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Play on unique tourism products

Amitabh Kant, G20 Sherpa, addressed the recent National Conference of State Tourism Ministers virtually and shared the success story of Kerala as a destination and 'Incredible India' as a campaign. Please do not copy the West and go back to your roots, he suggested states at the meeting.



Nisha Verma

Amitabh Kant, G20 Sherpa, began his address by recalling his assignment in Kerala. "Nobody had heard of Kerala as a tourism destination at that time. People used to go to Kashmir and Rajasthan. Very few tourists used to go to Kerala and that too only for Kovalam. When I took over as Secretary, Tourism, Kerala, it used to get just about 20 pounds a night and our challenge was to make it into a premier destination for upmarket clients and build it as a global brand," he shared.

Kerala story

Kant shared that they did everything, which was an antithesis



Amitabh Kant
G20 Sherpa

of tourism. "We decided not to copy the West and go back to the roots. We did several things, which promoted the unique strengths of Kerala. We stopped Kovalam beach because of encroachment and decided to

revive it and develop new products. That's how the beautiful backwater was developed as a tourism product. We brought back Ayurveda to the centre stage as an alternative medicine form. We brought back dances of Kerala like Theyyam, Kathakali and Mohiniattam to the mainstream. Tourism became the vehicle, which brought back culture of Kerala back as we brought back the traditional festivals of Kerala like Thrissur Pooram. We brought back the snake boat races of Kerala. We converted the poachers in Periyar into guides by paying them advance money for next five years. We promoted Kerala as a sustainable, green destination."

Incredible India

After that, the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee holidayed in

We are seeing a big focus on wellness, and a demand for experiences that are personalised

Kerala, which was overseen by Kant; he was posted as Joint Secretary, Tourism, Government of India (GoI). "As soon as I landed,

there were several crises in India. Our hotel occupancy was just 10 per cent. At the peak of that crisis, we launched the Incredible India campaign. The challenge was to build on India's unique strength. We said that there are certain markets we'll defend, certain markets we'll invest and certain markets, we'll seed. We loved our communication strategy, and we worked around the exclamation mark (!) in the campaign. This was when Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand had all stopped their marketing," he said.

However, he insisted that tourism is not just about marketing. "You will not be able to get the results if your product is bad," Kant said.

G20 Presidency

Speaking on why the states should step up for G20, Kant informed, "The Prime Minister has asked us to do G20 meetings in all the states and Union Territories (UTs). There are 200 events in 55 cities of India. Important thing is that every single visitor during G20 who comes to India is not coming for G20. We must send him back as a brand ambassador of India."

Upfront clearances for PPP

He advised states to give all necessary clearances for PPP models to flourish. "Otherwise, people will run around for clearances only. What Lakshadweep did was the right thing," he said.

'Tourism needs to give back'

Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI, recalls initiatives undertaken during the Sarawak convention, which focused not just on rebuilding businesses, but also on how the industry can give back to the environment.



Hazel Jain

Ajay Prakash, President, Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI), says, "We did achieve what we set out to do with the convention in Malaysia." Analysing the convention, he adds, "We had also set ourselves a target of doing this convention a little differently – in terms of content, in terms of attitude, and in terms of approach. And we did manage to raise a few pertinent questions in our members' minds to get them thinking about how all of us need to re-orient our thinking and approach to business."

The idea, he adds, was to bring home the fact that we ought not to be looking at going back to busi-



Ajay Prakash
President, TAFI

ness as usual having come out of the devastation of last two years. "It is important that the tourism industry realises how big an industry it is, with 10% of global GDP, and one in 10 people being employed in this industry. So an industry this size needs to be able

to make its voice heard. We have the power to actually influence global events if we come together. This was one of the ideas we wanted to bring out – how resilient our industry is, and how it can be a force for positivity, for growth, for sustainability," Prakash adds.

Talking the walk

The business sessions were very well-attended, which is always a challenge at conventions, Prakash jokes. The B2B show that Tourism Malaysia organised also went off very well. There were over 120 Malaysian sellers there and it gave TAFI members an opportunity to discover new products and return with a better understanding of Sarawak.

G20 game changer for MICE?

MICE in India has been poised for a second coming. There is an increase in demand for domestic destinations with G20 Summit in sight, opines Naveen Kundu, MD, EbixCash.



Lipla Negi

G20 Summit, likely to be held in Bengaluru in 2023, is a positive development for the country to catapult Indian tourism on to the international stage. The country needs to reposition itself as the biggest MICE destinations in the world. It is spectacular because India is trying this in every city to demonstrate the government's intention to market the country as a tourist destination in the world. Ebix Cash has tried its best to refine the MICE sector in India, which spent the last 25 years redefining the sector. It is proud of anything that occurs in any region across the country when it comes to the industry.



Naveen Kundu
MD, EbixCash

Journey of MICE

India is a magnificent and diverse country; it is unfortunate that we have not exploited the opportunities to take the sector forward. Big convention centres and spacious meeting halls could have been constructed in many cities and

townships and India could have steadily demonstrated its prowess to the world. Sadly, that was not to be. The country lost a lot in the past 75 years in MICE and tourism, because it lacked the infrastructure, and connectivity.

The Prime Minister said unequivocally the government intends to make improvements in every industry, including tourism, over the next 25 years. Despite this, we are far behind the rest of the world and the closest Asian nations, including Thailand, Dubai, Singapore, and Malaysia, all of which are popular MICE destinations.

Role of MICE business

Indian outbound MICE is currently

Contd on page 14 ▶

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India 'heaven for tourism': VP Dhankhar

The Ministry of Tourism, working with a '360-degree perspective' to develop tourism in the country, organised the National Tourism Awards 2018-19 in New Delhi on World Tourism Day, where the India Tourism Statistics 2022, New Incredible India Global Promotional Films, and 'GoBeyond:75 Experiences of North India' were released.



Janice Alyosius

The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, organised the National Tourism Awards 2018-19 at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi recently. The awards, organised after a two-year hiatus, coincided with the World Tourism Day.

Vice President of India, **Jagdeep Dhankhar** presented the tourism awards to persons from the industry for their outstanding contribution. **G. Kishan Reddy**, Union Minister of Tourism, Culture and Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER); **Ajay Bhatt**, Minister of State for Defence and Tourism; **Arvind Singh**, Secretary, Tourism, and other senior officers of the Tourism Ministry were present on this occasion.

A total of 81 awards were given away this year highlighting the achievements of the industry in 2018-19. The Vice President also released India Tourism Statistics 2022, New Incredible India Global



Vice President of India, Jagdeep Dhankhar; G. Kishan Reddy, Union Minister of Tourism, Culture and DoNER; Ajay Bhatt, Minister of State for Defence and Tourism; Arvind Singh, Secretary, Tourism, along with other dignitaries at the NTA Awards ceremony

Promotional Films, and 'GoBeyond:75 Experiences of North India' e-book on the occasion.

In his keynote address, Dhankhar described India as a "heaven for tourism" and urged Indians to explore domestic tourist destinations first before embarking on international travel. Referring to the long history of civilisation and rich cultural heritage of Bharat, he emphasised that most of the tourist attractions of the country have a deep connect with our history, folk arts and ancient texts. He

termed tourism as a key driver of economic growth and employment generation in the country.

Referring to various aspects of tourism, the Vice President stressed on the need to fully utilize India's potential in medical tourism and the growing global interest in the country's ancient healing practices like Ayurveda and Yoga.

Acknowledging the government's efforts in developing the tourism sector in the country, Dhankhar said the development of tourism infra-

structure has been accompanied by innovative initiatives like Dekho Apna Desh and Utsav Portal.

Speaking on the occasion, G. Kishan Reddy said that India's Tourism sector is moving towards creative, responsible, and inclusive growth. The Ministry of Tourism is working with a 360-degree perspective and a whole of government approach for the development of the tourism sector.

He said that India plans to position itself as a major tourism destina-

tion during its G20 Presidency for 2023. "During the Presidency, we aim to showcase India as a 'must-visit' destination at a global level. 3600 railway coaches have been allocated for tourism purposes for Circuit specific trains. Such trains have already started for Ramayana and Buddhist Circuits, while the one for Krishna Circuit will start soon. Our aim is to make India one of the most prominent destinations of the world," Reddy said. He added that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is working as the brand ambassador of Indian tourism.

Ajay Bhatt congratulated the awardees and said that the MOT has prepared a draft of the National Tourism Policy-2022 as part of New India's vision of high growth and prosperity. "The policy aims at improving framework conditions for tourism development in the country, supporting tourism industries, strengthening tourism support functions, and developing tourism sub-sectors," he said.

Earlier, during his welcome speech, Arvind Singh said, "Travel & Tourism is one of the world's largest economic sectors, creating export



During the G20 Presidency, we aim to showcase India as a 'must-visit' destination at a global level

— G. Kishan Reddy

Union Minister of Tourism Culture and DoNER

and prosperity around the world. India's tourism sector has emerged as one of the key drivers of India's post-Covid economic growth," he said.

He further spoke about the recently revamped Swadesh Darshan programme that was re-launched to develop sustainable and responsible tourism destinations.

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Wedding Tourism

The wedding industry is making noise on the growing size of this sector. The Indian wedding industry is pegged at \$50 billion (Approx. ₹5 lakh crore) while the global wedding market size is valued at \$160.5 billion in 2020 and is projected to reach \$414.2 billion by 2030.

This disorganised and underrecognised sector can be the next big thing for tourism. Nearly 800 Indian weddings go abroad each year, big business that is lost by the Indian hotels and state tourism authorities. While the states are working to strengthen their MICE offerings, they seem to have ignored the importance of destination weddings in enhancing tourism. Some food for thought?

Indian wedding planners now want the tourism ministry to recognize destination weddings as a growing arm of inbound tourism and help them attract foreign weddings to India. If 800 Indian weddings can go abroad then why can't 400 foreign weddings come to India?

Visa debacle

October started with a focus on the slow visa process offered by the US Embassy in India. For a visa appointment in New Delhi and Mumbai, the wait time was 800+ days. While a few called this wait a 'quiet crises' the Indian media and travel industry wasn't quiet about it. Is this harming travel business? Yes! Did all the noise make a difference yet? No!

While the US Embassy blamed the slow process on the lack of staffing compared to pre-COVID levels, visa processing for most countries has been a slow and painful process. Now the problem is hitting India as well. British nationals are making noise on the slow process of applying for an Indian visa. The Indian High Commission in the UK is enforcing a rule that requires British citizens attend visa centres in-person, causing wait times for tourists looking to travel to India. While the industry is hopeful for the revival of inbound tourism this winter, how much will the visa process impact the sector? Let's wait and hope that the industry can jump this hurdle!

Summer season ends on high note

As per the air passenger data released by the International Air Transport Association (IATA), total traffic during the month was up 67.7 per cent compared to August 2021. Globally, the air passenger traffic was at 73.7 per cent of the pre-crisis levels.



TT Bureau

Momentum in the air travel recovery continued in August, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA). As per the passenger data, total traffic during the month (measured in revenue passenger kilometres or RPKs) was up 67.7 per cent compared to August 2021. Globally, the air passenger traffic was at 73.7 per cent of the pre-crisis levels.

Domestic traffic was up 26.5 per cent compared to the year-ago period. Total August 2022 domestic traffic was at 85.4 per cent of the August 2019 level. International traffic rose 115.6 per cent versus August 2021 with airlines in Asia delivering the strongest year-over-year growth rates. August 2022 international RPKs reached 67.4 per cent of August 2019 levels.

"The Northern Hemisphere peak summer travel season finished on a high note. Considering the

International Passenger Markets					
August 2022 (% Year-on-year)	World Share ¹	RPK	ASK	PLF (%-pt) ²	PLF (level) ³
Total Market	100%	67.7%	43.6%	11.8%	81.8%
Africa	1.9%	69.6	47.6%	9.8%	75.7%
Asia Pacific	27.5%	141.6%	76.5%	19.9%	74.0%
Europe	25.0%	59.6%	37.8%	11.8%	86.2%
Latin America	6.5%	55.0%	46.6%	4.5%	82.4%
Middle East	6.6%	135.5%	65.4%	23.7%	79.6%
North America	32.6%	29.6%	20.0%	6.4%	85.6

¹1% of industry RPKs in 2021 ²year-on-year change in load factor ³Load Factor Level

While the region experienced the strongest year-over-year growth, remaining travel restrictions in China continue to hamper the overall recovery for the region.

❖ European carriers' August traffic climbed 78.8 per cent versus August 2021. Capacity rose 48.0 per cent, and load factor increased 14.7 percentage points to 85.5 per cent. The region had the second highest load factor after North America.

year-ago period, and load factor climbed 23.7 percentage points to 79.8 per cent.

❖ North American carriers saw a 110.4 per cent traffic rise in August versus the 2021 period. Capacity rose 69.7 per cent, and load factor climbed 16.9 percentage points to 87.2 per cent, which was the highest among the regions.

❖ Latin American airlines' August traffic rose 102.5 per cent

Easing of travel restrictions at some key Asian destinations, including Japan, will certainly accelerate the recovery in Asia

❖ African airlines experienced a 69.5 per cent rise in August RPKs versus a year ago. August 2022 capacity was up 45.3 per cent and load factor climbed 10.8 percentage points to 75.9 per cent, the lowest among regions. International traffic between Africa and neighbouring regions is close to pre-pandemic levels.

❖ Australia's domestic traffic posted a 449 per cent year-over-year increase and is now 85.8 per cent of 2019 levels.

❖ US domestic traffic was up 7 per cent in August, compared to August 2021. Further recovery is limited by supply constraints.



prevailing economic uncertainties, travel demand is progressing well. And the removal or easing of travel restrictions at some key Asian destinations, including Japan, will certainly accelerate the recovery in Asia. The mainland of China is the last major market retaining severe COVID-19 entry restrictions," said **Willie Walsh**, IATA's Director General.

International passenger markets

❖ Asia-Pacific airlines had a 449.2 per cent rise in August traffic compared to August 2021. Capacity rose 167 per cent and the load factor was up 40.1 percentage points to 78.0 per cent.

❖ Middle Eastern airlines' traffic rose 144.9 per cent in August compared to August 2021. Capacity rose 72.2 per cent versus the

compared to the same month in 2021. August capacity rose 80.8 per cent and load factor increased 8.9 percentage points to 83.5 per cent.

Domestic Passenger Markets					
August 2022 (% Year-on-year)	World Share ¹	RPK	ASK	PLF (%-pt) ²	PLF (level) ³
Domestic	62.3%	26.5%	18.9%	4.7%	79.7
Australia	0.8%	449.0%	233.7%	32.1%	81.8%
Brazil	1.9%	25.7%	23.4%	1.5%	81.2%
China P.R.	17.8%	45.1%	25.7%	9.0%	67.4%
India	2.0%	55.9%	42.3%	6.9%	78.9%
Japan	1.1%	112.3%	40.0%	24.0%	70.6%
US	25.6%	7.0%	3.3%	3.0%	84.6%

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'We expect 80% load factor for India'

Lau Yin May, Group Chief Marketing & Customer Experience Officer, Malaysia Airlines, believes that if the facility of Visa on Arrival is introduced for Indian nationals, it will help Malaysia Tourism. She discusses the airlines' expansion plans and new products for passengers.



Hazel Jain

What kind of potential does India offer to Malaysia Airlines?

India has always been an important market for Malaysia Airlines. There is a strong demand in India to travel again leading us to increase frequencies, reinstate routes and upgrade to wide-body aircraft on certain routes. With COVID-19 in the endemic stage, millennial travellers in India are becoming more enthusiastic about their vacation plans with many looking at an international holiday at short-haul destinations. This is ideal considering we currently operate direct flights to five cities in India and will increase to six by the year end, especially as we are also witnessing strong demand from India for onwards travel across our network in ASEAN, and Australia.

What is the kind of load factors you see today?

For our India market, we are currently operating 31 weekly flights



Lau Yin May
Group Chief Marketing & Customer
Experience Officer, Malaysia Airlines

from five major cities in India, namely Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Chennai. Current load factor for the market has been encouraging with up to 70 per cent load factor on these flights and forecasted to go up to 80 per cent by the end of 2022.

Are you looking at increasing frequency or flights to India?

Yes, we are gradually increasing our frequencies and network as we aim to achieve more than 70 per cent of pre-COVID-19 capacity for domestic and international travel

by the end of 2022. By December 2022, we will ramp up the weekly flights on the existing routes from India and also reinstate weekly flights from Kochi (COK), which will increase our overall weekly flights from India to 52.

There are talks of easing visa process for Indian nationals and introduce VoA for visitors arriving directly from India. How can this catapult the numbers from India into Malaysia?

The introduction of Visa on Arrival (VoA) will not only make it easier for Indian tourists to travel to Malaysia, but also contribute to our tourism growth, footfall and receipts. This is a good opportunity for us to tap into. With the VoA, the last-minute impromptu travel demand to short-haul destinations like Malaysia can also be captured.

Tell us about your partnership with TAFI for their convention in Malaysia?

Since its inception, TAFI has shown true commitment towards

creating a more evolved and stable environment for the travel industry. We were delighted to be the official carrier for TAFI Convention 2022 and fly over



420 agents from across India to Kuching, Sarawak. We are excited to establish deeper and meaningful partnerships with travel agents.

How will the TAFI convention help Malaysia leverage India's potential?

Our travel agents play a key role in supporting the recovery of the sector, and we truly appreciate the great lengths they have taken, especially as travel demands continue to soar. India has always been an important market for Malaysia Airlines, and we are hopeful that through this association and convention, our agent partners would be encouraged to promote Malaysia Airlines to their customers. The TAFI convention provides a good

platform to create that first-hand experience and showcase the airline's offerings as well as the destination product; it facilitated the buyer-seller face to face interactions to create new products and selling opportunities.

Any new developments from Malaysia Airlines that you would like to share?

We introduced the Journify platform for customers to easily discover new places, plan their trips and shop local favourites; all on one single platform. We have also made significant enhancements to Enrich, which has transformed from a conventional frequent flyer programme to a holistic travel and lifestyle programme through which members can conveniently earn and redeem Enrich Points on credit card points conversions, hotel stays, and retail spend with a host of lifestyle partners, among others. This makes it a more attractive offer for members.

We have also introduced the MH Group Bookings portal, which

offers the convenience of direct booking, prompt responses to all queries, end to end automation, optimised travel experience and much more for those travelling with a group of more than 10. To encourage corporate travel, we have introduced programmes

We currently operate direct flights to five cities in India, and will increase to six by the year end

such as MHBiz Pro and MHBiz Plus. MHBiz Pro is designed for small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and corporates. Another programme that provides greater customisation to a company's travel requirements with more benefits is MHBiz Plus.

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Wellness makes comeback

Ramesh Daryanani, Vice President, Global Sales, Asia Pacific, Marriott International, feels industry needs to go back to the basics to speed up the business recovery.



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Marriott International returned with one of its most coveted events 'The Exchange India event 2022' (earlier called Sales Mission/ At Marriott), one of the leading B2B networking and business events taking place for the first time since the pandemic. The event took place in Mumbai and New Delhi with more than 65 international hotels in attendance.

Speaking on the sidelines of the show, **Ramesh Daryanani**, Vice President, Global Sales, Asia Pacific, Marriott International, said, "We have today 65 hoteliers that have come in from all parts of the world representing 150 hotels across our portfolio. This event is all about promoting tourism, MICE and business travel to these destinations."

According to Daryanani, projections for the near future look promising. "We believe travel will continue to rebound and improve versus 2019 levels and this will



Ramesh Daryanani
Vice President, Global Sales
Asia Pacific, Marriott International

be led by leisure. We are seeing a lot of pent-up demand for leisure travel across the region and the world. We are also seeing corporate travel continue to strengthen as well. With regard to meetings and events, our queries for 2023 has surpassed our expectations. We feel very optimistic about 2023. In addition to that, we are also adding new hotels. We have more than 700 hotels in the pipeline in this part of the world. Our new build hotels take approximately 3-4 years to come into the system – hence these openings will be staggered across the

region. Along the way, we will also have some new conversions that will be joining the system as well," he shared.

One of the recent conversions are six hotels in Vietnam from the Vinpearl Group. The openings has taken the total number

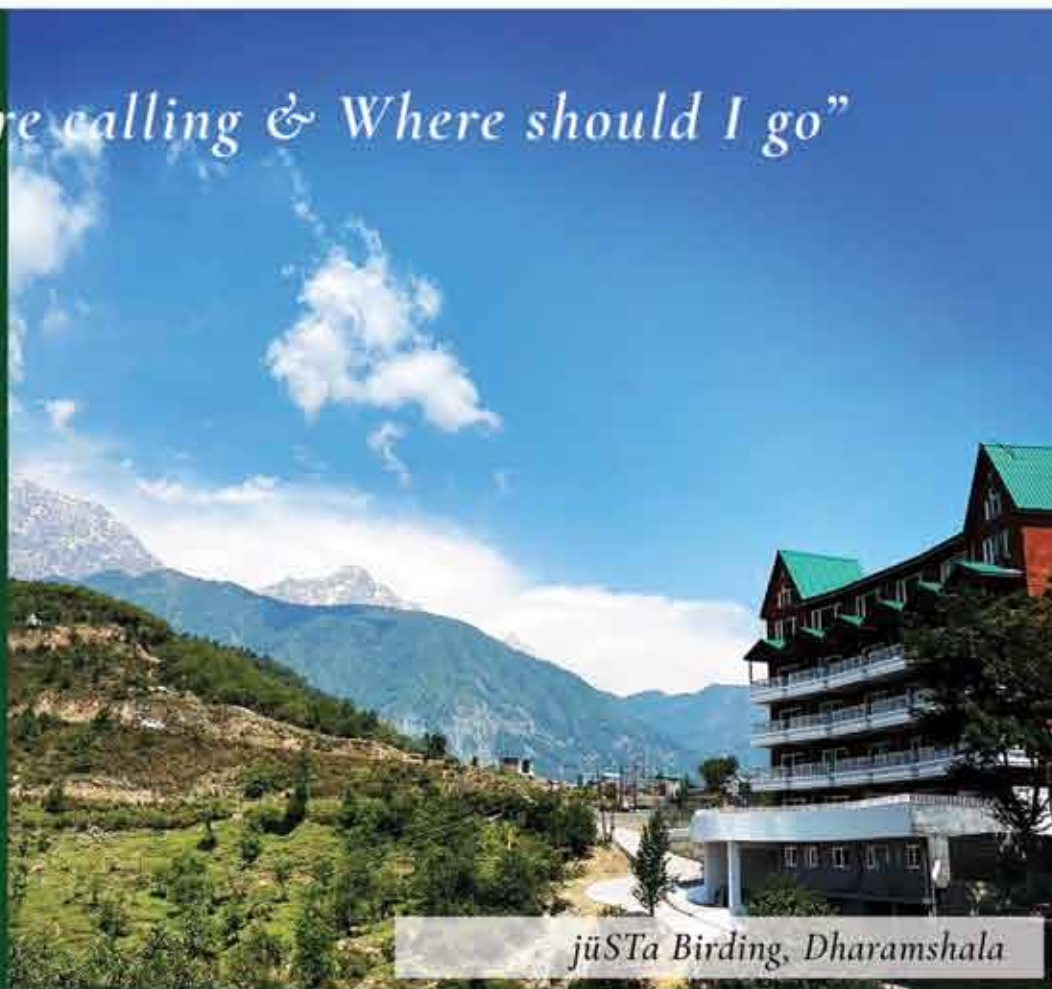
We are seeing a big focus on wellness, and a demand for experiences that are personalised

of hotels for the group to 17 in Vietnam. "But we have a pipeline of 30 hotels overall. We have had a strong 2022 so far. RevPAR levels are 4 per cent behind 2019 levels and we see the next quarter improving as well. We feel optimistic about Q4," he said.

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Accor expands luxury footprint in India with signing of Fairmont Udaipur Palace

Explore domestic destinations before taking up international travel: Vice President of India

100th hotel of Sarovar comes up in Puducherry

Spree Hospitality signs a new 30-key hotel in Udaipur

Expedia-TAAP announces 24x7 Call Centre for the Indian market

Ramesh Arora conferred Lifetime Achievement Award at British Parliament

Turpal platform to up post reservation sales for travel trade, launches in India

2023 will be the year to visit Andhra Pradesh, declares CM Reddy

The star categorisation criteria for hotels needs a revamp: Union Minister G Kishan Reddy

'India 3rd largest market globally'

Brett Thorstad, Vice President, Travel Solutions, Agency Sales, Asia Pacific, Sabre, shares his perspective on the growth that India is showing and some key agency trends that he sees emerge from the India market, one of them being automation tools.



Hazel Jain

Asia-Pacific is at the centre of growth in the travel industry and Sabre is witnessing a rapid acceleration in the recovery, says **Brett Thorstad**, Vice President, Travel Solutions, Agency Sales, Asia Pacific, Sabre. He was recently in India visiting key customers in New Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru.

He adds, "We have a large development centre in Bengaluru where we employ over 1,500 people. Sabre is investing heavily in major technology transformation and a lot of that work is being done out of this centre. India is actually the third-largest travel market in the world just behind the USA and China. We are seeing rapid growth in the India market with high single-digit GDP growth every year. This is also translating into the travel market as the demography of the Indian population is changing. India is a

very important market for Sabre and that is why we are planning to make some significant invest-



Brett Thorstad
Vice President, Travel Solutions, Agency Sales, Asia Pacific, Sabre

ments in India in the next several years and take advantage of the travel recovery here."

Tech transformation

Sabre invests a lot on technologies. In 2019, Thorstad shares, it spent over a billion dollars on developing new technology. "We have recently partnered with Google to transform the Sabre



platform into a cloud environment. We are also working with Google on collaborations around innovation, particularly in the AI space. We look to introduce many innovative AI products like Sabre Travel AI launched last year – in the airline space around intelligent retailing. We will launch some exciting products in the agency space soon," he reveals.

The big thing the airlines are looking to do right now is offer their products the way they want to offer. "We are seeing that travelers are looking for hyper-personalised buying experience. So you have the need on the airline side to retail how they like to retail and the desire on the consumer side to purchase travel the way they like to. Sabre sits in the middle and personalised travel is our vision for future. NDC is a com-

ponent of personalised retailing. But we are looking to go beyond NDC. Having said that, we do see NDC as a big opportunity over the next few years," Thorstad says.

Capacity challenges

He, however, adds that a lot of airlines are struggling with ca-

airlines don't have capacity in terms of fleet or they don't have staff in terms of baggage handlers and ground crew. Airports are struggling to manage capacity as well. As we do see travel demand return, the problem is on the ability to meet that demand," he says.

Speaking of recovery, Thorstad says that Asia-Pacific has been trailing the recovery globally as a region. "For 2022, we are seeing recovery of 40 per cent of 2019. For India, it's a slightly different story. India is actually leading this recovery for Asia-Pacific, together with Australia and New Zealand.

Market trends

Thorstad says bleisure has taken off well. "We see the business travel sector recover far faster than we had predicted and believe it will come back to 2019 levels soon. We see a lot of investments into automation products by agencies," he adds.

We see a lot of investments into automation. In fact, we see agencies pushing self-booking tools to their corporate clients

capacity. "We see that the demand for travel is rising. That extends both in the corporate space as well as leisure travel. Either the



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New exhibitors to attend WTM

World Travel Market London (WTM), to be held from November 7 to November 9, is expecting to facilitate a record number of deals this year as the number of new and returning exhibitors grows.



TT Bureau

World Travel Market London (WTM), to be held from November 7 and November 9, is expecting to facilitate a record number of deals this year as the number of new and returning exhibitors grows, making the event a must-attend for travel buyers from around the globe. There are more than 3,000 exhibitors confirmed, more than 70 of whom are making their WTM London debut. "We are delighted to welcome brand new exhibitors to this year's event – new organisations participating is essential to moving the sector forward, as well as being very pleased to see some of our long-term loyal exhibitors return. These new and returning participants come from all corners of the globe – there are now exhibitors from more than 100 countries confirmed." **Juliette Losardo**, Exhibition Director, WTM London, said:

Some of the highest-profile new participants can be found in the



Juliette Losardo
Exhibition Director
WTM London

ist board Embratur, with other returnees representing destinations as diverse as Kyrgyzstan and Rwanda.

First-time destination-driven exhibitors include the Association of Ugandan Tour Operators and representatives from the Azadi International Tourism Organization. Elsewhere, there will be a

These new participants come from all corners of the globe - there are now exhibitors from more than 100 countries confirmed

greater presence this year from the more established leisure destinations such as the Caribbean, Spain, and Portugal.

Switzerland Tourism Webinars.



Upcoming webinars on Zurich and BLS Interlaken - Aletsch Arena - Matterhorn Gotthard Bahn - Swissminiatur & FoxTown.



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- **Aletsch Arena**, the most liberating natural experience in Switzerland.
- The excursions and services experienced with **Matterhorn Gotthard Bahn**.
- **Swissminiatur**, Ticino's popular park that houses miniature replicas of Switzerland's top attractions and experiences.
- **FoxTown Factory Stores**, Ticino's shopping paradise.

2. Zurich and its fantastic touristic offerings for the Indian market.

Date	Day	Webinar	Time	Registration QR code
18th Oct 2022	Tue	BLS Interlaken – Aletsch Arena – Matterhorn Gotthard Bahn – Swissminiatur & FoxTown	3.00 PM IST	
28th Oct 2022	Fri	Zurich	3.00 PM IST	

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2000 meetings @Atout France event

Atout France India's 2022 B2B Showcase in Udaipur witnessed a record participation of 42 tourism companies from France and more than 80 travel professionals from pan-India. The first offline workshop since 2019 saw more than 2000 one-to-one meetings between buyers and sellers over two days. Ambassador of France to India, Emmanuel Lenain was also present.





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A comprehensive insurance cover

Drawing on its experience, Asego realised that it can't work with just one insurance company. As a result, for the first time, it has come up with a multiple underwriting model to be able to offer travellers coverage for all their needs. Dev Karvat, Founder & CEO, Asego, shares more details.



Hazel Jain

How has insurance as a product changed over the years?

We were quite surprised when we saw that during the lockdown, our conversions had actually doubled. We felt that it was only going to be for those 12-18 months while there is pandemic. But we saw that trend continue. Now, travellers want to buy travel insurance before they leave. For the first time in our 22 years, we are getting a lot of calls from travellers at the airport asking for travel insurance. So there is an after-regret which was never there earlier. Surprisingly, the big uptick has been in the Asian countries. When people travelled to the Middle East or Far East countries, they would never buy travel insurance. On the non-Asia plans, where people travel to Europe and USA, we have seen a jump in the medical sum insure that they are taking. Earlier, they used to be happy with a ₹ 50,000 sum insure, which was a minimum requirement for the

visa. Now, they are ready to pay that 25-30% more.

What kind of innovation have you brought in this segment?

We realised that we can't work with just one insurance company. And for the first time, we have come up with a multiple underwriting model.



Dev Karvat
Founder & CEO, Asego

On a single platform, a travel agent has the option to choose different types of insurance cover. We have extreme adventure sports cover that is provided by a particular company. So when a customer gets a travel

insurance policy from us, a medical coverage from company A, deep-sea diving is from company B, the full-trip cancellation is from company C. It is essentially a concoction of different insurance companies.

Could you share insights into some major risks travellers face nowadays?

Recent travel volumes have skyrocketed with the gradual dissipation of COVID-19 around the globe, and so has travel related risks. Eventualities such as missed/delayed flights and hotel/flight cancellations are inevitable when it comes to travel. However, we have recently witnessed a huge spike in newer travel risks such as loss and damage of gadgets, cyber security issues, identity theft and credit/debit card fraud among travellers.

How does Asego mitigate these risks?

Asego has been working tirelessly to identify and mitigate these risks with comprehensive travel assistance and insurance solutions. Our bouquet of offerings not only takes

care of medical emergencies and other travel-related inconveniences but also ensures that travellers are protected against travel risks. Further,

Recent travel volumes have skyrocketed with the dissipation of COVID globally, and so have the travel related risks

ther, our carefully curated standalone products offer travellers an opportunity to customise their protection plans as per their needs.

Asego did the travel insurance for TAFI delegates attending the convention in Malaysia. What benefits were they offered?

Ensuring a safe trip for travellers, be it on land, air or sea, has always been our priority. Being TAFI's

preferred travel protection partner for over a decade, Asego offered complimentary global assistance with insurance to all delegates who attended the convention in Malaysia. With our exclusively curated protection cover, all delegates

were extended benefits such as medical emergency cover including COVID-19, emergency medical evacuation, protection against loss of valuables like passport and baggage along with relevant assistance services.

What differentiates Asego

- ❖ Fast track claims support: Its travel assistance and insurance products are powered by 24x7 fast track claims support and expert teams present across the globe ensure that the travellers are fully protected, no matter where they are.
- ❖ Customisable protection plans: Its bouquet of travel assistance services and new-age bundled products have always been customer favourites. Nevertheless, we realised that tailoring offerings at a micro level are the need of the hour. We are now offering an array of relevant standalone products, such as emergency OPD expenses, quarantine cancellations, cruise cover, and flight delay/interruption covers, pertinent to the current scenario.
- ❖ Cutting-edge technology platform: AI and machine learning are key to the ever-evolving Insurtech market. Asego has been leveraging these tech capabilities to create a specialised system which helps us understand our customers more deeply and creates a customised user experience, helping them choose the right plan for their needs.

'MICE journey in India has been slow'

► Contd from page 3

expanding rapidly. Once the international borders were closed during COVID, the country turned to the domestic market; but as soon as the pandemic impact subsided, we were back on track. According to data, Ebix Cash has completed 105 international groups in addition to around 250 domestic groups during the past two quarters—from April to September. India has an opportunity to earn foreign exchange by luring MICE to India and retain Indian MICE.

So, what does MICE exactly do? MICE is a type of tourism that directly enhances the economy through the generation of jobs, consumption, and infrastructure. It provides the government with a significant amount of taxation. It is a form of inclusive tourism, and the government can market India as a MICE destination globally and develop the necessary infrastructure to support it. This is because the economy will immensely benefit in three ways: creating jobs, bringing in foreign exchange, and boosting the economy and consumption. No other sector has a

more immediate and positive impact than tourism and MICE.

Strategy

There are various tourism boards for India around the world. It is quite unclear how much or what they are accomplishing as far as promoting Indian tourism is concerned. It is quite clear that India has not done a good job of it (promoting tourism) and that the economy is paying a high price for setting up these tourism offices abroad. We can now cut back on the size and cost of those overseas offices. The Union Ministry of Tourism should appoint PR and marketing companies overseas to advocate for India, what is available in India, and what it is all about, rather than having the tourism offices' representatives operate out of the embassy, high commission, or consulate.

Public relations and marketing companies have not been employed by Indian tourism offices abroad. The only activities they engage in are inviting a select few travel agents to roadshows,

buy and get them drinks among others, we feel. But the activity should restrict to the travel trade, otherwise how will you connect with the customers, and tourists who will be spending money to visit India? The Incredible India



Naveen Kundu
MD, EbixCash

campaign, launched by Amitabh Kant, former Secretary of Tourism, Union Government, gave India a boost, but since then not much has been done. The only way to make a difference is to employ PR and marketing firms in different countries around the world to promote India as a destination, cut down the size of the overseas tourism

government offices, and assign a qualified person to sit outside the Indian Embassy.

Revenue generation

MICE will experience a significant increase in income generation once there are more exhibition centres, convention centres of various sizes, and hotel rooms available to accommodate those centres. Therefore, the fundamentals must be established, including connectivity of the infrastructure, conference centres of various sizes, and exhibition centres. For instance, we have created Aerocity and constructed so many hotels, so much so that it is now a beautiful location. Worldmark One, Worldmark Two, and Worldmark Three are excellent sites with sizeable entertainment zones, but where is the enormous convention centre? The execution of this massive project in India has been excellent, but where is the convention centre? The Dwarka Convention Centre is scheduled to open soon, then one can see how it performs.

The country has a lot to offer with destinations such as Jammu and

Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Puri and getaway cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Goa, Bengaluru, and Kolkata. Where are the convention centres, though? Because there is no space in India for large conventions, even the

Ebix Cash has completed 105 international groups in addition to around 250 domestic groups during the past two quarters

Indian companies must travel abroad to hold such events. There is barely any space in India.

Key initiatives

It is paramount to keep in mind the government's intentions. India tourism bodies must collaborate. The ministers gathered at the Sushma Swaraj Bhawan in New

Delhi's Chanakyapuri, and it was undoubtedly a great event where they exchanged ideas. But today there is utter silence. There has been no change.

The biggest opportunity we have had at the G20 Summit thus far, where the public and private sectors must collaborate to make a difference. The G20 Summit will put the Indian MICE industry to the test in terms of food and beverage, entertainment, conference spaces, transportation, professionalism, personalities, and employment. When I say the private sector, I do not simply mean major corporations; every small firm can make a difference and every aspect will be examined.

Silverlining

"The current government is making many declarations that are constructive. We hope that now that they are fully awake, they will involve the private sector, including some seasoned industry professionals, and come together to create a future direction for MICE business in India. 🐦"

'We know Japan intimately'

With Inspiring Vacations, agents have the option to organise tickets and customer visas for the client, or select a convenient flight-inclusive package, says Dinesh Bhardwaj, Head of Sales, Inspiring Vacations.



Janice Alyosius

Japan has been one of the most important destinations for Inspiring Vacations and they are witnessing a surge in demand for the guided tours to the country with a high volume of direct customer inquiries. "We know Japan intimately – we have the experience and connections to deliver an unrivalled and meticulously managed holiday package at undeniable value," said **Dinesh Bhardwaj**, Head of Sales, Inspiring Vacations.

The company offers value-packed tours to exciting destinations on all seven continents and have bestsellers spanning multiple segments in Spain, Portugal, Morocco and Japan. The brand is conducting various webinar with the destination experts to promote and highlight the offerings of the destinations. Recently they conducted a webinar to promote Japan. "It was wonderful to connect with so many interested agents on our webinar. Much like the rest of our efforts with the In-



Dinesh Bhardwaj
Head of Sales, Inspiring Vacations

dian travel fraternity, it was a very enthusiastic response. We've been inundated with sales calls and inquiries," he said.

India webstore

Speaking of the Inspiring Vacations' India webstore and pre-fixed tours, Bhardwaj said, "It is an incredible easy way to plan, secure and manage the client's travel booking."

Business strategies

Speaking of the brand strategies in terms of attracting repeat clients, he said, "We find repeat

business a no-brainer: direct customers and travel professionals alike genuinely love our value offering and easy booking experience. We have many repeat customers and loyal agents who feel confident recommending and returning to us as a trusted travel brand with quality tours at compelling value."



Much like the rest of our efforts with the Indian travel fraternity, it (webinar) was a very enthusiastic response

Collaboration with industry partners and affiliates has always been important to Inspiring Vacations. They believe that the service that they offer agents and customers reflects their incredibly high standards in everything they do. 🐦

Visit Brussels' roadshow in India



Aimed at strengthening existing relationships while building new ones with the local travel trade fraternity, Visit Brussels organised a two-city roadshow in India earlier this month. The roadshow, held in Mumbai and New Delhi, sends out a clear message that Belgium, in particular the city of Brussels, is ready to welcome the Indian outbound travel fraternity once again after a hiatus of 24 months.

Spain takes six agents to a trip



The Tourism Office of the Embassy of Spain in India (TURESPAÑA) recently organised a familiarisation trip for six key travel agents to explore the niche tourist segment of the Way of Saint James (Camino de Santiago).

Now, people vouch by fat weddings

COVID-induced changes have become a trend in the wedding segment. Single event weddings, small and private events, sustainable and budget-friendly, and hybrid weddings are some of the concepts that have now become part of the wedding segment.



Janice Alyosius

Over the years, weddings have been a major revenue earner for most hotels in India. This segment went through a transformation during the pandemic. Though there is a rise in big fat Indian weddings—scrumptious menus, flashy decors, and extravaganza events—it has rather given way to thoughtfulness, personalization and celebrating with loved ones.

Small and private weddings have become the trend now. **Abhishek Pani**, Hotel Manager, Novotel Vijayawada Varun, said, "The virus has forced families and couples to look at hosting weddings differently. Guest lists have shrunk. If an average wedding had 800 people, they now take place with 400 to 500 invitees. Couples are now opting for new-age wedding formats such as shift weddings where guests are invited in batches or hybrid/intimate weddings. As far as wedding invitations



Abhishek Pani
Hotel Manager,
Novotel Vijayawada Varun

The virus has forced families and couples to look at hosting weddings differently

are concerned, while some are choosing to go digital, others are opting for e-invites."



Lakshmi Sridhar
Operations Manager,
Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach

In January when some weddings got cancelled, they rescheduled them to the summer season

Lakshmi Sridhar, Operations Manager, Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach, said, "In the



Shiv Bose
General Manager, DoubleTree by Hilton
Goa-Panaji

The big fat Indian weddings are now back with large-scale festivities and exuberance

month of January when some weddings got cancelled, they rescheduled them to the summer

season. Earlier, people would wait for the wedding season, October to February, to organize weddings. People have now bounced back to celebrate this once in a lifetime event with a lot of pomp and show. There is no halt on bookings. People are coming with different ideas and customs to make the event a more elaborate one."

Often guests cannot travel, due to various reasons. This has made livestreaming a big booming part of the industry. Micro-weddings, those with fewer than 100 guests, are still a niche idea, he added. A budget-friendly wedding is another factor that the couples and families are looking for.

"Customers, who showed caution towards expenses, now seem to rely more on allied cost. The big fat Indian weddings are now back with large-scale festivities and exuberance," shared **Shiv Bose**, General Manager, DoubleTree by Hilton Goa-Panaji. 🐦

Domestic air passenger traffic up

Domestic air passenger traffic was estimated at 103 lakh in September 2022, which was 2 per cent higher compared to 101 lakh in August 2022. It witnessed a year-on-year growth of 46 per cent, as September 2021 was yet to recover from the second wave of COVID-19. However, it fell short by only 10 per cent to the pre-COVID levels of September 2019. The airlines' capacity deployment in September 2022 was 27 per cent higher than September 2021. However, it was lower by 9 per cent than the pre-COVID levels. On a sequential basis, the number of departures in September 2022 were lower by 2 per cent. International passenger traffic continues to rise since the resumption of the scheduled international operations with effect from 27 March 2022.

Rising prices of aviation turbine fuel (ATF) and the general inflationary environment continue to stifle the industry earnings, with ATF prices in October 2022 higher by 60 per cent on a YoY basis. However, the same declined by 4.5 per cent sequentially.

TAFI helps members 'Build back better'

The Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) successfully concluded its international convention at Kuching in Sarawak, Malaysia, which was held after a gap of four years from 20 to 23 September this year. TAFI initiated two CSR activities at the convention in order to encourage members to contribute towards creating a more equitable society.



Sarawak welcomes Indian travel trade

More to 500 Indian delegates attended the convention, which was hosted by Tourism Malaysia, Sarawak Tourism Board, Business Events Sarawak and MyCEB. Insightful business sessions and keynote addresses from eminent speakers highlighted the event that was bookended by pre and post tours for the delegates.



After great start, Akasa plans to expand

After successful completion of two months of its operations, Akasa Air plans to strengthen the domestic connectivity by adding to its network an aircraft every 15 days. To fulfil its goal of developing a strong pan-India presence, the company plans to operate 300 weekly flights by October end.

TT Bureau

With a commitment towards making travel accessible in India, Akasa Air has been progressively expanding its network across the country in a phased manner and introducing flights to Tier 2 and 3 cities. The company recently received its sixth aircraft and plans to have a fleet size of 18 aircraft by the end of March 2023. Over the next four years, the airline plans to add 54 additional aircraft, taking its total fleet size to 72 aircraft.

On the completion of first two months of Akasa Air's commercial journey, **Vinay Dube**, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Akasa Air, said, "Our first two months have been very exciting and satisfying, as we moved from planning to commercial operations. We have been hyper focussed on establishing and delivering an empathetic, dependable and reliable flying experience unlike anything witnessed



in the Indian skies thus far." Dube added, "We are delighted that a significant number of flyers have already chosen to fly with us and are very pleased with the positive feedback we have received on our product and services. It is equally satisfying to see the pride in our employees as they work together to deliver the Akasa Experience."

Marking the airline's first 60 days of operations, Akasa Air established Delhi as the sixth destina-

tion on its network and inaugurated flights on the Delhi-Bengaluru and Delhi-Ahmedabad routes. The airlines also announced eight destinations - Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Kochi, Chennai, Delhi, Agartala and Guwahati - that will be covered with 11 non-stop routes.

Commenting on the occasion, **Praveen Iyer**, Co-Founder and Chief Commercial Officer, Akasa Air, said, "We are elated by the response we have received, as

we welcomed on board more than 100,000 passengers within just 60 days of operations. Further strengthening our domestic connectivity and catering to more flyers during the festive season, we are delighted to be able to add Delhi to our network and connect the capital city to the rapidly growing and vibrant cities of Bengaluru and Ahmedabad. By expanding our network with an aircraft arriving every 15 days, we aim to fulfil our goal of developing a strong pan-India pres-

ence and expect to operate 300 weekly flights by October end."

About the product, services and customer experience, **Belson Coutinho**, Co-Founder and Chief Marketing & Experience Officer, Akasa Air, said, "We set out with a promise to be a dependable airline focussing on warm, efficient and reliable service. We are extremely happy with the reception and feedback on our product and services, which motivate us not just to sustain but raise the standard of our service delivery. We will continue to provide our passengers with category-first and personalised product features."

He added, "Further, as we continue with our vision to create an inclusive and humane travel experience, Akasa's pet-friendly service will commence from 1 November 2022, wherein passengers flying on Akasa Air will be able to travel with their pets in the cabin."

In Numbers

- 300** weekly flights Akasa Air plans to operate by October end
- 18** aircraft fleet size the newly launched airlines plans by the end of March 2023
- 54** additional aircraft the airline plans to add in next four years, taking the total fleet size to 72 aircraft

EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



Date	Event	Time
18	Switzerland Webinar	03:00 pm
18-19	GPS - Kochi	11:30 am
19-21	ITB Asia	09:30 am
19-21	Travel Tech Asia	09:30 am
19-21	MICE Show Asia	09:30 am
25	PATA Annual Summit 2022	09:00 am
27	Atlys Webinar	03:00 pm
27-28	International Conference on Hospitality and Tourism Management	08:00 am
28	Switzerland Webinar	03:00 pm
28-30	International Tourism & Travel Show	11:00 am
31	Inspiring Vacations Webinar	03:00 pm

NOVEMBER 2022

2-Nov	Turpal Webinar	TBA
3-Nov	Oman Webinar	03:00 pm
7-9 Nov	World Travel Market 2022	10:00 am

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

Southern Travels celebrates 50 yrs

Southern Travels, India's prestigious, dependable, and prosperous brand, celebrated completion of 50 years recently. G Kishan Reddy, Union Minister of Tourism, Culture and DoNER, was among the dignitaries who graced the occasion.



Oman: Blend of modernity & tradition

If you have been waiting to experience the delights of the Arabian Nights, visit Oman. Distinctively Arab in its outlook, the country will not only fulfill your fantasies, but you will also come away relishing the entire experience, as tradition and modernity go hand in hand in many aspects of Omanis' lives.

Sunlit dinners, sea, sand, and not a cloud in sight! Uninterrupted sunshine bathes a unique blend of magnificent Arabian heritage. And welcoming one is tradition, hospitality, discovery and adventure.

If you have been waiting to experience the delights of the Arabian Nights, just cast a glance at Oman. Not only will it fulfill your fantasies, but you will also come away relishing the entire experience.

Tradition and modernity go hand in hand in many aspects of Omanis' lives, making the country a land apart, where contemporary life meets timeless desert.

Once a thriving, strategically located port of the Arabian Peninsula, Muscat, the capital of Oman, today ranks among the world's best-planned and cleanest cities yet remains a cradle of culture

visit Muttarah, a busy commercial centre renowned for its cornice, girdle-shaped promenade, bay and harbour with romantic old dhows, visiting cruise ships and naval vessels. Lining the promenade are offices, shops, cafes, trading houses and souks, notably the Muttarah Souk with some shops the size of a small lounge, others no bigger than a walk-in closet. Meander through the maze of this market souk with its seemingly endless corridors of little shops, wade through stalls of vegetables and dates, and see the day's catch on display in the busy fish souk. Incense smell prevails. The same atmosphere pervades Souq Al Juma, popularly known as Friday Market.

Bargain and enjoy yourself. Munch on ripe dates and sip mildly spiced herbal tea, and discover why Arabian shopping can be delightful, exciting and tiring at the



variety of modes, from driving flashy cars to working on computers. Dress codes are important and the dishdashas are almost always spotlessly clean. To judge

it. Well, try this for size. Domestic meals include famous regional dishes, notably Thareed, Harees, and Mohammar. Typical ingredients used include varieties of meat, fish, rice, and vegetables, washed down with light tea. Rounding off the meal are sweet preparations like Aseeda and Halwa.

Tradition is also reflected in parks, statues, and artifacts of heritage value that dot the highways. Dominating the impressive cityscape of concrete and parks are pale white structures. The blend of these structures, co-existing with traditional ones, gives a distinct character to things.

National pride can be seen in the local showpiece, the seaside palace of H.M. The Sultan, a magnificent building with huge multi-coloured columns that feature different architectural styles.

Culture and tradition can also be seen in Bait Al Zubair Museum that serves as a valuable link between Oman's past, present and future and contains a fine antique collection that includes traditional and

historic Omani weaponry, jewelry, costumes, domestic utensils, as well as recreated urban and rural environments.

The Natural History Museum is a 'shop window' through which one can see the Oman's wealth


Oman's capital Muscat today ranks among the world's best-planned and cleanest cities yet it remains a cradle of culture

of flora and fauna. Displayed are animals, shells, insects and photographs.

A separate section – The Whale Hall – displays the skeleton of a huge sperm whale and smaller species, backed by pictorial and video sounds.

The sea has contributed generously to Oman's beauty, and the country's intrinsic relationship with the sea is visible at several places. At the Yacht Centre of the Marine Science and the Fisheries Centre, one sees both the practical and leisure side of marine life. The small fishing village of Qantab provides great sea view and a close look at fishermen's unique lifestyle.

Modern and progressive it may be, but Oman remains distinctively and proudly Arab in outlook and attitude, and Muscat personifies this to the letter. The call of the muezzin calling the faithful to prayer, souks typically Arabian in atmosphere, and traditional styles of dressing serve as constant reminders that one is in the heart of Arabia.

Muscat mirrors several different images, some journeying back to its founding 900 years ago. Images of old shipyards that built the famous dhows that sailed the seas in those early days. And of battle-scarred old structures, notably two old Portuguese forts, Jelali and Merani, that flank the rocky cove around which the city is built.

It's Arabia, served on a platter. Nice and easy!



Inder Raj Ahluwalia
Travel Journalist and Author

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



tucked away in the folds of tradition, presenting a blend of the old and the new. It is this stark contrast of lifestyles, existing alongside one another, that makes the country a fascinating tourist destination.

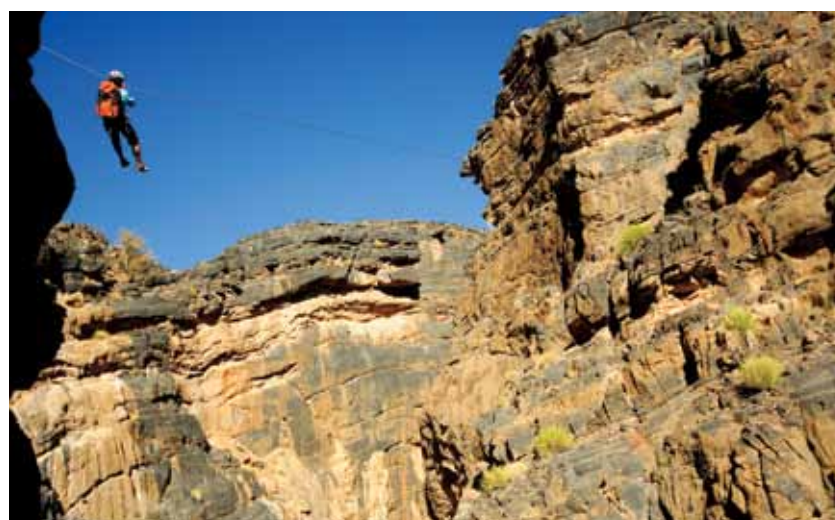
The Oman Government's idea is to preserve local heritage and culture amid progress. They are constantly moving forward and transforming. The country's location is another big plus point. The country has an eye on the desert and the sea, both of which facilitated trade and also created a rich heritage, right from early days.

Muscat typifies this well. For a taste of genuine local flavour,

same time. The temptations are inescapable with antiques, historical artifacts, objects of art, electronics, textiles, spices, jewellery, clocks, watches, tribal rugs and khanjars (curved ceremonial daggers) lining shelves. The souks also offer a typical 'market-day' oriented atmosphere with robust bargaining. This done, discover the other end of the spectrum in Al Qurum with its upscale ambience and elegant shopping malls.

Omanis are proud, family-oriented, colourful people, conscious of their status and physical appearance. Men in traditional white dishdasha (dress) and women in abaya and veil can be seen in a

people, observe their food and eating habits, an old saying has



MOVEMENTS

WEST BENGAL TOURISM

West Bengal

The Government of West Bengal has appointed **RAJ SINGH**, the founder chairman of Antara River Cruises, as the Chairman of the West Bengal River Tourism Sub-Committee. A renowned authority on Indian wildlife and a travel industry pioneer, Raj Singh started Antara River Cruises almost 10 years ago for special interest travel. Recently, the State Government had constituted a State Tourism Task Force to unlock and augment tourism potential in West Bengal. Under its aegis and advise, it was found imperative to form a separate sub-committee on each of the prime sectors under tourism for a focused and planned approach.



TOURISM MALAYSIA

Mumbai

EDIWANTO EDDI has joined Tourism Malaysia Mumbai office as a Deputy Director with effect from September 1, 2022. Previously, he had worked for 8 years at the Tourism Malaysia headquarters in Putrajaya, Malaysia. At the headquarters, he was involved in organising various domestic tourism roadshows and familiarization trips. His key role now in Tourism Malaysia Mumbai would be to encourage marketing Malaysia as an attractive destination, to organise Trade & Media fairs, to collaborate joint promos with Trade & Media partners, to participate in various trade fairs and organise Tourism Malaysia roadshow.



THE LEELA BHARTIYA CITY BENGALURU

Bengaluru

VIRENDER RAZDAN has been appointed as the General Manager of The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru. With a career spanning over three decades, Virender is a performance oriented senior hospitality professional who has worked at Hyatt Regency Delhi, Hilton New Delhi, Oberoi Hotels Mumbai, The Leela Mumbai, and ITC Hotels in Mumbai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Bengaluru. He has successfully translated strategic goals into operational plans to achieve targeted growth in sales and drive profitability. Virender is a science graduate from Kashmir University and has also completed his IHM.



THE LEELA PALACES, HOTELS AND RESORTS

Mumbai

The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts appointed **SHANU AMMUNNI** as Vice President – Information Technology for The Leela portfolio. With an overall experience of 18 years, Shanu's work experience includes assignments with Marriott, Wyndham and IHG Hotels & Resorts across the Middle East. Prior to joining The Leela, he was Group Director of IT, Hospitality at Al Mulla Group based in Dubai. He is a result-oriented technology leader with extensive cross-cultural expertise in the Hospitality IT sector. Well versed with interconnected information management disciplines, he has delivered value-based programmes with a strong commitment to achieve organisational goals.



CYGNETT

New Delhi

Cygnett Hotels & Resorts has promoted **SANDEEP BASU** as Associate Director – Development & Operations. He will play a key role in meeting Cygnett's aggressive growth goals. Sandeep brings with him an incredible track record of over two decades of experience in the hospitality sector, having essayed roles in various renowned companies like Hyatt, ITC Hotels, The Park Hotels and Sheraton. He is an articulate and passionate hotel professional with a strong business acumen. Cygnett Hotels & Resorts, set up in 2014, operates a diverse portfolio of economy, midscale to upscale properties with key business and leisure locations.



THOMAS COOK (INDIA)

Mumbai

Thomas Cook (India), India's leading omnichannel travel services company, has elevated **ABHISHEK NAGPAL** to Business Head, Visa & Passport Services. He has been associated with the company since 2018 as General Manager - Visa & Passport Services. With nearly two decades of industry experience, Abhishek will now lead the company's visa functions pan-India and manage consular and key stakeholder relations. Abhishek's key responsibilities will include adherence to compliance, smooth operations, efficiencies in end-to-end visa processing. Prior to Thomas Cook India, he has worked with Udaan Visa Facilitation Services, Cozmo Travel World, Udaan India, and Wipro.



GRAND MERCURE BENGALURU

Bengaluru

BALACHANDER GVANESHWAR joins Grand Mercure Bengaluru at Gopalan Mall as the Food & Beverage Manager. In his new role, he will spearhead the F&B operations of the hotel. His responsibilities would also include coordinating, planning and implementing F&B concepts. Starting career in 1995 with Taj Residency Bangalore, Balachander moved to the Middle East in early 2000s. He later moved into the Shangri-La Group and have been involved in successful hotel launch of Shangri-la Barr Al Jissah Resort. In his last role, he led the F&B operations for Shangri-La Al Husn Resort & Spa, Muscat, Oman and the Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa, Muscat, Oman as a multi property resource.



FOUR SEASONS HOTEL

Mumbai

Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai has appointed **KEITH RAJAN**, a hospitality industry specialist with more than 22 years of experience across different markets, as Hotel Manager. In his new role, Keith will oversee the day-to-day operations of the hotel, including managing its luxurious rooms, the city's favourite Asian restaurant, San:Qi, the spa, meetings & events. His role will also be focused on the monumental relaunches scheduled for the property in the coming months. These include the iconic rooftop destination AER, as well as the brand-new Modernist, set to be the city's most sought-after members-only Club, and many more.



COURTYARD AND FAIRFIELD BY MARRIOTT BENGALURU ORR

Bengaluru

Courtyard and Fairfield by Marriott Bengaluru ORR has appointed **PRIYA KUMARI** as the new Training Manager. Priya began her journey in the hospitality industry in 2013 as a Reservation Associate. Since then, she has been associated with top brands like Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach, JW Marriott Bengaluru, Grand Mercure GIFT City, Mercure Hyderabad KCP and Ibis Hyderabad Hitec City, and has handled various operational activities. Priya comes with more than nine years of experience in the industry in Reservations, Revenue Management and Training.



TALKing People

ANANT KUMAR, Co-founder, Brij Hotels, shares, "My preferred way of de-stressing is by a good session of workout or meditation. Alternatively, a detox from technology and some quality time with my family is what I like. One skill I have absolutely mastered during the lockdown is to manage stress. My all-time favourite destination to travel is Masai Mara. Being an avid vegan and an animal lover, I love spending time in the wild and enjoy it at the fullest. I am looking forward to visiting Thailand next, for a close friend's wedding."



SONIA PAUL, Cluster Director (Marketing), Hyatt West India, takes her work passionately, which keeps her going. "It takes away my stress, I love what I do and every morning I look forward to it. Post work, I hit the gym, which is a major stress reliever, I feel calm and happy. Other than that, I love my me time over self-pampering at salons and binge on Netflix, and I adore my people too, so I catch up with my friends and family. My favourite holiday destination in India is Punjab. My next holiday will be to Canada and the UK."



VIKRAM SINGH, Director of Sales & Marketing, Indore Marriott Hotel, shares, "Spending quality time with the family is a great way to de-stress. Listening to my son talk about how his day was at school makes me forget the work stress after an exhaustive day. The lockdown helped me improve my athletic skills. Running the empty roads and parks helped me in focusing my energies on taking care of my body. India is a diverse country and each state has something to offer. I love Udaipur for its lush, green, hilly terrain, palaces and serene lakes. I would like to visit Nashik and experience the vineyard staycation for next holiday."



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'Indian visitors perfect for NZ'

Gregg Wafelbakker, General Manager, Asia, Tourism New Zealand, was in India recently to reconnect with the travel trade and discuss how the bias of the Indian visitor for off-peak travel during the New Zealand summer can be encouraged and translated into real numbers.



Hazel Jain

"There is a strong pent-up demand to travel, and we are seeing that transpire into bookings," says **Gregg Wafelbakker**, General Manager, Asia, Tourism New Zealand. He was recently in India with the objective to reconnect with the Indian travel partners. "We are also discussing with them the uniqueness of the Indian visitor. When we look at the profile of Indian visitors coming into New Zealand post the pandemic, there is a natural bias for off-peak travel. While the New Zealand summer months of December-February is our peak, we see a bias for off-peak from India for the months of April-June and October-November, which is perfect for us. So, a lot of the conversations with the travel trade right now is about encourage this and lift this off-peak demand," Wafelbakker adds.

Pre-pandemic, New Zealand welcomed 67,000 Indian visitors. What is remarkable about this, says Wafelbakker, is that number had doubled in five years. "This translates to almost a 15 per cent compounding annual growth rate. As we look forward, obviously we start from a low base. We have a target audience in India. we look at an audience of those who have New Zealand as their top five preference country and there is 12.3 million of those. And we know that 12.3 million of 1.4 billion people may not seem a lot but certainly for us that is our audience. And 64 per cent of that audience has New Zealand as the number one preferred destination for a visit," he says.

Leisure & incentive from India

The jump in number over the five years is simply because of the awareness of New Zealand, their growing preference for the destination, and obviously a large and growing middle class segment in

India that has more discretionary income and wants to spend it on travel. "As we look long term, we expect the growth out of India to continue and that makes India a very important market for us. Our focus on the market is predominantly leisure travel but what is also an important growing market here is incentive travel," Wafelbakker shares.

While there is no direct flight at the moment between the two countries, pre-pandemic, there were multiple ways to get to New Zealand indirectly.

Of all our international visitors, it is the Indian visitor that does the most activities when they are in New Zealand

"Not all these routes have started but we expect them to come back by 2023. We would love to see direct flights, but that is not essential to grow this market. From all our international visitors, the Indian visitor actually does the highest number of activities when they are in New Zealand. They stay the longest as well. The average length of stay is 14 days. So, by staying longer they are seeing more parts of New Zealand. And we love that! These make Indian nationals our perfect visitors. We would really like our visitors to get outside of the major hot spots and see some of the other lesser-known destinations, interact with our communities and share some culture. They are also among our highest spenders," he exclaims.

Trade engagement

While the borders were closed, the tourism board conducted a lot of webinars, virtual road trips, as well as education series with the trade. Now, when the borders are open, it is working with travel partners like Thomas Cook India, Kulin Kumar Holidays and MMT on conversion campaigns.

The New Zealand tourism industry also re-connected with the world this April on TRENZ Connect 2022 through a series of online events. TRENZ Connect is a digital marketplace launched by TIA (Tourism Industry Aotearoa) last September to connect international market-ready New Zealand tourism operators with the international travel trade.

This year, almost 300 travel and tourism buyers from around the globe, including 24 from India, connected virtually and discussed latest updates from New Zealand. More recently, it organised a two-day Kiwi Link event in Singapore that was attended by 15 buyers from India, who met 65 operators from New Zealand.

'If you seek' campaign

With New Zealand borders reopened since August, Tourism New Zealand has launched its new global campaign titled 'If You Seek' - a call to all visitors who

wish to seek more through extraordinary travel experiences. The campaign captivates viewers via alluring perspectives of the destination's people and places. The campaign was launched in India through key trade partners such as Thomas Cook, MakeMyTrip and Kulin Kumar Holidays. The campaign's objective is to convert pent-up demand for New Zealand through these partnerships to boost recovery. "With this, we want to tap into the curiosity of manuhiri [visitors] who love adventure, nature, and true connections with people. Through this campaign, Aotearoa New Zealand welcomes Indian manuhiri [visitors] with open arms and urges to seek the unseen, explore the unexplored and re-imagine travel experience," explains Wafelbakker.



Gregg Wafelbakker
General Manager, Asia, Tourism New Zealand

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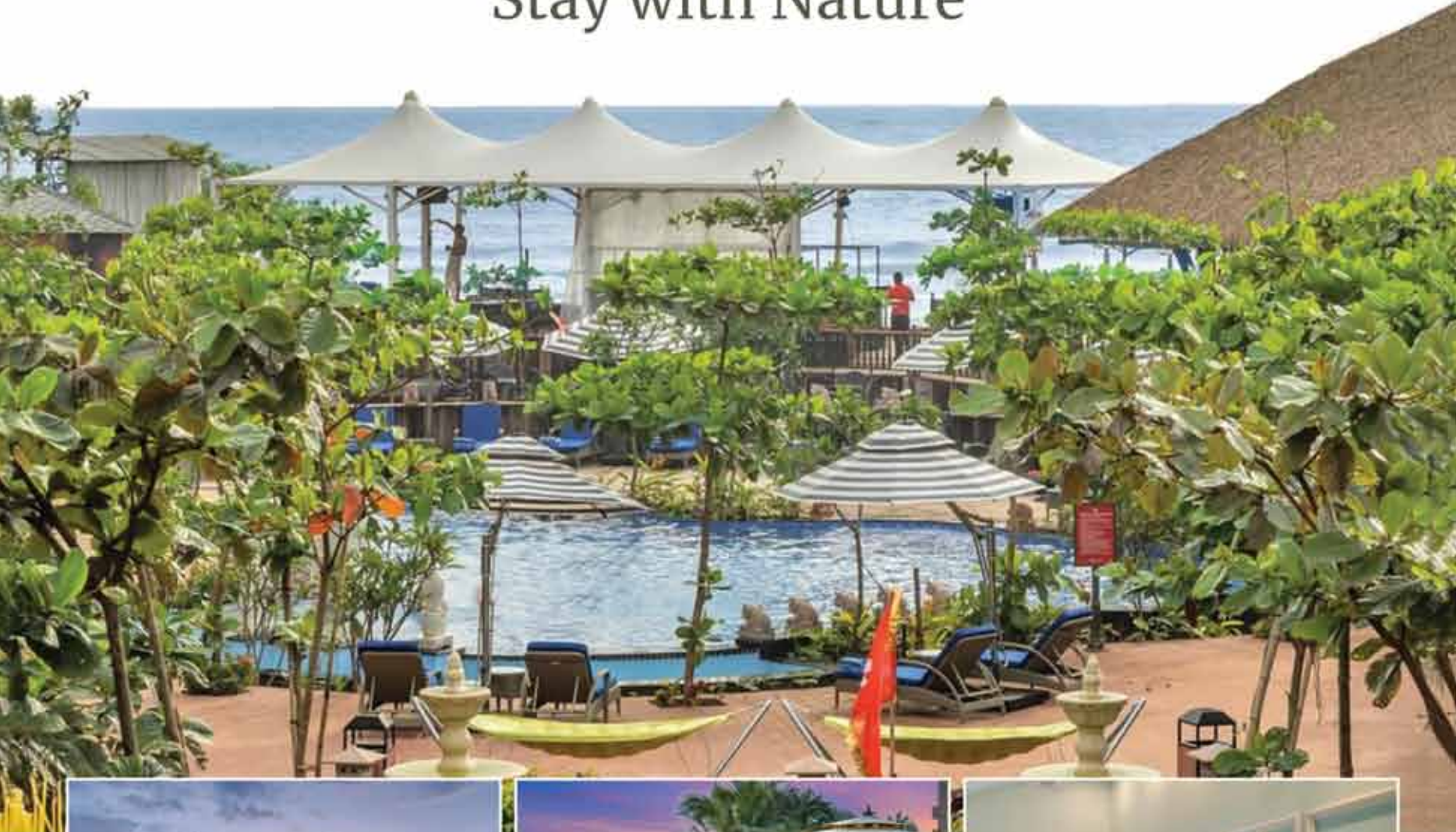


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