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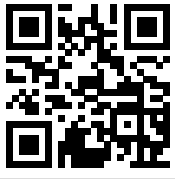
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# 'Experiences' lead summer travel choices

Experience-led travel is a priority for Indians this season, who are opting for short-haul, mid-haul and long-haul travel, along with exploring new and developing domestic destinations. While visa issues remain a big sore point for international travellers, bookings are happening in huge numbers across the country. Experts take on the issue:



Dev Karvat  
Founder & CEO  
Asego

“Today's traveller is not just focused on the destination, but also the kind of experience it offers. While new travellers may continue to opt for popular destinations, an evolved segment is more likely to choose offbeat destinations that offer unique experiences like adventure sports, eco-tourism, or distinctive visuals like the northern lights. This recent evolution of travel trends has had a positive impact on our business. Firstly, owing to the pandemic, travellers today are more aware and conscious of their own safety and financial security than ever before. Secondly, newer travel risks have driven us to continue innovating and curating products that don't just secure customized itineraries, but also enhance the overall travel experience. Lastly, with the travel trade regaining steady momentum post the pandemic, it would be immensely helpful if the visa issuance process is made increasingly seamless to facilitate smooth operations and growth within the travel sector.”



Mahendra Vakharia  
EC Member/ Immediate Past President –  
OTOAI & MD, Pathfinders Holidays

“We are seeing a renewed interest for travel to Africa, particularly South Africa and East Africa. Also, we have clients travelling to New Zealand, Japan, Australia, UK + Scotland, Scandinavia, France, Switzerland, Spain, hiking trip for a small ladies group in Iceland, USA (for self-drive) and South Korea. The Schengen visa issue is still a challenge and is causing a lot of heartburn and angst with clients as the appointment dates with some Schengen countries is still a challenge. This is hampering conversion of business to these destinations, and we need to arrange and book a trip for the client to another destination, where visa is not a challenge. Hope that this situation will soon be resolved by the respective embassies and consulates to pre-COVID times with very limited wait time for appointment as this will directly give us the confidence to promote and push that country for a holiday to the clients.”

Contd on page 12 ▶

# 'Keen to make tourism top economic activity'

Manisha Saxena, the newly appointed Director General of Tourism, is keen to promote tourism assets of India to the world through various mediums. G20 Presidency is a big opportunity for the country to leverage tourism as one of the foremost economic activities, she says.



Nisha Verma

**M**anisha Saxena, Director General, Tourism, is not new to the sector, having served as the Principal Secretary, Tourism, Government of Mizoram, before moving to the Central Ministry in March. Sharing her views on the sector, she says, “I think there is

an overall focus on tourism and the Honourable Prime Minister has been constantly underlining the need to develop India as a tourism hub, so that it can lead to better livelihoods and better jobs in this sector. We are a country of thousands of years of history and we have a lot to showcase. The idea is to tell all those stories in a way that entices foreign tourists

and encourage domestic tourists to see the country. Even one lifetime is not enough to see all of India. I think the sooner one starts, the better it is. I have been posted in Delhi, Goa and even Northeast. Thus, I feel that it is a country of such diversity that people living in one region cannot even imagine what the other region would be like. Hence, it will be good

if everybody can travel a lot and learn about the diversity in the country. My endeavour in this ministry would be to facilitate that process and become a part of it in whatever way possible.”

## G20 Presidency

Talking about India's G20 Presidency, she shares, “It is a big

opportunity to leverage tourism as one of the foremost economic activities and let the world see what we have to offer. Accordingly, the strategy for G20 events has been planned in such a way that we are going to 56 cities with so many events happening. Every ministry is doing an event in a new destination. Hence, I think



Manisha Saxena  
Director General, Tourism

it will be a huge showcase for the international community with the

Contd on page 22 ▶

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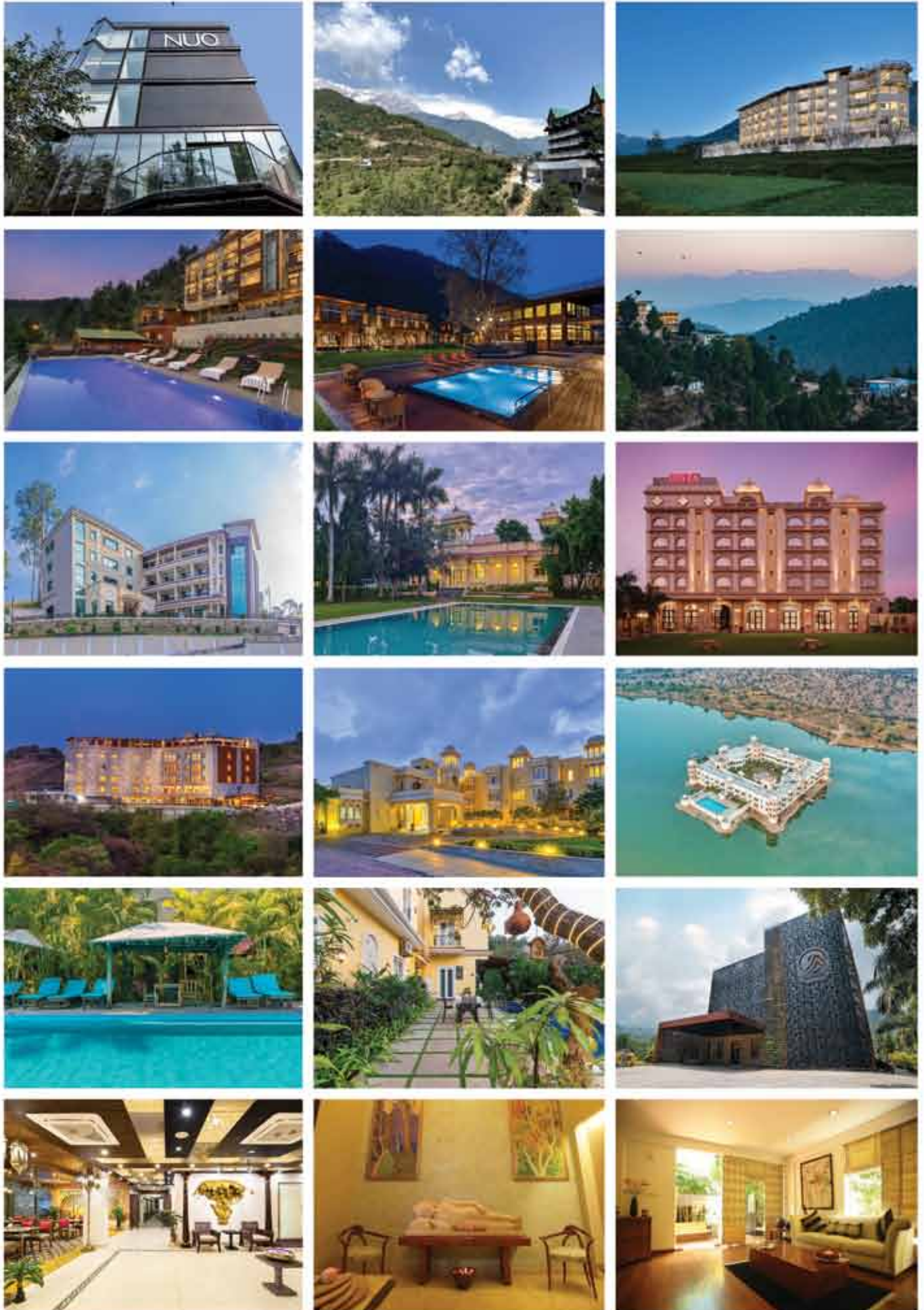


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# Setting the tone for Mission Tourism

The Union Ministry of Tourism's recent Chintan Shivir in New Delhi, attended by industry associations and leaders, aims to deliberate, ideate and devise strategies for promoting Tourism in Mission Mode in the country.



TT Bureau

The two-day Chintan Shivir, attended by the states, industry associations and industry leaders, had 11 knowledge sessions covering a wide variety of topics. Addressing the gathering on Day 1, **G. Kishan Reddy**, Minister of Tourism, Culture & DoNER, said that the government's vision is to leverage tourism as a vehicle for socio-economic development, job creation and achieving sustainable development goals for the country.

He said that it is the most opportune moment to unveil a shared vision for future of India's tourism, guiding its course for next 25 years to make India as the most sought-after travel destination in the world when India celebrates 100 years of Independence in 2047. He pointed out the three key pillars of developing tourism in mission mode - active participation of the states, convergence of government



tourism and responsible travel with the aim to take the benefits of tourism to the grassroots level.

## Incredible India@100

On Day 1, the discussions were divided into six sessions, where participants deliberated on Incredible India@100 - Shared vision of Central Government, States and Industry, Policy Benchmark-

Tourism Sector. Some of the key speakers were representatives from the industry stakeholders, international organizations like World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the State Governments.

UNWTO discussed the development of a Tourism Investment Strategy (TIS) through the UNWTO framework on organizational,

attractiveness, and promotion strategy, which will provide a structured approach to developing a comprehensive investment strategy that considers factors



**Govt's vision is to leverage tourism for socio-economic development, job creation and achieving sustainable development goals**

such as the local business environment, the potential for growth in the tourism industry, and the availability of financing options. Rajasthan's presentation focused on granting of industry status to the tourism and hospitality sector along with benefits

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programs and public private partnerships (PPPs). He said that one major step would be to develop national strategies and models for providing guidance to the states in developing their tourism potential. The Ministry has recently formulated national strategies for development of various tourism sectors such as rural tourism, adventure tourism, MICE tourism, ecotourism, and medical tourism.

## Green tourism is key

**Arvind Singh**, Secretary, Tourism, called Chintan Shivir a platform for all stakeholders to conduct fruitful interactions and share good practices followed across the country and a stage to share unique ideas involving technological solutions in travel sector, sustainability in

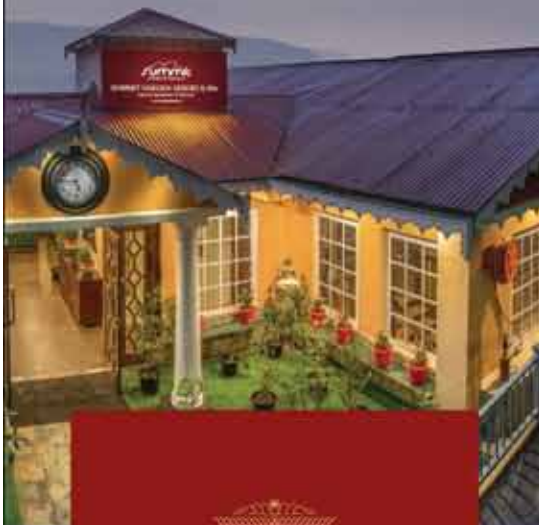



**2023 is of great importance for India with assuming the G20 Presidency and holding the Chair of Shanghai Cooperation Organization**

ing and Ease of Doing Business, Investible Projects and Public Private Partnerships, Global Best Practices and Capacity Building for Tourism Investments by UNWTO, Developing MICE Tourism and Wedding Tourism and Innovation and Digitalisation and Startups in

## Key results of Chintan Shivir

- ❖ Industry aspirations for US \$3 trillion GDP in 2047
- ❖ Best practice for grant of Industry Status to tourism and hospitality sector by Rajasthan to be taken up for replication by other states
- ❖ A more focused State tourism policy benchmarking exercise will be taken up with less parameters and more rigour in analysis of state policies
- ❖ A working group to go into various aspects of Ease of Doing Business in Tourism and Hospitality
- ❖ Destination profiles to be created to attract private sector investment
- ❖ Lakshadweep as a success story for PPP to be used for replication
- ❖ India as a MICE and Wedding Destination - Launch of national marketing campaigns
- ❖ MICE - Hyderabad Convention Promotion Bureau is a good model for destination level convention bureau - to be studied in detail for replication
- ❖ Ministry to engage with UNWTO for capacity building tourism investment strategy
- ❖ Ministry to pursue strong engagement with startups in tourism and hospitality
- ❖ NIDHI plus will be positioned as National Tourist Services Portal and linked to Incredible India for SEO
- ❖ ATITHYAM - is a major transformative initiative from Gujarat Tourism to be replicated at the national level
- ❖ Convergence - Inter ministerial working groups set up to develop convergence matrix in four areas of connectivity and infrastructure, tourism products and experiences, skill development, regulatory reforms and ease of doing business
- ❖ Homestays - one nation one registration to be pursued
- ❖ Centre of Excellence for Best Practices to be explored to benchmark, replicate and scale up best practices by the States and Industry
- ❖ Rural Tourism Cluster Development - model to be developed
- ❖ Mega Adventure Trails - to be developed in partnership with MoEFCC, MHA, Civil Aviation and States
- ❖ Model Law on Adventure Tourism - to be finalised expeditiously
- ❖ Adventure Tourism Rescue Centre to be finalised expeditiously
- ❖ Challenge mode for selection of 50 destinations as per budget announcement presented to the States - which based on five parameters and will be finalised expeditiously



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## Anywhere, everywhere!

Summer is a popular time for travel among Indians, with many people taking advantage of the school holidays and warmer weather to explore new destinations. Here are some interesting travel trends that have emerged this summer.

**Domestic travel:** Many Indians are continuing to explore domestic getaways within the country, especially for long weekends and short breaks.

**Experiential travel:** With many people seeking unique and thrilling experiences, adventure travel has also becoming increasingly popular.

**Road trips:** Road trips have gained popularity, especially during the summer season. Many people prefer to rent a car and hit the road for travel.

**Culinary travel:** The Indian palette is not shy any longer. Exploring new cuisines and being adventures with food is slowly gaining popularity.

**Wellness and spiritual travel:** Many Indians are choosing to travel to destinations that offer retreats, treatments, and wellness experiences.

## Green Tourism

Green tourism, also known as sustainable tourism or eco-tourism, is a form of tourism that promotes environmentally-friendly practices and responsible travel. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tourism Working Group meeting held recently in Siliguri, Darjeeling, all countries unanimously adopt Green Tourism to be 'most important' priority. The meeting was attended by 56 delegates from 17 Member Countries, 8 Invitee Countries and 4 International Organizations. The event also saw the participation of Ambassadors of seven G20 countries viz. Australia, Bangladesh, Japan, Singapore, Mexico, Indonesia and Korea.

According to the World Tourism Organization, sustainable tourism is the "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities". Let us hope that we use the post-pandemic restart keeping in mind a sustainable roadmap and do not end up with a problem of irresponsible overtourism!

# India H1 recovery fast in APAC

Considering the tickets confirmed for international arrivals in the first half of 2023, India is one of the most recovered destinations in the world, according to a report released by ForwardKeys. However, the recovery is still 18 per cent below the pre-pandemic levels.



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ForwardKeys has revealed that India is one of the most recovered destinations, with tickets confirmed for international arrivals in the first half of 2023, which is only 18 per cent below pre-pandemic levels.

"The APAC region continues in recovery mode, mostly driven by VFR travel. The latest forecast from ForwardKeys points to an overall recovery of international arrivals of 51 per cent of 2019 volumes in H1 2023. India is one of the most recovered destinations, with tickets confirmed for international arrivals in the first half of 2023 only 18 per cent below pre-pandemic levels," says **Juan A. Gomez**, Head of Market Intelligence at ForwardKeys.

"Most recovered international hubs in the region in Q2 versus pre-pandemic, in terms of

The recovery of some destinations is still driven by VFR		
International arrivals in Asia Pacific in H1 2023, as of 14 March 2023; vs 2019 levels		
Destination countries*	Var vs 2019	
Pakistan	-1%	
Bangladesh	-1%	
Maldives	-11%	
India	-18%	
Philippines	-32%	
Indonesia	-34%	
Vietnam	-37%	
Japan	-41%	
Singapore	-42%	
New Zealand	-46%	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>-49%</b>	
*With share in arrivals > 1.5%		
Source: ForwardKeys Air Tickets Data		

set to reach pre-pandemic levels, but some will certainly exceed 2019 numbers. In the report, it is mentioned that India is expecting a full recovery by the end of Q1 2023. "Although India's size as an international outbound market is largely attributable to its significant global diaspora, its middle-

### Coming back to pre-pandemic arrival levels

The report mentions that the latest data shows a recovery in global international air travel that could reach 80 per cent of 2019 volumes by the end of the first half of the year. Not all destinations are set to reach pre-pandemic levels, but some will certainly exceed 2019 numbers. It says that the Middle East is set to be the first global region to grow in international visitor numbers overall, while in Europe, Mediterranean destinations are getting close to pre-pandemic arrival levels or even surpassing them.

### Limited capacity and travel disruptions

The report points out that in the post-COVID-19 context, non-stop connections and 'simple' flight itineraries have become decisive factors for travellers concerned about the inconveniences of varying travel requirements



**Juan A. Gomez**  
Head of Market Intelligence  
at ForwardKeys

**India has managed to recover some ground and some regional leisure destinations are set to post growth on arrivals from India in Q2 versus 2019**

destinations around the world, we will see this trend continuing in 2023," it says.

### Asia-Pacific returns

The report points out that things are looking up for a few destinations in the Asia-Pacific region. ForwardKeys has revealed that China's decision to ditch its zero-COVID policy has triggered a surge in flight bookings.

### High on Luxury

As observed by the fast recovery of premium cabin classes in 2022, the report says that travellers have shown interest to spend more on travel services and experiences. It will benefit airlines, destinations and tourism-related businesses.

### Communication and crisis management

"Clear communication has been key throughout the pandemic crisis and should remain consistent whenever there is a disaster – Turkey could have avoided such a fall in bookings, especially in Istanbul if crisis communications were laid out in time," says **Olivier Ponti**, VP of Insights, ForwardKeys.



planned air seat capacity, include Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (-1 per cent) and Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport (-9 per cent). India as a whole is just 9 per cent below 2019 levels," adds Gomez.

"As a source market, India has also managed to recover some ground and some regional leisure destinations are set to post growth on arrivals from India in Q2 versus 2019: Vietnam (+121 per cent) and Indonesia (+3 per cent)," he shares.

The data shows a recovery in global international air travel that could reach 80 per cent of 2019 volumes by the end of the first half of the year. Not all destinations are

class population is growing, and the number of outbound leisure travellers from the country is increasing as a result. Moreover, while India's intraregional outbound travel market is relatively small, it had experienced more growth (+10 per cent) than any of the other major Asia Pacific outbound markets – both international and intraregional – over the five years before the pandemic. Now that the country has fully reopened, ForwardKeys expects its development as an interregional outbound market to accelerate," states the report.

### Key trends

The report lists six key trends and opportunities to look out for in 2023.

and the likelihood of flight disruptions. "Despite travel restrictions now being lifted in most

India is the best-connected market in the APAC region		
Air Capacity for intraregional departure in Asia Pacific in Q2 2023, as scheduled on 20 March; vs 2019		
Origin markets*	Var vs 2019	
India	-9%	
Vietnam	-11%	
New Zealand	-12%	
Australia	-13%	
Singapore	-16%	
Philippines	-20%	
South Korea	-24%	
Indonesia	-25%	
Malaysia	-28%	
Taiwan	-33%	
<b>TOTAL INTRAREGIONAL</b>	<b>-32%</b>	
*With share in arrivals > 1.5%		
Source: ForwardKeys Air Tickets Data		

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# CEOs' take on future of aviation

The aviation industry in India is facing challenges and opportunities equally, as it recovers from the pandemic. Leaders from major airlines, including Air India, IndiGO, Jet Airways, Vistara, and SpiceJet, share their diverse perspectives with **ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY** on issues such as sustainability, growth potential, infrastructure development, fleet rationalization, and profitability.



Janice Alysius

**S**taying ahead of the curve is crucial for success in the competitive aviation industry. This is why the leaders of some of India's major airlines, such as Air India, Air India Express, IndiGO, and Jet Airways, are constantly strategizing and adapting to changes in the industry. One area that has become increasingly important is environmental sustainability, as more and more companies prioritize eco-friendly practices. **Campbell Wilson**, CEO,



**Alok Singh**  
CEO, Air India Express

investment. "While growth may currently be the top priority for the ecosystem, we cannot ignore our commitment to the net zero by 2050 goal that the industry has signed up for. As part of this commitment, we have partnered with the Indian Institute of Petroleum to develop sustainable aviation fuels, although there is still much work



**Sanjiv Kapoor**  
CEO, Jet Airways

achieved with relatively few operational disruptions. In contrast, Europe and the US faced significant challenges during their recoveries. While there were some challenges in terms of queues at airports, the V-shaped recovery itself is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our workforce, teams, and procedures. In just six months, we were able to increase our number of weekly flights from a few hundred to 1,800, which is a remarkable achievement."



**Ajay Singh**  
CEO, SpiceJet



**Campbell Wilson**  
CEO, Air India

**While growth may currently be the top priority for the ecosystem, we cannot ignore the industry's commitment to the net zero by 2050**

Air India, is a strong believer that this focus on sustainability will play a critical role in decision-making for corporate accounts and investments. On the other hand, other leaders such as **Alok Singh**, CEO, Air India Express and **Peter Albers**, CEO, IndiGO, emphasize on the potential for growth and innovation in India's aviation industry. However,

**We will continue to pursue current strategy and explore new markets, realizing synergies between low-cost entities and parent company**

**Sanjiv Kapoor**, CEO, Jet Airways, expresses concern over whether the country's infrastructure can keep up with the high demand for air travel. **Vinod Kannan**, CEO, Vistara, stresses on the importance of achieving scale for lower costs and increased utilization. **Ajay Singh**, CEO, SpiceJet, aims to utilize their regional fleet to strengthen operations in international markets and return to pre-COVID capacity levels. The industry has faced challenges due to COVID, but SpiceJet's higher yields and load factors indicate that demand is still strong. These diverse perspectives highlight the complexity and challenges of the aviation industry in India, and the need for innovative solutions to ensure sustainable growth.

Wilson, the CEO of Air India, said that environmental sustainability will become a key factor in the decision-making process for corporate accounts in the aviation industry. It will affect finances and



**Peter Albers**  
CEO, IndiGO

**What is impressive is that this (domestic market recovery surpassing pre-COVID levels) has been achieved with few operational disruptions**

to be done in terms of infrastructure. In addition, we are investing over \$70 billion in new aircraft to ensure that we operate an efficient, modern, and sustainable fleet that minimizes our emissions," he said.

Singh, the CEO of Air India Express, anticipated a significant growth in the next three to five years, especially in the low-cost carrier (LCC) market, which is dominant in both the domestic and short-haul international markets. "Air India Express plans to take advantage of opportunities in both markets and

**There has been a huge focus on infra investment in the past and I believe that as long as the infra can keep up, the market potential is not an issue**

increase capacity in existing ones. The company will also continue to pursue its current strategy and explore new markets, realizing synergies between its low-cost entities and the parent company," he said. "Fleets will be a critical component of our growth strategy, and we have already begun to rationalize our route network structure between the full-service and low-cost entities. Markets and routes that are more suitable for the LCC model, such as non-business type, VFR, and leisure, will gradually transition to the LCC side of the business. For instance, stations like Surat, Bagdogra, Bhubaneswar and Ranchi will see the full-service capacity move out and being replaced by the low-cost entity," he added.

Albers, the CEO of IndiGO, highlighted India's potential for growth, given its position as the fifth largest economy globally, with aspirations to become the third largest by 2030. IndiGO aims to take its digital efforts to the next level, as India is a great country for digital innovation. Albers said, "It is certainly true that India has experienced a V-shaped recovery, as discussed by the Minister of Civil Aviation. India is one of the largest aviation countries in the world, and the domestic market has already surpassed pre-COVID levels, while the international market is recovering quickly. What is impressive is that this has been

Kapoor, the CEO of Jet Airways, agrees that aviation demand in India grows at 1.5x to 2x of GDP growth and that India has significant market potential. However, he is concerned about whether the infrastructure can keep up with the demand. "There has been a huge



**Vinod Kannan**  
CEO, Vistara

**Vistara aims to increase its international capacity from 25 per cent to 40 per cent and reach a fleet size of 70 in the next year**

focus on infrastructure investment in the past and I believe that as long as the infrastructure can keep up, the market potential is not an issue," he said.

Kannan, the CEO of Vistara, shared his views on the future of India's aviation industry and stressed on the importance of achieving scale for airlines to benefit from lower costs and increased utilization. "While ideal fleet size depends on context and goals, Vistara aims to increase its international capacity from 25 per

**Higher demand has led to increased yields of around 15-20% compared to last year, indicating that the crisis has not adversely affected the industry**

cent to 40 per cent and reach a fleet size of 70 in the next year," he said. He also emphasized on aircraft configuration and said it should match demand and purpose. Vistara's A320 planes are performing well for international operations and some smaller cities benefiting from single-class configurations, he added.

Singh, the CEO of SpiceJet, emphasized on the objective of utilizing the current assets, particularly the regional fleet, despite the challenges emerging due to the pandemic, which affected OEMs and some specific issues related to SpiceJet. "The airline is taking measures to address these challenges and strengthen its operations, particularly in international markets where it had 40 per cent capacity before," he said. Singh aims to return to that level as soon as possible while focusing on profitable markets. "Higher demand has led to increased yields of around 15-20 per cent compared to the previous year, indicating that the crisis has not adversely affected the industry. SpiceJet has discovered that increasing fares do not necessarily result in reduced traffic, as load factors are currently at 95 per cent and even reach 97-98 per cent on some days. Therefore, there is still room to increase fares, while maintaining this level of demand," he added.



# Laying down the green carpet

SEBI has mandated top 1,000 listed companies in India by market capitalization to make filings as per the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting from FY23. In line with this, Thomas Cook India & SOTC Travel have tied up with LTIMindtree to launch 'Green Carpet' - a global platform for enterprises to manage business travel emissions.



TT Bureau

Global warming and its resultant impact on the environment and mankind have forced countries across the world to take concrete measures to curb the damage and preserve the future – and India is at the forefront of this movement. SEBI has mandated the top 1,000 listed companies in India by market capitalization to make filings as per the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) from FY23. Coming against this backdrop, Thomas Cook (India) and its group company SOTC Travel have announced their partnership with global technology consulting and digital solutions company LTI-Mindtree to launch 'Green Carpet' – a global platform to monitor and manage business travel emissions.

Green Carpet is built on the combined prowess of Thomas Cook & SOTC's expertise in the travel industry, LTIMindtree's Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG)



**Madhavan Menon**  
Chairman & Managing Director  
Thomas Cook (India)

consulting and digital solutions capabilities and also leverages the global expertise of Fairfax Digital Services (a Fairfax company). A SaaS-based platform, Green Carpet is designed to address specific concerns faced by organizations, helping them capture, monitor, analyze and reduce their carbon emissions from business travel. It offers real-time insights

related to Scope 3 emissions and helps them reduce their ESG reporting costs.

**Madhavan Menon**, Chairman & Managing Director, Thomas Cook (India), said, "Under its G20 Presidency, India has set ambitious ESG goals, and India Inc. has been called on to implement

**Green Carpet is designed to address concerns faced by organizations, helping them capture, monitor, analyze and reduce carbon emissions**

SEBI's BRSR mandate starting FY23. The need for a trustworthy partner to provide accuracy and speed in reporting is hence



an imperative. At Thomas Cook & SOTC, our leadership in the travel sector formed the basis of our partnership with LTIMindtree – a technology solutions provider. Green Carpet, therefore, not only embodies this potent partnership of leaders, but also leverages the global expertise of Fairfax Digital Services to collectively empower enterprises with the ability to seamlessly monitor and manage business travel emissions and drive their net zero goals."

**Sudhir Chaturvedi**, President and Executive Board Member, LTIMindtree, said, "ESG has become a board-level priority for nearly all organisations, especially in cogni-

zance of India's ambitious goal to reach net-zero emissions by 2070. To achieve this goal, organisations are investing in initiatives and infrastructure that will enable them to track, reduce and report carbon footprint seamlessly. The Green Carpet will help climate-conscious

**Sanjay Tugnait**, CEO, Fairfax Digital Services, said: "In this the year of India's G20 Presidency, as a member of the G20 Startup 20 Task Force on Sustainability, under the leadership of Dr Chintan Vaishnav, I am delighted we have built this digital solution that India can showcase among the G20 nations."

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US visa costs are set to increase as processing fees for certain categories rise

Air India to fly direct connecting Gatwick to Ahmedabad, Amritsar, Kochi & Goa

Unified Air India Express & AirAsia India interface records 25 per cent international flight revenue on launch day

Ministry of Tourism's Yuva Sangam initiative to strengthen people-to-people connect, especially among youth

36 per cent travel managers say sustainability more important factor than it was pre-pandemic: Cvent

Thomas Cook India inks long-term agreement to set up forex outlets at Manohar International Airport, Mopa – Goa

Post Covid, travellers favour non-stop connections and simple flight itineraries

Free Singapore tour for transfer and transit pax is back

# Green Tourism top priority at TWG meet

Arvind Singh, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, shares details of the second Tourism Working Group (TWG) meeting, held in Siliguri, West Bengal, from 1-3 April 2023. Fifty-six delegates from 17 member countries, eight invitee countries and four international organizations attended the meeting.



Nisha Verma

**G**kishan Reddy, Minister of Tourism, Culture and DONER, along with **John Barla**, Minister of State for Minority Affairs, graced the inaugural session of the TWG meeting, attended by 56 delegates from 17 member countries, eight invitee countries and four international organizations.

The working group meeting was preceded by side event on 1 April on the theme, 'Adventure Tourism as a vehicle for achieving Sustainable Development Goals'. Discussions were held on promoting Adventure Tourism and presentations on Global and Indian scenario of Adventure Tourism were given.

Reddy, in his inaugural address, said, "The vision is to make India a one trillion dollar tourism economy by 2047 - our 100<sup>th</sup> year of Independence."

He said that MOT has also formulated a Draft National Tourism Policy. The new policy is a holistic frame-



Arvind Singh  
Secretary, Ministry of Tourism

work for sustainable and responsible growth of the tourism sector in the country and aims at improving framework conditions for tourism development in the country."

Singh informed that the next TWG meeting will be held in North India. He said that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> TWG meeting, all countries unanimously adopted green tourism to be the most important priority for all the participating countries. "In the first

working group meeting in Rann of Kutch, we had introduced the priorities and everybody gave the initial remarks. In Siliguri, there was a deeper discussion, because after the first working group meeting, the UNWTO had conducted a survey among all the member countries. Their responses had come on the priorities and the result of those surveys was presented by UNWTO. The UNEP had made a presentation on the Mission for LIFE, which was launched by the Prime Minister and the UN Secretary General, which was relevant for the tourism sector and how it can be adapted because that is also part of what will be one of the deliverables after the ministerial meeting at Goa," he informed. He added, "The UNWTO conducted a workshop among all the countries, who shared all the priorities. All the countries engaged, participated very positively, gave their suggestions. Finally, we had presentations by all the countries on various themes. There were high quality presentations, which were appreciated by all."

Presentations were made by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Indonesia, Italy on five priorities of Green Tourism, Digitalisation, Skills, Tourism MSMEs, Destination Management respectively.

**All countries unanimously adopted green tourism to be the most important priority for all the participating countries**

Singh also mentioned that the two themed side events on adventure tourism were also good. "One side event brought a global perspective and the global best practices were shared with G20 candidates, delegates and the Indian industry. On the second day, we saw a totally domestic perspective, as best

practices in India were shared. State representatives from Northeast, Uttarakhand, Jammu & Kashmir and industry representatives were also present," he informed.

Overall, in terms of substantive output also, he said, "We are satisfied and progressing in the right direction as far as our deliverables, which is the Goa communique, which will happen after the ministerial meeting and the Travel for Life campaign communique, that will also come out. We have two more working group meetings. The next one will be from 22-24 May in Northern India and in June the last working group meeting will be held in Goa, which will be followed by the ministerial meeting there."

Singh also shared that they are pushing theme areas at every meeting. "At Rann of Kutch, we pushed rural tourism and archaeological tourism, which were relevant for that area. We promoted adventure tourism at Darjeeling and Siliguri, and we will promote cruise tourism at Goa," he said.

## Mehra set for 2<sup>nd</sup> term at IATO

Rajiv Mehra re-elected unopposed as the President of IATO for a second term for 2023-24, along with other office-bearers. Election for the IATO Executive Committee is scheduled on 18 April 2023.



Nisha Verma

**T**hanking members of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) for unanimously electing him unopposed for the second time, **Rajiv Mehra** said that he is grateful to all the members to have their trust in him. "I thank them for seeing how hard we have worked in the last two years. I would continue doing the same, along with my team for the next two years as well. There are a lot of things that still need to be done, and we are trying our level best to do so. Once again, my thanks to each and everyone in the IATO membership for having me and all my office-bearers on the post," he added.

Apart from Mehra, the other office-bearers have also been elected unopposed. **Rajnish Kaistha** is the Senior Vice President, **Ravi Gosain** remains Vice President, **Sanjay Razdan** is Honorary Secretary and Sunil Mishra is the Honorary Treasurer. Voting will happen for the Executive Committee members on 18 April 2023.



Rajiv Mehra  
President, IATO

### Maharashtra convention

Sharing details on the IATO Annual Convention in Maharashtra, he said, "The 2023 convention has already been announced for Aurangabad at Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar. Approvals from the Maharashtra government have already come and we have started doing our work on that. Shortly, I and Mr. Gosain will go to Sambhaji Nagar to finalise the events. We will be finalizing the dates in a month or a month and a half." Mehra also informed that in 2024 they have

two states that have invited them to host their convention "Documents have been submitted to all of them, and as and when we get a call and whoever gives the first call, the convention will go to them directly," he shared.

**2025 convention in Odisha?** For 2025 Convention, he shared, "I had made the announcement in Bhubaneswar in February that

**2023 convention has already been announced for Aurangabad. Approvals from the Maharashtra government have already come**

we have submitted our proposal to the Odisha Tourism Minister, who would take it to the Chief Minister for his approval."

## MOT plans major M!CE drive

Rakesh Verma, Additional Secretary, MOT, claims that M!CE in India has a bright future with the Ministry planning a new campaign keeping in view various options surrounding the G20 Presidency.



Nisha Verma

**R**akesh Verma, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism (MOT), has said that the G20 Presidency of India is a great opportunity to present the country's M!CE potential. "We are going to step up our efforts to promote India as a M!CE destination. We are going to pick up all 55 destinations where G20 meetings are going to be held as places to be promoted. We are also launching a major campaign around M!CE in digital marketing space, so that people come to know about it. The M!CE conferences, which are going outside, at least they will explore venues within India, generally mobilizing India as a destination for M!CE tourism," he added.

MOT recently organised the second Tourism Working Group meeting in Siliguri. Verma gave a presentation on the proceedings of the event alongside Secretary, Tourism, sharing details on how the delegates attending the meeting, not only deliberated on the issues and topics at hand with



Rakesh Verma  
Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism

each other, but also experienced the various facets of the beautiful destination. While Siliguri is not popularly known as a destination for M!CE events. Verma, however, concedes, "Darjeeling is an established destination and it receives a lot of tourists and the entire region of Siliguri, Darjeeling area has a lot of potential and we will continue to focus on this. There are a lot of adventure tourism opportunities. I am sure that this has got an impetus due to our G20 meeting and we will focus on that."

### NIDHI progress

Speaking on the NIDHI portal, Verma said, "Nidhi portal has further grown, and we have now got the travel trade move to that. We are now putting a destination centric website view where you pick up one destination and you can get all

**We (at Ministry of Tourism) are also launching a major campaign around M!CE in digital marketing space, so that people come to know about it**

hotels, tour operators, attractions and tourist guides also. We are trying to now make it more holistic. It hasn't yet been launched in a big way, but now that we have tried, tested and everyone is on board, we will have a launch of NIDHI in a big way."

# TNZ hopes for direct air connectivity

New Zealand considers India a priority market. The two countries can get direct air connectivity once the visitor numbers are encouraging enough, says Angela Blair, GM International, Tourism New Zealand, celebrating 20 years of her organisation's presence in India.



Hazel Jain

**A**ngela Blair, General Manager International, Tourism New Zealand, was in India recently, along with a huge delegation of travel trade from New Zealand, to celebrate 20 years of presence in India with the travel trade in Mumbai and New Delhi. She said, "We have 20 industry partners, including activities, hotels and DMOs, airlines as well as airports. They conducted frontline training with 200 travel sellers in Mumbai and Delhi. We are also celebrating 20 years of Tourism New Zealand in India."

From 2015 to 2019 the visitor numbers from India to New Zealand doubled to reach 66,775 visitors in 2019.

"Recovery of all of our international markets is tied closely to air connectivity. We are constrained with some of the connectivity coming from our Asian hubs. But we are

**Continued growth would mean a possibility of direct connectivity between India and New Zealand, which would be a big unlock for us**

really encouraged by being able to offer online visas, which means you don't have to be in the main centres to go through the visa process," she said, adding, "India is a priority market for us. It is an emerging market and in our top 10 source markets. Continued growth would mean a possibility of direct connectivity between India and New Zealand, which would be an enormous unlock for us. With this, India could climb up the ranks."

Tourism New Zealand also has an incentive programme that it looks at on a case to case basis.

"We are seeing exponential growth in MICE travel and have recently signed up our first incentive group. One of things we look for are high-quality visitors – several things define them. It's the range of activities they take part in, how they travel across seasons and across regions, it's

the way they engage with our culture and our community, as well as the care they show to our environment. Our Indian visitors very much set in that. They participate in a high number of activities when they visit. We do see a big increase in visitors coming to New Zealand as a mono destination. Pre-COVID the average stay was 14 days," Blair said.



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The national tourist organisation (NTO) will now conduct its big trade show TRENZ that is taking place in Christchurch from 9-11 May 2023, where 15 travel agents from India will be hosted. The New Zealand trade delegation

included a diverse mix of Regional Tourism Organisations, hotels, attractions, airports and airlines from New Zealand.

The focus of the frontline training workshops was for the New Zealand industry to reconnect with Indian travel trade. They shared the latest destination information and experiences in New Zealand and

highlighted destination readiness, as India approaches its peak travel season, which coincides with New Zealand's autumn and winter. This was also a great opportunity for Tourism New Zealand to celebrate 20 years of operations in India with trusted partners and pay tribute to the role they played in the growth of Indian tourism to New Zealand.



**Angela Blair**  
GM International  
Tourism New Zealand

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# Surge in summer travel demand



**Sanjay Arya**  
CEO  
KFT Corporation

“ This summer has seen a surge in travel demand, as people look to make up for a year of missed holidays. The most booked destinations this summer is Europe, with countries like Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Italy being the most popular. Additionally, beach destinations such as Cancun, Miami, and the Caribbean have seen significant increase in sales. The travel industry has experienced a rebound in business, with financially fortunate individuals being more willing than ever to splurge on luxurious travel. Business is booming as people take advantage of competitive prices and flexible booking options. Airlines and hotels have seen an uptick in bookings, and many travel companies are reporting strong recovery. Visa issues have been a persistent challenge.”



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

“ During peak summer booking season, we have witnessed 4x surge in demand for long haul and 3x for short haul and domestic destinations compared to the previous year. Europe continues to top our demand pipeline with a surge of over 300 per cent, followed by Southeast Asia's Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia; with Vietnam and Cambodia witnessing brisk business; also Maldives, Mauritius, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Ras Al-Khaimah. Additionally mid-long hauls like Australia, New Zealand, Turkey and South Africa are also seeing strong re-emergence. Also bucket-list destinations like Iceland and Rhodes Island in Greece. There is big growth in travel to Japan and South Korea for the Cherry Blossom season. Baku and Almaty with convenient access are popular.”



**Manoj Saraf**  
Managing Director  
Gainwell Travel & Leisure

“ This summer is seeing huge demand for a number of new destinations, as well as old favourites. The international destinations that are selling the most are Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, Switzerland and Europe. Cruises are very popular amongst Indians this season. However, getting a visa appointment for many of the destinations is proving to be a deterrent for travellers who want to explore international shores this summer. I believe that there seems to be a deliberate attempt to create hurdles in smooth issuance of visa for some Schengen countries and United States of America (USA). The appointment slots are being sold at a premium and it seems that all stakeholders are aware of this issue, but still they are choosing to turn a blind eye to what's happening.”



**Daniel D'Souza**  
President & Country Head - Holidays  
SOTC Travel

“ Long and mid haul destinations leading demand are Europe's Switzerland and France, Turkey, South Korea, Japan, Egypt, Jordan, Australia and New Zealand. Given visa challenges, our internal data indicates high interest for visa on arrival/easy and quick visa destinations like Singapore, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Oman, Ras Al Khaimah, Thailand, Indonesia, Maldives, Mauritius, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Seychelles; also Bhutan from the Indian subcontinent. The visa challenge is two pronged: obtaining appointment slots coupled with technical challenges faced by applicants on the appointment booking pages of Austria, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland. Italy, France and Spain currently do not have appointment slots.”



**Ankit Bajaj**  
Manager  
Chiky Travels

“ This year the tourism industry is at its peak this summer and the entire Indian population has their mindsets and schedules spaced with a plan for a good leisure trip with their friends or families. Some of the preferred domestic destinations include Kashmir, Ladakh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim (which was slightly affected due to recent natural calamity), and Rajasthan. Some of the preferred international destinations for my clients are Turkey, Azerbaijan, Singapore, Bali, Vietnam, and of course Europe. However, visa is creating a lot of hurdles in execution of these trips, appointments are lately like a lottery, VFS also sometimes plays to mint money with their premium lounge arrangements (where appointment are only available when one buys their premium lounge).”



**Ajay Chhabria**  
Partner  
Intime Travels By Design

“ There is tremendous pressure on travel agents. Europe being a hot favourite every summer, putting huge pressure on us agents for Schengen visa dates. People want cooler places in summer, so Europe still is number one but many who have valid USA and UK visas, are opting for Turkey as that is an e-visa online. Japan is a country many are opting for, and USA and UK are top on every family list as backups as many have family based there. Canada has strangely fastened up on the visa front, while Asian countries and Middle East countries' visas are a cakewalk. Number one is Europe, which is yet in demand and people are trying every way possible for appointments. Many agents have made it a business to sell Schengen visa ODMV dates for money.”



**Anshu Tejuja**  
Managing Director  
Ashoka Dream Holidays

“ The destinations selling most this summer include the ever-green Europe. However, I have seen clients wanting to explore more offbeat and unusual places in the countryside and village areas, beaches as well and add on new experiences in destinations already visited. A lot of people want to include gastronomic experiences in their itinerary. With increased spending power of high-end travelers, sale of business class travel and suite rooms has increased to make a statement. Apart from Europe, Asia and Australia, cruises in Japan, offbeat Africa, Vietnam and Korea have also done very well for us this summer. The visa challenges continue but things are slightly better than what they were last year. The planning needs to be done in advance.”



**Meha Vashi**  
Director  
Nivalink Holidays

“ Switzerland is all time favourite, along with Alpine countries in Europe along with Scandinavia (specifically Norway and Finland). In short-haul travel CIS countries such as Azerbaijan are in demand, along with South East Asian Countries (specifically Thailand and Vietnam). In India, Himalayas are always one to head for in summer for travellers. While there is overall demand for Kashmir, Himachal, Uttarakhand and Darjeeling-Sikkim, travellers are also looking at lesser visited areas of Upper Kumaon and offbeat Himachal (Sangla Valley, Lahaul Valley, Spiti Valley and Banjar Valley). We are expecting 20-25 per cent volume growth for Summer 2023 over Summer 2022. Visa processing capacity for Europe in general continues to fall short of demand.”



**Rajat Bagaria**  
Managing Director  
Shrishti Tours & Travels

“ Europe as usual is the flavour for the summers, but at the same time, other destinations are in demand, thanks to the visa complications. Austria, Italy, Croatia, Norway and Iceland are in focus. On the other side - Bhutan, Mauritius & Maldives do get their share. Sri Lanka is also an area of interest for many. Domestic holidays continue in big numbers. Destinations where new direct flights have started or connections have improved, are showing good growth. Business is good. Visas are definitely hampering business. Appointment dates for US, and Schengen visas are difficult. Considering the number of tourists Europe gets from India - they should have a better streamlined policy to encash. Overall, the business is not suffering, but getting shifted to other destinations.”



**Anju Tandon**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Ark Travel Group

“ Europe still holds a lot of charm for the traveller. France and Switzerland are still all-time favourite with people. Also, a first-time traveller to Europe has these two destinations as his first choice. Spain is fast catching up with the old favourites. Since summer vacations are longer than the rest of the breaks, long haul destinations are more in demand. Many a time the client is choosing a destination for the ease of visa appointments and time frame of issuance for each individual country. Higher airfares are also proving to be a deterrent for the coming season. There are no appointments for visa submissions and longer processing time for most European visa is a sincere concern as one is not able to achieve the desired numbers for want of these.”



**Rajesh Magow**  
Co-Founder and Group CEO  
MakeMyTrip

“ On the international front, while long-haul destinations, including Europe, are generating a lot of interest, short-haul destinations such as Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Maldives, and UAE make it to the top five. India's rainbow offering of diverse cultures and landscapes, offering varied destinations to travellers, is coming to the fore in our booking mix. Goa, Kochi, Srinagar, Dehradun, and Leh are the most sought-after domestic flight destinations. From an accommodation lens, the top ten most booked destinations remain consistent, led by Goa. Leading metropolitan cities, such as Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Chennai, take the next five slots. Jaipur, followed by Kolkata and Pune, complete the top ten list.”



**Alefiya Singh**  
Director  
IRIS Reps India

“ This year, summer travel season looks promising, we can see a tremendous boost from India to Mauritius. Dubai is always in prime demand for summer holidays. Within this skyline are also some of the best hotels in the world. Indian vacationers are also choosing cruises. Vietnam is not only famous for the beautiful natural landscapes but also well-known for its untouched beach resources and limestone bays. If you are planning your tours to Vietnam from India, taking the Paradise Vietnam cruise is one of the must-do things that you will not want to miss. Several foreign missions in India are finding it difficult to process the sudden high demand for visas. We expect an improvement in the visa situation for Europe and UK, thus allowing more customers to travel to their favourite destinations.”

# Get The Royal treatment in Dubai

Atlantis Dubai has just launched its ultra-luxury Atlantis, The Royal, which gives travel agents one more reason to sell Dubai. Neil Shah, Director (Sales), Atlantis Dubai, who was in India recently, says India is among their top five source markets for Atlantis, The Palm and they expect good number of visitors for Atlantis, The Royal as well.



Hazel Jain

Atlantis Dubai consists of two resorts, Atlantis, The Palm, which opened in 2008 and Atlantis, The Royal, which started recently on February 10, 2023. It saw a spectacular launch with performances from Beyonce and Swedish House Mafia with a host of global celebrities in attendance. **Neil Shah**, Director (Sales), Atlantis Dubai, was in India recently to meet the travel trade in Chennai, Hyderabad, and Bengaluru as part of a roadshow, and interacted with some boutique travel designers in Mumbai. Atlantis Dubai also hosted some key Mumbai agents for evening cocktails and dinner to introduce them to Atlantis, The Royal.

"We are seeing a great response from India for this. India is (among) our top five source markets for Atlantis, The Palm and we expect good

milestone events, plus FIT luxury travellers, which is a big market for us," Shah says.

Atlantis, The Palm was completely refurbished in 2018. Today, it has brand new rooms and it has also expanded its waterpark, which makes it the world's largest waterpark. Atlantis Dubai now has an inventory of 1,544 keys at The

## About Atlantis, The Royal

The 43-storey ultra-luxury resort offers a collection of 795 rooms, including 693 standard rooms, 96 suites, and 6 signature penthouses with stunning views of the Dubai skyline and the Arabian Sea. The 17 restaurants and bars at the resort, include eight restaurants by celebrity chefs creating cuisines ranging from Peruvian, Mediterranean, Spanish to Contemporary British offering dining experiences like no other. All stays at Atlantis, The Royal also include complimentary access to Atlantis Aquaventure, the largest waterpark in the world.

Palm and 795 at The Royal. Shah adds, "It is easy to go online and book today, but when it comes to the HNIs, they expect travel specialists to have all details about the properties and that's why we are getting a great response. India is our top key source market. We will soon have a global reward program for the travel agents as an incentive for them. We already have

that for Atlantis, The Palm where on every booking they get an additional incentive. It is updated on our system and they receive all our updates. We have about 400 global members at the moment in India. They get an incentive on every room night they book – US \$5 for entry category and US \$7 for Club category and US \$10 for every night of a suite booked." 



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**Neil Shah**  
Director (Sales), Atlantis Dubai



**We will soon have a reward program for the travel agents. We already have that for Atlantis, The Palm where they get an additional incentive on every booking**

numbers for Atlantis, The Royal as well. The array of curated experiences offered by the resort warrants longer stays and we are anticipating an increase in the number of visitors in the coming months. It is one of the most ultra luxury experiential resort. We will focus on all traveller segments from India for this. We already have requests coming from corporates for MICE, leisure groups with large families wanting to celebrate

# Visitors look for new destinations



**Rahim Aslam**  
Founder & Consultant  
One Above DMIC

“ Business from India can grow in double digits, one of the fastest in the world. But some deterrents are – most of the destinations has increased cost up to 30 to 50 per cent and airlines more than 50 per cent, which plays a major role in choosing a destination. The future looks bright for short haul destinations like Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Philippines, and Vietnam. Europe is already sitting with 95 percent occupancy this summer for FITs, group series and leisure groups. We expect to see many exciting opportunities for globetrotters from India looking for unforgettable trips throughout the world. To attract more Indians many countries uplifted the restrictions this year, the travel loads have increased majorly. ”



**Nitin John**  
Vice-Chairman & Director  
Riya Group

“ Indians are now looking at at least one international vacation every year. Middle East, Singapore, Europe, UK, Vietnam, Thailand and Maldives will always be top summer favourites. Our strategy is to plan unique domestic trips during shorter holidays and a fabulous international destination for that one gigantic family vacation. We are seeing a similar growth for rail travel. Cruise is another segment with strong summer potential. It is predicted that summer travel will surpass pre-pandemic levels. This year, there has been significant reduction in visa appointment waiting period. However, there is need to reach at least pre-pandemic level. Hence, we are encouraging people to plan their summer trips to countries with a quick turnaround time. ”



**Rikant Pittie**  
Co-Founder  
EaseMyTrip

“ This summer, people are keen on planning a rejuvenating vacation to beat the scorching heat. Ladakh, with its snow-capped mountains, pleasant weather, and picturesque views, is their go-to destination. Travellers' second choice is the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. We have witnessed a 70 per cent increase in searches on our platform and are expecting a growth trajectory through the summer season. With the resurgence in travel, delays in visa appointments continue to disrupt travel plans for the second consecutive year. However, several destinations, especially Schengen area countries, are making it possible for travellers to obtain visas in two to three days. Even the visa application period has been extended from 3 to 6 months. ”



**Pradeep Kumar Rai**  
Managing Director  
Skyline India Travels

“ This year is quite good for Tourism. Though domestic is in large numbers in comparison to foreign tourists. Important destinations visited by tourists this year is Varanasi along with Prayagraj and Ayodhya because of best connectivity by air, rail & road. UP Tourism and Government of India have given appreciable effort for promotion of spiritual & pilgrimage tourism along with options to spend quality time with lots of changes and promotions. Tourists are also going to Agra and Gaya along with hill destinations like Manali, Spiti, Simla, Kufri, Nainital & Jim Corbett. Goa as usual is the hottest selling destination for India. Internationally, most in-demand destination is Vietnam. Other than that, outbound is popular for Europe, UK, Canada and USA. ”



**Vinay Malhotra**  
Head of Global Sales  
IndiGo

“ The Indian aviation sector witnessed a record number of flyers in the second half of 2022 surpassing the pre-Covid levels, with the growth streak continuing in 2023. We are expecting this summer to have an uptick in Domestic as well as international travel. We have been expanding in both, international as well as domestic markets. We are currently operating over 1800 daily flights, covering 400 routes, across 78 domestic and 26 international destinations. We are further planning to add 600 weekly flights this summer season. We have recently announced new destinations including Dharamshala and Nashik and commenced operations from North Goa, Hollongi, and Deoghar. We're also planning to expand our network. ”



**Anil Kalsi**  
Joint Secretary  
TAFI

“ The travel bug is taking Indians to all parts of the world. It is no longer a luxury to travel overseas, as the middle income group also aspires to travel to value destinations in the neighbouring countries. It's the experience and knowledge addition to the traveller that opens new vistas to their personality and growth. Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore top the current list. The well-travelled are planning to travel to Europe, UK, USA, Canada and Australia, more so since they can afford the additional cost of getting priority visas or already have long term visas. A fair number of aspirational travellers are having major visa problems as getting visa interview dates are certainly a deterrent. ”



**P P Khanna**  
President  
ADTOI

“ With the hectic current academic session coming to an end, the summer rush could be seen all around the country. Hills, coastal areas would be preferred by all age groups. Pilgrim tourism will also be promoted by the religious groups. With the Government initiatives Northeast has come up very well as far as the infrastructure and connectivity are concerned. Being G20 Presidency year, all states would make special efforts to maximise tourist traffic to their states and bring out special promotional campaign with the latest additions. Kashmir, Leh, Ladakh witnessed an unprecedented tourist rush last summer. New destinations have been developed in Jammu (Bhaderwah), Kashmir (Doodhpathri) and Ladakh (Kargil) and there can be shift in the preferred destination. ”



**Prateek Hira**  
Chairman, FICCI Uttar Pradesh  
& IATO UP Chapter

“ Summer of 2023 is expected to be an indication of the trends of travel after almost full recovery of domestic travel. In fact, in many cases the numbers have surpassed the pre-COVID levels. Also, with the restriction-less opening of international destinations, long-haul travel is back with the only downside being the high fares and the visa waiting period of many countries which has become long and impractical for leisure travellers. Kashmir and Ladakh have suddenly become preferred destinations since last year and this year too it's on rise. Even the higher terrains of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand are generating huge interest among domestic travellers. Surprisingly even the scorching heat of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, are in great demand this summer. ”



**Sunil C Gupta**  
Director, Travel Bureau  
Chairman, IATO North Region

“ The Indian Outbound has started well despite high airfares, limited seat availability, TCS and Visa struggles. The destinations doing well are Vietnam, Azerbaijan and the traditional southeast and middle east countries. New tours to Cyprus, Iran, Lebanon are exciting. Almaty and Uzbekistan are also getting popular and getting leisure groups and conferences. Saudi Arabia and Oman are also wooing Indian holiday Makers and doing well. Cruise travel is also widely accepted now after the pandemic. The traditional destinations like Paris, Switzerland remain on top of the favorites. Visa remains a dampener for most European countries and USA and late appointments will not help tourists during this summer. ”



**Rajiv Mehra**  
President  
IATO

“ This summer season, people are preferring different locations to go for a change. We had a meeting with the tourism minister of Maharashtra, where we were talking about visiting the state in monsoon season, as they are talking about some destinations for the same. It's a very good idea to seek both domestic and international tourists in monsoon. Apart from the routine destinations like Mussorie and Nainital in North India or in the hills, and some hills in Maharashtra or Ooty. There are few new destinations coming up whether it is in Kerala, Karnataka or Mumbai. Hence, I am quite hopeful that people would like to go and avoid the crowd at other places. People prefer places where there is less rush. They are checking in to hotels in those areas and avoid run-of-the-mill places. ”



**Valmiki Harikishan**  
Managing Director  
Valmiki Travel & Tourism Solutions

“ Destinations popular this summer include Vietnam, Dubai, CIS countries like Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Thailand remains an all-time favourite. However, VISA issues for major destinations are continuing. Huge delays in obtaining visa for European countries and USA. Hence travellers are choosing visa-free, visa-on-arrival or hassle-free visa countries to travel. Most of the countries are giving Visa on Arrival if Indians have a valid US, UK, Schengen visa, then they are given visa on arrival. To resolve the issues, staffing problem needs to be sorted out at the earliest by consulate and embassies to handle Indian travellers as post pandemic travel has increased beyond measure. Visas are getting delayed due to server down or cracked with few countries, which needs to be fixed urgently. ”



**SMA Sheeraz**  
Director  
Sheeraz Tours

“ There is a drastic boom in almost all the travel sectors, be it MICE, Leisure, or Fixed departures. Preferred destinations for summer are mostly European countries and some offbeat cities in Europe and Turkey. Also, Vietnam is picking up this time. Travellers from II & III tier cities want to explore places with longer itineraries for this vacation eg. like Yas Island in Abu Dhabi, ALULLA in Saudi destination like Hua Hin & Chiang Mai in Thailand & Malaysian Kota Kina Balu, Radang. Regular itineraries are not trending anymore. Schengen Visa & US visas have major appointment issues. Hence, the client is getting diverted to other countries. The embassies should outsource more staff to clear the dependencies and accept more applications to promote tourism. ”

Inputs by TT Bureau

# Catch up with startup culture: Naik

Shripad Yesso Naik, Minister of State for Tourism and Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Gol, speaking at 58th annual day function of the IHM Pusa, asks youth 'to foster a mindset of creating and promoting job opportunities' keeping in view the increasing startup culture in the country.



Janice Alyosius

**S**hripad Yesso Naik, Minister of State for Tourism and Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Government of India, has suggested the youth "to foster a mindset of creating and promoting job opportunities" keeping in view the increasing startup culture in the country.

"The country is gearing up for a startup culture, and it is imperative that students foster a mindset of creating and promoting job opportunities. I have full faith that the students will channel their efforts towards growth and development," he said in keynote address, while speaking as the Chief Guest at the 58th annual day function of the Institute of Hotel Management, Catering, and Nutrition, Pusa, recently.

During his speech, Naik emphasized the importance of hospitality in building bridges between people from different parts of the



**The country is gearing up for a startup culture, and it is imperative that students foster a mindset of creating and promoting job opportunities**

world. He also spoke about how the industry had changed over the years, with a focus on sustainability and responsible tourism.

He expressed happiness and praised the institute's efforts in teaching and encouraging students beyond the usual academic curriculum. "The students here are not only taught the skills required for a career in the hospitality industry, but also imparted life skills that would help them in their personal development," he said.

Praising the institute, he said, "It is one of the best hospitality institutes in the country. I am proud to note that the institute's students are spread across the world, working in some of the best hospitality organizations. The government's aim is to provide quality education and training to the students at the institute,

enabling them to build successful careers in the industry."


The event also included an awards ceremony, where the students who had excelled in different areas were felicitated. The annual day celebration was a huge success, with the Minister's address inspiring the students and faculty to continue their efforts in making IHM Pusa a

leading institution in hospitality education. The institute celebrated the 58th annual day on the theme of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", which advocates "one earth, one family, one future". The function was attended by dignitaries from the hospitality industry, as well as alumni and students of the institute. In his welcome address, the institute's director spoke about the significance

of the theme, highlighting how the hospitality industry brings people together, regardless of their background, culture, or nationality.

The event began with a cultural program that showcased the diversity and richness of India's cultural heritage. The performances included traditional dances, songs, and skits from different parts of the country.

The students put up a splendid show, leaving the audience spell-bound. An awards ceremony recognized students' achievements.

The Institute of Hotel Management Catering & Nutrition, Pusa, known as IHM Pusa, is the top hotel management institute in India, located in Delhi. The institute is situated in Pusa Institutional Area, New Delhi. 



**Shripad Yesso Naik**  
Minister of State for Tourism and Ports,  
Shipping and Waterways of India



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# LOT Polish flies high post Mumbai link

Amit Ray, Director India, DACH markets & Italy and Head of Global Corporate and Strategic Sales at LOT Polish Airlines, shares how they are catering to the needs of Indian travellers, especially now with an additional connection via Mumbai. He says that the plan is to showcase more destinations in Poland to Indians going forward.

 Nisha Verma

**A**mit Ray, Director India, DACH markets & Italy and Head of Global Corporate and Strategic Sales at LOT Polish Airlines informs that they entered the Indian market in September 2019 with direct flights between Delhi and Warsaw giving Indian consumers access to Central and Eastern Europe. "Post-COVID, we have gradually scaled up our frequencies to key markets worldwide. As far as India is concerned, we now operate seven weekly nonstop flights from India to our global hub in Warsaw—from Delhi every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday; and from Mumbai every Sunday and Wednesday. India has great potential and is considered a strategic market for LOT Polish Airlines, and we certainly desire to further strengthen our position and cooperate with Indian carriers here," he adds.

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**Amit Ray**  
Director India, DACH markets & Italy and Head of Global Corporate and Strategic Sales at LOT Polish Airlines

and on ground are suited for travellers in India, he shares, "Our engagement in India has been fruitful and we strongly believed in the Indian market from the beginning. For example, all flights between India and Poland are operated with our flagship aircraft, the modern Boeing 787 Dreamliner featuring three class of service—Economy Class, Premium Economy Class and Business Class.

On the culinary side, we are serving Indian food catered by well-known Taj Sats ex-India and by premium airline catering provider Do & Co ex-Poland, and we feature Indian movies and music for inflight entertainment. Furthermore, another crucial aspect for our valued customers from India is that we depart from Delhi and Mumbai during breakfast time, and passengers arrive at our global hub in Warsaw mid-day, giving them multiple options to continue their journey to many onward destinations across our network in Europe and North America. Our hub and spoke strategy, supported by our modern fleet and the onboard experience, are crucial pillars LOT Polish Airlines can build on – in India and globally, which is reflected in a net profit of approximately ₹1.8 billion in 2022."

  
**Our (LOT Polish Airlines') engagement in India has been fruitful and we strongly believed in the Indian market from the beginning**



work with them in a collaborative manner. Our B2B partners recognise that LOT Polish Airlines offers what their customers are looking for, and what the trade needs to work with us."

**Trade engagement**  
Lauding the support of the partnerships in the travel industry, he says, "We certainly appreciate the valuable partnership with the Indian travel trade community and we

work with them in a collaborative manner. Our B2B partners recognise that LOT Polish Airlines offers what their customers are looking for, and what the trade needs to work with us."

**Unique product**  
Amid several European carriers flying from India, LOT Polish has made its presence felt. Agrees Ray, "LOT Polish Airlines and India are a good fit. We strive to make our Indian guests feel welcomed aboard and enjoy the service they expect. LOT Polish Airlines is an independent airline with a 95-year long history; however, the airline and its staff are young at heart to provide a smooth customer experience."

dent airline with a 95-year long history; however, the airline and its staff are young at heart to provide a smooth customer experience."

**Partnerships**  
Speaking on codeshares, he says, "LOT Polish Airlines enjoys codeshare partnerships with other airlines from around the world, which share our understanding of customer service and guest experience. Among others these include Lufthansa, Swiss, Austrian Airlines, SAS, Singapore Airlines and, of course, Air India." 

# TourFox celebrates 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary

On 1 March 2023, TourFox celebrated its 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary at an exclusive event in Mumbai, hosted by the Honourable Consul General of Switzerland, Martin Maier, along with the Board of Directors of TourFox, CEO Toovey Abraham and key industry partners. It was a delightful evening with great music, special Swiss cuisine and a lucky draw.



# IRCTC chugs ahead with PPP support

Rajni Hasija, CMD, IRCTC, says how PPP is proving to be a gamechanger for the Indian Railways, as the private sector can add expertise to any government project. Going forward PPP will be the best way for developing better infrastructure and boost tourism, she adds.



Nisha Verma

**Rajni Hasija**, Chairman & Managing Director, Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), believes that public private partnership (PPP) is the best way forward. "We all know that PPP model has become the essence now-a-days because of two reasons- finance & scalability and maintenance standards. We need to have a specialist on board to handle the issues and have a good investment, so that new projects could be launched. Railways, as we know, involves a lot of investment. Thus, recently we made humble beginnings, where we started with launching executive lounges at the stations, and invited investments from the public sector. In the second spree we started launching budget hotels, where we had also invited the participation of various sectors in creating a budget hotel. Our bud-

Also, she added, "In theme-based tourism, we know that we are saving time for customers by travelling at night and doing excursions in the day. Thus, the train must be comfortable and to the standards of the tourism department. Thus, we are doing many modifications in the pantry cars and making the journey more comfortable by creating salons or creating dining cars

in the train, so that the passengers get some space to move around and be a little more comfortable. In this, we have noticed many times that not much competition is there, and private players don't have much technical knowledge of the subject. Thus, handholding of the private



partner is must, which IRCTC has been doing and we have been able to perform well also by delivering."

She said that there is a little scepticism about the performance in railway tourism because it is a mass tourism. "It becomes different from other tourism where

you must handle 700-800 guests at one time. Any change or delay in running of the trains may cause changes in the itinerary and that must be handled and executed beautifully. Otherwise, we are going to get complaints. Hence, the education of the private partner really helps and we have been pioneering that and have been very successful in executing that," she claimed.



Rajni Hasija  
CMD  
IRCTC

**Recently, we made humble beginnings, where we started with launching executive lounges at the stations, and invited investments from public sector**

get hotels at Lucknow, Kevadiya and Khajuraho are under construction, where good capital support is being given by IRCTC and participation has been received from the public sector also."

She claimed that the public sector is specialized in doing certain activities. "The way they can do certain things, we as the government have challenges. This association becomes crucial between us and them to execute a project. A recently launched project of Bharat Gaurav also has minor participation from the private sector in a way that we are appointing a service provider for running the trains. These are the trains running on our theme-based circuits. Some participation has also been invited by IRCTC, so that they also become a part in executing the project and their accountability becomes more. Once the participation level gets increased and accountability increases, then the output is nearly welcome. There are good results too," she said.



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# Israel aims: 1 lakh Indians this year

This year Israel may cross the pre-COVID visitor numbers from India, thanks to the exceptional increase in air connectivity between the two countries. Sammy Yahia, Consul, Tourism Affairs, Israel Ministry of Tourism, India & Philippines, says they hope to cross the 1 lakh arrival mark from India this year and shares more exciting details.



Hazel Jain

Israel welcomed 75,000 tourists from India in 2019, which fell to 31,000 in 2022 starting May due to COVID-induced lockdowns. But this year, the destination may cross the pre-COVID visitor numbers, thanks to the exceptional increase in air connectivity.

**Sammy Yahia**, Consul, Tourism Affairs, Israel Ministry of Tourism, India & Philippines, says, "We are aiming to cross the 1,00,000 mark this year in terms of visitor arrivals this year. We will have two carriers flying directly from BOM-TLV, which will be EL AL airlines and Air India. It will be approximately a five-hour direct flight, three times a week. Moreover, Air India will be flying from BLR as well from October 2023. Arkia will also be resuming operations via Goa and Kochi directly to TLV, and Israir announced they want to start operations in India too. With this increase in air connectivity, tourism from India is expected to multiply."



**Sammy Yahia**  
Consul, Tourism Affairs, Israel Ministry of Tourism, India & Philippines

EL AL is set to resume non-stop flight services from Delhi and Mumbai to Israel from October 2023, after a three-year break. The overfly agreement with Saudi Arabia and Oman for Israeli airlines was recently finalised, allowing for a shorter flight duration of 5.5 hours for Mumbai and 6.5 hours for Delhi. The sales of flight tickets started in April 2023, and the price starts at \$399 for Lite tickets. EL AL

will operate four non-stop weekly flights from Mumbai to Israel on the Boeing 737 with Economy and Business service classes, and two non-stop weekly flights to Delhi on either the Boeing 787 or 777, both wide-bodied aircraft.



**We will have two carriers flying from BOM-TLV - EL AL airlines and Air India. It will be about a five-hour direct flight, three times a week**

**Shlomi Zafrani**, Vice President, Commerce and International Affairs, EL AL, says, "We are excited to launch these new flight routes from India to Israel, which were made possible thanks to the overfly agreement with Oman.

We anticipate there will be high demand for these flights due to vast business activity between



**Shlomi Zafrani**  
Vice President, Commerce and International Affairs, EL AL

the two countries, as well as constant growth in Indian tourism to Israel. Israel is a beloved vacation destination to the Indian people, whether it is a family trip or a group vacation."

Air India has also increased number of flights to Israel from existing three daily flights per week to five daily flights per week starting March 26, 2023. In addition, it will be starting to operate direct flights on the sectors from Mumbai and Bengaluru by June and October, respectively.



**We are excited to launch these new flight routes from India to Israel, which were made possible thanks to the overfly agreement with Oman**

Yahia says, "The new announcements from El Al and Air India will boost tourism from and to Israel. The new air corridor over Saudi Arabia and Oman is likely to stim-

ulate growth in the aviation sector. The airlines from India will be able to offer more competitive prices and reduce the flying time to five hours direct flight making it easier for passengers to travel. The statistics speak for themselves; the January and February 2023 numbers are 24 per cent better than the 2019 numbers."

## Focus on metro cities

Yahia will focus on the metro cities, especially New Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru. "The minimum days recommended are five nights in Israel. Israel is a country of luxurious experience, hence the amount spent is totally depending on the choice of hotels and activities," he says.

"Our focus for the India market is leisure and MICE. Wedding is still not yet a tapped market for the Indians. We will conduct virtual seminars, in-house presentations, and trade FAMs as we have adapted a more measurable approach," he adds.

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# Pre-departure cover for fliers

Asego has launched exclusively curated pre-departure covers to protect travellers and their travel investments against unforeseen contingencies like trip cancellations and missed connections.

TT Bureau

There has been a key shift in the way people perceive travel, especially post the pandemic. Travellers these days want to break away from their routines and enjoy niche travel experiences. However, planning

find themselves in any of the scenarios listed below, Asego's protection plans, and a team of experts will be available round the clock for their assistance.

## Trip cancellation cover

The cover reimburses non-refundable expenses related to

mon carrier owing to delay or cancellation of a connecting flight or offloading of passengers due to overbooking, Asego's pre-departure cover pays the traveller a fixed benefit amount to cover their losses. Furthermore, it also reimburses the customers for any pre-paid expenses such as lodging, alternative travel bookings, upgradation of travel booking or accommodation.

## Change in fees

Another highlight of the pre-departure cover is that it reimburses travellers the difference in fare and rescheduling charges in case of unforeseen illnesses and injuries or inclement weather, terrorist activities, strike, curfew, airport shut down at the traveller's place of departure or destination.

## Travel inconvenience

Asego's pre-departure cover also covers the cost incurred by travellers if their trip is cancelled due to loss of passport, non-acceptance of visa by Indian immigration authorities, loss of wallet and cards, quarantine or prohibition of travel by government authorities.

airfare, accommodation, scheduled tours and events paid by the traveller if the trip is unavoidably cancelled due to occurrence of any major event in or around the place of departure, the destination or any other intermediate place that is a part of the journey.

## Missed connections

If the traveller fails to board a com-



such trips come at an added price and required advanced planning.

This summer, Asego has launched exclusively curated pre-departure covers to protect travellers and their travel investments against unforeseen contingencies like trip cancellations, missed connections, and change in airline fees. Should travellers

# Connecting travel trade

The IHCL Connect, held in Delhi on 11 April 2023, was a resounding success with more than 2,500 participants taking part at the event, along with IHCL hotels across India.



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# Qatar keen to tap India market

Qatar has established itself as a premier destination for activities related to meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) with a modern infrastructure and warm hospitality. With a goal to attract six million visitors annually by 2030, Qatar is keen to tap the Indian market, which, it believes, can contribute significantly to achieve the target.



Janice Alyosius

Qatar has emerged as a leading destination for MICE activities, with its state of the arts infrastructure and warm Middle Eastern hospitality. With the goal of welcoming six million visitors annually by 2030, Qatar is keen on tap the Indian market, which, it believes, can contribute almost 20 per cent to achieve the target.

## Qatar's advantage as a MICE destination

Philip Dickinson, Vice President International Markets, Qatar Tourism, said, "Qatar's strategic location, visa-on-arrival facility, and convenient air connectivity from India make it an ideal choice for corporate events. With modern, purpose-built exhibition centres such as the Doha Exhibition & Convention Centre (DECC) and the Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC), as well as impressive indoor and outdoor venues such as the Katara Cultural Village and the National Museum of Qatar, and a



Philip Dickinson  
Vice President International Markets  
Qatar Tourism

wide range of hotel options, Qatar has everything needed to make it a top choice for MICE travellers."

## Perfect balance between business and leisure

Dickinson highlighted that Qatar offers a unique destination for those seeking something different by emphasising on the perfect balance between business and leisure. "Qatar has become a highly sought-

after destination for MICE events, providing top-notch services and cutting-edge infrastructure in areas such as art, culture, heritage, sports, luxury, and hospitality. With its impressive facilities, the country is an ideal location for hosting business meetings, conferences, seminars, workshops, and other gatherings. It offers an exceptional blend of business and leisure tourism, combining Arabian traditions with first-rate amenities. Qatar has been designed to accommodate an influx of business visitors, making it a versatile destination. In recent years, the country has expanded its range of attractions and activities, including museums, galleries, markets, shopping malls, beaches, theme parks, desert safaris, and more, catering to all interests," he said.

## Infrastructure suits corporate events

Qatar's infrastructure is well-suited to host corporate events of any size, from intimate gatherings to large conventions, shared Dickinson.

"Every hotel in the country offers something unique to MICE groups and Qatar also boasts purpose-built venues and various community centres and cultural sites that can

Qatar's strategic location, visa-on-arrival facility, and convenient air connectivity from India make it an ideal choice for corporate events

serve as meeting spaces and event venues. These include Barahat in Msheireb Downtown, Msheireb Museums, Al Shaqab Equestrian Centre, Lusail Boulevard, National Museum of Qatar, and the Museum of Islamic Art. Furthermore, the country has world-class conven-

tion centres such as the Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC) and the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC)," he said.

## World-class attractions for corporate visitors

The country also provides corporate visitors with the opportunity to experience a diverse range of attractions. Some of the must-see destinations include the National Museum of Qatar, Doha's skyline, Souq Waqif, and unique dining experiences. Qatar also offers a range of entertainment attractions such as Al Maha Island and Lusail City. Visitors can enjoy a sunset at Khor Al Adaid, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, kayak through the Al Thakira mangroves, or view Qatar from a hot-air balloon. Additionally, Qatar boasts world-class wellness retreats for those interested in wellness.

## Robust subvention programs for corporate partners

Visit Qatar is committed to promoting the MICE sector and actively engaging with corporate clients from

Delhi, NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and beyond, to facilitate corporate events. Dickinson shared, "Our primary focus area is MICE, and we have close collaborations with corporate clients from various parts of India. Qatar tourism provides visitors with support and attractive funding programs right from the initial planning stage. All corporate clients who visit Qatar will have a plethora of options to choose from. Furthermore, we are working to educate MICE and trade operators throughout India about Qatar as a potential destination for upcoming corporate events through the Qatar Specialist Program, MICE and Corporate FAM trips. Qatar Airways offers the QMICE program, which provides businesses with attractive group fares for travel to Qatar." He added, "We are witnessing a quick recovery in the market, and with our strategic partnerships, attractive incentive programs, targeted campaigns, and outreach efforts, we are well-positioned to capitalize on the momentum and provide the best MICE experience."

# Agoda seeks tech talent for growth

The travel booking platform is actively seeking technology talent in India due to the abundance of high-scale, high-performance engineering solutions. With a focus on technology innovation, Agoda is experimenting with artificial intelligence and consumer fintech options to provide customers with the best possible experience.



Janice Alyosius

With innovation in mind, Agoda has been actively seeking technical talent in India, as the country has highly skilled individuals, said Idan Zalberg, CTO, Agoda. "India's proximity to Bangkok and Singapore, where Agoda has offices, is also a key factor for the brand to target the India market. This allows for easy collaboration and mobility among teams, and many Indian employees appreciate the opportunity to work for a company with a strong presence in the region," he said.

Highlighting the reasons for Agoda's interest in hiring Indian developers, is the abundance of high-scale, high-performance engineering solutions in India. "These developers are well-equipped to handle the challenges of building efficient, fast-moving solutions at scale. Additionally, the hunger to learn and grow among Indian employees is highly valued



Idan Zalberg  
CTO, Agoda

by Agoda, as the company has a culture of moving fast and getting things done," Zalberg said.

In terms of opportunities for technology innovation, India is a market with a high rate of online penetration, second only to China in terms of travel. This makes India a prime location for early adoption of new technologies, he shared.

Agoda considers itself a tech company first, with the goal of becoming the world's largest travel company by prioritizing technology investments that support this vision, shared Zalberg. "Our ability to efficiently scale while remaining agile is a key component of our success, driven by our culture and technology. In addition to enabling our own business, we have also begun creating new business opportunities through technology, such as white-labelling our platform and services for other companies to use. This has led to partnerships with companies like Paytm and providing complete OTA solutions for companies like JTB and others in the US," he said.

## Impact of technology

Speaking of the impact of technology on the company's business, Zalberg said, "Agoda's business is heavily driven by technology and there are several innovations that have made a significant impact on the company's success.

One example is the experimentation platform that is used to make decisions related to marketing and other aspects of the business. With over 1,000 experiments running at any given time, customers

India's proximity to Bangkok and Singapore, where Agoda has offices, is also a key factor for the brand to target the India market

are often participating in around 70-80 experiments per session without even realizing it. Another important aspect of Agoda's success is its ability to scale efficiently. The company performs tens of billions of searches every day,

which requires a lot of ingesting and delivering data in large quantities. Agoda has built its own stack and data centres from scratch, using open source technology like Kubernetes to ensure efficiency and provide customers with the best experience possible."

Agoda also has a large data platform and data science team that helps the company create interesting programs for partners, particularly smaller and independent hotel owners who may not have the resources to reach customers on their own. Agoda's programs provide these hotel owners with visibility into their data and allow them to target and market their services to potential customers. Overall, these innovations have helped Agoda become a successful tech company that is focused on providing its customers with the best possible experience.

## New products

Revealing the launch of new products, Zalberg shared, "Agoda start-

ed as an accommodation company and has now evolved into a travel company. We have seen significant growth in our flight and attraction offerings, and this year we plan to add airport transfers to our portfolio. Our ultimate goal is to combine these offerings to provide customers with even better deals. We are also exploring consumer fintech options such as smart refunds, cancel and rebook, and price freeze to ensure customers receive the best deals possible. Additionally, we are experimenting with generative AI to enhance the customer experience and improve our operational efficiency. These are still in the development phase but we have some promising ideas."

Currently, the travel industry in India is experiencing a tremendous boom. There has been significant growth in domestic travel, and the value of outbound Indian travellers is expected to increase by double digits in the next few years. Additionally, India has the potential to attract more inbound travellers."

# Brainstorming on future of travel

Corporates and professionals from airline, travel and hospitality industries as well as from international tourism boards discussed the finer points of business at the 8th edition of Travel MICE & Corporate Show, organized from 18-19 March 2023 in Chennai. The show witnessed more than 1,000 fruitful business meetings.



# Building on boutique island identity

Bahrain's tourism recovery rate at 92 per cent is the fastest in the Middle East region and one of the highest globally. To reinforce its position as a boutique island destination, the country is spending a lot on tourism infrastructure, with waterfront developments, new hospitality ventures, and hotel properties launching this year.



Janice Alyosius

Bahrain has a long-standing relationship with India that spans culture, commerce, and history. This makes India a crucial market for Bahrain, particularly in the tourism sector. To promote its presence in India, Bahrain is exploring different ways to improve air connectivity and association between travel and tour operators of the two countries. Their goal is to create more direct business relationships and promote Bahrain as a destination in India and various provinces and governance around the country, shared **Dr. Nasser Ali Qaedi**, CEO, Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority.

## Building strong B2B relationships

Bahrain's strategy is to focus on building strong business-to-business (B2B) relationships to enhance its presence and visibility in India. "To achieve this, we are working on multiple fronts. Firstly,



**Dr. Nasser Ali Qaedi**  
CEO, Bahrain Tourism  
and Exhibitions Authority

we have established a physical presence through a representative office in VFS, with whom we have a contract to promote Bahrain in the local market and create more B2B linkages. We have also signed up with over 100 tour operators across the globe, enabling them to project their marketing and promotion campaigns and content calendar into different markets. Bahrain is also develop-

ing specific promotions to attract different segments of the market and expanding its network to ensure broad reach," said Qaedi.

## Engaging in various events and activities

Bahrain is engaging in various events and activities with different parties in India to increase awareness and generate word of mouth publicity. "The more contacts Bahrain has on the ground, the more effective our efforts become. We are collaborating with various chambers of commerce and representatives from the travel and tour industry to organize more FAM (familiarization) trips to Bahrain. This is a crucial initiative for us, both in terms of segmented and general FAM trips. We are also inviting event planners and organisers of conferences and exhibitions to showcase the country as a unique destination," he said.

## Boutique island experience

Bahrain has created a unique and

exclusive boutique experience that cannot be found anywhere else, shared Qaedi.

"Our focus is not only on providing separate visa counters or facilities, but also on working closely with planners, organisers,

**Our focus is not only on visa, but also on working closely with planners, organisers, and families to ensure a seamless experience from start to finish**

and families to ensure a seamless experience from start to finish. We assist with everything from flights, logistics, hotel and transportation arrangements, to dealing with suppliers and part-

ners on the ground. We even offer assistance with visa processing and other areas to make the entire process as convenient and enjoyable as possible for our clients," said Qaedi.

## Investing in infrastructure

Bahrain invested in one of the largest facilities in the Middle East, Exhibition World Bahrain. It offers over 100,000 square metres of indoor exhibition space and bridal suites, making it a versatile venue for conventions, exhibitions, weddings, and other events. "Exhibition World Bahrain is our newest and the largest global venue, which has attracted interest from international events. With Exhibition World Bahrain's location adjacent to the Bahrain International Circuit and the Aldana amphitheatre, Bahrain is positioned as an entertainment destination with strategic assets in tourism," highlighted Qaedi.

## Fastest tourism recovery

Highlighting the target numbers

and recovery rate, Qaedi shared Bahrain achieved 9.9 million visitors last year, exceeding its post-COVID recovery projection of 8.3 million visitors.

"The recovery rate is 92 per cent, which is the fastest in the region and one of the highest globally. To reinforce Bahrain's position as a boutique island destination, we are going through one of the largest periods of tourism infrastructure spending in its history, with waterfront developments, new hospitality ventures, and hotel properties launching this year. Gulf Air, the national carrier of Bahrain, is also increasing flight connectivity to new destinations globally, including India," he said. "The collaboration between Bahrain and Gulf Air aims to increase air connectivity and develop more air connectivity agreements within India. These initiatives support multiple layers, including the business layer, the tourism layer, the promotional B2C layer, and conventions," he added.

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# Tell India story to all: Saxena

Contd from page 3

kind of efforts that are being taken. As part of G20 events, entire cities are improving their infrastructure. It's not just one event. A lot of effort is being put into making that destination a more beautiful, pre-sustainable, more attractive for all kinds of tourists. I think word of mouth publicity and international showcasing, as part of the G20 Presidency events, will go a long way in promoting tourism as a whole and we need to take this opportunity to also learn from international experience and see what we can do better to leverage this as our strength."

## Key focus

In her new role, informs Saxena, "My focus would be to facilitate the tourism sector in as many ways as possible, as part of MOT's overall policy. I just want to be a part of the team which delivers tourism as one of the foremost economic activities in India."

## Technology integration

Talking about the power of technology in today's travel industry, she comments, "In earlier days, when you planned a trip, you consulted a travel agent or



you spoke to someone who has been on that side of the world. Now everybody just picks up their phone or laptop and

**I think word of mouth publicity and international showcasing, as part of the G20 events, will go a long way in promoting tourism as a whole**

browse. Hence, a digital presentation of your strengths is very important as a destination and a lot of states have done some good work on it. Almost everyone has a website and a

tourism app. However, challenge of digitalization is how to combine all of it with the places where all the action is. I think we are working keenly on it, and we will be able to bridge that gap. We are leveraging the strength of social media and using digital media, AR, VR, evidence-based studies from the visitors from various countries. All that is in process. It will throw up some very good insights and we will be able to work on those."

## Trade engagement

Saxena informs that she has met some of the travel and stakeholders already and is keen on more such engagements. "I look forward to meet as many people as possible and hear their viewpoints, understand their perspectives and then accordingly work with everybody to make things better," she assures.



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# 'Travel partners our first ambassadors'

Rendez-vous en France, a B2B trade event for the French tourism sector, hosted international travel partners invited by the Atout France network and held 26,320 pre-scheduled business meetings at its 16<sup>th</sup> edition. The show provided a unique opportunity to promote France with a specific focus on sustainable and inclusive innovations.



Poonam Akolia

**R**endez vous en France, a leading international trade show for agents and exhibitors from all over the world, was held on 21-22 March 2023 in Paris. During the show, 786 international tour operators met 660 French exhibitors. The show provided an opportunity for more than 250 international buyers to discover tourist destinations of France through 26 familiarisation trips across the country.

Atout France recorded €58 billion of international tourism revenue in 2022. **Caroline Leboucher**, CEO & Director General, Atout France,



**Caroline Leboucher**  
CEO & Director General, Atout France

**Atout France recorded €58 billion of international tourism revenue in 2022. The industry has recovered and exceeded the pre-pandemic levels**

announced that the industry has recovered and exceeded the pre-pandemic levels. In an exclusive interaction with **Christophe Decloux**, Managing Director, Paris Region Tourism Board, he added, "We believe that our international partners such as tour operators and travel agents are our first ambassadors to the final consumer. They propose and communicate the different offers that we have within the destination."

Out of 786 international delegates from 67 nations, Atout France India hosted 34 representatives from the country. **Sheetal Munshaw**, Director, Atout France in India, said,

"India had a formidable presence in the form of 34 delegates. Our delegation was a good mix of agents who have as their core business, leisure, corporate and MICE travel and represented the pan India po-



**Christophe Decloux**  
MD, Paris Region Tourism Board

**We believe that our international partners such as tour operators and travel agents are our first ambassadors to the final consumer**

tential, as they came from varied source markets including Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, Pune, Chennai, Nagpur, Lucknow, Pune & Chandigarh. The delegates had a chance to meet with our partners who have been working in the market for many years and also those partners interested in foraying into the market."

Explicitly outlining the all-encompassing approach of the show, she added, "Rendezvous en France was the perfect platform to develop and fortify synergies with French suppliers across the travel industry, including institutional organisations such as regional tourism boards, local tourist offices, hoteliers, attractions, shopping



**Sheetal Munshaw**  
Director, Atout France in India

**Our delegation was a good mix of agents who have as their core business, leisure, corporate and MICE travel and represented the pan-India potential**

brands, iconic visits and strategic transport partners."

The Indian delegation found the event more evolved and productive as well. **Anshu Tejuja**, Managing Director, Ashoka Dream Holidays, expressed, "A lot of new attractions, such as virtual reality tour, more sightseeing and gastronomy experiences, and USP of every region was outstanding. It is lovely how so much importance is being given to sustainability."

Emphasizing on how France has changed as a travel destination, **Samina Munshi**, Director, N.Chirag Travels, said, "France has been always been preferred as a destination for people who are travelling for the first or second time. The destination has truly evolved and people have started travelling beyond Paris and Nice. We are looking forward to promoting more itineraries."

**Naeem Khan**, Director, Mulberry Tours, added, "It was a very productive event. The interactions

with partners added new insights and introduced us to new experiences to offer to our clients in the Indian market. Most of the Indian travellers have only been offered Paris, Nice or Champagne region at the most, but there is much more to France than these attractions. There are so many different experiences among vineyards, gastronomy, historical sites and many more regions to explore. Occitanie, Lourdes and the French Alps has so much to offer. Some of the regions have one of the most beautiful villages of Europe."

Looking at the growth of the Indian Market, French exhibitors were very excited to meet Indian delegation. **Alexandre Willmann**, Director of Marketing Commercial, Grand Eastern Regional Tourism Agency, said, "India is very impor-



**Anshu Tejuja**  
MD, Ashoka Dream Holidays

**A lot of new attractions, such as virtual reality tour, sightseeing and gastronomy experiences, and USP of every region was outstanding**

tant market for us. Keeping Indian demand, we have supply of very nice five-star hotels and Michelin-star restaurants within the region."

Highlighting the recovery from the Indian market, **Florence Pasquier**, Chief Commercial Officer, Rail Europe, said, "India is very important market for us. It's in our top five source market list. The recovery from the India market is very good. We already marked complete recovery last year."

Highlighting the role of Bollywood movies in promoting destinations, **Nicole Pradines**, Commercial promotion manager, Occitanie Tourism, said, "We are working on how we can attract the Indian film industry to shoot at our destination because I think it's a way to present Occitanie destination to the Indian travellers."

Atout France also launched their 2023 #ExploreFrance campaign. For the third consecutive year, the



**Samina Munshi**  
Director, N.Chirag Travels

**The destination has truly evolved and people have started travelling beyond Paris and Nice. We are looking forward to promoting more itineraries**

collective #ExploreFrance campaign is uniting with an aim to surprise visitors through the promotion of an unexpected France. Based on the results of a study by Atout France, the collective is directing a marketing campaign that adequately fits the new aspirations of travellers, advocating a slower, more sustainable and more authentic style of tourism. "Dream big, live slow" is an invitation to dare to dream big and to make the best trips in France come true.

**Olivia Grégoire**, Minister for Small and Medium Enterprises, Trade, Crafts and Tourism, France, said, "Sustainable tourism is not just a trend, it is a major development and France must do its part. Since the end of the pandemic, tourist flows have tended to diversify. Tourist habits are changing and



**Olivia Grégoire**  
Minister for Small and Medium Enterprises, Trade, Crafts and Tourism, France

**This (sustainability) campaign is an opportunity to promote a new form of tourism, one that is more responsible, more respectful of our biodiversity**

tourism must change with them if France is to continue to be a land of excellence for tourists. This campaign is an opportunity to promote a new form of tourism, one that is more responsible, more



**Naeem Khan**  
Director, Mulberry Tours

**The interactions with partners (at the show) added new insights and introduced us to new experiences to offer to our clients in the Indian market**

respectful of our biodiversity and more conducive to contemplation and discovery."

# Flying green with SWISS

The Lufthansa Group has accumulated an extensive expertise in sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) technologies and their market development by participating in research programmes, pilot projects and alliances, and SWISS now being part of the group, the same applies to it also, says George Ettiyil, Senior Director Sales (South Asia), Lufthansa Group.



Hazel Jain

**S**ustainability has been an industry buzzword for some time. What does this mean for SWISS and what are some of the ways in which the airline is implementing this?

Our's has been a long-standing commitment to sustainability with a deep-rooted desire to create lasting value for our customers, our employees and the wider society as a whole. We have not spared any effort to halve our 2019 net carbon dioxide emissions by 2023 and aim to achieve net carbon zero by 2050 through a variety of measures, including the use of SAF.

**How can the travel agents and tour operators help SWISS towards this?**

Our trade partners give us the reach to the end consumer and the wider public and join us in spreading our sustainability innovations. Our agents and tour operators act as consultants, advising on the sustainable packages for our



**George Ettiyil**  
Senior Director Sales (South Asia)  
Lufthansa Group

customers, including flights with carbon offsets for example.

**How is SWISS using a new technology called AeroSHARK towards this objective?**

Back in October SWISS became the first airline in the world to deploy the innovative AeroSHARK technology on its passenger services. The transparent AeroSHARK film has been applied to aircraft's

fuselage and engine nacelles replicates the hydrodynamic skin of a shark to reduce aerodynamic drag and, as a result, lower both inflight fuel consumption and car-



**Our trade partners give us the reach to the end consumer and the wider public and join us in spreading our sustainability innovations**

bon dioxide emissions. The annual CO<sub>2</sub> emission savings of this new technology is up to 15,200 tonnes.

**Fleet renewal is one aspect whereby an airline can bring down its carbon footprint. Please share SWISS plans for its fleet expansion and renewal. Will any**



**of these changes take place on the India routes?**

We are in the midst of the largest fleet renewal in the history of our company (LHG) and are investing more than €2.5 billion per year for a 'green' fleet, which translates into a new aircraft coming in every two weeks for the next many years. As a strategic market India will be a beneficiary of these investments.

**What are the airlines' plans for the summer schedule?**

From our entire Lufthansa Group offer, this summer will see the return of the 747-800 to Bengaluru, which has a strong fan following

stay tuned for we may have some surprises for this winter.

India overall has been for many years a booming market, continued to throughout the pandemic and remains a market with strong demand. Indians all over the world need to travel and connect and we are glad to be there from Bengaluru, Chennai, Mumbai and Delhi.

**What are SWISS goals towards use of SAF?**

With Lufthansa Group having committed to €2.5 billion SAF purchase in next 3 years our airline group is the largest SAF customer in Europe and top three worldwide. We are committed to making flying sustainable, we make change fly!

## Good to know

- ❖ SWISS is first commercial airline to use SAF from Switzerland
- ❖ SWISS has an innovative partnership with Synhelion
- ❖ As of now, the following companies have publicly communicated their commitment to SAF in partnership with SWISS: Breitling, Switzerland Tourism, Finass Reisen

# Experience Mauritius with Solis 360

Solis 360, along with Heritage Resorts, Mauritius, recently hosted a few select travel agents in Mumbai for cocktails and dinner at the beautiful One 8 Commune. Present at the event were Lady Sara Moollan, Director, Solis 360 and Rajiv Dunneram, Chief Sales & Marketing Officer, Solis 360. Also present to support them were Air Mauritius and Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority.



# Hollywood stars descend on Mumbai

Do you know who was behind the city tours that Hollywood celebrities like Gigi Hadid, Zendaya, and Tom Holland took recently in India? Meet Eesha Singh and Harshvardhan Tanwar, Co-founders of No Footprints, who curated the experiences of the stars in Mumbai and brought the city back on the global tourism map.

 Hazel Jain

Mumbai city recently played host to some of Hollywood's biggest names - Gigi Hadid, Tom Holland and Zendaya. These stars were in the city for the inauguration of the Nita Mukesh Ambani Convention Centre, but they didn't miss the chance to explore the city's vibrant streets. No Footprints, the boutique travel experience company that took them around the city, introduced them to the vibrant sights, sounds and culture. The company has been in the industry for nine years and has curated tours for names like Nigella Lawson, Madhuri Dixit and Eric Roth.

**Harshvardhan Tanwar**, Co-founder, No Footprints, says, "We conducted 'Jio (live) Mumbai' city tour for Gigi Hadid, which showed highlights of the city but through storytelling. For Tom Holland and Zendaya we did a yacht ride called 'The Strange Stories of the Sea' because Mumbai



Eesha Singh and Harshvardhan Tanwar, Co-founders of No Footprints

is connected to the sea. So, we did a mixed bag for different people depending on their interests. Since all of them were from the US, they enjoyed the American history in Mumbai. For instance, the Star-Spangled Banner written on HMS Minden - a ship that was made in India, or Watson Hotel in Mumbai that Mark Twain had visited. The fact that we do the tours in a storytelling narrative really intrigued them."

Tanwar adds that foreign tourists are back and the company has had a

good February and a decent March 2023. "We get a lot of tourists from the UK, US, a bit of French and the Aussies as well. The cruise market is also coming back slowly, mostly from the UK," he adds.

The company has been founded by Harshvardhan Tanwar and **Eesha Singh**, offering 35 signature experiences in Mumbai and Delhi, including the iconic 'Mumbai by Dawn' tour, the 'Queer Day Out' tour, and the 'Refugee Food Tour.' The team's connection with the larger commu-

nity they live in is rapidly diminishing in urban setups, and they created No Footprints to bring that connection back to the fore. With their expert curation and attention to detail, No Footprints promises to deliver a travel experience that is truly one-of-a-kind. There is also a customized tour option for those who want to explore Mumbai at their own pace. Singh says, "We believe that travel should be personal, and our tours are designed to help you discover Mumbai in your own unique way."

  
**We get a lot of tourists from the UK, US, a bit of French and the Aussies as well. The cruise market is also coming back slowly, mostly from the UK**



Gigi Hadid with her friends

Whether you are a foodie, a history buff, or just someone who loves to explore new places, we have a tour that's perfect for you."

Speaking about promoting India in the international market, Singh

says, "Marketing definitely needs to be a massive priority for India. When we attend international travel discussions, we understand that inclusion and diverse tourism has become a priority for the industry at large."

EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



APRIL 2023

Date	Event	Time
18	Switzerland webinar	3:00 pm
19-20	Texas Travel Expo	9:00 am
19-21	Kazakhstan International Tourism Fair	10:00 am
23-25	Great Indian Travel Bazaar-Jaipur	9:00 am
26-28	ITB India- Mumbai	9:00 am
30-3May	Global Meeting & Incentive Travel Exchange	9:00 am
30-4 May	Australian Tourism Exchange	11:00 am

MAY 2023

1-4	Arabian Travel Market Dubai	9:00 am
2-3	ILTM Arabia	9:00 am
4-7	Seoul International Travel Fair	10:00 am
9-11	Trenz	9:00 am
9-11	AdventureELEVATE	9:00 am
9-12	ILTM Latin America	9:00 am
17-19	Global Tourism Investors' Summit-Delhi	9:00 am
18-20	Dhaka Travel Mart	10:00 am
19-21	Guangzhou International Travel Fair	9:00 am

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

## Meet discusses tourism goals

► Contd from page 5

accrued to the industry from the same. On the other hand, Government of Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh showcased the investible projects to attract investment in tourism and hospitality sector. Union Territory of Lakshadweep Islands also shared successful case studies of PPP.

### MICE & Weddings

There was a separate session to deliberate on various policies, initiatives and strategies for development of MICE tourism and wedding tourism in the country. MICE tourism brings higher revenue and year-round business for the destination overcoming seasonality. At the same time, MICE needs its own ecosystem before a destination can succeed as MICE destination. Wedding destinations are also fast emerging segment in India. Telangana showcased how MICE tourism in the state of Telangana was being developed and promoted via dedicated Hyderabad Convention Visitors Bureau.

The MOT felicitated the states to recognise the best practices followed by them in six major categories under Swadesh Darshan Scheme. The government has recently announced to promote development of Tourism Sector

in Mission Mode with active participation of the states and convergence of government schemes and PPP.

  
**The MOT felicitated the states to recognise the best practices followed by them in six major categories under Swadesh Darshan Scheme**

Chintan Shivir also offered an opportunity to deliberate on the strategies and preparations for the 1st Global Tourism Investors' Summit from 17 to 19 May 2023, which will be organised by the MOT. The event saw participants deliberating on a wide range of challenges and opportunities for development of tourism sector with active participation of states, industry associations and industry leaders.

### Day 2

On Day 2, Reddy thanked the participants of the conference for

sharing insightful thoughts and strategies that can be adopted nationally to implement Tourism in Mission Mode in India. Singh concluded the two-day Chintan Shivir talking about the upcoming 1st Global Tourism Investors Summit and the valuable inputs that have been received from stakeholders to carry forward the mission of growth in India's tourism sector.

Addressing the valedictory session, Singh pointed out that 2023 is of great importance for India with assuming the G20 Presidency and holding the Chair of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). "Recently, MOT has organised the SCO Tourism Ministers' meeting in Kashi (Varanasi), which has been designated as the first cultural capital of SCO. The 1st Global Tourism Investors Summit (GTIS), to be held in New Delhi from 17-19 May 2023 will serve as a platform to enable interaction between global and domestic business leaders and explore investment opportunities in the Indian Tourism and Hospitality sector," he said.

### Covergence is key

The second day covered the issues related to Convergence of Government Programs across multiple sectors. The stakeholders delib-

erated on several issues to build synergies in the plans of different ministries for development of connectivity and infrastructure to enhance the potential of tourist destinations. Several line ministries like Ministry of Civil Aviation, Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways, Ministry of Port, Shipping and Waterways, Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and Ministry of Jal Shakti shared their plans to develop various natural and cultural attractions under their control in consultation and partnership with the MOT so that the same could be marketed and promoted to the domestic and foreign travellers. The discussions covered topics of convergence of government programs in developing different sectors, developing homestays, souvenirs, and tourist guides and developing adventure tourism and rural tourism in the country.

The event saw associations like Adventure Tour Operator Association of India (ATOAI) and many state governments of Kerala, Maharashtra, Karnataka, West Bengal, Sikkim, Bihar, Meghalaya, Tripura, Manipur, Uttarakhand and UT of Ladakh participating in the discussion and presenting case studies.

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# MOVEMENTS

## THE LALIT SURI HOSPITALITY GROUP

New Delhi

**VIVEK SHUKLA** has been elevated to the position of CEO at The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group (A Bharat Hotels). A key member of the organisation's senior leadership team, Shukla is responsible for product enhancement, driving key initiatives, along with leading the overall business performance for the brand. He has been one of the core members of the Strategic Management Committee, a key management core group of the company to formulate strategies, oversee the operations, business and corporate affairs. He has over 31 years of experience in the luxury hospitality industry, out of which 18 years have been with The Lalit Group.



## NOVOTEL PUNE

Pune

Novotel Pune has appointed **RAHUL PANWAR** as the new General Manager. Panwar has more than 16 years of experience in the hospitality industry and his diverse background includes working with some of the most prominent hotel chains in India, USA, China and Vietnam. Most recently, he served as the General Manager at Grand Mercure Gandhinagar GIFT City. He has also worked with Hyatt, Marriott Hotels, and has been a proud member of the Accor group for the last 8 years. In his new role, he will oversee the day-to-day operations of the hotel, ensuring the highest levels of guest satisfaction and leading the hotel's team to deliver exceptional experiences to guests.



## HYATT REGENCY PUNE & RESIDENCES

Pune

**RAMANDEEP MARWAH** joins Hyatt Regency Pune & Residences as the General Manager. During his more than 20 years of career in the hospitality industry, Ramandeep has held various senior management positions in renowned hotels across India, including 10 years at Marriott, The Oberoi, The Leela, Taj and Shangri-La for a brief period. As the General Manager of Hyatt Regency Pune & Residences, Ramandeep will be responsible for overseeing all aspects of hotel operations, including guest services, sales and marketing, and human resources.



## SAJ HOTELS

Mumbai

Saj Hotels has appointed **ZAMIR KHAN** as its new CEO. In his new role, Zamir will develop strategies, drive growth and foster innovation for the hotels and restaurants verticals of the group. Zamir has more than two decades of experience across various sectors such as Hospitality, FMCG, Real Estate, Aviation, ITes, and Telecommunications and has been part of the founding team of prestigious brands like Massive Restaurants, Wrapster Foods, and worked with leading indigenous business houses like Taj Hotels, Resorts & Palaces, Oberoi Hotels & Resorts, Dabur, Avantha Group, and DLF Retail.



## RADISSON BLU PLAZA DELHI AIRPORT

New Delhi

**SHALINI SHARMA** has been appointed as the Director Sales & Marketing of Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport. She is a spirited leader with more than 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry. With an impressive skill set and an extraordinary knack for creativity, Shalini started her career in 2003 as a senior sales associate at InterContinental The Grand New Delhi and has never looked back since then. During her journey, Shalini has worked for other impressive hotel chains, including Starwood, Carlson, IHG and JW Marriott. The hotel is excited to have her on board and looks forward to gaining so much from her experience.



## WYNDHAM HOTELS & RESORTS

New Delhi

Wyndham Hotels & Resorts has announced the promotion of **NIKHIL SHARMA** to the role of Market Managing Director for Eurasia. In his expanded role, Nikhil, who joined Wyndham as Regional Director for Eurasia in 2019, will have a full management remit encompassing franchise operations support, regional sales, revenue management services, while also steering the development strategy for the region. The expansion of Nikhil's role follows a number of key development hires in Eurasia. Nikhil will now oversee this team and contribute to the future growth of Wyndham in the region.



## FOUR SEASONS HOTEL

Bengaluru

Four Seasons Hotel Bengaluru welcomes **MEGHNA TRIVEDY** as its New Director of PR and Communications. Meghna will be responsible for driving sustainable financial gains through leveraging corporate potential, innovative branding strategies and ideations to build a solid corporate brand. She looks forward to employing her experience and creativity to bring profitable solutions and incentives to Four Seasons and drive business growth, while enhancing the hotel's reputation as a leading luxury destination in Bengaluru. Meghna has worked with renowned brands such as Marriott, Movenpick, The Park, and The Leela. She brings over 14 years of experience in luxury hospitality sales and marketing.



## JW MARRIOTT

Kolkata

**CHANDAN SHARMA** has been appointed as the Director of Sales at JW Marriott Kolkata. He has more than 10 years of experience in luxury hospitality sales in Gurgaon and Bengaluru. In his current role, he will be in charge of planning and implementing the hotel's sales strategy, maximizing revenues, exploring new business opportunities, setting annual budget and putting together strategies. He establishes effective sales strategies in all market sectors to increase hotel earnings, developing sales strategy based on research of consumer buying trends and market conditions and selling luxury experiences to the guests.



## BRIJ HOTELS

Varanasi

Brij Hotels has appointed **SANDEEP SINGH** as the Vice President Sales. He brings with him extensive experience in leisure travel sales for luxury hospitality segment. At Brij, Sandeep will lead the sales efforts for seven operational hotels and develop strategies for upcoming properties. With more than 25 years of experience in the luxury hospitality industry, Sandeep is a seasoned professional with extensive knowledge of the market. Prior to joining Brij Hotels, Sandeep served as the Director of Sales and Marketing for the Gujarat region at The Leela Palace Hotels and Resorts. Sandeep started his career with Jaypee Hotels.



## TALKing People

**SANDIPAN BOSE**, General Manager, Ekaaya Udaipur - a Mementos by ITC property, said, "It would be an exaggeration to say one has no stress in the lifestyle of today's age. I enjoy cycling and over time, it has become my everyday stress buster. The one skill I acquired during the lockdown is swimming and it's a feat for me. If I were to holiday in India, it's definitely Goa for the beautiful and diverse landscape it offers. However, if I am travelling abroad, then I would pick Europe for the bountiful it offers. On my next holiday, I would be in the God's Own Country - Kerala enjoying the tranquil of the backwaters, away from the urban chaos."



For **ABHISHEK SAHAI**, General Manager, Conrad Pune, spending time with family is the biggest stress-buster. "Despite being a hotelier who is always working, I have learned to separate my professional and personal lives. By doing so, both aspects of my life complement each other, which reduces my stress levels remarkably. I also practise yoga, meditation, and listen to music to gather my thoughts. My favourite holiday destination is Udaipur in India and internationally, it's Bali. For my upcoming holiday, I have decided to visit one of the beautiful destinations in Maharashtra."



During lockdown, **SAI KUMAR P**, Talent & Culture Manager, Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach & The BheemiliResort, learnt the importance of being connected. "This not only helps in one's wellbeing, but also makes you more hospitable. I also understood the importance of engaging in activities that refocuses your energy from the external events to within. Acknowledge what you are grateful for. Helps rewire your brain and encourages it to seek out more things to be grateful for. My favourite holiday destination in India is my hometown near Puttaparthi (AP)," he says.



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# ‘Travel demand promising’

Prabuddha Sen, Chief Operating Officer - South Asia at VFS Global, highlights the steps taken to improve customer experience, the future of traditional visa processing, and the collaboration with travel trade partners.



Janice Alysius

The lifting of border restrictions and revival of international air travel have unleashed the pent-up demand of COVID-19 years. “Travel demand in 2022 was significantly different from the travel demand before the pandemic with no defined peak season. We noticed that the peak season extended up to the conventional lean period of September-October and the momentum continues to remain strong,” says Prabuddha Sen, Chief Operating Officer - South Asia, VFS Global.

In 2022, visa applications from India across all categories reached nearly 80 per cent of the pre-pandemic levels, and the volume of visa applications more than doubled compared to 2021. “In 2023, travel demand looks very promising, with a healthy start and a positive outlook,” he adds.

## Peak season visa processing

During peak season visa processing can take longer than anticipated, and this is common across all geographies and across all governments. Sen shared, “VFS Global manages only the administrative and non-judgemental aspects of the visa application process. Decisions on visa applications, including the availability of appointment slots and the timelines to process them, are at the sole discretion of the respective client governments and may vary from one mission to another. VFS Global maintains its standard turn-around-time of processing visa applications in one business day to send to respective embassies/ consulates for decision-making. There could be an additional day due to the hub and spoke travel time required between cities, as and when applicable.”

Sen added, “We also urge responsible travel partners to create awareness about scammers and

fraudulent entities who charge fees from visa applicants for scheduling appointments or providing any other services independently.”

## Steps improving customer experience

One of the most defining changes observed in customers’ expectations and behaviours post the pandemic has been the increased important to health considerations and prioritising safe travel. This has led to a wider acceptance of personalised and digital solutions. Sen shared, “VFS Global’s Visa at



## Travel demand in 2022 was significantly different from the travel demand before COVID-19 with no defined peak season

Your Doorstep service, which enables travellers to bring the entire visa application experience including biometric enrollment to their homes or offices, has seen around 5x growth in 2022 against 2019. Similarly, VFS Global has observed a steady rise in demand for its Premium Lounge service that comprises individual assistance with all visa related queries, quicker completion of the application submission process, and immediate biometric enrolment, all within a plush lounge facility.”

VFS Global’s focus on customers has been the distinguishing feature of its journey. “All of our innovative services are designed to meet the changing requirements for trust, convenience, personalisation, reliability, and security. In response to the growing need for personalised

and at-home services, VFS Global is moving more of the visa application process online, making it accessible from the comfort and safety of our customers’ homes,” he said.

Emphasizing on the technical aspects, Sen said, “We have also introduced the Digital Document Check and Digital Application Submission services for accurate and convenient online visa application submission. Our Digital Document Check service helps in better document preparedness through pre-submission review of their visa application, while our Digital Application Submission service helps customers in conveniently submitting their visa applications with our assistance on video chat.”

## Future of visa processing

On the introduction of e-visas and visa-on-arrival in several countries, Sen said, “eVisa is one of the most innovative solutions implemented for simplification of cross-border mobility which, in turn, can boost economic growth. Easing of travel restrictions globally and gradual recovery of international tourism are pushing countries to explore innovative programs to boost tourism demand as countries providing smoother visa solutions tend to attract more travellers.”

He added, “We have recently introduced a fast-track visa-on-arrival service for Indonesia-bound travellers from 86 nation-

alities including India, which ensures a hassle-free travel experience with access to a fast-track immigration lane.”

## Collaboration with trade partners

Highlighting the collaboration with travel trade partners to facilitate visa applications and processing for travellers, Sen said, “Our travel partners have always been the pillars of the travel ecosystem in India and expected to play a more critical role during this period of recovery. They are an integral part of the travel ecosystem and we have always valued their contribution, and their role will be even more important to rebuild confidence among travellers in this market.”



Prabuddha Sen  
COO - South Asia at VFS Global

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