experience over price

People are ready to travel at higher cost for experiences. "The starting airfares for Europe are around 3-4 lakhs. Despite the high fares, people are not getting air tickets, as all are sold out. This indicates a surge in the demand of travellers. The reason could be pent-up demand and the increased spending capacity," says Munshi.

**Smaller, curated, personal tours or holidays for two or three people will be a trend this year. Also, they want advance info**

**Instead of exploring 4-5 destinations, they choose to stay longer and explore one destination in one trip**

**Indians used to stay in Thailand for 5.5 days per trip pre-COVID. The number has risen to 6.5 days per trip**

believed that the travel would return to the pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2022, while one-third said that it would happen by 2025 or later. Amid this optimism and enthusiasm for travel, new trends are emerging, which the

search by bookings.com, 33 per cent of respondents said that they chose to travel outside of peak season and 27 per cent chose to go to a less popular travel destination over the last 12 months to avoid overcrowding. Homestays,

with, and about their safety," says Ali Barter, Founder, Trunk India.

Small private trips to off-beat destinations have become a new trend. "This presents an opportunity for travel platforms to partner

# Court relief on service charge

Contd from page 5

hence doesn't seem unfair. "As a matter of fact, it is a universally accepted practice - prevalent not only in the hospitality sector, but also across other industries such as real estate, banking, e-commerce businesses, and even apps. However, unfortunately, the hotel industry has been singled out. Moreover, it is a mere guideline as a fixed amount isn't dictated. We are and always will be loyal to our consumers, and we do not compromise on our services. Therefore, I don't think adding a service charge to the final bill is unethical."

**Service charge optional**  
Shreekant Chopda, Managing

Director, Pushpam Group, says that the ban on service charge cannot be classified as good or bad as it was never about gaining or losing revenue from it. "The idea of service charge is to gain the value of



Pranav Maheshwari  
Co-founder of StayVista

serving and hospitality. It is exclusively and completely distributed among the direct and indirect staff



Shreekant Chopda  
Managing Director, Pushpam Group

involved in serving the customers. It should not affect any business or service as long as restaurants are doing it honestly. It should not affect any business as it is not primarily the extra revenue charged upon the principle amount. It was anyways optional for customers to pay service charge, hence making the leverage mandate was not nec-

essarily a need. Just the consumer grievances methods for hotels that make it mandatory or embarrass consumers to pay the service charge were enough to deal with the matter," he says.

## Totally up to the guest

Gaurav Sinha, Hotel Manager, JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru, believes service charge should not be mandatory. "It should be left up to the customers whether to pay or not depending on how satisfied they are with the services. It should be the experience that should drive the decision rather than by any enforcement of rule. I do not believe that it will have an impact on the F&B business at JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru as we do not have the practice of charging

service charges. We have always believed in extending services from our hearts, whether it's food,



Gaurav Sinha  
Hotel Manager  
JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru

room services or be it any another operation," he says.

## Convenience fee?

Service charge acts as an extra income for the staff, says Rakshit



Rakshit Sharma  
CEO, Rester Hotels & Resorts

Sharma, CEO, Rester Hotels & Resorts. "Service charge is not imposed on any guests but it's left as an option. Guest is clearly informed that service charge is voluntary. This ban wouldn't have affected our business, but it would have affected the service staff who would have lost an important source of incentive," he says.



# Air charters soared even in COVID

Charter aviation industry was one of the few industries that benefitted from the pandemic. 'We struggled like everyone else in the first six months. However, our revival has been a lot stronger and faster than anyone else's,' shares Kanika Tekriwal, Founder and CEO, JetSetGo Aviation.



Nisha Verma

The pandemic saw the charter aircraft business take off like no other. **Kanika Tekriwal**, Founder and CEO, JetSetGo Aviation, said, "We never expected this surge to come after COVID. Everyone wanted a plane to move parents, kids, pets, etc. That was the first piece of demand and they all preferred private over commercial aircraft owing to risk against kids and elderly at main airports," she informs.

## Catering to first timers

She said that a lot of queries were from people who were first time private jet users and who would remain last time private jet users also. "I think handling them was most difficult because

most of these people were going through some duress at the time," she explained.



**Kanika Tekriwal**  
Founder and CEO  
JetSetGo Aviation

## COVID, a learning

Saying that COVID was a big learning experience, she added, "It made us realise that we need to increase our offering and make our offering more suitable for the masses. Hence, we started the

among people moving to Goa. Overall, it was a very good learning experience for us."

In fact, Tekriwal claimed, the private jet industry was one of the few industries that got benefitted. "We struggled like everyone else in the first six months. However, our revival has been a lot stronger and faster than anyone else's," she mentioned.

## The flip side

Tekriwal agreed that the trend led to revenue increase for everyone in the industry. "At the same time, during this period, the input cost has almost become twice. Fuel has now almost become twice of what it was. Our spare parts and freight costs have gone up substantially. Training costs have gone up because of COVID, lead-

and only 10 per cent B2B. That's primarily because most private jet users are HNIs and UHNIs. They would not ideally go through a travel agent for a private jet. Still almost 10 per cent of our bookings happen through travel agents."

**It (COVID) made us realise that we need to increase our offering and make our offering more suitable for the masses**

Talking about inbound business, she said, "Earlier December to February, most of the private aircraft were deployed for Jaipur, Udaipur, Jodhpur, Goa and Kerala circuits because there was so much inbound tourism coming in. Somehow, since COVID, India still has not been able to pick up its inbound numbers. Domestic tourism is at its all-time high, which can be seen at all levels. Hotels are full with domestic customers, conferences and business guests. However, no inbound conferences are happening. Earlier, we used to see a lot of international conferences coming in, where charter planes were used. Now, zoom has become the new private jet. Thus, there is no real need for the corporates to travel."

## India's perception

Claiming that earlier they used to

get inbound corporate travel business via Delhi, but now things have changed. "After speaking to a lot of international customers, I have realised that it's not about how much COVID is there in India, it's that foreigners don't trust the Indian Healthcare System to be able to handle it. Thus, outbound business is growing, but inbound has dramatically fallen," she said.

## Airport ease

Tekriwal claimed that it's easy to go through all the processes at the airports these days. "All airports have transparent online procedures. Overall, it's simple to apply for permits and clearances. However, airports slots are an issue. Other issues include shortage and price of fuel," she informed.

## Aircraft status

Tekriwal revealed that they work on three different programmes, when it comes to aircraft. "One is self-owned planes, which we operate for charter. Then another is a programme for owners, when other people buy planes and only use it for 200-300 hours. We buy all the excess capacity of the plane so that their costs are reduced. The third programme is when a lot of people buy planes, but don't manage them, as it's not their expertise. Hence, we manage the aircraft completely for them. Currently, we have 34 planes available," she said.

## Govt support

However, when it comes to government support for the industry, she opined, "I think this industry

is always considered an industry for the rich. It has a very bad perception. As it is, the aviation sector, because of COVID, didn't get any bailout and now we don't get fuel, and the price is only rising. The government is not controlling it. Even the commercial price tickets have gone up dramatically. Hence, we are left on our own means to figure this out."

## Roadmap ahead

When asked about plans, Tekriwal revealed, "Going forward, we want to get into the aircraft leasing space. We opened a company in GIFT City. We are leasing a second aircraft to that company in GIFT City, after which we would hopefully increase that number going forward. However, the long term plan is to do a lot of EVTOLs."

**Now, zoom has become the new private jet. Thus, there is no real need for the corporates to travel**

The idea is that at places like Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Delhi and Mumbai, which are so cramped for traffic, we must ensure to move traffic off the roads and into the sky. We are working closely with the government and a lot of people. Our target is to make that a reality by 2026."



they would not understand why a Delhi-Mumbai ticket would cost ₹10,000 for commercial airline, whereas the private jet costs ₹8 lakhs. We patiently attended to their queries because

JetShare program, where we had three to four people booking a plane together. We ran some packages to Maldives, when people first started doing vacations. Suddenly, we saw demand

ing to a lot of pilots not being able to go for training," she claimed.

## Trade and inbound

Tekriwal shared that the private jet business is "90 per cent B2C

# 'IATO constitution changes for 10 years'

► Contd from page 5

Memorandum of Associations (MoA), which was done after 26 years, revealed Mehra. "Finally, the MoA has been amended after 26 years. In the last couple of years, the executive committee was trying to figure out the changes that must be made and how. Twenty-six years is a long period, wherein things have changed. Hence, we had to update it to suit present situations, needs and requests by members. We have also ensured that it covers the next 10 years and there is no need to amend

the MoA again before that," he said. Sharing a few highlights of the changes, Mehra said, "We have implemented one person, one post rule, which means that a Chapter Chairman cannot be in the Executive Committee (EC). Similarly, an EC member cannot be a Chapter Chairman. We have now allowed anyone who gets his MOT recognition done, to get their status changed from allied to active member. Earlier, a person used to wait for two years before his status was changed to active. Now, it can be done immediately without any waiting at all."

He added, "We have also said that anyone who wishes to join and stand for elections, must be in the IATO EC for at least one term before standing for a leadership position like that of a President, or an office-bearer. This has been done so that everyone knows how the IATO EC functions."

He also informed that the tenure of an EC member was unlimited. "An EC member could stand for as long as he/she wanted, whereas office-bearers' term was limited to two. Now, we have limited the maximum terms of the EC to

**Some other states have also approached us for hosting the convention, but we will concentrate on Rajasthan**

three. After that he/she must elevate to an office-bearer or lead IATO. This would give more

people a chance to be a part of the IATO EC," he claimed. Green shoots are also there. "Any person who gets an MOT recognition as a green shoot will be immediately taken as an allied member after fulfilling the requirements of an allied member. These green shoots have also been introduced and applied," elucidated Mehra.

Apart from that, Mehra revealed, the association has given more powers to the chapters. "Now, if there are substantial number of members in a chapter, they will have the power to elect their own

Chapter Chairman. Funds will also be given. This way, each chapter will get the opportunity to elect their leader. It would also bring a good balance in the next five to six years between North and South India," he pointed out.

## New members

Mehra shared that they are ready to accept new members. "In the last 45 days, we have received around 51 new applications, which is an achievement. If people want to become IATO members, we are ready to accept as many new people as possible."



# Big city hotels see higher revenue

After being hit by COVID, tourism and hospitality sector is not shaken, but learning from the past and preparing for a future that is not only brighter but better prepared to handle another crisis. It is a whole new environment of revival, and the trends show that the industry is quickly adapting to the changes.

International tourism had gone back by 30 years due to COVID-19, UNWTO stated in an early assessment. At stake was \$1.3 trillion of tourism earnings, global GDP loss of \$2 trillion and 100-120 million direct jobs. A report by McKinsey had anticipated compression of 70-75 per cent business in hotel and aviation sector in India. COVID-19 took away, as the Minister of Tourism informed the Parliament, a staggering 2.1 crore jobs. Hospitality industry had seen occupancy plummet by 48 per cent in 2021 and RevPar by 66 per cent — an estimated revenue loss of ₹190,000 crore. Fortunately, now the industry is recovering fast, posting its highest ADR index of the year at 106 per cent of 2019.

According to an STR study in March 2022, occupancy increased to 109 per cent of the matching 2019 level. A recent report attributed to Naukri.com says



that 80 per cent of the job demand came from the hospitality industry — again establishing the predominant role of the industry in economic revival.

The domestic tourism visits before the pandemic were estimated to be a staggering 1800 million and the current revival is pushed by pent-up domestic demands for travel, aided by strong growth in MICE and corporate travel. For some time to come, domestic tourism will continue to be the driving force.

Expansion of accommodation and access will be crucial factor to sustain this tempo. The construction of 100 new airports in Tier II and Tier III cities under UDAN will facilitate opening of new areas and destinations.

As UNWTO had assessed, FTA will show results only in 2023. There was some expectation that falling rupee may give India advantage, but the effects are uncertain and, if at all, are likely to be minimal. It may encourage dollar income tourists

but many other currencies have depreciated and rupee value may not be a strong incentive. According to JLL's latest Q1 report, Mumbai's RevPAR saw the biggest growth at 71.5 per cent. Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Goa and Kolkata also witnessed high growth. Even Tier II and III cities such as Shimla, Dehradun, Agra, Jaipur and Udaipur are witnessing large number of travellers. According to JLL's recent report, there was 43 per cent increase in travel to Tier II and III cities. According to their Q1 report, around 27 new 5-star hotels plan to open in the coming year. This investment can increase manifold if government allows the benefits of infrastructure status to hospitality.

But the summer rush to the hills and beaches has brought to focus the need for attention to carrying capacity, responsible tourism and opening new destinations like the pristine Northeast. As UNWTO says,

COVID-19 "is a watershed moment to align the effort of sustaining livelihoods dependent on tourism to SDG and ensure a more resilient, inclusive,

**Hospitality industry is seized of the imperative sustainable practices and adapting innovative ways to be in tune**

carbon neutral and resource efficient future". Recent surveys have shown Indian travellers, like travellers everywhere else, put overwhelming value on sustainability in their travel choices. Hospitality industry by and large is seized of the imperative sustainable practices

and adapting and adopting innovative ways to be in tune.

Technology is changing how industry manage the services they offer. And digital and contactless services, such as smartphone check-in, contactless payments, voice control, AI experiences and biometrics are transforming traditionally customer-facing services. It is a whole new environment of revival, and the trends show that the industry is quickly adapting to the changes.



M.P. Bezbaruah  
Secretary General  
Hotel Association of India

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

# Travstarz promotes Thai tourist spot

Travstarz Global Group, in association with Vana Nava Water Jungle, Hua Hin, Thailand, recently hosted a Networking Dinner and Product Presentation for the travel trade in Delhi. The event was supported by Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). Vachirachai Sirisumpan, Director, TAT; Aso Lori, Marketing Officer, TAT and Pinky Arora Marketing Manager, TAT, were among those present.





# Adventure puts spotlight on women

The ATOAI Women's Collective was formed to create a network of women entrepreneurs in the adventure tourism industry. AWC, in a partnership with **EVENT TALK**, recently launched a series called 'Spotlight on Women in ATOAI'. AWC intends to help budding women entrepreneurs gain visibility in the industry and give them a platform for growth.

**Janice Alyosius**

**Arshdeep Anand**, Co-Founder and CEO, Holiday Moods Adventures, Chairperson, ATOAI Women's Collective and EC member, OTOAI, looks confident after her 25 years of journey in the adventure tourism sector.

"The industry has allowed me to discover many aspects of my personality. I learned to push my limits and try different adventures. Adventure tourism have given me wings to fly. Successful women entrepreneurs in travel and tourism are confident, enlightened and mindful; take calculated risks, hence do not hesitate to innovate.

They are purposeful and dedicated, so can control, supervise and lead their enterprises to achieve the desired goals, without sacrificing the quality," she says. Speaking about her journey, she

shares, "My husband and I started a business together. Before forming the team, we researched all aspects of business management ourselves. Today, travelling has become an experience and



**Arshdeep Anand**  
Co-Founder and CEO, Holiday Moods Adventures, Chairperson, ATOAI Women's Collective and EC member, OTOAI

women have an edge here as they can empathize and perceive the requirements to create a holiday which is memorable for the travellers. During the various treks, I had the opportunity to discover the beauty of the Himalayas, the experience shaped my life and

my work. The camps were very basic and the washrooms non-existent. So, when we set up our campsite, we made sure we had clean sheets and enough bathrooms for the women to be comfortable, and not being able to use the toilets was not an impediment."

As a mother of two, she realized that children are less connected to nature. Therefore, she developed a strong interest in creating programmes for schoolchildren focused on adventure activities, as well as community service and learning skills for sustainability. She feels it is a way to return to the community by helping the environment, creating jobs for local communities and influencing young minds.

As a successful businesswoman, it is imperative to make sure you are properly respected and encouraged. Anand, an executive committee member of the

Outbound Tour Operators Association of India, shares her experience of working with the association. "I have got strength and confidence as an entrepreneur

**Women owners are empowered with great leadership skills to successfully steer the ship over storms in bad weather!**

working with the association," she says, adding that, "women are very underrepresented and empowering women in the travel industry is very liberating."

ATOAI Women's Collective (AWC) was formed in June last

year, "When the opportunity to start a women's collective came my way, I grabbed it with both hands. I am very happy to share that ATOAI Women's Collective has made huge strides in its first year. Empowered with a wonderful team and unstinting support from the office-bearers of ATOAI, today, AWC is well recognised," she shares.

One of the objectives of ATOAI Women's Collective is to recognise women who have inspiring journeys and are looked upon as role models. "We recently felicitated Professor Harshwanti Bisht for becoming the first woman president of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF). We had a great interaction with her and discussed ways to collaborate between IMF and WCC. We also requested her to include the issue of 'Women's Outdoor Safety' in the curriculum of mountaineering courses," she tells.

The collective also reached out to Rupinder Brar, Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, and made a request to the Ministry of Tourism to start a helpline for the women in distress in the outdoors and also to promote homestay tourism.

As part of other activities, AWC organised a gender sensitisation workshop for the adventure travel industry with the goal of helping aspiring and ambitious entrepreneurs find a strong place in the industry. After a successful gender awareness workshop, AWC organised a photo contest, which was another attempt to focus on the adventures of women, entrepreneurs and people working in the travel and outdoor industries. The organisation also partnered with DDPL to launch the 'Spotlight on Women in ATOAI' series to focus and promote women.

EVENT TALK

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AUGUST 2022

Date	Event	Time
2-4	PATA Destination Marketing Forum, Thailand	9:00 am
5-7	India International Travel Mart Chennai	10:00 am
9	Abu Dhabi Webinar	3:00 pm
10	Incredible India "Believe it or Not" series webinar	TBA
11-12	International Conference on Leisure and Tourism	8:30 am
11-14	Korea International Tourism Fair	9:00 am
13-14	Tourism Fair Durgapur	1:00 pm
14-17	GBTA Convention & Exposition	9:00 am
18 - 21	International Travel Expo Hong Kong	10:00 am
18 - 21	The M.I.C.E. Travel Expo	9:00 am
19-21	Halal Indonesia Expo	9:00 am
19-21	India Travel Mart New Delhi	11:00 am
19-22	Taipei International Tourism Exposition	10:00 am
24	Qatar webinar	TBA
26-28	Holiday Expo-Varanasi	9:00 am
27-29	International Joint World Cultural Tourism Conference	12:00 pm

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

## 'Medical tourism rapidly growing'

When it comes to medical tourism, sky is the limit for India. The industry, valued \$6 billion in 2020, has all it takes to attract such tourists from across the world, and is predicted to reach \$13 billion by 2026, says Rajeev Taneja, Founder and CEO of Global Care.

**TT Bureau**

**Rajeev Taneja**, Founder and CEO of Global Care; Member, SEPC and President, Foundation of Healthcare & Wellness Promotion, claims that medical tourism is one of the most rapidly growing sectors. "It is valued at an impressive \$6 billion in 2020 and is predicted to reach approximately \$13 billion by 2026. Both the private and public sector is working tirelessly to achieve this target," he adds.

"The government has planned to augment the medical infrastructure of 17 cities, which are known as the hub for medical tourism in India. Besides, with various summits, visa regulations and campaigns, the government is also drafting a roadmap to harmonise and standardise the sector to harness the true potential of the industry to extend services worldwide," he adds.

**Government initiatives**  
Taneja informs that the government is actively working to-

wards positioning India as the most favourable destination for medical treatments.

"Heal In India initiative is one such campaign perfect for branding the message. The collaboration between Union Health



**Rajeev Taneja**  
Founder and CEO of Global Care; Member, SEPC and President, Foundation of Healthcare & Wellness Promotion

Ministry, Tourism, Ayush, Civil Aviation ministries, hospitals and other stakeholders to build a roadmap to connect overseas patients with healthcare facilities in India will not only boost medical tourism, but also help in boosting the medical infrastructure and R&D in the country," he said.

**Ayush Visa**  
On Ayush Visa issue, Taneja says, "With Ayush Visa, the government wishes to help patients from across the globe access traditional treatments in India. India is witnessing exponential growth and interest in Ayurveda, naturopathy, Unani, homoeopathy medicine, wellness etc, not just in the country but also globally. The Ayush sector is now valued at over 18 million USD. The visa will facilitate further growth of this sector thus, augmenting medical tourism as a whole."

**India medical tourism hub**  
Taneja says that medical tourism by virtue is about cost-optimisation without compromising on the quality of treatment. "India is the best suited for medical value tourism because fluency in English is commonplace in our country, especially among the medical fraternity," he says.

"One of the key reasons that strongly places India as the strongest contender for medical value tourism is cost-optimisation.

Quality treatment is not just about good doctors. India not only has one of the best international qual-

**Govt has planned to augment the medical infrastructure of 17 cities, which are known as the hub for medical tourism in India**

ity healthcare services, but also robust allied sectors," he adds.

**Medical source markets**  
The Middle East & West Africa, CIS and SAARC Nations are the biggest value source markets for India, reveals Taneja. "A few underdeveloped countries like Bangladesh also look towards India for effective medical treatment and skilled medical fraternity," he adds.



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Day 2	Dubai (U.A.E)
Day 3	Dubai (U.A.E)

#### 4 Nights Dubai - Abu Dhabi

Departure Ports : Dubai (U.A.E)

Departure Date 2022-23

Dec'22	Jan'23	Feb'23	Mar'23
24*	07   14   21   28	04   11   18   25	04   11

Day 1	Dubai (U.A.E)
Day 2	Doha (Qatar)
Day 3	At Sea (Cruising)
Day 4	Muscat (Oman)
Day 5	Abu Dhabi (U.A.E)

#### 3 Nights Abu Dhabi - Dubai

Departure Ports : Abu Dhabi (U.A.E)

Departure Date 2022-23

Dec'22	Jan'23	Feb'23	Mar'23
28*	11   18   25	01   08   15   22	01   08   15

Day 1	Abu Dhabi (U.A.E)
Day 2	Abu Dhabi (U.A.E)
Day 3	Dubai (U.A.E)
Day 4	Dubai (U.A.E)

#### Costa Toscana Ship Facts



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11  
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19  
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Itineraries are indicative and subject to change.



# MOVEMENTS

## CROSS HOTELS

### New Delhi

**SANDEEP RAGHAV** has been appointed as the Director (Business Development) for the India market. He will now be working with Buzz Travel Marketing. He has over 20 years of experience with international hotels. Working with brands such as Taj Group, Radisson UK Hotels, Jumeirah Group, Frasers Hospitality Singapore, Starwood Hotels, Marriott Hotels and Conrad Maldives has given him immense exposure to the luxury segment to handle FIT and group business from India. He is a seasoned hotelier specialising in luxury leisure and MICE segment for various outbound destinations. He has been a key element for their team goals.



## UTTARAKHAND TOURISM

### Uttarakhand

**SACHIN KURVE**, a 2003-batch IAS officer of the Uttarakhand cadre, has taken charge as Secretary of Tourism, Government of Uttarakhand, and CEO, Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board. Kurve has held several senior key positions so far in his career spanning close to two decades. Out of these, he has held key positions in the Government of Uttarakhand and Maharashtra. The prime positions he held during this tenure includes, District Magistrate of Rudrapur, Tehri-Garhwal, Dehradun, and Haridwar and Director and Additional Secretary, Panchayati Raj Department, and Additional Secretary to the Governor.



## MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL

### Indore

**SHIVAM JUNEJA** has been appointed as the Market Director of Revenue Strategy for Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh cluster effective June 2022. With over 12 years of experience in Revenue Management, Juneja has worked with various international and domestic hotel chains. He started his career with The Park hotels in 2009, followed by revenue management roles at Hyatt Hotels Corporation and Taj Hotels. He joined the Marriott family in 2017 as Revenue manager – Bengaluru Cluster. In his new role, Juneja will be responsible for revenue management functions for the MP and UP Cluster.



## JW MARRIOTT BENGALURU PRESTIGE GOLFSHIRE RESORT & SPA

### Bengaluru

JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa has appointed **DUSHYANT SINGH** as the Executive Assistant Manager - Food & Beverage. In his new role, Dushyant will be overseeing the end-to-end F&B operations while managing the forecasting, budgeting, sales and marketing, and implementation of brand service strategy and initiatives. Dushyant has an experience of more than 18 years in luxury hospitality with Marriott International across Asia and Middle-East. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Hotel Management from the Institute of Hotel Management Catering Technology and Applied Nutrition, Goa.



## COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT

### Madurai & Trichy

**MAYOORAKANTH SIVALINGAM** has been appointed as the Cluster Director of Sales for Courtyard by Marriott Madurai and soon to be launched Courtyard by Marriott Trichy. With a substantial experience in corporate real-estate, tourism, Sivalingam also has more than 15 years of experience in the hospitality sector. He holds an experience with travel companies like Cox & Kings and DMC Leisure, prior to joining Marriott International. In his new role, he will be spearheading planning, development and implementing sales strategies in Madurai and Trichy markets. He began his journey with Marriott in 2007 at Courtyard by Marriott Chennai.



## VFS GLOBAL

### Mumbai

VFS Global has announced the appointment of **ADITYA ARORA** as its Chief Operating Officer. Arora will be responsible for managing the company's global operations, focusing especially on developing greater efficiencies and synergies across all its services and products for applicants and client governments. He will be responsible for the transformation of systems and processes through increased technology leverage. In a career spanning over 26 years, Aditya spent over two decades in the outsourcing industry. He has set up several large businesses with cross-cultural teams, across multiple verticals.



## GRAND MERCURE BENGALURU GOPALAN MALL

### Bengaluru

**NAUNIHAL SINGH** joins Grand Mercure Bengaluru at Gopalan Mall as the Revenue Manager of the hotel. Singh brings in over nine years of experience in pricing and inventory, market analysis and revenue strategy in the hospitality industry. He began his career with The Oberoi Cecil, Shimla, later being part of the Guest Service Management programme by OCLD. He joined Accor as The Assistant Revenue Manager for the Bangalore Cluster in 2019, and has upskilled himself with many certifications and trainings in the area of Revenue Management & Pricing Program.



## HYATT REGENCY JAIPUR MANSAROVAR

### Jaipur

**NIKHIL GANDHI** has been appointed as General Manager of Hyatt Regency Jaipur Mansarovar. Nikhil has spent more than 20 years in the hospitality industry. He brings with him a wealth of experience in operations management, driving guest engagement and commercial strategies, ensuring superior business results for the properties he has worked with. Nikhil will assume an integral role in elevating the Hyatt Regency brand experience, bringing a unique hotel to Jaipur, and ensure that the team delivers timeless guest experiences. He has acquired a deep knowledge of diverse aspects of hotel management while working across India.



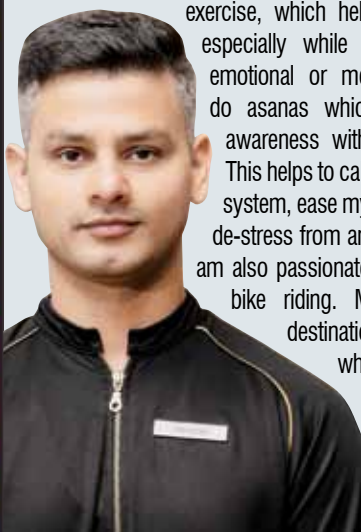
VFS Global has appointed **SUKANYA CHAKRABORTY** as the Chief Communication Officer. With the company entering a new growth chapter and under new ownership, Sukanya will bolster brand advocacy and reputation management through the 360-degree global communication mandate of the organisation.

Sukanya joined VFS Global in 2018 as Head of Corporate Communications & CSR. She has been in different communications and marketing roles in global organisations before joining VFS Global. In her over 23 years of experience, she worked extensively on building B2B & B2C communication strategies and integrated campaigns focused on building an offline and online presence, creating narratives to enhance corporate reputation and brand perception.



## TALKING People

**PRATEEK ARYA**, Yoga Instructor at The Ritz-Carlton, Pune believes that stress is the root of all problems for mind, body and soul. "I regularly practice meditation with breathing exercise, which helps me attain calm, especially while going through any emotional or mental stress. I also do asanas which helps create an awareness within my body parts. This helps to calm down my nervous system, ease my muscle tension and de-stress from any physical tension. I am also passionate about trekking and bike riding. My favorite holiday destination is the Himalayas where I learnt a lot about the simple and healthy lifestyle from people there," he says.



**NEHA KAPOOR**, Director of Rooms, JW Marriott Kolkata, de-stresses by redefining her abode of stay from time to time, fashion indulgence and taking a stroll with her fur baby. "During the lockdown, I picked up a great skill. From hating to loving fish, I can proudly say it smells fishy but I love to cook it. Another rejuvenating hobby which I enjoyed during lockdown was drawing. I also enjoy travelling and two of my favourite destinations is Rajasthan and Amsterdam. But my next holiday will be to Turkey and Gangtok," she says.



**SAPNEAL RAO**, Director, SSR Travel Solutions, enjoys music. He says, "After a hard day's work, I like to unwind by listening to my kind of music. It de-stresses me and gives me a renewed energy to face another day." Rao also used the time during lockdown well and learned how to stretch well. "Give your body a good stretch and you will realise that it will take you up for sure and help you stay positive," he says. His favourite holiday destination is Maldives. However, My next holiday will be to Puerto Rico!" he adds.





# Wedding TRAVEL SHOW

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# 22 direct flights to Australia

Tourism Australia is excited about India, one of the 15 international markets it prioritises globally. Come September, it will have 22 direct flights from India, shares Robin Mack, Executive General Manager, Commercial & Business Events Australia, Tourism Australia.



Hazel Jain

Tourism Australia recently hosted five corporates from India on a fam – the first group from an international source market since the country's borders re-opened. **Robin Mack**, Executive General Manager, Commercial & Business Events Australia, Tourism Australia, is excited about the market.

"MICE has been a very important segment for us. To share some data points, we had 59,000 MICE visitors coming into Australia from India and they spent AUD 339 million in the visitor economy. Now that we are coming out of COVID, it has gained even more importance. We think the segment from India has great potential for us, especially the incentive category," he says.

Mack believes that Australia will be back to 2019 visitor numbers by 2024. "It is not going to be an immediate return but we really believe the potential from India is huge. If we look at the market as a whole – leisure, business events, education – previously India was at 4,00,000 visitors coming in, which was AUD 1.8 billion to the visitor economy. We believe that is really going to come back, particularly with the direct air connectivity," he says, adding, "Air access is key to bringing in the numbers. We are about 49 per cent of 2019 levels coming into the country. We are projecting it to be 70 per cent by December 2022. But for India, it's a real positive story.

We are already ahead of our direct aviation from 2019 when we had seven direct flights. By September 2022, we will have 22 direct flights from India! We are very excited about that. India is a great story for us!"

## MICE and events

Mack refers to an India Economic Strategy report 2035, which talks about 4,00,000 outbound numbers from India to Australia pre-COVID to 1.2 million until 2035. This would equal to spends going from AUD 1.8 billion to AUD 9 billion. "We are really pushing towards that million

that the average stay is about five nights covering two destinations. We would obviously want this to be more – maybe seven nights and beyond, perhaps by adding a third destination. We do get a lot of repeat visitors, so we hope that on the second visit they might want to try a new destination," he adds.

Australia recently welcomed a 650-delegate Prudential group from India visiting Melbourne and Gold Coast, followed by a 300-pax group arriving to Sydney.

To leverage this corporate demand, he says, Tourism Australia has recently launched the second phase of its new campaign focused on MICE that says 'There's Nothing like Australia for Business Events'. "To ensure we can cater to increased demand, Australia has had an unprecedented infrastructure growth in the last two years. More than a 100 new or refurbished hotels opened in the last two years adding 12,000 new beds. We also have new experiences," says Mack, adding, "We are lucky to have a great calendar of events – Australia Open and the Grand Prix. And of course, the ICC World Cup – these offer great opportunities to us. We have such a shared love for the game."

## Going green

Underlining some key trends that he sees emerge, that Australia is working towards catering to, Mack says, "What we see

globally is a real trend towards sustainability and that conscious traveller coming in and picking a destination based on that. It is becoming more of a driver of destination choice. We have a great sustainability story. Our role is to educate and advocate that. We have great experts on the ground – from venues or DMCs – who can curate a bespoke experience that delivers on the sustainability. Another trend we are hearing about more and more in corporate programmes is to add wellness into them. Corporates are asking for both sustainability and wellness these days."



**We had 59,000 MICE visitors coming into Australia from India and they spent AUD 339 million in the visitor economy**

visitors for 2030. We are hopeful of that since we are high-yielding destination. We prioritise 15 markets globally and India has been one of them," Mack adds.

That is why, he says, the Australia High Commission has dedicated extra support to facilitate easy and quicker visas for the larger incentive groups coming in from India. "From the MICE perspective, our data tells us

## Qantas' direct flight routes to India

Qantas Airlines will operate four weekly return flights from Sydney to Bengaluru from 14 September using Airbus A330. These will be the first non-stop flights between Australia and southern India by any airline and will cut almost three hours. Qantas will continue to operate up to five flights a week between Melbourne and Delhi.



**Robin Mack**  
Executive General Manager  
Commercial & Business Events Australia, Tourism Australia



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