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Budget to boost tourism

After Union Budget presentation, Minister of Tourism thanks Prime Minister and Finance Minister for the focus placed on development of infrastructure, connectivity and border linkages, which, he says, will boost tourism in India.



Nisha Verma

G Kishan Reddy, Union Minister of Tourism, Culture and DoNER, said that an additional amount of ₹2,400 crore has been earmarked for the Union Ministry of Tourism (MOT).

"This budget is 18.42 per cent higher than the allocation in 2021-22. It will be used by MOT for developing tourism infrastructure, marketing & promotion and capacity building. As India celebrates 75 years of independence with Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, we are entering Amrit

Kaal and this budget presents a blueprint for India at 100. This year's budgetary allocations for Vikas (development) and Virasat (heritage) go hand in hand, as evidenced by significantly higher budgetary allocations for the Tourism and Culture Ministries," he said.

The pluses

Lauding the PM Gati Shakti Masterplan, Reddy shared, "Gati Shakti is driven by seven engines — roads, railways, airports, ports, mass transport, waterways and logistics infrastructure. These engines supported by energy transmission,



G Kishan Reddy
Union Minister of Tourism
Culture and DoNER

IT communication, bulk water, sewerage and social infrastructure, will pull forward not just the economy but will also play a role in boosting tourism in India."

The Union Budget has also planned for development of new river links (Daman Ganga Pinjal, Par Tapi Narmada, Godavari Krishna, Krishna Pennar, and Peenar Kaveri), which will boost cruise tourism that has seen great success on the Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers.

With the budget placing focus on developing roads in border regions, Reddy said, "MOT has been making efforts to boost border tourism in the country. Border villages with sparse populations, limited connectivity and infrastructure often get

Contd on page 10 ►

Infra to benefit

Focus on infrastructure in Budget will create an enabling environment for tourism industry to grow in the long run, says Rupinder Brar.



Nisha Verma

Rupinder Brar, Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism, while commenting on the recently announced Union Budget, said that the government's focus on infrastructure continues. "This has been helping tourism and shall continue to do so. We are already at a point where India has the second largest highway network after USA and the Finance Minister has reiterated the support to the infrastructure sector. Railways getting 400 new generation Vande Bharat Express trains is an exciting product for tourism. The waterways, the draft DPR and the five river routes would provide a huge potential for inland waterways



Rupinder Brar
Additional Director General
Ministry of Tourism

and cruise tourism. Hospitality sector once again found a mention in the ECLGS, which shall continue till March 2023: The same will extend support in such times," she said.

Contd on page 3 ►

Focus on macro benefits

Union Budget evokes mixed response from travel and tourism sector. Stakeholders say while it does offer macro benefits to the industry, it does not give out money into the hands of those in B2B channel.



Rajiv Mehra
President, IATO

ASSOCIATIONS

"We are disappointed with the Union Budget 2022-23. We were expecting some relief for inbound tourism, which was without work for the last two years, and hence were expecting that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who supports tourism industry, will do something for us. But nothing has happened except ECLGS extension, which is no good for small or medium tour operators. If we do not have the money, what will we do with loans! That is why, we were asking for grants, which, if we survive and do well, the government can get back in the form of taxes."

"The only thing that I can see that is positive for the industry is the extension of the ECLG Scheme and the infusion of the additional ₹50,000 crore, which is hopefully allocated specifically for the hospitality and related industries. But in terms of taxation, the TCS was something that all associations had brought up repeatedly. We had even discussed this with the MoT. That finds no mention at all in the Budget. There could be certain indirect spin-offs in terms of development of the North East or e-passports. But these do nothing for the travel trade. It is disappointing. The government has really not been able to understand the value of, or to capitalise on the potential of this tourism industry."



Ajay Prakash
National President, TAFI

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'We are looking for support'

KB Kachru, a veteran in hospitality industry, says Union Budget was a letdown, but Hotel Association of India (HAI) will continue with its demand from government for industry and infrastructure status.



Nisha Verma

The Union Budget 2023 has "disappointed" the hospitality industry. **KB Kachru**, Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group (RHG) and Vice President, HAI, however, says that "at least something good" has happened in the budget.

"We need to acknowledge that. It is a breather in terms of the extended emergency credit line, which has been afforded for the hospitality industry. We had expectations from the government. We, as an industry, are not looking for loans, but we are looking for support in terms of



KB Kachru
Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor,
South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group (RHG)
and Vice President, HAI

survival. Unfortunately, our industry is still treated as elite, but they do not realise that we need hand-holding," he said.

"However, there are some policy decisions, which can be taken outside the budget, where no direct cash is involved. Decisions such as granting infrastructure status or industry status related benefits to the industry must help it to survive. Our travel partners and people overall in the tourism trade were expecting that some important aspects would be covered in the budget, which unfortunately has not happened. As HAI, we are still going to push for getting infrastructure status and industry status related benefits. I see no reason why a particular vertical is given industry status and we aren't. Our entire industry is together in this ask," he added.

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Disappointment writ large

Pradeep Shetty, Joint Honorary Secretary, Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI), discusses nitty-gritties of what Union Budget delivered to hospitality sector, including long-standing disappointments that continue.



This year's Union Budget was the third one since COVID-19 hit us, and the disappointment still continues, feels **Pradeep Shetty**, Joint Honorary Secretary, Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI). "There is no takeaway from it except that the ECLGS for the hospitality sector has been extended, and additional funding has been poured into it. So, it was nice of the government to finally identify and recognise this part and distinguish the hospitality industry from everybody else. Besides, there is absolutely nothing else for us. But despite recognising the serious impacts on this industry, there is no real relief measure that has been given," he says. The announcement of ECLGS was made months ago, but the implementation is lacking on the ground, he adds.

"At this point, financial institutions are not implementing it, and we have been continuously going back to the government and saying that – look, your measures are laudable, you are



Pradeep Shetty
Jt. Hon. Secretary, FHRAI

at least providing some measures by which people can have some more capital, but financial institutions are making it very difficult. Therefore, we have requested a grievance window where these issues between the industry players and financial institutions can be resolved quickly. We had requested a meeting of all the bank chairmen where these issues could be discussed. This industry has been put on the negative list of lending by all institutions because of what it is going through," he further adds.

Incentivise domestic tourism
All of this had a cumulative effect, and that is how 30–40 per cent of the establishments have shut down. "There were many



other things that would have really helped the sector to revive. We wanted the government to incentivise domestic tourism with more funding, especially for the hospitality sector, that last-mile connectivity between tourist attractions and hotels in the vicinity. That, of course, has not happened," Shetty says. "Soft and easy loans could have made the comeback or reopening easy for the people who have shut down and also for employee support. Basically, all these measures, would have helped revive the industry faster. But with no support and just an ECLGS that means I have a loan and I am going to get more and more loans. Is there a way to repay those loans because international flights are still not happening? So nobody is going to be able to repay all of that," Shetty adds.

The sector is also waiting for the one-time funding for the

industry, through which ₹60,000 crore for the hospitality sector was announced and is to be operationalised. "The announcement came a couple of months ago, but operational details have still not been revealed. Under this fund, loans were provided at a very low interest rate. This kind of fresh funding would have really helped the industry come back. Due to successive waves and open-shutdown scenarios, most of the players are

This industry has been put on the negative list of lending by all institutions because of what it is going through

in debt or losses and many of them are not open. There were certain tax reforms, which were very critical in reviving the industry. Fresh loans and longer tenures under the infrastructure status would have really helped the industry. But unfortunately that didn't happen," he said.

Infra to develop tourism

Contd from page 1

She further highlighted initiatives by the FM. "In the hilly regions, the FM has mentioned Parvat Mala to be developed in the PPP mode. Ropeways are an important infrastructure support needed for the development of tourism, especially in the hilly areas. The Union Finance Minister also talked about border villages. Border tourism is of great interest to everyone because it takes you to hitherto lesser-known areas. Once developed, border villages have a lot of scope for tourism, especially sustainable tourism and employment," she said. "The Northeast has been our focus area last year as well. Now, an additional ₹1,500 crore is being made available for the projects in the budget," she added.

Infra in focus

She claimed that the government's focus is on large infra-

structure. "Tourism is truly driven by infrastructure, and hence a lot of positivity is there for our industry. In fact, I've been getting a lot of support from the railways, civil aviation and roads, and we will continue to ensure that this sector keeps developing," she said.

Enabling ecosystem

While the industry has been raising its concerns about not getting a direct benefit from tourism, Brar explains that the government is doing what it needs to do, which is to create large infrastructure that would drive tourism.

"Unless you have an enabling ecosystem in tourism, direct support has no meaning. The idea is to look at expanding the destinations because we need to move away from the traditional two to three sectors and explore new and lesser-known destinations in India. Many new sectors have opened

up with the ministry's support through the viability gap funding for many air routes. One can see that the places that we can now access add to our tourism potential and create opportunities for stakeholders in hospitality and tourism to set up businesses

A lot of infrastructure is being created, both at the centre and state levels

in new areas. I think we need to remember that the government's huge infrastructure focus drives the sector, and therefore, it will go a long way in creating the enabling ecosystem required by tourism and hospitality," she elaborates.

Acting on industry requests

Brar mentioned that in terms of investing in tourism-related infrastructure, the MOT also has got the required budget.

Highlighting that Union Tourism Minister has been doing many interventions for the industry support, Brar revealed, "There have been three glass-top coaches, which are very popular on the Vizag-Araku, Mumbai-Goa and Baramullah routes. Under UDAN 3, we have already supported 29 tourism routes, which are operational. MOT has been supporting the Union Civil Aviation Ministry by providing the Viability Gap Funding. Large infrastructure is where the government truly needs to come in because that is where it's not easy for individual corporations to spend, and that's where we see the role of government and create the right ecosystem for the development of tourism."

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Amazing foreign tourist

The industry has developed a new-found love for the domestic traveller. After all, they came to the rescue during the pandemic and helped tourism keep afloat. But the importance of India allowing international tourists from 80-odd countries without quarantine and tests from February 14 cannot be undermined.

The benefits that an international visitor brings to India is myriad and sometimes cannot be replicated by a domestic traveller. Not only does the exchequer gain from them, the trickle-down benefits go right down to the tourist guides. Boutique hotels that understand and cater to the specific requirements of an international traveller had been unable to cope with the domestic traveller. But even bigger hotels suffer. Many hotels who had taken licences under the EPCG Scheme from 2007-08 onwards were not able to maintain the secondary condition. If there were no foreign tourists visiting India, how are these hotels to meet annual export obligation?

Budget fails to enthuse

From how the industry puts it, the Union Budget 2022-23 was another year of continued disappointment for the travel and tourism sector. While the government does highlight the stress on infrastructure and connectivity, apart from extending the limit on ECLGS, the industry's claims remain to be tax benefits and ease of doing business, which according to them still remain unfulfilled. On the other hand, Tourism Ministry's budget allocation has been increased to ₹2,400 crore, which is 18.42 per cent higher than last year's budget. However, the allocation for promotions, both inbound and domestic, has been reduced. This, apparently might be a sore thumb for a country that is looking to attract international tourists and finding its name among some of the coveted destinations around the world. At the same time, only ₹89 crore out of the ₹524 crore allocated for overseas promotions last year, were actually used. Hence, it remains to be seen if the leftover allocations would be utilised this year, or it would be a dampener for inbound, which is still waiting for international borders and flights to open.

Hospitality shows signs of revival

With increased vaccination rates and fewer travel restrictions restoring tourist confidence, Indian hospitality business is currently on an upward trend. As a result, in Q4 of 2021, Revenue Per Available Room increased by more than 100 per cent year on year.



TT Bureau

In Q4, 2021, the Indian hospitality sector saw over 100 per cent year-on-year increase in Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR), according to Hotel Momentum India (HMI) report of JLL, the global commercial real estate services company.

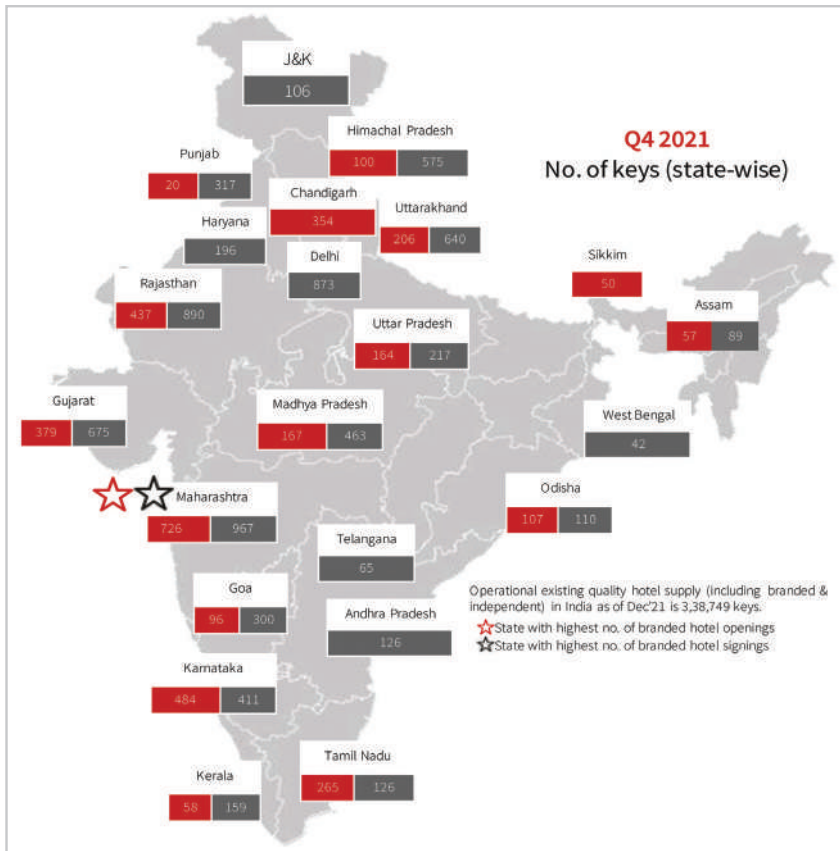
The quarterly RevPAR for Q4, 2021, (October-December) was 41.9 per cent.

While the Omicron wave began to have an impact in the later half of Q4, the last quarter (Q4, 2021) was mainly the strongest performing time of the previous year, aided by long weekends, holidays during festivals, and social events. Business travel returned in some areas, but in small numbers. International arrivals increased significantly in the fourth quarter of 2021 (Q4, 2021) when compared to the same period the previous year.

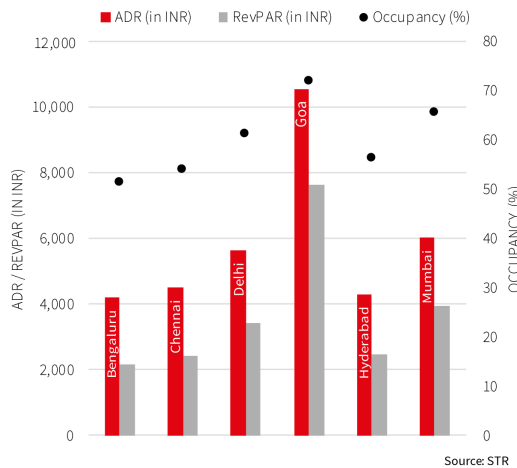
As the present wave dissipates, increase in airline and train travel is predicted in the next two quarters, providing a boost to hotel performance. Demand for both corporate and leisure travel will continue to be driven by the domestic segment. As social gathering limitations relax, the social MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) segment will grow, providing

much-needed business to the industry in the near future. In the fourth quarter of 2021, there were 85 hotel agreements totaling 7,347 keys. The number of hotel registrations increased by 81.9 per cent in Q4, 2020 as compared to Q4, 2019. In terms of inventory volume, domestic operators had a 52:48 advantage over overseas companies in signings.

The QHM reviewed key hotel market performance for the six



Q4 2021 performance trend chart



Key hotel market performance

Cities	Q4 2021		
	Change over same period last year		
	RevPAR Change (%)	AOR change (pp)	ADR change (%)
Bengaluru	↑ 143.0	↑ 24.8	↑ 25.4
Chennai	↑ 91.8	↑ 18.3	↑ 27.7
Delhi	↑ 130.6	↑ 20.2	↑ 54.8
Goa	↑ 106.7	↑ 18.4	↑ 57.4
Hyderabad	↑ 100.9	↑ 22.6	↑ 22.7
Mumbai	↑ 106.4	↑ 22.9	↑ 34.4

Source: STR RevPAR: ↑ Increase ↔ Stable ↓ Decrease

cities of Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Goa, Hyderabad, Mumbai.

In the fourth quarter of 2021, before the outbreak of the third wave of the pandemic, hotel performance in India's major cities grew dramatically. Corporate travel began to rebound as confidence in the office sector strengthened, with commercial real estate experiencing the greatest net absorption rate in the last eight quarters. Furthermore, staycations, long week-

end leisure demands, weddings, and social events remained the hospitality sector's mainstays. This rapid recovery would not have been feasible without growing confidence among travellers as a result of the country's high vaccination rates. "Even as uncertainty over various Covid forms and waves persists, the hospitality sector is projected to recover strongly in 2022," said Jaideep Dang, Managing Director, JLL Hotels and Hospitality Group, South Asia.

Govt policies to chart progress

In response to COVID-19, WTTCII is working with central and state governments on policies and practices to make most of India's tourism potential. Country must prepare for opening its borders to bring back international travellers from non-risk countries.



Janice Alyosius

The tourism and hospitality sectors have been hard hit by the pandemic. The World Travel & Tourism Council, India Initiative (WTTCII) is working with the centre and state governments on policies and practices to maximise India's tourism potential.

"For the last two years, we have been advocating with the government on various ways to overcome the pandemic. In fact, the Hon'ble Finance Minister in her Budget Speech acknowledged and put in motion one of our key recommendations, the extension of the ECLGS. This, with an additional fund of Rs 50,000 crores earmarked exclusively for hospitality and related sectors, will provide relief," said **Dinesh Khanna**, Chairman, WTTCII and Executive Director, Eastern International Hotels Ltd.

"With the pandemic, over 2020–2021 and three waves, we have seen the tourism industry plummet and rise. We are in the middle of the Omicron wave, and data from John Hopkins University and Massachusetts General Hospital points to the end of this pandemic. At the end of March 2022, we should be looking at normalcy. In spite of the three COVID-19 waves, we have seen domestic tourism demand rise," he said.

"In the short term, with lower caseloads, we hope that domestic tourism will rebound and hold the sector for the next four to six months. We must be prepared to open borders and focus on bringing back foreign travellers. It must be based on the individual status of the traveller rather than a blanket ban or red-list of countries. We need to reconnect the Incredible India campaigns to our source markets. We welcome the government's move to



Dinesh Khanna
Chairman, WTTCII and Executive Director
Eastern International Hotels Ltd

include the Indian embassies and missions in the promotions and marketing strategy. This will give a solid grounding to our market presence. We need to focus on the right policies now to make the sector comeback and come back fast," he added.

Considering the top priorities for regaining India's status as a premier travel destination, Khanna believes that India must rebuild its image. "Many destinations around the world have begun doing so by launching targeted

and aggressive customer-reconnecting campaigns. India must emulate Thailand's sandbox programmes to slowly ease international travellers into the country," he suggested.

"We need to announce to the world that we are ready to receive guests. Closing borders will not stop the propagation of the pandemic. Well-meaning, high-intent travellers who are willing to take the risks, take bubble flights, comply with our health and hygiene protocols and travel to and stay in India for a possible longer duration. We welcome the UK government's decision to scrap testing for those who are fully vaccinated travelling to the UK and to remove pre-departure tests for travellers and replace day two PCR tests with lateral flow tests. We need to adopt such best practices in opening borders and implement immediate measures to open India as a destination. In

terms of access, Indian low-cost or full service must be encouraged with easier bilateral support and supportive code share

We need high spending tourists who visit India and contribute to making India a sustainable destination

arrangements to connect prime source markets and increase seat capacity," he added.

Khanna predicted that Indian tourism as a destination of choice will rebound post-pandemic if the international travel industry can recover quickly, travel restrictions across the globe are lifted and the third wave ends.

Tourism News

Extension of validity of Ministry of Tourism recognition in all categories of service providers in the wake of Covid-19

MOT formulates National Strategy and Roadmap for Development of Rural Tourism in India

Qatar Tourism announces new superyacht luxury cruises to set sail from Qatar

Russia is expected to be a key source market for Asian destinations by 2022: ForwardKeys

16 new airports will be built in five central Indian states: Jyotiraditya Scindia

Jammu & Kashmir launches an Integrated tourism portal

TAFI panel signs agreement with Marriott Hotels for excellence programme

Jammu & Kashmir launches an Integrated tourism portal



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Trade disappointed again

“I have always been advocating at various forums in the past that connectivity and development of infrastructure are the most important keys to success for tourism to grow in India. I am glad to note the government is working aggressively towards developing the highways, railways, metros and ropeways, which indirectly will boost tourism in the times to come. Better connectivity and an improved infrastructure in future will provide a much better experience to the travellers. However, nothing more is there in the budget for the hospitality sector, which has been suffering the most for the last two years, as only the ECLGS's time period and the allocation has been increased, which unfortunately is not going to help much to the sufferers in our tourism industry.”



PP Khanna
President, ADTOI

“Having seen the budget, it is disappointing for the hospitality and tourism industries that the government does not recognise the importance of tourism. We talk about culture and heritage without realising the importance of financial support. Since the tourism industry has been severely affected, we were looking for government assistance. However, knowing that inbound tourism is not going to start until a while, the only hope we had was the announcement of financial assistance in the Budget. There is a serious physical stimulus needed, since 40 per cent of the tourism industry has suffered. And if financial support is not provided by the government, another 40 per cent of the industry will disappear in next two years. The budget has given little support to the sector.”



Jatinder Taneja
Vice-Chairman, PATA India Chapter

“It is a good budget in terms of overall economic growth, especially with respect to infrastructure and government capex allocation. It is a growth-oriented budget, but I am disappointed that no specific measures have been announced to revive the travel and tourism sector. We were hoping for some GST relief measures (a temporary waiver or reduction) to aid the recovery for travel companies. The recent introduction of TCS also distorts the competitive landscape and makes it favourable for the foreign travel companies, which do not have to abide by these rules, thus making an uneven playing field. It is important that this is reconsidered and some relief measures are implemented to promote inclusive growth of our industry.”



Gurbaxish Singh Kohli
Vice President, FHRAI

“Given the massive damages that decimated the entire sector's ecosystem, these measures (in the budget) are not adequate to bridge the losses and offer impetus to the hospitality and tourism industry. The number of meetings we held with the Union Finance Ministry and other ministries led us to believe that they were surely going to announce some sort of specific relief for the industry, but it is a disappointment that it has not come through. We had requested the FM to allow domestic travel for individuals and corporates to be a deductible expense in their IT returns, inclusion of hotels and tourism related sectors in the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP), infrastructure and industry status for the hospitality industry and allowing input tax credit (ITC) for restaurants.”



Riaz Munshi
President, OTOAI

“It is the same as last year's budget for the tourism industry. There is nothing to cheer about since we had hoped to reap some direct benefits from the industry. It varies by vertical within tourism. However, there is still a large portion of people connected with inbound tourism, the operators, guides and transport operators, who are still seeking help and business. We were looking for direct grants in addition to the loans to be able to survive, as inbound tourism is still a far-off dream with no regular flights yet available and the seven-night quarantine is a big disruption for us. Many of our demands have not been met. There are some transportation-related developments that are good for the national tourism, but for us survival and revival are essential.”



Anirban Chakraborty
MD & CEO, TFCI

“There have been many things in the Union Budget 2022-23, which can be applauded. Easing of international travel with the introduction of e-passports with embedded chips and the extension of Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) to 2023 with its guarantee cover expanded by ₹50,000 crore to total cover of ₹5 lakh crore is expected to bring further respite for the tourism and hospitality sector, especially the smaller players. There could have been further provisions (direct tax breaks, etc) to limit the impact on the tourism industry that has faced hardships due to the pandemic for a long time. We believe continued inoculation and easing of lockdowns will help travellers to venture out. Strengthening Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code is also a welcome move.”



Vinayak Koul
Honorary Secretary, ATOAI

“We are disappointed with the budget. For the last three years, there has been no relief given to us. The tourism industry has been bleeding. It contributed about 10 per cent of the GDP and about 30 billion dollars in 2019. The need of his country is to tackle unemployment and help us revive the industry. At least one or two good things have happened. ECLGS has been extended till the end of 2023 and other benefits such as linking of rivers, starting of ropeways, are meaningless because they are not going to give us any immediate relief. Hence, we again appeal to the MOT, Health Ministry, Home Ministry and the Civil Aviation Ministry to restart scheduled international flights, reactivate tourist visas and remove restriction of quarantine on passengers with double vaccination.”



Dinesh Khanna
Chairman, WTTCI & Executive Director, Eastern International Hotels Ltd.

“The Union Budget is in the right direction with adequate pushes in infrastructure extension of highways by 25,000 KMs in FY23, in introducing services such as 400 Vande Bharat Trains. Extension of ECLGS till March 2023 is a welcome move and a much-needed booster for the aviation and hospitality sectors. Implementation of these schemes will definitely see the three pillars of Incredible India – Infrastructure, Access and Ease of Business – strengthened. Aviation has been overlooked and this being a sector which was equally and as badly hit by the pandemic. The TCS issue is still unresolved. The industry had hoped the free five lakh ETVoA scheme was carried forward. This with the restoration of LTA/LTC scheme would work for both aviation and tourism.”



Subhash Goyal
Founder Chairman
STIC Travel & Air Charter Group

“We welcome the move to sanction additional ₹50,000 crore exclusively for the hotel industry as ECLGS loan to tide over the liquidity crisis. But this is another loan which cannot be considered as relief. The moratorium period of one more year, which is extended till March 2023, is not adequate and it needs to be extended up to March 2025 to overcome the loss, which the industry has incurred in last two years. The addition of eight ropeway projects is good news and we do hope something is there for Odisha. The additional ₹1,500 crore for the North Eastern Council on the lines of Gati Shakti is definitely welcome. Although there is a marginal hike in the allocation for the tourism ministry, it is not at all adequate.”



J K Mohanty
CMD, Swosti Group; Chairman, Hotel & Restaurant Association of Odisha & Chairman, IATO, Eastern Region



Prateek Hira
Chairman, IATO UP Chapter & President & CEO, Tornos, and Director, River Rhapsody

“Unfortunately tourism industry was once again sidelined in the Union Budget 2022-23 as no direct benefit was passed on to it. The extension of ECLGS through 2023 is a welcome step and allocation of additional ₹50,000 crore dedicated to tourism will bring in some relief for the industry. The announcements regarding multi modal transport for convenient travel, introduction of new Vande Bharat trains, detailed projects of five river systems and the eight ropeways and integrated connectivity between train stations and expansion of 25,000 kms of highways in the country is a thrust on creating a tourism ecosystem for long-term growth. E-passport will place India among the developed nations. The renewed thrust on the North-East will also boost tourism.”

“When it comes to inbound tour operators, it is a disappointing situation. ECLGS has a narrow spread for tour operators, and it does not help small and medium operators, who have never applied for a loan before. The various schemes on infrastructure and expenditures are welcomed, but they will have a long-term or medium-term impact on tourism. What we were looking for was some direct intervention in this industry. COVID has severely impacted the inbound tour operators, who have closed their offices for the last two years and have expenses to meet with no revenue. So, we were looking for some direct reliefs, which, if the government wanted, could have worked out based on the GST paid by us. We were expecting a bit of attention to tourism.”



Nilesh Shah
President, TTAG

“If you look at the Economic Survey released a day prior to the Budget, it admits that hospitality sector is in the worst possible state and hasn't recovered yet. The government in Goa has given us interest concession for last year for up to six month of up to five per cent, which is good. Moreover, for charter landings in Goa, they have given landing fee concession of up to one lakh, which also needs to continue. Our main concern was on the ease of doing business in Goa, for which the government is now offering five-year licence for excise and tourism. Even for MICE in Goa, there are multiple permissions that are required and we have requested the government to have one-window system in actual sense on the lines of film shoots. So, it was difficult for the trade to cope with the domestic market.”



Sunil C Gupta
Chairman, IATO Northern Region



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Extension of ECLGS bright spot

“The industry has lost two business seasons in a row. Although the allocation to tourism budget has been increased, looking at the challenges faced by industry the increase in inadequate. About 60 per cent increase in tourism infrastructure budget is a welcome initiative, but the Budget has seen a drastic reduction in tourism promotion budget from ₹668 crore to ₹416 crore, which is likely to impact the Incredible India campaign. After the impact of pandemic lessened, tourism will be driven majorly by domestic tourism and international travel will commence in due course. The Budget has provided quite a lot of indirect boost to the sector with plans for national highways, 400 energy-efficient trains, ropeway development and e-passports that will indirectly promote tourism.”



Rajeev Jainapurkar
Chairman, IATAPI

TECHNOLOGY



Sandeep Dwivedi
Chief Operating Officer
InterGlobe Technology Quotient (ITQ)

“Extension of Emergency Credit Line Scheme till 2023 is a welcome move but not enough to sustain the SMEs and MSMEs in these times, which need financial support through waivers or moratorium of loans and interest. On a brighter side, Gati Shakti Scheme is a stupendous move to boost the tourism, along with the launch of e-passport having embedded chip, which is going to be influential in ease of international tourism, and will bring the experiential change for the traveller. Digital payment facilitation to digital currency launch using block chain or other in-house developed technologies is a level-up approach for rising Indian economy through #MakeinIndia solutions.”

“International travel has been severely impacted by the pandemic, which is why we are pleased with the introduction of e-passports with embedded chips in the Union Budget for the Financial Year 2022-23, which was announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. This will provide a big boost to travel and add a level of convenience for international travellers from the country. Additionally, the expansion of the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) by ₹50,000 crore to ₹5 Lakh crore will enable the small travel operators and stakeholders within the travel and tourism industry to reel back from the disruptive impact of the pandemic, which has taken a toll on the industry in the last couple of years. E-passports will give boost to the ailing tourism industry.”



Rikant Pittie
Co-founder, EaseMyTrip

AGENTS



Guldeep Singh Sahni
MD, Weldon Tours and Travels

“The industry has somehow tried to survive itself for the last two years, but now for revival, the government did not support us at all. We didn't get any functional support from the government. We didn't ask for monetary support, but we needed support in terms of GST or tax. Even the credit line, which the government has extended, has to be returned and will not go in our pockets. The government should have thought a little bit about the employment that we generate. While inbound (tourism) is recognised by the government for generating foreign exchange with 30 to 35 million people travelling abroad, even outbound creates a lot of job, inventory and generate taxes for the government. The tourism industry generates 9 to 10 per cent of India's GDP.”

“The Union Budget 2022-23 reflected a development and investment orientation, with much needed emphasis on infrastructure, technology, skill development and health. From a travel & tourism perspective however, the Union Budget has been disappointing. The Budget made no reference to the industry's recommendations to aid revival, including rationalisation of taxes (a complete GST holiday, exemption of TCS on outbound tours, reduction in indirect taxes), removal of SEIS benefit capping of ₹5 crore. For a sector that is a key contributor to the country's GDP and brings in valuable foreign exchange earnings, with a force multiplier impact on jobs and skill development, a stimulus would have supported the country's road to recovery.”



Madhavan Menon
Managing Director
Thomas Cook (India) Limited



Vishal Suri
Managing Director, SOTC Travel

“The Union Budget presented by Union Finance Minister provides the much needed positivity with focus on infrastructural development, digital enhancements, and healthcare. While, the Prime Minister's PM Gati Shakti plan focusing on roads (25,000 km additional national highway), railways (2,000 km new railway network by 2023), airports, ports, waterways as these modern infra developments will raise productivity and be the key drivers of domestic tourism economy. Additionally, the Parvat Mala announcement with 8 National Ropeways development project will ease commuting and thereby improve connectivity. The two noteworthy announcements of issuance of e-passports and the expansion of the ECLGS will help boost the industry.”

“While the Union Budget 2022-23 offered significant initiatives and outlay pertaining to infrastructure development, technology, health, education and skill development, we are disappointed that the travel & tourism sector saw limited attention. The recommendations put forward by our industry to support recovery did not receive mention – including tax rationalisation, GST holiday, exemption of TCS on outbound tours, reduction in indirect taxes, removal of SEIS benefit capping of ₹5 cr. The Union Budget's focus on expansion and modernisation of transport infrastructure, leveraging the PM Gati Shakti master plan, is a welcome move in unlocking the full potential of domestic tourism that has played a mission-critical role over the last 2 years.”



Rajeev Kale
President & Country Head, Holidays,
MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India)



Alok Bajpai
Group CEO & Co-founder, ixigo

“India is currently the third-largest start-up ecosystem in the world. Extension of tax incentives of start-ups will provide additional support to the industry and will help them recover from the losses and hardships faced during the pandemic. Ease of doing business 2.0 will empower upcoming entrepreneurs and give rise to a new generation of founders. We also welcome the tax incentives for startups until March 31, 2023. Startups are the backbone of a thriving economy and we are glad that the government is focused towards prioritising this sector. Digital learning and upskilling policies announced will address the industry-academia widening gap and nurture entrepreneurship at the grassroots level. International travel is likely to recover soon despite it being slowed by Omicron.”

HOTELS

“Overall the Budget 2022 is a positive & balanced budget, which is committed to inclusive growth of the overall economy while focusing on key sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure & women development. We are happy with the announcement regarding the extension of ECLGS up to March 2023 and increase in guarantee cover to ₹5 lakh crore is a welcome step that will bring a lot of relief to the battered hospitality sector and pent up demand post COVID. The announcement regarding National Ropeways Development Programme to be taken up in PPP mode will not only improve the connectivity but will also give impetus to travel and tourism sector. Secondly, the Budget has given a boost to the railway & infrastructure sector.”



Sonica Malhotra Kandhari
Joint Managing Director, MBD Group



Kush Kapoor
CEO, Roseate Hotels and Resorts

“The hospitality industry has been severely battered by three consecutive COVID-19 induced waves over the last two years. The extension of Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) moratorium by one year for the hospitality sector will come as a breather for the hotel industry players grappling with burden of loan repayment and uncertainties in revenue generation. The move will bolster the much-needed liquidity to the sector, which employs a large number of people across the country. It is appreciated that despite the revenue constraints faced by the government and its impact on the widening fiscal deficit, the government has taken cognisance of the strain that the hospitality sector is going through. This will help the hospitality sector tide over the cash crunch and working capital issue.”

“The budget seems to recognise the importance of hospitality industry. The announcement of the extension of ECLGS is a good move for the industry. The fact that the FM has gone ahead with more allocation for our industry will definitely go a long way to propel growth. We operate in the different tiers and understand how the last two years have impacted the overall industry. It will help in a big way, especially mid-sized hotels from the liquidity standpoint. The budget has emphasised growth aspects, both infra and sustainability. Overall the steps will certainly boost the tourism and hospitality sector. The announcement of Parvat Mala having eight ropeway projects will not only reduce congestion in hilly regions, but also boost tourism development. FM also informed about 400 Vande Bharat trains.”



Sarbendra Sarkar
Founder, Cygnitt Hotels and Resorts



Zubin Saxena
MD and Vice President Operations,
South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group

“We, at the Radisson Hotel Group, welcome the budgetary announcements made by Union Minister of Finance Nirmala Sitharaman while presenting the Union Budget for the year 2022-23 in the Lok Sabha. The minister proposed strategic financial assistance to enable the speedy recovery of the hospitality sector in the country. The extension of the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) with an increased cover of as many as ₹5 lakh crore till March 2023 for the hospitality sector has been seen as a positive move by the Union Finance Ministry. With domestic travel in the entire country picking up pace, we believe that the highway expansion plans across the country by the central government would further facilitate accessibility and strengthen this demand further.”

Looking forward for govt support

“Over the last few weeks, the government has been actively engaging with industry and other stakeholders to announce various measures to revive the economy. Tourism and hospitality play a pivotal role in economic development and the industry was anxiously waiting for some key announcements from the Union Budget 2022-23. The Union Finance Minister has considered the extension of the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) and expanding its guarantee cover by ₹50,000 crore to ₹5 lakh crore. This will be a great boon for the hospitality and travel trade sector, which has been adversely impacted.”



SP Jain
Managing Director, Pride Hotels



Manoj Agarwal
Head, Asset Management
InterGlobe Hotels

“Hospitality is one of the industries that still has not recovered from the impact of the pandemic, whose intensity has still not lessened across the globe. The third wave of virus restricted people from travelling and slowed down the recovery witnessed by the industry in the last quarter of previous year. We extol the announcement by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Union Budget of extending the ECLGS by ₹50,000 crore up to March 2023. Hopefully, this move will provide breathing space to the players by creating further liquidity and assisting the faster recovery of the hospitality sector.”

“By announcements made for the hospitality industry in Union Budget 2022, the Centre has shown that it understands the situation and plight of the industry, which is struggling to survive during the pandemic. Extension of the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) and allocation of additional ₹50,000 crore for hotels and hospitality sector till March 2023 has brought a wave of relief to the industry. The budget is also inclusive of aggressive infrastructure development with eight ropeways, an additional 25,000 km of National Highways and 400 new Vande Bharat trains, e-Passports among others.”



Colonel Manbeer Choudhary
Chairman & MD
Jewels Group of Hotels

AIRLINES



Ronojoy Dutta
Whole Time Director and Chief Executive
Officer, IndiGo

“The Union Budget 2022-23 appears to be growth-oriented by increasing capital outlay of ₹7.5 lakh crore, fiscal deficit capped at 6.4 per cent and efforts are being made to reduce compliance burden and improve ease of doing business. We expect the Union Budget would enable India to achieve growth estimate of 9.2 per cent. We welcome the new incentives of issuing of e-passport and introduction of digital currency. Having said that we were expecting tax concession to aviation industry in the forms of cut in ATF excise duty.”

CRUISE

“While the travel and tourism industry has suffered significantly during the ongoing pandemic, it has also received an encouraging boost in the form of domestic travel. This momentum must be retained and seems more likely to keep rising. We have had a good run in year just gone by and we look at retaining the momentum and levelling up in 2022. Indians are traveling in India and choosing local destinations to explore the less explored and niche hidden gems of the country. This is a positive sign as the numbers speak for themselves.”



Jurgen Bailom
CEO and President
Waterways Leisure Tourism

VISA



Shikhar Aggarwal
Joint MD, BLS International

“We would like to applaud the government for a progressive Union Budget for 2022-23 about the introduction of e-Passports by using an embedded chip, to be rolled out in 2022-23. A well-thought initiative by Union Minister for Finance Nirmala Sitharaman, this move will help boost the overall travel and tourism industry and also ease out the process for overseas travel and augment global mobility. We at BLS have been helping different governments across the world to roll out e-Passports and would be extremely glad to share our expertise with the Government of India.”

Trade opportunity in Birmingham

VisitBritain held an event in Delhi in conjunction with their roadshow for the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games campaign. It was intended to meet with travel trade people face-to-face to share destination knowledge about West Midlands and to educate them about the region as a whole.



Janice Alysius

The 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham will be held at venues across the West Midlands from July 28 to August 8. The sporting event provides a valuable opportunity to showcase Britain's tourism treasure, thus encouraging tourist visits and boosting business.

Keeping this in view, VisitBritain, the national tourism agency responsible for marketing Britain worldwide, recently held an event in Delhi to meet people from travel trade face-to-face to share destination knowledge about West Midlands, to let them know that Birmingham will host the Commonwealth Games this year, and to educate them about the region as a whole, revealed **Shuja Bin Mehdi**, B2B Manager-India, VisitBritain. Speaking about their plan, Mehdi said that the agency is planning several

activities with the travel trade people, starting with a series of roadshows in February and March. They will also conduct campaigns with an online travel boutique and a consumer campaign with MakeMyTrip. The main agenda is to promote the West Midlands as a region and make Birmingham the gateway to the region.

Moreover, VisitBritain is also planning a consumer awareness campaign with Jio, under which it has selected a couple of influencers who have travelled to the West Midlands last year in October. They are producing a series of videos, which will be launched as DigiVideos on Jio platforms in the second week of February. The purpose of the campaign is to bring awareness to wider Indian consumers of the activities and attractions available in the West Midlands, i.e., to see beyond Birmingham. And consider places such as Stratford-upon-Avon,



Shuja Bin Mehdi
B2B Manager-India
VisitBritain

Agency planning several activities with travel trade people, starting with roadshows in February

Coventry, and see Birmingham as the heart of England.

On the anticipated campaign, **Rajeev Sabharwal**, Chief Executive, Gaurav Travels said, “Due to



Rajeev Sabharwal
Chief Executive
Gaurav Travels

I believe if things return to normal, people would definitely visit Birmingham and the West Midlands

restrictions and fear, not many events took place during the past two years in the industry. I believe that if things return to normal people would definitely visit Birmingham and the West Midlands,



Varun Soni
Managing Director
Elevate Holidays

2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham will let travelers see areas of the city that are not so popular

especially for 2022 Commonwealth games. UK is among the top destinations where Indians visit, it is in fact my top 3 favorite destination. The weather, the people and the culture are very

welcoming. So, the 2022 Commonwealth Games will be an additional reason for people to visit the country. Travel will surely pick up if the borders reopen and people get good incentives at better rates. I think tourism will pick up when safety and connectivity improves”.

Varun Soni, Managing Director, Elevate Holidays, said, “When an international event occurs, it contributes to the economy of the country as well as helps create awareness and promotion of that destination. Similarly, the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham will let travelers see areas of the city that are not so popular. Additionally, India is one of the biggest source markets for UK. Last year, a lot of events were held in Manchester on similar platforms, which had contributed to good tourism in the city. I believe that tourists will find Birmingham appealing”.

Educational journey to Rann Utsav

In a first for any travel trade association, Gujarat Tourism invited TAFI Western India members for an educational tour to Rann Utsav – an event that is hugely popular with travellers. Chapter now has plans for more such tours to the state, keeping with its vision to promote domestic destinations.



Hazel Jain

Gujarat Tourism, for the first time in its history of educational tours, opened Rann Utsav to any Indian travel trade association and hosted members of the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) Western India Chapter recently.

Sharing details of the tour, **Jitul Mehta**, Chairman – Western India, TAFI, says, “We are fortunate to get complete support from Gujarat Tourism on this. The tour was a three nights, four days itinerary from January 27 to 30, with around 90 members. We initially planned this for the Western India chapter, but later decided that it was time to include other chapters as well. So, we invited Pune Chapter as well.”

The tour also included Ahmedabad (Heritage Walk, Gandhi



Jitul Mehta
Chairman
Western India, TAFI

We will organise more study trips for all other state chapters. This is part of TAFI's vision to focus more on domestic tourism

Ashram). Mehta adds, “This study tour offered us a practical experience which gives us confidence to sell Rann Utsav and



Manish Sharma
Chairman
Gujarat Chapter, TAFI

The new MD is active with the trade partners and understands the importance of their involvement in promoting a destination

Ahmedabad as a destination. We will organise more study trips for all other state chapters in support with Gujarat Tourism.” The tour



also included visits to both Tent City properties.

The team also interacted with Alok Kumar Pandey, the new Managing Director, Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Limited (TCGL) virtually. The national TAFI team also joined in virtually.

“The new MD shared his vision and his pro-activeness in developing tourism in Gujarat and working closely with TAFI. Nirav Munshi, Manager, Commercial & Skill Development (Events, Tours, Travels and Hotels), Gujarat Tourism, also spoke to us about how we can take this association with them further and create more synergy between the two entities.

This is part of TAFI's vision to focus more on domestic tourism,” Mehta says, adding, “Gujarat Tourism has offered to host us on a study tour to Saputara in August. We need

tour, says, “Gujarat is a very important destination for travel agents and tour operators. It not only has culture and history, but also new tourism products like Statue of Unity and new destina-



to plan the same. We are also discussing with other state and international tourism boards for other study tours.”

Manish Sharma, Chairman, Gujarat Chapter, TAFI, who was involved in the planning of this

tions that will appeal even to the youth. The Gujarat Chapter team proposed this tour to Gujarat Tourism and planned it as well. The new MD is active with the trade partners and understands the importance of their involvement in promoting a destination.”

More funds assigned for tourism

► Contd from page 1

left out of development gains. Such villages on the northern border will be covered under a

new Vibrant Villages Programme. Activities will include construction of village infrastructure, housing, tourist centres, road connectivity,

provision of decentralised renewable energy, DTH access of DD and education channels, and also support for livelihood generation.”

Allocations

Reddy shared that out of the ₹2,400 crores, ₹1,644 crores have been earmarked for the development of tourism infrastructure, including an outlay of ₹1,181.30 crore for the Swadesh Darshan Scheme.

The budget allocation will help the Ministry to complete ongoing projects under the scheme, and the infrastructure created will provide a better tourism experience for tourists at smaller and lesser-known destinations. A total of 55 new destinations are being planned to be developed under the Swadesh Darshan scheme and the Ministry will continue to have its focus on the Northeast, Himalayan region, tribal regions etc.

He also said that ₹235 crores have been allocated for the PRASHAD Scheme.

“A total of 37 projects have been sanctioned under the PRASHAD

Scheme, of which 17 projects have been completed,” he added.

Sharing details about the other initiatives, he said, “Under the various schemes run by MOT, we have developed 278 parking lots,

We need to be responsible to ensure that we will do our best to stay safe and keep our guests stay safe

278 toilets, 181 cafeterias and 34 sound and light shows among other things.”

Highlighting the importance of the Northeast from the tourism perspective, Reddy shared, “We are happy to see that the budget sup-

ports a major thrust for the region. The PM development initiative for the Northeast, PM-DevINE, being implemented through the Northeast Council, will fund infrastructure in the spirit of PM Gati Shakti and social development based on the health needs of the North East. This will specifically benefit the youth and women of the North East. An initial ₹1,500 crore has been made available. MOT has further allocated ₹227 crore for the North-Eastern States for the year 2022-23; ₹98 crore is earmarked under the Tribal Sub Plan for the creation of tourism infrastructure in the tribal areas,” he stated.

Sharing more details, he said, “An allocation of ₹130 crore is set apart for the development of iconic sites. The remaining allocation would be used for funding other schemes like capacity building for service providers, champion service sector schemes, information

technology, etc. and also to meet the establishment expenditure of the Ministry and its subordinate offices, the India Tourism Offices in the country and abroad.”

Around ten scheduled commercial banks have launched the new Loan Guarantee Scheme for the COVID-affected Tourism Service Sector (LGSCATSS). “Cheques/sanction letters have been distributed to some of the beneficiaries of LGSCATSS. An allocation of ₹12.50 crore is provided under MOT's Budget for 2022-23 for this purpose. The total allocation proposed under the scheme for five years is ₹62.5 crores,” shared the minister.

Emphasis on promotions

By leveraging the success of India's robust COVID-19 vaccination drive, “Ministry will continue to place focus on marketing and promoting both domestic as well as inbound tourism,” he said.

Budget allocation for difference schemes

(Amount in ₹Crore):

Sl No.	Schemes	BE 2021-22	RE 2021-22	BE 2022-23
1	Swadesh Darshan	630.00	262.00	1181.30
2	Overseas Promotion and Publicity, including MDA	524.02	89.00	341.00
3.	PRASHAD	153.00	150.95	235.00
4.	Domestic Promotion & Publicity	144.70	60.00	75.00
5.	Champion Services Sector Scheme (CSSS)	190.00	84.51	101.54
6.	Asstt. to Central Agencies	90.00	90.00	80.00
7.	Asstt. to IHMs/FCIs/ITM/NIWS	75.00	75.00	70.00
8.	Capacity Building for Service Provider	63.65	25.00	34.00
9.	Market Research	20.00	4.24	10.00
10.	Safe Tourist Destinations for Women	5.27	5.27	5.27
11	PIDDC	5.00	5.00	0.00
12	Development of Iconic Tourist Destinations	0.03	0.03	130.00
12	Loan Guarantee Scheme for Covid affected Tourism Services Sector	0.00	0.50	12.50
	Total (Scheme)	1900.67	851.50	2275.61
	Total (Non-Scheme)	126.10	118.30	124.39
	Grand Total	2026.77	969.80	2400.00

Effective February 14, there will be a uniform health protocol applicable to all international travellers. An agreement for recognition of vaccination certificates between India & 82 named countries has been released, according to the MoHFW.

Promoting Gujarat as destination

As many as 90 members from TAFI's Western India and Pune Chapters embarked on a four-day study tour to Gujarat in partnership with Gujarat Tourism. In Ahmedabad, they experienced activities such as heritage walk and Tent City and interacted with new Gujarat Tourism Managing Director.



Charters to prop up Goa tourism

With international charter flights starting in a small way, Goa hopes that its travel trade, including tourist guides and small and mid-sized hotels, will be able to conduct business in better way. At present, about 500 passengers are reaching Goa from Moscow every 10 days, and number is expected to increase in coming days.



Hazel Jain

There is good news and bad news coming from Goa. Nilesch Shah, President, Travel & Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG), reveals that international charters – the main artery for travel business in Goa – restarted from Russia and Ukraine in December 2021.

"From Moscow we are welcoming almost 500 passengers every 10 days and we expect this to in-

crease," Shah said. "However, the charters from Ukraine have paused for the time being due to the third wave and the civil unrest there," he added.

"Moreover, TUI was to send four flights per week from the United Kingdom – two from Manchester and two from Gatwick. This unfortunately got cancelled because of the third wave. They were to start from January 20, 2022. But we remain hopeful and with the new private airport in Mopa, which will



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

be operational by the next season, I think the charter movement will see a boom as there will be no restrictions," he added. Rescheduling these TUI charters looks difficult.

"The challenge is that charters take a long time to plan. Now that the one to Goa is cancelled, they will look at other countries for their charters that have similar climate such as Egypt or Sri Lanka," he says. "So, it looks difficult for now. But we could get



Travel & Tourism Association of Goa

them back in the next season," Shah said.

With the charters starting in a small way, the smaller hotels in Goa have opened up. "It has been tough for them. While charters stay for between 10 and 21 days on an average, the domestic tourist only stays in Goa for three days. Also, the domestic travellers' needs are very different. So, for the smaller hotels to shift from foreign tourists to domestic was challenging. It was difficult for them to cope with that market. Charters have also given a boost to tourist guides, who have started to get business. Despite challenges we are hopeful," he said.

Goa needs ease of doing business

TTAG recently conducted a bike rally in Goa, along with Goa Tourism. Speaking about the issues that

In Goa specifically, the government has given interest concession for six months of up to five per cent. They should continue this for another year

the trade continues to face in Goa, Shah says, "In Goa specifically, the government has given inter-

est concession for six month of up to five per cent. They should continue this for another year. For charter business, they had given a landing fee concession of Rs1 lakh. That should continue. Goa had pushed for free visas of up to ₹5 lakh and we hope it will be increased to more than five lakhs."

The main agenda that TTAG wants to push now is to allow ease of doing business – whether it is tourism licence for five years or permissions for events and weddings. "We have requested the Goa government to have a single-window clearance for events like they have done for film shoots. This will help especially with the new convention centre in Goa," Shah explains.



If the UK's additional Omicron measures had been in place at the beginning of November (prior to the variant's detection), the peak of the Omicron wave would have been delayed by only five days, with 3% fewer cases, finds a recently study published by Oxera and Edge Health.

Hoteliers to push for demands

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Restart and revival

Kachru agreed that they have had a difficult two years, except for a couple of months last year. "Firstly, the industry has to be together and see what is essential to survive in the industry. Then we also have some obligations towards our communities, partners, and sustainability. HAL is working with the federal and state governments to look at these objectives," he said.

Ups and downs

With new COVID-19 variants and waves, Kachru advised everyone to be cautious. "We need to be responsible to ensure that we will do our best to stay safe and keep our guests stay safe. That confidence level has to be created both at the shop floor level, at the government level, and at every single touch-point. Secondly, if we want more investment to come into our industry, we need long-term policies. Hence, we are asking our government to consider us as a viable industry, give us the industry status in states and make us part of the infrastructure status, so that we

get benefits and people who are investing here have some kind of certainty to get proper return on investment (RoI). Then there are issues directly linked to the pandemic, like the opening of

We need to be responsible to ensure that we will do our best to stay safe and keep our guests stay safe

international flights, which can provide confidence to tourists. We welcome the announcement made by the Union Finance Minister about e-passports, which will help people to travel outside India and send the right message," he said.

Growth on cards

Talking about the growth plans for RHG, he shared, "Radisson has been fortunate to have 104 hotels operating currently in India and we have another 60 under active de-

velopment. We are opening around 10 to 12 hotels every year. Our resort and overall getaway locations are doing well because of domestic tourists. In the last two years, domestic tourism has been a huge opportunity. Had we not focused initially on it, we probably would not have had so many hotels and any other source to survive. We are growing at the rate of almost one hotel a month, both in opening and signing new deals. Even during a difficult phase, we are introducing some other verticals, which would help us position ourselves better in the marketplace. We are introducing our luxury brand 'Collection' in this market and even talking about our other brands for the mid and upper-mid market. In addition, we are seriously looking at taking small luxury locations under our umbrella, even if the size is not big."

Talking about homestays, which is a market where many domestic markets are already operating, Kachru said, "We are seriously considering this market. We have to be proactive in the market and give what it needs, but not at the cost of our brand specs. We want



to just stay where our brand specifications allow us to be."

Trade connections

When it comes to working with the travel traders, he gives credit to them and says, "Fortunately, the combined strength of the travel trade and hospitality partners have helped each other to survive this period. We get business from OTAs and other travel partners as well.

The only missing piece is that there is no international business. Hence, travel agents who were specialising in the incentive business and MICE have been impacted."

Immediate openings

Saying that their hotels in hill stations are a priority at present, Kachru added, "We're getting very good rates and occupancies, and the flow is good. In Himachal, we

have recently opened a property in Dharamsala and will be opening one in Kufri. In Jammu & Kashmir, we are the only international brand to have signed seven hotels, and we opened last month two hotels there – a golf resort in Pahalgam and one property in Sonamarg. We are very active. We opened an absolute upscale hotel in Nasik. I feel things are moving very quickly and we want to keep that pace."

According to a research conducted by WTTC, if vaccine and booster rollouts continue at their current pace this year, and curbs on international travel are eased throughout the year, the sector could generate 58 million jobs and \$8.6 trillion in 2022.

Are you COVID safe?

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Travelport+ tools for better travel

Travelport has launched a new Trip Manager portal on Travelport+, offering travellers to service their trip and carry out fast and easy transactions on the go. With Smartpoint tool, now visitors can access new itinerary enhancements, including Trip Quote, to customise quotes, and Assisted Ticketing capabilities.



Nisha Verma

Travelport has introduced a latest update to its next-generation platform, Travelport+, by which customers using the latest version of Travelport's desktop tool, Smartpoint, can now access new itinerary enhancements, including Trip Quote, to customise itinerary quotes, and Assisted Ticketing capabilities.

Additionally, Travelport has launched a new Trip Manager portal on Travelport+, offering self-service for travellers to carry out fast and easy transactions for their trip on the go and continues with its Intelligent Storefront mission by making it easier for agents to understand offers and compare brands with similar attributes on a like-for-like basis.

Agencies using Travelport can also better manage the hotel bookings

they sell with a simple self-service rules engine, the Content Optimizer.

These enhanced and modern retailing tools are paving the way to revolutionise travel retail, modernise the booking experience, and make it easier for agents to offer more choice and deliver better service to their travellers, said **Kyle Moore**, Global Head, Customer Strategy & Marketing for Travelport.

Self-service

Speaking on how the new tools would aid travel agents, Moore shares that with automated exchanges, agents using Travelport+ can generate 50 per cent (or more) time savings on tasks like processing refunds or exchanges. "Travellers get a 'self-service', kiosk-style experience to manage their exchanges - while avoiding the 'waiting for the next available agent' user experiences. It gives travellers the ability to eas-



Kyle Moore
Global Head - Customer
Strategy & Marketing, Travelport

ily add extras to their trip, make changes on their own or add their information. It allows us to save time and preserve resources. Currently, Sabre and Amadeus do not have a comparable product that offers this kind of self-service option for travellers," he said.

Ease of business

Moore elaborates that Smartpoint on Travelport+ benefits agency training programmes for new entrants into travel (for advisors). "Smartpoint cloud works well for

agencies' change management. Three things make Smartpoint better, first is the extensible platform with many additional solutions available, and multiple ways to customise solutions to our particular needs. Secondly, it makes us more efficient because we can integrate many of the complex tasks needed to book and manage traveller needs into one workflow.

With the recent debut of the latest tools and functionalities, there are 150 per cent more brands, agents can compare - making up-selling easier

Also, it has rich multi-source content integration (Travelport has over 400 airlines, including 120

LCCs and more than 150k hotels) so that agents can match the quality of traveller's searches. Agents can take advantage of Smartpoint Cloud advancements that are only going to be available with Travelport+," he shares.

He further explains that Trip Quote offers truly customised itinerary quotes that help agents become faster at providing travellers with customised itineraries. "Faster Assisted Ticketing capabilities will streamline complex ticketing and exchange tasks (50 per cent or more time savings) as well as support refunds and exchanges," he says.

New business solutions

Moore shares that through simplified access to multi-source content, Travelport is supporting more content onto virtual shelves in the travel marketplace. "With the recent debut of the latest tools and functionalities, there are 150 per cent

more brands, agents can compare - making up-selling easier. With Travelport+, agents will also be able to easily identify upsell offers with NDC and ATPCO fares, for a simpler, more modern browsing and shopping experience. Travelport is also implementing new technology to help manage itineraries originating from diverse sources," he adds.

Indian market

Moore says that the Indian market remains a priority market for Travelport.

"While government and travel restrictions remain a potential threat for travel recovery in the near future, we fully expect a strong recovery and will support our agency customers and air partners with the travel retailing tools and capabilities needed to help them work more efficiently while delivering exceptional service to travellers," he claims.

FITUR 2022 superhit with traders

With over one lakh guests, this year's international tourism fair, FITUR 2022, exceeded all expectations. Number of exhibitors and attendees nearly equalled pre-pandemic levels, making fair a success and positioning Madrid as a global hub for the international tourism community.



TT Bureau

FITUR Madrid hosted the International Tourism Trade Fair, FITUR 2022, from January 19 to 23. The results show efforts of the entire tourism industry value chain to create new prospects, allowing it to look forward to a robust revival in 2022.

The trade fair was crucial in regaining business and turnover, positioning Madrid as a global hub for the international tourism community and giving a message of confidence and strength to the entire world.

The participation at FITUR 2022 exceeded initial expectations. Over its first three days, there were 81,193 trade attendees from 127 countries, which was double the number from 2021. There were also 30,000 general visitors at the weekend, taking

up the number of attendees to over one lakh mark.

The online participation of professionals from around the world was also record breaking.



With FITUR LIVEConnect, the fair offered a hybrid format with a longer season and more geographic coverage.

A total of 33,286 people registered, a 10 per cent increase over initial predictions. The number of unique users on the FITUR website was up 90 per cent reaching 150,000 users, twice as many as in 2021.

The response from companies, countries and destinations was excellent. This was evident in the 6,933 participants from 107

countries. There were 600 exhibitors and official representation by 70 countries, led by the Dominican Republic, which this year, under the slogan Has it all, deployed extraordinary resources as a FITUR Partner Country.

This diverse group of participants contributed to making FITUR an edition that has had a significant impact on the sector's revitalisation. The enormous number of visitors to FITUR is believed to have boosted Madrid's economy by more than €150 million.

Another highlight this year was the strong institutional support for FITUR. The presence of Spain's Royal Family put the finishing touch on the opening day once again.

At FITUR, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez announced the release of the second edition of the



Spanish Government's Tourism Sustainability Plan. UNWTO representatives, tourism ministers from 21 countries and four delegations, seven Spanish government ministries, regional presidents, tourist councillors from Spanish regions and mayors from several Spanish cities also attended the fair.

There were 3,981 accredited journalists from 40 nations, nearly twice the number in May of 2021.

The 1,200 postings made on the fair's channels to promote the event increased FITUR's social media influence. The fair's social media channels garnered

over six million impressions and 90,000 interactions. For two days in Spain and one day in the Dominican Republic, the hashtag #FITUR2022 trended on Twitter. The hashtag's total online reach topped 600 million potential impacts.

Apart from the diverse content presented in the eight FITUR halls by a variety of companies, countries and destinations, the fair also organised hundreds of activities, forums, presentations and initiatives to stimulate the market within its zone.

In addition, FITUR was also the platform for public presentation of HELIXA Experience Center to tourism sector companies and professionals. HELIXA Experience Center is the result of IFEMA MADRID's innovation programme to promote the adoption of cutting-edge technology in the trade fair business.



Mr Greesh Bindra

VP Operations, The Suryaa, New Delhi

“The auditors were very professional and touched points that were very relevant, more so after we have gone through these trying times. It was delightful to see the lead auditors do a through back of the house round and give us some valid inputs.”

Mr Kush Kapoor
CEO, Roseate Hotels & Resorts

“To get certified by QualStar, an accredited body that is recognised in over 100 countries, was very reassuring, both for the hotel and the guests. It helped us examine the standard and protocols put in place for Covid and assess their efficiency from a fresh perspective.”



For more information, contact:

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Paradigm shift in vacations

Over last two years, we have ridden roller coaster. Owing to pandemic, travel has turned topsy-turvy, and has redefined multiple times since March 2020. We still do not know for how long this will last, but that will not deter us from going on vacations. Here are few possibilities how the vacations would look like in 2022.

During the last two years, which witnessed three waves of COVID-19, people travelled to destinations that had simple travel rules, they drove a lot (mostly to nearby places), vacationed in villas, paid attention to hygiene wherever they stayed, preferred wide open spaces, postponed intercontinental travel and saw India like never before (and were not embarrassed to admit it on social media). So, how will travel look like in 2022?

People will travel amid new COVID-19 waves

By now we know that like a regular Windows version, new COVID-19 variants may keep coming. We do not know for how long this will last. But most people will not care by then. They will still travel amid new pandemic waves.

A McKinsey Research reveals travelling to be the second most desired activity. We saw that during the brutal second wave



in April and May 2021, people were struggling for oxygen and hospital beds. Two months later, people were struggling for hotel beds. But people continued to travel. Travel is in people's DNA. They will pause, but they will not stop.

People will travel to places that are near to them

How far will they travel in 2022? Like in 2020 and 2021, mostly nearer than far. But a bit farther. So, Indians will travel a lot within the country because they will consider it easier, safer and less

complicated. And they will not be shy to share with people on Instagram that the usual summer holidays in the Canary Islands have been replaced by regular trips to a swanky villa in Alibag.

They will continue to travel to Maldives, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Dubai and Oman, as curbs ease between the waves. Asia has been in limbo for almost two years now, so when it opens, expect a deluge of visitors. Apart from travel curbs, another important determinant would be flight availability and airfare.

People will travel to places that are on their wishlist

In the past two years, travel wish lists have been refined many a time. The fact is that people have had time to figure out what kind of experiences are important for them and what are not. Surveys had shown at the start of the pandemic that people will prefer wide-open spaces post-pandemic. While that was true in the initial stages of the pandemic, the later stages proved that many travellers don't care. So, if Madrid is on their wishlist and it's easy to travel to, they will go there and crowds are damned.

Travellers will demand flexibility in plans

This is going to be a very important demand from travellers. They will want to know what happens to their money if another variant brings in curbs. Cancellation and rescheduling policies will continue to be looked into with a fine toothcomb. Booking a trip through an OTA will

come with its own set of problems as complete changes to a complex programme will demand human intervention. Travel companies that can handle these changes will at-

During the second COVID wave, people were struggling, but two months later, people continued to travel

constantly changing rules and restrictions that travellers must navigate, and that will continue to exist through most of 2022. If they have had a great experience with an online site, they will continue to give it a shot. But if an offline agent helped them create a memorable trip, they will prefer to continue with such an agent. Going to every hotel website, or checking every country's immigration website to find out what their safety protocols are, will continue to be a massive waste of time.



Abhik Dutta
Director
The Wanderers

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

tract more business. But compared to the early stages of the pandemic when hotels were going overboard with their flexibility, many will want their usual cancellation policies to kick in.

People will book travel through those they trust

Trust will play a huge role in 2022, thanks largely to the morass of

India hub of medical tourism

Sumit Banerjee, Academic Administrator, Global Group of Institutions, discusses emerging medical tourism industry in India. Cost, quality and waiting time are just a few reasons that contribute to growth of industry, and over time, India has established itself as premier destination for people seeking best clinical treatment.

Medical Tourism (also known as Medical Value Travel, Health Tourism or Wellness Tourism) is the rapidly growing practice of seeking healthcare services in other parts of the world. In India, healthcare services and offerings are divided into three primary categories: **Medical treatment:** Includes heartcare, organ transplantation, orthopaedics, neurosciences, oncology and bariatrics, among other things. **Wellness and rejuvenation:** Cosmetic surgery, stress alleviation, spa treatments, and other services aimed at rejuvenation or aesthetic purposes. **Alternative Medicine:** Treatment to seek Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy (AYUSH) services.

India presently has about 18 per cent of the global medical tourism market, according to the Union

Ministry of Tourism. Over the years, India has become a premier and attractive destination for travellers from across the globe to attain the best clinical treatment, recharge and rejuvenate. Medical tourism in India is expanding at a rate of 30 per cent each year. The cost, quality, waiting time and other aspects contribute to the development. Medical treatment costs in India range between 10 per cent and 20 per cent of those in the United States and one-sixth of those in Europe.

India is considered one of Asia's leading medical tourism destinations. The country has several advantages, which include specialised professionals, infrastructure and state of the art facilities. Owing to all this, the country has seen an influx of patients from the Middle East, South Asian countries, Europe and Africa for treatments for multi-organ transplants, cardiac care, cosmetic surgeries,

hip replacements, cancer surgeries and gastronomical procedures. As per a FICCI report, over

India presently has about 18% of the global medical tourism market, according to the Ministry of Tourism

500,000 foreign patients come annually for treatment in India.

The Government of India has been taking crucial steps to establish the country as the hub of medical tourism. Some of the key initiatives include:

The e-Medical and Medical Attendant Visas: The e-Tourist Visa

launched in 2014 has expanded to include medical visits and medical attendant visas in order to streamline the travel procedures and protocols for allowing multiple entries and long-term stays of medical tourists. Additionally, separate immigration counters and facilitation desks have also been set up at major Indian airports to provide end to end support and facilitation.

The National Medical and Wellness Tourism Board: The National Medical and Wellness Tourism Board has been constituted under the chairmanship of the Union Minister for Tourism to provide a dedicated and comprehensive institutional framework to promote and enhance medical tourism, including the Indian system of medicine covered by AYUSH.

Digital Enablement: The Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Services Export Promotion

Council (SEPC) have developed a healthcare portal for seekers and potential medical tourists from across the globe which functions as a comprehensive information site covering hospital-related and travel-related information on India. The portal covers 124 accredited medical facilities across 93 medical centres, 30 Ayurveda and wellness centres and one special care centre.

Fiscal Support and Non-Fiscal Initiatives: To encourage medical tourism, the Union Ministry of Tourism aims to provide financial aid to approved Wellness Tourism Service Providers and Medical Tourism Service Providers under the Marketing Development Assistance Scheme (MDA). The government has been taking initiatives to promote indigenous medicine and related therapeutic procedures. The Union AYUSH Ministry has recently been al-

located ₹2,970 crore in the Union Budget for FY 2021-22, as compared to ₹2,122 crore for FY 2020-21, tapping the centuries old wisdom of spiritual philosophy. The Union Tourism Ministry has constituted a Wellness and Medical Tourism Promotion Committee and chalked out detailed guidelines to promote wellness and medical tourism as niche tourism products among international tourists.



Sumit Banerjee
Academic Administrator at the Global Group of Institutions in West Bengal

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

Re-imagining travel

Tourism and hospitality sectors are constantly innovating in a bid to smoothen distribution channel and how travellers consume content. This appetite to improve and simplify has only intensified since COVID-19. TRAVTALK takes a brief look at what's happening on start-up front and kind of encouragement it is receiving.



Hazel Jain

The pandemic seems to have been a blessing in disguise for start-ups around the world, especially in the tourism industry. For many, it was an opportunity amid a crisis as they tried to resolve the challenges that COVID-19 posed to the business.

Ankit Kedia, Founder and Lead Investor at Capital A, feels there is dynamism in the Indian start-up arena today. "With the year ahead expected to push the Indian economy towards a revival, there is likely to be good growth in most sectors. However, the beneficiaries will be industries with faster and widespread digitisation. Similarly, infrastructure development is bound to get a big push from the public as well as the private sector in the next few years. SaaS companies will be another high-potential investment area. Today, the Indian domestic SaaS market

is witnessing a rapid surge in demand from almost every segment. Digital technology is going to be the key enabler of efficiency and market dominance, and innovative SaaS start-ups that build the right solutions will be a good investment option," he says.

Explaining how Software as a Service (or SaaS) products are giving companies an edge, **Sanjay Ghare**, Founder & Managing Director, Vervotech, said, "The Union Tourism industry is going through a digital transformation. The pan-

demic has pushed the transformation further. SaaS-based solutions for TMCs, B2B, B2C, and DMCs like white label solutions, payment gateway aggregations, and supplier aggregations help travel businesses leverage them for digital transformation."

What are some of the ways in which SaaS is helping travel businesses and travellers at large? "SaaS-based solutions provide cost-effective solutions to businesses and allow them to go to market faster. Today's travellers

need everything at their fingertips and also need flexible options," Ghare added.

Encouraging bright minds

Seeing the success rate of bright minds in the country, many companies are offering encouragement by way of opportunities and/or financial support. For example, as many as six cutting-edge innovators have been selected to partner with the Indian Hotels Company (IHCL) to pilot new cost-effective and climate-smart cooling technologies.

This year's Union Budget too delivered something for start-ups in India. **Chirag Agarwal**, Co-Founder of TravClan, says, "Being a B2B travel tech start-up, we are happy to see that the ministry has prioritised our needs and has extended the tax incentive until March 2023. This is a relief for new businesses such as ours to sustain, and it will also help a lot of new start-ups to take off. From a travel perspective, since travel agents are considered our primary partners, we welcome the well-deserved loans that are being introduced to give this

sector some relief. The pandemic has been tough on the industry, and this decision will not only assist our business, but also impact the entire industry on the whole."

The prediction is that start-ups that reach the other side of the current year will stand strong and have a large market for them to capture. **Aditya Sanghi**, Co-Founder, Hotelogix, another start-up in India, feels that in 2021, hotels will learn to stay relevant with technology. "This will impact their tech adoption decisions in 2022. Implementation of cloud-based hotel property management system (PMS) will be a boon in disguise for efficient multi-property operations as chain brands are in consolidation mode. This will help them address issues such as workforce shortages, while offering system access to their remote employees. There will be an exponential demand for touchless and AI-driven solutions to enhance the guest experience," he said.



Ankit Kedia
Founder and Lead
Investor at Capital A



Sanjay Ghare
Founder & MD
Vervotech



Chirag Agarwal
Co-Founder
TravClan



Aditya Sanghi
Co-Founder
Hotelogix

Trending towards sustainability

Not-for-profit online platform, The Sigmund Project is open to those people who have an idea to advance global tourism industry. As 2022 begins, Sigmund has received more than 100 ideas. Since its launch, online platform has received over 18,000 unique visitors to its site from as many as 108 countries.



Hazel Jain

Launched in June 2021, The Sigmund Project is travel and tourism's first digital not-for-profit start-up dedicated for innovation and collaboration. Since its launch, the online platform has received over 18,000 unique visitors to the site from 108 countries.

Developed by industry expert **Alan Elliott Merschen**, The Sigmund Project is open to anyone who has an idea to advance the global tourism industry, be it from small entrepreneurs to MNCs to accommodation providers in transportation sector to varities and start-ups. As 2022 begins, over 100 ideas were received by Sigmund through its Open Source programme on the website.

"We definitely see a trend towards sustainability based on



Alan Elliott Merschen
Founder
The Sigmund

Many of the creative ideas we see include an equal focus on profit, people, and the planet

consumer interest. Many of the creative ideas we see, include an equal focus on profit, people, and the planet. We are encouraged to see that everyone who submits

an idea has a clear understanding of how their idea relates to all three disciplines, as well as which UNSDGs will be improved as a result of their idea coming to fruition," said Merschen.

Are there any submissions from the Indian subcontinent? Merschen replied in the affirmative! "Two really interesting submissions have come in from India," he said. One of them is a booking platform called Ecoplore, started by Prerna Prasad, which promotes only those hotels that are made of mud, wood, bamboo, stone, or any local architecture and maintains at least 33 per cent greenery on its campus. The other is an idea of proper management of non-biodegradable waste generated on houseboats in India.

While Merschen is based in the US, his interests have always been international. "This year will



be a big year for us as we plan to launch a uniquely structured support programme for entrepreneurs. We are in the early days of building this. What we are certain of is that the programme will serve early to mid-stage entrepreneurs in tourism, travel and hospitality who are looking for creative capital, that is, not just finance, but also technical assistance, training, mentors, technology, public relations and marketing. The idea is that col-

laboration might be the next step. Also, we see large, established companies looking for solutions too," he said.

A gap in the industry

Given that the industry has seen such drastic changes in the travel landscape and traveller behaviour in the last two years of the pandemic, there are obviously some gaps in the industry that do not address the challenges. Merschen said, "Travel and tourism

are notoriously low-tech, and so we believe there are huge competitive advantages for those innovators who understand the power of machine learning and Artificial Intelligence for their existing or new business concepts. For example, protecting the likeness (in photographs and videos) of certain indigenous groups has been an issue in our industry for a long time now. There are certain cultures that require a person's likeness to not appear in any promotional material, website and brochure among others, once they have passed away. We have received an idea that proposes using Machine Learning, AI and facial recognition technology to empower indigenous communities in a bid to identify and take down images and videos on the internet that they wish to be taken down. This has been a manual, technical and time-intensive process."

EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



FEBRUARY 2022

Date	Event	Time
17-19	India Travel Mart - Dehradun	9:00 am
19-20	Chicago Travel & Adventure Show	9:30 am
22	New Zealand Tourism Webinar	11:00 am
23	Cordelia Cruise Webinar	3:00 pm
25	Austria Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
25-27	India Travel Mart - Goa	9:00 am
25-27	Holiday Expo Vadodara	9:00 am
26-27	Travel and Adventure Show	9:00 am
28	Singapore Tourism Webinar	TBA

MARCH 2022

3-4	Luxury Travel Mart	9:00 am
3-6	Travel Exhibition	10:00 am
4-6	India Travel Mart Ahmedabad	9:00 am
4-6	Travel & Tourism Fair- Bengaluru	10:00 am
4-6	India International Travel Mart Kolkata	10:00 am
4-6	India Travel Mart - Jammu	10:00 am

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

Tourism with responsibility

CGH Earth changed how luxury was perceived in hotels around the world. Beginning with an idea of business that also protected environment in 1988, today the brand is a flagbearer of sustainability and responsible tourism.



Nisha Verma

It was in the year 1988 that CGH Earth got the opportunity to venture into Bangaram Island in Lakshadweep, shared **Michael Dominic**, CEO, CGH Earth.

"It was a pristine island and the ecosystem was very fragile. We knew that it had to be sustained for a long time. Hence, protecting the environment was our primary motive which overrides everything else, and all our decisions are based on how we protect the environment," he said.

"When we were there, one of the terms of the contract were that we had to employ 80 per cent of locals. Training them was different than training conventional hotel staff in white shirts and ties. We asked them to come dressed in their local costumes. However, the big learning is



Michael Dominic
CEO, CGH, Earth

that their service came from the heart. This evolved into our DNA of making CGH Earth and creating our core values," Dominic added. "The logistics in Lakshadweep were quite erratic, including irregular flights and ships. We depend on the local population for our supplies which created a symbiotic relationship between the local population and the hotel resulting in a win-win situation for both," he said.

"They became major stakeholders, and today, tourism is

an important part of their lives," he added. With this learning, Dominic shared, they came to mainland India. "We started our first property, Spice Village in Kerala, and it was a paradigm shift from traditional hospitality. We realised that it was the experience that made people come back, not the built space. In short, responsible tourism is about building better places for people to live in and better places to visit," he revealed.

When asked if sustainability pays, Dominic said, "Today, CGH is a successful model because sustainable and responsible tourism pays. It gave us the impetus or the visibility because we are in that space of responsible tourism."

He added, "Otherwise, I am sure we would have been just another hotel and not noticed. We have people coming to our properties across the world,

including international celebrities. Today, we are internationally known for our responsibility and sustainability. Everyone who comes here tells us to

We started our first property, Spice Village in Kerala, and it was a paradigm shift from traditional hospitality

stay as we are. This has remained our most important learning experience."

Dominic stressed that it gives them a lot of confidence that the future is in responsible tourism. "Responsible tourism is about making better places for people to live in and better places to visit," he concluded.

Agents of positive change

In a scenario in which there is no guarantee of flights not getting cancelled, travesties of travel agents is at an all-time high, juggling between customers and airlines. UFTAA is making sure that they convey plight of customers to IATA, airlines and the government.



Nisha Verma

The travel industry is going through a bad patch, said **Sunil Kumar**, President, UFTAA. "This uncertainty is bothering the industry and stakeholders. We had a good time in November and beginning December, but then everything started falling flat. Thereafter, the fear of Omicron and families travelling together has created a scare," he added.

"I think this will continue for a couple of months and can eventually lead to a herd immunity. We don't want to lose our summer business this year, and starting March we all want to be busy. There have been so many inquiries from people for April-May-June," he said.

Looking forward
Passengers have become smart, shared Kumar. "Unlike



Sunil Kumar
President, UFTAA

earlier, they don't want to pay in advance for a travel in May or June. They are just getting ready with no financial commitment. There is no ticketing from our side. However, we will have to wait and watch," he added.

UFTAA activities
Kumar said that there are several UFTAA activities going on at present. "We have been having a lot of meetings online and our debate with airlines or IATA have not been very effective because we are online. Unless

we sit across the table and put back our fights to debate on certain issues, we are not going to see brighter part of it."

He highlighted that UFTAA's forecast is turning true. "Airlines are getting funded by the sales of tickets for a period, which even they are not aware if flights would operate. So there is a lot of accumulation of resources via a potential sale. People have paid money, which might not come back. UFTAA has been voicing its concerns. There must be settlement as you fly, and the money gets transferred when the flight takes off or is ready to take off, not before. That's the quintessence of our entire submission to IATA, and to the airlines," he elucidated.

Explaining the challenges faced by customers, he said, "They pay full money upfront and one day before or one week before



they know that the flight is not taking off. That is when they come to us running around for another ticket. They don't understand the challenge we have. We can't adjust the past money with another ticket on another airline, as that requires a process."

What next
Kumar said that they are looking for consistency and sustainability. "Kudos to all the agents, in a country like India, where the industry earnings are not very high and yet, our agencies have kept themselves active online or offline and made themselves available to the customers. Hence, at least

the customers in India must turn their heads in favour of travel agents, because we stood the test of time and we are not taking away their money," he claimed.

Price hike
Kumar said that they can't even explain to the customers why a ticket to USA, costing one lakh earlier, is costing two and a half

We have been having online meetings but debate with airlines or IATA have not been effective in absence of face-to-face meets

lakhs today. "The reason for this is more demand than supply. Hence, some airlines have taken advantage of this," he added.

IMTEX rescheduled

Indian Machine Tool Manufacturers' Association has refixed its flagship event 'IMTEX Forming & Tooltech' keeping in view COVID-19 crisis around the world. The Indian Machine Tool Manufacturers' Association metal forming show 'IMTEX



V Anbu
Director General & CEO
IMTMA and BIEC

Forming & Tooltech', along with Digital Manufacturing, will be held at the Bengaluru International Exhibition Centre from June 16 to 21. IMTEX with a focus on metal cutting will be held from January 19 to 25 in 2023. "The decision (to reschedule the event) was not easy for us," said **V Anbu**, Director General & CEO, IMTMA and BIEC.

Focus on business with safety

Hospitality industry was among the hardest hit by the pandemic. However, the industry is gradually adjusting to the new normal, as hotels are now more vigilant about guest and employee safety and focusing on development to gain lost ground as soon as possible.



Janice Alysius

COVID-19 affected almost every sector in the world, but the hotel industry was among the hardest hit. This was because people were not allowed to travel domestically or internationally, or go to restaurants and cafes. They also cut back on their spending during the pandemic except for basic necessities.

Abhishek Pani, Hotel Manager, Novotel Vijayawada Varun, said their hotel is gradually adjusting to the new normal, but outlined a few challenges the hotel is still facing.

Introduction of technology: Contactless methods have reduced guest interactions and hence reduced the chance of creating meaningful guest experiences.

Decrease in revenue: There has been a significant downfall

in revenue generation due to various state/central restrictions on gatherings.

Unforeseen expenses: Government mandated social distancing and cleaning ordinances incurred higher fixed and variable expenses.

Renewed lockdowns: When everything is reopened, people do not observe proper social distance protocol. The result is a renewed lockdown of cities with significant obstacles for the hospitality industry.

Pani said that Accor, in collaboration with Bureau Veritas, has developed "ALLSAFE" protocols, which will be implemented across all operating hotels to ensure uniformity of cleaning and sanitisation.

Ravi Rai, Cluster General Manager, Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach and Bheemili Resort,



Abhishek Pani
Hotel Manager
Novotel Vijayawada Varun

We witnessed an increase in staycation and transient bookings

managed by Accor, said that the hotels also follow the ALLSAFE protocol. "Every single touch point is monitored by a team. A daily audit ensures that safety standards are not compromised," he said.



Ravi Rai
Cluster General Manager,
Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach

A large number of people have been motivated to take a revenge trip

Speaking of the hotel business, Pani said, "Our hotel experienced a decent recovery post the second wave of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. Specifically, the months of August and September saw a

good number of guests visit the hotel. In the last quarter, as the Vijayawada market is heavily dependent on inbound visitors, we witnessed an increase in staycation and transient bookings. As a result of back-to-back celebrations and the festive season, F&B revenues also spiked. However, we have seen our business slow down at the beginning of 2022. For example, in January, we received cancellation notices from two corporate groups due to surges in current cases."

Rai said, "A large number of people have been motivated to take revenge trips. In addition to regular vacations, workations have also been popular. We are doing well in terms of business and have been able to achieve spectacular revenue growth since 2019. We have seen an increase in leisure and corporate bookings this year due to companies and families trying to

fill in the gap from last year. MICE events that were cancelled last year have also begun again this year. It appears that people are adopting and adhering to COVID protocols and plan to proceed with their events and meetings as planned."

Novotel Vijayawada Varun also introduced monthly guest engagement events to bring cheer to their loyal guests. The hotel's design has not changed, but safety measures have been strengthened at all touch points to ensure safety. The hotel tends to focus more on staycations, wellness packages and food deliveries.

Rai said, "In hospitality, business strategy is influenced by customer behaviour. Our loyalty programme allows you to 'unlock your dream' stay, inviting guests to discover the best of these destinations, unlocking the finest stays and personalised experiences."

Mélange of tourism and academia

Third International Conference on Enterprise and Entrepreneurialism, organised by Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi recently, witnesses newer research insights and best practices with viable solutions being presented on varied topics related to tourism and hospitality.



Nisha Verma

Jamia Millia Islamia recently organised the third International Conference on Enterprise and Entrepreneurialism in New Delhi from January 28 to January 30. The conference, supported by the Union Ministry of Tourism, comprised around 20 focused sessions on the industry, which included three plenary and five technical tracks of discussions, discourses, deliberations and workshops.

The event saw newer research insights and best practices with viable solutions being presented on varied topics related to tourism and hospitality, including Entrepreneurial Opportunities, Women as Entrepreneurs, Contemporary Issues and Innovation and Technology. The conference focused on offering the participants a unique opportunity to discuss, deliberate and interact, so that they can un-

veil facets of entrepreneurship in tourism and hospitality.

The Chief Guest at the valedictory session, **Dr Venu Vasudevan**, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary, Higher Education and Tourism, Government of Kerala, congratulated Jamia Millia Islamia for organising a comprehensive, well thought out and extremely relevant international conference.

He posited that there is a great need to encourage community involvement and women participation in entrepreneurial activities for a resilient recovery in the tourism and hospitality sector keeping in view the COVID-19 situation.

Other guests of honour included Prof. **Syed Inayat Ali Zaidi**, former Dean Faculty of Humanities and Languages, Jamia Millia Islamia. Zaidi outlined the traditional wisdom of Indian business communities as the bulwark of



Dr Venu Vasudevan
IAS, Additional Chief Secretary
Higher Education and Tourism, Kerala

There is a need to encourage women's role in entrepreneurial activities

entrepreneurial zeal in India that weathered many great upheavals since historic times. Echoing the same thought, **Anil K Rajput**, Joint Secretary, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI), shared the successful



Najma Akhtar
Vice Chancellor
Jamia Millia Islamia

Jamia has always striven to bring out the best research and collaborative projects

entrepreneurial models of distant, off the beaten track destinations and the need to replicate these.

The conference focused on public engagement and discourse on the issues of the revival and

resilience of entrepreneurship amid COVID-19.

The online conference was attended by prominent authorities from the Ministry of Tourism, National Tourism Associations and Academia. From the tourism industry, there was **Rajiv Mehra**, President, IATO and Hon. Secretary of FAITH; **Dr Madhu Chandok**, President, Women's Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry (WICCI), Delhi Chapter and **Sonia Singh**, Co-Founder Nippon Taiyo Hospitality.

Padma Shri Prof. **Najma Akhtar**, Vice Chancellor, Jamia Millia Islamia, in her inaugural address, stressed upon the need for an active collaboration of the industry and the academia. She said that the university has always striven to bring out the best research and collaborative projects with the practitioners making it an institution at the forefront and aspiring

evermore to deliver solutions even at the international level.

Dr Sarah Hussain, the Conference Chair and Head of Department, also addressed the delegates. **Prof. SP Bansal**, Hon. Vice Chancellor of the Central University of Himachal Pradesh, highlighted the paradigm shift that has taken place in the new normal with the new trends of staycations and other practices.

Vinod Zutshi, former Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism, was the Guest of Honour. **Dr Nusrat Yasmeen**, Assistant Professor, DTHM, Jamia Millia Islamia, released the Book of Abstracts. Prof. **Parikshat Singh Manhas**, Director, School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Faculty of Business Studies, University of Jammu, gave the keynote address. **Prof. Nimit Chowdhary**, DTHM, Jamia Millia Islamia gave the vote of thanks.

ANANTA HOTELS AND RESORTS

Jaipur
GAGAN KATYAL joins Ananta Hotels and Resorts in Jaipur at the corporate office as their Corporate General Manager – Sales & Marketing. Katyal will look after the overall sales and marketing of Ananta Hotels and Resorts, revenue management and central reservation system. Ananta Hotels and Resorts has a wide range of products ranging from luxury resorts to small and boutique hotels. Mostly located in leisure destinations. Prior to this, Katyal was worked with a slew of organisations, including ITC Ltd, looking after Sales & Marketing for ITC Rajputana Jaipur.



IRIS REPS

Mumbai
HARISH ACHARYA has joined as the Executive Director at IRIS Reps. With over two decades of experience in Travel and Hotel Industry, his expertise lies in Marketing and Sales, multi-tasking, product handling, public relations with a vast network in industry. In the past he has managed Sales and Business development with leading organisations such as Accor Group, Venetian, Marina Bay Sands, Jetair, VFS, Le Meridien and Cox and Kings. With IRIS, his prime focus and responsibility will be for developing, executing and sustaining IRIS Reps product strategy.



Delhi
SANDEEP RAGHAV has been appointed as Business Development Director at IRIS Reps. Bringing over 20 years of experience in the industry and an expert in business development for leisure packages, corporate travel management, outbound leisure tour & MICE. He has successfully strategised, co-created and executed business for brands such as Marriott International, Conrad Maldives, Frasers Hospitality, Accor Group, Jumeirah Hotels. His role in IRIS Reps will be to acquire new accounts and also handle and sustain the existing portfolios for IRIS Reps.



NOVOTEL HOTELS & RESORTS

Goa
ROHAN SAMARTH has been appointed as Director of Sales & Marketing at Novotel Hotels & Resorts. He will be responsible for the entire management of the sales and marketing programmes, along with implementation of strategies and budgets for the two five-star properties in Goa. He brings with him 10 years of experience in Revenue Management and knows the Goa market from his past association as Director of Revenue with Novotel Hotels and Resorts Goa in 2016. His last assignment was a corporate role as Director of Revenue and Distribution for ibis and ibis styles India.



NOVOTEL

Chennai
RAYAN ARANHA has been appointed as the General Manager for Novotel Chennai OMR, ibis Chennai OMR and Novotel Chennai SIPCOT. An industry veteran, Rayan has over two decades of hospitality experience in Sales, Marketing, Distribution and Operations. Rayan is currently in his 10th year at Accor, where he started as the Director of Sales & Marketing at Grand Mercure in Bengaluru and swiftly moving to operations as Executive Assistant Manager. He has also worked with Pullman & Novotel New Delhi before heading operations at ibis Mumbai Airport. His most recent assignment was with Grand Mercure Bangalore and Grand Mercure Mysore as Cluster General Manager.



DOUBLETREE BY HILTON

Gurugram
HARPREET KAUR BAKSHI joins DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Gurugram Baani Square as the Marketing & Communications Manager. She will be responsible for managing all Marketing and PR activities, elevating and sustaining the hotel's brand positioning, driving engagement and additional revenue through invigorating social media campaigns. Bakshi has more than 10 years of experience in the hospitality industry. Prior to this, she has been associated with reputed hotels such as The Metropolitan Hotel & Spa, ITC WelcomHotel Dwarka, Eros Hotel New Delhi.



LORDS HOTELS AND RESORTS

Mumbai

SANDEEP MALUSARE has been appointed as Business Development Manager at Lords Inn Hotels & Developers Pvt. Ltd. Malusare will be managing Pre-Opening of the same. He has over 21 years of experience. He spent his initial days at Hotel Millennium Park as Assistant Manager FO and then at Kokanratna Holidays Resort as Operation Manager. Later, he moved on to Mahindra Holidays as Senior Manager Operation and Administration and was involved in the Pre-Opening of Club Mahindra Saj and Club Mahindra, Hatgad. He has worked with The Machan, Lonavala as Sr. Manager Operation & Administration.



PANKAJ JAISWAL has been appointed as the Sales Executive at Lords Inn Hotels & Developers Pvt. Ltd. He is a seasoned professional and has more than 16 years of experience in various fields of the hospitality industry. Jaiswal has spent his initial days at Hotel Krishna Palace, Angel Broking, Star Placement Company & Bharti Airtel Services Ltd. He then moved to Sarovar Hotels – RSO Mumbai as Sales Assistant. Before joining Lord Inn Hotels, Jaiswal was associated with Le Birch Hotels as Assistant Manager Sales. He holds a Diploma in Hotel Management.



PREFERRED HOTELS & RESORTS

NEW YORK

CHERYL WILLIAMS has been appointed as the Chief Revenue Officer at Preferred Hotels & Resorts. Williams will lead the brand's commercial efforts. In her role at Preferred, she is tasked with overseeing and fine-tuning the group's sales, revenue optimisation, marketing, and e-commerce among other things. Prior to joining Preferred, Williams, who has over 20 years of experience, served as Regional Vice President of Sales & Marketing in Hawaii for Highgate. She also held progressive sales and marketing leadership positions for Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide.

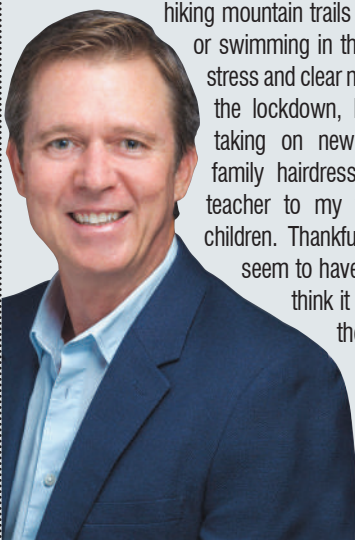


TALKing People

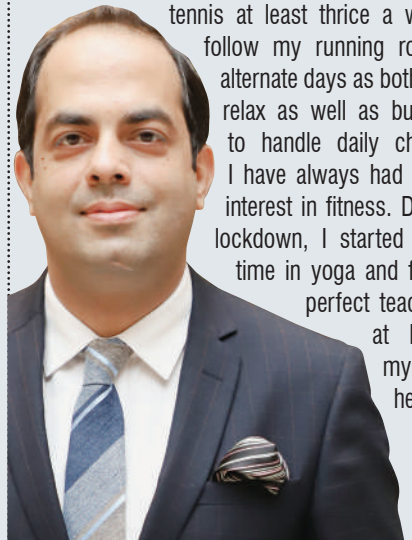
When **SUBHASH SINHA**, General Manager, The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat, is stressed out, he goes for a walk, travels, or listens to music. "To relieve tension, it is a good idea to keep your mind engaged. But the lockdown came a blessing in disguise. I began learning to play the guitar and learnt many more skills," he says, proudly. Sinha also loves travelling. "I am an avid beach lover. Goa and Kerala are my all-time favourite destinations for a holiday. Internationally, it would be the US during the fall season. Some awe-inspiring old villages in the world are built into the mountainous valleys in Europe," he adds.



BRAYDON HOLLAND, Senior Director, Sales (Asia), NCL, loves to spend time outdoors. He says, "I like to spend time at the golf course on a sunny day, hiking mountain trails with my family or swimming in the ocean to de-stress and clear my mind. During the lockdown, I found myself taking on new roles as the family hairdresser and school teacher to my two wonderful children. Thankfully, those days seem to have passed now. I think it is best to leave those jobs to the professionals."



Tennis and running are the preferred ways to relax for **ABHISHEK SACHDEV**, Hotel Manager, Fairfield by Marriott Kolkata. "I try to play tennis at least thrice a week and follow my running routine on alternate days as both help me relax as well as build focus to handle daily challenges. I have always had a special interest in fitness. During the lockdown, I started investing time in yoga and found the perfect teacher right at home in my spouse," he says.





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Sarovar Hotels eyes milestone

Unlike many other hospitality chains, Sarovar Hotels took difficult decisions during COVID-19, and also learnt from them. The hotel chain is eyeing to breach 100-hotel mark this year by opening more properties across India.

Nisha Verma

While the pandemic hit almost every hospitality chain, many of them had to take hard decisions to sail through the crisis situation. However, not many admit that there were decisions that turned into learnings. **Ajay Bakaya**, Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels, claimed that while they did not make any blunder in the beginning, they were never found wanting in taking decisions.

"We were the first ones to go ahead with reducing staffing, rotating staff and cutting costs. We started vaccinations right at the beginning. As difficult in hindsight it is to say, but perhaps we could have anticipated it more. Still, I would honestly do exactly what I did in those 12 to 18 months," he says.

But he insists that lessons were learnt. "We were looking at cutting down costs dramatically. We compromised in some of our hotels on upkeep and maintenance of plant and machinery, which hurt us very badly when it was time to get back in action in a big way. So, the lesson was learnt and it's been already put in place," he tells.

Another lesson, he says, one should learn is not to let one's guards down. "With the COVID-19 second or third wave being milder, one tends to take a lot of things for granted. That is where we are going to be extra careful," he adds.

Insisting that they took all the actions when needed, Bakaya says, "We are not people who were fence-sitting and waiting in the initial stages from March

2020. One challenge that all hotel chains are facing is that we had to let a lot of our people go. At one stage, we had to lose almost 50 per cent of our workforce. To my mind, there were 50 per cent people without jobs. Now, when I have the business back and I am calling these people, they are not available or not keen to join back in the hotel industry. Going forward, we would make sure that the General Manager himself sat with every single person of the team that we see leaving, on his own or otherwise, to figure out the reason for leaving and leave a window open until things got better."

Standing up to the pandemic
During the second wave, one property of Sarovar Hotels in

Our emphasis is on training and getting all the front line staff back on board

Gurugram was converted into a COVID-19 hospital. However, the model was not replicated in any other property. Bakaya explains, "We did not do it in more properties firstly because it was an expensive exercise and needed corporate sponsorship. However, for those 45 days, we saved a fair few lives."

Revival
When it comes to revival, Bakaya believes it is vital for the workforce to be properly trained. "Our emphasis is on training and getting all the frontline staff back on board. Hotels cannot engineer revival, but it is the market en-

gine that controls it. We had a good run from July to December as well as from October to December. Our December 2021 revenues for Sarovar Hotels were higher than December 2019 revenues. We had taken a big tumble in January. In March, we could get back on track on our budgeted numbers," he added.

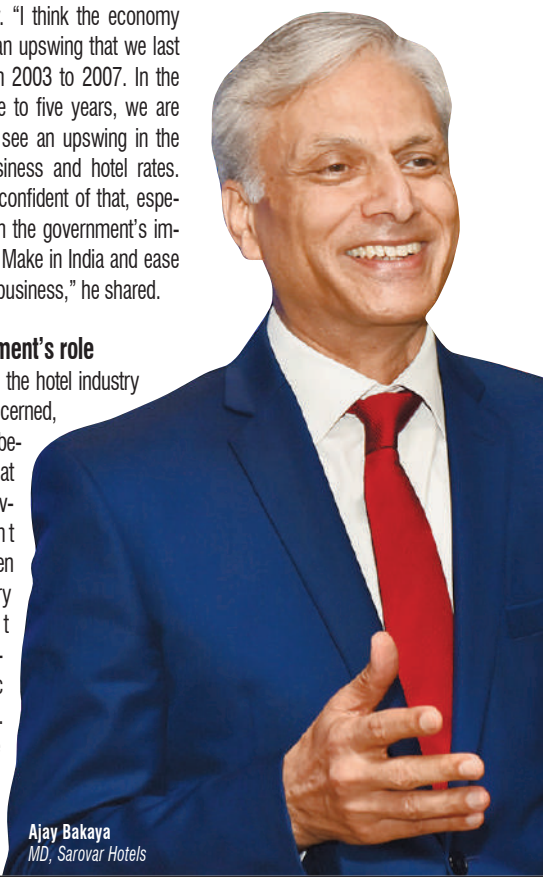
Looking at future
Sharing details about their plans, Bakaya informs, "We have 45 hotel projects running currently. We are conservatively committed to opening eight hotels in the calendar year 2022, which would allow us to comfortably breach the 100-hotel mark."

Industry outlook
Bakaya believes that the hospitality industry follows the Indian economy. "I think the economy will see an upswing that we last saw from 2003 to 2007. In the next three to five years, we are going to see an upswing in the hotel business and hotel rates. I'm very confident of that, especially with the government's impetus on Make in India and ease of doing business," he shared.

Government's role
As far as the hotel industry is concerned, Bakaya believed that the government has been a very patient and sympathetic listener. "We are pitching strongly to have t h e

hotel industry benefit from infrastructure status and we have reached out to several quarters," he says.

Technology and jobs
While Sarovar Hotels has adopted technology, he said he doesn't believe it would compromise on jobs. "We accept the number of physical meetings will reduce and many people would prefer managing things online. Some of it would change in reverse as we need to interact with real human beings. Technology is not meant to reduce jobs, but it means many people working on the technology. The key for hotels is to make sure there is a healthy balance for the customers," Bakaya said.



Ajay Bakaya
MD, Sarovar Hotels



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