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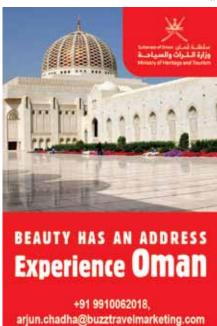
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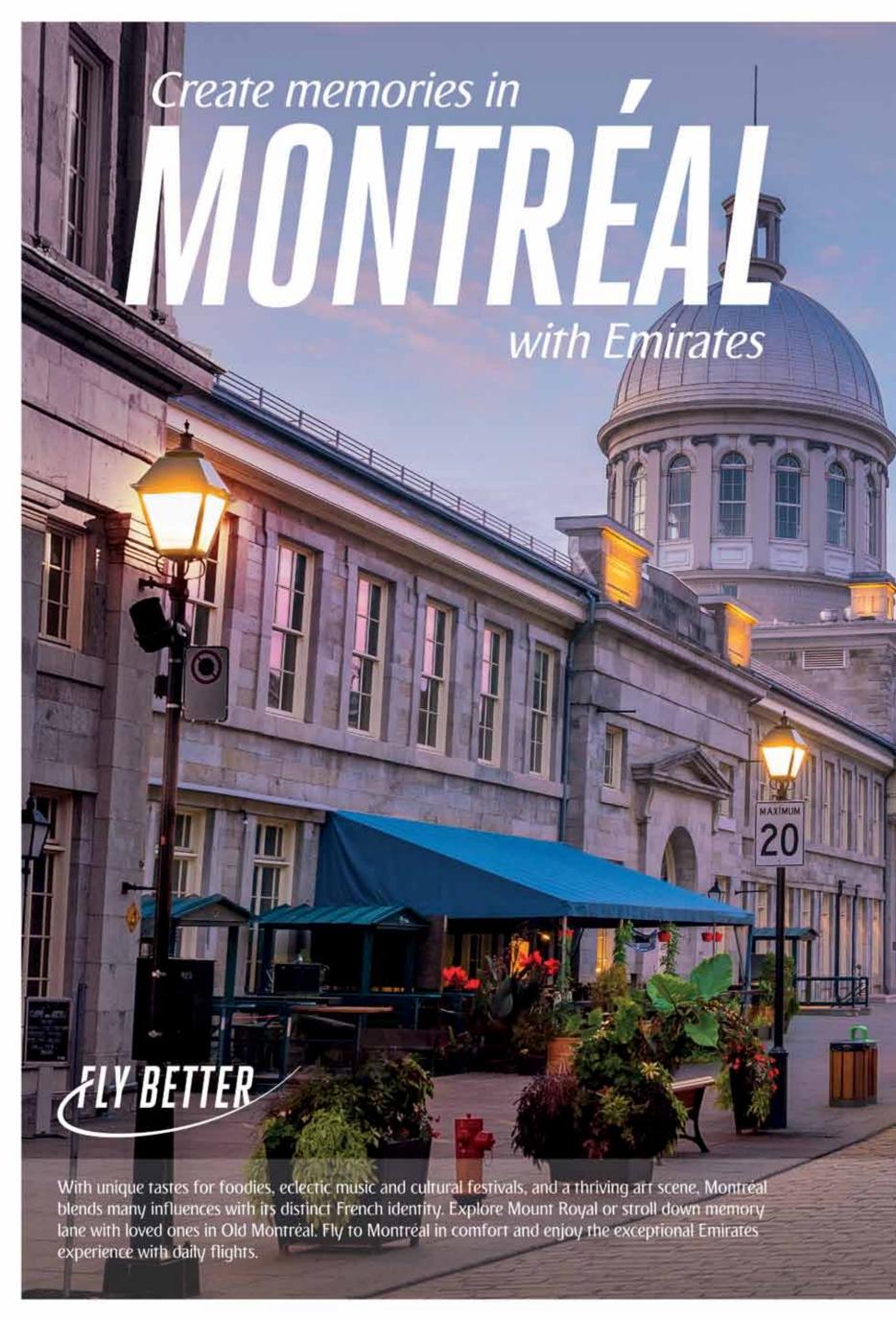
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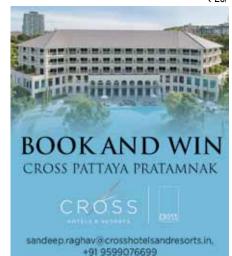
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'Govt addressing parking issue'

Ajay Bhatt, MoS for Tourism, says the tourists' rush at famous tourist destinations has necessitated the need for more parking facilities, and govt has already started work in this direction.

Poonam Akolia

jay Bhatt, Minister of State for Tourism, has highlighted the pressing need for additional parking spaces at popular tourist destinations. "The unprecedented number of tourists visiting these famous places has necessitated the development of more parking facilities in nearby areas. As a proactive measure, efforts have already begun to construct a parking area in Bhowali and Bhimtal near Nainital. The government is



Ajay Bhatt Minister of State for Tourism

also considering plans to further expand parking spaces at other tourist destinations to cater to the increasing influx of visitors," he said in an interaction with TravTalk recently.

The MOT also recognizes the potential of developing border areas for tourism purposes. "To achieve this goal, the ministry is committed to developing all necessary facilities and infrastructure in these areas. This includes improving transport network, tourist attractions, and amenities," he said.

IDing the millennial traveller

As the industry evolves to meet the millennial traveller's demands, experts from the field share their views on why it makes business sense to tap them and how to attract them.



Rajiv Mehra Director Uday Tours & Travels

One message that all tour operators and travel agents need to understand is that millennials, covering 27 per cent of global population, are interested in authenticity, fulfilment, and sustainability. Hence, there significance in this industry cannot be undermined. Travelling more frequently, exploring destinations are activities loved by millennials, and they are ready to pay more for experiences. Offering new experiences, offbeat destination, slow tourism is something that we need to sell them as travel group. They experience travel with responsible approach. This segment loves to engage with local population.

Contd on page 10

India Travel Awards celebrates excellence

India Travel Awards North 2023 recognizes the movers and shakers of the industry, who have contributed to the country's vibrant tourism landscape, setting new benchmarks.

Janice Alyosius

The India Travel Awards North 2023 took place at Hyatt Regency Delhi on 25 July 2023. The event was a huge success, as it brought together the brilliant minds from the travel and hospitality sector to acknowledge and honour outstanding leaders and achievers.

With an impressive participation of more than 12,000 votes in this edition, the event recognised INDIA
TRAVEL
AWARDS
NORTH 2023

celebration of excellence and innovation, inspiring others to follow in the footsteps of these outstanding individuals. The awards process began with an online nomination that saw enthusiastic participation from across the sector. The



dynamic

utmost

nature of the

Indian tourism

industry. Voting

was conducted

care to ensure

with

The event commenced with a keynote address by Chief Guest, VK Duggal, former Governor of Manipur & Mizoram

Contd on page 14



From L to R: Ashwani Lohani, Subhash Goyal & V K Duggal

the trailblazers, who made substantial contributions this year to the country's vibrant tourism landscape, setting new standards for the entire industry. It was a thought-provoking nomination form encouraged participants to contemplate what sets them apart, resulting in over 203 different nomination categories, highlighting the diverse







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Embrace the thrill, ATOAI urges industry

The Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) wants more travel agents to start selling adventure travel packages, particularly soft adventure, and expand their business. Ajeet Bajaj, the association's President, ensures that they will handhold and connect them with good adventure operators.

Hazel Jain

ncouraging travel agents to expand their business and start selling adventure tourism, Ajeet Bajaj, President, Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI), says, "Almost 80 per cent of the market today is soft adventure travel and we want to network with travel agents and tour operators in Mumbai and other cities to discuss responsible adventure tourism, best practices, as well as how to select and start working with good adventure tour operators across the country. The Maharashtra travel trade is a mature body, and I would like to encourage them to start selling soft adventure travel to their clients. There are a lot of fantastic adventure operators in India who use excellent equipment and have highly skilled adventure guides."

Soft adventure includes activities such as rafting, trekking, and ziplining that anyone with a little bit of training can do. On the other hand,



Ajeet Bajaj President

for hard adventure one needs a greater amount of training and physical fitness.

The ATOAI conducted its first regional event post-pandemic in Mumbai recently. It started with a seminar, followed by an adventure tourism roadshow during which 13 sellers met with more than 160 buvers from Mumbai. The seminar

focused on key topics, such as best practices in adventure, safety and insurance in adventure travel.

Bajaj says, "We want to spread the message of safe and responsible adventure tourism in India. We set the ball rolling by organising training for the adventure guides in Mumbai in Wilderness First Aid and CPR. We also conducted a course on responsible adventure tourism. The guides also took a pledge that not only will they do the right thing as far as safety is concerned and preserve the environment, but will also serve as honorary wardens and ensure that everyone follows the ATOAI safety guidelines."

The idea behind the seminar was to educate travel agents and tour operators about responsible adventure tourism and best practices. A lot of members from other national associations, such as TAFI, ADTOI, IATO, as well as the Maharashtra Adventure Council were also present. ATOAI will conduct similar

events in other cities, including Hyderabad, Kolkata, Guwahati, Delhi, Bengaluru and Pune.

Mega trails a great product Sharing some statistics, Bajaj says, "Globally, adventure tourism

The Maharashtra travel trade is a mature body, and I want to encourage them to start selling soft adventure travel

was a US\$ 683 billion industry in 2017 growing at a compound annual rate of 22 per cent. As per the pre-pandemic projections, adventure tourism was to be a trillion dollar industry by 2024. We are

to their clients



ADVENTURE TOUR OPERATORS
ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

waiting for the 2022 report, but we are hoping that adventure tourism will bounce back quickly to the prepandemic levels. Adventure tourism is on a mission mode in our country. We now have a national strategy for it. There is also a national board for adventure tourism. We have had four meetings so far. There is also a national board for sustainable tourism. We have a lot of work in progress for adventure tourism such as the model law."

Adventure was also part of the G20 meet that happened in Darjeeling,

where Tourism Minister G Kishan Reddy announced the launch of two mega adventure tourism trails.

Addressing a session at the G20 tourism working group meeting, Reddy said the trails are expected to be launched this year: the Ganga trail (2,700 kms) and northwestern Himalayan trail (1,200 kms).

"This is going to be a gamechanger for adventure tourism in India. Travellers can walk the entire trail or do sections of it. The idea is to make these mega trails to be the finest examples of sustainable tourism. We have been working on this – the MoT, ATOAI and the state governments – and we will come up with a great product," Bajaj says.

Agents must keep in mind

- There is no overcrowding in adventure areas
- Follow the 'Leave no Trace' ethos
- Limit carrying capacity in ecologically fragile areas
- Always follow safety guidelines



TRAUTALK

VIEWPOINT

Betting big on outbound travel

After closing a successful summer season, India's outbound market is already aiming at autumn and Diwali bookings, which has risen to an all-new level in the last few years. In fact, before the pandemic, outbound from India wasn't just seasonal, it was a 365-day phenomenon, and we are on the same path again. A recent report by Nangia Anderson LLP has claimed that the international tourist arrivals have reached 80 per cent of pre-pandemic levels in the first quarter of 2023, owing to strong results in Europe and the Middle East, compared to a 66 per cent recovery level for the year 2022. It also stated that around 235 million tourists travelled internationally in the first three months, which was more than double of those in the same period of 2022.

However, when it comes to destinations, Indians are preferring new experiences and trying new destinations, but traditional favourites are still getting the most numbers. The report states that the UAE, Saudi Arabia, USA, Singapore, and Thailand are the top destinations for Indian travellers. In fact, India's outbound tourism market is estimated to reach US\$ 15163.4 million in 2022 and projected to rise by 11.4 per cent AGR between 2022 and 2032.

With such high projections for outbound, there seems to be no dearth of money for Indians when it comes to travel. Now with packages estimated to skyrocket in future, owing to high TCS for outbound packages, things might change. However, India remains a key source market for most tourism boards, who are investing more money in promotions and activities here. Vietnam is a great example of cracking the Indian outbound market, even if it's because of the closing of Chinese market. From what we see, this growth momentum will continue despite the Chinese travelling again in huge numbers.

What is needed is the government making outbound more conducive for both the travellers as well as the service providers by strengthening bilaterals and encouraging travel exchange too. This might just turn the page for India inbound, which is much-needed post-pandemic.

Indian hotel industry in sweet spot

Indian hotel industry is likely to witness a decadal-high occupancy of 70-72 per cent in FY2024, says a report by ICRA. The healthy demand uptick results in a pick-up in new supply announcements and commencement of deferred projects over the last 12-15 months.

CRA estimates pan-India premium hotel occupancy at 70-72 per cent in FY2024, after recovering to 68-70 per cent in FY2023. Pan-India premium hotel average room rates (ARRs) are expected to be at ₹6,000-6,200 in FY2024. While the occupancy is expected to be at decadal highs. the RevPAR is expected to remain at a 20-25 per cent discount to the FY2008 peak. Consistent improvement in consumer sentiments despite the inflationary environment, stable corporate performance, and domestic air passenger traffic inching above pre-COVID levels augurs well for travel and hotel demand. The demand recovery has been strong in the last one year, and the agency anticipates it to continue in FY2024 as well. Sustenance of domestic leisure travel, higher bookings from meetings, incen-



tives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICF), and business travel, along with an increase in foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs), would support demand. The industry is also likely to benefit from specific events like the G20 summit and the ICC World Cup 2023.



Vinutaa S. Vice President and Sector Head - Corporate Ratings, ICRA, said: "Gateway cities like Delhi and Mumbai are likely to top the occupancy chart at 75 per cent+ in FY2024. Demand is expected to remain healthy across markets, although Bengaluru and Pune are likely to be laggards

if any. Sustenance of a large part of the cost-rationalisation measures undertaken during the pandemic period, along with operating leverage benefits, resulted in a sharp expansion in margins. The agency's sample set, comprising 12 large hotel companies, reported operating margins of

compared to other key cities. While the G20 summit would support occupancy across cities in FY2024, improved economic activity and business associations stemming from these meetings are likely to translate into incremental demand for hotels over the medium term. ICRA expects an improving trend in ARRs as well across markets in FY2024 driven by healthy occupancy. Further, mid-scale hotels have also witnessed traction across cities and are likely to continue reporting healthy ARRs and occupancy in FY2024."

The agency estimates a 13-15 per cent revenue growth for the Indian hotel industry in FY2024, notwithstanding the potential impact on demand from exogenous shocks,



In Numbers

pan-India premium hotel occupancy in FY2024

₹6,000-6,200 pan-India premium hotel

ARRs in FY2024 20-25%

RevPAR discount compared to FY2008

32 per cent for FY2023, against 20-22 per cent pre-COVID. While there could be some moderation in margins from these levels with an increase in some cost-heads, including refurbishment/ maintenance, the margins are still expected to be higher than the pre-COVID levels over the medium term. The staff-to-room ratio remains below pre-COVID levels and is expected to continue to be so going forward as well. Accordingly, the agency has a positive business outlook on the Indian hotel industry.

"The healthy demand uptick resulted in a pick-up in new supply announcements and commencement of deferred projects over the last 12-15 months. The incremental premium supply is concentrated in select markets, with Mumbai and Bengaluru accounting for a bulk of the upcoming inventory. There are sizeable supply announcements in tier II and religious destinations as well. However, the hotel supply pipeline is expected to grow only at a threeyear CAGR of 3.5-4 per cent, adding approximately 15,000-16,000 rooms to the pan-India premium inventory of 95,000 rooms across 12 key cities in India. This will facilitate an upcycle, as demand improves over the medium term and outpaces supply. The current inventory growth is significantly lower than the expansion of approximately 18 per cent witnessed during FY2009-2013, after the global financial crisis. In terms of trends, rebranding has been prevalent, and a significant part of the pipeline is expected to be through management contracts and operating leases. Also, not

Consistent improvement in consumer sentiments despite the COVID related challenges augurs well for travel and

many mergers and acquisitions are being witnessed, attributable to demand pick-up, even as ECLGS support for the industry has waned," Vinutaa reiterated.

hotel demand

Meanwhile. Domestic air passenger traffic for the month of June was estimated at 125.2 lakh, 5 per cent lower than 132.1 lakh in May 2023. However, it witnessed a YoY growth of 19 per cent. Domestic passenger traffic in June 2023 was higher by 4 per cent compared to the pre-COVID levels.

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Experts wary of cruise targets

The Union government aims to establish India as a global tourism hub and increase cruise traffic from 0.4 mn to 4 mn. However, experts highlight a few challenges that can be limiting factors for the progress of cruise tourism in the country.



ruise shipping is one of the most exciting and rapidly expanding segments of the global leisure business. With respect to India, which have a beautiful coastline, rich culture and diversity in delicacies, the country can be amazing destination for cruise travellers. The Union government is taking several initiatives to boost cruise tourism. which can be seen in its decision to constitute a National Strategy for Cruise Tourism. Under the government initiatives, new routes and terminals are being developed or in pipeline.

Rise in cruise passenger volume

Sarbananda Sonowal, Union Minister, Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways (MoPSW),



Sarbananda Sonowal Union Minister, Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways (MoPSW)



Managing Director FhixCash Travel Group



President and CFO Waterways Leisure and Cordelia Cruises

pointed out that India is not able to provide favourable environment, a major challenge hampering rise of domestic cruise tourism "Till the time we don't provide favourable atmosphere to the cruise liners,

no matter how many terminals are

department do not have this kind of attitude, no matter how many ships or cruises come to India, they won't be able to sustain."

He cited the example of one of his companies, Holland America regulations need to be followed, for progress."

On the other hand. Kundu is not impressed by the number, as he feels India is such a rapid growing economy that 4 million is a "very small number". "India would be able to achieve larger number for domestic cruising provided all stakeholders come together to create infrastructure and smooth sailing for cruise liners." he said.



Joel Katz, Managing Director, CLIA, said, "Collaboration is the key to achieve landmarks, with tourism authorities, local and national governments, cruise lines, tourism operators, port operators, ground operators, suppliers, food producers, technical support providers, local chambers of commerce, and retail associations. These collaborations might



Joel Katz Managing Director CLIA



says the government is deeply

committed to provide a world

class infrastructure to enable

growth of cruise travel and mari-

time trade. Sharing details about

new cruise terminals, he said, "It gives me immense happiness to

share that three new internation-

al terminals will be completed by

2024. Volume of cruise ships

will increase from 208 to 1,100

by 2024." He added, "Pas-

senger numbers will also rise

from 5 lakh in 2030 to 45 lakh

in 2047. The government also

plans to work on Gujarat Pilgrim-

age Tours, Cultural and Scenic

Tours, Ayurveda Wellness Tours

and heritage tourism to boost

However, a few challenges high-

lighted by experts can be limiting

factors, even if new routes are in-

troduced or new cruises come to

India. Naveen Kundu, Managing

Director, EbixCash Travel Group,

cruise tourism remarkably."

Obstacles highlighted

by experts

Subhash Goyal Chairman STIC Travel Group

introduced or how many cruise liners come to India, they won't be able to retain their position in India." Kundu said.

Founder & Director

Jurgen Bailom, President and CEO, Waterways Leisure and Cordelia Cruises, said that a major challenge has always been less awareness about cruising among potential tourists in the Indian market.

Echoing similar sentiments, Subhash Goyal, Chairman, STIC Travel Group, emphasized on negative attitude of Customs & Immigration department. Recalling a personal experience, Goyal said, "I visited Portugal and Spain, where I took a cruise and observed that cruise just had single digital identity card, which helped me for all the onboarding procedures. The movement with that card is so smooth that people board and deboard the cruise as if they are moving in metro or local trains. Till our Customs & Immigration

Cruise. He said the amount of trouble and inconvenience they faced at Mumbai Port with respect to immigration and sailing procedures, they decided to blacklist the port. "If wishes were horses, all beggars would ride them." he said.

Nishith Saxena, Founder & Director, Cruise Professionals, said: "It is good to be ambitious and confident, but how does the government plan to achieve 4 million mark? If this is an annual tourist count for cruise to be achieved by 2040, we have 15 years to achieve it, for which right step like appointing independent advisors, single-minded focus and

The Union govt is taking several initiatives to boost cruise tourism, including a decision to constitute a **National Strategy** for Cruise Tourism

be led by government or by tourism authorities, or at a grassroots level they might be united by local business working groups and passionate individuals.

Costa Cruise & TripJack have partnered to offer cruising experiences during season time. From November 2023 to January 2024, Costa Serena will offer a total of 23 sailings and a dual homeport of Mumbai and Cochin. It will sail to Mumbai, Cochin, Goa and, for the first time ever, the beautiful Lakshadweep islands with a 2, 3 and 5-night itineraries.



Millennials like personalisation



Director ETAA - Event Head

Marketing is the most important pillar of a business, especially when you want to tap this segment. You may have a good product, but if you don't package and promote it well, how will they know about it. Millennial customers can get detailed product information from a variety of sources. Marketing has changed over time. It is no more about just selling a product, it is about connecting with the audience, educating them and sharing knowledge.



Abraham Alapatt President & Group Head - Marketing Thomas Cook (India) and SOTC Travel

According to me, being a millennial traveller is not about age at all, it's about a mindset. It's about the way these travellers think, which is different from the way travellers historically did. To my mind the big difference is that they travel for local experiences. It needs to be authentic, and it can be people, culture, art, food, anything. From the economic standpoint, these new-age travellers are really about willing to invest in experiences. ""



Reena Sachdev Travel Arena

Cur marketing strategy has completely changed, especially since September 2021 when we incorporated social media. client engagement events and many more offline marketing activities for our millennial patrons. which have resulted in much greater bonds with people. We had 800 followers on Instagram in 2020 and as on today our following has increased to 21.6K organic followers.



Kathy Koyamaibole Regional Director Asia and Pacific, Tourism Fiji

Millennials and Gen Z travellers make for one of the most significant traveller segments in today's world. They are largely driven by their evolving aspirations and it's exciting to see travel has emerged as one of the top aspirations for younger generations. Both are important segments for us, as a major share of the travellers from India are couples and honeymooners. We've taken a targeted approach to tap into these.



Atout France India

The millennials and Gen Z are an important segment largely because they are well-informed, have the means to travel frequently and are always open to discovering new experiences and go beyond the tried and tested. In addition, this type of traveller is always digitally connected. We are trying to enhance our visibility and create awareness through channels/ platforms that are often frequented by them, such as digital platforms.



Tarun Malhotra Director InOrbit Tours

We are largely a M!CE tour operator, primarily into corporates, and offering niche itineraries to them. Interestingly, at our company, it is my son and not I who is strategizing on how to tap this target audience. He is a lot of help. Whichever country I travel to, he makes superb reels with the videos I shoot on my phone to post it on Instagram and Linkedin to attract the millennials. As a result. we are getting inquiries through Instagram.



Neliswa Nkani Hub Head – Middle East, India and South-East Asia, South African Tourism

The last few years have seen India become the world's largest millennial market, drawing attention from across the world. They contribute significantly to the Indian economy and are among the main breadwinners of their households. This demography will continue to dominate the Indian workforce for at least next 10 years and their wallet share will keep on increasing, making them an extremely important segment for the industry.



Kulin Shah Managing Director Kulin Kumar Holidays

We specialise in group tours, but we have seen a huge shift in the average age of travellers that are booking with us. Initially, there were more senior citizens and middle aged travellers who were wanting to travel more. Now after the pandemic, a lot of younger people – from the teens to young adults - want to travel with their friends even if they are married, or single. We are trying to target this new-age traveller.



Bernadette Willemin Director General for Destination Marketing, Tourism Seychelles

Our strategy is more hybrid; we don't rely only on in-person touchpoints or online platforms. We also maintain contact with our trade partners. We have strengthened our approach to digital marketing. A significant portion of our strategy is to employ more new measurable outlets, such as our websites and social media. In India, majority of our audience increasingly spends time on digital platforms, particularly social media.



Guldeep Singh Sahni *Managing Director Weldon Tours & Travels*

Millennials are the most critical segment for outbound travel, as around 40 per cent of bookings for outbound travel come from this group. Risk-taking and willing to experiment and travel for beautiful experience and culture, immersing themselves into their destinations. It is really a pleasure to work with this group, as they are well informed and does a lot of homework before coming to us. You also get to learn from them.



Manoj Saraf Managing Director Gainwell Travel & Leisure

The millennial segment really constitutes an important target market for us. We all know how due to initiatives of digital India, the 0-23 years age group people prefer and prioritize tech-savvy choices. For example, booking a hotel room direct through online facilities rather than through a travel agent. Millennials prefer searching web for itineraries rather than consulting travel trade, this has become favourite activity for youth.



Andaman & Nicobar Chapter, IATO

Millennials are future of tourism. Since this group likes and demands different things, tourism service providers will have to think differently in order to cater to the segment. This group is willing to pay extra for getting lifetime experiences. They will pay extra or borrow money to see the world as long as they are interested, which is a different concept from earlier generation. This segment is backbone for the industry.

Contd. on page 12

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Social media best influencer



Skyworld Tours & Travels

Solution Day by day, social media is becoming increasingly important to attract the millennial traveller. This involves blogs, microblogs, social networking platforms, reviews, and interactive sites. In recent years, social media has emerged as a new commercial communication too! Social networking helps you link and improve your brand awareness and maximise the productivity of business.



Chirag Gupta Devor

I can confidently say that our marketing spend has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, with a strong emphasis on performance marketing and digital media strategy in order to tap the millennials. We have strategically allocated resources to channels that allow us to track and measure the performance of our campaigns. This approach enables us to optimize our spending based on KPIs.



Naveen Kundu FhixCash Travel Group

Millennial travellers are now a core segment of travel. They influence the decision making of the travel fraternity a lot. There is a paradigm shift, people are not buying group departures now. Every household earlier wanted to travel in a group. With millennials in place, group travel is not a situation anymore. They want to choose the hotel, the airline, and the destination and book tickets as per their preferences.



Sandeep Arora Brightsun Travel

As digital technologies and online platforms gained prominence in order to attract the younger traveller segment, we recoanised the need to shift our focus towards digital marketing. Today, we have increased our investment in digital marketing channels, including SEO, social media marketing, and email marketing. By leveraging social media, we are able to share engaging travel content with customers.



Noshir A Marfatia Senior VP - Sales & Marketing The Fern Hotels & Resorts

We have wholeheartedly embraced social media as a crucial part of our marketing strategy in order to attract the millennial travellers. In recent years, we have allocated a significant portion of our marketing budget to digital platforms, including social media. This has enabled us to effectively reach a wide audience, engage with potential customers, and promote our brand. It has allowed us to connect with customers.



Aiith Nair Resident Manager, Radisson Blu Resort Goa Cavelossim Beach

The trend has shifted more towards digital platforms, as the same is more commercially viable and also has boundless reach. It allows focussed activities, such as targeting the right audience, be it age or region specific, particularly the millennials. The ROI can also be better measured. Our marketing spend ratio has been 60:40 for 2023-24 viz a vis 40:60 in 2021-2022. We are active on our social media platforms.

ChatGPT: A boon or a bane for biz?

With the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Natural Language Processing (NLP) technology like ChatGPT in the today's world, travel companies can improve their efficiency, communication, and customer satisfaction, while saving a lot of time and resources. **Saurabh Mehta**, Co-Founder, Tourwiz, explains.

rtificial intelligence (AI) has been transforming various industries for the past few years, and the travel industry is no exception. With the rise of Natural Language Processing (NLP) technology like ChatGPT, travel companies can improve their efficiencv. communication, and customer satisfaction while saving a lot of time and resources. I have taken ChatGPT as an example here, as we have already started incorporating its API into www.tourwizonline.com. It's called TourWizAl Assistant. Al can be integrated into a travel company's website, app, or social media accounts to help assist companies and their customers in planning their travel itinerary, write emails, and create brochures. Here are some of the ways that travel companies can use various Al models to improve efficiency and communication.

Improve communication

Al can help travel companies overcome the language barrier when



communicating with English or non-English speaking customers. With its natural language processing capabilities, it can understand queries and respond to them in multiple languages, along with English. So, what this means to thousands of small travel companies and #DMCs who are non-English speakers, communicate with their customers in English or customers' own language in a matter of seconds. Think of the time saved. That in itself would be worth paying a monthly fee. This

can improve customer satisfaction and attract more customers to the travel company's website or app.

Generate instant itineraries

Al can help generate instant brochures and itineraries based on a customer's preferences and budget. The #travelagency can input the preferred travel dates, destination, budget, and interests, and the AI can generate a customized itinerary with recommendations for activities, restaurants, and accommodations. This saves the agency

a lot of time, nearly 70 per cent, and eliminates the need for them to research and plan the trip manually.

Write proper emails

Technologies like #chatgpt can help travel companies communicate with their customers in a

Al can be integrated into a travel company's website, app, or social media accounts to help them and their customers in planning travel

professional and efficient manner. It can draft emails that are clear, concise, and personalized based on the customer's query.

Do destination research

Al can help travel companies research and compile information on a destination. It can find information on popular tourist attractions. hotels, restaurants, and transportation options.

Create customized package

Al can create a package for end customers, which includes their customized itinerary, travel documents, and other important information such as visa requirements and travel insurance.

Provide customer support

Al or NLP technologies can provide customer support to customers at any time of the day. Customers can ask queries about their trip or seek help with any issue they may encounter during their travel. This can improve customer satisfaction and help travel companies provide excellent customer support.

Recommend F&B places

One of the most important things

customers want when they travel is a great culinary experience of meal requirements. Technologies like ChatGPT can recommend places to eat and drink, as well as various types of cuisine based on the customer's preferences.

So, ChatGPT and other Al technologies can help travel companies improve their efficiency, communication, and customer satisfaction while saving time and resources.



Saurabh Mehta

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

Tourism made India richer by ₹16tn in '22

Tourism planning is the best way forward for India to accomplish a \$5 trillion economy, says Anish Kumar PK, CEO, The Travel Planners, Trivandrum, Kerala, who believes that it is possible by improving education, quality of travel and showcasing the best India has to offer.

Nisha Verma

nish Kumar PK, CEO, The Travel Planners, Trivandrum, Kerala believes that achieving a \$5 trillion economy for India is a huge goal, which can be achieved with the help of tourism planning. "In 2022, the travel and tourism sector contributed ₹15.7 trillion to India's economy. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), this value is projected to reach ₹16.5 trillion by the end of this year. The forecast for the next 10 years is estimated to be a staggering ₹37 trillion. To achieve this ambitious goal, India's tourism marketing and development require comprehensive planning. It is essential to revamp India's tourism marketing strategies, adopt state-wise planning approaches, and position tourism products effectively to drive tourism growth," he says.

Enhancing education

Putting emphasis on the improvement of education, he adds, "To increase awareness about the significance of tourism and improve service quality, India should expand its tourism education and

India should expand its tourism education and training initiatives to increase awareness about the significance of tourism

training initiatives. The tourism education programs should encompass multidisciplinary majors that prepare students for the future of the sector. Promising new majors could include tourism data science and tourism business management."

Given the increasingly competitive global tourism market, he mentions, it is crucial for the tourism industry to constantly strive for improvement in order to enhance its international competitiveness. "To ensure high-quality tourism education, training, and research programs, Indian Institute of Management (IIM) should introduce tourism management courses. Graduates from these programs can then be placed in top tourism positions within the Ministry of

Tourism and various state tourism departments," he suggests.

Undergrad job opportunities

Pointing out that there is a considerable gap in job opportunities within the lower segments of the hospitality sector, particularly in housekeeping, food production, service, and driving, he advises, "Undergraduate students can be provided with skill development training to bridge this gap and offer employment opportunities in these sectors."

Improving quality

Kumar PK has claimed that improving the quality of transportation in India will go a long way in helping the country's economy. "India has 352 five-star hotels and 425 four-star hotels. To attract upscale travellers, Indian tourism marketing efforts should focus on upgrading the transportation sector, particularly by providing luxury tourist vehicles. Initiatives such as providing Easy Mudra loans with lower interest rates and waiving Central Goods and Services Tax for tourist vehicles for one year can help address the shortage of luxury tourist vehicles in the country," he shares

Showcasing India

Putting emphasis on showcasing India, Kumar PK says, "India's tourism products, with their diverse offerings such as authentic spirituality, wellness (Yoga, Ayurveda), wildlife, nature, beaches, temples, and cuisine, need to be marketed effectively to cater to a wide range of tourists' interests and preferences."



Anish Kumar PK CEO, The Travel Planners Trivandrum, Kerala

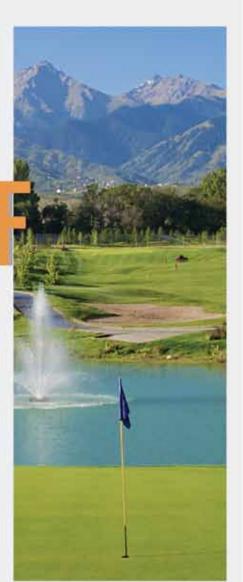
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India improves its ranks among Australia's source markets, first to recover to pre-COVID levels

Singapore Airlines has highest share (15.5 per cent) of its seats in premium cabins: CAPA

Russia to launch e-visa for Indian passports holders from 1 August 2023

Scindia launches RCS UDAN 5.2. increases VGF and reduces fare cap

Rail Europe launches Eurail Greek Islands Pass via its B2B website and AP

Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels enters Odisha with 40-key Zone by The Park

Australia keen to leverage India potential, AMI 2023 sees participation from 86 sellers

Green tourism in spotlight at UN

G Kishan Reddy, Union Minister of Tourism, Culture and DoNER, recently addressed the 'High-Level Political Forum 2023 - UN World Tourism Organization', where he highlighted India's commitment towards sustainable and green tourism.

TT Bureau

Kishan Reddy, in his address at the UN Headquarters, said that India is creating a conducive environment for the tourism sector to contribute to economic growth, environmental protection and social well-being in a sustainable manner. "India is actively advancing Sustainable Development Goals through tourism implementing various activities and strategies," he said.

During the session, he informed that India has launched a national strategy for sustainable tourism, and that there are seven key pillars under the strategy which focus on promoting environment, economic and socio-cultural sustainability, protecting biodiversity and creating awareness through skill evelopment and entrepreneurship training. "MOT has launched the 'Travel for LiFE' programme to promote sustainable tourism in the country, which is developed to bring largescale behavioural change among



G Kishan Reddy Union Minister of Tourism Culture and DoNER

tourists and tourism businesses, which will have a significant impact on environmental protection and climate action. The programme holds tremendous significance for promoting India's G20 priority of Green Tourism under the Tourism Working Group." he said.

Also, he insisted that India is working towards enhancing connectivtions. "MOT is collaborating with the Ministry of Civil Aviation and other ministries in the country as a 'whole-of-government approach'. Such initiatives have resulted in the operationalisation of tourism routes, facilitating easier access to iconic sites and boosting tourism in those regions."

Informing that under India's G20 Presidency, five interconnected priority areas in the tourism sector have been identified, he said that they are the key building blocks for enhancing the tourism sector and achieving the targets for 2030 SDGs. "The Goa Roadmap for tourism as a vehicle for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is a pioneering global effort towards developing the tourism sector through the lens of sustainable development goals," he claimed.

Reddy added, "A notable feature of the G20 Indian Presidency 2023 Goa Roadmap is its commitment

to promoting collaboration and engagement to leverage activities to position the tourism sector as a leader in collective progress towards the SDGs.'

Also, he said, in line with the digitisation drive, India is leveraging technology to empower the hospi-

tality and tourism industry. "These 'comprehensive efforts' by the Gol reflects its commitment to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals through tourism by focusing on sustainable practices, infrastructure development, enhanced connectivity, green transport and digitalisation," he averred.

G20 Tourism Working Group Priority Areas

On the road to progressing the SDGs, India's G20 Presidency has identified five priority areas for the Tourism Working Group (TWG) where the tourism sector can lead in making important contributions.

- Green Tourism: Greening the tourism sector for a sustainable, responsible and resilient tourism sector
- Digitalisation: Harnessing the power of digitalisation to promote competitiveness, inclusion and sustainability in the tourism
- Skills: Empowering youth with skills for jobs and entrepreneurship in the tourism sector
- Tourism micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs): Nurturing tourism MSMEs, startups and private sector to unleash innovation and dynamism in the tourism sector; and
- Destination Management: Rethinking the strategic management of destinations towards a holistic approach that delivers on the SDGs

ITA inspires Travel & Tourism industry

and Chairman, Advisory Councils of VFS Global and OYO Hotels. He acknowledged the growth of the domestic tourism market, but also stressed on the need for addressing challenges like pricing to boost inbound tourism. He urged the industry to focus on providing competitive pricing, seamless travel experiences, and sustain-



able practices to attract and retain international tourists, further elevating India's position as a preferred global destination. The awards recognized several accomplished names in the industry for their outstanding contribution.

The Gallery of Legends Inductee: Ashwani Lohani, ex-Indian Railway Service officer and former CMD, Air India, expressed his deep connection with the travel industry and said, "The entire tourism sector is a big family. One joins it never

to get out. I have thoroughly released my association with the tourism family and would continue

DDP Trailblazer for 2023: Rajiv Mehra, President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), expressed gratitude for the award, saying, "This award will now motivate me to work further and fulfil the goals of my members who have just begun their revival journey."

Wedding Tourism Ambassador 2023: Rajeev Jain, Founder & Director, Rashi Entertainment, acknowledged the appreciation from the travel industry, saying, "The amalgamation of travel and wedding industry is a big thing."

DDP Game Changer for 2023: Rikant Pittie, Co-Founder, Ease-MyTrip. On his behalf. Nutan Gupta. COO, EaseMyTrip, took the award and said. "Hard work and there is no shortcut to success at any-time zone I've seen Rikant working all the time and this award resonates with him and his core personality." Face of the Future: Isha Goyal,

Executive Director & CEO STIC Travel Group, humbly acknowledged her recognition and said, "I would be a miss if I didn't credit this recognition to my amazing team at STIC, without whom I am only a face."

These exceptional leaders were celebrated for their dedication. innovation, and outstanding contributions, which have played pivotal roles in shaping the Indian tourism landscape.

The ceremony also showcased exceptional achievements across various other categories, including Best Airline, Best Tour Operator, Best Hotel Chain, and more. This provided a glimpse into the immense talent and dedication within the Indian tourism and hospitality industry, truly reflecting the vibrant spirit of Indian hospitality.

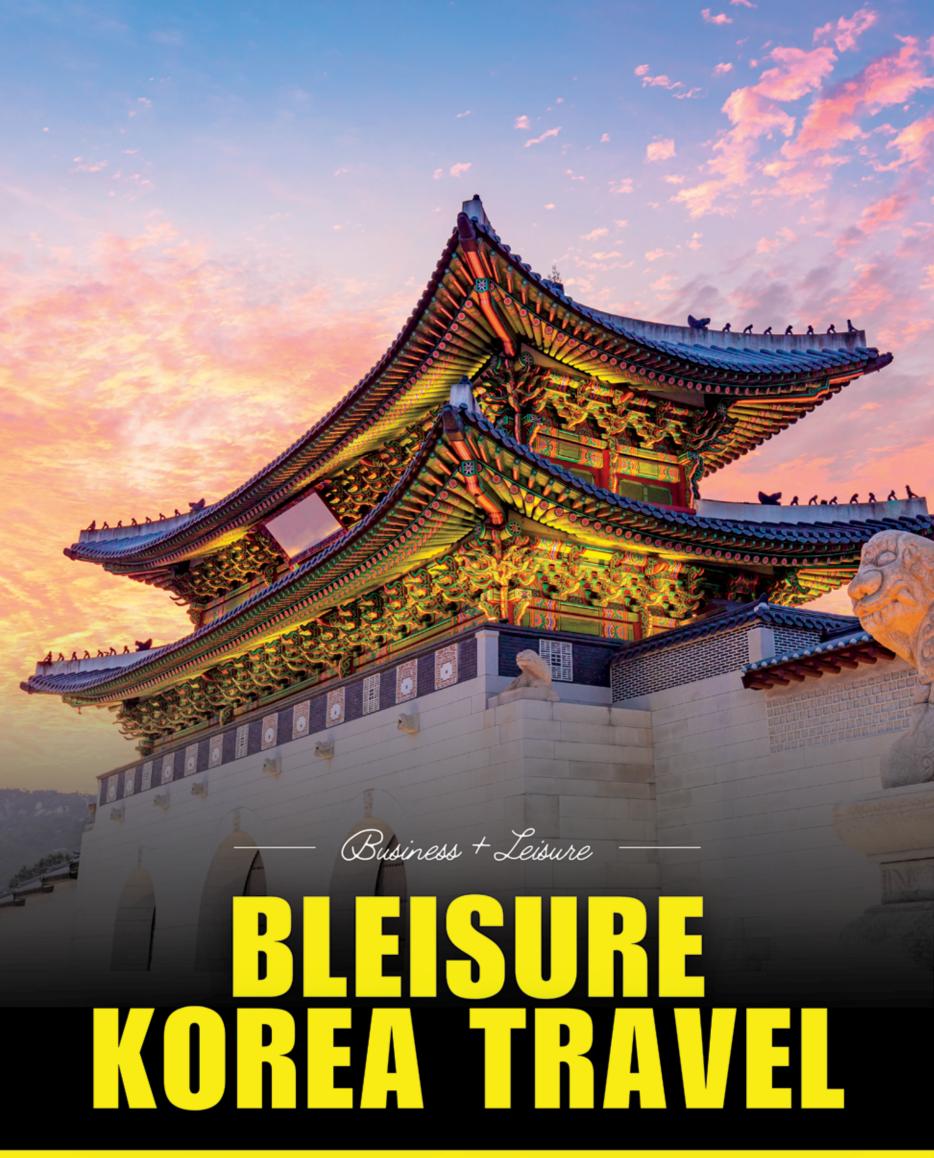
SanJeet, Founder, DDP Group, expressed his delight at the event organisation, saying, "Tonight's award recipients embody the spirit of excellence. creativity, and resilience. They have elevated India's status as

showcased the true essence of Indian hospitality. From creating unforgettable experiences for travellers to empowering the workforce behind the scenes. these trailblazers have left no stone unturned in their pursuit of excellence."

India Travel Awards is not just an event; it is a celebration of the outstanding contributions of individuals and organisations in the tourism industry

India Travel Awards North 2023 is not just an event; it is a celebration of the outstanding contributions of individuals and organisations in the tourism industry, inspiring others to follow in their footsteps and continue to propel India's tourism sector to greater heights. 🖖





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Seoul adventure with Indian taste

Indian travellers can now find authentic Indian flavours and vegetarian cuisine right in the heart of South Korea's bustling capital. From traditional curry houses to trendy fusion restaurants, the increasing availability of Indian food in Korea makes it an ideal destination for those looking to indulge in flavourful dishes while exploring this vibrant city.

outh Korea's capital, Seoul, is not only known for its technological advancements, but also for its diverse culinary culture. In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in the popularity of Indian food among locals and tourists alike. This surge in demand has led to the availability of a wide variety of Indian cuisine options throughout the city. What makes Seoul an emerging preferable destination for Indian travellers is not just the availability of Indian food, but also the growing trend towards vegetarian and vegan cuisine. As more people embrace plant-based diets, the demand for vegetarian and vegan options has skyrocketed. Many restaurants in Seoul have recognized this shift in food habits and now offer a range of delicious vegetarian and vegan dishes to cater to these preferences.

In the past, travelling to countries with meat-heavy cultures could pose challenges for those seeking



Kim Jangho Deputy Minister Ministry of Culture, Sports & Tourism

Culinary experience plays a vital role in highlighting and celebrating the shared heritage and traditions between the two countries



Lee Younggeun Executive Director-International Tourism Department, Korea Tourism Organization

_У-This culinary shift has the potential to attract visitors Indian from who may not have considered visiting the country for holidays earlier

vegetarian meals. For many people from the Jain, Marwari, and Gujarati communities in India, finding suitable food options while abroad can be a concern. However, South Korea has recognized the growing demand for vegetarian cuisine and has made efforts to accommodate travellers from these communities

Kim Jangho, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Culture, Sports & Tourism and Director, Korean Culture and Information Service, has emphasized the significance of the culinary experience in strengthening the bilateral connection between India and South Korea. Along with other cultural ties, the culinary experience plays a vital role in highlighting and celebrating the shared heritage and traditions between the two countries, he said.

The Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) has recently published a 'Food Guide for Indians', catering specifically to the dietary preferences of Indian visitors. This comprehensive guide not only highlights the names

and locations of Korean restaurants, but also provides detailed information on the types of vegetarian and vegan options available. This is particularly relevant for travel agents and tour operators who want to sell South

ity of temple food and vegetarian cuisine. "This culinary shift has the potential to attract a new segment of travellers from India who may not have previously considered vis-



Korea as a destination to clients with specific dietary requirements.

Lee Younggeun, Executive Director-International Tourism Department, Korea Tourism Organization, sheds light on an emerging trend in

iting the country for their holidays. In addition to the well-known allure of K-pop and K-drama culture, the availability and promotion of vegetarian options could prove to be a significant draw for these travellers," Younggeun said. 🦫

TAFI regional bodies elect new chiefs

The Northern and Western India chapters of Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) elected new teams recently. While Khushvinder Sarna, Director, Federal Travels, was re-elected as the TAFI Northern India Chapter Chairman for two years, Jay Kantawala is the new Chairman of Western India Chapter for the new term.

he Northern India Chapter of Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) conducted its Annual General Meeting (AGM) at The Park Hotel, New Delhi, on 10 July 2023.

TAFI Northern India elected Khushvinder Sarna, Director, Federal Travels, for the second term as the Chapter Chairman at the meeting. His tenure will be for two years (2023-2025). Sarna was elected over Ashwani Sharma, Chief Executive Officer, Sheraton Travels.

Apart from Sarna, the new team of TAFI Northern India Chapter consists of Dinesh Kumar (Inter Airwings) as Secretary, Rajiv Agarwal (Hindustan Air Travel) as Treasurer and Naveen Gupta (Travelco) and Charu Arora (YTS Travel Services) as Committee Members. After his election, Sarna said, "I have been given a great responsibility again, as TAFI North India has chosen me



Khushvinder Sarna Director, Federal Travels Chairman, TAFI Northern India Chapter

as office-bearer. North India has 400 members and is the biggest TAFI Chapter and we aim to grow it further"

He expressed gratitude to the association members of Lucknow. Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana and other chapters of the northern regions in India for their support. Talking about the challenges facing the travel industry such as

weather conditions, high airfares, and manpower shortage, Sarna said, "We cannot do anything about weather, but rest of the challenges can be overcome. India's travel and tourism sector has massive potential, and all travel stakeholders need to come together."

¥

Focus on training. education, and knowledge sessions is of importance in order to equip travel agents to fight challenges

While talking about the association's initiatives, he said that TAFI will be taking up the pending issues with the government at different levels. "We are also trying to converse with other travel



Jay Kantawala

trade agencies and associations," he added.

Sharing his priorities, Sarna said, "Focus on training, education, and knowledge sessions is of utmost importance in order to equip travel agents to fight challenges."

Meanwhile, the TAFI Western India Chapter recently announced its

new team that has been elected unopposed. Jay Kantawala is the new Chairman, Arun lyer is the new Secretary, **Dharmesh Shah** is the new Treasurer and Satbir Singh Narula is the Committee Member. The announcement was followed by an intense session on

We have been on the committee for the last four years and so we will try to add value to the TAFI membership, so that they can gain more value

Tax Collection at Source (TCS), conducted by Arjun Akruwala, who clarified a lot of the doubts in the minds of members. Speaking about the vision the new team will bring to the table, Kantawala says, "We have been on the committee

for the last four years and so we will try to add value to the TAFI membership, so that they can gain more value by being members. We also want to ensure that we will continue to give them frequent updates on the industry - situations, events, issues, and updates on new products, and arranging for educational trips." He added. "We also want to ensure that there is more participation from the members. We want to make this relationship more collaborative. We want to generate more ideas on how we can help the members tackle issues."

Meanwhile, Iyer said, "As the new team, we had a discussion with the committee, and we want to give more momentum to the interactions that take place between our members. We also want to increase our membership and get more members from other sectors like hotels, wedding planners, and M!CE operators, so that there can be more collaboration between members and help existing members as well."



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Oman's roadshow starts with Delhi

The Ministry of Heritage & Tourism of Oman started its 4-city India roadshow recently with the inaugural event in Delhi. The roadshow aimed to educate Indian travel professionals and enthusiasts about the diverse experiences Oman has on offer, fostering stronger ties between the two countries while promoting its rich heritage, stunning landscapes, and warm hospitality.



Tamil Nadu responds to overcrowding

Tourism should be synergetic and mutually beneficial for both locals of that destination and travellers. In the past years, Tamil Nadu has enticed millions of tourists. However, on the flip side, it has caused overcrowding at destinations and pollution. Tamil Nadu is coping with the situation by diverting tourists to lesser-known tourist places.



amil Nadu (TN) has witnessed a remarkable influx of tourists, according to the 63rd edition of Indian Tourism Statistics Report released recently. The state has registered an annual growth of 17.02 per cent in domestic visits with 115 million travellers. Dominating the Indian market for six out of seven years, the state has been consistent with securing the top rank in domestic tourist volumes. However, it has become important to properly implement strategic planning and sustainable methods to evenly distribute the tourist flows

Issues with popular locations in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu Tourism faces several challenges with respect to managing beautiful and well-known places in the state. Sandeep Nanduri, Director Tourism, Tamil Nadu and Managing Director, Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation, said that the Nilgiris



Sandeep Nanduri Director Tourism, Tamil Nadu & MD. TTDC

alone recorded a footfall of 10 million visitors. "This sudden growth presents a few challenges for the state. No doubt that destinations like Madurai, Ooty, Kodaikanal, Courtallam, and others are cherished for their beauty, but it presents problems like overcrowding, environmental impact, infrastructure strain and inability to preserve the cultural and historical heritage." he said.

Uneven season

Certain tourist destinations in the state register increased footfall during festivals, or at a particular time of the year. For example, to escape summer heat waves, travellers generally prefer to go to hills or beaches like Goa is crowded throughout the year, Shimla, Manali and Dharamshala witness peak traffic in summers, festivals like Kumbh Mela, Varanasi and Rishikesh see large volumes of tourists due to some specific attractions. "However, it escalates into a challenge when there is absence of evenly distributed tourists throughout the year and hence, requires special attention," Nanduri said.

Lack of awareness

He said that the state tourism department is facing the problem of lack of awareness about some offbeat locations in the state. "There is a need for information and knowledne on alternative destinations," he said, adding that tourists are really missing out on some destinations' hidden treasures and offerings.

Need to divert pressure to infamous destinations

The state has launched the Tourism Destination Development Scheme to facilitate integration and overall development of the offbeat places. Nanduri explained how the state tourism department is prioritizing

Problems like overcrowding, environmental impact, infra strain and inability to preserve the cultural and historical heritage

economic, social, and environmental sustainability with the aim of encouraging tourists to visit offbeat destinations. "Beautiful and lesser-known attractions like Kolli

hills, Jawadhu hills, Mannavanur, Muthupettai, and more are being promoted," he said.

Giving an example of Blue Flag Beach in Kovalam, he said, "The beach management committee has improved and established new facilities to provide enjoyable experiences for travellers and diligent efforts are being made to maintain this beach." Similarly, various activities like nature trails, boating, beach walks and extensive promotions are being done for Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park, an offbeat attraction having distinct coastal ecosystem.

Development of niche tourism Nanduri emphasized on acceler-

ating growth of various tourism forms like adventure tourism. caravan tourism, and camping. "These forms of tourism have very less impact on nature, while providing memorable experiences," he said.

Talking about the recent campaign, Discover Tamil Nadu 2.0, he said that the influencer campaign was organised for covering places like Jawwadhu hills in order to create visibility and establish themselves as popular destinations on social media.

"It has encouraged potential visitors to discover the hidden gems of Tamil Nadu and consider them as viable travel options to explore," he said.

Reactions shown by tourists

- Consumer behaviour has been shifting towards immersive forms of tourism
- Arrivals witnessed 53 per cent increase in 2022
- Visitors look for unique and less congested experiences
- Tourists searching for new and authentic travel experiences
- Adventure tourism and beach tourism has also gained momentum

Resurgent Skål calls on members

Skål International Delhi -125 recently hosted an exclusive networking dinner for its members at Harp by Maruchi. Ranjit Vig, President of the organisation, said that the club's focus is on providing value to its members and bringing positive changes with support from the newly constructed board.

Janice Alyosius

↑ kål International Delhi -125 recently organised a networking dinner for its members at the newly launched speakeasy, Harp by Maruchi. Speaking on the occasion, Ranjit Vig, President, Skål International Delhi -125, emphasized that the organisation's primary goal is not just about increasing membership, but providing substantial value to its members. Expressing his intention to bring about positive changes in the association, he said, "We have a newly constructed board and some great stalwarts of the industry who have come on board with us and with their help. together we are brainstorming and making sure that we are able to take the vision of the club forward "

He added, "We strive to bring value to our membership and, by doing so, aim to retain and grow our membership base. Our goal is to reclaim our position as the largest club in the world, a title we held at one point in time. Our primary



Skål International Delhi-125 Team at Harp By Maruchi

focus is on delivering value to our members and provide a platform that caters to their needs and preferences, ensuring they have a fulfilling experience as part of our club. By offering relevant services, exclusive benefits, and creating a supportive community, we aim to create a platform that members can truly appreciate.

Vig also highlighted the importance of giving back to the community through various social projects. "The most important factor is to bring back value to our members and create a platform where we are able to socially do projects and give back to the industry and to the community. Fix a calendar where we can have inspired speakers to come on board, where we can leave memorable experiences. The preamble of Skål is always doing business among friends and our focus will be doing business," he said.

Skål International Delhi -125 boasted a diverse membership. encompassing individuals and or-

ganisations associated with various aspects of the hospitality industry. From hoteliers to airlines, tour companies to travel agents, and educational institutions to government bodies, the club's wide-ranging canvas provided ample opportunities for networking and collaboration. "It's a very large canvas and we want to reach out to people in all spheres, so that we have a very collaborative membership and that is how we will be able to engage and bring more to our community,"

Skål International Delhi -125 team for 2023-2025

- Greesh Bindra Immediate Past President
- Ranjit Vig President
- Ajay Bhatnagar Vice President 1
- Homa Mistry Vice President 2
- Ankush Nijhawan Secretary
- Tekla Maira Treasurer
- Vinay Malhotra Member of the Board
- Manish Marwan Member of the Board Sunny Sodhi - Member of the Board
- Nayan Seth Member of the Board

Vinay Malhotra & Nayan Seth are the new committee members, joining the esteemed group in their commitment to advancing the goals and vision of Skål International Delhi -125.

Skål Delhi raises toast to new team

Skål International Delhi -125 recenly organised a networking dinner at the newly launched speakeasy, Harp by Maruchi, exclusively for its members. An exquisite exclusive venue echoing the allure of a bygone era, this speakeasy created a fun evening for over 70 skålleagues and their partners. The club focuses on providing value to its members.



J&K's adventure biz gets G20 boost

The G20 summit acted as a catalyst for Jammu and Kashmir's adventure tourism sector, providing hotels and tour operators an excellent opportunity to showcase their diverse offerings to a global audience. They have started to tap into the growing popularity of adventure tourism, aiming to position the region as a magnet for adventure enthusiasts.

Janice Alyosius

he G20 Summit was not only a platform for world leaders to discuss global issues, but also an opportunity for Jammu and Kashmir to showcase its potential as a premier adventure tourism destination. Hotels and tour operators in the region anticipated hosting adventure activities ahead of the summit, which is positively impacting their business and contributing to the overall tourism sector in the state.

Arbaz Khurshid Shah, General Manager, Clarks Inn Srinagar, emphasised that Jammu and Kashmir is famous for its natural and serene beauty and hosting adventure activities is going to give a new dimension. "This push has led to increase in tourist footfall and a positive buzz is being created among the adventure tourists. Kashmir is mostly equated with natural beauty, but this summit gave us an opportunity to showcase another aspect of Kashmir." he said.

Prateek Acharya, Director of Operations, Zone by The Park Jammu, acknowledging the government's efforts in promoting Jammu as an adventure destination, said, "This will definitely attract audiences from all areas, which will increase the business. Jammu and Kashmir already has religious tourism in place, and with adventure activities, the state can be positioned as the next big adventure tourism destination."

Highlighting the change in travellers' demand, Acharya said, "Today, travellers are looking at experiences and want to explore newer places and adventure activities. If these activities are strongly backed by marketing/ media campaigns, hotels can attract tourists who look out for such experiences."

Emphasising on Jammu's immense tourism potential, Acharya further said, "The potential can be harped on very strategically



Arbaz Khurshid Shah General Manager Clarks Inn Srinagar

Kashmir is mostly equated with natural beauty, but this (G20) summit gave us an opportunity to showcase another aspect of Kashmir

through G20 Summit spotlight. The media coverage will educate the travellers on the hidden treasures of the state, which were overshadowed by the troubled past. It is a golden opportunity for us hoteliers, the government, the citizens, and the travellers to experience the state in a new light - with significance being attuned to M!CE, developing sustainable tourism, adventure activities getting a new lease of life. The G20 Summit has placed Jammu & Kashmir on a global platform as a global tourist destination."

Sumeet Taneja, Area Director, IHCL and General Manager, Taj Chandigarh, highlighted that Jammu and Kashmir have been synonymous with various recreational activities and sports. "Amid the spectacular landscape of the state, these lend a unique immersive flavour to overall tourism experience. Besides, these are an excellent source of ancillary revenue as well, and will therefore help in positively influencing the overall tourism of the state."

The successful hosting of adventure activities during the G20 Summit would have a long-term positive impact on the overall tourism sector in Jammu and Kashmir, Shah highlighted, "Adventure activities give us an opportunity to cater to different sets of people in addition to leisure tourists who visit Jammu and Kashmir, So, holding these activities in connection to G20 is going to present J&K as a major global destination and increase the occupancy of both domestic and international tourists."



Prateek Acharya Director of Operations Zone by The Park Jammu

_¥. J&K already has religious tourism in place, and with adventure activities. the state can be positioned as the next big adventure tourism destination

Highlighting the G20 impact on bookings, Shah said, "Currently J&K is witnessing a very good tourist season and our property is fully booked. Holding of G20 in



Sumeet Taneja Area Director, IHCL and General Manager, Taj Chandigarh

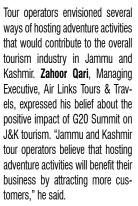
Adventure activities lend a unique immersive flavour to tourism experience. **Besides, these are** an excellent source of ancillary revenue as well

J&K has given an impetus to the bookings. Overall, a good season has translated into substantially higher ARR. Also, the inflow of queries has increased substantially. This has resulted in more brand awareness and an increase in bookings."



Zahoor Qari Managing Executive Air Links Tours & Travels

Jammu and Kashmir tour operators believe that hosting adventure activities will benefit their business by attracting more customers



"Adventure tourism has gained popularity in recent years, and by capitalizing on this trend, tour



Sameer Ahmad Baktoo Marketing and Operations Head India Travel Connection

Nasir Shah MD. Culture & Nature Expeditions

Kashmir for past 100 years has been a paradise for adventure lovers. This has been the oldest adventure destination of our country

operators aim to position Jammu and Kashmir as appealing destinations for adventure enthusiasts. thereby increasing tourism numbers," he added.

Nasir Shah, Managing Director, Culture & Nature Expeditions Tours & Travels, recalled the golden era of adventure tourism in Kashmir before political unrest.

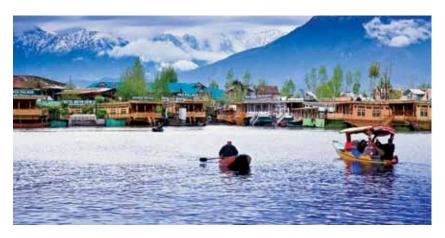
"Kashmir for past 100 years has been a paradise for adventure lovers. This has been the oldest adventure destination of our country. Pre-1990, we used to get thousands of adventure tourists from USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, France & Italy. Unfortunately, this activity got disrupted due to the political situation in Kashmir. With the G20 taking

Kashmir has a lot of places that are overcrowded now. We as stakeholders have requested the government to develop unknow destinations

place, the prime agenda of the UT government and stakeholders is that travel advisory should be lifted completely, as they will for themselves see how peaceful this place is. We can then anticipate at least a million foreign tourists visiting Kashmir next year."

Sameer Ahmad Baktoo, Marketing and Operations Head, India Travel Connection, shared his optimism about G20's potential impact on tourism. He also said that to make the most of the event, the development of lesser-known destinations with adventure activities is crucial. "This will increase the region's carrying capacity and preserving its natural beauty. I believe that the positive message conveyed by the summit would attract tourists. Kashmir has a lot of places that are already developed and overcrowded. We as stakeholders have requested the government to develop unknow destinations. If the government will help boost new destinations, then our carrying capacity would increase."

The successful hosting of adventure activities was expected to enhance Jammu and Kashmir's reputation as an adventure tourism destination nationally and internationally. Tour operators believe that the positive experiences shared by G20 attendees and other tourists would contribute significantly to establishing the region as a top adventure destination and attract adventureseekers from around the globe. 🤟



Saluting excellence and triumph of

The India Travel Awards North 2023, held at the prestigious Hyatt Regency Delhi on 25 July, saw an evening of commemorating the travel industry for the exceptional triumph showcased throughout the year. The ceremony brought together the finest minds of the tourism and hospitality industry to honour exemplary leaders and achievers for their outstanding contributions.



the industry at India Travel Awards



Infra upgrade for Meghalaya

Meghalaya has secured \$79.05 million grant from New Development Bank for the Meghalaya Ecotourism Infrastructure Development Project to boost tourism infrastructure in the state.

TT Bureau

Meghalaya Ecotourism Infrastructure Development Project (MEIDP) is an externally aided project (EAP) funded by the New Development Bank (NDB) with a total project cost of

state government company under the aegis of the Planning Department, as the project management unit. The project aims to construct cutting-edge infrastructure that will elevate the tourism industry in Meghalava. This transformative project seeks to create com-

to expand the tourism sector. With the infusion of funds. Meghalava will witness the construction of state-of-the-art infrastructure that complements its breathtaking landscapes, cultural heritage, and diverse flora and fauna.

The ambitious endeavour will also serve as a catalyst for job creation, particularly benefiting the youth of the state. The project will open numerous employment opportunities across various sectors, including hospitality, travel services, and local businesses. This tripartite collaboration between Government of India, the Government of Meghalava and NDB exemplifies a shared commitment to sustainable development and inclusive growth.



\$98.80 million (equivalent to ₹731 crores), of which \$79.05 million is being supported by the NDB. The agreement for this project was signed between the Government of India and the NDB on 10 July 2023. For EAPs being implemented in the Northeastern states, the Government of India passes 90 per cent of the funding as grants to the state government, while only 10 per cent of the total amount is borne by the state government.

The MEIDP is spearheaded by the Meghalayan Age Limited (MAL), a

Funds will be utilised towards

- Construction and upgradation of tourism/ eco-tourism attractions
- Development of high-value and rural accommodation at strategic locations to increase the length of stay of tourists
- Construction of connecting infrastructure to improve access to the tourist attraction points (construction of important roads)
- Shillong Peak ropeway project

prehensive ecotourism circuits that will attract travellers from all

corners of the globe, while ensur-

ing sustainable development. The

primary objective of the project is

Institutional capacity building and project management

Save 40% on off-season travel

'Escapes by Globus' offers exclusive itineraries for off-season. Travellers can save up to 40 per cent compared to peak-season itineraries to European and many other hotspots.

ffering the ideal solution for agents looking to boost year-end sales, Globus family of brands has launched vacations during the winter season. Calling it the 'Thinner crowds & Thicker wallets' effect, the company has unveiled 'Escapes by Globus', with a multitude of vacations dedicated to winter and spring travel. All escapes departures are scheduled between November and March and are guaranteed to operate - all this at a time of the year when the options to enjoy the benefits of escorted travel are not really many. Varesh Chopra, Managing Director, Globus family of brands, said, "Off-season travel is the hottest trend in touring. When the heat is off and crowds are halved, Escapes travellers can wind and bend their way through Europe's narrow streets and alleys with the locals. Escapes are priced at about \$125 a day and include Globus' signature recommendations excursions from local guides and the support of a tour director apart from the top-notch Globus service



Managing Director Globus family of brands

Chopra adds that Globus' Escapes bookings are approaching a record sales pace for 2023, up 33 per cent over pre-pandemic levels. Escapes departures to Italy, Portugal, Spain, Greece and Ireland are leading the way. In 2023, Globus has also increased its 'Escapes by Globus' operations by 15 per cent, as well as added new destinations, including Turkey, Wales, Finland. Albania. This brings it to almost 40 itineraries with over 600 departures to 25 countries making it guite a wide choice for any discerning world explorer. These

ESCAPES BY GLOBUS

departures are also extremely attractive for solo travellers as there is no single supplement on many

Globus launched 'Escapes' in 2017 with a handful of off-season options. "Considering we are the only ones to operate such a wide range of escorted vaca-

When the heat is off and crowds are halved, Escapes travellers can wind and bend their way through Europe's narrow streets with the locals

tions even during the traditional 'off-season', our agent partners are extremely happy to have options to offer to their clients even during winter, especially to Europe," he said. 🤟

ATOAI engages with Mumbai agents

The Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) recently conducted its first regional event after COVID in Mumbai. It started with a seminar, followed by an adventure tourism roadshow where 13 sellers met with more than 160 buyers from Mumbai. The seminar focused on key topics such as best practices in adventure, safety and insurance in adventure travel.













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Travel 😿

AUGUST 2023				
Date	Event	Time		
2-3	MICE India & Luxury Travel Congress 2023-Goa	9:00 am		
4-6	India International Travel Mart Chennai	10:00 am		
4-6	Tourism Fair Jaipur	9:00 am		
6-10	NIMA Convention	10:00 am		
7	Philippines Tourism Roadshow-Delhi	10:00 am		
8	Philippines Tourism Roadshow-Kolkata	10:00 am		
9	Philippines Tourism Roadshow-Chennai	10:00 am		
10	Philippines Tourism Roadshow-Mumbai	10:00 am		
11-12	International Conference on Leisure and Tourism 2023	9:00 am		
11-13	India Travel Mart - Jaipur	9:00 am		
11-14	Korea International Tourism Fair	9:00 am		
17	Switzerland Webinar	3:00 pm		
18-20	Holiday Expo-Vadodara	9:00 am		
18-21	Taiwan International Travel Fair 2023	9:00 am		
22-24	Travel Trade Maldives 2023	10:00 am		
23-25	Travel & Tourism Fair-Ahmedabad	9:00 am		
25-27	Global Travel Marketplace West 2023	9:00 am		
26-27	Africa Traveltech Summit & Expo 2023	8:00 am		

Economic outlook in transit phase

Andrew Staples, Regional Head (APAC), Policy & Insights, Economist Impact, discusses the global economic outlook at PATA's Annual Summit in Nepal. World faces a new set of challenges, as it gradually recovers from the pandemic, he says.

s the global tourism industry strives to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, it must remain vigilant and prepared for future pandemics. "Geopolitical tensions pose additional challenges, requiring careful consideration and mitigation strategies. While the road to recovery may not be without obstacles, the economic outlook indicates steady growth and promising opportunities, particularly in Asia. The dynamics of inflation, currency fluctuations, and shifting consumer trends will influence the path to recovery for the tourism sector," says Andrew Staples, Regional Head (APAC), Policy & Insights, Economist Impact. By addressing these factors and adapting to the changing landscape, stakeholders can navigate the transition from COVID-19 to a new phase in global tourism. Here are excerpts from his speech:





Regional Head (APAC) Policy & Insights, Economist Impact

outlook, Staples predicts steady growth for the current year without reaching stellar levels. However, he anticipates an acceleration in growth from 2024 onwards, once inflation and high-interest rates are overcome. Despite this positive outlook, he warns of the persistent risks, particularly those stemming from geopolitical tensions. "The need to be prepared for future pandemics also remains crucial, considering the significant and long-lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy," he adds.

USA recession: **Opportunities and concerns**

Staples turns his attention to the United States, where a significant interest rate hike has been implemented to combat inflation. While the US is expected to see a modest 1 per cent growth this year, concerns about a potential recession have emerged. However, any downturn is predicted to be shallow, with the economy quickly bouncing back. Staples brings optimism to the table, suggesting that the second half of the year holds promise for improved conditions. He highlights Asia's role in global growth, with countries like India and China expected to contribute around 70 per cent of the overall growth.

Cost-effective Japan

Staples draws attention to currency dynamics noting that likely to appreciate against the US dollar. Japan, however, stands out due to its weak currency, making it an attractive destination for travellers. He recommends taking advantage

Geopolitical tensions pose additional challenges, requiring careful consideration and mitigation strategies

of the favourable exchange rate, emphasizing that Japan offers cost-effective opportunities for tourism. Although hotel prices are soaring, overall consumption within the country is relatively affordable.

Showcasing enchanting Himalayas

Himalayan Travels and IDMC World recently organised a five-day familiarization (Fam) trip to Sikkim & Darjeeling for more than 150 travel agents from across India. The trip to the breathtaking landscapes and cultural wonders of the enchanting Himalayan region aimed to highlight the mesmerizing beauty and potential of the Northeast as a destination.











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MOVEMENTS

ATMOSPHERE HOSPITALITY

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DIPTI RANJAN PATNAIK has been appointed as the Chairman of Atmosphere Hospitality. A promising entrant in the Indian hospitality



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New Delhi



THE FERN SEASIDE LUXURIOUS TENT RESORT & NEST BEACON RESORT

Daman

The Fern Seaside Luxurious Tent Resort and Nest Beacon Resort promote **GURPREET S KANDHARI** to the position of General Manager. With his successful leadership of operations in Daman since 2020, Kandhari has consistently exhibited exceptional skills. In his new role, he will be entrusted with the responsibility of elevating the guest experience, managing the hotels' online reputation, driving core sales, cultivating valuable relationships, and uplifting both properties. He brings with him a vast experience in the industry.

COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT BENGALURU HEBBAL

Bengaluru



WYNDHAM CHANDIGARH MOHALI

Chandigarh

The Wyndham at Chandigarh Mohali has named MANISH YADAV as the General Manager. In his new role, Yadav will be responsible for

managing the entire operations of the hotel, including general property performance, sales and marketing strategy, profitability, and revenue, besides supporting the implementation of the brand service strategy and brand initiatives with the objective of meeting guest expectations and developing strong associates team. Earlier, Yadav served as General Manager for ITC Fortune, a luxury resort in Solan, Himachal. He is a graduate from the Institute of Hotel Management in Varanasi.

THE FERN HOTELS AND RESORTS

The Fern Hotels and Resorts promotes KARTIKESHWAR PANDA as the General Manager of The Fern Gir Forest Resort, Gir. Kartik began

his journey with The Fern Gir Forest Resort in 2011 as a Sous Chef, showcasing his culinary skills and commitment. Hailing from Odisha, he holds a degree in hotel management from IHM Bhubaneswar and commenced his career in 2005. Prior to this. Kartik worked with Hotel Hindustan International (HHI). gaining valuable expertise in the hospitality field. As a passionate, self-motivated, and result-oriented professional. Panda believes in leading from the front.

RENAISSANCE BENGALURU RACE COURSE HOTEL

Bengaluru

Renaissance Bengaluru Race Course Hotel appoints SHEEL JADEJA as the new Director of Sales. His core responsibilities will include planning and implementing the hotel's sales and strategy, maximizing the hotel's revenue, exploring business opportunities through events, setting annual budgets, forecasting, and analysing revenue reports and strategy among others. He has more than 13 years of experience in the hospitality industry. Prior to this. Sheel served as the Assistant Director of Sales at JW Marriott Hotel Bangalore.

BENGALURU MARRIOTT HOTEL WHITEFIELD

Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield appoints SOMRUP CHANDA as the Director of Operations. Having accumulated around 18 years

of expertise in upscale hospitality operations across various cities in India and internationally, Chanda will oversee several key areas, including enhancing the brand, developing products, managing budgets, talent development, succession planning, and organising work and initiatives on a quarterly basis. Chanda will be responsible for ensuring guest satisfaction, product upgradation and social media activation for increasing engagement. He will also help in curating events to increase footfall and look into improving brand image.

JW MARRIOTT BENGALURU PRESTIGE **GOLFSHIRE RESORTS & SPA**

Bengaluru

JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resorts & Spa welcomes **SANDEEP NAIK** as the Director of Services. In his new role, Sandeep will lead the service team and oversee the delivery of exceptional experiences to guests. With a remarkable career in the hospitality industry, Naik brings a wealth of expertise and a strong passion for providing unparalleled customer service. As the Director of Services, he will play a pivotal role in ensuring the highest levels of guest satisfaction and elevating the

The favourite destination for **PRAGYA RATHORE**. Marcom Manager, The Ritz-Carlton Pune, to go on holidays is Kerala. "Imagine gliding through serene backwaters on a traditional houseboat, surrounded by lush greenery, the enchanting hills of Munnar, with their emerald tea



plantations, and, of course, palm-fringed beaches. Internationally, my heart yearns for Paris. It is my dream destination that captivates the senses and leaves an indelible mark on the heart. I would love to indulge in the delectable flavours of French cuisine. My next holiday will be at the bustling streets of Tokyo, Japan," she says.

When it comes to holiday destinations, **JERLYN DSILVA**. Marketing & Communication Manager, Sheraton Grand Pune Bund Garden Hotel, has two favourites. "In India, Goa holds a special place in my heart with its beautiful beaches and vibrant atmosphere. Internationally, the



Maldives captivated me with its stunning islands and crystalclear waters. As for my next vacation, I am excitedly planning a trip to Seychelles. I can't wait to explore its breathtaking landscapes and experience its paradise tropical firsthand. It promises to be a memorable and rejuvenating getaway," she says.

A favourite of TULASHA PILLAI, Director of Conference & Events, Conrad Pune, is Thailand. She says, "I am drawn to Thailand for its stunning beaches and the delectable cuisine it offers. The country's coastline boasts pristine sandy shores, crystal-clear

service standards.



waters, and breathtaking sunsets, making it an ideal tropical paradise. Whether it's lounging on the beach, snorkeling or diving to explore vibrant underwater ecosystems. or indulging in water sports. Thailand offers a diverse range of beach activities to enjoy. Moreover, Thai cuisine is renowned worldwide for its flavourful and aromatic dishes.'



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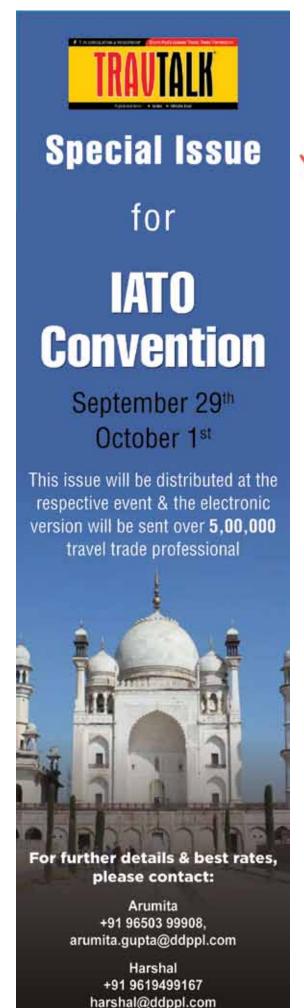


GPS INITIATIVES









'Beware of visa frauds'

Prabuddha Sen, Chief Operating Officer for South Asia, VFS Global, urges the travel trade fraternity to caution their clients against visa frauds and incorrect documentation and encourage them to apply for visa in advance.

rabuddha Sen, Chief Operating Officer (COO) for South Asia, VFS Global, speaking on the sidelines of a TAFI event in Mumbai, indicated a big focus on collaborating with the trade. He said, "The travel community is an integral part of the eco-system that we belong to. The demand for travel post the pandemic has been way too high. As a result, diplomatic missions were unable to process the number of visas that were being applied for. Hence. the problem of visa shopping appeared on our horizon."

Enter the trade fraternity. "We have dealt with it in conjunction with the travel fraternity. While I cannot say that it has been a smooth journey so far; people have faced difficulties in getting visa appointments, especially because of the capping, and people have faced difficulties getting their passport processed on a timely manner. But we have tried our best and have engaged with the diplomatic community also to make it seamless for the applicants," Sen added.

Planning for visa key

He said that VFS Global has had a lot of engagement on social media requesting travellers to plan their travels well in advance. "People are able to apply for their visa 90 days in advance for most of the governments. In fact, for Schengen visa, they can apply even six months in advance. Forward planning is something we have heavily encouraged during this difficult period. We have observed that this has increased in recent times. There is a lot of

What is visa shopping?

Visa shopping is the practice of applying for a visa from a country where it is faster or easier to get as compared to others.

visa shopping that happens because people are trying to apply for a certain visa with incorrect documentation, probably intending to go to country A but ending up in country B's queue because that is where the appointment is available. For us as well as the trade, it should be a constant endeayour to be able to educate the applicant and create the aware-

У

Some Schengen countries will still face some issues, especially because of visa shopping, which is also leading to poor quality of documentation

ness that they don't get trapped. At VFS, we do not sell visa appointments, and as of last month, we have started a campaign in this regard to educate gullible applicants to not fall prey to many of the grev operators that exist in the system. Therefore, we really urge people to utilise the window of 180 days before which they can apply for visa. At the end of the day, it becomes an administrative hassle for us also," Sen said.

Another issue that he touched upon is forgery and fraudulent visa processing. "India is a large country and not every corner can be covered. But national associations like TAFI can help because of their wide reach and we encourage them to take this message across to their client base," he said.

Visa situation now

Sen said that there are a lot of governments which are already doing a lot better now than in 2021. "Some Schengen countries will still face some issues, especially because of visa shopping, which is also leading to poor quality of documentation. That is leading to a rise in the rejection rate and also increasing processing times. But I'm sure we will be able to cross this bridge too," he added.

After more than a decade, VFS Global opened a visa centre in Lucknow in February this year. "That was a step forward. We do have plans to open a few more visa centres in places where we are not present today. But these will largely be tier II or III cities. Before we do that, we are already engaging with media in the language of the land to be able to take the message across – not to fall for visa fraud by hands of grey operators," Sen said.

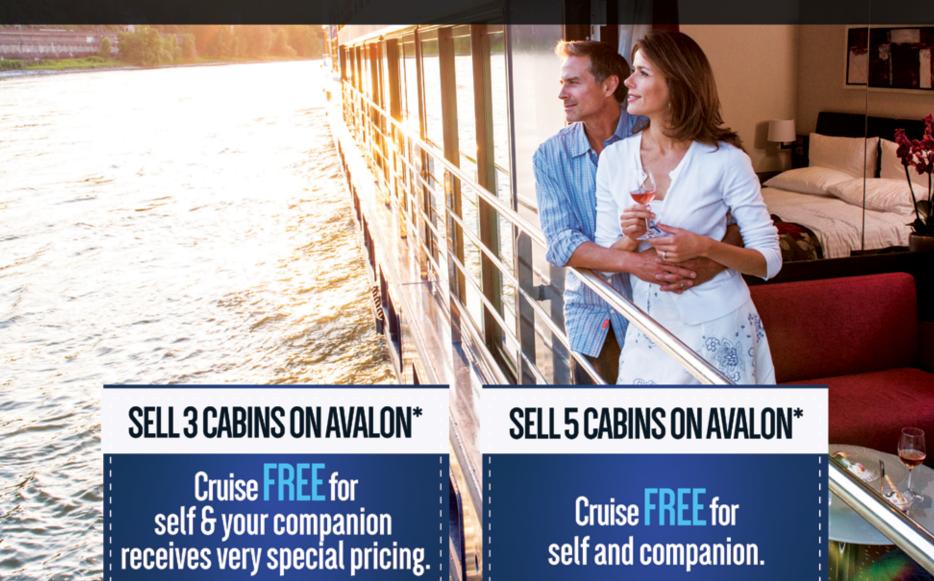
Shift in seasonality Last year, on an average VFS Global processed 20,000 applications each day throughout the year. Not all were Schengen of course; they included UK and USA and Canada also. "But during season time, that daily number increased to 25,000 per day. What we have also seen significantly is a shift in the seasonality. Due to the pent-up demand, we have seen demand remain constant through the period of so-called lean months like September and October. This year, we see a certain amount of stability already having set in because of part of 2021 and 2022. After the restart hap30,000 applications come in every day across the spectrum," Sen revealed.

Traditionally, from India, UK, USA, Australia, and Canada remain busy. Schengen could have been busy if they were able to process more applications, though the intention is there to get more tourists from India. "The geo-political situation in the world, some of the key markets are not performing well. So, there is a strong desire to get more applicants from India. If we didn't have any capping, we would have possibly touched our Schengen count of 2019-20. We fell short by about 30 per cent, but we will continue to see a strong recovery. This is in spite of the fact that the airfares are at an all-time high," Sen exclaimed.





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