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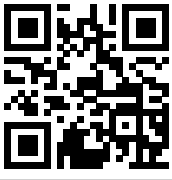
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# Digitalising Brand India

**Rakesh Verma**, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, shares that the government is working on a new portal for Incredible India, which will focus on digitising content and allow the industry to be an active part of it.

Nisha Verma

The Ministry of Tourism has taken a lot of digital initiatives to not only build Brand India, but also promote it in the right way. Sharing details, **Rakesh Verma**, Additional Secretary, MOT, said, "We have our own Incredible India website and our social media presence that collectively markets India as a destination. We used this opportunity to rethink and recalibrate ourselves. Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given us the direction that our portal

should be one of the top tourism portals in the world. Now, we have finalised our strategy to revamp our digital platform, and will be looking at content services and outreach. Content is the most important piece in our digital marketing. Earlier, we had just one website system integrated to support us, but we realised it is more about marketing, branding, and design."

## Support in partners

He revealed that they now have three partners to support them in digital marketing. "One is the lead agency to give us



**Rakesh Verma**  
Additional Secretary, MOT

the branding, the design, and the marketing. Then there is the technology company to provide support at the backend. The third agency is a

production agency to support us in terms of content. We are working with the states and we will partner with the industry to have an automated content management system. Anyone and everyone can contribute to the content, which can lead to the marketing of India as a destination," Verma said.

He added that they are also trying to put a customer relationship management (CRM) in place by profiling the visitors, followed by personalisation and targeting. "The tools of today allow you not only do

Contd on page 3 ▶

# Right response

The events and wedding stakeholders came together to meet the Health Minister in New Delhi to urge him to remove the 20-pax cap.

Hazel Jain

Key stakeholders from the events and weddings industry in New Delhi came together to appeal to **Satyendar Jain**, Health Minister to consider some relaxations. The eight-member delegation, led by **Rajeev Jain**, MD, Rashi Entertainment, made a unified appeal on behalf of the events industry to draw attention to the sector hit due to the situation in last two years.

Jain said, "A joint representation was given by the entire Delhi wedding industry, including wedding planning agencies, caterers, banquet owners, 5-star proper-



**Rajeev Jain**  
MD, Rashi Entertainment

ties to the Health Minister, requesting to remove the cap of 20 guests in Delhi for weddings as well as suggestions for way forward. The minister heard us and confirmed that the government will respond at the right time."

# Plea for exciting budget

With Union Budget 2022-23 approaching, industry is unsure whether it will be a repeat of previous years' budgets or if they can expect the Finance Minister to present a comforting budget.



**Rajiv Mehra**  
President, IATO

"We have only two demands from the government. Our expectation from the budget is that TCS should be removed for foreign nationals. This is one point we want to stress when it comes to the Union Budget. The other demand is that a simplified way to replace SEIS should be implemented and the new scheme should come into place smoothly. Under the GST regime, tour operator services are taxed under five per cent tax slab with denial of Input Tax Credit (ITC) under SAC code 9985. Five per cent tax on entire package value results in taxing all the input service procurements made by the tour operator once again. This has resulted in cascading of taxes of the entire supply chain."

"The TCS provision has impacted Indian operators adversely as compared to overseas portals and tour operators. If the intention is to bring more people under the tax net, a token one percent ought to suffice. A five percent rate simply diverts business to overseas entities. The SEIS has been scrapped, after reducing the quantum and capping eligibility. A rational scheme is required to support the beleaguered sector. One understands the futility of expecting any direct cash support, unlike that extended by various foreign governments, but surely it's not too much to ask that performance be recognised and rewarded! Tourism can be at the heart of India's revival story. It forms the mainstay of many countries' economies. All we ask is that it be given its rightful due."



**Ajay Prakash**  
President, TAFI

Contd on page 10 ▶

# India shines at Dubai event

Senior officials of the Ministry of Tourism (MOT), Government of India participate in the various panel discussions at the India Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai and share various tourism opportunities in the country.

Nisha Verma

The India Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai showcased the best of India during the India Tourism fortnight which saw MOT displaying the tourism offerings, under the 'Incredible India' campaign.

**Rakesh Verma**, Additional Secretary, MOT, said that they are developing the 'Heal in India' brand to market India as a medical and wellness tourism destination. **G Kamala Vardhana Rao**, Director General, MOT, also addressed the session, 'Adventure & Wildlife: The untapped potential of Incredible India', where he said, "In terms



**G Kamala Vardhana Rao**  
Director General, Ministry of Tourism

of adventure tourism, India will emerge as a major destination."

**Rupinder Brar**, Additional Director General, MOT, also spoke virtually at a session on



**Rupinder Brar**  
Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism

'Investment opportunities in Travel, Tourism and Hospitality'. "Tourism has exponential possibilities to boost the entire services industry in the next decade," Brar said.

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## FHRAI signs MoU with J&K

In a first, the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India recently signed an MoU with the J&K government to develop hospitality and related infrastructure in the UT. Gurbaxish Singh Kohli, Vice President, FHRAI, signed the MoU on behalf of the hospitality industry.



TT Bureau

The third largest hospitality association in the world and India's apex hospitality association, the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI), has signed a historic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Jammu & Kashmir (J & K) to promote hospitality and related infrastructure in the Union Territory.

This is the first time in history that a joint MoU has been signed between an association of hotels and restaurants and the government. The MoU was signed on December 27 at the Real Estate Summit 2021, jointly organised by the Government of Jammu & Kashmir, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), the Government of India and the National Real Development Council (NAREDCO) at the Jammu Convention Centre.

Thirty-nine MoUs were signed for the development of hous-



Gurbaxish Singh Kohli  
Vice President, FHRAI

ing, hotel and commercial projects. **Gurbaxish Singh Kohli**, Vice President, FHRAI, represented the hospitality industry at the event and signed the joint MoU.

**Hardeep Singh Puri**, Union Minister for Housing & Urban Affairs and **Jitendra Singh**, Union Minister of State for the PMO, were also present at the event, which focused on providing an effective platform to showcase potential real estate investment opportunities. Intensive discussions were held on the policy and regulatory framework at the event.

Kohli said, "FHRAI is hon-



oured to have received the opportunity to represent the hospitality industry. We thank the MoHUA, the J&K Government and NAREDCO for inviting us and signing the MoU to develop hospitality and related infrastructure in the region. J&K is a very promising venue with wonderful people and a hospitality-friendly ecosystem. With this MoU, we look forward to strengthening further the public-private partnership in the region to leverage the enormous potential the region has to offer for hospitality and tourism. We are hopeful that this will facilitate the J & K government providing land to FHRAI members for various projects and extend incentives and other benefits as per existing policies and rules. New developments in hospitality will give a strong push to economic growth through increased in-

vestments and will create more employment opportunities in the region."

At the event, Kohli stressed the need to promote the region as an untapped destination for growth in infrastructure, tourism, hospitality and real estate. The panel discussion witnessed participation from **Rohit Kansal**, Secretary-Information Department, Govern-

FHRAI is honoured to have received the opportunity to represent the hospitality industry

ment of Jammu & Kashmir; **Sarmed Hafez**, Secretary-Tourism Department, Government of Jammu & Kashmir; **Anoo Malhotra**, Director-I & C, Jammu; **Mahmood Ahmad Shah**, Director-I & C, Jammu; and **Sanjay Sethi**, MD & CEO-Chalet Hotels.

## New Incredible India portal

Contd from page 1

mass marketing, but also be selective and customised. We have a strong platform called the Adobe platform, offering hyper personalisation, and the CRM will help us in compiling



and making sure that we are effective and targeted. We are targeting that by May 2022, we should launch our new web portal," he said.

### It is time to go digital

Another initiative, Verma said, is that tourism is the ideal sector for digitalisation. "Tourism is all about digitali-

sation. Unless all inter-related industries — the destination, the attraction, get digitalised, the impact of the destination in the market may not be as good. Hence, the digital tourism mission will look at four aspects. The first is to benefit

from India's status as a leader in the digital world. Second, tourism domain data, where a unified interface will be developed and the data will be available to everyone, and they can use it for their own marketing, research, or planning needs. If someone wants to build solutions, portals, or aggregate platforms,

the mission will enable it all. Our timeframe is two to three years, and it will go a long way towards strengthening the tourism sector," he added.

### Benefitting trade

Speaking on how the digital mission can benefit tour operators directly, Verma shared, "I feel that we should provide support to the industry in digital marketing, especially to small and medium-sized businesses. To bring them on board for digital marketing, we will create policies and initiatives for Marketing Development Assistance (MDA) and capacity building and digital skills. The third aspect is we are putting all the marketing material into a digital asset available for tour operators as well," he averred.

Apart from the content that carries stories and visuals about destination India, Verma said they have a sepa-

rate section about services. "Hence, in the next set of designs, we will be integrating with tour operators, where they can share everything from people, products or services. It could be circulated to all other members as information on the kind of interest, query or lead that is generat-

Individual industries will get digitised, but tourism is about complete digitalisation

ed from our website. We will have that factored into our design," he said. Verma also requested that whatever material is sent by the MOT, the IATO members should circulate it to all members and share whatever contributions, suggestions or feedback that comes from members.

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## TRAVELTALK

## VIEWPOINT

## Recovering travel market

Different researches have shown the strength of the domestic travel market while trends for 2022 highlight its upward trajectory.

The Indian domestic travel market was the first to rebound and it helped to keep the travel industry afloat. This segment is quick to reopen, remains strong and has the spending capacity. Time and again we have written about India's domestic market competing with outbound travel, but 2021 trends have a different story to tell.

In the second half of 2021, international travel started to show signs of recovery while domestic travel remained strong. This got us thinking that the travel market is actually growing in size and is getting bigger!

Yes we can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel! Now, the focus needs to be on the pent-up demand and the eagerness to travel. The strength of the travel bug is such that we will see growth sooner than later.

## Incredible India story

The private sector has been demanding global and branding for a while now and come 2022, it started with a bang.

Yes, India has gone all out and showcased its strength during the tourism week at Expo 2020 in Dubai. The India-UAE tourism is one of the busiest sectors in the world fuelled by the 3.3 million strong Indian diaspora in the UAE. While UAE to India sees 50,000 tourists a year, UAE received over 6 million Indian tourists. Let us hope this proportion changes soon and India welcomes more tourists from the UAE in the years to come.

Highlighting the country's new tourism policy to the world, it was said India will create five missions like National Green Tourism Mission, Sectoral Mission on skill development, National Digital Tourism Mission National Mission on Destination Management and National Mission on Tourism MSMEs. While each of these missions is aligned with the global tourism framework, here is wishing that they translate make India a prominent tourism hub.

## Q3 booster for airline industry

With markets reopening in many countries and the travel demand picking up, airline industry breathed a sigh of relief in the third quarter. However, uncertainty looms over the industry keeping in view the emergence of new Covid variant.

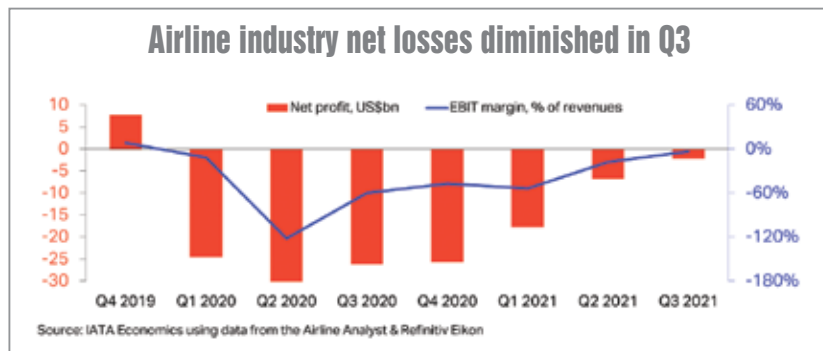


TT Bureau

The financial situation of airline industry improved at the global level in the third quarter as more markets reopened, travel demand picked up and cargo revenues remained robust worldwide. The financial results for the quarter indicated that the industry-wide operating loss in the July-September period stood at 3.4 per cent of revenues compared with the whopping 17.8 per cent loss in the previous quarter.

On the back of increasing passenger load, North American, European and Latin American airlines reported improvements in operating incomes. European airlines benefitted more from the robust demand on intra-European routes and from the news about the re-opening of the US-Europe corridor. Some short-haul routes such as intra-Europe and North-Central America also contributed to the recovery.

In the sample of 55 airlines, the industry's net cash flow from operating activities also improved significantly in this



## Airline Financial Results

No of Airlines in Sample	Regions	Q2 2021		Q2 2021	
		EBIT Margin <sup>1</sup>	Net post-tax Profit <sup>2</sup>	EBIT Margin <sup>1</sup>	Net post-tax Profit <sup>2</sup>
15	North America	-14%	72	0%	2,207
27	Asia-Pacific	-15%	-1,768	-20%	-2,952
14	Europe	-30%	-4,634	3%	31
7	Latin America	-16%	-360	-8%	-1,583
3	Others	-11%	-37	19%	106
66	Sample Total	-17.8%	-6,727	-3.4%	-2,191

<sup>1</sup>% of revenues <sup>2</sup>US\$ mAllion

Source: The Airline Analyst, IATA

China, Australia and Japan during the period.

The concern over the Omicron variant of the pandemic led to travel restrictions by many countries. This had its impact on airline shares, although

The aviation sector at present contributes \$72 billion to the country's GDP. In the financial year 2021, India's air traffic stood at approximately 115.37 million. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic and international air passenger traffic fell at a compound annual gross rate (CAGR) of -9.02 per cent in 2016 and -28.64 per cent in 2021.

Looking ahead, it seems, given the weak nature of the new virus, there will be a short-term impact on the sector.

With more vaccinations and Covid-19 Appropriate Behavior, we can hope for defeating the deadly virus soon and see more passenger bookings for domestic as well as international travel.



year's Q3 compared with the same quarter last year. Against the dismal -49.3 per cent, the net cash flow from operating activities improved to -0.9 per cent.

However, new Covid cases had their impact in the Asia Pacific region where the operating losses increased in

the prices made some recovery in early-December on the optimism that the new Covid variant was "less severe" than the catastrophic Delta variant. Similarly, increase in fuel prices also put some pressure on the operating costs, but a sharp drop in jet fuel prices in the final week of November offset the losses.

## Key points

- ❖ The latest sample of Q3 2021 financial results confirms that industry-wide losses diminished compared with Q2 amid gradual air travel recovery. However, the performance varied across regions; while North American, European and Latin American airlines reported improvements in operating incomes, the financials deteriorated in Asia Pacific.
- ❖ Airline share prices have fallen in response to Omicron news. As of December, the global airline share price index is 37 per cent below the pre-crisis levels while wider equity markets have risen by 30 per cent since the start of the pandemic.
- ❖ Bookings for future travel have been falling as Omicron-driven restrictions disrupt passengers' short-term travel plans.



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# Adventure tourism shows strength

ATOAI officials said they had begun to receive 'excellent feedback' on adventure tourism from both domestic and foreign travellers before the news of omicron started affecting the business again. Keeping in view the unfolding situation, the association needs to 'reassess and replan' its strategies.



Janice Alyosius

Adventure travel was witnessing a ray of hope before the news of omicron dampened the spirits a bit. Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) officials said they had begun to receive "excellent feedback" from



both domestic and foreign travellers. Now, their hope hinges on the fact that the situation won't get worse.

"With the omicron news, the association needs to reassess and replan," stated **Vinayak Koul**, Honorary Secretary, ATOAI.

"We're hoping it doesn't turn out to be as massive as the second

wave because a lot is riding on the next month's events," he added.

Talking about the association's achievements, **Tejbir Singh Anand**, Executive Committee Member, ATOAI, said, "We were able to form a new women's chapter committee with the idea and goal of bringing female entrepreneurs together. Addressing the difficulties that women confront and providing them with a platform will empower them. And I think it's a great initiative by ATOAI which we're proud of."

As per Koul, domestic tourism has been crucial support for the industry people to keep them afloat last year. Many hotel and tourism service providers saw a beacon of hope.

"Domestic travel has been a boon during the Covid era when



**Tejbir Singh Anand**  
Executive Committee  
Member, ATOAI

It's high time for us  
(the tourism industry)  
to position and sell  
India as an adventure  
destination to the rest  
of the world

the skies were closed and tour operators and service providers were unsure where to look for work. Domestic travel has aided them and given the coun-



**Vinayak Koul**  
Honorary Secretary  
ATOAI

The tour operators are  
well aware that they  
can't operate the trips  
in same manner as  
they were doing before  
the pandemic

try's domestic tourism a much-needed boost," he said.

Adding to the view, Anand said, "In Uttarakhand and Himachal

Pradesh, there was a lot of migration. The domestic market exploded, especially in these two states where Covid rules were not in place and a record number of people travelled."

Regarding the ATOAI's plans for the year ahead, Koul said that the organisation is planning to offer new and unique services to travellers while keeping high levels of hygiene and meeting customer expectations. "The majority of tour operators are preparing because they realise they won't be able to run the trips the same way they did before Covid."

Anand added, "I'm very hopeful that the image of India as an adventure destination will improve in the coming year. We are in partnerships with international associations, who are trying to help us pitch India in the right direction as an adventure destination, and I'm very optimistic

that by October 2022, we will have a lot of inbound groups coming in."

Speaking of the association's work with the government, Koul said, "Several meetings with the government are happening. We are requesting the government to give more emphasis to the promotion of adventure tourism in the country. We believe adventure tourism has got untapped potential that needs to be explored."

Anand said, "Our expectation from the Minister of Tourism and the Government of India is that they will assist us in advertising and branding ourselves in the market. India controls 73 percent of the Himalayan range. It's time for us to sell India as an adventure destination to the rest of the world. Apart from the famous tourist spots in India, there is much more to discover." 📌



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# Right push needed to replace SEIS

While the much-awaited SEIS dues were delayed and turned out to be much lower than expected, tour operators are facing another challenge — the dissolution of SEIS or its appropriate replacement. At one of the discussions recently, experts contemplated the way forward and also discussed alternative benefits for tour operators.



Nisha Verma

One of the business sessions at the recent IATO annual convention delved deeper into the future of Service Exports from India Scheme (SEIS) and what other benefits that tour operators can look for when it comes to the Foreign Trade Policy (FTP).

The session, titled 'SEIS: New Policy under FTP', saw the presence of **Pronab Sarkar**, Immediate Past President, IATO, as the moderator and the panellists including **CA. Sunil H. Talati**, Chairman, Services Export Promotion Council (SEPC), **Raj Muthuraj**, Additional DG, Directorate General of Foreign Trade, **Dr. Abhay Sinha**, Director General, SEPC and **Bipin Sapra**, Partner, Ernst & Young LLP.

Sarkar said that the association had to wait for a year to get approval from the Finance Ministry to obtain SEIS and the association officials had to run from door to door to get the scheme signed.

"Without the Commerce Ministry's and SEPC's assistance, it would not have been possible," he said.

## Continue incentives

Talati said the SEIS for financial year 2019–20 has been delayed due to the pandemic and the government's thought process. "**Piyush Goyal**, Minister of Commerce and Industry, stated at the recent SEPC conclave in Delhi that businesses and services today cannot survive and continue to do business solely on government incentives; they must be able to stand on their own. As a result, he is debating whether SEIS should be phased out, and he has already said they (the government) would not be giving SEIS in 2020-21 and 2021-22. For exporters, this is a big shock because the incentive is always included in the cost or profit. The full cost is determined by the surplus created by the incentive. There would be a disincentive if it were to stop," he said.

He revealed that at SEPC all stakeholders, particularly the IATO, are being asked to make a representation to the Union Finance Minister on the issue.



**Sunil H. Talati**  
Chairman, Services Export  
Promotion Council (SEPC)

I would also urge the IATO to make a representation to the Centre that service exporter perks must not be discontinued at any cost

"I would urge the IATO to also make a representation to the Union Ministry of Commerce and the PMO that service exporter incentives must not be discontinued at any cost since this incentive will promote exports," he said, adding that "The government wants us to hit a 10-trillion-dollar target by 2030. On the one hand, they want exports to rise from 55 per cent to 59 per cent of GDP growth, but if they stop doing so, it will not be a welcoming idea."

Second, Talati said, SEPC is putting in a lot of effort and making a compelling case to the government in support of this incentive. "Not only big tour companies, but also medium and small tour operators should join SEPC," he stressed. "We have met with the Union Commerce Minister, Niti Aayog and we have asked DGFT to give a presentation as well. I believe that good coordination among the RBI, the Ministry of Commerce and the DGFT is required to enhance exports."

Sarkar argued that without the government's assistance, tourism in India will not grow. "We will not be able to compete with our neighbours if the incentives are not provided. We need to make our product more valuable. As a result, SEIS must continue," he stressed.

## Probable alternatives

Beyond SEIS, Sinha's presentation focused on the benefits for tour operators. Later, he said that

travel and tourism are integral parts of the 14 service sectors for which the council is accountable for export promotion. SEIS has been delayed and has a ceiling of ₹ 5 crore.

The Ministry of Commerce needed an alternative plan for the next international trade policy even before the notification concerning the continuation of SEIS was announced. To incentivise the industry, SEPC conducted a research based on the Remission on Duties and Taxes on Exports Policy (RoDTEP). The study is titled 'Duty Remittance of Export Services Policy (DRESS)', which is still under consideration.

He said there is a suggestion to establish a customised or sec-



**Pronab Sarkar**  
Immediate Past President,  
IATO

We (operators) will not be able to compete with our neighbours if the incentives are not provided. We need to make our product more valuable

tor-specific incentive scheme. "Now the question is: Are we only interested in incentivising completed exports, or in incentivising the entire value chain of exports, which necessitates hand-holding at various levels in order to make them competitive and eventually export them? This is being debated, and we're attempting to figure out if we can come up with specific schemes for exports to reward exporters, as well as specific schemes for the full process of making an export viable. The Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Tourism have already implemented a few projects. Today, SEPC has the opportunity to raise aware-



**Dr. Abhay Sinha**  
Director General  
SEPC

There is a suggestion to establish a customised or sector-specific incentive scheme for the promotion of services

ness about such programmes as well," he added.

He continued, "On the alternative schemes, we will hold a series of brainstorming sessions. Despite the fact that we submitted DRESS, we still hope to come up with new ideas and strive to incorporate them into the forthcoming international trade policy."

## No multiple taxation

According to Sapra, Ernst & Young developed a study dubbed as DRESS, which was filed by SEPC to the Ministry of Commerce and aimed at refunding taxes already paid on services.

"Our goal is to construct a scheme that is similar to SEIS in terms of advantages when the new foreign trade strategy is revealed (in two to three months). A tour, according to DRESS, consists of hotel reservations, local transportation, sightseeing and a profit margin. Certain aspects of GST are already built in, such as the 18 per cent tax on five-star hotels, which is an embedded cost. In addition, when a tour operator offers a package, he takes a 5 per cent commission. A nominal calculation yields a tax structure of 12 to 14 per cent, which is incorporated into the tour operator services that are exported. As a result, DRESS addressed

the incentive scheme having a percentage that is linked to the tax cost that is contained in the service, and we have proposed that it be based on that," he stated.

Sarkar said there is a cascading effect, as a result of which tour operators are suffering and in need of government aid.

"This needs to be looked into, and we need to reduce double taxation and remove the cascading impact," he asserted, adding that, "As per government policy, taxes should not be exported, and we should benefit from this."

Muthuraj agreed that export is a significant sector for the government in terms of services.

"Our exports were valued at US \$125 billion in the current period, an increase of nearly 18 percent. With a change in nomenclature, SEIS is a continuation of a prior scheme. So, from 2014 to



**Bipin Sapra**  
Partner  
Ernst & Young LLP

Our goal is to construct a scheme that is similar to SEIS in terms of advantages when the new foreign trade strategy is revealed

2015, the government has notified whatever services it believes have potential. It was notified the next year as well, and the last notification was in September. Hotels, restaurants, tour guides and travel agents are all well represented in the tourism sector," he said.



**Raj Muthuraj**  
Additional DG  
Directorate General of Foreign Trade

Our exports were valued at US \$125 billion in the current period. With a change in nomenclature, SEIS is a continuation of a prior scheme

However, there is a budget issue currently and the government is imposing a time limit on all other cases from previous times as well.

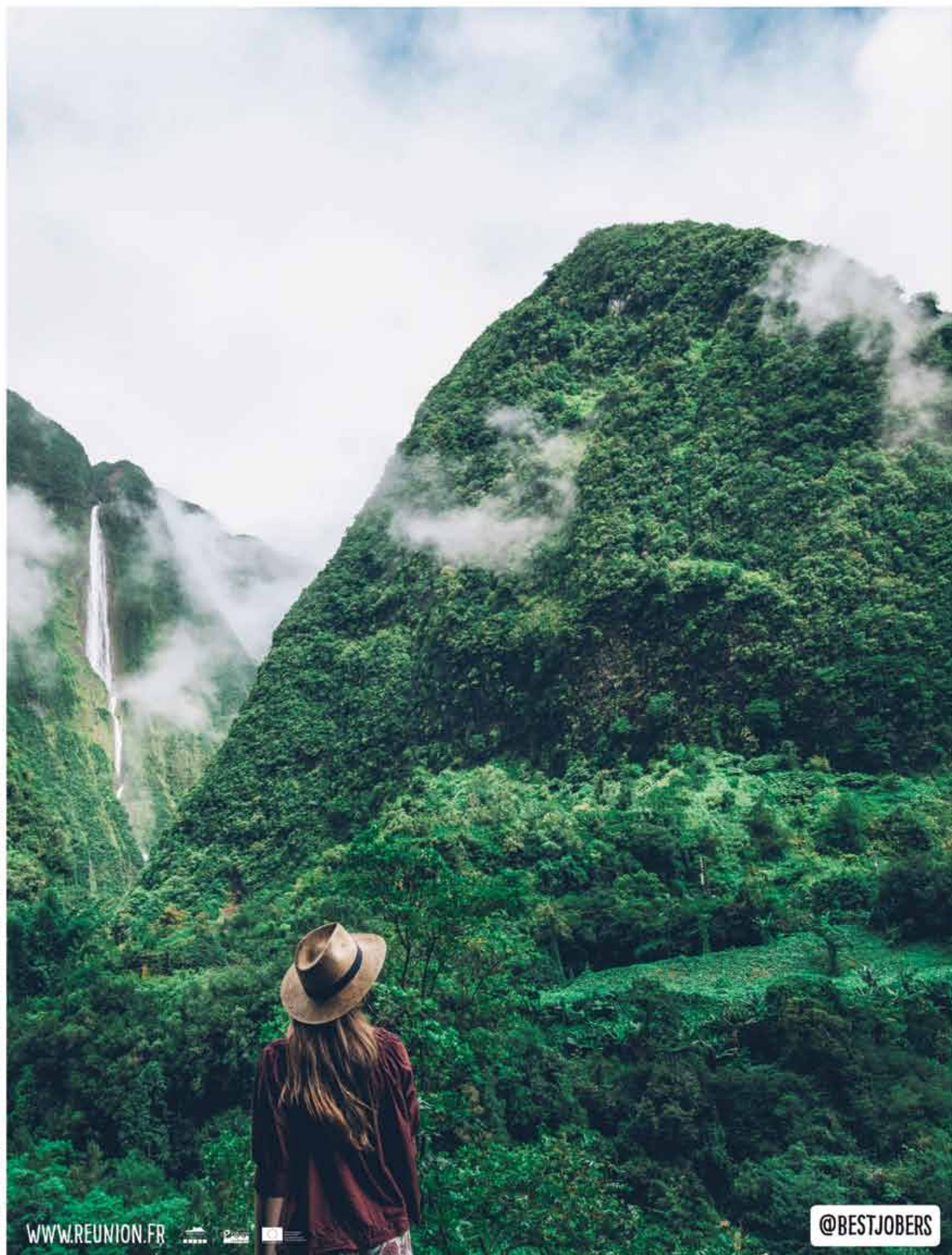
"A change has been made to our foreign trading policy. The government extended the deadline to December 31, 2021 and invited everyone to file any outstanding claims," he said.

The Additional DG advised the tour operators to contact the DGFT's regional authority in case they faced any problem.

Sarkar said many big tour operators were unable to upload their claims due to the time limit. Another point he raised was that the scrips are being released to people, but they cannot sell them because of restrictions from the Finance Ministry. "Hence, brokers are approaching them to buy in advance at a lower prices, which is a loss to the actual beneficiary. It is important to look into these things since they have not been released for the last three weeks which is creating a hurdle," he added. Later, during the questions-answer session, the tour operators raised several related issues and Muthuraj tried to address them. ➔

*Luxury hotel group Kempinski is planning to open a floating hotel in Dubai, complete with 12 satellite "houseboat villas" surrounding it. The Kempinski Floating Palace will be positioned next to one of the beach stretches in the emirate on Jumeirah Beach Road.*





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## TourismNews

Mandatory 7-day home quarantine for all international arrivals to India, RTPCR test result to be uploaded on 8th Day on Air Suvidha portal

Global passenger numbers are predicted to reach 3.4 billion in 2022, finds IATA study

12,000 start-ups mobilising US\$ 83 million are working on new tourism technologies, says UNWTO

Employment set to rise by 18% in 2022 to reach 324 million jobs: WTTC

TravelBullz adds Destination India in its product portfolio for B2B travel fraternity

InterGlobe Air Transport (IGAT) to enter hotel booking business, says Sunil Talreja

IRCTC launches new scheme for issuing Rail Reservation Tickets from 9147 post offices in Uttar Pradesh

RT-PCR not must for inter state domestic travel: ICMR advisory

# Business recovery is not far

**Ramesh Marwah**, Group CEO & Director, Dex Group, shares how in the constantly changing situation it is needed that we remain optimistic and patient because business will only grow when things settle down.



Nisha Verma

When it comes to recovery, **Ramesh Marwah**, Group CEO & Director, Dex Group, claims that the situation is changing every hour. "The revival and recovery of the industry is dependent on reaction and response to the fear and the hysteria that has been generated by COVID-19 and its variants. Recovery in such a scenario is difficult. The panacea for the recovery of our industry is the opening of the borders and doing away with the air bubbles as it is leading to customers paying a lot. Allowing the regular scheduled airlines to operate in and out of India, is going to trigger the recovery," he says.

Marwah adds, "We need to build up the confidence of the travellers that the airlines are following all 'health and hygiene protocols' for the betterment of their travel. Also, the SOPs and



**Ramesh Marwah**  
Group CEO & Director  
Dex Group

protocols for the arrival and departure destinations will have to be very clear because they differ from one state to the other. There needs to be a unified approach to clearly define these protocols. The agents must also be fully informed and share the same with customers."

With airline fares on a rise owing to Omicron scare, the question arises if the low fare market would come back. Marwah says, "The surge in the fare is because of the scarcity of seats.

With only air bubble flights operating instead of regular scheduled flights. It is the demand and supply equation. The moment borders open and we have more airlines flying in and out with large capacities, the fares will drop to pre-COVID levels or may even get better with demand meeting the supply of required seat capacity. Currently, there is a huge pent up demand, which needs to be cultivated for future."

When asked for advice to agents who are trying to recover, Marwah says, "Patience is the key. The travel industry colleagues in India have been very resilient. We will surely bounce back very fast. We all will move on despite what happened in the last two years."

With technology taking a front seat during the pandemic, the fear looms over job opportunities. Marwah claims, "Technology and innovation have

definitely helped in facilitating enhanced efficiency and flow of information. There will be a minor shift from the regular way of doing business to the technology area, but in no way would it majorly impact the way of doing business in India, as people feel more confident to interact and communicate with human

open, some shift will be there and it will also help trigger the growth in our industry. However, the way things have gone during the COVID period, the way of doing business will almost remain the same."

Speaking on reducing manpower, he says, "It is the outcome of loss of business and negligible earnings. Our industry has been hit the hardest. However, if the travel companies have to grow, need and demand for skilled and experienced manpower will be felt very soon."

He says, "The endeavour and effort from our end is to grow our business. Having gone through difficult times, we need to recover in the shortest time. We want to bring ourselves back to the normal times and search for newer avenues to expand and grow our business to pre-COVID levels and more."

The panacea for the recovery of our industry is the opening of the borders and doing away with the air bubbles

beings behind the machines. This need to receive information and getting queries answered was strongly felt by those who got stuck during the COVID-19. I think that once the borders

# Welcome to the West Midlands

VisitBritain aims to use the upcoming Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games as a hook to talk about the West Midlands and to encourage the visitors to choose this region to explore when they visit the United Kingdom. A networking dinner aimed to take trade partners through the region and tell them about ticketing.



Hazel Jain

VisitBritain recently organised a networking dinner with its key trade partners in Mumbai, with the agenda to talk about the West Midlands and the Commonwealth Games. **Shuja Bin Mehdi**, B2B Manager – India, VisitBritain, said, "We want to educate the travel trade about the West Midlands, which is going to host the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. Our objective was to take them through the region and tell them about the ticketing that is happening for next year as well as encourage them to start selling the region a little more."

Speaking about how the past year has been for VisitBritain, Mehdi adds, "It has been very encouraging honestly. Even though the year started with the



**Shuja Bin Mehdi**  
B2B Manager, India,  
VisitBritain

second wave hitting India, in terms of the numbers of visitors to the UK, we are sort of coming back on track in comparison to 2020. In terms of 2019, obviously, we are a little down. But what is encouraging to see is the growth in family visits, people who are going there accompanied by their children who are going there as students – that was also at a high. We see good potential going into 2022. I think the numbers are going to pick up again and we will be back to

the 2019 numbers in the next couple of years."

The NTOs have already tweaked their strategies, keeping the pandemic in mind. "We are now focusing more on the West Midlands region because they are going to be playing host to the

We are focusing more on the West Midlands region because they are going to be playing host to Commonwealth Games

Commonwealth Games. We will continue to focus on the Manchester and the North of England as well as London plus destinations and go forth with our focus



on the Scotland, which really works in India as a destination," he adds. Numbers for the Commonwealth Games will depend upon how India as a country performs at these big-ticket sporting events, Mehdi explains. "We have had the Indian team display their

best performance in the recent Tokyo Olympics last year. That will go very well into the Commonwealth Games next year. I think the Indian contingent is going to perform really well. The interest level is going to peak around July-August when the Games actually

happen. And we hope that will encourage more and more people to visit during the Games. Our objective is to use the Games as a hook to talk about the destination and encourage people to visit the wider West Midlands region," he adds.

*International flights from Pune airport in Lohegaon has started since January 7. The international flight operations at Pune airport were completely shut since March 2020 due to the Covid outbreak.*



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# Taxes remain major concern

## ASSOCIATIONS

“The Government of India is aware of the plight of the industry and since tourism contributes to the national GDP, we sincerely hope that what FAITH, on behalf of tourism, travel and hospitality associations, has submitted to the MOT/Finance Ministry should be favourably considered. The tourism industry is pushing for lower taxes and incentives as Nirmala Sitharaman, Finance Minister prepares the Union Budget for the financial year 2022-23. By offering interest-free loans, subsidies, and reduction in tax structure among others, the central government should assist in the recovery of the industry. We are looking forward to more reliefs/ incentives in the Union Budget 2022 from the Ministry of Finance.”



PP Khanna  
President, ADTOI



Jatinder Taneja  
Vice-Chairman, PATA India Chapter

“The travel industry definitely needs a lot of relaxation in the taxes in the upcoming budget for the next financial year (FY 2022-23) in order to keep ourselves afloat. The government can look towards waiving off the GST at least for two or three years to uplift the dying inbound tourism industry in the current circumstances. They can also consider reducing the income tax for at least three years for foreign exchange earners to induce a new life in the inbound tourism industry, as their business has badly suffered due to the pandemic. They could also waive off the TCS, which is a new tax and makes the outbound packages very expensive, which would in turn affect the industry. However, I am not sure what kind of benefits we are going to receive in this budget.”

“We are requesting that hotels and tourism related sectors be included in infrastructure projects listed in the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) set up under the Development Financial Institution (DFI) by the Ministry of Finance for promoting infrastructure funding. This will enable the COVID hit hospitality sector to avail funds with extended repayment periods at a low rate of interest. The hotel industry is a long gestation industry which incurs losses in the initial years of operations and profitability improves only after few years. Because of this, most hotels carry forward business losses with the expectation to set them off over the coming years. However, the industry's profitability took a massive hit due to the unprecedented pandemic conditions and expects businesses to post losses for the next few years.”



Gurbaxish Singh Kohli  
Vice President, FHRAI



MP Bezbaruah  
Honorary Secretary General, HAI

“Policy interventions are imperative for the sector's survival and its early return to normalcy. Access to softer funding, longer periods to repay loans, and the resultant shortening of the gestation period will make hotel investments more attractive and sustainable. The status of "infrastructure" will resolve a number of issues and enable hotels to avail the benefits of lower taxation, utility tariffs, and a simplified approval process for projects. Also, extended moratorium, tax rationalization, and facilitating the ease of doing business can help the road to recovery. HAI has submitted detailed suggestions to the Finance Ministry on some easily doable policy reforms, which will greatly help in revival of the industry and will also enable it to flourish in the long run.”

“We hope the budget will draw attention to the fact that the tourism industry is severely affected by the pandemic. Due to lockdowns from time to time and international commercial flights not operating, tour operators had trouble surviving, and loans from the govt. put pressure on them, that increased the likelihood of non-payment. Outbound Tour Operators Association of India has requested that the Finance Minister of India extend special individual income tax relief for tour operators and travel agents for FY 21-22 and FY 22-23 and roll back TCS on outbound tours. In addition, we request that the government include outbound tours under the LTC scheme and provide loans at lower interest rates for working capital.”



Vaibhav Kala  
Vice President, ATOAI

“Adventure tourism needs to be recognised as an independent industry providing serious employment opportunities in the remotest parts of the country. Additionally, subsidies should be extended to promote the development of adventure tourism-related activities and infrastructure.

Despite the fact the average profit margin in this sector is 10%, GST with Import Tax Credit should not be over 1.8 per cent. The current GST rate of 5 per cent assumes a profit margin of 28 per cent, on which 18 per cent GST is applied, resulting in a 5 per cent tax. That is not correct and has an impact on the industry. Tour operators, camps, hotels, lodges, and cruises should be included in IGST instead of SGST, so they can benefit from Import Tax Credits.”



Riaz Munshi  
President, OTOAI

“We expected the state government to not charge us property tax and electricity bills during the pandemic, but that has not happened. Our request is still with the state tourism department, and we hope that the govt. will consider not to charge property tax and electricity bills during the pandemic, in the coming budget. Last year the government announced financial assistance of up to 10 lacs to authorised tour operators and up to three lacs to tour guides approved by Ministry of Tourism. But only a few tour operators and guides are approved. We would like to again request the government that no GST or other taxes on tour operators for at least 3 years, financial support on low interest rates without any clause, and entry fee reductions on ASI monuments.”



Dharmendra Singh Chauhan  
Maharashtra Chapter Chairman, ADTOI



Dharmesh Advani  
National General Secretary, ETAA

“The travel industry is again under tremendous pressure. Travel globally is affected, and people are taking a wait and watch approach. As domestic tourism has picked up, more budgetary allocation should be made for infrastructure in developing areas near famous monuments. More funds should be available under the UDAN scheme for regional connectivity. The Income Tax deductions on domestic travel will encourage people to travel domestically, that will further benefit the larger ecosystem. The tourism industry is really fighting hard to survive this current crisis, and we look forward to our governments extending full support to help us in reviving the sector. We are hopeful that this Budget will have something positive for us.”

“Increasing SEIS entitlement from existing 3 percent to 10 per cent of the net Foreign Exchange Earnings for the next three to five financial years will help the industry mitigate some of the damage inflicted on it due to the pandemic. Also, to accelerate and incentivize all-round development of Tourism infrastructure catering to foreign tourists, fiscal incentives in the form of SEIS certificates and import against EPCG should be continued for the near future. In view of the volatile economic environment, the timeline for meeting Export Obligations (EO) should also be extended by at least four years for all EPCG licenses which has EO period falling from February 2020 onwards. The granting of Export Status with tax incentives will help us be competitive.”



Pradeep Shetty  
Jt. Hon. Sec, FHRAI



Manmeet Singh  
Chairman  
Punjab Chapter, IATO

“There are definitely many plans being worked out by the bureaucracy, but how many of those plans will make it to the light of the day, will only be determined after the budget announcement. I hope and pray that everything turns out well for the travel and tourism industry. We have also enumerated our industry's expectations, such as relief to the industry, reduction in GST, rollback of TCS, etc., but I know that we have discussed these points several number of times with government officials and ministers alike, and everyone is fully aware of the current situation that arose due to the COVID-19. Therefore, let's hope that in the budget announcement of 2022, the industry's expectations are addressed.”

“The tourism budget has rarely demonstrated any cheer, and we are always disappointed and more hurt when there is almost no mention of tourism in the budget and no increase in its budgetary allocations, despite its huge potential that the PM keeps referring to. According to our expectations, those who have been hardest hit should receive the most aid. Firstly the Finance Minister must acknowledge that tourism sector is the most severely impacted hence needs extra relief measures to sustain its employment potential. For outbound the TCS may be postponed for three years. For Inbound additional ₹ 5,000 crores to be given to Ministry of Tourism to provide direct support to stakeholders and increase direct marketing overseas.”



Sunil Gupta  
Chairman, IATO Northern Region



Prateek Hira  
Chairman  
Uttar Pradesh Chapter, IATO

“This financial year will pave the way for better times ahead. I hope for a three-pronged budget, focused on the revival of inbound tourism by way of free or low-cost tourist visas, short-term tourist visas on arrival (not e-visas) for select countries, and a temporary exemption of GST for inbound travellers. On another front, I wish to get a window of income tax exemption on businesses for three years to rebuild working capital and restart the businesses. At the policy level, I wish for a larger budgetary allocation for the MOT for a well-planned, researched, and structured marketing plan to revive the tourist traffic. The tourism industry, for the third time, is pinning its hope on the annual budget.”



# Banking for revival on Budget

“In the upcoming Budget, the tourism and hospitality sector has urged the government to announce more schemes to promote tourism. They are seeking lower taxes, incentives, and reliefs. Additionally, they want easy SOPs for the sector in the upcoming Union Budget. As a result of the pandemic, many small hotels and resorts have closed; it is important for the revival of these units that the government announces interest-free loans or assistance. Also, more funds should be allocated to the development of infrastructure. The government should take this issue seriously and save the travel industry, especially medium class travel agents, who have been struggling for the last two years.”



**Rajesh Arya**  
Vice President, ADTOI



**EM Najeed**  
Senior Vice President, IATO

“In our pre-budget proposals, we have asked the Finance Ministry to treat tourism industry as deemed exporter at par with IT industry under export of services. The criteria for determining the place of supply (POS) of services should be uniform between IT Industry and Tour Operators Industry. Another request is of removal of cascading effect of GST on tourism industry, which has been hurting the industry's margin. We have also requested to withdraw tax collection at source (TCS) for the foreign tourists. In addition, we have requested for refund of IGST paid by the tourist leaving India on supply of goods taken out of India -Tax Refund for Tourists (TRT) Scheme under section 15 of the IGST Act 2017 to be implemented.”

## TRADE

“For budget expectations my submission is that the tour operators should be given the same benefits as physical exporters. Even in the IT industry, since people ordering the services in India get exempted, but the tour operators who provide services in India to people based abroad, are not exempted. Secondly, the cascading effect of taxes should be removed. VAT refund or GST refund should be provided at Indian airports. The TCS on foreign packages should not be there. The SEIS should be increased for another 5 years. Tour operators sending tourists to the neighbouring countries or abroad should be exempted from all taxes.”



**Subhash Goyal**  
Founder Chairman,  
STIC Travel & Air Charter Group



**Pranav Kapadia**  
Founder & Director Global Destinations

“Year on year, we as the travel industry set high expectations for the annual budget, but we've always been left with disappointment. We will continue to hold faith in our government to help the industry emerge from the disruptions caused by COVID-19 and return to normalcy. Even after two difficult years behind us, the ramifications faced by the entire sector continues to be. It is time the government recognised the significance of domestic, inbound and outbound tourism, which are all very important for our country. Our trade deserves some financial-aid, tax rebates, and favourable policies that boost the ease of doing business and attract tourism, and at the same time, pave the way forward for an 'industry status' ensuring a fair structure and professionalism.”

“The last 2 years have highlighted the power of the domestic market and towards unlocking the full potential of domestic tourism, we look forward to Budgetary focus on infrastructure development, technology and health-safety across airports/aviation, road, rail and waterways. Empowering our global embassies, export (zero-rated) status to the inbound tour business and deeper marketing investment is much needed to kick start inbound demand. We look forward to the government's announcement of granting Industry status, rationalisation of taxes, removal of SEIS benefit capping of ₹5 crore and introduction of soft loans with favourable terms as a stimulant to enable the sector get back on its feet.”



**Madhavan Menon**  
Managing Director,  
Thomas Cook India Group

## TECHNOLOGY



**Sandeep Dwivedi**  
Chief Operating Officer  
InterGlobe Technology Quotient

“Considering the impacts and effects of the last two budgets on the national markets, the upcoming Union budget is expected to be an improved version for the travel industry. The Budget should reveal a long-term strategy for revenue generation—from tax relief to incentives, including continuous infrastructural development. It is assumed that the Indian tourism market will rebound and improve the travel experience. As the biosphere recognises the importance of technology as a game changer, what better than a tech-enabled tourism experience that provides a traveller with confidence, trust, and safety? All of this will have an impact.”

## HOTELS



**Mehul Sharma**  
Founder & CEO, Signum Hotels

“The government must consider steps to promote local destinations, and LTA should be increased to incentivise people to travel. The long-pending demand for hospitality to be granted infrastructure status remains unheard. Hospitality must be recognised as an industry that contributes well to the country's economy. A lower GST and taxation on hospitality, F&B services and a uniform tax structure across the board is needed. Liquidity to be made available for upcoming projects Increased international investment in hospitality should be allowed to achieve this. The government must create funds to improve infrastructure and support tourism-focused development.”

“With the majority of the population of the country being vaccinated, we believe the hospitality and tourism industries are prepared for their moment of resurgence in the next quarters of the year 2022. Our sector will witness amplified growth and activity in the latter half of the year. The work-from-anywhere culture will be a continued trend throughout 2022. We expect private travel through chartered jets and helicopters to be much more common in luxury travel segment, and private experientials to also have a higher demand. Along with rising demand for immersive cultural experiences, a strong focus on wellness during travel bookings is definitely bound to increase. We are hopeful that in the imminent years we will surely see massive growth and stability in the travel and tourism industry.”



**Jose Ramapuram**  
Director of Marketing  
Evolve Back Luxury Resorts



**Devendra Parulekar**  
Founder, SaffronStays

“Given the impact of twin lockdowns in the last two years due to COVID-19, and fixed cost structures, there is an immediate case for relief on GST for the tourism and hospitality industry, granting industry status to the hospitality businesses. Electricity boards must be encouraged to provide them with net metering, and also some special subsidised schemes should be offered to the hospitality industry to install sustainable, renewable energy solutions such as solar, wind, hydro, rainwater harvesting, and many more of these kinds. The hospitality industry has flourished in the last couple of years, prior to the pandemic and while it is moving in a digital direction, we also need more skilled manpower. The budget must provide for greater support from NSDC towards providing skills and training for this travel and tourism sector.”

“Hospitality sector was the first to be affected and last to be recovered in Pandemic. Due to the prolonged impact, the hospitality industry has incurred significant losses. The Union budget should immediately look at boosting domestic tourism. For this hospitality and travel industry needs an emergency resuscitation plan starting with reduction in GST to encourage people to travel domestically. In order to support the sector further, the government should permit the corporate bookings to come under IGST. This will help the companies to avail GST input credit. The Government should also offer low interest loans which will help us in recovering the losses. We are hopeful of support.”



**Rakshit Sharma**  
CEO and Director-on-Board  
Intellistay Hotels

## CRUISE



**Jurgen Bailom**  
CEO and President  
Waterways Leisure Tourism

“There is no defined precedence with respect to both direct and indirect tax laws. We are exposed to higher rates of GST. With no expertise in India on availing services from foreign vendors for cruise ops, we are liable to pay GST on a reverse charge basis, increasing our cost. The Direct Tax Laws in India provide only for the residential status of crew and related tax liabilities, which is inconsistent with the global taxation laws. Also, there is ambiguity in customs and excise regulations imposed on international cruise liners/airlines vis-a-vis domestic. The shipping authorities in India are favourable towards international liners, whereas being an indigenous cruise liner, we are exposed to various restrictions.”

## VISA

“For a swift recovery from the pandemic, I suggest some measures that can revive the travel industry, which include: GST's inter-state input tax credit adjustment should be available for at least three years; incentive schemes should be introduced to boost the travel industry; and at least two years of tax holidays should be given. GST in travel related expenses to be reduced from 18 per cent to 5 per cent and GST refunds to be clear within a time period of one month of filing for the return. Increased LTA provision as an inducement for employees to spend more on travel. Extra investment allowances, such as 150 per cent for 100 per cent of expenses for income tax purposes, should be granted to the travel industry.”



**Shikhar Aggarwal**  
Joint MD, BLS International



# Full fervour at IATO Convention

The 36<sup>th</sup> IATO Annual Convention at The Leela Gandhinagar saw the who's who of the Indian tourism industry in attendance. The delegates not only got a chance to interact with industry colleagues, but also delved deeper into the issues plaguing the industry. Networking, discussions, solutions and entertainment — the three days of IATO convention packed everything.





# Get-together to share trade views





# Connectivity takes lead

Connectivity plays an important role in boosting tourism. As transportation services in India, whether it is rails or roads, are improving, the only thing needed for all stakeholders is to join hands to benefit each other and work towards offering best facilities for tourists.



Nisha Verma

One of the sessions, titled 'Connectivity: New Frontiers', at the 36<sup>th</sup> IATO Annual Convention saw how transportation is pushing the tourism sector in India to reach new heights. **Aashish Gupta**, Consulting CEO, FAITH, was the moderator and the panellists included **Rajiv Jalota**, Chairman, Mumbai Port Trust, **Rajiv Jain**, Additional General Manager (Tourism), Indian Railway Catering & Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), **Sanjay Kumar**, Chief Strategy & Revenue Officer, IndiGo and **Raj Singh**, Chairman, Antara Luxury River Cruises.

Gupta said that tourism is dependent on transportation and the goal of the conversation was to determine which IATO mem-

predicted in 2019-20 by a study. This included two international cruise calls as well. While the market is reviving internationally, India has not seen much



**Rajiv Jalota**  
Chairman  
Mumbai Port Trust

If IATO could give more ideas regarding locations and the kind of investment needed, this sector could pick up momentum

growth. However, one domestic cruise has started in Mumbai in September this year, which goes to Goa, Diu, Kochi and Lakshadweep. As of now, 40 cruise calls with 80,000 passengers were reported."

He believes that cruising has a bright future because the country has formulated the master plan for cruise tourism, which is divided into three parts — ocean cruising, river cruising, and island and lighthouse tourism. By 2042-43, a growth of 10 to 12 times with 40 lakh cruise passengers is forecast, out of which over 20 lakh will be domestic cruise passengers. Domestic cruises have a potential, from an infrastructure point of view. It would need smaller vessels and less infrastructural availability. For both international and domestic cruises, the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW), in collaboration with MOT, has focused on developing six ports as cruise destinations — Mumbai, Goa, Mangalore, Kochi, Chennai and Visakhapatnam," he informed.

## Boost to aviation

Giving an overall view of the aviation industry, Kumar shared that while ongoing COVID-19 impacted the aviation sector, the

industry had recovered 70 per cent of the pre-COVID-19 levels before the second wave, which saw numbers dip to 10 per cent of the pre-pandemic levels and eventually go back to almost 2019-20 levels by 2021-end. "Despite Omicron, we are still continuing to operate almost at pre-pandemic levels. We have seen changing patterns in the marketplace over the last two years. With metro traffic being largely dependent on corporates, we have seen growth in the new markets, i.e., tier 2 and tier 3 cities. In the last three to four months, we have seen cities such as Kanpur, Bareilly and Gwalior doing well, and we made progress by deploying our capacity there. A lot of domestic growth is visible despite the postponement of international flights," he said.

Kumar claimed that India continues to be an underpenetrated market. "We believe that we need



**Rajiv Jain**  
Additional General Manager  
(Tourism), IRCTC

IATO and its members can also partner with us since we are open agency-oriented businesses too

more than 2,000 flights in the next 10 years. The IATO members can take huge advantage of the network growth coming out of the domestic market. There is a need to look at products around domestic travel, which would meet our business objectives together," he asserted.

## Not just railways

IRCTC is coming up with many innovative products and has come a long way by changing its perception as a tourism company, instead of being a platform to

book train tickets. Jain revealed, "The IRCTC has gone into every area of tourism, be it cruises, airlines, railways, or land traffic. However, 30 to 35 per cent of



**Sanjay Kumar**  
Chief Strategy & Revenue Officer  
IndiGo

IATO members should look at destinations such as Tirupati, Prayagraj, or Banaras, and make packages around them for visiting tourists

our tourism revenue still comes from rail products. On a retail basis, we have some tie-ups and back-up quotas where confirmed tickets are available for those booking a tourist package. Airline traffic has grown, 38 to 40 per cent of our traffic comes from domestic air packages. We have tied up with Antara Luxury Cruises as well as other ports in Mumbai. We are facilitating tourism by all modes of transport instead of just railways."

He stated that IRCTC was open to working with agents and agencies to sell packages and partner on a PPP model. "We have also entered the budget hotel segment. Apart from the Maharaja Express and the Buddhist Express, we have also launched the Ramayana Circuit for 17 days," he added.

## Inland cruising

Singh claimed that the potential

of river cruising in India is immense, with over 110 rivers being designated as national waterways. "Many of these rivers are navigable, which means river cruise tourism can happen everywhere. The important thing is that the ships must be made to suit the river's conditions. At Antara, we take domestic cruises to places such as the Sunderbans, colonial towns, and the like. Also, we will be operating cruises in Odisha for the first time as the government there is doing a lot. There are avenues for tour operators to book new cruises and destinations. We are also looking into combining river cruises with sea cruises. We have nine cruises and we can offer special rates and deals for the IATO members," he offered.

## Joining hands

While new and large vessels will be built, Jalota said, this would require facilities and eco-system development, which would start with capacity building or human resource development. Both MoPSW and MOT are pitching in with adequate funds under Sagarmala. "If the IATO could give more ideas regarding locations and the kind of investment needed, this sector could pick up pace. We need to work as partners, as this is the right time," he suggested.

Kumar shared that during the pandemic they saw opportunities in many verticals, including domestic charters. "We have seen people hiring Airbus 320 and 321 for groups ranging from 10 to 50 pax. I think it is a new niche market not only in the domestic sector, but also for nearby countries such as Singapore, the UAE and Maldives. Another segment for which we have developed connectivity is the religious tourism segment, and the IATO members should look at destinations such as Tirupati, Prayagraj (Allahabad), or Banaras, and make packages around them for for-



**Raj Singh**  
Chairman  
Antara Luxury River Cruises

We will be glad to do a session with the IATO members to educate them on river cruise potential

eign as well as domestic tourists. Also popular are domestic holiday charters, which are a great opportunity as well. We can think through a strategy to market and sell such packages together. There is huge potential in the Indian domestic tourism market."

## Affiliate marketing

Jain claimed that the IRCTC, which was an old PSU that started with a capital of ₹ 5 crore, today has a net worth of more than ₹ 1,400 crore in two decades.

"The IATO and its members can partner with us since we sell our packages not only via direct sales team or online, but we are open agency-oriented businesses too. Depending on the product, we charge a travel agency commission ranging from 2 to 7 per cent. It is a simple process and does not take much time. Within a week, an agent can come on board. Right from air package, rail package, or road package, we have provision for agency commission," he said.

## Stay informed

Singh advised that if the IATO members could talk to their overseas partners about river cruising of international standards being available in India, it could create the right buzz. "Once that is done, we can help you out with the kind of offerings we have. We will be glad to do a session with the IATO members to make them aware of the river cruise potential and the places where it is done," he said.

Summing up, Gupta said, "We need to work together and only then can we look at a long-term vision different from online modelling, where the customers look for instant gratification. I believe that this is a period of hibernation and after this, the IATO members need to look at reskilling and upgradation to change their strategy, scale and scope with better partnerships and products."



**Aashish Gupta**  
Consulting CEO  
FAITH

IATO members need to look at reskilling and upgradation to change their strategy, scale and scope with better partnerships and products

ber could work best on each vertical of transportation so as to revive his or her business.

## Cruising status

Starting with cruises, Gupta asked about the status of the cruise industry currently, which could be a huge opportunity for India with its 700-km coastline.

Jalota shared that cruise tourism was on an upward trend before COVID-19 and that 2019-20 was the peak year for cruise tourism in India. "There were 4.67 lakh cruise passengers on 451 cruise calls, which was way beyond the 2.2 lakh passengers

## Potential for cruising tourism

Cruising has a bright future as the country has formulated the master plan for cruise tourism which is divided into ocean cruising, river cruising, and island and lighthouse tourism. By 2042-43, a growth of 10 to 12 times with 40 lakh cruise passengers is forecast which 20 lakh will be domestic cruise passengers.



# Ark Travels charts a new course

Ark Travels recently held a networking event in Mumbai for Norwegian Cruise Line and to bring all its travel partners together. Led by Kishan Biyani, Ark Travels has ventured into a lot of different segments – it has started representing many destination management companies in Ukraine, South Africa, Turkey as well as Hong Kong, and has also tied up with Sarova Hotels & Resorts.





# IHG's new brands on the anvil

**Sudeep Jain**, Managing Director, South-West Asia, IHG Hotels & Resorts, shares his experience of 2021 and also what entails for the hospitality in 2022, including new brands suited for the Indian market. He expressed hope that the growth momentum will continue across key markets in India.

Nisha Verma

Wrapping up year 2021, Sudeep Jain, feels that the last year showed mixed kind of business. "Given that the COVID-19 situation in India continued to vary throughout 2021, the business was mixed with lows during the second wave of the pandemic and significant recovery once the situation stabilised. Effective roll-out of the vaccine and easing of travel restrictions have helped in return of consumer confidence and hotels across our portfolio register a noteworthy increase in bookings and occupancies across key destinations such as NCR, Goa, Jaipur, Agra and Chennai. In markets such as Delhi and Mumbai, many of our hotels have recorded over 80 per cent occupancy at the peak of business, which is a marked improvement from last year," he says.



**Sudeep Jain**  
Managing Director, South-West Asia, IHG Hotels & Resorts

## Business recovery

He claims that after the second wave started settling, situation improved further. "Starting June 2021, as the situation started to stabilise, we have also been receiving a considerable number of bookings for weddings and social events. We have seen an encouraging 30 per cent jump in the wedding APC (Average per Cover) and over 25 per cent surge in residential weddings. The leisure destination travel demand has also bounced back almost fully. Our InterContinental

Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort recorded occupancies close to Q1 2020 levels in Q3 2021, along with a higher ADR. In fact, our business performance has been quite strong in Q4 2021, with occupancies in some cases reaching above 2019 levels. Although the rates are still slightly reduced, we have witnessed a substantial surge in overall GOP (Gross Operating Profit)," he adds.

## Growth continues

Jain shares that given the attractiveness of the tourism and hospitality sector, their owners have continued to show confidence in them. "We have progressed with our growth plans in the country. This year, we opened Holiday Inn Zirakpur Chandigarh and Holiday Inn Goa Candolim. We signed Holiday Inn Express & Suites in Jalandhar to strengthen our footprint in Punjab and debuted Holiday Inn Express in Jaipur in October. In addition,

we announced the debut of our world-renowned extended stay brand, Staybridge Suites in India with signing of Staybridge Suites Bengaluru Thanisandra. We also

We expect domestic travel demand to continue to rise in 2022 and expect further easing of international movement

recently launched our first Six Senses hotel in India in Rajasthan," he reveals.

## Indian market

When asked about the major developments in the industry in the last one year, he says, "The Indian market has always been driven by domestic tourism, how-

ever, in the last couple of years with restrictions on international movement, domestic travel has gained even more traction. Quick weekend getaways, staycations and intercity vacations have emerged as key trends as travellers increasingly look for a break from their routines.

"Also, the concept of 'intimate weddings and social events' have played a crucial role in helping the industry move towards stronger recovery. In addition, with F&B being an important part of our business, we started offering home delivery service to our guests along with in-hotel dining options. This segment of F&B has seen rapid growth since last year. We incorporated healthier options with focus on immunity building food and overall wellness."

## Plans for 2022

Jain shares that in this year, they are looking at stronger recovery.

"We expect domestic travel demand to continue to rise in 2022 and expect further easing of international movement in the coming months. With accelerated vaccination drive across the country and people resuming work from office, we are optimistic about a stronger return of corporate travel in the coming year. Besides, we are also enthusiastic about the emphasis on GOP for the owners as the hotel investment trading volume increases in the coming quarters," he reveals.

"We also expect to continue with our growth momentum across key markets in India. Our mainstream portfolio will continue to drive this growth in line with market demands. However, we also see potential of debuting our global brands such as Regent, Kimpton and the recently launched Vignette Collection," he concluded.

# Bracing for the year ahead

In the last two years, the business landscape has shifted. The hospitality industry has taken advantage of this shift to manage its sales and revenues better. With new developments, fresh offerings and an optimistic attitude, the sector is gearing up for the coming year.

Janice Alyosius

The passing year was a mix of good and bad for the hospitality industry. While it began on a bright note, the second COVID-19 wave wreaked havoc on the industry across the country. However, the industry is now doing better, thanks to the wedding season and the New Year.

## Business in 2021

In terms of the business in 2021, **Sidharth Koul**, Director Sales & Marketing, JW Marriott, Bengaluru, stated that the hotel's central location has benefited them. It was one of the most sought-after places for clients planning special festivities and weddings, thanks to a choice of open-air venue alternatives. "Even in a city like Bengaluru, which is mostly known as a business destination, the wedding season



**Sidharth Koul**  
Director Sales & Marketing  
JW Marriott Bengaluru

The last couple of months have been considerably busy on account of the wedding season, even in a destination like Bengaluru

has been extremely active in the last several months. In terms of the number of weddings that are already confirmed and those that are planned for the coming



**Ajay Sampige**  
General Manager  
Hotel Royal Orchid Bangalore

The hospitality industry has had a severe impact. Our employees, owners, operators and ancillary industries have taken a beating

year, we continue to see a positive trend." About the business in 2021, the Hotel Royal Orchid in Bangalore revealed that it has always been a

popular choice for weddings, but due to the pandemic and the limited number of guests, they decided to split the large venue designed to hold over 500 guests into multiple sections.

"Splitting the enormous space enables us to host multiple social events at the same time, such as weddings, anniversaries, birthdays and other celebrations," said **Ajay Sampige**, GM, Hotel Royal Orchid, Bangalore.

## New offerings

Regarding new offers, Koul says, "At our all-day fine dining restaurant, JW Kitchen and our PAN-Asian restaurant, Merak, we are offering a multi-cuisine

buffet for guests. To enhance our guests' overall experience, we've put together some fun room-packages for families and couples who want to spend their vacation in luxury." Hotel Royal Orchid, Bangalore, expressed concern over the new COVID variant.

## Future plans

When asked about the plans in 2022, Koul expressed his displeasure with the revelation of the new variant, saying, "With the news of the new variant, we're keeping a close eye on the first quarter. With the exception of international travellers, who make up a substantial amount of our business, we had expected a significant recovery

in most categories of our business. I believe, there will be a negative impact on a few. We remain positive about the revival of business travel, as well as a slight uptick in international travel, beginning in the second half of next year."

Sounding positive, Sampige said, "We all hope 2022 will be a better year for all. The hospitality industry has had a severe impact. Our employees, owners, operators and ancillary industries have taken a beating. But the last couple of months have been extremely good and we are already back to 2019 revenues. I feel that 2022 will be stronger than ever."

*The so-called 'Double Sunrise' flight service by Qantas, which ran from Australia to Sri Lanka from 1943-45, often lasted over 30 hours. Today, the longest commercial flight is between Singapore and New York (17 hrs, 50 min), which is run by the Singapore Airlines.*





# focuses on Destination India

The Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) recently conducted an exclusive session with India Tourism on the benefits of registering with the Ministry of Tourism and promoting India as a destination to clients. Led by President Ajay Prakash and Western India Chairman Jitul Mehta, the event held in Mumbai saw participation from many members, who are keen on selling 'Apna Desh'.





# Watch out for travel trends in 2022

Despite the fact that the path to recovery is not always accurately predictable, we know that travel and tourism industry will revive and continue to grow in 2022. Industry experts have indicated the key trends we expect to see in 2022, especially the growth in the domestic travel.



Janice Alyosius

There was some sense of normalcy in mid-2021 when the virus showed signs of receding and travel began opening up, but with the emergence of the Omicron variant and cases once again on the rise, experts are optimistic that travel demand will return in the coming months and have identified some key trends that will shape the travel industry in 2022. It will take weeks before the true impacts of the new variant can be seen.

People have learnt to spend on holidays much more and make it a part of their annual



**Raymond LIM**  
Area Director  
Singapore Tourism Board

2022 will be a successful year for us if we scale up and become more innovative and creative

nant trend, and thereby, lesser-known destinations will see an upsurge of tourists," said Hira.

He continued, "The distinction between travel businesses such as inbound, domestic, outbound, and so on will become diluted, and the new-age tour operator will mean the 'one who offers tours to travellers' rather than in the area of descriptive geographical boundaries. "Operators will reinvent themselves and get into new travel verticals that otherwise they were resisting to ramp up their revenue sources."

While, **Raymond LIM**, Area Director, Singapore Tourism Board, believes the industry should focus on innovation and creativity. Our industry has been



**Pankaj Gupta**  
General Manager  
Crowne Plaza New Delhi Mayur Vihar

Business in wedding segment is picking up, selling at the right price should now be the primary focus of business in 2022

hospitality industry. Business in the wedding segment is picking up very strongly. November and December have gone quite well, and we anticipate that January and February will also go well. Selling at the right price should now be the primary focus of doing business in 2022."

2021 saw a surge in domestic business, and 2022 is expected to see a revival of the international travel also.

**Neha Morris**, Director of Sales, The Park Hotels, Delhi, assumes international travel will revive. It has been my observation that people are eager to do a lot of events domestically. In the past, people were more focused on international destinations, but now they are more focused on domestic locations where they can connect with others.

**Rajeev Kumar**, Director of Sales, Zone by The Park, added, "We do not see as many physical events as in 2019. However,



**Rajeev Kumar**  
Director of Sales  
Zone by The Park

Things look good at present; business has started to pick up. The industry will continue to thrive and survive in 2022

Corporate and domestic business is expected to boom in the near future.

**Rahul Kanishta**, Global Sales at Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts, further added, "International business is thriving now,



**Prateek Hira**  
IATO Chapter Chairman, Uttar Pradesh; President & CEO, Tornos and Director, River Rhapsody

The exploration of lesser known places will be a dominant trend, with the kind of knowledge today's travellers have gained

growing further in 2022. This will make our travel economy more stable, self-reliant and also attract a lot of high-end travel businesses in the domestic travel segment".

He further added, "Small and personalised travel companies will gain ground as travellers will have many more questions than they ever had and this new class of travellers may not be so happy dealing with large tour companies that, in spite of their best efforts, may not be able to cater to this demand so well." And the same will apply to B2B dealings in terms of dealings with large DMCs. This trend will bring regional players and small operators more prominently into the mainstream market.



**Naveen Kundu**  
Managing Director  
EbixCash Travel Services

India has a diverse nature and culture, so domestic travel will continue to flourish and thrive in the year ahead

going through a very difficult time over the last two years, where a lot of events haven't been able to take place physically, a lot of events have been cancelled, and we have gone to a virtual, hybrid model. "2022 will be a successful year for us if we scale up and become more innovative and creative. Although the year might not start in a very positive manner, we should be optimistic and realistic about how we can move forward in the industry to ensure that we carry out our activities and events in a safe manner. Despite the current conditions, we need to continue to be inventive and creative with technology so that we can carry on our activities and work

together with all the key players. Formerly, we were competitors, but now it's important that we be friendly opponents and work together," he said.

**Naveen Kundu**, Managing Director, EbixCash Travel Services, said that the domestic travel industry has got its due now, which was long overdue. People are waiting to travel overseas, so domestic travel will continue to dominate in 2022. Domestic travel will continue to flourish in the current year because of our country's very diverse nature and culture. In my opinion, more and more domestic conferences are going to take place in India, increasing the number of international conferences as well. India as a destination has a lot to offer, not just to corporates but to the whole travel industry. In the next 6 months, I believe that business travel will increase. The corporate travel season as well as meetings have already begun. There will be an increase in meetings, events, and corporate travel after two years of lull because people will have to get their employees out and interact with them more frequently," he said.

**Pankaj Gupta**, General Manager, Crowne Plaza, New Delhi, Vihar expects business to grow in the wedding industry with a focus on pricing the products correctly. "The wedding segment at the end of 2021 observed ascendancy, which is a very important segment for the



**Neha Morris**  
Director of Sales  
The Park Hotels, Delhi

In the past, people were more focused on international destinations, but now they are more focused on domestic



**Rahul Kanishta**  
Global Sales  
Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts

With flight connectivity and ease in travel restrictions, international destinations will also pick up for the Indian market

slowly and gradually, events will start to pick up. Corporate travel from the next financial year, beginning in February-March, is expected to pick up. In recent months, domestic business has grown, and we expect it to continue growing in the coming year. Things look really good at present; business has started to pick up. I think the industry will continue to thrive and survive in 2022. We have seen a lot of change in business.

especially in the neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka and Dubai. We expect international business to flourish again in 2022. Bookings have started coming in for corporate travel to Delhi and Bangalore, and similarly, international travel to Dubai and Sri Lanka has also picked up. With flight connectivity and ease in restrictions, other destinations will also pick up for the Indian market. "↓

## Weather advisory

In view of the weather advisory issued by the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), the Directorate of Tourism Kashmir has established an emergency 24x7 helpline number service to facilitate the tourists seeking help during any emergency arising due to inclement weather, rain or snowfall in the Valley.



# A 'Maldivian Night' in Mumbai

OneAbove DMC recently hosted a 'Maldivian Night' in Mumbai in association with Villa Hotels & Resorts. The event was attended by over 130 select trade partners from Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur and Delhi, who interacted with **Fathimath Ifasha**, Manager - Sales & Marketing, Villa Hotels & Resorts. **Rahim Aslam**, Founder & Consultant, OneAbove, expressed his gratitude to everyone present.





## EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



### JANUARY 2022

Date	Event	Time
7-9	Holiday Expo-Coimbatore	9:00 am
12	Dubai Accessible Tourism International Summit	9:00 am
14-16	Travel Fair	10:00 am
19-23	FITUR	9:00 am
21-22	India International Travel Mart Ahmedabad	9:00 am
21-23	India Travel Mart Dehradun	9:00 am
24	Thailand Tourism Forum	9:00 am
27-29	India International Travel Mart Cochin (IITM)	9:00 am

### FEBRUARY 2022

4-6	India International Travel Mart Ahmedabad	9:00 am
4	Travel & Tourism Fair Bengaluru	10:00 am
5-6	Travel Fair	10:00 am
9	International Mediterranean Tourism Market	9:00 am
13	Adventure Travel Film Festival	3:00 pm
25-27	Travel & Tourism Fair-Chennai	10:00 am
25-27	The Outdoor Adventure Show-Toronto	10:00 am
25-27	India Travel Mart - Goa	9:00 am

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

# Luxury beach resorts added in Puri

Swosti Group is all set to expand its new venture **Swosti Premium Beach Resorts**, the first five-star premium luxury beach resort at Sipasurubuli, Puri. This will also provide direct employment to 375 people and indirectly employ around 700 people.



The events industry in India is all set to get a new address with the latest offering from Swosti Group — Swosti Premium Beach Resorts — the first five-star premium luxury beach resort at Sipasurubuli, Puri. The property that comes equipped with facilities to host mega conferences and elaborate wedding ceremonies, boasts of large open-air landscaped lawns.

It also offers cuisines of various states of India, besides Chinese and intercontinental, at the food court. The highlight of the property is the Sky lounge bar situated at a height of 150 feet above ground level overlooking the Bay of Bengal.

It offers infinity swimming pool along with the 125 luxury rooms (including five premium luxury long suites on the 12th



floor) and a no-obstruction view of the sea. The centrally air-conditioned property boasts of more such state-of-the-art facilities. Each banquet hall will be attached to an open-air lawn. For the young and young-at-heart, there is also a game zone at the food court area to make sure there are enough activities to keep the guests occupied. A state of the art wellness spa and gym will also be made available at the resort to ensure fitness and wellness are on everyone's

mind. And the basement comes equipped with ample parking space to be able to host large weddings and conferences.

Swosti Group under the leadership of **J K Mohanty** has been promoting the tourism sector of Odisha successfully since 1981. The new Swosti Premium Beach Resorts will give direct employment to 375 people and indirectly employ around 700 people, including all vendors. Emphasis will be given to the local people

who have experience in the hospitality industry or have done courses in hotel management from Swosti Institute of Management & Social Studies.

Apart from Swosti Grand, Swosti Premium at Bhubaneswar and Swosti Palm Resort at Gopalpur-on-Sea, Swosti Chilika Resort situated at the banks of Chilika Lake, within a span of only four years, has been established as a major tourist attraction to the State and has become famous for leisure and MICE destination.

While Odisha is witnessing shortage of star category hotel rooms in comparison with neighbouring states, this latest offering from Swosti Group will attract investors to invest in tourism infrastructure. Odisha Government has taken several initiatives to attract investments in tourism sector which is the largest employment generator in the global market.

## IN MEMORIAM



**Bhagwan P. Kanuga**

We regret to inform the general public of the sad demise of our respected **Bhagwan P. Kanuga** on January 9 at the age of 91. Kanuga was indeed a gentle and noble soul. He was TAAI Western Region's Active member from Bathija Travels Pvt. Limited, Mumbai. Bhagwan P. Kanuga had served as Honorary Treasurer, TAAI during the term(s) 1995-1996, 1996-1997, 1997-1998, 1998-1999 and as Honorary Secretary General, TAAI during the term(s) 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005. We as a fraternity, convey our heartfelt condolences to the family and pray that the departed soul rests in peace.

# Bonding with travel fraternity

OTOAI recently organised an EOGM in New Delhi, where the participants shared the issues facing the association, its target areas and recent actions. **Riaz Munshi**, President, OTOAI, also shared the association's vision for 2022 in the meeting.



Janice Alyosius

Speaking at the OTOAI's Extra Ordinary General Meeting, **Riaz Munshi**, President, OTOAI, said that the organisation is working on creating relationships with all stakeholders, including airlines, visa facilitation services and the tourist board, and extending its assistance in giving all relevant information to them. "This is a moment for collaboration and building relationships so that everyone's business may grow," Munshi said.

**Shravan Bhalla**, General Secretary, OTOAI said, "We've been in touch with stakeholders via virtual meetings over the last few months. We intend to convene regular physical meetings with stakeholders, so that they can present themselves and inform the members about the latest happenings in their respective destinations."



**Riaz Munshi**  
President, OTOAI

This is the time of cooperation and building relationships, so everybody can strengthen their business

**Vineet Gopal**, Joint Secretary, OTOAI, said, "The association is advocating with the concerned authorities to have a global standard aviation policy because, in the long run, when things will open up, it is important to have



**Himanshu Patil**  
Vice-President, OTOAI

The association is in conversation with the government about having a licensing scheme for the travel trade

uniform practices at the airport. So, to fulfil the need, OTOAI, as an association, is working on it and we are also writing to all the authorities to initiate and develop the policies." **Himanshu Patil**, Vice President, OTOAI, said the



**Shravan Bhalla**  
General Secretary, OTOAI

We plan to call for regular physical meetings with the stakeholders to discuss the latest travel activities

travel industry has begun to see a decline after the news of new COVID-19 variant, Omicron. "There are not many activities we could do, as a lot of tourism boards and airlines are active at



**Vineet Gopal**  
Joint Secretary, OTOAI

The association is advocating with the concerned authorities to have a global standard aviation policy

present," he said. "The OTOAI is in talks with the government to have a licensing scheme for the travel trade to have an idea of the number of travel partners working in an authorised manner," he added.





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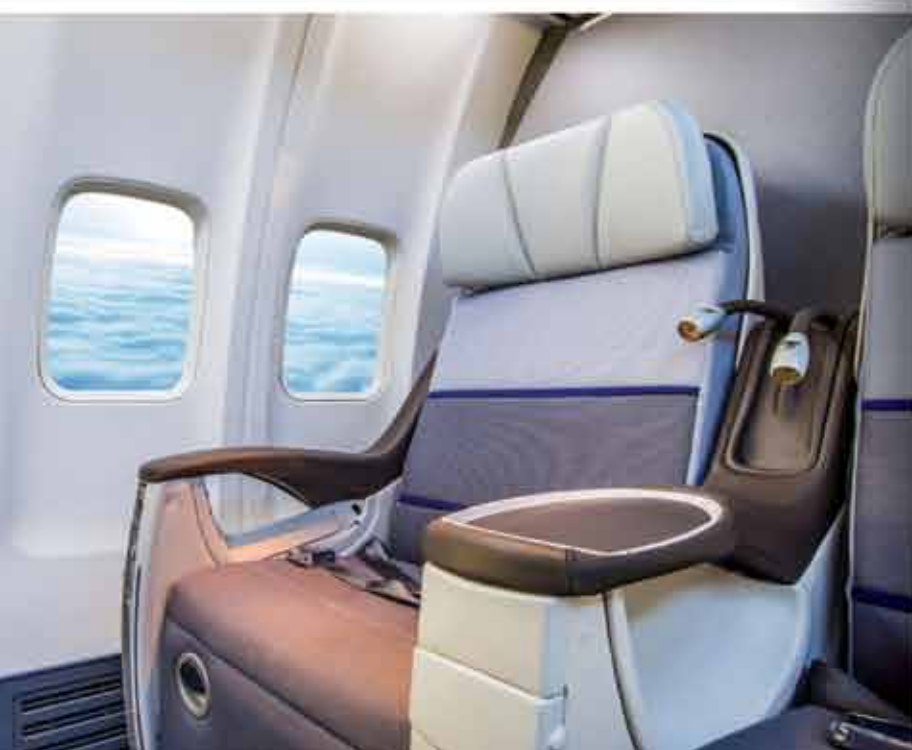
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## VISTARA

**Delhi**  
**VINOD KANNAN** takes over as Chief Executive Officer at Vistara. Kannan started his stint with Vistara as Chief Strategy Officer in June 2019 and took over as Chief Commercial Officer in January 2020 with responsibility for developing, executing and sustaining Vistara's corporate strategy and ensuring the airline's commercial success. He played a pivotal role in launching Vistara's international operations, expanding its domestic network, fleet size and driving airline's steady growth during the pandemic. Kannan spent over two decades working with Singapore Airlines (SIA).



## INDIGO

**NCR**  
**NEETAN CHOPRA** joins InterGlobe Aviation Ltd (IndiGo) as Chief Digital & Information Officer (CDIO). He will take on this newly created role with over 25 years of experience. Neetan is currently "Group Chief Technology Officer" at Dubai Holding and was previously a Senior VP of IT & Innovation at Emirates. Having begun his career at Accenture Consulting in India in early 1992, Neetan moved to the UAE and joined Emirates in 1995 as a Senior IT Manager. Neetan will be responsible for all aspects of IndiGo's information technology and systems related issues.



## MAKEMYTRIP

**New Delhi**  
**SAMEER BAJAJ** has been appointed by MakeMyTrip as the Head of Corporate Affairs and Communications. A multifaceted Corporate Communications & Corporate Affairs expert, Sameer has been in senior leadership roles across varied industries, including sports, real-life entertainment, direct-selling and edtech. During his career spanning over 20 years, Sameer has played a critical role in building corporate brand reputation and leading external & internal communications for global brands such as Discovery, Amway and WhiteHat Jr.



## ABSOLUTE HOTEL SERVICES

**Mumbai**  
**SHILPA JOSHI** has joined Absolute Hotel Services India, Mumbai, as the Director of Sales. She joins in with more than 13 years of experience, working across various industries such as Airlines, Travel trade and Online Platforms covering Hospitality and Sales fields. Her last assignment was with HRS GmbH, Key Account Manager, Sales, India Region. Joshi would be responsible for sales for all the properties in the India region. GThis includes strengthening the pan India sales and distribution network.



## JW MARRIOTT

**Bengaluru**  
**SANDEEP UDUPA** joins as Assistant Director of Human Resources at JW Marriott, Bengaluru. Bringing over 14 years of experience in the industry and an expert in end-to-end Human Resource functions, he has successfully strategised, co-created and executed business transformation through people processes to enhance business and sustain organisation. Starting his career in 2012 with Goa Marriott Resort and Spa, Sandeep gradually forayed into the Human Resource space when he joined Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield. He has held multiple managerial-level positions.



## SWOSTI PREMIUM

**Bhubaneswar**  
**DEVENDRA SHARMA** joins as the General Manager at Swosti Premium, Bhubaneswar. With 17 years in the hospitality industry, he is a seasoned hotelier with strong operations background. He began his career with the Taj Hotels and rose the ranks through various positions in different cities in India. He joined Marriott International as Beverage Manager at Le Meridien Jaipur and got promoted to Food & Beverage Manager at the Indana Palace and then as GM at Inder Residency, Udaipur, Goverdhan Eco Village, Mumbai, followed with Rajasthali Resort & Spa.



## DOUBLETREE BY HILTON

**Gurugram**  
**HARPREET KAUR BAKSHI** has been appointed by the DoubleTree by Hilton as the Marketing & Communications Manager. Harpreet has over 10 years of experience in the hospitality industry. Prior to this, she was associated with hotels such as The Metropolitan Hotel & Spa, WelcomHotel by ITC Hotels at Dwarka, Eros Hotel New Delhi Nehru Place. Harpreet holds a strong understanding of digital, traditional marketing and PR management skills. She has managed networks in media, marketing circles and social media influencers. She will be responsible for managing all Marketing and PR activities, elevating and sustaining the hotel's brand positioning.



## GRAND MERCURE BANGALORE

**Bengaluru**  
**ANUJ CHAUDHRY** has been appointed as the new General Manager for the 126 keys Grand Mercure Bangalore. He has a career spanning over 16 years in hospitality management and business leadership. He is a seasoned professional who has worked across markets in Hyderabad, Bangalore, Kolkata and Delhi NCR. Anuj will lead the hotel's overall performance and growth. He began his career with the Taj Krishna in Hyderabad, and later joined the Accor India team at its flagship hotel Novotel Hyderabad Convention Center and Hyderabad International Convention Center as an Assistant Manager Front office.



## THE RESORT HOTEL

**Mumbai**  
**CLINT RODRIGUES**, a proficient professional in the hospitality industry, is the new Food & Beverage Manager at The Resort Hotel, Mumbai. Having over 18 years of rich and diverse experience in Bar and Restaurant Management, he is proficient in handling restaurants' day-to-day operations, while meeting the quality standards, ensuring guest service satisfaction and revenue goals. Rodrigues started his journey in the hospitality industry with the JW Marriot Mumbai. He then moved to P&O Cruise Line as Food & Beverage waiter. His also worked at the Holiday Inn at Mumbai International Airport.



## TALKing People

**CYRUS MADAN**, Senior Vice President (Business Development) for India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Nepal, Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts, unwinds by going on motorcycle trips with his motorcycle buddies. "One thing I am passionate about is making sure that my family's elderly are comfortable and feel cared for." Sharing one of his most memorable holiday moments, Madan says, "There are so many of them. The most recent one was riding motorcycles in Jaisalmer along the Indo-Pak international border. In India, I love spending time in the hills."



**MANAV KHANDUJA**, Co-founder, Pugdunde Safaris, is a nature lover, and a nature walk works wonders to help him de-stress. "I also indulge in my favourite pastimes, which include bird watching and physical exercise. During the lockdown, I found pleasure in gardening, especially herbs," he says. His favourite holiday destinations are Kanha National Park in India and Switzerland. "Kanha is the most versatile park in the country, and we also have our lodge there. It always feels like going back home," Khanduja adds.



**DILIP MODI**, Founder, Travel Union, feels that with remote working being the norm during the ongoing pandemic, it is necessary to take small breaks during work hours to avoid burnout. "I de-stress by spending quality time with my family. I make sure we go on a vacation to places that are close to nature. I have picked up yoga and meditation as skills. I learnt it during the lockdown. I can sense the calm it brings even at work, in stressful situations, and even otherwise," he shares.





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# Always synonymous with luxury

**Anuraag Bhatnagar**, COO, The Leela Palaces, Hotels & Resorts, shares how they utilised the COVID-19-induced lockdowns to open new properties and plan for future growth, while claiming that they plan to stay in the luxury space.



Nisha Verma

The pandemic has not left anyone in the industry untouched, says **Anuraag Bhatnagar**. "It has affected the entire hospitality and travel trade equally. It was agnostic to the brands and hotels," he adds. However, he claims that for Leela, it was a time for growth.

## Time for opportunities

"For us at Leela, since we have been growing and adding hotels, we were slightly insulated. We created opportunities out of this adversity and opened three hotels — The Leela Gandhinagar, The Leela Palace Jaipur, and The Leela Bhartiya City in Bengaluru. Overall, we added 900 keys to our portfolio, and we used this time to also bring a lot of technology; hire some of the best talent in the industry; set up our systems and processes in the organisation; and bring in some cost synergies to bring in efficiencies," adds Bhatnagar.

## Survival strategies

Detailing the survival strategies they employed during the lockdowns, he shares, "The first step was to get through the pandemic and survive." Hence, we made our fixed cost structures as variable as possible. Secondly, we used this time to deploy our people because Leela is one of the very few organisations where we ensured that jobs and roles were not impacted."

They also rolled out technology so that they could offer high-tech and high-touch without taking the personalisation away. "Although the world was moving away from contact and social distancing, we brought in the technology

that will enable our services to be delivered more efficiently. We rolled out the Leela Palace Butler Services Program; Ceremonial Rituals as a representation of true Indian luxury; the Pride Pins that we wear; and the 'I am Leela' campaign. We used technology to make our HR, accounting, and finance processes more efficient," he shares.

Most importantly, claims Bhatnagar, "We used this time to acquire hotels and expand our portfolio. All our hotels are doing exceptionally well. The Leela Palace Jaipur, which we

I think Leela is synonymous with true Indian luxury and that is where we have carved a niche

opened during the pandemic, is now topping the Jaipur market as the preferred destination for FITs and weddings. Leela Gandhinagar hosted the IATPO's 36th Annual Convention. We have a lineup of international and domestic events at this hotel, along with Mahatma Mandir. The Leela Bhartiya City, spread over 130 acres, as a whole, has amazing food and beverage restaurants. Hence, we have worked on all these strategies to make sure that when the new normal returns, we come out leaner, more efficient, and far more agile to own this upswing."

## IATO convention

Bhatnagar was a panellist at one of the sessions at the recent IATO Convention. "The best part about attending the



convention was meeting all these people after a long time. Kudos to IATO President Rajiv Mehra and his Executive Committee for bringing everybody who matters into the grand ballroom at the Leela Gandhinagar. The second thing was to understand from them how the business is panning out, the challenges and how they are coping with this pandemic. We need to see how, as a travel trade and industry, we can work with each other to sail through this together. It is the spirit of collaboration and their feedback that is important because, as hoteliers, we completely recognise the role that IATO partners play — they are our B2C. They make sure that there are end users and how we can improve our working relationship. We had meaningful talks, which will set the tone for the future," he claims.

## Only luxury

When asked if they would enter the budget space, he denies it, saying, "I think

Leela is synonymous with true Indian luxury and that's where we have carved a niche. We are clear that we want to grow in this space. We believe there is a lot more opportunity for strategic growth. Our resort hotels, especially during the pandemic, have been doing 120 to 140 per cent of the revenue that they were achieving in 2019."

## New ventures

After opening three hotels during the pandemic, there is no stopping for new ventures. "We are working on some interesting and exciting openings," Bhatnagar claims.



**Anuraag Bhatnagar**  
COO, The Leela Palaces, Hotels & Resorts

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