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Digital tourism gets boost

Union Minister for Tourism G Kishan Reddy launched e-Marketplace as part of the digital tourism solution for IITFs and IITGs on International Women's Day to bridge the gap between customers and service providers.



Nisha Verma

G Kishan Reddy, Union Minister of Tourism, Culture and DONER, has launched the e-marketplace platform at a special event organised to coincide with the International Women's Day at Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management (IITTM), Gwalior.

The digital platform (e-Marketplace) has been launched as part of digital tourism solution for IITFs/ IITGs (Incredible India Tourism Facilitators/ Guides), to provide web and mobile app based interaction mechanism,

which is to be used by the tourists and certified tourist facilitators/tourist guides. This e-Marketplace portal would be similar to platforms such as OLA, UBER among others which would help IITFs/IITGs to get business opportunities and would work as a bridge between the customer and the service provider.

Also present at the event was Ajay Bhatt, Minister of State of Tourism & Defence; Vivek Narayan Shejwalkar, Member Parliament, Gwalior. Also, virtually the event was attended by Jyotiraditya Scindia, Minister of Civil Aviation; Narendra Singh



G Kishan Reddy
Union Minister of Tourism, Culture and DONER

Tomar, Minister of Agriculture and Farmer Welfare and Usha Thakur, Minister of Tourism and Culture, Madhya Pradesh. In his address, Reddy said

that India has great variety of tourism destinations and tourism has immense potential in generating employment and business opportunities. "Students at IITTM have several avenues in tourism sector and they will play a critical role in the growth of the tourism sector. Under the guidance and leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Vikas (development) is our only mantra and that will lead us to more tourism opportunities. Our government is working shoulder to shoulder with all states to develop tourism in the country," he adds.

Contd on page 18 ►

Policy on anvil

Ministry of Culture will formulate a National Culture Policy with a view to develop and improve museums in the country.



Nisha Verma

Speaking at the Global Summit on 'Reimagining Museums in India', **Govind Mohan**, Secretary, Ministry of Culture, said that the museums today are more crucial than ever before as visual communication has become intrinsic to the younger generation. He said, "As India celebrates Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav with a view to commemorate 75 years of progressive India and the glorious history of its people culture and achievements; the time to rethink the functioning of museums becomes even more pertinent in this national reawakening, where 1.3 billion Indians, especially the young rediscover



Govind Mohan
Secretary, Ministry of Culture

their evolutionary journey and socio cultural identity. Museums will play a significant role in showcasing this cultural heritage." Mohan highlighted that through this Summit, Ministry of Culture aims to

Contd on page 12 ►

Industry hope gets wings

Ministry of Civil Aviation's announcement to resume international commercial flights from March 27 has left stakeholders in tourism and hospitality sector ecstatic, as they expect a rise in business.



Rajiv Mehra
President, IATO

"Even though the decision of restarting scheduled international flights from Ministry of Civil Aviation was on the cards, still it has come as a relief for the entire travel and tourism fraternity. We look forward to the revival of international tourism in the country. Furthermore, to enhance the foreign tourist flow to the country, we urge the government to restore all visas that were issued earlier, but were suspended due to COVID-19. This apart, we appeal to the government to resume multiple entry visa and e-Visa for the countries. We also request the government to extend the validity of free tourist visa till March 31, 2024, without capping of five lakh free tourist visas."

"It is a huge relief that the government has finally decided to do away with the air bubbles and to open up the Indian skies to scheduled commercial aviation again. We hope that health requirements will also be tweaked and that all airlines will now move swiftly to restore schedules and capacity. Unfortunately, we lost the entire incoming season and inbound tour operators will have to survive somehow for another six months. However, the resumption of flights spells hope for the outbound summer travel season. Foreign travel will become more expensive with depreciation of the Indian Rupee. Hopefully, the capacity increase might bring down international airfares to more realistic levels to even things out."



Ajay Prakash
President, TAFI

Contd on page 14 ►

Efforts on to win tourists

Ministry of Tourism is leaving no stone unturned to make sure that India is in the eyes of potential inbound tourists, while making sure that domestic tourist influx continues via Dekho Apna Desh campaign.



Nisha Verma

G Kamala Vardhana Rao, Director General, Ministry of Tourism (MOT), speaking at the Pata India & BBC News webinar 'The New Ways of Marketing to Recharge Tourism', he comments that the geo-political scenario has not been in favour of tourism. "Tourism has taken a beating, during the pandemic, which is a natural calamity and also because of the man-made impact with the war," he mentions.



G Kamala Vardhana Rao
Director General, Ministry of Tourism (MOT)

Campaigning continues

Rao claims that they have been continuing social media campaigns for a long time. "Apart from that, we have written letters to

ambassadors and high commissioners in 20 source markets and have appointed 20 officers in Indian embassies and high commissions to look after tourism related activities, exhibitions and connect with

local correspondents and travel agencies," he shares.

What's different?

He also shares that they are concentrating on the overseas Indian diaspora, which is the largest in the world. "We'll be reaching out to Indian diaspora and asking them to interact with the local tour operators and the travel agencies and other local population there. We have significant presence in the USA, Middle East, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand," he adds.

Focus for Incredible India

India, says Rao, is an all-round destination. "It's not one particular

Contd on page 18 ►



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'We need to lure more FTAs'

FHRAI has been requesting the central government to waive off the secondary condition with regard to average forex earnings under the EPCG scheme retrospectively from 2007-08 in order to become more competitive as a destination in Asia.



Hazel Jain

The Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI), seeking waiver of the secondary condition with regard to average forex earnings under the EPCG scheme retrospectively from 2007-08, has sought intervention of the Union Finance Minister to resolve the long-pending issue.



It is understood that the Centre Government is planning to scrap the EPCG scheme altogether for the hospitality industry.

Speaking over the issue, **Pradeep Shetty**, Joint Honorary Secretary, FHRAI, said, "If India wants to compete for international tourists with South East



Pradeep Shetty
Jt. Hon. Sec., FHRAI

Asia and Sri Lanka, we need to be completely attuned to global standards. This is in terms of technology, décor, property, maintenance systems and the like. So many things are not manufactured in India. Therefore, the EPCG scheme is of prime importance. In fact, this is not causing any kind of monetary loss to the country because the primary condition is that when you import on zero duty, the hospitality industry earns six times that in terms of forex."

Shetty added, "Of course, we accept the fact that we are moving

towards Atmanirbhar and Make in India, but we cannot do that for hospitality till such a time as our manufacturing industry gives us singular products in terms of quality, pricing and technology. At such a time, to completely scrap this scheme would be detrimental to the tourism as well as hospitality industries."

When the FHRAI team met Union Tourism Minister **G. Kishan Reddy** to discuss the issue, he agreed to conduct a survey or consultation on it. Now, the FHRAI would give a list of things imported into India and verify if they are available in India. However, this is yet to happen.

Waiving secondary conditions

The secondary condition says that hotels have to maintain an average of the first three years after importing the goods.

"Until 2005-2008, forex earnings were high. After that, political situations around the world forced free trade agreements (FTAs)

into India to drop. The secondary condition requires us to maintain an average of the first three years, which is something that is impossible to achieve," Shetty said. "The FHRAI has had several rounds of meetings with the Directorate General of Foreign Trade and the empowered committee

We will now make a very strong case for waiving this second condition

there, as well as the Tourism Minister. This waiver of secondary conditions due to de-growth – on average of about 8 per cent – is provided by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade rules. Such waivers have been given to other industries. We will make a strong case for waiving this second condition," he added.

Waiting in the wings

Global tourism was witnessing a rise after two tough years, but the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has hit the aviation business with the flight between Europe and Asia forced to take longer routes. Industry looks forward to an end to the crisis and a successful summer.



Janice Alysius

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has created an uncertainty over the travel business, but as of now its impact seems to be of regional nature. The direct impact has been limited to airlines flying between Europe and Asia, which are forced to longer routes. "However, if the conflict lingers on, it may impact travelling to certain regions," said **Riaz Munshi**, President, OTOAI.

"As of now, there is a strong and steady rise in demand for global travel as countries are lifting COVID-19 restrictions and preparing to welcome tourists. However, it is quite early to comment on the situation. If the war escalates, it could indeed slow down travel. People are looking forward to their vacations after a gap of two years and I certainly hope that things settle at the earliest. There was excitement among the travel-

lers, especially the young travellers and family vacationers. So, fingers crossed, we are hopeful for a good summer," Munshi added.

Expressing similar views, **Shravan Bhalla**, General Secretary, OTOAI, said, "As things started opening up amid decreasing COVID numbers all over the world, we expected a big surge in travel. But queries have gone down due to the impact of conflict between Ukraine & Russia. People have not cancelled their plans, but queries have been put on hold. However, we have seen an increase in the number of bookings for destinations that have opened up recently such as Australia, Thailand and Sri Lanka."

Ashish Kumar Arora, General Manager, Vision Travels and Tours Pvt Ltd, said, "After the news of the conflict between the two countries broke out,



Riaz Munshi
President, OTOAI

People are looking forward to their vacations after a gap of two years and I hope things certainly settle at the earliest

to-and-fro travel from Russia and Ukraine became zero. Airlines flying over these countries would have to divert, and this could cause issues, but South East Asia, UK, USA, Canada, Switzerland as well as the Middle East and South East would



Shravan Bhalla
General Secretary, OTOAI

People have not cancelled their plans, but queries have been put on hold due to the conflict between Ukraine & Russia

be unaffected. So, I believe there would be no cancellations or negative effects as such."

Munshi said the conflict at present looks to be of regional nature and should not affect global travel.

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TRAVELTALK

VIEWPOINT

Skies to open again

As India prepares to resume scheduled commercial international flights from March 27, we can see a sigh of relief within the travel industry. It feels like we might be back in business and our industry will finally bounce back. An industry among the hardest hit by the pandemic and one that received the least support, the travel fraternity's preparedness will not be put to the test.

Has India tourism evolved? Are we promoting brand India differently now? Are we going back to the same source markets and attracting the same age bracket? While we must strengthen our core before exploring new markets, I wonder how the last two years would have changed travel buying patterns in our core source markets. However, I am confident that roadshows, exhibitions, and destination workshops will help prepare the travel agents for a busy winter 2022; a refreshed marketing campaign for the country, is going to be a wait and watch before we see foreigners flocking to India.

Taking flight

As commercial flights are all set to reopen, the Indian travel is waiting with bated breath to book that foreign holiday again. It has been a while since it felt to take a holiday across the globe and believe me when I say this, we just can't wait to explore the world again.

While the Indian traveller is waiting to explore the world, foreign tourism offices are leaving no stone unturned to welcome the Indian traveller. From destination trainings, to workshops and continued meetings, the Indian agent has been armed with all the required information to make that memorable itinerary. Interestingly, a few countries have developed new tourism products and offerings to make sure that a repeat travellers has enough of new experiences and memories to make. Australia is an example. MICE and luxury travel are another sectors to watch out for. So, what will decide the next most popular international holiday destination for Indian travellers? Let us hope now it is their favourite travel agent and not their favourite Bollywood star.



TT Bureau

Visiting a beach is a dream for many. A recent survey, sponsored by Tripadvisor, revealed 32 per cent of travellers globally will take a beach trip in 2022. If you are one of them, browse through these award-winning beaches, along with guidance from fellow travellers, on the best ways to experience them to make your pick.

"We know a perfect day at the beach looks different from one person to the next. Some love classic soft white sand and sunbathing, while others love exploring rocky coves. This list has something for everyone, because it was determined by the millions of different travellers all over the



world reviewing their favourite beaches on Tripadvisor throughout 2021. Although last year was still far from normal, these are the beaches travellers visited and loved more than any others," said Christine Maguire,

Top 10 Beaches in Asia for 2022

Radhanagar Beach, Havelock Island, India

Highlights: Waves are awesome with clear blue turquoise waters and white sand.

Yonaha Maehama Beach, Miyakojima, Japan

Highlights: Visit in the evening when the sun starts to set. It has the best mix of coral and fish.

Railay Beach, Krabi, Thailand

Highlights: The beach is fabulous for either a day of sunbathing or exploring. Kayaks available.

Cavelossim Beach, Goa, India

Highlights: The beach is clean. Walks along the beach on the soft and clean sand is enjoyable.

Agonda Beach, Goa, India

Highlights: This beautiful and huge beach is good for walks or runs, and has a stunning view of the sunset.

Nai Harn Beach, Phuket, Thailand

Highlights: You can enjoy a massage, plenty of restaurants, food stalls, shopping and bathrooms.

Haeundae Beach, Busan, South Korea

Highlights: It holds the Guinness record for the beach with most deck chairs. A must go in Busan.

Varca Beach, Goa, India

Highlights: Beautiful quiet beach with amazing soft sand, perfect to find yourself. Clear waters.

Karon Beach, Phuket, Thailand

Highlights: Good waves for surfing or body boarding. A relatively long beach if you like to run.

Benaulim Beach, Goa, India

Highlights: Beautiful and peaceful place for morning walks/jogs. You can fish in mornings and evenings.

Top 10 Beaches in the World for 2022

Grace Bay Beach - Grace Bay, Turks and Caicos

Varadero Beach - Varadero, Cuba

Turquoise Bay - Exmouth, Australia

Quarta Praia - Morro de Sao Paulo, Brazil

Eagle Beach - Palm - Eagle Beach, Aruba

Radhanagar Beach - Havelock Island, India

Baía do Sancho - Fernando de Noronha, Brazil

Trunk Bay Beach - Virgin Islands National Park, US

Baía dos Golfinhos - Praia da Pipa, Brazil

Spiaggia dei Conigli - Lampedusa, Italy

Vice President, Global Media Business at Tripadvisor. "Whether you are looking for a trip where you can continue to social distance outdoors, or are comfortable heading to spring break, beaches are the perfect place to be in 2022, and the Travellers' Choice Awards can guide you to the best ones for you," Maguire added.

The number one beach in the world determined by travellers this year is Grace Bay Beach in Turks and Caicos. With over 7,200 reviews to-date (90 per cent of which are 5-bubble), this quintessential Caribbean paradise has travellers raving about its white sand and crystal clear water.

This year, India still retains the crown of being home to Asia's most loved beach, but travellers have crowned a brand new winner for 2022: Radhanagar Beach

in Havelock Island. It is ranked as the sixth best beach in the world! This year, India also had the most winners on the 'best beaches

The number one beach in the world determined by travellers this year is Grace Bay Beach in Turks and Caicos

in Asia' list, including Cavelossim Beach (#4), Agonda Beach (#5), Varca Beach (#8) and Benaulim Beach (#10).

Tripadvisor, claiming to be the world's largest travel platform, announced the second edition of its annual 'Travellers' Choice® Awards for 2022' in the second fortnight of February.



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TourismNews

MOT invites final stakeholder comments on draft report for National Digital Tourism Mission

Nepal eases travel restrictions with no PCR test for fully vaccinated tourists

South African Tourism aims to achieve 64 per cent YoY growth in arrivals from India in 2022

2023 will be a hockey stick revival for Incredible India: Vikram Madhok

Scheduled international flights to and from India to resume from 27th March after 2 years

Siliguri welcomes the trade for the 6th edition of Bengal Travel Mart

MoT starts Swadesh Darshan Awards in different categories, invites entries from States and UTs

Ebixcash files draft papers for ₹6,000-cr IPO with SEBI

Huddle over tourism hub

A special meeting between GMR Hyderabad International Airport and FTCCI's Tourism Committee discusses tourism opportunities in Telangana region, ahead of the Hyderabad Aviation Summit 2022, planned next month.



Nisha Verma

In a brainstorming session, Tourism Committee of Federation of Telangana Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FTCCI) and GMR Hyderabad International Airport mulled over 'Roadmap for Building a Stronger Tourism Product' with an idea to make Hyderabad, Telangana State and nearby region as a tourism hub. At the meeting, senior GMR Hyderabad officials, headed by their CEO, **Pradeep Panicker**, shared their views on the way forward. This meeting was the precursor to the Hyderabad Aviation Summit 2022, planned in April.

"Inbound tourism has huge economic multiplier impact on the city and the state GDP. We are happy to work closely with stakeholders such as FTCCI Tourism Committee and make the



FTCCI Tourism Committee members meet GMR Hyderabad delegation

State of Telangana and its capital Hyderabad a tourism destination of choice in the region. Some of the sites in the region are even more beautiful than famous international tourist sites. We just need to promote these places well," Panicker said at the meeting.

"In order to turn this region into a tourism hub, we need to curate the sites based on specific themes and experiences and support them with world class infrastructure, hygienic facilities, hotels, skilled tourism ecosystem workforce, which can act as

brand ambassador for the region and promote these tourism sites aggressively across India and globally," he added.

Ashish Kumar, Chief Commercial Officer, GMR Hyderabad, also shared his insights at the meeting. A 15-member team of the Tourism Committee of FTCCI, led by the committee Chairman **Valmiki Hari Kishan**, also shared its views during the brainstorming session.

Earlier, to showcase the State of Telangana, FTCCI's Tourism Com-

mittee successfully organised a three-day Telangana Tourism Conclave in 2018, for which they hosted 1200 tourism stakeholders from pan India.

Among many points that were highlighted during the meeting included the huge potential that the region in and around Hyderabad had for inbound and domestic tourists. It was unanimously agreed that the potential largely remained untapped for a long time. Apart from the famous monuments like Charminar, Qutb Shahi Tombs, there are places

in the region that remain unexplored, such as Ramappa Temple — a UNESCO World Heritage Site — Thousand Pillar Temple, Mallikarjuna Temple (also known as Srisailem Temple), Gandikota Liamtra (known as Grand Canyon of India), Pochampally village, which was recently awarded 'Best World Tourism Village' by the UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organisation). Moreover, with new entrant such as The Statue of Equality, Yadagirigutta Temple and Buddhavanam at Nagarjunasagar, it was the right time to market and promote the tourism in the region. **Anuradha Reddy**, Convenor, INTACH Telangana chapter, gave a brief presentation of how aviation started from Hyderabad and how it is shaping the future. The Tourism Committee delegation came out with many ideas to make Hyderabad a happening city with support from all stakeholders.

Dedicated push must for Telangana

From a dismal budget to the need for proper tourism promotion drive in Telangana at the highest level, K Ranga Reddy, Chairman IATO Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Chapter, highlights what needs to be done in the youngest state of India to attract tourists.



Nisha Verma

K Ranga Reddy, Chairman IATO Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Chapter, claimed that despite having three tourism ministers, the importance of tourism was not highlighted much at the time of budget. "Looking at the budget presentation, I feel that co-ordination among the three tourism ministers was not done well enough or not given a room for much discussion," he said.

Need to review

Claiming that in foreign countries, the guides, transport and tour operators follow the rules for safety and comfort of tourists. "There needs to be an agreement between overseas tour operators with those in India, so that the facilities are maintained at par with international standards. Such understanding can be done through a contract, which can only be done by meeting them personally,



K Ranga Reddy
Chairman, IATO Andhra Pradesh
and Telangana Chapter

showcasing our products and not through emails," he added.

However, he claimed that the provision of getting overseas tour operators to India was there before the budget, but it is being changed. "The government has amended the rules and regulations to avail the MDA scheme, wherein when the tour operator goes for international promotions, could claim ₹2,50,000 per visit. Now, they have changed the condition saying that a tour operator

needs to earn ₹20 crores of foreign exchange to avail the scheme. However, when we have zero foreign tourists visiting India, how do we get this foreign exchange?" questions Reddy.

He added, "They have also amended that the MDA scheme is only meant for the government approved tour operators. They are offering a loan of ₹10 lakh to those who have minimum ₹15 to ₹25 lakh yearly turnover. In the last two and a half years, there has not been any business. From where we can show this ₹25 lakh of business in our books? Hence, we are totally disappointed."

The dichotomy

Reddy claimed that the government has permitted five lakh free tourist visas on a first come first serve basis to India, but that is peanuts for international tourists. "When a person is spending \$6-7 on his visit, \$30-40 does

not make any difference to him. Hence, we have demanded to not only give free visa for five lakh

Looking at the budget presentation, I feel that coordination among three tourism ministers was not done well enough

people, but to also allow them to not pay entrance fee to visit any place of interest or a monument. However, it has not been considered yet," he stressed.

Another thing that the government shall look into is the roaring international flight fares. "Nothing is being done in this regard. The government has abruptly stopped the tourism officials to go and

showcase tourism products with the tour operators in Berlin, London, Geneva, Switzerland Tokyo and Madrid. This cannot be done by someone from the embassy overseas, because we are interacting with the tourism officials in India," suggested Reddy.

What's in a scheme?

Commenting on the PRASHAD scheme, he said, "If the government is developing a destination under PRASHAD scheme, it has to be highlighted to international media. In a remote corner of the country, if they are spending some crores in development and even the neighbour does not know about the facilities there, it is not going to help," he added.

Multiple factors

He said the MOT should think that the generation gap is becoming wider for tourists coming to India. "Five years ago, elderly people who saved money in Germany,

France and Switzerland, used to travel for culture tours. But their next generation have different concepts and preferences, and hence we should consider the requirement of youth. Hence, the government can give a gap of one year for the PRASHAD scheme, and turn it into a marketing scheme," he suggested.

Telangana for tourism

Saying that a few years back, Hyderabad was used as a transit destination where people would come in the morning, look around and then go in the evening. However, commenting on Telangana State Tourism Policy, he said, "Unfortunately, this is the fifth or sixth year when there is no policy formulated by the Telangana government for the sector."

He suggested that Telangana should take a cue from states like Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Kerala.

WELCOME BACK TO SINGAPORE

Travellers from India who are fully vaccinated can now visit Singapore quarantine free on Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL) flights.

Singapore Airlines operates daily VTL flights from Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai. From 16TH March 2022, all Singapore Airlines stations in India will operate VTL flights.

For the latest information, please visit
<https://safetravel.ica.gov.sg/vtl/requirements-and-process>

Or scan the QR code below



singaporeimagine

VTL: A safe gateway to Singapore

Singapore Tourism Board (STB), together with Singapore Airlines (SIA) and Changi Airport Group (CAG), conducted a refresher webinar for the travel trade in India and Sri Lanka. This session was in time with the announcement that the Vaccination Travel Lane (VTL) will open to all cities in India with effect from March 16 this year.



Hazel Jain

Travelling between Singapore and India and Sri Lanka has now been made easier. The countries have streamlined their entry and COVID-19 testing protocols while bearing in mind the safety of travellers and locals. The VTL allows fully vaccinated travellers from both countries to visit Singapore quarantine-free. The on-arrival Covid-19 testing requirements in Singapore have been revised and travellers are now required to only take a Supervised ART* within 24 hours after arrival at one of the testing centres. They could carry on to enjoy their stay in the city once they have received negative test results. When returning to India or Sri Lanka, pre-departure test and quarantine are no longer required.

Connecting with the trade

As part of STB's trade engagement strategy to grow and deepen their connection, a joint webinar by STB, SIA and CAG was conducted to update the trade fraternity on the revised guidelines of the VTL. More than 1,100 agents from India and Sri Lanka attended the session on 28th February 2022. The post-webinar survey indicated that 89 per cent of the participants rated the session to be very helpful, and 95 per cent of the participants found the process of travelling to Singapore via VTL easy to understand.

During the webinar, SIA announced the launch of two new weekly flights (A350) between Colombo and Singapore on 29th March 2022. Customers in India can now experience its new regional Business Class and Economy Class cabin prod-



GB Srithar
Regional Director, IMESA (India, Middle East & South Asia), STB

The extension of VTL to Singapore from all Indian cities provides a much needed impetus to travel between the countries



Wong Renjie
Area Director, Mumbai STB

I look forward to working with our trade partner-friends in India and Sri Lanka and to drive tourism recovery in the coming months

ucts on Airbus A350 and Boeing 787-10 aircraft. Moreover, the iconic SIA Airbus A380 returns to Mumbai on 14th March 2022. To celebrate this, SIA launched a discount of up to 40 per cent for its A380 flights from Mumbai to Singapore.

CAG shared that they are ready to handle an increase in traffic

via the two operational terminals today – Terminal 1 and Terminal 3. Changi Airport offers a wide range of services, including Meet and Greet service upon disembarkation, and a clinic that accepts the booking of Supervised ART*, should customers wish to do so upon arrival. CAG also shared about Jewel Changi Airport, a one-of-its-kind life-

style destination with more than 280 dining and shopping outlets. With Jewel, CAG is proud to offer a snippet of what it means to have "the World meet Singapore" upon touchdown.

The start of March 2022 saw the launch of the STB's first series of nine familiarisation trips for MICE Corporates, travel agents and influencers, which validated the seamless VTL experience. Sunil Sharma – Head of Travel & MICE of Ancalima Lifesciences Limited, who was on one of the familiarisation trips, said, "The implementation of the VTL indicates the seriousness in view of the pandemic, and the willingness to create every possible opportunity to facilitate travel in a safe way is unique. The application of Vaccinated Travel Pass (VTP) on Safe Travel Office website is simple, user friendly and supported by detailed information. Furthermore, each step is self-explanatory. Overall, my VTL experience was very smooth and fast."

Extension of VTL points to all cities in India

On 4th March 2022, Singapore announced the extension of



VTL to all cities in India from 16th March 2022. The VTL was earlier applicable only to Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai since 29th November 2021.

SIA Group announced that they will be progressively converting all their flights from India to Singapore to VTL. This includes flights from Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kochi and Kolkata, and Scoot's flights from Amritsar, Coimbatore, Trivandrum, Tiruchirappalli and Visakhapatnam. With this new development, more travellers from India, who are fully vaccinated, will be able to use the VTL for quarantine-free travel to Singapore.

SingapoReimagine – New tourism offerings

Travellers visiting Singapore can look forward to interesting offerings such as SkyHelix Sentosa, Museum of Ice Cream, National Orchid Garden and more.

On the cruise front, Royal Caribbean has also announced Spectrum of the Seas will sail from Singapore beginning 11th April 2022. The ship will offer three and four-night 'cruise to nowhere' programmes.

GB Srithar, Regional Director, IMESA (India, Middle East & South Asia), Singapore Tourism Board, said, "The extension of VTL to Singapore from all Indian cities provides the much needed

impetus to travel between the countries for all traveller types, whether for leisure, business or cruise. This is part of Singapore's calibrated and progressive approach in re-opening our borders. Over the past year and a half, we had continued engaging the consumers and travel trade through a myriad of content and virtual experiences. We had recently launched a "Reserve in Singapore" consumer engagement activation under our SingapoReimagine campaign and are glad that more travellers from India may now start to plan their trips and reserve their experiences in Singapore. We look forward to sharing Singapore's new, reimagined tourism offerings and experiences with our Indian visitors."

Wong Renjie, soon to assume the role of Area Director, Mumbai, Singapore Tourism Board, assured travel agents that visiting Singapore is more streamlined and straight-forward. "We are excited to welcome back visitors from both India and Sri Lanka through the VTLs. We have a lot of exciting work cut out for us. I look forward to working with our trade partner-friends in India and Sri Lanka and to drive tourism recovery in the coming months," he said.

*From 15 March 2022, travellers on VTL will only need to take a self-swabbed ART within 24hrs after arriving Singapore.



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Time for Goa to innovate

Tourism in Goa has taken another hit with the Russia-Ukraine conflict – both top source markets for Goa – and all charter flights from the region has stopped for now. The state will therefore need to enhance its charter game rather than depend on its traditional markets if it wants to attract more international tourists.



Hazel Jain

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent suspension of Russian flights is hitting Goa's charter season hard. **Nilesh Shah**, President, Travel & Tourism Association of Goa, said, "Most charter guests spend 14-21 days in Goa. Many hotels that have been suffering for the past 20 months depend on charter business for survival."

At the moment, Goa is receiving only once-a-week charters from Kazakhstan. This was inevitable with the political situation in the Eastern Europe region worsening. Goa will need to branch out and bring its 'A' game to the fore as it competes with Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, Maldives, and even Tanzania for international charter flights. **Gavin Eccles**, Managing Partner GE Consulting & Advisory, said, "For Goa, domestic tourism has been leading



Nilesh Shah
President
Travel & Tourism Association of Goa

With new private airport in Mopa, which will be operational by next season, I think the charter movement will see a boom

the way so far. It is a fascinating story for the state. If you look at Goa from the European travellers' point of view, we look at Goa from November to May because it is



Gavin Eccles
Managing Partner
GE Consulting & Advisory

You cannot expect Mopa to drive charters. Somebody has to create a push for brand Goa in the markets

winter in Europe. The mentality for the Europeans is that when we travel to a destination that is semi long haul, we go predominantly in the winter."

Advantage Mopa airport?

The other big question is – what is the vision behind the new Mopa airport? Eccles said, "What I am hearing from the airport directly is that the old Dabolim airport will continue to operate under AAI even once Mopa starts operating. But the problem is that Mopa is in the middle of nowhere. So from tourism point of view, where does this leave the tourists? South Goa beaches – which is where most of the tourists are going at the moment – are much more aligned from the existing airport rather than Mopa. So the complexities of Mopa are not so great for South Goa. Now, the opportunity that Mopa presents is the opportunity for building new resorts in the north of Goa. So, the question is – is there a vision to look at resort development to the north of Goa where the connectivity from the new airport is easier?" If Goa keeps both airports open, they actually compete with each other for



the same type of customer in the international space."

Meanwhile, Shah had revealed earlier this year that Goa was welcoming almost 500 passengers every 10 days from Moscow, which was expected to increase. Moreover, TUI was to send four flights per week from the UK – two from Manchester and two from Gatwick. This unfortunately got cancelled because of the third wave. Shah said, "But we remain hopeful, and with the new private airport in Mopa, which will be operational by the next season, I

think the charter movement will see a boom, as there will be no restrictions and fewer permissions required for charters." However, Eccles said, "You cannot expect Mopa to drive charters. Somebody has to create a significant push for brand Goa in the markets it wants to go after. Just because you have an airport does not mean you will have connectivity and charters come in. The airport is just a port of arrival." He added that Goa needs to understand why charters are being diverted to other destinations from the state and work accordingly.

It's homecoming for Air India

After Air India was handed back to its founders Tata Group, almost seven decades after it was nationalised, industry leaders are ecstatic and hopeful that a new era would start for the cash-strapped national carrier. They said the Maharaja could be one of best passenger-carrying airlines in the world in one to two years.

"I would like to compliment the government to finally achieve the divestment of Air India. For many years, the taxpayers money was being eroded. I am very happy that not only Air India has been privatised, but it has gone to its rightful owner, TATA, the company that started it. There were many issues with Air India. Maharaja as a brand is very strong and with TATA behind it, I am confident that within 1-2 years it can be one of the best airlines in the world."



Subhash Goyal
Founder Chairman
STIC Travel & Air Charter Group



Rajiv Mehra
President, IATO

"Now Air India will be coming under the new management of TATA. We have not been in touch with them so far because of other issues. Very soon, we are going to have a meeting with them and I am confident that like AirAsia India or Vistara, also owned by TATA, Air India would be cooperative with the tour operators and travel agents. We are confident that this will mean something new for the clients travelling in from abroad, as many FTOs had shifted from Air India to other airlines. They would all shift back to Air India once again."

"The industry is certainly excited to have Air India back in the Tata Group and is looking forward to getting this converted to a global-standard airline in the days to come. Please note that the biggest opportunity that we have is the proximity to international borders. Thus, it is time for the Tatas to reinvent East and promote cross border tourism through regional connectivity across Eastern South Asia, which will give high return from the international market in the next five years from now."



Debjit Dutta
Chairman, IATO West Bengal Chapter



Valmiki Hari Kishan
Chairman - Tourism Committee, FTCCI

"Undoubtedly, it is a very good sign — after almost 68 years Air India has come back home. As an industry voice, we would not have appreciated if it had gone to someone else. We are happy it has come back to the Tata Group. We Indians are emotional with the Maharaja and our emotions are greatly satisfied and we are sure Tatas can turn back Air India to profit mode in due course of time. Many other countries' national carriers also no longer belong to their governments today."

"For Tatas, Air India is one of their initial projects when they started out of their regular business of iron and steel. For them, it was a flagship company, which the government took over later and now it has come back to its kitty. I think their professionalism will come in handy for Air India to make it one of the best airlines in the world, while there have been many hurdles that have been created during the course of time when the government was controlling it. All this will take a long time to iron out."



Guldeep Singh Sahni
MD, Weldon Tours and Travels



Zahoor Qari
CEO, Airlinks Tour & Travels, Kashmir

"It is a good thing that Air India has gone back to Tata, its original owner. In the last few years, the way Air India was performing, divestment of the airline was the best thing to happen. We appreciate this shift from government to private sector. It was not at par with the other private airlines, but now we are hoping that it will revive its lost glory. We know how Tata takes care of their products, which is visible in AirAsia and Vistara. We also know that it will progress now and will add more sectors."

Inputs by Nisha Verma

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Gainwell official partner for T20 WC

Gainwell Sports, which promotes a number of sports events worldwide, and has become the official partner to offer hospitality packages for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, to be held in Australia in October 2022, says agents can buy tickets for the game from them, make their own packages, sell them to customers and earn commission.



Nisha Verma

Manoj Saraf, MD, Gainwell Travel and Gainwell Sports, shared that Gainwell Sports became a new vertical for the company about seven years ago. "Since then, we have been promoting all sporting events across the world. Apart from cricket, we are also selling FIFA World Cup in Doha, Grand Slam tournaments, the football fixtures in Europe, and every possible sports, including Formula 1. Now, this vertical has become very important. In 2019, we were the official agent for Cricket World Cup in England and in 2020 we were also the official agent for the T20 World Cup Australia, which got cancelled because of the pandemic," he informed.

"Now the opportunity is back this year, with the World Cup happening in October and we are now the official hospitality agents for this



Manoj Saraf
Gainwell Travel and Gainwell Sports

product. This means that we will provide the premium tickets for all the matches of the World Cup — including the five India matches, starting with India versus Pakistan and then the preliminary matches, which India is playing at Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Perth, followed by semifinals and finals. The hospitality tickets will be given by us at face value, which ensures that the end customer is getting the ticket at the price he can see on the website. There is no markup or additional cost on that. That is because we

will get a small commission on them. This would prevent all kinds of hoarding of tickets," he added.

Distribution

Saraf revealed that even the agents can buy the tickets from them and make their own packages and sell them. "Although there is a procedure for making the payment, and Gainwell would guarantee a small commission to the travel agents. This works in a very transparent way as these are hospitality tickets, where food and beverage would be complimentary for all the spectators in the stadium," he said.

The distribution of these match products are done only through a limited channel, shared Saraf. "We have a huge network of travel agents across India, and we expect a lot of sales to happen through the travel trade across India. Leading agents like Kuoni, SOTC and Make My Trip are probably going to buy tickets through

us or one of our channels. So, it is a huge scope for selling B2B here," he added.

Plans

Apart from the Cricket World Cup in Australia, Saraf is promoting a number of other sports events. "Looking at my general sports calendar, the first event that we are promoting is the Bahrain Formula One from 18th – 20th March. We will see a lot of people travelling for that and we have a lucrative product starting at about ₹65,000, all inclusive for people to go to Bahrain, watch the Formula 1 and come back," he informed.

"After that there is the T20 World Cup in Australia and immediately after that is the FIFA Football

World Cup in Doha. In between these two mega events, we also have many football tournaments, the English Premier League and

Apart from cricket, we are also selling FIFA World Cup in Doha, Grand Slam tournaments

the La Liga Football tournaments across Europe. Hence, a lot of people who are travelling to Europe or sports fans are keen to watch games there," he added.

Saraf claimed that in the last few years young travellers going abroad are not just going for a holiday but for an experience. "If he is a sports fan, he would make sure to watch a football game, Wimbledon, Cricket, or anything else he likes. Thus, it has become a big attraction and add on to any holiday package," he said.

Gainwell Travels

Saying that they are slowly opening up, Saraf added, "We did fairly well in the October-December quarter. In fact, we were almost catching up on our regular business when Omicron hit. Now we see a lot of people coming back to travel, or people who cancelled bookings in January want to travel in February-March."

Kerala Tourism will roll out aggressive promotional campaigns across the country, targeting diverse segments. The campaigns will be based on various themes and will be bolstered by travel trade networking activities, participation in trade fairs & roadshows.

Museums to drive tourism potential

► Contd from page 1

initiate a dialogue to understand the best approach for developing India's museums, forging strategic partnerships between Indian and international institutions and drawing a master plan for renewal of Indian museums and to make them truly world-class. "We aim to come up with a standard operating procedure for developing the finest museums worldwide. Under the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, the message of rejuvenation of museums and cultural spaces will continue to play a critical role in the task of nation-building and discharging responsibilities towards character-building of our citizens in the 21st century. Taking forward the vision of the PM of the two T's—Tradition and Tourism, for India the potential for this development in the museum space is vast and waiting to be unlocked," he stressed.

He further shared, "Specialists and planners, both have highlighted the need for investment in culture as a national policy, as

it is done for Education, Health or infrastructure. This message has been internalised within the Ministry of Culture and we are well on our way to developing a national culture policy with the right growth impetus through policy and markets. The expansion

We are well on our way to developing a national culture policy with the right growth impetus through policy and markets

sion of the museum landscape in India will lead to an exponential increase in income generation and job creation, and culture in general, and museums specifically will become a major driver of economic growth."

He shared that earlier the role of Ministry of Culture in promoting museums was mostly restricted

to providing financial assistance under two schemes—the museum Grant scheme and the scheme for promotion of the culture of science.

"We want to go beyond this now with a renewed mandate of modernisation, upgradation and establishment of new museums. We aim to bring our institutions closer to international standards of Museology, which are relevant for the 21st century. Broadly, The areas that need renewed attention is the management of museums with highest standards of professionalism and best practices education in audience engagement, development of capacity and skills and the sustainable growth of museums," he highlighted.

He suggested that there is a need to facilitate strategic partnerships and collaborations, develop capacities for heritage professionals, and develop an ecosystem for a robust network of stakeholders to engage in this sector. Putting stress on the digitalisa-



tion in the post-pandemic world, he claimed, "In the new normal ushered in, by COVID-19, the digital has emerged as the most important space for engagement in the museum sector. The use of digital technology to enhance user experience is however, not limited to just artificial reality or virtual reality - AR and VR. But it is to widen, public access through modernisation and digitisation of collections and exhibitions.

We have seen extensive use of technology for enhanced user experience and engagement in our national museum in Delhi

and advanced projection mapping at the Victoria Memorial Hall Kolkata and also the National Gallery of modern Art's New Delhi," he pointed out.

He claimed that while India has a vast number of museums, they have so far received limited attention from international or even domestic tourists, educational entities or private stakeholders.

"We feel that there is an urgent need to significantly improve the visibility of these spaces through marketing and outreach initiatives to attract visitors, increase both public and private investment,

improve livelihoods, generate employment and ideally ensure longevity and sustainability for museums," he said.

He concluded, "Museums in India today need to create a sustainable future by taking care of their core assets and collections and ensuring that the museum continues to be relevant and valuable to future generations.

The reimagining museums in India Summit expects to illustrate and discuss best practices from India and abroad, which can create conditions that will integrate the global museum community with some of India's, most significant cultural institutions and museum spaces. I envisage that 2022, which marks 75 years of India's independence will see immense growth and development of the museum sector in India."

It is said that there is nothing more powerful than an idea whose Time Has Come. reimagining, museums, is India in India is indeed such an idea.

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Flight restart to boost business

► Contd from page 1

“The lift of the ban on international flights has come as a much-required aid for the sector. We wholeheartedly welcome government's decision to open commercial flights. As India is being recognised for its vaccination efforts throughout the world, the fear in the minds of travellers has also subsided. This gives us a positive outlook for the future. We are optimistic that we will start getting good business starting August 2022. However, more initiatives are required for the sector to recover and reach its full potential again. For instance, tourist visas are still on hold. Issuing these visas will help both the travellers as well as the industry. MOT should also start marketing India as a destination again on different platforms like print media, digital channels and travel fairs.”



Jatinder Taneja
Vice-Chairman, PATA India Chapter



PP Khanna
President, ADTOI

“Government's decision to resume international flights after two years' break is a much-awaited news for the industry as they wanted international flights to start as quickly as possible to revive both inbound and outbound tourism, which was suspended since March 2020. It's better late than never and the stakeholders who have suffered business loss on account of the suspension will heave a sigh of relief from this development. While revival of outbound tourism may pick up soon due to approaching summer season, inbound may take some time to catch up. However, a beginning will be made for the tourism industry, since during the last two years, stakeholders were totally dependent on domestic tourism alone. Now with multiple choices, the industry will flourish.”

“We thank the government of India and Ministry of Civil Aviation for restarting international flights, as we had been following it up with the ministry to restart international travel because most countries have thrown open gates for international travellers. The industry was awaiting an announcement in this regard since early bird gets the worm. Foreign Exchange earnings for the last two fiscals has been entirely wiped out due to curbs which also forced approximately 30 per cent of hotels and restaurants to shut business. The industry's total revenue in FY 2019-20 stood at Rs1.82 lakh crores and it employed 50 million people. The latest announcement has come as a ray of hope for hospitality businesses and those employed in the sector.”



Gurbaxish Singh Kohli
Vice President, Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI)



Riaz Munshi
President, OTOAI

“OTOAI is happy with resumption of scheduled international flights. After having recognised the increased vaccination coverage across the globe and in consultation with stakeholders, the Government of India has decided to resume scheduled commercial international passenger services to/from India from March 27, 2022 i.e. start of Summer Schedule this year. We at OTOAI could not be happier with this news. Continuing with our efforts, OTOAI had written to Civil Aviation Minister two days ago, requesting him to resume scheduled international flights. With the opening up of world tourism and relaxation of COVID-19 curbs and India coming on the Green List of most countries, we feel the announcement couldn't have come at a better time. We are thankful to the Government.”

“It has been a very long two years and we welcome this move to open travel. This comes not a moment too soon, for an ailing industry. It promises to revive flyer confidence, and herald a period of normalcy, and be a catalyst in breathing life to both inbound and outbound travel. We have sensed a slow rising of intent travel, but then the means were not available with pandemic closures of air spaces. This latest news combined with an all-time low in case numbers and a high vaccination rate will be sure to put India back on the destination road map, again. Airfares are falling already and many routes closed so far, are open with attractive fares. The war in Europe could slow demand for India as a destination from Europe, so we will need to wait and watch how this pans out.”



Vaibhav Kala
Officiating President of ATOAI



Ronojoy Dutta
Whole Time Director and CEO, IndiGo

“We, at IndiGo welcome the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Directorate General of Civil Aviation's (DGCA's) decision to allow resumption of scheduled commercial international flight operations from India after a gap of two years. It was in March 2020 that scheduled flight operations were stopped, owing to the start of the pandemic. The industry has been waiting for this announcement for a long time. This much-needed step will provide impetus to the economic recovery for the sector and the nation, with borders opening for tourists from across the world. We look forward to connecting our customers to the people and places they love. We will soon be announcing the schedule for our international destinations, in accordance with these new guidelines.”

“The resumption of international scheduled flights is great news, not only for our economy but also from the travel industry standpoint. It is definitely going to give industry the scope to quickly address the need to have strong inbound traffic slowly. This move is also a great sentiment booster, as now hospitality and travel companies will start pushing their marketing efforts to create business opportunities. Consequently, with time, this will augur well for the inbound demand in India. At present with India easing travel within as well and business getting back to business as usual, international travellers will find it easy. This is also the right moment as we will get time to ensure that within six months, business comes back in the right track as per our targets.”



Sarbendra Sarkar
Founder & MD, Cygnett Hotels & Resorts



Alok Bajpai
Co-founder & Group CEO, ixigo

“This is great news for all travellers and the industry, especially before the peak summer season. The demand for international travel is picking up in India and there has been a significant uptick in travel search queries for popular international destinations such as Australia, Sri Lanka, US and UK. Travel search queries from India for Australian cities such as Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney have jumped 15 to 20 per cent this month. We are seeing a trend of travellers now eager to book long-haul destinations, fuelled by international borders reopening and relaxation of rules across the globe. Resumption of international commercial flights will also regularise the demand-supply balance resulting in lower international airfares.”

“The announcement by DGCA and Ministry of Civil Aviation regarding the restart of scheduled international flight operations is a positive start and we hope things get normal going forward. This announcement has sent a wave of excitement through the industry and we have already started getting good number of queries for the coming season under FIT and smaller groups. However, few of the clients are still watching on the Russia-Ukraine conflict and once it ends we expect those queries converting into business and closure. Over and above, social events like birthdays and anniversaries outside India are getting back in demand for this season. Let's hope year 2022 be good for tourism industry.”



Shrawan Bhalla
General Secretary, OTOAI
Inputs by Nisha Verma

Sailing amidst pandemic

Postcard Hotel opened three new hotels in last one year and planning another in this quarter keeping in view the increasing demand for smaller boutique hotels with full comforts in tourist places.



Janice Alyosius

During the pandemic, The Postcard Hotel has seen an upsurge in demand. “Especially during the festival season, eight of the hotel's current operational rooms were booked to capacity. What was common across almost all our resorts was that they are booked out by families and groups of friends travelling together, making it an even safer escape for them,” shares **Akanksha Lamba**, Sr. Vice President, Operations, The Postcard Hotel. “The teams also ensured that guest experiences, including dining, were customised and planned within the hotels,” she says.

When asked about the safety and security, Lamba said, “Even before the pandemic, The Postcard followed highest service, safety and hygiene protocols. During the pandemic, these standards



Akanksha Lamba
Sr. Vice President, Operations
The Postcard Hotel

were reviewed, heightened and strictly followed with consistent and constant checks, along with extensive training.”

In December 2021, The Postcard Hotel launched The Postcard Hideaway, Netravali, in South Goa with 20 rooms spread across 20 acres. It is situated close to pristine, untouched beaches. The hotel is designed to let guests enjoy a truly restorative stay. Keeping in view the fact that a number of social needs

remain the same despite shift in people's behaviour, Lamba appears upbeat about the brand's new properties and prospects for 2022. Last year, the chain opened

Not only has the hotel prioritised the safety of its customers, but it is also committed to the protection of its employees

three new hotels comprising The Postcard Gir Wildlife Sanctuary, The Postcard Hideaway, Netravali and The Postcard Mandalay Hall, Kochi. “Clearly, demand for smaller boutique hotels in tourist places with full home comforts has grown substantially. We are also opening a hotel in the first quarter of 2022,” she shares.

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All set to rise above barriers

Juliette Losardo, Exhibition Director, WTM London in conversation with **Devika Jeet**, Director, DDP India, talks about the challenges facing the travel trade sector and how they plan to overcome them, especially after the intensity of COVID-19 has lessened the world over.



TT Bureau

What would be your vision for WTM 2022? What difference can the trade expect?

Confidence and Sales

We are confident as we embark into WTM London 2022 as travelling abroad has become more accessible for fully vaccinated travellers. With recent news that the UK has scrapped COVID-19 tests for arrivals, and that the EU plan to follow suit ahead of Easter, our commercial team have become busy. Customers such as Peru, Guatemala, Croatian National Tourist Board, The Republic of Bulgaria and Visit Flanders have committed to this year's show. We are very excited about it.

Recovery

According to WTTC, in 2020, the sector had experienced a \$4.5



Juliette Losardo
Exhibition Director
WTM London

trillion drop in GDP and 62 million people lost their jobs around the globe. Although domestic travel has been a key factor in recovery to date, return of full recovery of the global economy will be possible with international travel. This year's show will address full recovery and plans to support the community by enabling business meetings, networking, learning opportunities and encouraging new business opportunities.

Travel insurance

Although many destinations have been relaxing the pandemic regulations, we continue to navigate through complex times; those that demand high levels of contingency planning and comprehensive travel insurance. While there is plenty to celebrate, consumers are likely to expect refundable bookings and date flexibility to resume.

Recruitment

Recruitment is another issue faced by the travel community following the pandemic. Travel firms have called for a joint industry effort to address the staffing shortage, as recruiters warn it will take at least six months to resolve the problem.

Technology and sustainability

We recently announced that our travel technology show, Travel

Forward, will become part of WTM London in 2022, and will be referred to as WTM Travel Tech.

We are planning two theatres in the WTM Travel Tech area of the show. As per Euromonitor International, 39 per cent of the industry say they

This year's show will support traveller community by enabling business meets and learning opportunities

are investing in new technology to future-proof business, and 53 per cent of the companies are focusing on sustainability features to reach SDGs.

WTM London 2021 Overview

Last year, WTM focused on the health and safety of all attendees. It is essential when pulling together a large-scale international event in the wake of a global pandemic. We are proud to have enabled the travel community to come together despite a challenging backdrop and were delighted to have welcomed exhibitors from more than 100 countries.

There were 36 new exhibitors at WTM London, 4,000 buyers from 140 countries, 110 expert speakers taking part in 50 sessions, offering invaluable insights regarding rebuild, innovation and sustainability.

Asia, especially India, has had a large participation at WTM which is shrinking. How do you plan to grow this sector?

India has always been one of



our fantastic participants with 60 exhibitors at the show during pre-pandemic days. However, in 2021, WTM London has reflected the global landscape, with curbs still on in many regions. Asia has remained shut for most of 2021, resulting in absence of some countries at the show.

Would you be undertaking any marketing and promotional activity in India?

In 2016 India was WTM London's Premier Partner, which saw a surge in visitors. India experienced growth in international tourism and a bumper number of business deals. We are open to the country's tourism board to highlight its diverse attractions to the world.

Gearing up for expansion

Year 2021 was 'successful' for WelcomHeritage despite COVID-19. Now, the hospitality chain looks forward with 'much optimism' as it plans to open new properties.

WelcomHeritage, one of the leading hospitality chain in India, is expanding its hotel portfolio in some of the key tourist destinations in the country. Led by its CEO **Abinash Manghani**, the hospitality chain looks all set to build upon the success of the past year.

comHeritage Cheetahgarh Resort & Spa, Bera in its portfolio in 2021. It added 85 keys to its overall inventory in the last year.

Now the hospital chain is planning to continue the brand's expansion around the country with four planned openings in 2022, including WelcomHeritage Azo-

ness will continue to grow at the same rate as in pre-COVID times. Going forward, we expect to clock generous three-digit growth in 2022. As we turn the page to 2022, we are excited to build on the growth of the previous year by offering more options to our guests looking to explore diverse destinations," he added.



"We approach every endeavour of ours with the utmost thought, planning and discernment. The year 2021 was a very successful year for us despite the challenges brought by the ongoing pandemic. We are looking at 2022 with much optimism as we plan to open a number of new properties and continue to create experiences that bring people together to celebrate life," said Manghani.

Last year, withstanding the challenges caused by the pandemic, WelcomHeritage managed to add new hotels, including WelcomHeritage Elysium Resort & Spa, Shimla; WelcomHeritage Badi Kothi, Allahabad and Wel-

ra, Fort Kochi; WelcomHeritage Ayatana, Ooty; WelcomHeritage Desert Resort, Mandawa and WelcomHeritage Parv Vilas, Solan. When operational, these properties will add 171 keys to the existing inventory of 903 keys of WelcomHeritage. "We are very excited about our new hotel openings across the country. We are optimistic that busi-

A joint venture between ITC Ltd and Jodhana Heritage, WelcomHeritage represents some of the finest traditions of heritage hospitality and tourism in India. Some of the other destinations that WelcomHeritage is targeting for expansion in the near future include Kufri, Chail, Udaipur, Jodhpur, Luni, Chikmagalur, Goa and Wayanad.

ATOAI puts best foot forward

Adventure tourism was more affected than any other tourism trade due to the pandemic and other factors. Now, ATOAI is proactively improving products to meet the client needs and deliver best results.



Janice Alyosius

Adventure tourism is passing through a difficult phase. "Adventure tourism is more affected than other tourism business since it involves longer travel times, connecting flights, destinations that may or may not be prepared for SOPs, smaller accommodations and roadheads that may not be perceived as safe. As a result of the pandemic, supply lines for equipment are drying up," shared **Vaibhav Kala**, Officiating President, ATOAI.

"Many people are talking about their travel plans in 2022. Bookings for quick getaways are coming in at short notice, but conversations for longer vacations are still going on. We anticipate tourist surges with the relaxation of restrictions and increased vaccinations. There is a need to adapt, innovate, offer new products, instil sense of security among customers and reach out to them in a better way," Kala added.



Vaibhav Kala
Officiating President, ATOAI



Vinayak Koul
Honorary Secretary, ATOAI

Vinayak Koul, Honorary Secretary, ATOAI, said, "Due to the current scenario, it is extremely difficult to plan for the future. Nevertheless, ATOAI is focusing on improving its products and doing its homework, so that when the time comes to meet the clients' needs, it would be ready to deliver the best."

Koul said the association members know how to operate tours safely amid the pandemic. He advised customers to be proactive in keeping up with the changes in state and national travel advisories, and follow the protocols that the association recommends.

He sought the government's support to overcome the challenges. "It is important that the government supports the adventure tourism industry through increased marketing at national and international level, especially for inbound tourism, as well as by easing out the requirements as much as possible. We have seen this trend all over the globe. Every country has put its best foot forward and is trying to market themselves. So, only when you keep yourself out in the open before the customer, you can expect them to think about travelling and booking holidays."

Fests to promote Maha

With the state opening up for tourists, Maharashtra Tourism has initiated an aggressive campaign to promote the sector by organising mini festivals and upgrading culinary experiences.



TT Bureau

The Maharashtra Tourism department has been organising 20 mini festivals in the state over February and March to promote its tourist destinations. These include a grape festival in Junnar; Nandur Bird Festival in Nashik; Vengurla (Sagareswar) Mahotsav in Sindhudurg; Fishing Village Paryatan Mahotsav, Vengurla; Shrivardhan Paryatan Mahotsav in Raigad; Katalshilp Paryatan Mahotsav in Ratnagiri; Wai Mahotsav in Satara and Panhala Mahotsav in Kolhapur among others.

Apart from promoting the districts through these mini festivals, the tourism department

is also creating opportunities for the locals to earn additional income. It is also conducting familiarisation tours for tour operators to showcase the richness and tourism potential of Maharashtra. The group will include participants from various cities, including Delhi, Jaipur, Ahmedabad and Bengaluru.

Starting from March 7, road shows also will be conducted in nine cities of Maharashtra to invite tourists from other states.

To ensure development of tourism from the ground up, the department has been conducting guide training programmes at 14 destinations with huge participation. It is also running nationwide advertisement campaigns to promote tourism on 10 Air India aircrafts and 500 taxis.

Culinary experiences

Recognising the demand for unique culinary experiences, Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) is

upskilling its kitchen staff to provide the same. Till now the state tourism accommodation has been providing a basic Indian food menu, but now they plan to include global cuisine, with special focus on health-conscious guests. To facilitate this, MTDC

The Maharashtra Tourism department is also creating opportunities for the locals to earn additional income

signed an MoU with Maharashtra Institute of Hotel Management & Catering Technology, Pune, to impart skill development training in kitchen and restaurant management, and food-safety training to over 60 chefs and kitchen staff. The five-day training was conducted at the institute in Shivajinagar.

DoNER calls Dubai investors

A high-level delegation from eight Northeast states of India visited Expo2020 Dubai to showcase the business opportunities in the region, including those in the tourism sector.



TT Bureau

The India Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai hosted 'Northeast Fortnight' from March 4 to 17, 2022, which witnessed participation from various representatives of the state, Northeastern Council (NEC) and Ministry of Development of Northeast Region (DoNER). The high-level delegation included Bedu Singh

leaders at the Expo to showcase the economic potential of the region, highlight the crucial sectors such as tourism and hospitality, and to promote the rich cultural heritage, including art and culture from these states. To position the region as a developing part of the nation, the delegation hosted several sessions aimed to highlight success stories, reforms and sectors of excellence. The

opportunities that Northeast region has to offer and to actively engage with potential investors to

Several B2B and B2G meet were scheduled at the Expo to highlight the tourism opportunities that Northeast has to offer



Panth, Minister, Commerce & Industries Department and Tourism & Civil Aviation of Sikkim, Robert Royte, Minister Tourism and Sports of Mizoram. They actively engaged with business

start-ups from these states also showcased their innovations.

Several B2B and B2G meetings were scheduled during the fortnight to highlight the business

invite them to explore business opportunities in the region. It included a session on highlighting the investment opportunities in the eight north-eastern states and presentations by the states, followed by interaction. There was also a session on 'Tourism Opportunities in the Northeast'. Besides the business meetings, there was an array of cultural performances, including traditional music and dance performances by well-known bands, fashion shows and film screenings.

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'We understand weddings well'

Zuri White Sands, Goa Resort & Casino, spread over 40 acres, is among the few hotels in the coastal state that offers multiple venues for various functions in a wedding as well as two ocean-facing lawns to play the perfect host, says Ajith Nair, the resort's Head of Sales & Marketing.



Hazel Jain

Situated on the shore of Varca Beach in South Goa, The Zuri White Sands Goa Resort & Casino has Goa's true spirit and flavour. Home to a gigantic meandering swimming pool that stretches across the resort, it offers the best in accommodation and cuisine, with plenty of facilities and services to play the perfect host. The resort has 154 keys, which includes four luxury suites.

Speaking about its key selling point, **Ajith Nair**, Head of Sales & Marketing, The Zuri White Sands, Goa Resort & Casino, said, "Our USP is the spread of the hotel over 40 acres with only 30 per cent of the built-up area. The rest offers large open spaces with breathtaking views of the Arabian Sea. The hotel also offers 5,400 sq ft of private space per guest, which is a luxury in these pandemic times."



Ajith Nair
Head of Sales & Marketing,
The Zuri White Sands, Goa Resort & Casino

Sharing an overview of how business has returned to the hotel, Nair said, "The leisure business has gained momentum and it contributes 38 per cent to our total occupancy. Since the pandemic, more guests prefer to opt for the meal package options – which are half and full board – considering their safety. Guests also prefer to drive down from Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat now more than ever before." He added, "With the international travel restrictions still on, this segment had complete-

ly shut down since the start of the pandemic until the recent revival of Russian and Kazakhstan charter flights from December 2021. In fact, we had already operated approximately 450 room nights from this segment. Unfortunately, the recent Ukraine-Russia conflict will certainly have a negative impact on this segment."

MICE and weddings

Goa has always been a highly sought-after destination for MICE and large weddings due to its logistical convenience, large banqueting and outdoor spaces.

"For Zuri White Sands, Goa Resort & Casino, the month of March is filled more with off-sites and conferences than weddings. We have achieved our fair share of both segments. We have done 47 weddings till date in this financial year with the pandemic still hovering over us. Our resort has always been a market leader in this

segment. We had done some big ticket weddings and could accommodate even buy-out requests

We have gained goodwill among our trade partners as we understand the minute requirements of a client



this season as the international travel was completely shut off," Nair shared.

He claimed The Zuri White Sands, Goa Resort & Casino is among

the very few hotels in Goa that offer multiple venues for various functions in a wedding and also the luxury of two ocean-facing lawns and an exclusive pool for parties and events. "Our banquets also have seamless access to

large open lawns. We have gained goodwill among our trade partners as we understand the minute requirements of a client when it comes to weddings, which makes us a preferred option for destination weddings," he added.

Abu Dhabi has updated its Covid-19 travel protocol as on March 1, 2022 and has removed requirement for PCR test for fully-vaccinated Indian travellers. No rapid test required under 6 hours at the airport and no RT PCR test required under 48 hours.

e-platform to benefit women

Contd from page 1

Rupinder Brar, Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism, said that this E-platform will be gamechanger in tourism. "The reason to launch it on 8th March-International Women's Day, is that despite being for all genders and ages, many extraordinary opportunities will be generated for women through this platform, which will give them a flexible mode to work any time they want to. It will be a platform for huge opportunities for everyone," she says. Reddy also



Rupinder Brar
Additional Director General
Ministry of Tourism

visited Gwalior Fort along with officials of MOT and observed the tourist facilities at the monu-

ment. Thereafter, a review meeting was held with the officials of Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) under his chairmanship. A detailed presentation was made by Principal Secretary (Tourism & Culture), Government of Madhya Pradesh on progress of various Tourism Infrastructure projects funded by Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India. A newly built International Executive Guest House at IITM Gwalior Campus was also inaugurated.

India for medical tourism

Contd from page 1

aspect which India is offering to the world. From wellness tourism, Ayurveda, Himalayas, desert in Rajasthan and Gujarat or the wildlife, backwaters of Kerala and a history of 5,000 years —India has everything. However, looking at the recent trends, it's wellness, Ayurveda and yoga, which has been popular, particularly post pandemic. Medical tourism is also getting popular," he adds. Rao claims that the MOT is following an inclusive approach. "We are developing niche tourism, spiritual

We are developing niche tourism, spiritual tourism, rural tourism and creating thematic circuits

tourism, rural tourism and creating thematic circuits," he informs.

He further adds that there are a number of wildlife sanctuaries, where people from Middle East

countries are showing interest apart from adventure tourism.

Dekho Apna Desh

Under the Dekho Apna Desh campaign, says Rao, the number of tourists travelling within India has grown three fold in the last two years. "They are exploring places which were hitherto neglected. Especially students, are going to forts and not just going for recreational tourism. Current generation is showing interest in going to historical sites," he claims.

Marriott opens golf resort



JW Marriott has opened its JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa luxury resort located within the Nandi Hills region of Bengaluru. Developed by The Prestige Group, the resort offers 301 rooms and a convention centre spread over 35,000 sq. ft. with a 24,000 sq. ft. of pillarless space that can host over 4000 guests.

Thailand calls tourists



The Royal Thai Embassy and Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), New Delhi, organised a media briefing event to apprise the Indian travel fraternity about the reopening of Thailand, including flights from India. The event also included highlights of TAT's marketing campaign 'Amazing New Chapters' to welcome back tourists to Thailand with new perspective and experiences.

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19-20	Vancouver International Travel Expo	11:30 am
22-23	India International Travel Mart - New Delhi	11:00 am
24	Costa Cruises Webinar	3:00pm
25-27	Holiday Expo - Varanasi	9:00 am
25-27	India Travel Mart - Bhopal	9:00 am
29-31	India Travel Mart - New Delhi	9:00 am
30-31	India International Travel Mart - Cochin	11:00 am
31-2Apr	Travel & Tourism Fair - Chennai	10:00 am
31-2Apr	Holiday Expo - Vadodara	9:00 am

APRIL 2022

5-7	ITB India	10:00 am
6	World Tourism Forum (WTF)	9:00 am
23-24	Travel Mice Show	TBA

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

Focus on cultural heritage

Government of India is developing 10 museums on tribal freedom fighters to recognise their contribution in the freedom struggle, besides continuing its support to specialised museums such as textiles and crafts museums, defence museums and railway museums.



Nisha Verma

G Kishan Reddy, Union Minister for Culture, Tourism and DoNER, recently inaugurated a two-day Global Summit in Hyderabad on 'Reimagining Museums in India' — a first of its kind for India. In his address, he said, "As we celebrate Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, we are proud to renew our focus and dedication to preserving, protecting and perpetuating our cultural heritage. I believe that museums play a pivotal role in reviving our glorious past to life. Today India's 1000+ museums are instrumental in not just showcasing and preserving the cultural heritage, but also educating future generations."

Highlighting the role of other ministries and departments in promoting and upgradation of the museums across the country, Reddy said, "The Government of India is also developing 10 museums on tribal freedom fighters to



G Kishan Reddy
Union Minister for Culture,
Tourism and DoNER

recognise their contribution in our freedom struggle and is continuing to support specialised museums such as textiles and crafts museums, defence museums and railway museums."

Sharing more details, he said, "As per the mandate, the Ministry of Culture also works for supporting and promoting our museums. Since 2014, the Ministry of Culture has funded 110 museums across the country and in order to promote scientific temper, 18 science museums are also being

developed. Apart from this, the Archaeological Survey of India, which functions under the Ministry, runs 52 museums across the country."

He said that the Ministry of Culture is working on an inclusive model that involves artists, museum professionals and educators, and places them at the core

so that our citizens can own them like their own parks and playgrounds," he added.

In his address to the media, he shared the kind of efforts being put in to bring back the country's stolen heritage from abroad. "95 per cent of the heritage that was stolen or taken away has been returned during the tenure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Out of the 212 antiques that have been returned since 1976, 199 were returned after 2014. Among these 157 antiques have been returned from the USA recently. This once again shows the Government's commitment to Vikas and Virasat," he said.

He said that the government has planned several initiatives for the state of Telangana, including a Science City in Hyderabad.

At the meet, national and international experts shared views on museums across the world.

India's 1000+ museums are not just preserving heritage, but also educating future generations

of the museums in the country. "Our museums need to reinvent themselves to be relevant for the 21st century in the new digital age. We need to ensure that our museums are more accessible

Paving way for women in events

An early starter in the events industry of Hyderabad, Rakhi Kankaria from Rachnoutsav, has carved her own niche. She believes that tourism and events are inseparable, as tourism creates opportunities for a traveller to reach to a destination, an event professional can add a lot of texture to the human experience.



Nisha Verma

For Rakhi Kankaria, Founder Director, Rachnoutsav and Vice Chair, Tourism Committee, Federation of Telangana

Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FTCCI), the journey in events industry started early in 1996. "It's been close to almost three decades and at that time the subject of events was not

understood. I learnt early since my father used to throw great parties at our family home. When my husband and I decided to do something different, I embarked on first doing a survey in Delhi, Mumbai and Calcutta for three weeks, and then started my party planning company, which I later termed as an event management company," she said.

Changes

Saying that the industry has changed in the last 30 years, Kankaria points out that today, there is a plethora of event managers in every nook and corner. "However, my husband Sanjay and I have been very passionate about our work and never saw anything as a challenge. In fact, we found it interesting to find solutions and receive accolades, appreciation through words and references for future business. That made us grow. Till date, we don't have a marketing depart-



Rakhi Kankaria
Founder Director, Rachnoutsav and Vice
Chair, Tourism Committee, FTCCI

ment in our company as we have only grown via word-of-mouth," she elaborated.

Men's industry?

While she thinks it is a man's world even today, Kankaria believes that her skills, and an equal partner in her husband, made her shine in this industry. "If I wouldn't have my husband with me, I wouldn't have been as successful as I am. Event management has a wide spectrum of subjects," she said.

Tourism in Telangana

Apart from Rachnoutsav, Kankaria also dons the cap of Vice Chair of Tourism Committee at FTCCI. A big advocate of Public Private Partnership (PPP) in tourism, she shared, "Telangana is a treasure trove of tourism locations, but only if there is PPP model, there will be a role responsibility, smartness and efficiency, which cannot be done by the government alone. The FTCCI Tourism Committee has identified Pocharam as a destination that can be developed under PPP and I have found an investor who's ready to invest. More locations have been identified by the team. Also, the team has identified around eight tourism places in the state, including Ramoji Film City, Charminar and Golconda Fort, where we can have memorabilia and souvenirs shops."

She also revealed that two years back, FTCCI organised the Telan-

gana Tourism Conclave. "In October, we are planning that conclave again," claimed Kankaria.

Tourism & Events together

She believes that tourism and events are inseparable. "Tourism creates opportunities for a

Only if there is PPP model, there will be smartness and efficiency, which cannot be done by the government alone

traveller to reach a destination, but an event professional can add a lot of texture to the human experience. From food outlets to Wi-Fi kiosks at tourism locations, everything can be done by event professionals," she said.

Form - IV

Statement about ownership and other particulars about newspaper TravTalk to be published in the first issue every year after the last day of February

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I, SanJeet, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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NOVOTEL Hyderabad

Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre (NHCC) & Hyderabad International Convention Centre (HICC) announced the elevation of **VARUN MEHROTRA** as the Director of Sales & Marketing of the complex. In his present role, he will be responsible for strategising and implementing sales and marketing activities for the property. Varun has a proven track record of 17 years with extensive experience managing international conference business, convention & banquet sales business. Starting his journey at Accor Group with NHCC & HICC as Associate Director of Sales, he has worked with renowned brands in the hospitality.



SOFITEL MUMBAI BKC Mumbai

Sofitel Mumbai BKC announced the appointment of **SNEHA JHA** as the Director of Sales & Marketing. In her role, Sneha will be responsible for leading and further improving all aspects of the sales and marketing department. A seasoned hotelier, Sneha has been in the hospitality industry for nearly 20 years and brings on board expertise and knowledge across sales and marketing, and business development. An alumnus from IHM Bengaluru, she started her career with The Leela Kempinski in Mumbai and thereafter worked with brands like The Taj, Marriott, Intercontinental and Holiday Inn. She was earlier Director of Sales for The Westin Goa.



DOUBLE TREE BY HILTON AGRA Agra

DoubleTree by Hilton Agra has announced the appointment of **SHYAM KUMAR** as the new General Manager. Shyam is a passionate hotelier with over 21 years of experience. He started his career as an operations trainee and worked with companies such as Sarovar Park, ITC, Shangri-La and Marriott before leaving India for higher education to New Zealand in 2005. Prior to joining DoubleTree by Hilton Agra, Shyam was the Director of Operations at Conrad Bengaluru. He has also worked with Starwood and Marriott. He has been awarded as the Runner up for the "Best Hotel Manager" South India at BW Hotelier Awards 2020.



AMRITARA HOTELS AND RESORTS New Delhi

SARVAR HANS has been recently promoted as Vice President-Commercials for Amritara Hotels & Resorts. Hans joined Amritara Hotels & Resorts in 2018 and has spearheaded some of the most successful hotel openings of the brand, apart from heading Sales, Marketing & Revenue. Hans will now be responsible for acquisitions of new properties and brand expansion. A strong believer of deliberate and instinctive thinking, he has efficaciously lead the brand towards excelling in its goals. Under his leadership and guidance, the brand has recorded highest revenues over the years.



RED CARPET TRAVELS Mumbai

SHUBHANGI CHITRE has recently been appointed as the Sales & Marketing Consultant for Maharashtra region's B2B market at Red Carpet Travels. She will be responsible for promoting Red Carpet Travels DMC - USA, Canada, Europe, Scandinavia and Australia to the B2B market. Chitre is Director of BTFL Travel - a Mumbai-based representation company. She has more than two decades of experience in the tourism industry. She has worked with major companies like Thomas Cook India, ITH, Buzz Marketing for Philippines Tourism Board and SATTE show.



HYATT REGENCY Delhi

Hyatt Regency Delhi announces the appointment of **SHRIKANT WAKHARKAR** as the General Manager and Area Vice president of Hyatt Hotels - North. Wakharkar brings with him over 30 years of rich experience and will lead the iconic hotel's operations, oversee strategic and tactical growth strategies, besides spearheading innovative programmes. Before stepping into his present role, he was the General Manager at Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty. This would be his second innings with Hyatt Regency Delhi as he has been a part of this flagship hotel and held the position of Assistant Director of Food and Beverage in 1999.



ABSOLUTE HOTEL SERVICES Mumbai

Absolute Hotel Services India has announced the promotion of **PRASHANT SHEWALE** as Regional Manager - Revenue & Distribution. Qualified in Hotel Management and paired with Business Administration from Greenwich University, Prashant has over a decade of exposure in operations, with a sizeable tenure in the UK, noteworthy being Accor namely Ibis and Novotel. He joined Absolute Hotel Services at Eastin Easy Aishwarya Talegaon as Front Office Manager and went on to become Rooms Division Manager. He has showed interest in understanding markets, revenue models, distribution networks and its implication on business.



MARRIOTT Kochi

UTSAH SEHGAL has been appointed as the new Director of Operations of Kochi Marriott Hotel. Utsah brings with him 13 years of experience in leadership and managing large teams across several properties of Marriott. He is an alumni of IMI, Switzerland. With his management skills, he will lead us to identify new avenues for profitable business with expertise in developing and follow up of the service standards and operational services. Prior to his current role, he was the Director of rooms for Renaissance Hotel Bangalore. Utsah began his journey with Courtyard by Marriott, Pune, as a Front office Associate.



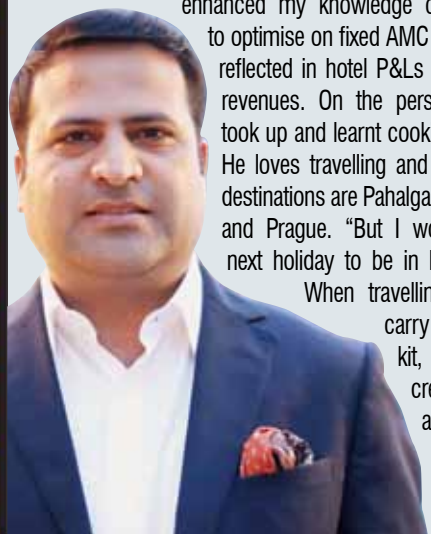
RENEST RIVER COUNTRY RESORT Manali

TEMJEN has been appointed as the new Resort Manager at Renest River Country Resort in Manali. His responsibilities include sales and marketing, human resources, empowering associates to provide superior customer care, managing food and beverage, communication and problem-solving. Temjen has joined the resort with 10 years of experience in the industry. He has worked in Singapore, India, UAE and Bahrain with renowned brands like Oberoi, Taj and Accor. Working in the hospitality industry was a choice that came out of his passion for the industry. Apart from work, Temjen has a bit of an adventurous streak.



TALKing People

JATISH GHAI, Manager Operations, South Asia, Radisson Hotels, meditates post work hours and also indulges in an evening walk to unwind himself. "During the lockdown, I enhanced my knowledge of machinery to optimise on fixed AMC costs, which reflected in hotel P&Ls even with nil revenues. On the personal front, I took up and learnt cooking!" he said. He loves travelling and his favourite destinations are Pahalgam in Kashmir and Prague. "But I would like my next holiday to be in Nice, France.



When travelling, I always carry a first aid kit, international credit cards and digital photo IDs," he said.

KOVID KAPOOR, Co-Founder & CTO, Holidify, lets few things stress him out. "But when I am stressed, I try to channel it into physical exercises like going on a long ride on my cycle. It not only helps me calm down, but cycling also introduced me to a more beautiful part of Bengaluru - the little-known, alleys and cycle lanes. During the lockdown I also started learning to play the saxophone. I plan on pursuing this hobby and getting better at it," he said.



ROHIT BAJPAI, General Manager, Sheraton Grand Palace Indore, is an adventure enthusiast and likes to explore the unknown and experience new places and people. "Currently, I find Gorumara and Dooars valley situated in West Bengal extremely enchanting. The area is calm on the soul and uncomplicated, dotted with dense forests and is a great place to explore. Now, I cannot wait to visit Mexico and Peru. Their cultural history, amazing food, and an infectious love of soccer is something I admire," said.



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Accor eyes better market share

Accor India & South Asia is improving its market share in Indian market and trying to remain ahead of stiff competition by offering a variety of stay options through its different properties across India, including a whole new luxury portfolio.



Nisha Verma

Revealing a bouquet of offerings from Accor, **Pratima Badhwar**, Head, Commercial, Accor India & South Asia, said, "For India, we are aiming to reach 70 hotels by 2025. Our portfolio of leading hotel brands across the luxury, premium, mid-scale and economy segments compliment the Indian market, while supporting our long-term growth strategy. With our presence across cities, we have been able to capture a fair market share and are trending better than 2019 levels at many of our properties. The tier II & III markets have shone despite COVID-19 and shone through to recovery."

Luxury offerings

Claiming that they have strengthened their market position in India by introducing Accor's luxury brands here, she said, "With the introduction of Raffles and Fairmont, we are able to solidify our position in the country. The guests are keen to explore these brands for newer experiences. Raffles Udaipur has been garnering good occupancy levels indicating that the Indian market is looking forward to experiencing world class luxury synonym to the brand. We believe that in a market like India, luxurious hospitality brands will thrive, as there will always be an opportunity for the segment to rise."

Ready to reopen borders

With lifting of more curbs, demand trends are strengthening and ADRs are climbing up, she claimed. "As some international borders have been thrown open, corporate travel is starting to pick up pace, giving impetus to tier 1 markets. As the curbs are fully lifted, we should see the

inbound tourists coming back to our leisure destinations," said Bandhwar.

Hand-in-hand with trade

Claiming that Accor has worked closely with the travel trade world in domestic and international markets, she shared, "Through virtual platforms, we participated in many informative sessions for our hotels in India and outside the region. We partnered with domestic consolidators and conducted roadshows

cost-effective and enhanced guest experience. We embraced technology to ensure minimisation of human contact at every level," said Bandhwar.

"We collaborated with Microsoft to launch ALL CONNECT, a hybrid meetings concept supported by Microsoft Teams enables guests around the world to adapt to the new ways of working. This new offering aids corporate customers and meeting planners to combine physical in-hotel meetings with virtual interactions across multiple locations simultaneously," she added.

"For weddings, we rolled out 'Vivaah at Novotel', which is conceptualised for the contemporary virtual weddings and extends a hybrid approach. It offers an array of customised and flexible packages and guests can select a host hotel in any city as their wedding venue. To bring the couple's dear ones closer to them on their wedding day, the host hotel extends a web telecast of the wedding to their relatives and friends present in different cities," she added.

Women in hospitality

Speaking on women in the industry, Bandhwar shared, "Hospitality is one of the most

dynamic, hardworking, and demanding industries. This requires a great amount of motivation & passion. Women today are venturing into every field and are not restrictive of a certain profession. Patience, listening skills, nurturing nature, multi-tasking and problem solving are some of the key qualities women possess that come in handy in the tourism and hospitality industry."

By strengthening our sales structure, we are striving towards a better market share for each hotel as against pre-pandemic levels

in new source markets to generate additional demand for domestic business, especially for staycations and weddings."

Indian promotions

For the Indian market, she claimed, "We ensure we are agile and have the first mover advantage with our customers. By strengthening our sales structure, we are striving towards a better market share for each hotel as against pre-pandemic levels. Focus for Q2 & Q3 will be to maximise on the pent up corporate and MICE demand for our hotels."

Technology forward

"The pandemic pushed travel stakeholders towards technology, and the same goes for us. Contactless hospitality and technology made operations



Pratima Badhwar
Head, Commercial, Accor India & South Asia



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