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Connectivity, infra top MOT agenda

Citing that the tourism sector is beneficiary of investments by various ministries and departments, including national highways, rural development, civil aviation and railways, G. Kamala Vardhana Rao, Director General Tourism, Government of India, urges investors to invest in tourism and infrastructure projects.



Janice Alyosius

G. Kamala Vardhana Rao, Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India & Managing Director, ITDC Ltd, has urged investors to invest in the tourism sector. "India is going to host the G-20 meetings next year and it will be organised across various states and cities. The states are also investing heavily to build infrastructure. I urge investors to come forward and invest in the hospitality sector," he said, while addressing the 7th National Tourism Investors Meet 2022, organised recently by FICCI.

Speaking about the investment potential in tourism sector, Rao

said that the sector is beneficiary of all the investments by various ministries and departments, including national highways, rural development, civil aviation and railways. "Every state is focusing on construction of roads as a part of rural tourism initiative to ensure rural connectivity. And here, technology is playing an important role. Use of modernised equipment is ensuring that the roads are strong enough and are not damaged or get affected easily by monsoon rains," he added.

Rao's views hold significance in the view of PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan (PMGS-NMP), which was launched to provide multi-modal connectivity infrastructure



G. Kamala Vardhana Rao
Director General, MOT, Government of India
& Managing Director, ITDC Ltd

to various economic zones. There are seven engines that drive the plan comprising roads, railways, airports, ports, mass transport, waterways and logistics infrastructure. Separate budgets have

been allocated for different segments and the government is working towards achieving the macro-economic level growth with a focus on micro-economic level all-inclusive welfare.

Working on the lines of PMGS-NMP, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways is rigorously working towards the set target of National Highways Network to be expanded by 25,000 km in 2022-23. The other and an important area of focus is the air connectivity. Rao said that each year the government is taking various steps to improve the rail and air connectivity but air connectivity in the north-eastern sector still needs to be enhanced. "The government

is focusing on discovering new airports and last mile connectivity. Every year we are focusing on improving our connectivity, which is a challenge in a lot of destinations, especially in the Northeast

Every year we are focusing on improving our connectivity, which is a challenge in a lot of destinations, especially in the Northeast region

region. (The) Prime Minister has given a target that 100 university students in India should be taken to Northeastern states to show and let them experience the beauty but connectivity is a major issue there. So, apart from road and highway, the government is focusing on airport development and air connectivity," he added.

He also mentioned about the G20 summit. India will hold the G-20 presidency from 1 December 2022 and convene the first G20 leaders' summit in 2023. "This is an opportunity for India to recover and bounce back," Rao said, requesting the investors to invest in the development of new destinations and promote India.

Speed up visa, say agents

Travel trade continues to struggle as there is considerable delay in getting visas to Schengen countries for various reasons. **TRAVTALK** speaks to a few key agents to get their points of view.



Hazel Jain

The ongoing EU visa processing delays may have been creating more Indian traffic for other international destinations. According to **Mahendra Vakharia**, Executive Committee Member & Immediate Past President – OTOAI & MD, Pathfinders Holidays, there is definite delay and difficulty in getting appointments for visa applications to most of the Schengen countries right now. Due to this challenge in getting the appointment slot for submission of documents, there is considerable delay in the visa process to be completed.

He said, "Clients have had to change their plans and prefer



Mahendra Vakharia
Executive Committee Member & Immediate Past President, OTOAI & MD Pathfinders Holidays

to travel to Turkey, South Africa, and Kenya: visas are easier and quicker to obtain. South Africa, Kenya, Thailand and Singapore are some of the countries where visa can be obtained in a reasonable time. The Indian outbound

travellers are eager to fly out from India for a holiday with family, which means they are going to spend good money in the destination. The outbound market has been subdued in the last two years. However, since March 2022 when the market opened and picked up and if only the embassies and consulates had anticipated this surge and kept their teams ready, the season and business to Schengen states would have been much better."

Yes, said **Dharmendra Singh**, Director, Plaisir Hospitality Services. "It is difficult to get a Schengen visa nowadays. The waiting time is minimum five to six months. I think it is due to less staff or Schengen

Contd on page 10 ►

'Tourism is serious business'

After spending three years in MOT, Rupinder Brar, Additional Director General, Tourism, Gol, is getting repatriated to her parent cadre (IRS-IT) for a promotion. The MOT stint was full of learning, she claims.



Nisha Verma

When she joined the Union Ministry of Tourism in 2019, Rupinder Brar saw a lot of ups and downs within the industry, the biggest upheaval being the ongoing pandemic. Agreeing that she would be formally leaving the tourism ministry and joining an assignment with the IRS, she said, "It has been an eventful journey, where I learnt a lot professionally as well as personally. As we all know ongoing COVID-19 played the villain in terms of stopping travel from March 2020. It has been a tough two years for us all," Brar said.

"This period," Brar said, "has been a time of great learning for



Rupinder Brar
Additional Director General, Tourism, Gol

me. When you continue to do things the way they are being done, the change is incremental in terms of adopting and adapting to new practices. The ongoing COVID-19 was so upsetting that it required a lot of rethink; things needed to be done differently. We

all had to put our hats down and think about how we should come out of the crisis. How travel and tourism should recover. It was a tremendous three years, active and engaging. I have personally and professionally grown a lot in the last three years," she added.

Period of learning

Stating that when she joined the Tourism Ministry, she said, "I moved in from the IRS, which is an earning department and I was going to a spending department. The biggest learning for me has been that tourism is a sector with a huge opportunity for India. This learning has gotten reinforced every single day. Tourism is a game changer because there

Contd on page 18 ►



LA INSIDER TRAINING PROGRAM WINNERS FOR 2022

Bumper Prize Winners



Shanam Jain
Head of Marketing
Maurya Travels



Neeraj Gupta
Director
Peekay Holidays



Vyoma Bhatt
Director
Aspen Vacations



Hamed Ali
Managing Director
Imad Travel



Dheeraj Kandur
Partner
Flight Shop

Other Awardees

Ciji Varghese
Intersight Holidays

Meera Rajaram
Narmada Holidays

Ranvir Singh
Ghoorna Vacations

Sudhir Tull
Travel Instagram

Nitish Gupta
Zenith Holidays

Utsav Bhambha
Kulin Kumar Holidays

Abdul Aleem
Brilliance Holidays

Sambhu P.S
Flyover Holidays

Neha Kasliwal
Thomas Cook India

Vikas Soningra
Bella Corsa

Vishal Panchamia
Musafir.com

Sreejith Velayudhan
Benchmark Holidays

Janhavi Rane
Veena World

Roshan George Jacob
Kerala Travels Interserve

Sarabjeet Singh
Akbar Travels

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Sky World Tours & Travels

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IATO lauds 'favourable' GST decisions

IATO is thankful to Union Finance Minister, GST Council and Chairman of CBIC for accepting its two recommendations — removal of GST on services provided outside India to foreign tourists and GST for ferry service hired for transport of passengers, says Rajiv Mehra, President of the Association.



Nisha Verma

The Union government has accepted IATO's two recommendations — first, the removal of GST on services provided outside India to foreign tourists if they take combined package of India and neighbouring countries and second, GST for the ferry service hired for transport of passengers, including tourists used as public transport from point-to-point transport in Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

GST on combined package

Elaborating on the issue, Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO, said, "We have been recommending to the Ministry of Finance for the last couple of years in our budget recommendations to remove GST on services provided outside India to foreign tourists if they take a combined package of India and outside India. We thank the government for considering our request favourably and giving a clarification that service provided

by an Indian tour operator to a foreign resident for a tour partially in India and partially outside India



Rajiv Mehra
President, IATO

is to be subject to tax proportionate to the tour conducted in India for such foreign tourist subject to conditions that this concession does not exceed half of tour duration."

Ferry tickets GST

In its budget recommendations, IATO had also requested for exemption or reducing GST on private ferry tickets at Andaman considering that these transport

ferries operating in Andaman and Nicobar Islands are not luxury/tourism ferries or cruise, but they are used as means of transport and is only source of connectivity between small islands and Port Blair. "The government has considered this too favourably and clarified that there would be no GST for the ferry service hired for transport of passengers, including tourists used as public transport from point-to-point transport, including in Andaman & Nicobar Islands," added Mehra.

Pending demands

Apart from expressing gratitude for the relief provided, IATO also urged government to remove cascading effect of GST on tour operators and GST on tour operators be charged on deemed value as in the case of air travel agents, where a deemed value of 10 per cent of gross billing of the tour operator may be considered as the taxable value on deemed basis whereas it is being charged on gross value for tour operators.

Besides, there is a small correction needed in CGST Notification No. 11/2017-CT(R) dated 28.6.2017 (as amended), where a word "and" is required to be replaced by the word "or", informed Mehra.



hotel accommodation also, which is 12 per cent or 18 per cent of the tax, which we are already paying. "Our request was that let the government charge 18 per cent on our deemed 10 per cent profit or 10 per cent markup. So, this is still under consideration, according to my sources in the ministry, as this has not been dumped, but has been kept and might be considered whenever we meet again," he said.

Aiding business

When asked about helping the members in reviving business, Mehra shared that it has to be done by the government. "There is no promotion done by the government yet, but we are hopeful that it would start in the next couple of weeks.

Beyond SEIS

Talking about the SEIS, which the government is not willing to continue with, Mehra said, "SEIS not being continued is an old story and we have realised this in the last two years. We have been

writing and talking to Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Finance that at least for the tour operators and travel agents, five to 10 percent of duty drawback or something should be given on whatever they earn in foreign

We thank the government for considering our request favourably and giving a clarification on services provided outside India

exchange. However, nothing has happened. There has been no headway and it seems that the government does not want to do it either. We are still telling them to support the industry as this is the minimum they can do.



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Zest to travel

On March 27, 2022, most Indians rejoiced the restart of international flights after a gap of two years. In the last two years, Indian luxury hotels and destinations did well as the enthusiasm to travel continued during the pandemic, but the opportunities were limited. Research and studies conducted in March this year showed that most Indians were waiting to travel abroad again. At the time, most travel service providers were reluctant but, fortunately, travel picked up at an accelerating speed. The recovery was as quick as the slowdown and the hustle and bustle made most of the industry happy.

Flights out of India are full, visa appointments are nearly impossible, and hotels are over-booked! What a good season for business. Everyone wants a visa and just can't wait to travel. Destinations that offered visa on arrival or e-visa services have done exceedingly well this summer. Interestingly, no one anticipated this kind of rush for visas and, unfortunately, the supply hasn't been able to match the demand. Rumour has it that Europe's loss is Australia's gain this summer.

While Indians are aggressively travelling, global brands, DMCs and international tourism authorities are heavily investing in India. As the Indian industry has become lucrative, everyone wants a share from this pie. A recent United Nations report projected India to surpass China as world's most populous country during 2023. But what does this mean for international tourism? Will investments by international travel brands also be one of the highest in India? While this is something worth watching, let's hope that the Indian traveller sees more ease in travel across the world.

Since the pandemic, while the Indian travellers have started spending more on their holiday abroad and started to invest in luxury, it's the lack of the Chinese and Russian outbound travellers that has put a spotlight on the Indians. While this is our moment to shine on an international platform, how is the sector making the most of it? I wonder how the associations are taking this forward as we aren't hearing much at all!

Indians 'confident' to travel

About 82 per cent of Indian travellers, the highest in the Asia Pacific region, have an appetite for sustainable travel and are willing to pay more if it means they can make more choices, reveals Booking.com's inaugural APAC Travel Confidence Index.



As various countries have opened their borders, Indians are eager to make their travel dreams a reality in the next few months! Around 86 per cent of Indian travellers stated they intend to travel in the next 12 months. They are eager for a leisure trip despite Covid-19 fcurbs.

These insights have been drawn from Booking.com's inaugural APAC Travel Confidence Index, which provides a snapshot of how confident Indian travellers feel about exploring the world again. The research, which polled 11,000 travellers from 11 countries across Asia Pacific, offers insights into the region's travel confidence.

India tops TCI

The travel confidence index explores the overall comfort levels and concerns of travellers across APAC and how this varies across the region. Out of the 11 APAC markets, Vietnam, China, South Korea, Taiwan and Japan ranked lower than India on the index in terms of overall confidence, while travel intent among th respondents remained relatively high (above 60 per cent).

Ritu Mehrotra, Commercial Director, APAC at Booking.com, said, "It is exciting to see India emerge at the top of Booking.com's APAC Travel Confidence Index. The findings highlight



Indian travellers' love for travel and readiness to explore the world once again. And while travel optimism remains strong,

opportunities available for the industry to adapt and collaborate now to bolster the overall confidence of travellers, so we can truly make it easier for everyone to travel and experience the world again - now and in the years to come."

Top travel considerations

The desire to travel remains strong among APAC as well as Indian travellers, with ease of planning and booking travel being the top two considerations. Both ranked consistently high across all markets, even as restrictions started to continue to ease around the region. While corporate travel is beginning to make a comeback, the shift to remote working and virtual meetings has perhaps brought about a shift in the way we work.

Top travel deterrents

When asked about their concerns and what would prevent them from booking a trip, the possibility of getting stuck because of changing border regulations was listed as the top deterrent by 35 per cent of Indian travellers and 37 per cent travellers in APAC, respectively. In fact, the findings emphasised flexibility in travel bookings, as 89 per cent of Indian travellers would postpone or cancel a trip if they saw a rise in Covid-19 cases at their travel destination.

Reopening of borders

Because of the fear of future Covid-19 waves, there is a preference for domestic travel, despite resumption of international travel. As per the research, nearly

87 per cent of Indian travellers are likely to travel domestically. In addition, Indians continue to welcome tourists and visitors, with 87 per cent of Indians polled comfortable with India reopening its borders to international travellers. About 84 per cent of Indian travellers stated that they are confident about their country's preparedness to safely receive international travellers.

Sustainable travel

Out of the countries polled across the APAC, India once again topped the index in terms of intent to travel sustainably, with 93 per cent of respondents

Out of 11 APAC markets, Vietnam, China, South Korea, Taiwan and Japan ranked lower than India in terms of overall confidence

India once again topped the index in terms of intent to travel sustainably, with 93 per cent of respondents agreeing on its importance

agreeing on the importance of making sustainable travel decisions. The intent also translates into action as 82 per cent of Indian travellers are willing to pay more if it means they can make more sustainable travel choices and 77 per cent are okay with less variety in options as long as their travel decisions are sustainable.

Country Ranking by Travel Confidence

1 st		India
2 nd		Vietnam
3 rd		China
4 th		New Zealand
5 th		Australia
6 th		Singapore
7 th		Hong Kong
8 th		Thailand
9 th		South Korea
10 th		Taiwan
11 th		Japan

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India's international air passenger volume likely to hit 97 per cent of pre-Covid levels in FY23: IORA

V Krishna Teja moves, PB Nooh is now Director, Kerala Tourism

India elected to Inter-governmental panel of UNESCO for 4 years: Reddy

Indian aviation ready to become world's third largest market by 2024, says MoCA

Ethiopian to thrice a week flights between Addis Ababa and Chennai

Venice to be world's first city to have compulsory entrance fee from next January

Deoghar Airport in Jharkhand ready for operations

Direct Bhubaneswar-UAE flights to operate very soon, says Odisha CM

Turkish Airlines & IndiGo resume existing codeshare partnership

Inbound efforts by govt needed

From medical tourism to leisure inbound, everything needs to be marketed in the right way internationally. This will make locals and tour operators aware who specialise in medical tourism, says Ranga Reddy, Chairman, IATO Telangana and Andhra Pradesh Chapter.



Nisha Verma

Ranga Reddy, Chairman, IATO Telangana and Andhra Pradesh Chapter said, "In terms of medical tourism, Hyderabad offers accessibility in terms of air connectivity, road or trains. The only problem is that the Telangana government does not participate in the global marketing and travel exhibitions among others. The tourism department must come out with a consortium of hospitals—with each hospital listing out its specialities and participate in the global and national roadshows. This will bring more awareness to locals as well as tour operators who specialise in medical tourism."

He suggested that the state governments, while taking this consortium outside India, should highlight the various benefits and facilities available not only for the patients, but also for the attendants. "Presently, it is the private hospitals, which are doing that.

But of late, even the government hospitals have jumped into the bandwagon. People from other states and countries arrive in Hyderabad for medical issues, including in-vitro fertilisation, fish



Ranga Reddy
Chairman, IATO-Telangana and
Andhra Pradesh Chapter

medicine or treatment of acute bronchitis. People from Nagpur, North Karnataka, North East, tribals of Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh come to Hyderabad," claimed Reddy.

Back to business

Reddy shared that people are making inquiries from September onwards.

"They have given a lot of quotations, including specialisation in textiles, culture tours and outstation tours up to Goa. Hopefully, the inquiries may materialise. We are in touch with the other IATO Chapter Chairmen also in this regard. It is not because of COVID-19, but because of the season, which is not new. June-July are important months in Indian education system as students change institutions, go for admissions and settle themselves in new colleges," he added.

Inbound revival

When it comes to representing IATO, Reddy informed recently Prime Minister Narendra Modi has told Union Minister for Tourism G. Kishan Reddy to interact with the association members and resolve their problems to boost inbound tourism to India.

"They have levelled several things, including the MDA aspect and hopefully, IATO is looking into it," he informed.

Reddy believes that inbound will not reach 2019 levels before 2024. "This is because people are still reeling under recession. They come from San Francisco to India, not only to visit India, but also to



It (tourism) has more to do with the govt because all the tourists touch down at New Delhi first, and then go to other cities

visit Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Nepal—a one round trip. These issues need to be ironed out. When all these things normalise, it will also boost inbound tourism," he said. Foreign tourists, unlike Indian tourists, do not like to step out for sightseeing or any other

excursions without guides. We met around 15 to 20 guides and none of them have any assignment since almost 21 days, which shows that there is no momentum of foreign tourists. In any case, we know from experience that May, June and July are the worst affected months, as far as foreign tourists are concerned, because of the hot humid and rainy seasons. During this period, every year it is dull, and it is not just ongoing COVID-19 phenomenon," he claimed.

Not a state issue

Tourism, said Reddy, does not face all problems because of the state. "It has more to do with the government of India because all the tourists touch down at New Delhi first, and then go to other cities. Unfortunately, many flights are not operating directly to Hyderabad via Delhi or Mumbai. That is also a big drawback, and the cost factor is beyond the control. The problem is that the government has to concentrate to bring infra into tourism."

'Boost confidence of inbound tourists'

K Pandian, Chairman, IATO Tamil Nadu, Andaman & Nicobar and Puducherry Chapter and Founder Chairman, Cholan Tours, says they are the first Indian travel company, domestic or inbound, giving insurance complimentary to all its clients, which ensures safety and boosts their confidence.



Nisha Verma

K Pandian, Chairman, IATO Tamil Nadu, Andaman & Nicobar and Puducherry Chapter and Founder Chairman, Cholan Tours, said, "Our company has started travel assistance and complimentary insurance cover for inbound clients from 15 June 2002 and for domestic clients from 1 July. In fact, 99.99 per cent of the travellers from Malaysia who come to Tamil Nadu do not take insurance. If they take insurance, their safety and security will be ensured. It is not only for the client, the agents should also make use of this service." The insurance aid covers accident or small injuries for which hospitalisation is not needed. "It covers illness of immediate blood relatives. Trip cancellation is also covered. Missing connecting domestic flight and airline costs are also covered. All this coverage is available once they arrive in India and not before," he revealed.

"After ongoing pandemic subsided, we expected the central or state governments to come up with a complimentary insurance cover for tourists. I was expecting a statement in this regard from Narendra Modi, Hon'ble



K Pandian
Chairman, IATO Tamil Nadu, Andaman
& Nicobar and Puducherry Chapter
and Founder Chairman, Cholan Tours

Prime Minister. Unfortunately, it was not to be. Hence, I decided to do it myself. We are the first travel company in India, domestic or inbound, who is giving the travel assistance cum insurance complimentary to all clients

booked with my company or South Tourism Services. The insurance covers hospitalisation, accident, baggage lost or trip cancelled due to personal tragedy or illness, and emergency medical expenses in family as well." It will give a positive vibe for the tourists, he added.

Getting back to business

"We are doing better than anybody in the country. In 2021, we have done much better than anybody in the country. In 2022 also, we are moving forward. Most people did not even make ₹50 lakhs in 2020-2021, but we have done business worth ₹3 crores. In 2022, we are moving forward as inbound has already started. This travel assistance cum insurance cover is one reason to make clients choose us," he claimed.

Expecting numbers

When it comes to reaching 2019 levels, Pandian said that it is still a long way ahead. "If we do 20

to 23 per cent business of what we did in 2019-20, that would be remarkable. I think actual inbound is likely to start from October 2023," he said. Some movement may start in January 2023," he claimed.



To boost tourism, the government should bring all the stakeholders together and try to know their problems and issues

He reiterated, "All this will happen soon if the central and state governments welcome tourists, promote tourism and introduce insurance cover for tourists coming



to India, apart from announcing 2023 as a Visit India Year."

Sustainability

Speaking on the government's focus on sustainability, he shared that his company has taken sustainability seriously for the last many years. "I started this initiative in 2008. Our company stopped using papers since 2008. We only use e-files, we do not have couriers, no cheques are issued—no print-outs are taken or no brochures issued. We created a mobile app in 2014 so that clients get all the

documents/info in the app. We shifted to using solar power in 2010. Thus, in 2018 in Montenegro, we were the first Indian company to get a Lufthansa Green Award," he said.

How to boost numbers

Pandian believes the government should make five or 10-year plans for boosting tourism. "The government should bring all the stakeholders together and try to know their problems and issues. The government should act as a facilitator. That will help in promoting the country," he said.

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Head for a MICE time in Australia

Business Events Australia, along with Tourism Australia's partners Melbourne Convention Bureau and Business Events Sydney, and SOTC, recently hosted five corporates from Mumbai to a six-day luxury famil to Australia. Here's what the corporates had to say about their trip to Melbourne and Sydney.



Hazel Jain

Even before Australia had removed all travel restrictions for international travellers (dated July 6, 2022) the destination had started to see movement from India – not just FIT but student and corporate travel. Taking advantage of the



Kketan Pabari
Head – Commercial & Procurement,
Aditya Birla Sun Life Insurance Company

interest it saw building up, Tourism Australia in India planned a corporate famil – the first that Australia welcomed since the border reopened. Five corpo-



John Pareira
Manager – Travel
Lupin

rates were a part of this and this famil. For **Kketan Pabari**, Head – Commercial & Procurement, Aditya Birla Sun Life Insurance Company, all the activities the group did in Melbourne and Sydney were amazing. "If I had to choose, two things really stood for me. One was the Sydney Cricket Ground because most Indians love the game and will love visiting this place. The other one that I loved from the nature point of view was Glenworth Valley in Sydney where we did horse-riding and quad biking," he said.

New destinations discovered

This was his first visit to Australia, says **John Pareira**, Manager – Travel, Lupin. "I now understand what can be included and what can't be, keeping the budget in mind. We have never done a group to Melbourne. So, this trip was an eye-opener. I realise



Cletus Colaco
Senior, General Manager (Market Development) Gulf Oil Lubricants India

that we can create an itinerary for eight days or more and include Melbourne in it," he adds.

Cricket a big draw

Cletus Colaco, Senior, General



Bhaumin Shah
Associate Vice President
State Bank of India

Manager (Market Development) Gulf Oil Lubricants India, showed more interest the in cricket venues. He said, "We saw Melbourne and Sydney Cricket Grounds, which was excellent. Both have a lot of space where we can do conferences, gala dinners and performances. The Melbourne Skydeck is also good for social events. Even the Harley Davidson ride we did in Sydney was good."

State Bank of India was also part of this famil and with a staff of

over 10,000 employees, it organises many corporate trips. **Bhaumin Shah**, Associate VP, SBI, said, "After visiting Australia myself, I know that there are many other options as well that



Melvin Joseph
Dy GM (Sales Service & Administration – Lifestyle) Raymond

we can incorporate, specially for our 200-300 top performers."

A new option for MICE

This visit was a dream for **Melvin Joseph**, Dy GM (Sales Service & Administration – Lifestyle) Raymond, and he managed to have a



Naveen Kukreti
Associate Vice president – MICE,
SOTC Travel

good look around for his groups. "I think there are a lot of opportunities, specially in Sydney – I think that is one of the best cities I have visited and our groups will enjoy it.

Speaking from the tour operator point of view, **Naveen Kukreti**, Associate Vice president – MICE, SOTC Travel, shared that his company has brought many groups to Australia after COVID. "This was the first group we did to Australia after borders opened. We have a lot of groups lined up. 🇮🇳

Visa delay diverting Schengen traffic

Contd from page 3

countries have kept some fewer quota for India, but we are facing problems and losing business. Now clients do not want to wait for long to depart for their much-awaited holidays, instead they are willing to travel to those countries where visas on-arrival are available, or they get visas easily such as Maldives, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Dubai, Thailand, Indonesia, UAE, Dubai, Maldives, Vietnam, Singapore," he said. He requested Schengen countries, UK and USA to make visa processing faster and smoother.

Rajeev Kale, President & Country Head, Holidays, MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India), said, "The challenge is two pronged: obtaining appointment slots coupled with extended processing time of between 15 to 35 days for Europe and Schengen countries. Greece is now issuing visas in around 15 days with a fee waiver. Switzerland and France are currently processing applications within five to seven working days. Given European visa challenges, customers are opting for easy visa destinations (no visa/e-visa/ on arrival). Not surprising then that we are witnessing a shift in

demand to mainly Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia with an uptick of 25 to 30 per cent; Vietnam and Cambodia are emerging well too; Turkey, Egypt, Maldives and Mauritius have witnessed (20 to 25 per cent) due to close proximity/easy access; USA up by 40 per cent (for visa holding customers). The pipeline for Australia is seeing robust demand of 15 to 20 per cent from both lei-



Dharmendra Singh
Director
Plaisir Hospitality Services

sure and MICE segments, with the new flight Bengaluru-Sydney as well as the cricket bonanza starting in October. New emerging options include Jordan, Seychelles, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan."

While Western Europe is heading the leader board with destinations such as Switzerland, France,



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

Austria and Italy, visa challenges are resulting in a push back on departure dates. To avoid disappointments, MICE customers of Thomas Cook India are being advised to plan their holidays and submit their visa applications well in advance, Kale said.

Allow online visas

Even as a B2B agent for Europa-mundo, **Anju Tandon**, CEO, Ark Journeys said that her booking were impacted due to visa issues. "My cruise booking is delayed due to US and Canada visas. Delayed appointment dates, longer processing period, some kind of mismanagement/racket, I believe, are the reasons. As per market reports, if a client is willing to pay additional money (varying from ₹8,000 to ₹20,000 per person) they can get quicker appointment.

But that still does not guarantee an early processing. My Europa-mundo bookings have been either cancelled or postponed due to visas delays," she averred.

Dubai and Turkey have gained huge numbers from India as visa on arrival or online if you have valid US visa is easy, Tandon said. Kenya and South Africa have gained numbers along with all Southeast Asian countries. "Online visas or on arrival



Anju Tandon
CEO
Ark Journeys

visas are the best option for travellers. It is time for revenge tourism. Be it leisure travel, business travel or visiting family there is a demand. Currently, there are two deterrents—ease of visa and very high airfares," Tandon said.



Kunal Sampat
Country Head (Sales)
Visa Lounge

Echoing similar sentiments, **Kunal Sampat**, Country Head (Sales), Visa Lounge, said, "The biggest issue faced by Indian travellers is securing an appointment for Schengen visas from European countries. The surge in travel was expected due to summer holidays after a hiatus of two years. Another pain point is the embassies /consulates were not equipped to handle the number of applications received. Indians love to travel, and we have seen lot of traction for countries where either Indian passport holders do not need a visa or where visa processing was not an issue. We hope that with borders opening up and travel picking up for Indian passport holders, the delay in visa processing gets resolved soon."

Shortage of staff

Dharmesh Advani, National General Secretary, Enterprising Travel Agents' Association (ETAA), said many in India, including travel agents, celebrated the restoration of commercial international flights, but it may have been too soon. In many cases, they are facing long delays in getting visas to some European countries and the UK. "Visa processing time for



Dharmesh Advani
National General Secretary
ETAA

some nations has risen to four to 10 weeks presently; this has forced many travellers to cancel flights and bookings. The delay is due to shortage of embassy staff, backlog of applications, and stricter protocols. Destinations that have visa on arrival for Indians have picked up a lot of interest among travellers," he said. 🇮🇳

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India market promising, says Accor

The hospitality firm, which currently operates 55 properties across India and South Asia, plans to add six new hotels to its network this year, two of which will debut in leading tier II markets in India, says Mark Willis, CEO - India, Middle East, Africa & Turkey, Accor.



Lipla Negi

Every disruption comes with its own set of changes. While the pandemic changed the hospitality business, Accor used the transformation to drive growth, creativity and innovation. "As we speak, we have 26 properties (5,146 keys) and more properties are in the pipeline," shares Mark Willis, CEO - India, Middle East, Africa & Turkey for Accor.

Accor currently operates 55 properties across India and South Asia, with 10,306 keys. As the brand continues to strengthen its portfolio in the country, Willis gives an insight into the new, advanced and immersive world of Accor where sustainability and hospitality go hand-in-hand.

Mid-scale & economy brands in spotlight

Willis says India is a "very resilient market" and showing "strong signs of recovery".

"We are constantly looking at opportunities to continue our expansion in the Indian market, across all segments and brands. Our mid-scale and economy brands, Novotel and ibis, have an extremely high brand recall



Mark Willis
CEO - India, Middle East
Africa & Turkey for Accor

in India and a strong focus on the meetings and conventions market, as well as the weddings and social events. The Novotel network, with 21 operational hotels, forms the largest network of mid-scale hotels in the country, with hotels in key cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru,

Chennai, Goa and Hyderabad. We also continue to look for the right partners as we expand our luxury brands such as Raffles, Fairmont and Sofitel, after the overwhelming response we received for Raffles Udaipur last year.

Expansion and partnership

Over the next 24 months, we are expecting to add six new properties to the network, two of which will debut in leading two-tier



We are looking at opportunities to continue our expansion in the Indian market, across all segments and brands

markets within India - Novotel Bhubaneswar Janpath Road and Novotel Jodhpur ITI Circle. We will also continue to expand our ibis and ibis Styles brand in partnership with InterGlobe Hotels by adding three more hotels in the next two years to the existing portfolio of 20 hotels.

Domestic travel remains the driving force

We believe domestic travel will yet again be a crucial driving

force for not just Indian tourism, but markets all across the globe. With evolving guidelines still in place for international travel, domestic travel will be leading the business and entertaining staycation, workcation and small MICE demands for top leisure destinations. Travellers are now looking for meaningful experiences under one roof to create deeper connections with their loved ones and the environment, and our hotels, especially

in the leisure destinations that are currently in demand.

Technology takes the lead

India is a very resilient market that is showing encouraging signs of recovery. We are confident that our industry will bounce back to full recovery soon. Innovations brought in by technological advancements have made operations more cost-effective and enhanced guest experience. There is a lot of potential in this area.

Aviation set to recover in FY23

CAPA India Aviation Outlook FY2023 projects that domestic and international traffic in FY23 will be higher than FY22. Further, a 'slight dip' in the domestic passenger demand could be seen due to the hike in air fares, but international traffic is expected to recover in the second half of FY24, it predicted.



Janice Alysius

CAPA India in a recent webinar predicted that domestic traffic in financial year (FY) 2023 is expected to be in the range of 130 to 140 million, which is about 46 million higher than FY2022. The international traffic in FY23 is predicted to be between 55 and 60 million, which is about 33 million higher than FY22. The leading aviation consultancy claimed that the ongoing hike in the airfares could impact the travel demand from domestic passengers over the next couple of quarters, resulting in a "slight dip" in the passenger traffic, but international traffic is expected to recover in the second half of FY24.

"Domestic air traffic volume recovered faster, whereas the aviation industry touched about 65 per cent recovery within nine months of the first Covid-19

wave and after every subsequent wave the recovery has been faster. The industry lagged in international traffic, mainly because of travel restrictions and the scheduled operations. Now

As of May 2022, Indian aviation industry has reached 70-72% of pre-Covid levels in terms of daily global departures

with the recent resumption of flights, the international traffic is catching up and as of May 2022, the Indian aviation industry has



reached about 70 -72 per cent of pre-Covid levels in terms of daily international departures," revealed Amit Thakran, Associate Practice Lead, CAPA India.

In terms of profitability, the aviation industry witnessed a loss of \$3 billion comprising low-cost carriers (LCC) loss of \$1.4-\$1.6 billion and full-service carriers (FSC) loss of \$1.2-\$1.4 billion in FY22, whereas in FY23, the industry is projected to witness a loss of about \$1.4-\$1.6 billion with FSC at pre-tax loss of about \$1-\$1.2 billion and LCC at about \$0.4-\$0.6 billion. This is largely because of the high operating cost, especially due to increased fuel and currency exchange rates.

Speaking of the fleet forecast, Thakran revealed that Indian

airlines is projected to operate more than 700 aircraft by the end of FY23, an increase of 46-52 aircraft vis-a-vis the levels in FY22. This is marginally above the pre-Covid levels in FY19-20, when the industry had about 690-695 aircraft, about 3-4 per cent higher in terms of in-service fleet this year.

Sharing the airline revenue forecast, Thakran said, "In FY23, Indian airlines is forecasted to generate a revenue of \$14.4 billion, which is about 16 per cent higher than pre-Covid levels. While the traffic is slightly below pre-Covid, it is estimated that the revenue to be slightly higher because fares next year are estimated to remain above 50-17 per cent above pre-Covid levels, mainly because price gaps are replaced and the price caps is expected to remain at least until the first half of this year. The



operating cost have gone up and therefore airlines are trying to pass on some of that pressure to passengers, therefore there is a hike in air fares. The advisory has factored in a 15-70 per cent growth compared to prepaid fares this year, and out of this \$14.4 billion, about 13 per cent contribution will be from cargo and ancillary."

He said a rise in fuel prices has led to the hike in airfares. "The average domestic fare in quarter one of FY22-23 is about 25

per cent higher than in FY19, while international fares are about 15 per cent higher compared to last year in the current quarter of FY22. The surge in air fares is impacting the demand by 10-15 per cent in both domestic and international routes. The operating revenue of Indian airlines in FY23 is forecasted to be about 116 per cent of the FY20 level. However, the operating expenditure is forecasted to be about 121 per cent of the pre-Covid levels," he said.

Malaysia to host TAFI meet

After a gap of four years, the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) will organise its first convention at Kuching in Sarawak, Malaysia, from 20 to 23 September this year.

TT Bureau

After announcing India as its convention venue early this year, the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) has now confirmed Kuching in Malaysia as its new destination for the convention. It will be held from September 20-23, 2022 with the theme 'Build Back Better'. Elaborating on the theme, TAFI President **Ajay Prakash** said, "As we seek recovery post-COVID, it is vital that the tourism industry does not forget the lessons of the pandemic. As one of the biggest global in-



dustries, the power of tourism to shape the world is phenomenal. It can be a powerful force for doing good, not only for the stakeholders but for the entire world. 'Build Back Better' encapsulates the resolve to rebuild tourism in a more responsible and sustainable manner."



Ajay Prakash
TAFI President

The convention committee is chaired by Seeraj Sabharwal and Jigar Dudakiya is Deputy Chairman. Commenting on the choice of destination, Sabharwal said, "Sarawak is a relatively unexplored destination for the Indian Traveller. It is an excellent destination for family travel, honeymooners, MICE, weddings and the film industry. TAFI has often organised conventions in unusual locations to expand the portfolio of travel agents and tour operators in India."

Deputy Chairman Jigar Dudakiya further commented on the choice of the Borneo Convention Centre Kuching (BCKK) that has state-of-the-art equipment and facilities.

He said, "BCKK is the first International purpose-built convention centre in Kuching. The convention centre can host up to 5,000 people with an uninterrupted Wi-Fi internet services for up to 8,000 simultaneous users."

'Build Back Better' theme encapsulates the resolve to rebuild tourism in a more responsible and sustainable manner

Prakash added, "There is an excitement among members since a convention is happening after four years. We expect an excellent turnout of delegates and speakers. Sarawak is at the forefront of responsible, sustainable eco-tourism and is the ideal destination to begin our journey to Build Back Better."

Going with the digital trends

As Maharashtra ranks first on utsav.gov.in portal, Valsa Nair Singh, Principal Secretary, Tourism department, Govt. of Maharashtra, says she is glad her department is keeping pace with the digital trends.

TT Bureau

During the pandemic, the Union Ministry of Tourism (MoT) launched its website utsav.gov.in and called for content of various events and festivals, as well as live darshan details of temple deities, from all the states/UTs. Maharashtra tourism department promptly responded to the call and shared the desired details. The ministry recently released a list of the states, ranking Maharashtra as number one on the portal with 10 published live darshan listings, and among the top 10 states with eight published events and festivals' listings.

Valsa Nair Singh, Principal Secretary, Tourism department, Govt. of Maharashtra, said, "I am glad that our department is keeping pace with the digital trend where tourists want to get all the information on a single click. Religious tourism being the oldest form of tourism followed in India, and where Maharashtra has unique religious circuit like Shirdi-Shegaon-Pandharpur, it plays a vital role for us to dis-



Valsa Nair Singh
Principal Secretary, Tourism department,
Govt. of Maharashtra

play about them on the national platform. Similarly, festivals are a way of showcasing the culture of our state and is equally important for tourists. As both the aspects are crucial to shape tourism in the state, we have taken keen interest in this initiative of MoT." She added, "I would like to appreciate the efforts made by MoT for bringing information on festivals and religious tourism of all the Indian states under one roof. This will definitely benefit in attracting more domestic and foreign tourists."

Having innumerable religious places/ temples/ pilgrimages, Maharashtra is also known for

its religious circuit. Shirdi, Pandharpur, Tuljapur, Jejuri, Trim-bakeshwar, Vani (Saptashrungi) and Siddhivinayak temple of Mumbai are only a handful of religious places that devotees/ tourists visit in huge numbers.

Our department is keeping pace with the digital trend where tourists want to get all the information on a single click

During the pandemic, when devotees could not physically visit these holy places, the temple authorities took up the initiative of online darshan. It became convenient not only for the management, but also for the devotees to be able to get a glimpse of deities from the comfort of their homes.



EXPERIENCE A WORLD BEYOND



India key outbound market for Oz

Sydney is witnessing a lot more inquiries now that borders are open, says Kristian Nicholls, Executive General Manager (Client Engagement), Business Events Sydney. With Australia considered an aspirational destination, and a lot of pent-up demand for travel to Sydney, he predicts tourism from India will continue to grow in near future.



Hazel Jain

How important is MICE traffic from India for Sydney?

Post-COVID, India is performing well and looking very strong. It was one of the first markets to bounce back with medium to large incentive group movements and inquiries. It is a key market for Sydney. Pre-COVID, around 20 per cent of our incentive group business came out of India.

We are starting to see a lot more inquires now that borders are open and airline capacity is returning. We have also got major events line-up with some headliners like the ICC World Cup, which appeal so well to the Indian market with our shared love of cricket. Australia is considered an aspirational destination, and there is a lot of pent-up demand for travel to Sydney, so we are projecting the numbers from India will continue to grow over the next two years.

Which segment of MICE is key for Sydney?

Incentive groups have traditionally been our strongest MICE market from across Asia. The insurance and financial sector has dominated



Kristian Nicholls
Executive General Manager (Client Engagement), Business Events Sydney

for some time, as has health and beauty. However, we are seeing some significant growth in manufacturing and automotive clients out of India in particular. From markets outside Asia, Sydney is popular for Association conferences and meetings.

How can sports/entertainment events help destinations like Sydney attract more visitors?

Sydney does attract visitors for its large cultural and sporting events. For India, the cricket is a big drawcard for leisure and business travellers alike. Sydney will host seven matches of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2022 in October and November. We anticipate seeing corporate clients sending their delegates so they can experience Sydney and attend a game.

The NSW Government, through its tourism and events marketing agency Destination NSW, has created an incredible year-round calendar of blockbuster events. In its 12th year this year, Vivid Sydney is an annual celebration of creativity, innovation and technology, which transforms the city for 23 days and nights. It is one of Sydney's biggest festivals we see a lot of interest from international delegates.

What is the average night stay in Sydney for Indian visitors and what are you aiming to take this to in the next 2 years?

Corporate visitors tend to spend 4 nights, 5 days on average, combining a city experience with all the cultural and dining elements, with a relaxing getaway into the easily accessible country areas nearby like the world-Heritage listed Blue Mountains, generations old wineries in the Hunter Valley, and soft adventure fun. We'd love to see that regional stay extending as more and more visitors are exposed to the range of different experiences available. In the city itself, we've seen a lot of new improvements to accessibility and walkability of the city centre and the surrounding neighbourhoods – which we hope will encourage more visitors to venture out and experience the city 'beyond the Instagrammable icons' and more to enjoy the lifestyle the locals enjoy.

What kind of engagements is BESydney looking to conduct with event planners, corporates and MICE agencies in India?

BESydney is in regular contact with planners across the India market. Also participating in

Is Sydney also prepared to conduct hybrid events?

We continue to work with our colleagues across the globe as a Hybrid City Alliance partner to share knowledge and experience to provide the best hybrid business event experience for the clients. Our state-of-the-art convention centre, the ICC Sydney with its full suite of technological capabilities and expert team is popular for clients wishing to pursue this option.

What are the new MICE trends that you see emerging in the sector?

Sydney and Australia are still in high demand. Timeframes are definitely shortened as clients emerge out of the pandemic, and our strong relationships and agility in responding to their needs is a winning strategy. Safety and hygiene factors remain an important consideration as travel returns. 🇦🇺

We have also got major events line-up with some headliners like the ICC World Cup, which appeal so well to the Indian market

trade shows and providing product training for travel agent partners, so that they can know and love Sydney like we do. We have got some big plans for our familiarisation program this year!

Ark presents Kenya property to trade

Representatives from the Ark Travel Group organised a roadshow in Mumbai to showcase the range of Sarova Hotels & Resorts Kenya to the travel trade. The representatives through an insightful and engaging presentation informed the participants about the property and its offerings, which they could offer to their clients.



Fiji eyes pre-pandemic tourist count

With Fiji targeting to reach pre-pandemic tourist count of 7,000 by 2024, Fiji Tourism has taken several measures to attract tourists to the country. Kathy Koyamaibole, Regional Director (Asia & The Pacific), Fiji Tourism, discusses with **TRAVELTALK** their revamped Fiji travel specialist programme and how agents can take its advantage.



Hazel Jain

Kathy Koyamaibole, Regional Director (Asia & The Pacific), Fiji Tourism, has been pushing for Fiji to become a standalone destination for travellers from India. She was in India recently to re-engage with their trade partners to reassure them that Fiji is still very invested in India and it continues to be their priority market. "Through our Care Fiji commitment, we have put in a lot of effort in our safety programme. So, we were able to open up to the world and reduce some of our restrictions over time for entering Fiji. We only have two requirements, one is to be fully vaccinated and the other is proof of booking within 72 hours of arriving in Fiji. No RT-PCR test required," she reveals.

Movement from India to Fiji has started and Koyamaibole's target is to reach 2019 numbers

of the 7,000-mark gradually and sustainably by 2024.

"Fiji is perfect for honeymooners and couples, which has always been our primary segment. We



Kathy Koyamaibole
Regional Director
(Asia & The Pacific), Fiji Tourism

also saw a lot of interest pre-COVID from families and MICE segments. These are our secondary target audience from India. We have connectivity via Singapore, Australia and New Zealand. The ideal stay in Fiji is six nights to get a full experience, as we have 333 islands and each one has a different charm," she adds.

Matai specialist programme

Fiji Tourism has just launched its revamped Fiji travel specialist programme called Matai 2.0, and it is more in-depth and interactive with quizzes and more video content!

Koyamaibole says, "There is nothing like bringing the experience to life than a video. The revamped programme has three tiers – Gold, Silver and Bronze – with different incentives. The difference between this and the older version is that the last one was a lot more static with a refresher every year. The programme has sub-destinations and also niches. So, it has some really amazing content. There are exciting prizes for those who complete the Matai 2.0 programme before 31 July 2022. They then qualify for a famil to Fiji. We request agents to register for it and complete the course. We also have incentives for it and on fulfilment of the programme, agents can win a famil

to Fiji. There are different incentives for different levels too."

Fiji Tourism will also participate in all the main trade shows, as well as some workshops that it has planned for tier II and tier III cities in India, where it sees a lot of potential.

New products

Fiji also has a few new products for visitors. "A lot of our resorts were able to take advantage of the lockdown and refurbished themselves. Some of them have upgraded themselves, some have separate clubs now. A lot of newer facilities, for instance, the Sheraton has undertaken a \$6 million refurbishment across all their properties on Denarau Island as has The Westin Denarau Island Fiji. Even Sofitel has a big clubhouse on the side with

a separate check-in. In terms of new products, we have a new day cruise. It is a premium product and part of the South Sea Cruises. Guests get on to a luxury

Those who complete the Matai 2.0 programme before 31 July 2022, they qualify for a famil to Fiji

yacht for an entire day just cruising around the islands, stopping at sand pits and having a good time. The second one is called Seventh Heaven, another float-

ing platform out in the middle of the ocean, with music and great vibes," Koyamaibole explains.

Fiji, a country in the South Pacific, is an archipelago of more than 300 islands. It's famed for rugged landscapes, palm-lined beaches and coral reefs with clear lagoons. Its major islands, Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, contain most of the population.

Indian passport holders do not need a visa to enter Fiji. On arrival, they get their passport stamped. "They don't need to apply for anything – just you and your Indian passport," says Koyamaibole. Fiji also has a huge Indian diaspora with its British history influence, so Indians will not have a problem with Indian or vegetarian food. 🇮🇳

International arrivals increased 182 per cent year-on-year in Q1 2022 to an estimated 117 million international arrivals compared to 41 million in Q1 2021. Of the extra 76 million international arrivals, about 47 million were recorded in March.

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'We understand Asian market best'

Michael Goh, President, Resorts World Cruises, says the cruise line will continue to capitalise on its valuable experience to innovate offerings and unique experiences for the Indian market and strengthen the brand presence in the country by expanding their B2B and B2C network.



Harshal Ashar

What are your expectations for this new cruise line?

Resorts World Cruises is a newly launched cruise brand, but with its deep Asian roots and over 50 years of affiliated experience in hospitality and cruising, we are confident that the brand will continue to resonate with the trade and consumers in India. Having established a homeport like Singapore is important as it is one of the leading cruise hubs in Asia and a popular destination for vacationers from India. Subsequently with our decades of affiliated experience in India and across Asia, we have the expertise to innovate offerings on the Genting Dream, including cuisine, on board activities, entertainment, shore excursions and more that will appeal to different target segments in the region.

What kind of target numbers do you have in mind for the next 2-5 years?

The response of the launch for Resorts World Cruises in India has been overwhelming. Within



Michael Goh
President, Resorts World Cruises

two months of opening bookings, we secured over 20,000 cabins from the India market. We are optimistic that the fly-cruise demand will continue to be strong in the following years, as we continue to push our of-

ferings to a wider market segment, including MICE.

What kind of strategy will you deploy for the India market?

We will continue to capitalise on our valuable experience to innovate new offerings and unique experiences; from our onboard thematic cruising offerings to authentic vegetarian cuisine, including Jain menus. In addition, we will further strengthen our brand presence in India by expanding on our B2B and B2C network. We will continue to work closely with our travel and trade partners in India to equip them with the necessary training and tools to strengthen the Resorts World Cruises brand and product offerings in India.

How is this product different from cruise lines in the same product category?

As an Asian cruise line with

deep Asian heritage, we understand the Asian market best and that is what sets us apart. With the launch of Resorts World Cruises, we had also reimagined



We are optimistic fly-cruise demand will continue to be strong in coming years, as we continue to push our offerings

our cruise offerings, redefining personalised cruising lifestyle experiences with diverse international offerings. Our unique highlights include our High Energy Zones, packed with activities,

'Cruise getting good response'

Kishan Biyani, Managing Director, Ark Travel Group, says, "Resort World Cruises was launched recently and we are already seeing a good, positive response from the market. It is a known ship and a familiar team as far as the trade is concerned. The ship is as new and charming as it was. The quality of food and entertainment is excellent. MICE and group business is promising and trends for FIT demand are good. We hope to reach pre-pandemic level sales in 2023. We have planned 23 roadshows pan-India in the months to come."



Kishan Biyani
Managing Director, Ark Travel Group

as well as our Quiet and Chill Zones, for that alternative relaxing atmosphere.

Please share perspective on the cruise landscape globally.

The global landscape has changed much over the last two years with the pandemic, which has impacted various industries, includ-

ing the cruise sector. However, this situation has enabled cruise lines to reset their thinking and operations. Consumer mindset has shifted and safety and well-being are still a priority for many travellers. Due to this, cruise lines have evolved and adapted at unprecedented speed to enhance its overall operations. 🐦

Events industry gets second wind

COVID-19 forced the events industry to chart a new course with virtual shows. However, they seem to work well in small groups. As the pandemic is subsiding, the appetite to meet again is incredibly strong on the back of much higher satisfaction ratings, opines Juliette Losardo, Exhibition Director, World Travel Market (WTM) London.



Devika Seth

How has the exhibition space evolved since the pandemic?

The event and travel industries have been adversely affected. We examined how business interactions might take place in the absence of face-to-face events. We found new ways to bring our community together that were not in our standard practices. We held virtual events and launched online portals. We considered how we might measure, value and track leads in a more centralised manner. We analysed how we can invest in the right areas to ensure that relevant shows are delivered in today's environment. We developed event technology and explored strategies to ensure that our customer interactions are no longer reliant on people handing out business cards. Thus, smart technologies are in development, and the pandemic has enabled us to capitalise on this. People need to do business, and they are concerned about what business continuity will look like amid such

a crisis. As we ease limitations and return to normal life, WTM will serve as a meeting point for people. So far, our exhibitors and buyers have shown a yearning to be onsite.

How will technology impact travel exhibitions?

The ability to capitalise on technology and test virtual channels has shown that they can also work. However, these are effective in small groups. Hence, face-to-face will be the way to go, and event technology will play a key role in exhibitions. This year, we



Juliette Losardo
Exhibition Director
World Travel Market London

are looking at technologies that will allow you to track who you meet and how you connect with them in a smart way, as well as

enable visitors to collect brochures and information from exhibitors with one-tap technology.

What new can the sector expect from WTM this year?

Many facets of the show will be slightly different this year, but our major focus will be on what value looks like for our audience. Real business issues are vital since our sector is struggling with infrastructure, recruiting and consumer confidence. Thus, we want to support the industry in overcoming these challenges. Development of a conference



programme is also underway. The focus will be on experience and remapping all buyers globally who purchase travel and ensuring we know who and where they are, what they are responsible for, and encouraging them to use WTM as a channel to purchase travel.

When will you reach the pre-pandemic numbers?

Bookings are still being made at a lower rate than earlier, but they have been robust so far. Will we be bigger than 2019? I am not sure. Will we be bigger than 2021? Definitely. We will eventually creep up to 2019 levels. Due to high demand, we hope to be back in full swing by 2024 with all the bells and whistles.

Will the WTM portfolio continue its virtual events?

We have decided not to go virtual for WTM London this year.

We get much higher satisfaction ratings for face-to-face events than for virtual events.

What will be the COVID-19 safety protocols?

By November, we hope to be in a better position. Cleaning and sanitation stations will

Many facets of the show will be slightly different this year, but our major focus will be on what value looks like for our audience

be installed across the exhibition floor and conference rooms. We will go above and beyond what is necessary. We are learning to live with the virus and must make sensible decisions. 🐦



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RDTM to begin from 22 July

Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot will inaugurate three-day Rajasthan Domestic Travel Mart, which is being organised jointly by Department of Tourism and Federation of Hospitality and Tourism in Rajasthan.



Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot will inaugurate the three-day Rajasthan Domestic Travel Mart (RDTM) at Hotel Clarks Amer in Jaipur on July 22.

Rajasthan Tourism Minister Vishvendra Singh will also preside over the event, which is being organised jointly by the Department of Tourism and Federation of Hospitality and Tourism in Rajasthan (FHTR), according to a press release. During the next two days of the event, there will be structured B2B meetings between the exhibitors belonging to Rajasthan



and the buyers from pan-India at the Birla Auditorium in the city. About 200 exhibitors will showcase the prowess and potential of their tourism products, including hotels, resorts



long way in reviving the tourism sector in Rajasthan post-COVID," the release stated. Prior to the mart, five pre-event roadshows have been held in Jaipur, Mandawa, Jodhpur, Bharatpur



Highlights

- ❖ 200 exhibitors from Rajasthan will showcase their tourism products
- ❖ 300 domestic tour operators pan-India to attend

and amusement parks. The 300 buyers will comprise of domestic tour operators, who will come from all parts of India. "The travel mart will go a

and Udaipur to promote the RDTM. It is to be recalled that the RDTM's first edition was organised in 2018 and was a huge success.

It's raining offers at Lords Hotels

Lords Hotels and Resorts' Monsoon Dhamaka plan not just offers a discount on the stay at any of the Lord's properties pan India, but also offers guests a chance to unwind themselves with wellness options.



If you are planning a vacation with your family or friends in the monsoon season, this offer from Lords Hotels and Resorts is sure to excite you. A quick rain check with Lords Hotels and Resorts via its website will enlighten you, the patrons, to its exhilarating offers of up to 30 per cent discount on stay. And, on arrival, the hotel offers its guests with a



refreshing welcome drink, along with a complimentary palette, that includes steamy tea and delicious and crunchy pakoras.

The offer is available pan India and Nepal properties of Lords Hotels and Resorts, where guests can enjoy the rains.



In Maharashtra, guests can take a detour to Lords Eco Inn in the hilly terrains of Panchgani or the Pushpam Lords Resort in Karjat, which is nestled in the Ulhas Valley and enjoy its splendid services amid its natural surroundings. The enchanting beauty of the beach in the rains is another story all together, where one is sure to go head-over-heels with the monsoon season. Here, a trip down to the beach destination of Porbandar or Dwarka region, where a staycation can be

enjoyed at the beautiful property of Lords Inn/Lords Eco Inn. And, if you enjoy the nature, there is no other place than Vishal Lords Inn Gir Forest.

Monsoon is also the best time to visit Jaipur, where the rains start in the month of July and ends around the month of September. Here, two well-designed properties, namely Lords Plaza Jaipur and Lords Inn Jaipur, Malviyanagar, offer luxurious comfort and services at affordable rates.

EVENT TALK

Media Partners:

JULY 2022		
Date	Event	Time
16-17	Tourism Fair - Ahmedabad	1:00 pm
21	'Jewel of India' webinar with Maharashtra Tourism	TBA
22-24	'Rajasthan Domestic Travel Mart'	10:00 am
23	Self-drive vacations in Andalusia webinar	3:00 pm
27	Reconnecting New Zealand webinar	11:00 am
28-30	Global Travel Marketplace	9:00 am
29-31	India International Travel Mart Bangalore	11:00 am

AUGUST 2022		
2-4	PATA Destination Marketing Forum	9:00 am
5-7	India International Travel Mart Chennai	10:00 am
11-12	International Conference on Leisure and Tourism	8:30 am
13-14	Tourism Fair Durgapur	1:00 pm
11-14	Korea International Tourism Fair	9:00 am
18 - 21	International Travel Expo Hong Kong	10:00 am
18 - 21	The M.I.C.E. Travel Expo	9:00 am
19-21	Halal Indonesia Expo	9:00 am
19-21	India Travel Mart - New Delhi	11:00 am

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

It's been great learning period: Brar

► Contd from page 3

are certain natural attributes that India has, including tangible and intangible heritage: the sheer variety that we have is immense. Another thing that we have is hospitality and warmth, which is embedded in our DNA. We have a large population of youngsters and a huge demographic divide in India. Therefore, tourism can be a game changer not only in terms of employment, but also in terms of adding to the GDP. Tourism can be a revenue generator and directly or indirectly. People with skillsets to the not-so-skilled and to the highly unskilled get jobs at various levels."

Brar said, "While there is always something to learn from those who perform better than India, all the things may or may not be the same since every country offers some unique things. You need to pick up from other countries in terms of how to showcase heritage and tourism. When I joined the ministry, I discovered that it has a huge focus on tourism in terms of creating huge infrastructure in hospitality sector, civil aviation network, extensive and good quality highways,

inland waterways, ports and, health infrastructure."

"The kind of work that is happening now in these sectors is contributing to the growth of domestic and inbound tourism for India. I think this is where the story looks upbeat. The surge in domestic tourists during ongoing COVID-19 exhibited the kind of interest that people today have in

While there is always something to learn from those who perform better than India, all things may or may not be same

travelling to different parts of India and utilizing what we now call as experiential or immersive tourism. While tourism is considered a lot of fun, and at the same time, is a serious business and India truly has a huge and bright future."



Rupinder Brar
Additional Director General, Tourism, GoI

Achievement

Brar was at the helm of Dekho Apna Desh webinar series, which has been a huge success. Talking about it as one of her biggest achievements in the past three years, she said, "It has been my passion and a journey of learning for myself. I am a student of History and I pride myself in being an avid traveller too. The more you unravel the layers of India, the more there is for you to learn. Therefore, the journey of Dekho Apna Desh became an unending journey for us. It is not only about old India, but also about moving to a vibrant one, and how the two co-exist—beautifully and seamlessly. I think what is incredible about India, for me personally, is Dekho Apna Desh. It will continue to inspire me."

Message for trade

Sharing her message to the travel industry, Brar said, "It has been a tumultuous time and I must congratulate everyone for coming up with fantastic ideas, not just about survival, but about bouncing back from the ongoing pandemic. While some adopted digital technologies in an amazing manner, some experimented with new products such as homestays. They did amazing work and I wish good luck to all of them. I truly wish that everyone comes together and showcases different aspects of India to others around the world. Let us work together to make sure that the country becomes the number one destination."

What's needed?

Looking back at 2019, one can say whatever strategies were adopted in the last few years were on track. "A lot of simplification of processes is helping the tourism sector. We need to strategise and market ourselves strongly. We must enter non-traditional markets so that more nations start looking at India as a destination. On marketing side; we should be working with PR agencies in this regard," said Brar.

Maharashtra

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MOVEMENTS

BANYAN TREE HOTELS AND RESORTS

New Delhi

Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts has appointed **TEKLA MAIRA** as the Regional Director of Sales - India for its five key hotels and resorts in Thailand, namely Banyan Tree Bangkok, Banyan Tree Phuket, Angsana Laguna Phuket, Cassia Phuket and Homm Bliss Southbeach Patong. "Tekla's expertise and rich experience will see her implementing innovative sales and marketing strategies for our Thailand hotels and create greater awareness for the global multi-brand ecosystem of Banyan Tree Group in India," said Benjawan Meksakul, Regional Director of Sales & Marketing – Thailand & Laos of Banyan Tree Group.



HOTEL SAHARA STAR

Mumbai

Sahara Hospitality Ltd has promoted **SALIL FADNIS** as the General Manager of Hotel Sahara Star. Fadnis joined the group in 2007 as the hotel's Executive Sous Chef bringing in more than a decade of hospitality experience. He continued his passion with food at the hotel opening nine food and beverage outlets and has been the force to reckon with in the F&B industry. After spending a few years as the Executive Chef, he began to spearhead the operations of the hotel as the Hotel Manager. Before joining Hotel Sahara Star, Fadnis worked with many luxury hotels including Oberoi and Marriott.



JW MARRIOTT HOTEL

Bengaluru

GAURAV SINHA has been elevated as the Hotel Manager of JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru from the position of Director of Operations. With over two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, Sinha exhibits a vast knowledge of management systems, guest service and overall support functions. Starting his career at Trident Udaipur, he has worked in managerial role with some of the most prominent hospitality brands in India. He has been part of the Marriott family ever since he joined the JW Marriott Aerocity New Delhi in 2017.



NEST JAIPUR RESORT

Jaipur

Nest Jaipur, the luxury resort on NH-8, has appointed **MANOJ THAPA** as the General Manager. In his new role, Thapa will be responsible for implementing high standards of services, business strategies and overseeing the entire hotel operations. Thapa is a passionate hotelier and has specialization in leading hotel operations, food & beverage department and revenue optimization. He has worked for well-known hospitality brands such as Four Points by Sheraton, Hyatt Regency, Svelte, Radisson and The Claridge. Prior to joining Jaipur Nest, he was working as a Consulting General Manager with Cabana Resort and Spa, Jalandhar.



CORDELIA CRUISES

Mumbai

PANKAJ JASWAL has recently joined Cordelia Cruises as National Sales Head. He has a degree in Hotel Management from the University of Bangalore and brings with him an extensive 22 years of experience in Hospitality Sales. He has worked with reputed brands such as Taj Hotels, The Park Hotels and The Paul Hotels and Resorts. Prior to joining Cordelia Cruises, Pankaj was the General Manager – Resort Sales at Mahindra Holidays and Resorts. He has developed strong relationships with clients primarily from India, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Europe.



KAMAXI GROUP

Panjim

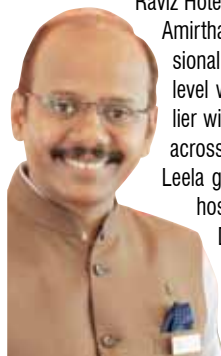
Kamaxi Group, which offers end-to-end services from training and certification to employment and upskilling in the hospitality sector, has named **SIDDHARTH SAVKUR** as the CEO. With a slew of leadership roles spanning over two decades, Savkur brings rich experience in business and people management and will spearhead the leadership team at Kamaxi. An alumnus of Institute of Hotel Management, Bengaluru, Savkur has held key positions at luxury brands like Alila Hotels and Resorts, Hyatt and Radisson. This broad and all-encompassing knowledge will be a valuable addition to the Kamaxi management team.



THE LEELA GROUP

Mumbai

The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts has appointed **UMAPATHY AMIRTHAM** as the General Manager of The Leela Ashtamudi, a Raviz Hotel. With an overall experience of 25 years, Amirtham is an acknowledged hospitality professional having held key positions across every level within the Rooms Division. He is a hotelier with domestic and international experience across India and the UAE. Prior to joining The Leela group, he was associated with renowned hospitality brands such as The Hyatt in Goa, Dubai, and Chennai, Umaid Bhavan Palace Jodhpur, Windsor Manor Sheraton Towers Bangalore, and ITC Kakatiya Hyderabad among others.



ALSTOM

Gurugram

OLIVIER LOISON has been appointed as the Managing Director of Alstom's India cluster, effective June 2022. He brings with him over two decades of experience in the transportation sector, contributing to some of the well-known infrastructure and railway projects across Asia and Europe. He has been with Alstom for over 22 years, working across various geographies, including China, Singapore and East Asia. In his new role, Olivier will be responsible for executing the Alstom in Motion (AiM) strategy, drive business expansion, oversee commercial and operational performance.



ROYAL ORCHID AND REGENTA HOTELS

Bangalore

AJAY SAMPIGE has been promoted as the Assistant Vice President for operations, Royal Orchid and Regenta Hotels. Sampige, who has close to 27 years of experience working with reputed hotels in the country, has been associated with Hotel Royal Orchid for over a year as the Area General Manager for Bangalore. In his new role, he will be responsible for hotels operations, commercials, development and strategies under the two brands, Royal Orchid and Regenta hotels and resorts. He started his career with Taj West End hotel and has worked in different international markets, including Australian and New Zealand.



TALKing People

GAVIN ECCLES, Managing Partner GE Consulting & Advisory, says, "After a long week, there is no better way to de-stress than to take a long drive east of my home in Lisbon to the countryside of Alentejo. There I enjoy sitting on the veranda and looking out over the valley and up to a 13th century castle. During the lockdown, I took the opportunity to play a lot of golf and to reduce my handicap significantly. In India, I like visiting Delhi, as well as the beaches of Goa. Internationally, a short break to Lake Como is a must, as well as the opportunity for a round of golf on the plantation course at the Kapalua Resort on the island of Maui."



SONIA SHARMA, Director of Human Resources, Rester Hotels & Resorts, loves to paint and has created many art pieces. "This has always helped me to relax my mind. In addition to that I love to do photography as well. I always believe that apart from our profession we should follow our personal passion as well to balance our life. In India, I love Kashmir and internationally I love Maldives. My next holiday will be to Bali - the next place in my list."



MANU NAIR, Director of Operations, Indore Marriott Hotel, says, "When I take a break from my routine I like to work out, watch a movie or go for a long drive. It helps me clear my mind and recharge. In the initial stages of the pandemic, I invested time in cooking and prepared new and exciting dishes for my family to enjoy. My favourite holiday destination in India is Leh-Ladakh. Internationally, I would love to explore Venice. My next holiday will be to Bali."





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FCM bullish on corporate trade

As industry recovers, there is a huge surge in business travel market, FCM is investing in technology and working towards sustainability to ensure it is in line with market requirement, shares Gaurav Luthra, MD, FCM Travel Solutions India.



Janice Alysius

FCM, a leading travel management company (TMC), has been in the Indian market for over 15 years now. Recalling the company's journey, **Gaurav Luthra**, MD, FCM Travel Solutions India, said, "When FCM came into India it bought and invested in a leading Indian homegrown corporate travel agency. Since then, we have been bullish on the corporate business in the Indian market. Not just for the large and multinational companies, but large national companies, medium and small enterprises are also part of our customer portfolio in the Indian market."

Luthra said when the business was "absolutely zero" two years ago, FCM focused on investing. "The company invested in technology to ensure it is in line with market requirements when the industry recovers, and it continues to invest. We have modernized our processes, systems, and tools. Our people have more mechanics to work on various tools, which adds value back to the customers," he added.

Luthra said, "I would like to put it across that as an organisation, we are aligning more and more with our global simplification strategy. Our FCM brand is the flagship entity that we will continue to follow in the Indian market as well, which means we will simplify and rename some of our businesses possibly into FCM. For example, we have already renamed our FCM MICE into FCM Meetings and Events, our foreign exchange business into FCM Payments. So, those kinds of small changes will continue to happen, and we will align more with our 'one brand' philosophy in the time to come."

He added, "The brand recall that FCM has in the Indian mar-

ket is fantastic. I think almost every customer that we have ever approached has instantly recognised us as FCM. So, we need to play with the strength of FCM brand and then make sure we build bigger success in the time to come."

He further added, "We started this brand 15 years ago and building brands in India and in the market like India is not cheap. We have significantly invested the money, energy and effort to ensure brand equity for FCM in the corporate travel space. Our constant endeavour is to nurture and grow FCM as the leading brand in the corporate travel space."

Talking about the changes in the wake of the pandemic, Luthra said that doing business has now become "tougher" in comparison to the pre-pandemic

I would like to put it across that as an organisation, we are aligning more and more with our global simplification strategy

times. "Travel was already complicated, especially for Indians. Now, it has become even more complicated with all the VTLs (vaccinated travel lanes) and certifications," he added.

He said, "I think the first thing that we saw was a faster recovery in the small and medium enterprise segment for corporate business. Then came the large national customers, and then came the global multinational



customers. We saw some bit of recovery coming back, but now, as we speak, there is a humongous surge in the demand. Everybody wants to travel, and everybody wants to travel now. I have spoken in the past as well, if and when the recovery is going to happen, which nobody knew when that is going to happen, it is going to be quite a surge, which is exactly what we saw. But it is a good problem to have. I am saying problem because it did not allow travel companies to prepare for the sudden surge in travel bookings in a short span of time, even outstripping pre-pandemic level corporate travel business. That is the level of surge that we have seen and we are working towards managing this surge."

Speaking of the emerging trends in business travel, Luthra shared, "We have a lot of corporate customers who are asking us how can we help them become more sustainable, how can we create more awareness, how can we create more information, give them more reports,

more data that can help them visualize and take a position. I think the offset of carbon footprint that Flight Center globally offers to its customers is holistic and for as low as about three and a half dollars per metric tonne. We are continuously engaging with our customers to deliver value and make travel seamless during these uncertain times."



Gaurav Luthra
MD, FCM Travel Solutions India

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