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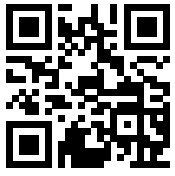
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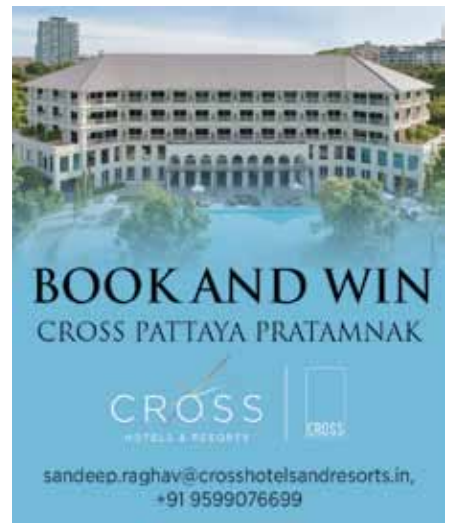
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Hoteliers prioritise sustainability

Sustainable practices have become a priority for hospitality leaders and hoteliers. Success of a hotel or restaurant depends on how it preserves the surrounding natural environment and cultural attractions that will entice tourists. Hospitality experts agree upon prioritising sustainable and eco-friendly practices at their properties.



Zubin Saxena
MD, Radisson Hotels

“Radisson is leading the sustainability efforts on a global level. There are many global sustainability initiatives going on, which we call sustainability basics and they start from daily operations like preparation of rooms and recycling of towels and soaps. On larger platforms, we have installed electric chargers in all our hotels and now we are looking to promote sustainability from Radisson Roadtrips as well. Sustainability is a way of life for us and we are deeply engaged in initiating such measures and ensure our hotels are really at the forefront.”



Sudeep Jain
MD, South West Asia, IHG Hotels & Resorts

“In 2021, we launched Journey to Tomorrow, a 10-year action plan of clear commitments to drive change for our people, communities, and planet, aligned to our purpose of True Hospitality for Good and to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Over the next decade, we focus on working with our hotels to reduce carbon emissions in line with climate science; eliminating single-use items or finding recyclable alternatives; reducing food waste; collaborating with local stakeholders to tackle water sustainability issues in areas of risk.”

Contd on page 18 ▶

Industry feels manpower pinch

The travel and tourism sector is facing shortage of skilled manpower. Experts share their views on what can be done to deal with the problem—which will not go away anytime soon.



Suhani Sood

Many companies in the travel and tourism sector are feeling the pinch due to shortage of skilled labour. “The main issue is that newcomers get trained by one agency and then take up jobs in other agencies. This needs to be streamlined. The institutions, which teach them travel and tourism are themselves unclear with the reality. Thus, until rubber meets the road, there is a



Guldeep Singh Sahni
Managing Director
Weldon Tours & Travels

huge gap,” said **Guldeep Singh Sahni**, Managing Director (MD), Weldon Tours & Travels.

Concerned over the supply of qualified workers, **Gaurav Khanna**, General Manager (GM), Products & Industry Relations, FCM Travel India, said, “Untrained workers result in errors and slower service. Businesses, in turn, provide service recoveries which adds to cost. It also takes almost three months to

Contd on page 9 ▶

Philippines e-visa for Indians

The Philippines Tourism conducted a four-city roadshow across major Indian cities, starting from New Delhi. The destination will be offering e-visas for Indian travellers from December 2023.



Janice Alyosius

The Philippines Tourism conducted its four-city India roadshow in New Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, and Mumbai. **Mark Anthony G. Articulo**, Third Secretary and Vice Consul Administrative Section Head, Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines, said, “Currently, around 120,000 Indian tourists explore



Shahlimar Hofer Tamano
Undersecretary for Tourism Regulation
Coordination & Resource Generation &
Concurrent Director for Regional Office VII



Mark Anthony G. Articulo
Third Secretary and Vice Consul
Administrative Section Head, Embassy
of the Republic of the Philippines

50 per cent to 100 per cent.” Acknowledging that India is an important source market for the Philippines, Articulo said that efforts are being made to streamline the travel process for Indian travellers. “We are negotiating on the resumption of direct flight from Delhi to Manila. From December 2023 onwards, the Philippines will offer e-visas for Indians,” he added.

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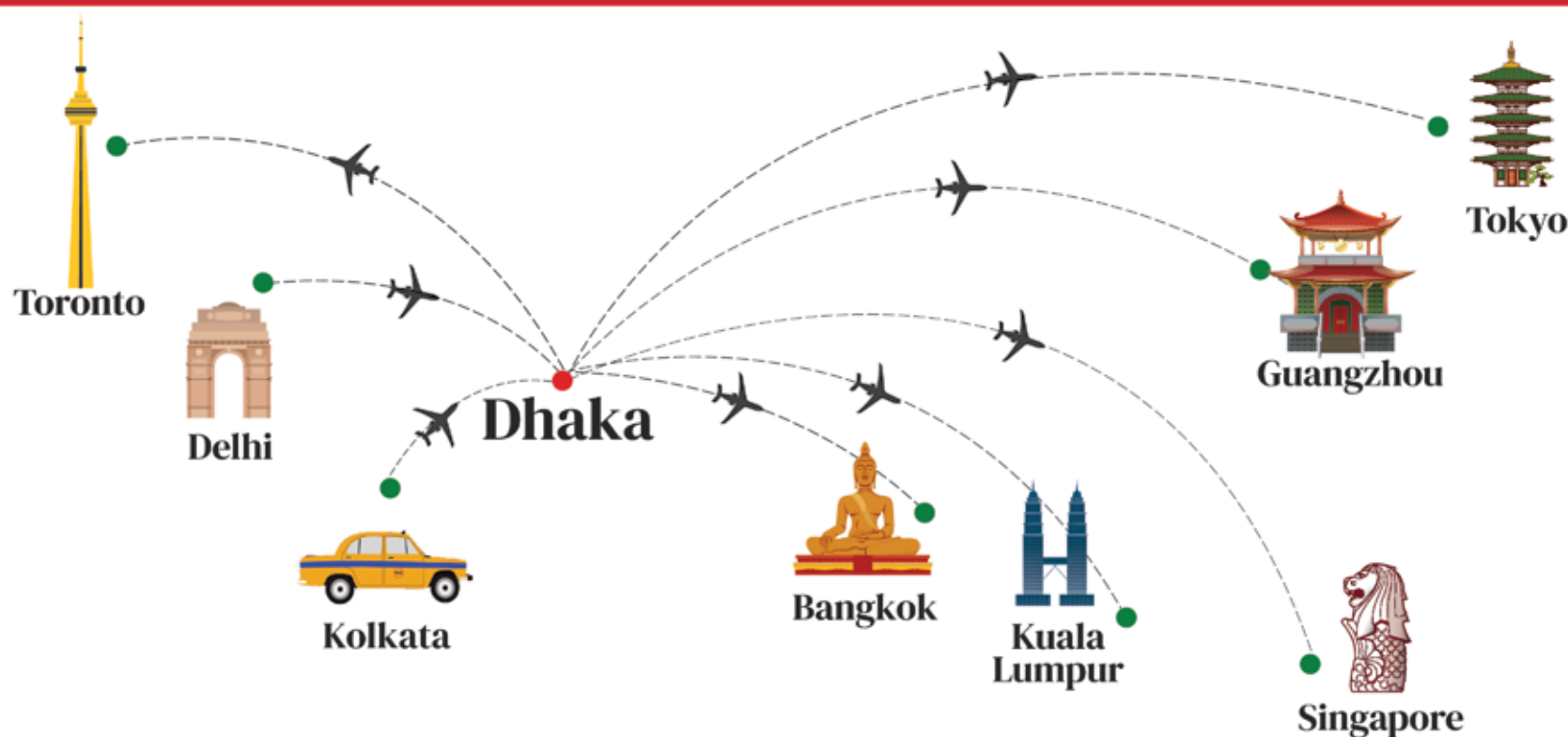


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Humility key to hospitality: Kachru

KB Kachru, Chairman, Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, releases his debut book 'Humility and Agility: The Life of a Hotelier', which focuses on his hospitality journey. Sharing insights of his illustrious career in the book, he emphasises on the importance of humility and agility in hospitality.

Janice Alyosius

KB Kachru, Chairman, Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, recently unveiled his inaugural book, titled 'Humility and Agility: The Life of a Hotelier'. Through this book, Kachru reflects on his remarkable journey, offering insights into the world of hospitality, while highlighting the values of humility and agility that have defined his eminent career.

Sharing the motivation for authoring the book, Kachru said, "I went through various phases of my life and felt I must take note of a few things which had happened with me and can be learnings for the generations to come because learning is an experience, and I just wanted to pass them on."

Within the pages of his book, Kachru aims to ignite a spark of motivation within the hospitality industry. "Many of my colleagues are writing good things about their



KB Kachru, Chairman, Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, launches his book in the presence of G20 Sherpa Amitabh Kant and other dignitaries

experiences, I think it will do very well. As leaders of the industry, we all should contribute and share our experiences with people, which will help everybody. You may relate to it now or later, but it will help everybody at some stage of life," he said.

Emphasising on the impact of G20, Kachru said, "G20 is helping us to position the country better. Travellers are now moving to the lesser-known destinations and understanding what India has to offer. These meetings have strategically

showcased lesser-known destinations in India, placing the country on a broader tourism map. So, I think this will help our industry in a big way."

Kachru highlighted the fact that sustainability is key to the tourism and hospitality industry. "It is very important not only for Radisson, but also for the entire hotel industry. They have recognized that we must do something for Mother Earth, and everybody is contributing, whether it is in terms of using a renewal energy, saying no to single-use

plastic. Each brand and hotel is contributing towards it," he shared.

Radisson Group is setting its sights on growth and have a remarkable number of properties in the pipeline. Highlighting that the brand is expanding horizons, Kachru shared, "We are coming up with hotels everywhere from Dera Bassi to Kerala, we are all over. We want to double our portfolio in next three years. We were lucky to get in roads with Jammu and Kashmir and we are the first international company to go to Jammu and Kashmir. We have set

up a hotel in Katra, and now we have 11 hotels in operation and in development. This will make a huge difference in exposing the state. We are also opening our best hotel in Srinagar in next 3-4 months." Kachru added that the brand intends to harness the road network's connectivity, focusing on infrastructure development. He emphasized, "Our goal is to build a hotel every four hours both from north to south and from west to east."

Highlighting the potential of India, Kachru said, "India is a dynamic

market, and we are proud of how our industry has come back after COVID and I think haste will be driven by the market as they are, and when more inventory comes, there would be

As leaders of the industry, we all should contribute and share our experiences with people, which will help everybody

stabilizing factor, we are all prepared for it, but we want more rooms, more inventory and people are investing and moving ahead. There is scope for everybody to grow. Both national and international chains are doing very well, and they have taken Indian market as a serious market, and we all are expanding."

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Welcome AI, but with caution

The whole buzz about Artificial Intelligence (AI) replacing human manpower in various fields is gaining momentum, but it seems our AI friend—ChatGPT and other such tools are not well-trained yet to take up the job. In fact, in travel itself, while talks about making itineraries with AI is the talk of the town, ChatGPT is not able to help customers with changes beyond September 2021. Yes, the information loaded on it doesn't have any details on places and attractions that have recently opened. This means while it can give one an outline of an itinerary, it's not intelligent enough to give the customer the right advice. That is what makes travel professionals indispensable. Human touch and trust will be the priority for customers. Hence, all that the travel service providers need to do is keep educating themselves and honing their skills, as technology can only be an aid, but not a substitute.

High-five to direct connections

Direct connectivity remains the biggest need for any destination to boost numbers from India. The country is one of the most sought-after markets for outbound travel for all the nations across the world. Not only are the Indian travellers spending, but they are also exploring new places, attractions, and experiences. This is visible with the increasing outbound numbers and what is projected in future. While many airlines have started direct routes from India, others are working hard to increase capacity. One can see how VietJet Air is connecting to even smaller cities, once Vietnam started getting travellers. Egyptair too has added a connection from Delhi. While some airlines are adding connections, others are still looking for bilaterals to be established. That is where the government should come forward and if not open skies, they should at least look at easing it up to an extent, which will be a blessing for Indian tourists, as well as those looking at travelling to India.

Experiences matter the most

A research by Collinson reveals travel-related rewards and benefits as rising opportunity for financial services brands to drive revenue in this 'customer experience era', even as 83 per cent consumers in India use their payment cards for travel and everyday expenses.



About 76 per cent of consumers in Asia Pacific perceive the experiences that brands and companies provide to be as important as its products or services, finds a report by Collinson titled 'The New Rules of Engagement: Customer Expectations Revealed'. Collinson surveyed 4,750 respondents across 10 markets in the Asia Pacific region.

According to the report, as consumers form the new 'C-suite', their expectations are rapidly evolving: they want brands to provide hyper-personalised communication and offers, to anticipate their needs, and are eager to build emotional connections with the brands. Against this "Customer Experience Era", travel-

Consumer expectations in Asia Pacific are rapidly evolving



74%
expect brands to provide them with personalised communication and offers



68%
expect to have an emotional connection with brands they buy from the most



67%
expect brands to be able to anticipate their needs

Hong Kong SAR (81 per cent), Malaysia (81 per cent) and China (79 per cent) are more likely to use payment cards with travel rewards or benefits for daily expenses. Interestingly, millennial consumers make up the largest group with

mental sustainability rewards, such as carbon offsetting (26 per cent); digital rewards in the form of NFTs (19 per cent); access to digital experiences in the Metaverse and charitable donations (both 18 per cent). These types of

4 in 5 consumers in Asia-Pacific are more likely to use their payment cards for travel expenses if the cards offer travel-related rewards or benefits

Top 3 most appealing travel-related rewards/ benefits in Asia Pacific



related rewards and benefits have emerged as a rising opportunity for financial services brands to drive better commercial returns. Consumers in India have ranked the following as the top three travel related rewards and benefits they value - access to airport transit hotels, airport lounges, and airport parking.

The report highlighted that four in five consumers in the region are more likely to use their payment cards for travel expenses if the cards offer travel-related rewards or benefits. This trend is especially apparent among consumers from Malaysia (84 per cent), India (83 per cent), Vietnam (82 per cent), Thailand (81 per cent), Mainland China and Hong Kong SAR (both 80 per cent). It is also reported that consumers from India (83 per cent), Vietnam (82 per cent),

this sentiment, while more than nine in 10 Gen Z consumers in Asia Pacific are likely to join a new customer engagement and loyalty program if it offers these rewards.

While most consumers (60 per cent) cite rational rewards such as points or cashback as preferred ways to engage with them; emotional, 'experiential' benefits are becoming increasingly significant, especially for younger demographics like Gen Z, and travellers who take 10 or more trips per year. Interestingly, the latter cohort are also members of twice as many customer engagement and loyalty programs when compared to less frequent travellers. Non-financial, experiential-driven rewards sought after by consumers in Asia Pacific include airport lounge access (41 per cent); VIP privileges (39 per cent); environ-

benefits are most appealing to millennials and Gen Z respondents. Consumers in India too have shared that they prefer engaging with brands digitally - through mobile apps (66 per cent), email (54 per cent), website (51 per cent), and social media (48 per cent).

The survey highlights

- ❖ Travel-related rewards and benefits have a strong influence on consumers' (the new 'C-suite' of this era) use of payment cards for daily and travel expenses
- ❖ Travellers who take 10 or more trips per year value experiences over financial rewards, are members of twice as many customer engagement and loyalty programs versus less frequent travellers, and are three times more likely to engage with digital and ESG-linked rewards and benefits
- ❖ When travel rewards and benefits are availed on payment cards, consumers in India (83 per cent) are more likely to use their payment cards for travel expenses and everyday expenses
- ❖ 76 per cent of consumers in Asia Pacific feel that the experience provided by brands is as important as the products or services

Skilled labour still an issue

► Contd from page 5

train anyone new to the industry. Skilled workers then demand higher salaries to do their existing work.”

Pressure on resources

Khanna explains how the shortage of skilled manpower is a serious problem. “It not only puts pressure on the existing manpower and resources, but ultimately leads to an increase in costs, which may not be sustainable for smaller businesses. Poor service or poor customer experience affects a brand and a company’s reputation, and can result in the loss of customers,” he said.

Post-pandemic challenges

Looking into the problems faced during the pandemic by the employees of travel and tourism sector, the younger generation doesn’t find it among attractive career options. However, **Rajiv Mehra**, President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), is optimistic. “The manpower at responsible positions is not at



Rajiv Mehra
President
IATO



Gaurav Khanna
General Manager, Products & Industry
Relations, FCM Travel India



Sanjay Aditya Singh
CEO and MD
Jet Airways

We have ample scope to groom the lower middle level to emerge and meet the challenges and opportunities that the post-COVID era will bring forth

Untrained workers result in errors and slower service. Skilled workers demand higher salaries to do their existing work

Shortage of skilled labour will hamper success, as there will be difficulty in meeting demands, reduced productivity and rise in cost



Sarbendra Sarkar
Founder & MD
Cygnett Hotels & Resorts



Gaurav Dogra
Founder
PlanYourHoliday

there is a need on part of the government to take initiatives encouraging more people to take up roles in hospitality and tourism sector. “Streamlining this issue of lack of qualified workers is need of the hour. Travel trade should speak up, institutions and

Gaurav Dogra, Founder, PlanYourHoliday, said that social media platforms can play a crucial role in spreading awareness and help the industry. “Knowledge is power,” he said, and suggested that spreading awareness about the advantag-



Offering comprehensive and detailed training to hotel employees can certainly help in combatting the challenge

Knowledge is power – spreading awareness about the advantages of the industry can motivate young people to join it

the same level of aptitude as it used to be in the pre-COVID era. Hence, we have ample scope to groom and train the lower middle level to emerge and meet the challenges and opportunities that the post-COVID era will bring forth. Though, it is going to take some time,” he said.

Sanjay Aditya Singh, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and MD, Jet Airways, categorically mentioned that skilled workers play a significant role in the suc-

cess of a company. “Shortage of skilled labour will hamper success, as there will be difficulty in meeting demands, reduced productivity, rise in cost and restricted creativity and innovation,” he said.

Ways to combat challenges

Experts expressed several ways such as more government initiatives, enhanced training and higher perks for employees to combat the problem of skilled labour. Sahni suggested that

governments should collaborate in order to combat this challenge,” he said.

Sarbendra Sarkar, Founder & MD, Cygnett Hotels & Resorts, emphasised on the importance of learning academies to upgrade and train employees. “It works as a valuable resource, as offering comprehensive and detailed training can certainly help in combatting the challenge,” he said.

es of the industry can motivate young people to join it.

Mehra said that entry-level pays for the employees should be a bit higher, as the salary range of ₹15,000-₹25,000 per month is not enough for the survival in metro cities like Delhi. “It is because of this reason, employees leave the tourism sector companies and seek refuge in other avenues,” he said.

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Port Blair airport to handle 5mn pax

Recently, PM Narendra Modi virtually inaugurated the new Integrated Terminal Building of Veer Savarkar International Airport, Port Blair. The news has given a new lease of life to the destination, believes the travel industry, which is optimistic about getting more tourists in the coming months, owing to increased connectivity.

 **Suhani Sood**

Constructed at a cost of around ₹7,100 million, the new Integrated Terminal Building of Veer Savarkar International Airport will handle five million passengers every year. Strategic location, double-insulated roofing system, parking space are some of the key features of the new shell-shaped terminal building, aiming to boost air traffic and enhance tourism in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Milestone for industry

Praising the airport authorities for their efforts, **Mohammad H Jadwet**, Chairman, IATO Andaman & Nicobar Chapter, said that the new airport is a milestone for tourism development of the islands. "Andaman & Nicobar Islands is 1,000-2,000 kilometre away from the mainland, the only way to reach there is by air, so the airport infrastructure is critical to the development of tourism," he said. "With this terminal building, the capacity to handle aircraft and passengers

has become five times more," he added.

International connectivity

Agreeing with Jadwet, **Sanat Kaul**, former Chief Secretary, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, said that the new terminal is 'really nice' and provides bigger capacity. However, he suggested to start international flights to and from the new airport. "Unless the authorities start international flights to these islands from nearby destinations like Phuket, Bangkok, and Singapore, it would not make much difference," he said.

Jadwet said that Andaman & Nicobar is closer to places like Bangkok, Singapore, Phuket, and Malaysia than to mainland India. "International connectivity will go a long way in promoting inbound tourism, where A&N lacks a lot. On an average, of the half a million who visit the islands, hardly 25,000-30,000 are foreigners. So, this is a very big gap we need to fill and that it will bring valuable



Mohammad H Jadwet
Chairman
IATO Andaman & Nicobar Chapter



Sanat Kaul
Former Chief Secretary
Andaman and Nicobar Islands



Subhash Goyal
Founder Chairman
Stic Travel Group

foreign exchange to the country," he said.

Subhash Goyal, Founder Chairman, Stic Travel Group, said that by building an international airport and not allowing flights is like giving someone best automatic gun, but no ammunition. "Port Blair has some beautiful hotel accommodations like Taj, CGH group, ITC, and Sarovar. International travellers will have a really good experience staying here, provided we have direct flights from the islands, as taking halts and changing flights is a tiring task," he said.


Lack of marketing

However, the destination needs better marketing. "Unfortunately, from the tourism point of view, we have not exploited or marketed the destination well," Goyal said.

The PM expressed confidence that the development work being done in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands will further strengthen the entire region.

 **With this terminal building, the capacity to handle aircraft and passengers has become five times more**

 **Unless the authorities start international flights to these islands from nearby destinations, it would not make much difference**

 **Unfortunately, from the tourism point of view, we have not exploited or marketed the destination well**

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Exponential growth on cards: MoCA

Keeping in view the increasing craze among travellers for Tbilisi, Baku, Almaty, and Tashkent in Central Asia, the Ministry of Civil Aviation plans to connect the offbeat destinations. Starting this month, all these places will be connected from India, says Rajiv Bansal, Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation.

Ritika Arora Bhola

Rajiv Bansal, Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), while addressing a gathering at PHDCCI Global Aviation and Air Cargo Summit in New Delhi recently, said that 2023 is the year of unprecedented growth for the Indian aviation industry. "In the 'Amritkaal,' i.e., the next 25 years, India will witness enormous infrastructural growth. At present, we are a \$3.5-trillion economy. Considering the overall economic growth and ongoing developments, the ministry has a vision of achieving \$32 trillion by 2047," he said.

Focusing on the Indian airports, he highlighted that not only the numbers of airports have doubled in the last few years in the country, but also the existing airports are adding capacities to meet growing demand. "There are very few airports in the world with a capacity of 100 million. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport being



Rajiv Bansal
Secretary
Ministry of Civil Aviation

the biggest airport in the world has 108 million passenger capacity. Interestingly, IGI Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) is expected to reach 100 million passengers per annum capacity by September this year. Apart from DIAL, other metro airports like Mumbai International Airport Limited (MIAL), Bangalore International Airport Limited (BIAL), GMR Hyderabad International Airport Limited

(GHIAL), as well as Chennai and Kolkata are also adding capacity," he said.

"Construction is going on for a new airport in Navi Mumbai with much greater capacity. Roughly, all the six metro airports in the country together will have 400 million passenger capacity per annum in the next few years," he said. "One must note that these are not hypothetical figures; these are projects on ground," he added.

Focusing on the Indian airlines, Bansal said, "Even during a worldwide crisis like COVID-19, India had a birth of an airline – Akasa Air. The carrier is now all set to add its 20th aircraft in August for both domestic as well as international operations."

Recently, Air India placed an order for 470 aircraft, whereas IndiGo placed an order for 500 planes. "Aircraft manufacturers like Airbus and Boeing, OEMs and engine producers like Pratt Whitney are actually finding it difficult to cope

up with the surging demand arising out of India. With this kind of growth, India is ready to become the global powerhouse. This kind of growth is across all the spectrums – small and big aircraft and airports," Bansal highlighted.

Airports have not only doubled in the country in the last few years, but also the existing airports are adding capacities to meet growing demand

Throwing light on the increasing craze for offbeat destinations like Tbilisi, Baku, Almaty, Tashkent in Central Asia, Bansal said, "We never had flights to these places. Many of us didn't even know where these



locations are, and now we are offering connectivity to these places. We started five flights a day to Vietnam, by Vietnam carriers, IndiGo is going one flight in a day now. We have regular flights going to Indonesia, Bali, Jakarta, Medan, Cambodia, and Myanmar. These destinations were never connected, but from August, all these places will be connected from India."

Bansal stressed upon the need for sustainable growth. "The Prime Minister and MoCA have committed a net zero target by 2070. Aviation is one of those sectors where

it is very difficult to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We have seen the first electric passenger 10 to 12-seater aircraft in Norway and Sweden, which has just started flying but looking at a 777 king of aircraft A350 powered by electricity, there is still a long way to go. Till that time, maybe SAF (Sustainable Aviation Fuel) will power our engines, but it is not easy because the fuel is scarce and moreover it is very expensive. Hence, the future is bright, there is optimism, clear goals and vision, and we are charting on the right path," he concluded.

'Free' cruising with Avalon Waterways

Avalon Waterways has witnessed their cruise bookings swell for 2023. Now, they have come up with a plan for cruisers to experience small ship cruising at 50 per cent off. They have special offers for agents, including free cruise for them and a special price for their companions.

TT Bureau

Ever since it set to sail, Avalon Waterways have led the river cruise trend, unveiling an unforgettable fusion of distinctive sights, colourful cultures and enduring traditions for those sailing aboard their innovative and award-winning Suite Ships. Now, they have come up with a plan for cruisers to board Avalon Waterways and experience small ship cruising at 50 per cent off.

Elaborating on the offer, **Varesh Chopra**, Managing Director, Avalon Waterways, South Asia & Middle East, said, "While cruising enthusiasts get to take their companion for virtually free, we would like to invite our travel agent partners to avail this opportunity to sail on Avalon and witness our legendary hospitality. This will give them a sneak peek into 'elevated cruising' and what makes Avalon a brand of choice for the sophisticated yet discreet travellers from South Asia & the Middle East."



Varesh Chopra
Managing Director, Avalon Waterways
South Asia & Middle East

He added, "With our all-inclusive sailings on the fabled rivers of the world, there can be no better way to enjoy the never-ending vistas that only river cruising offers."

Avalon Waterways has many offers for travel agents. "These offers have proved to be hugely popular among cruisers and travel agents. We have just witnessed our cruise bookings swell for 2023," Chopra

said. "In fact, Avalon Waterways is coming off one of its strongest sales seasons ever. From witnessing a surge in bookings, especially to Danube and to the Rhine Rivers, Avalon Waterways is now planning to add new departures and cruises in 2024," he added.

With our all-inclusive sailings on the fabled rivers of the world, there can be no better way to enjoy the vistas that only river cruising offers

Travel agents' experience

Sharing her recent cruise experience, Yashoda Salian, Uniglobe BIT Travels, Mysore, said, "We were a group of eight pax who had sailed on the Tulip time Avalon Cruise. We



had a fabulous time and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves on Avalon. The whole journey had surpassed our expectations in every way. We were really pampered by the outstanding cruise staff. The rooms, food, drinks, and entertainment excursions were superb. Definitely, the best part was the panoramic view of the vistas that we could see pass by from the luxury of our bed."

Key offerings

Sharing about some exciting

offerings, Chopra highlighted about delightful intimate cruise settings around the rivers of Europe, Asia and South America.

"All our fleet in Europe and South-east Asia comprises Suite Ships,

each featuring Panorama Suites, having the widest opening windows in river cruising. With two full decks onboard the ship and a spacious 200 square feet, and Panorama Suites are 30 per cent larger than the industry standard," he said.

Offer for agents

They have a special offer for agents. Agents who sell as little as three cabins on Avalon will receive a free cruise for themselves and a special price for their companion. And as a bigger bonanza, agents who sell five cabins will get the cruise completely free for themselves as well as their companion.

Bonanza

SCAN & WIN TICKETS TO USA

**STIC Travel Group celebrating its 50th Anniversary.
From 17th August – 1st September 2023,
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This contest is for travel agents & tour operators only**



To enter, simply scan the code, complete the quiz
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E-visa for India available only at Dabolim, foreign travellers at Mopa airport left confused
UAE tourist visa overstay fines reduced to AED 50 a day
GPS Ahmedabad witnesses more than 40 exhibitors meeting 600 buyers
'Are we beggars' Naveen Kundu asks Embassies and High Commissions over delayed visas
Kairali Ayurvedic Group opens new centre in Pune, making it 8 th centre in India and 14 th worldwide
Hospitality postings surge by 66 per cent from June 2022-23: Indeed
Government amendments in e-Medical Visa and e-Medical Attendant Visa to boost tourism
ADTOI launches mobile app on its 27th Founders Day
Hotel prices in Asia increase by 26 per cent: FCM

'Partnerships are crucial for us'

Currently operating from India throughout the year, Cordelia Cruises plans to expand to the Middle East next year and in the long term, when it has three ships, it will allocate them at different ports in India, reveals Jurgen Bailom, President and CEO, Waterways Leisure & Cordelia Cruises.



Harshal Ashar

How has the cruise industry evolved over the past few years?

There are two distinct segments in the cruise industry—cruises that stop in India en route to other destinations, and those that start and end in India, primarily catering to Indian passengers. The latter was our focus. Post-pandemic, we've seen an upswing as people are keen on leisure experiences like ours.

Which routes and destinations does Cordelia have in mind?

Currently, we operate from India throughout the year. From September to June, Mumbai serves as our homeport, cruising to Goa, Kochi, and Lakshadweep. During the monsoon, we switch to the Eastern coast, cruising from Chennai to three Sri Lankan ports—Hambantota, Trincomalee, and Jaffna. Next year, we plan to expand to Middle East and in the long term, when we have three ships, we would have



Jurgen Bailom
President & CEO
Waterways Leisure & Cordelia Cruises

them at different ports and explore new ports like Kolkata, Port Blair, Diu, New Mangalore, Porbandar, Vizag, Pondicherry and many more, along with ports we are already calling to. This positioning is necessary to market and operate in India.

How is Cordelia different from other cruises?

Indians deserve their own cruise

company. Cordelia offers essentially all Indian experiences to its guests: watching cricket, Bollywood entertainment, Jain food, vegetarian and non-vegetarian cuisine. It prides itself on doing everything the 'Indian way', providing a home away from home experience.

Any new innovations adopted by the company?

We have developed our entire booking engine and reservation system in India. Since our inception, we have been continuously advancing on technology and tools to embolden our partners and guests. We have developed a mobile application that provides passengers with a range of features and services. For the ease of the customers, we have deployed a payment system that allows user to pay in multiple transactions, which in turn has resulted in one of the highest conversion rates. While we have most of the technology build inhouse by our tech team, all our vendors with respect to technology are India based. We are keen

towards exploring the Indian startup fever and unicorns. We also have an app that offers functionalities such as online check-in, digital boarding passes, itinerary management, onboard activity schedules and all the necessary information. It helps to enhance convenience and allows

ment and will enable passengers to charge shipboard purchases, used as a cabin key card, and allows the traveller to embark and disembark the ship in ports and acts as a souvenir of the wonderful experience customers had onboard.

What are your plans for working with travel agents?

We have put a lot of effort into marketing. We are heavily focused on B2B/B2C, MICE, corporates, TAS, and OTMS, which means we target and focus on all segments of the industry. Our product caters to everyone. We believe the tourism sector is tightly knit and partnerships are crucial for us. We welcome everyone to sell our product. We invest, and our partners have a superior product to sell. This approach guarantees them a substantial earning opportunity in terms of commission, which ranges between 10-18 per cent. We are also expanding our B2B team to increase engagement and synergies with the travel agent community.

We have deployed a payment system that allows users to pay in multiple transactions, which, in turn, has resulted in one of the highest conversion rates

passengers to have information at their fingertips. Other technology such as the cruise card, serves as a personal identification docu-

Tertiary cities offer huge opportunity

Speaking on the sidelines of one of the most awaited events in India – Global Panorama Showcase – Harmandeep Singh Anand, Managing Director, Jagsons Travels, discusses new products and services offered by his company, and the immense opportunity that secondary and tertiary cities have to offer.



TT Bureau

Harmandeep Singh Anand, Managing Director, Jagsons Travels, highlights some of the key products and services that his Nagpur-based travel organisation has to offer. "We have started a lot of ancillary services that we have been promoting. We are one of the top-performing PSAs for Cordelia Cruises in India. We have managed to integrate various cruiseliners in India like Costa Cruises, NCL, MSC Cruises, and Holland America within our system wherein the agents can log in and make the reservations instantly online as we have API connections with a lot of these organisations," he said.

Apart from this, Jagsons Travels has integrated Next Cellular in their system, which offers international global SIM cards for 50 countries within minutes. "These SIM cards can be delivered anywhere across India without any cost to the consumer. If they have an e-SIM facility, this can be issued within



Harmandeep Singh Anand
Managing Director
Jagsons Travels

a minute. They just need to have three documents: passport, visa, and e-ticket. Prices range from the lowest \$449 going worldwide up to \$4199 inclusive of GST. There is also a free SIM where one can avail 30 minutes of WhatsApp chat and incoming for free," he added.

Jagsons also offers visa services. "We have tied up with Atlys for

e-visa services for more than 30-odd countries. We offer doorstep visas through VFS at various locations. We have camps almost every week and we can manage USA, UK, and Schengen countries. These are some of the highlights of our offerings. We have NDC carriers on our system and we have integrated more than 23 airlines and we are able to offer NDC fares to the agents through the system," Anand shares.

Developing tier II and III cities

Anand has seen the landscape evolve the years. He reminisces, "When we look at 2007-2008, tier II and III cities had not developed yet. So, we realised that there was an opportunity there. At Jagsons, we started Global Panorama Showcase in 2013, which is now developed into a full-blown event covering more than 14 cities in India. The secondary and tertiary markets have grown drastically. The growth has been multifold. Every city that IndiGo flies to they tend to create more opportunity for

the industry. And that has helped us also grow."

New travel trends

Anand believes there is a huge opportunity in cruise tourism in India.

We have managed to integrate various cruiseliners in India like Costa Cruises, NCL, MSC Cruises, and Holland America within our system

"Cordelia Cruises has been here for a while and now Costa Cruises has also started some sailings in

Indian waters. Apart from that, we are also in position to market international destinations, especially with a lot of airports coming up in smaller cities like Nagpur. This is especially true for the younger travellers," Anand says.

Jagsons' vision has always been to educate and empower the travel industry. "That is what our motto and goal of GPS has also been. We have grown with our partners over the years," he says.

Global Panorama Showcase

This year, GPS has crisper format. "We have table-top meetings as usual, and removed plastic altogether; it's a completely sustainable platform. We have created a marketplace within the GPS app whereby you can have GPS Connect through the web system. So, exhibitors who are participating at our events can

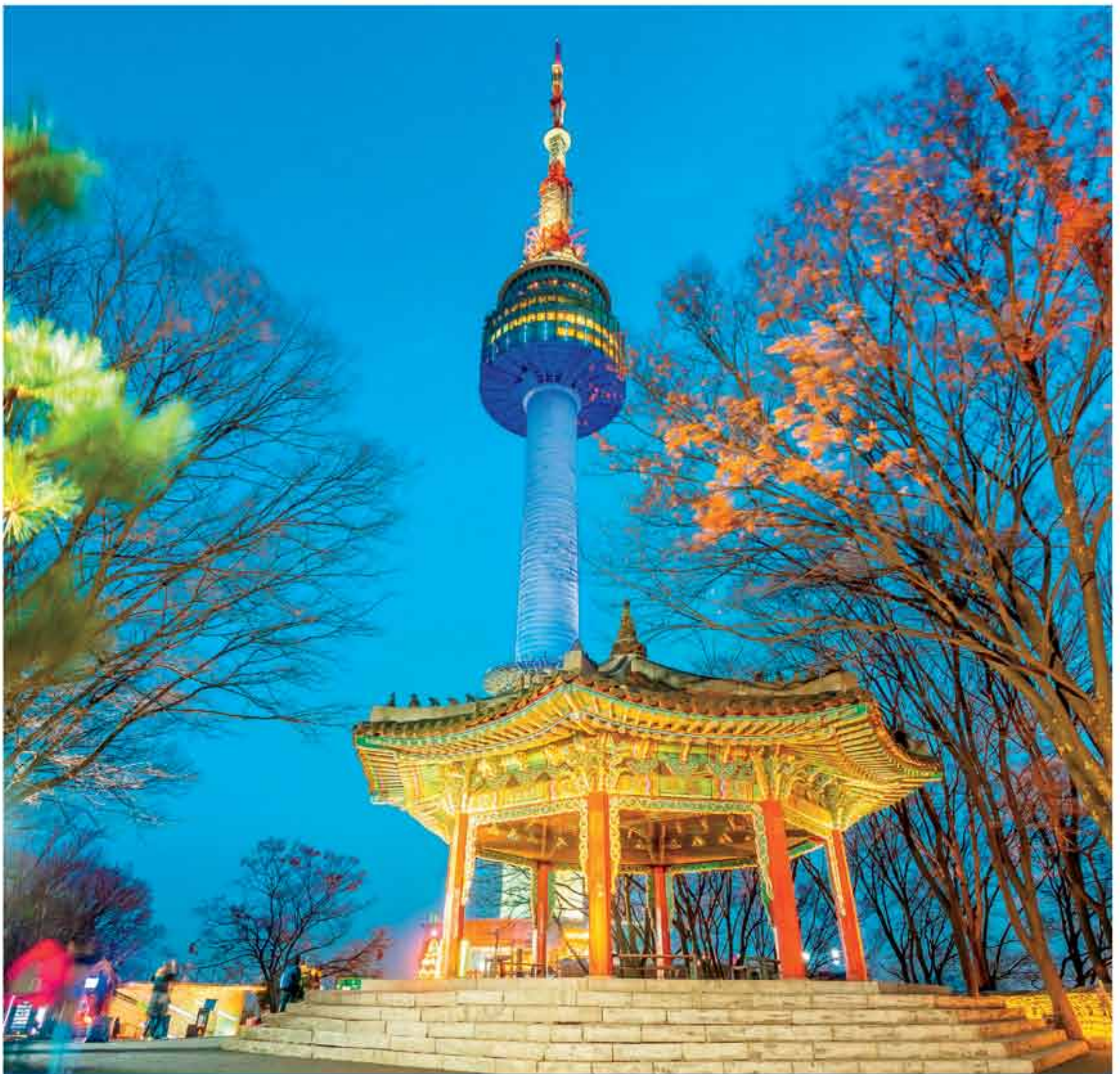
register. They have an access where they can upload an empty number of the information onto the system whereby buyers can have. It's similar to any of the social media platforms. So, you can connect with the buyers and the sellers through our platform. We plan to have some sort of an education discussion forum every fortnight within the platform," he says.

He expects close to about 8,000 to 10,000 buyers to be registered by the end of the year with 50-odd exhibitors at each of our events. This year started with Ahmedabad and added Jaipur and Guwahati this year. These are the two new cities that have been added this year. "So, we will have about 10 cities every year whether you join in from January to December or April to March." Anand adds.

Last year, Indian travellers spent about 30 per cent more on accommodations for their international travels than before the pandemic, and 20 per cent more than average Chinese customers, says a report by Nangia Anderson LLP.

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ChatGPT: A threat or an opportunity?

There's no denying it—ChatGPT, OpenAI's groundbreaking AI, is the talk of the tech world. This impressive Large Language Model is altering the landscape across many sectors, with the travel industry emerging as a prime example of its transformational power. **TRAVELTALK** finds out how the industry perceives this – as a threat or as an opportunity.



Hazel Jain

The excitement about ChatGPT has not yet abated. It still seems like the 'next big thing' for many, largely because there is still a lot of enigma surrounding it. Will it be a friend or a foe to the travel agents is the big question. While some of its reported capabilities are sufficiently interesting that warrant thoughtful evaluation by travel agents who may be affected by it, it's only a matter of time before the online agencies try to incorporate it into their systems and sector competition heats up again. We speak to a few travel and technology experts about their views on this.

Pritish Shah, Founder, A Travel Duet, feels that in the short run this doesn't seem to be a threat. "However, as it evolves it can definitely eliminate companies not adding real value. There are widespread use of AI including chatbots, auto voice calls and other experiments being carried out. ChatGPT and other AI innovations will certainly help travel brands in future. It's still in its nascent stages, but we definitely have been evaluating the use of ChatGPT to enhance our user experience in future."

ChatGPT, or conversational AI technology in general, has the potential to significantly impact the travel industry, particularly in the area of customer service and support, says **MP Deepu**, Founder, SeniorWorld. He adds, "By using chatbots and virtual assistants, companies can improve their customer service, personalised recommendations, and quick resolution of issues. Chatbots can help reduce customer service costs and increase efficiency by automating simple and repetitive tasks, allowing human agents to focus on more complex issues."

Taking travel to a new level

Travel advisors are already accustomed to being approached by clients who have performed searches to learn about travel options, prices, and more. ChatGPT may take that process to a new level.

Sanjay Arya, CEO, KFT Corporation, doesn't view ChatGPT as a threat to agents in the luxury sector. "Our clients will always seek tailor-made itineraries and guidance, and they admire the exclusivity we offer, which is a byproduct of our decades of experience. Since every AI-generated content platform, including ChatGPT, delivers on prompts, it is important to decipher what part of the job is fit for an AI to handle and what requires human intervention. For example, ChatGPT can dig out



Pritish Shah
Founder
A Travel Duet

It's still in its nascent stages, but we definitely have been evaluating the use of ChatGPT to enhance our user experience in future

information about cultures and traditions in a destination, but the celebration of these traditions within that community can only be understood and translated through human experiences. We have not felt the need to use anything like ChatGPT, as we curate extremely unique experiences and that beats anything available in the AI's landscape," he adds.

Reena Sachdev, Founder, Travel Arena, agrees with this. She opines, "ChatGPT is not a threat in the least for quality travel providers, it's just an added resource, which gives travellers information on the latest offerings. It's nothing but another Google. Travel agents and the trade can use ChatGPT for business. It can enable them to be faster in designing itineraries and understanding specific products more in-depth. We have thought of using ChatGPT, for training staff or using it for content creation on social media or blogs."

Embracing change

Technology and innovations are the key factors that are going to drive our life in the future. OTAs were perceived as a threat during the initial days. But embracing it has proved more productive for agents, hotels, airlines, etc. **Arun Iyer**, Founder & MD, My Golf Tours, says, "Hence there is no moving away from any new technology if one must be on top of their business. We must keep ourselves updated to differentiate what is real and what is fake infor-

mation and use it for our business accordingly. Chat GPT is as useful a tool as it is dangerous, if not handled well. At times the information can be fake too. Before it can be put to use, one must learn about it and get acquainted with it. Like how we know the products we sell. At our association level, we are planning to conduct masterclass for our members so that our members can benefit from it faster. The first and foremost easy use so far with Chat GPT is content creation for your holidays. That is too restricted as per the number of words you need, and scripts for our event videos. You have to imagine your needs and test how it can help. However, one cannot entirely trust the inputs as at times



MP Deepu
Founder
SeniorWorld

Chatbots can help reduce customer service costs and increase efficiency by automating simple and repetitive tasks

itineraries or content generated from ChatGPT may not be commercially viable or factual. We do use it as well. Currently we are using it for the above-mentioned areas." However, he cautions, human intelligence element has to audit content before it is shared commercially.

Sanjay Ghare, Founder & CEO at Vervotech, also believes that AI language models like ChatGPT do not directly threaten the existence of value travel agents bring to the table. "Still, they certainly eliminate the need for mundane, repetitive tasks travel agents do, such as travel planning and booking travel products. However, travel is an industry where 'end-user experience' could well be



Sanjay Arya
CEO
KFT

We have not felt the need to use anything like ChatGPT, as we curate extremely unique experiences and that beats anything available in the AI's landscape

make or break for any company selling travel products. That's where human intervention will always be needed and appreciated by travellers. That said, it's also an excellent time for travel agents to position themselves as more of a travel advisor than merely a point of contact facilitating smooth travel. They should



Reena Sachdev
Founder
Travel Arena

ChatGPT is not a threat in the least for quality travel providers, it's just an added resource, which gives travellers information on the latest offerings

leverage their existing knowledge to build more meaningful connections with clients that will also make business sense for their respective companies. The net demand for low-skilled travel agents will decrease in the larger scheme of things. But there's no threat to the profession," he adds on a positive note.

To keep his company agile, **Namit Jain**, Founder, Strode Experiences, is building a solid on-ground organised network linking traditional (and famously unorganised) tour guides with partner hotels and local experience seekers. "We view the AI



Arun Iyer
Founder & MD
My Golf Tours

ChatGPT is as useful a tool as it is dangerous, if not handled well—Before it can be put to use, one must learn about it and get acquainted with it

'threat' as something that keeps us on our feet and not get lazy. Because our customers can generate their own itineraries online, we have to stay one step ahead and offer them those on-ground, rooted, son-of-the-soil experiences that ChatGPT cannot. We invest in intense on-ground research, sending people on ground to offbeat locations and unique trails before opening them up to customers. Whether it's our Strode Hosts or Strode Rangers or a network of artists, artisans and experience providers, we're working with real people, some of whom are possibly left outside ChatGPT's radar. These people tell real, compelling stories. Our curated tours aren't just cleverly disguised, copy-paste itineraries; they're extensively authenticated on ground. That's what the evolved traveller wants today. Sure, AI can be



Sanjay Ghare
Founder & CEO
Vervotech

Travel is an industry where 'end-user experience' could be make or break for any company, where human intervention will always be needed

dazzling and give you the world on the click of a button. We're not using its services for marketing collaterals. However, can it tell an intimate story



Namit Jain
Founder
Strode Experiences

Because our customers can generate their own itineraries online, we have to stay one step ahead and offer them experiences that ChatGPT can't

that moves you to tears? The wider ChatGPT casts its net, the more intimate and intense we get. That's the differentiator for us," Jain adds.

Fly Cairo-Delhi direct on EgyptAir

Egyptair, the national carrier of Egypt, has launched four weekly direct flights connecting Delhi to Cairo. Mohamed Moussa, Chairman & CEO, EgyptAir, claims that these flights will facilitate connectivity between Egypt and India, and many other countries in Africa, America, and even Europe.

Sara Haque

Egyptair, the national carrier of Egypt, has launched four weekly direct flights connecting Delhi to Cairo. To celebrate the occasion, the airline recently hosted a launch party for the travel industry. The direct connectivity that these flights offer promise a flourishing relationship of tourism, trade, culture, and politics, for the two countries. Speaking at the event, **Capt. Mohamed Moussa**, Chairman & CEO, EgyptAir, said, "These flights will facilitate connectivity between Egypt and India, and many other countries in Africa, America, and even Europe. I think it's a promising force for the economy." The CEO also mentioned the ongoing collaborations with the governments of both, India and Egypt, to facilitate the tourism industry.

Amr Ali, Manager for North and Eastern India, EgyptAir, mentioned how the direct connectivity between Cairo and Delhi will be

"achieving success and mutual benefits for customers from both India and Egypt. Aviation can link the nations, enhance the tourist movement between the two countries, and lessen the distance between them. I'm very optimistic that it's going to have a very positive impact on the social, political and cultural relations between Egypt and India," he said.

The Cairo-Delhi route will have four weekly flights with A320neo, which is EgyptAir's newly acquired narrowbody aircraft with state of the art facilities, two cabin service with 16 seats in Business Class, and 126 seats in Economy Class. The flight MS973 departs from Cairo on Fridays and Sundays at 11:40 (EEST) and lands at New Delhi at 20:45 (IST), while flight MS975 departs from Cairo on Thursdays and Saturdays at 23:50 (EEST) and reaches New Delhi at 08:55 (IST).

Also present at the event was **Prabuddha Sen**, Chief Operat-



Capt. Mohamed Moussa
Chairman & CEO
EgyptAir



Amr Ali
Manager North and Eastern India
EgyptAir



Prabuddha Sen
Chief Operating Officer
VFS Global, South Asia

The ongoing collaborations with the governments of both, India and Egypt, will facilitate the tourism industry

I'm very optimistic that it's going to have a very positive impact on the social, political and cultural relations between Egypt and India

The visa application process for Egypt is very easy and can be done completely online

ing Officer, VFS Global, South Asia Market. VFS Global has collaborated with the Embassy of Egypt, based in New Delhi, to assist in the visa application process for outbound Indian tourists to Egypt, and also to promote tourism between the two countries. Sen mentioned that the visa application process for Egypt is "very easy" and can be done completely online. "The only requirements are certain documents that the tourists must have in hand, and the visa is granted within a very short period of time," he said.

Sen also advised to plan for the journey well in advance, preferably six months prior to the travel date.

Wael Mohamed Awad Hamed, Ambassador of Egypt and the Chief Guest at the launch, said, "The relationship between Egypt and India goes back at least 3,500 years. Today is the first time ever that the two capitals are directly connected."

Harness power of AI in travel retailing

In today's fast-paced travel industry, staying ahead of the competition and meeting the evolving needs of travellers is essential. One way to achieve this is by harnessing the AI power. Sanjay Kumar, CEO, InterGlobe Technology Quotient, claims that AI has become a game-changer, revolutionising various aspects of the travel journey.

TT Bureau

In recent years, the travel industry has witnessed a significant transformation with the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into various aspects of the journey, claims Sanjay Kumar, CEO, ITQ. "From planning and booking to on-the-go assistance, AI has revolutionized the way we experience travel. With its ability to analyse vast amounts of data and provide personalized recommendations, AI has become a powerful tool for both travellers and travel service providers. AI-most all tourism-related businesses currently utilise at least one AI-powered technology, which is expected to result in a CAGR of over 9.7 per cent by 2026."

ITQ for AI travel retailing
He claimed that ITQ allows the trade to explore the power of AI in travel retailing to enhance service offerings for high growth in many ways:

❖ Efficient Trip Planning: With AI-



Sanjay Kumar
CEO
InterGlobe Technology Quotient

powered travel platforms, agents can simplify the planning process by utilising machine learning algorithms to analyse vast amounts of data. These platforms can generate personalised itineraries based on traveller preferences, budget, and past travel patterns.

❖ Seamless Booking Experience: By incorporating AI-powered chat-

bots and virtual assistants into their services, travel agents can provide instant support and recommendations to clients.

❖ Personalised Recommendations: By utilising AI algorithms that analyse travel reviews, social media posts, and personal preferences, travel agents can provide highly personalised recommendations. Whether it's suggesting local restaurants, offbeat attractions, or hidden gems, AI-powered platforms can help curate unique experiences that cater to clients' specific interests and preferences.

❖ Enhanced Safety and Security: AI-powered technologies such as facial recognition and real-time risk monitoring can help streamline airport security processes and provide timely alerts to clients.

❖ Smart Assistance on the Go: By integrating smart assistants into services, service providers can offer real-time flight updates, suggest

nearby attractions, recommend local services, and provide translations. These AI-powered assistants can enhance the convenience and enjoyment of their clients' travel experiences, providing them with immediate support.

At present, almost all tourism-related businesses utilise at least one AI-powered technology, which is expected to result in 9.7% CAGR by 2026

❖ The Future of AI in Travel: As a travel agent or provider, staying abreast of AI advancements is crucial. Technologies such as predictive analytics, natural lan-

guage processing, and machine learning will further enhance personalization and enable agents to deliver tailored experiences to your clients.

Harness power of AI in business
Kumar advised that agents could adopt several approaches to harness the potential of AI in travel business. These approaches are:

❖ Embrace AI-driven tools and software: Examine your data to uncover valuable information about your clientele and their travel inclinations. The modern travel technology of Travelport+ allows you to analyse customer data based on their previous experiences. You can apply this knowledge to create personalized itineraries that enrich the customer journey.

❖ Collaborate with AI-powered companies: Partner with AI-powered companies that offer solutions tailored to the travel industry. These companies can provide you with

AI-powered tools, applications, and platforms that can enhance your services. Collaborating with experts in the field will ensure you deliver cutting-edge solutions to your clients.

❖ Stay informed about AI advancements: Continuously educate yourself about the latest AI technologies and trends in the travel industry.

❖ Prioritise data collection and analysis: Collect and analyse data about your clients, their travel preferences, and their feedback.

"Harnessing the power of AI in the travel industry presents exciting opportunities for travel agents and providers. By embracing AI-powered technology, you can elevate your services, offer seamless experiences, and cater to the unique preferences of your clients. So, make the most of AI and watch as your business thrives into the dynamic world of travel," he said.

Sustainability at heart of hoteliers

► Contd from page 5



Bhaskar Gurunath
Area Director of Engineering -
South Asia, Marriott International

“ Creation of a Sustainability committee in every hotel with the GM as the chairperson leading this initiative. Engaging our associates in sustainability community outreach programs, educating them about the Sustainability activities and initiatives that each Hotel is engaged in through meetings, activities and initiatives by each department. Balance score card is driven by departments and it becomes a goal for them to achieve.”



Pradeep Shetty
President
HRAWI

“ By prioritising life, property and environmental safety, we not only fulfil our ethical obligations but also lay the foundation for sustainable growth and success. The signing of the MoU between HRAWI and IGBC is a stepping stone in this direction. We will continue to hold awareness programs and seminars to educate stakeholders on the conservation of water, food and energy and to share best practices towards achieving Net Zero.”



Nikhil Sharma
Market Managing Director-Eurasia
Wyndham Hotels & Resorts

“ Sustainability and hospitality always goes hand-in-hand. In order to perform and do better in the market, sustainability plays a major role. We have a program called the Wyndham Green; it has five levels of certification; this is global program that we have shared with our global and domestic partners and we have been encouraging our hotels globally to reach different levels of Wyndham Green and make the hotels more and more sustainable.”



Gurmit Singh Arora
Chairman
Indian Green Building Council

“ The vision of IGBC is to enable a sustainably built environment for all and facilitate India to be one of the global leaders in the sustainably built environment. Towards this effort, HRAWI and IGBC have come together to raise awareness about the benefits of building sustainable properties across the hospitality industry. This will include incorporating existing establishments as well. If we do not conserve water, we will have a major problem on our hands.”



Atul Upadhyay
Executive VP
Pride Hotels Group

“ The budget allocation dedicated to sustainability initiatives varies appreciably among different hotels in our chain, and this variability hinges on factors such as the hotel's size, location, and overall commitment to sustainable practises. While specific figures can differ, many of our hotels are allocating a significant portion of their budgets to sustainability initiatives. This allocation encompasses investments in cutting-edge technologies helping environs.”



Raouf Dhanani
Managing Director
Sayaji Hotels

“ The hospitality industry has become the greatest example of adopting sustainable practices for the long run post-COVID. Sustainability reduces environmental impact through green practices. Sayaji Hotels constantly strive to protect the local communities, team mates, esteemed guests and life of Mother Earth in daily practice. There are no fixed budgetary allocations for sustainable initiatives, but we focus on energy-efficient measures.”



Sunil Kumar
General Manager
JW Marriott, Kolkata

“ We have been increasingly focusing on sustainability initiatives to reduce our environmental impact and promote responsible practices. These initiatives include zero-waste, water conservation through the installation of bottling plants and sustainable sourcing to name a few. As per the sustainability strategy, JW Marriott Kolkata's pan-Asian diner, Vintage Asia has set up the 'zero-wastage' concept by introducing 'single diner' menu for its guests.”



Devidyuti Ghosh
Hotel Manager
Mulberry Shades Bengaluru Nandi Hills

“ We believe in the harmonious coexistence of hotels and sustainability. One of our primary focuses is on energy conservation. Our culinary team prioritises sourcing ingredients locally, supporting regional farmers and reducing carbon emissions from transportation. Waste management is another crucial aspect we address diligently. We have established recycling programs for various materials and implement composting methods.”



Ashley James
General Manager, Angsana Oasis Spa &
Resort, Bengaluru

“ In these times, organised hotel management companies and organisations have shifted their focus towards sustainability and responsible hospitality. This change is necessary due to the increasing global demands in climate issues, UNSDG, and ESG goals. Our properties have been consciously built with minimal carbon footprints and a strong emphasis on supporting local employment and responsible hospitality.”



Ronan Fearon
General Manager, JW Marriot Bengaluru
Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa

“ Through meticulous planning and innovative strategies, we have incorporated various sustainable practices at our resort. From energy-efficient lighting and water conservation initiatives to waste reduction and responsible sourcing of materials, every aspect of our operations is designed to minimise our environmental footprint. We prioritise partnerships with local suppliers, contributing to the community while reducing our carbon footprint.”



Gaurav Pokhriyal
Executive Vice President - Human
Resources, IHCL

“ In the last financial year our spend on sustainability related initiatives was approximately ₹35 crores. The technology updates in the sustainability field and regulatory requirements are fairly dynamic. Hence, while we have a budget in place, spends will be not be limited to budgets but in line with our promise to lead positive change with IHCL's guiding force of Tajness. IHCL made an early transition to renewable power at its properties.”



HC Vinayaka
Vice President - Technical, EHS and
Sustainability, ITC Hotels

“ It is a matter of pride that ITC Hotels and WelcomHotels have achieved, much ahead of time, the 2030 carbon emission targets envisaged in the COP21 Paris agreement. Guided by the ethos of 'Responsible Luxury', we endeavour to create a harmonious balance between luxury and sustainability by prioritising environmental stewardship. ITC Hotels is among the first hotel chains to mitigate single-use-plastic at close to 150 touch points.”

Compiled by TT Bureau

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Air Mauritius plans South India foray

Air Mauritius has already expanded its operations to Delhi after Mumbai, and with the demand growing for the island nation, the airline plans to increase frequency from Delhi. As part of their strategic vision, they also plan to expand network to the southern regions of India by introducing direct non-stop flights.



Nisha Verma

Air Mauritius resumed its services between Delhi and Mauritius from 3 May 2023, offering two weekly flights on an Airbus A330-200 aircraft, informs **Sixtine Marot**, Head Sales and Marketing, Air Mauritius.

New frontiers

The airline was already connecting the island nation to Mumbai, and with the new addition of Delhi, the prospects of tourism flourishing in the country would grow further. Elaborating on the development, she says, "We are delighted to witness an increase in passenger numbers and are grateful for the unwavering support from our trade partners and valued customers. In response to the growing demand, Air Mauritius is enhancing its connectivity by introducing a third weekly flight on the Delhi route, beginning in November 2023. This is an exciting addition to the existing six weekly flights that operate



Sixtine Marot
Head Sales and Marketing
Air Mauritius

between Mumbai and Mauritius. This year, Air Mauritius is commemorating 50 years of steadfast operations to Mumbai."

Leisure in focus

Called as the honeymooners' paradise for Indians, Mauritius is today witnessing a wide variety of tourists coming to its shores. Marot agrees, "Mauritius primarily

attracts leisure travellers, making up a significant portion of the traffic. These leisure travellers include a diverse mix of honeymooners, families, and wedding groups, drawn to the island's idyllic setting. Additionally, the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) segment is also vibrant, catering to business events and gatherings. Given the robust economic, historical and business ties between India and Mauritius, corporate travellers and workers also form an essential part of our customer base on this route."

Teaming with MTPA

She says that they are making sure that they cater to all segments of travel from India. "Air Mauritius is committed to fulfilling the diverse travel needs of all market segments. Being the national carrier of Mauritius, we maintain a strategic partnership with the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA) to actively promote tourism from India. Our dedicated efforts focus



on tailoring services to cater to various customer groups, ensuring a seamless and enjoyable travel experience for all. Through the MTPA tie-up, we aim to enhance India-Mauritius tourism," adds Marot.

Best for summer

Pointing out that the Indian summer travel season conveniently aligns with the low travel season in their primary markets across Europe, she says, "This synchronicity presents a favourable opportunity for passengers from India, as they can benefit from increased availability

and ease in securing hotel accommodations during this period."

Growth plans

Sharing their growth plans Marot says, "As part of our strategic vision, Air Mauritius aims to expand its network by introducing direct non-stop flights to the southern regions of India. This plan aligns with our commitment to enhancing air connectivity and fostering stronger ties between key destinations in South India and Mauritius." Air Mauritius also has a code share arrangement with Air India.

Marketing & promotions

When it comes to marketing, Marot says that they work in close collaboration with their trade partners and the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA) to proactively promote the destination in the market.

Trade engagement

Saying that Air Mauritius fosters a strong and dynamic relationship with the travel trade in India, she adds, "We engage in collaborative efforts to promote Mauritius as an enticing destination." 🇺🇦

CharterTalk

Charters see post-pandemic boom

The charter or private aircraft market has seen a huge uplift in demand from not only those who always preferred it over commercial flying, but also those who got a taste of flying private during COVID for various reasons. Today, this industry is growing and is set to reach new heights with time.

While the global aviation market saw an unprecedented surge in demand for charter planes after the COVID-19 breakout, the scenario also came up with its own set of challenges. Post-pandemic, charter business witnessed an impressive demand, especially from the first-time flyers. A sizeable number of these flyers continue to fly private planes, whereas a majority of them went back to flying commercial planes, as the threat revolving around the pandemic has fizzled out.

Some of the challenges that are hindering the growth of charter industry in India:

❖ **Unavailability of exclusive charter terminal:** Barring a few airports in India like Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, and Cochin, we have no other airport in India that has the terminal for charters, which causes inconvenience to charter operators and passengers.

❖ **Seasonal demand variations:** To a decent extent, charter flying gets affected by its seasonal demand. This is especially the case with travel agencies dealing with



FITs. To some extent, even corporate houses avoid travelling during peak summers and rainy season.

❖ **Competition with commercial airlines:** During and post-pandemic, charter operators have been facing a competition from commercial airlines, which offer their complete aircraft (normally from 67-seater to 189-seater) for a

price, which is considerably lower than a private aircraft.

❖ **Regulatory and taxation issues:** We have a strict aviation

regulatory and taxation policy, which discourages many potential aircraft buyers to buy their own aircraft.

❖ **Perception and awareness:** A large chunk of charter customers consider hiring or owning a private plane as an expensive proposition, which is not the case. We have been conducting a training session with travel trade partners to explain

the benefits of charters and how it could add value to their customers. Also, we have a comprehensive presentation for corporate houses highlighting the cost-benefit analysis for them.

Post-COVID, charter business saw an impressive demand, especially from the first-time flyers. A sizeable number them continue to fly private planes

Future of general aviation

I foresee a bright future for the general aviation industry in India because of the rise in ultra-high net worth individuals (UHNI) and the regional connectivity scheme of the Indian government. As dispos-

able incomes increase and aspirations for luxury experiences grow, more individuals and businesses may opt for private charters as a convenient and exclusive mode of travel. A larger chunk of business travellers who shifted to flying private planes during the pandemic continue to fly and some of them even bought their own private plane and quite a few are in the process of buying their own aircraft.

The pandemic witnessed an impressive private jet flying in tier II and III cities. With the government encouraging regional connectivity schemes (RCS), under which many non-operational airfields have been activated, charter flights got a huge boost in connecting many small cities having manufacturing facilities of corporates houses and also places of tourist interests.

With the entry of new operators, this market is experiencing a high demand, which would help drive

innovation, improved service offerings, and potentially more competitive pricing.

Importantly, innovative digital platforms for charter bookings like BookMyJet can contribute to operational cost reductions and improved customer experiences. Lastly, there is an increasing emphasis on sustainable aviation practices, including the adoption of more eco-friendly aircraft, sustainable fuel alternatives and eVTOLS.



Santosh Sharma
Founder, BookMyJet

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

Oman woos Mumbai with its offerings

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, concluded its four-city India roadshow in Mumbai, which witnessed a strong turnout, facilitated successful business interactions between the Indian travel trade and Oman Tourism officials. The roadshow started in New Delhi, followed by the cities of Jaipur, Kolkata before coming to the financial capital of the country.



Unfurling the Christchurch charm

Christchurch is one of the world's most unique destinations, combining urban regeneration and innovation with heritage, culture, and exhilarating activity. It is a city that is evolving, from street art and innovative projects to a bustling hospitality scene and established green spaces. Christchurch is ready to be rediscovered.



Nestled in New Zealand's South Island, Christchurch beckons travellers with its unique blend of natural beauty, vibrant culture, and captivating history. From serene parks to dynamic urban centres, this city offers an array of experiences that cater to every taste.

The city's charm lies in its ability to seamlessly blend the old and the new, the tranquil and the adventurous. With its abundant natural beauty, cultural landmarks, and thrilling activities, the city promises a diverse range of experiences for tourists seeking to explore its treasures.

Discover Maori Culture

Maori culture is a journey into New Zealand's indigenous heritage. Rooted in deep spiritual connections with land and ancestors, it encompasses language, art, dance, and customary ritual. The Maori's rich oral traditions convey



stories, legends, and knowledge. By embracing Maori values, one gains insight into a culture woven into the nation's fabric.

Quaint Tram Rides

Step aboard the historic Christchurch Tram to embark on a journey through the city's landmarks. This iconic transportation offers a hop-on-hop-off service, allowing one to explore key attractions at your own pace.

Art and Culture

Immerse yourself in Christchurch's artistic scene. Home to galleries, studios, and artisan shops, this city celebrates creativity and showcases local talent. Don't miss the incredible graffiti and street art.

Sumptuous Food

Indulge your taste buds with a visit to Christchurch's Riverside Market. Savour fresh local produce,

artisanal cheeses, baked goods, and more. Food in New Zealand offers a vibrant culinary experience. Do a local food tour to really feel that explosion of flavours.

Adrenaline Activities

The city boasts an array of thrilling experiences. Embark on a heart-pounding helicopter ride to soak in breathtaking aerial views of the stunning landscapes. If river rides are your calling, the pristine wa-

ters surrounding Christchurch offer an adrenaline-pumping variety.

A Trip to Akaroa

Embark on a scenic drive to the charming French-inspired town of Akaroa. Nestled in an ancient volcanic crater, this coastal gem offers opportunities for harbour cruises, dolphin watching, and exploring colonial architecture. Don't forget to try the awe-evoking star gazing that can make you happier and more humble.

Alpaca Farms

The highlight of a trip to New Zealand is a visit to the Alpaca farm. The Alpacas have found their charming home amidst New Zealand's picturesque landscapes. Cuddles with them will make you forget everything else. These animals, with their luxuriously soft fleece and gentle nature, have become a unique feature of the country's rural scenery. Often seen grazing against the backdrop of rolling hills, alpacas thrive in

New Zealand's temperate climate. They not only contribute to the local wool industry but also offer a delightful attraction for tourists. With their curious expressions and tranquil presence, alpacas have woven themselves into the fabric of New Zealand's life, embodying a

With its abundant natural beauty, cultural landmarks, and thrilling activities, the city promises a diverse range of experiences

blend of pastoral charm and modern fascination. With its diverse blend of natural wonders and thrilling activities Christchurch stands as an inviting canvas for unforgettable experiences.

Summit to spread beyond hills

Summit Hotels & Resorts, which has 30 world-class hotels at 15 destinations across six states, plans to extend their presence beyond hill stations and include major leisure destinations.



Summit Hotels & Resorts, positioned in the midscale leisure market, prioritizes delivering quality and amazing experiences. Enriching their portfolio by constantly expanding to touristic hill stations, they aim to offer tranquil gateways to visitors. For the past 15 years, they have been at the forefront of evolving hospitality sector. They have established 30 world-class hotels and resorts, and still expanding. Their properties are spread across 15 sought-after destinations, spanning over six states, creating delightful experiences for the guests.

Northeast attraction

Sumit Mitruka, CEO and Founder, Summit Hotels & Resorts, said that recognizing void in hill station accommodations and limited connectivity is very critical. "By addressing gaps in infrastructure and connectivity in Northeast, we are strategically opening properties in pretty hill stations, creating a circuit of comfort with nature."



Sumit Mitruka
CEO and Founder
Summit Hotels & Resorts

He said that Summit Hotels & Resorts' commitment to remain unwavering, as they nurture destinations by facilitating connectivity and fostering growth, thereby transforming hill stations into vibrant destinations.

Partnership with travel trade

Engaging with the travel trade is vital aspect of the sales strategy. Mitruka informed, "Collaborations with the travel trade and agencies of-

fer exclusive packages, while immersive familiarization trips enable agents to promote their offerings."

Expansion Plans

Enlightening about the future plans of Summit Hotels, he said, "Our plans are focused on

Our plans are focused on extending our presence beyond hill stations and include major leisure destinations

extending our presence beyond hill stations and include major leisure destinations. We are delighted to bring our properties to diverse destinations, combining luxury with authentic local experiences."

Digital promotion key to hotels

Avi Arya, Chief Mogul, Internet Moguls, believes that the future of digital marketing in hospitality industry is promising and they make sure that every hotel brand creates its own niche.



Avi Arya, Chief Mogul, Internet Moguls, says that he started the digital marketing agency after he couldn't find an online agency that understood hospitality well. Initially, he started digital marketing for Ajanta, his own hotel in Delhi, and Tamarind, his another property in Goa.

He says that digital marketing changed the way hotels used to do business. "Nowadays, people find digital marketing a better investment than gold," he claims. "Earlier people didn't know how to calculate their Return on Investment (ROI) when they put money in digital marketing. However, today we don't have sufficient staff to give our clients, we have at least a month waiting to onboard a client," he adds.

Now, Internet Moguls is handling marketing for a number of hotel brands and makes sure that every brand retains its USP. "When we start working with a brand, we have at least two weeks of on-



Avi Arya
Chief Mogul
Internet Moguls

boarding, understanding previous mistakes. Hotels basically have four revenue centres — rooms, F&B, spa and banquets. We see where they stand and who is the competition. After that we give an X-ray of the issues affecting their business. Hotels generally don't like when they are made to stand in front of the mirror, but it is our job to show them the real picture and that is where the journey starts," he says.

In the digital marketing domain, especially in the hospitality sector, people are making lakhs of rupees every weekend by selling packages on Instagram and Facebook for their restaurants. "It

When we start working with a brand, we have at least two weeks of onboarding, understanding previous mistakes

is not possible to compete with OTAs at the same price, but you can do that by giving a package that you have not given to an OTA by running them on Facebook ads," he says.

Every Saturday, he conducts free trainings for 1,100 hotels from different parts of the world.

Capital gets the best of The Philippines

The Philippines Tourism recently kicked-off its four-city India roadshow in New Delhi. The roadshow focuses on promoting the destination's vibrant culture and natural beauty under their new tourism campaign–Love the Philippines. With 14 stakeholders from the destination's travel industry, the roadshow witnessed an overwhelming response from the travel trade in India.



Easy visa drives numbers to Oz

The Australia Marketplace India 2023, which was recently held in Bengaluru, gave a great opportunity to agents and service providers from Down Under to network. Sharing their views on the experience, six travel agents speak about how the demand for the destination continues to increase with the addition of air capacity and ease of e-visa.



Ashmi Dharia
Founder and Holiday Curator
Gypsy Soul Holidays

“Demand for Australia has been growing steadily and I am seeing more honeymooners and families travelling there. There were a few glitches in the visa process in the beginning when Australia had just opened, but now it is pretty smooth. In fact, my last clients got their visas within a week.”



Meha Vashi
Director
Nivalink Holidays

“Australia is a planned holiday and while visas took time, procuring them was not difficult. Australia could not be pushed to travellers who were unplanned and did not have window to procure visas. I met some interesting sellers here like Halcyon House, and Jamala wild-life lodge.”



Sunita Amarnani
Executive VP
Vexplore

“Demand for Australia has been growing compared to last season. Clients are looking for alternatives to Europe considering visa issues where Australia has advantage. Even the ROE of euro versus AUD has played a big role. What also works is that we don't need to submit passports.”



Anshu Tejuja
Managing Director
Ashoka Dream Holidays

“Demand for Australia from our clients this year has been exceptionally good, and we have noticed a notable growth in interest for this destination. Our clientele primarily consists of FIT leisure travellers, including families, groups of families, honeymooners, and couples.”



Bhawna Rao
Founder
Encompass Experiences

“Inquiries for Australia have shown a notable increase. Our agency has primarily been approached by honeymooners and families, including nuclear and multigenerational groups. The demand reflects a growing interest in exploring the diverse landscapes, cultural experiences.”



Purvi Jhaveri
Director
Sunday Pure Holidays

“There is growing demand from clients to visit Australia as their preferred destination, especially to the ones looking for long haul travel that includes families and honeymooners. While VFR visas were the quickest ones to obtain, getting a long-term tourist visa for three years was not too bad.”

Compiled by Hazel Jain

Aussie trade feels the Indian pulse

The 18th edition of Australia Marketplace India 2023, held in Bengaluru, witnessed record participation with 86 Australian delegates who met 94 buyers from 8 cities in India. India has been the fastest recovering market for Australia and ranks as the fourth inbound market in terms of visits. The three-day event reiterates the demand for Australia among Indian travellers.



Industry status fuels Assam tourism

Not just the state tourism's branding 'Awesome Assam' that has contributed to an incredible rise in tourist arrivals, but the political will has helped Assam's complete turnaround. This transformation can be attributed to the development of seamless connectivity, infrastructure, peace, stability and inclusiveness.



Hazel Jain

Assam witnessed a massive footfall of more than one crore domestic travellers in 2022-23 alone. This number was about 17 lakh during 2021-22, and 13.5 lakh in 2020-21, according to the state government. Effectively, the state recorded a staggering 575 per cent growth in tourist arrivals in the financial year 2022-2023, as per **Himanta Biswa Sarma**, Chief Minister, Assam. He recently inaugurated a 200-room resort developed by the Mayfair Group in Sonapur, near Guwahati, which will further boost tourism in the state.

With the grant of industry status to the tourism sector in 2022, restaurants and wellness centres among others are eligible for incentives. This further encouraged private investment into Assam for tourism.

The increase is not just in domestic tourists. **Jayanta Malla Baruah**, Tourism Minister, Assam, has said that there has been an increase of 783 per cent in foreign tourists this year. He attributed this to the improved law and order situation in last two years of the present state government, improved infrastructure and new branded hotels and resorts, including five-star hotels, being established in Guwahati, Kaziranga, Manas and other places.

"This decision will bring a paradigm shift to the tourism sector. Previously, only hotels and resorts above the three-star category and river cruises were included under thrust areas of Assam Industrial Policy. But now many new tourism units like heritage hotels, bungalows, camping sites, restaurants, amusement parks, ropeways, museums, tour operator service, adventure park, etc., will also be included," said Baruah. The policy aims for sustainable investment and capital formation.



Jayanta Malla Baruah
Tourism Minister
Assam

Many new tourism units like heritage hotels, bungalows, camping sites, and amusement parks will be included under the Assam Industrial Policy

According to **E Banlumlang Blah**, President, North East India Tourism Confederation, "Assam now has good connectivity and infrastructure in terms of air and railways, which is an entry and exit point for most visitors to the Northeast India. Trains coming to the Northeast except Sikkim have to enter through Assam before reaching any other destination in the region. Taking this into consideration, plus other tourist attractions, has resulted in Assam receiving high tourist numbers. A decade after the start of the present century has opened up the eyes of tourists about the Northeast. Unexplored natural beauty with many unseen cultures also attracts many tourists, especially domestic. Fortunately, together with the growth of tourism there is also a growth of infrastructure."

Many tour operators in the region believe that Assam is passing through an exciting phase in tourism. **Ranjeet Das**, Director, Landmark Tours & Travels, from Assam, says, "Interests in our destination have grown in the past few years and the number of visitors has also increased by many times. Thanks to the branding of 'Awesome Assam' and the electronic media for bringing stories of our region to the pan-India viewers. People have now realised that tourism in Assam is beyond our wildlife and the rhinos. We have rich culture, cuisine, sports, adventure, monsoon and



Ranjeet Das
Director
Landmark Tours & Travels

Interests in our destination (the state of Assam) have grown in the past few years and the number of visitors has also increased by many times

lier was one of despair. Now our youngsters have the confidence and can run enterprises. But most importantly, there is a political will. This complete turnaround and this hallmark transformation can be attributed to the simultaneous development of seamless connectivity, brisk infrastructure development, peace, stability and inclusiveness."

The Tourism Department, Government of Assam, was proactive in implementing measures to increase tourism before the pandemic struck. Various measures were taken, including infrastructure upgrades, effective marketing campaigns, including roadshows. The use of WhatsApp groups by the tourism department allowed for easy communication with registered tour operators of Assam, giving them an opportunity to showcase their offerings and give suggestions to the government. By working together, the tourism department and Assam tour operators were able to enhance tourism in the region, particularly from the domestic sector.

Arijit Purkayastha, Director, Koyeli Tours & Travels, also based in Assam, says that the series of webinars titled 'Dekho Apna Desh' organised by the Ministry of Tourism post the pandemic played a vital role in facilitating interactions for the region, both within the country

and beyond. "During Rupinder Brar's tenure as Additional Director General of the Ministry of Tourism, the webinars she organised played a vital role in fostering connections and interactions within the country and beyond, particularly for our region. These webinars significantly raised awareness about the tourism offerings in Assam and the Northeast region of India. The Ministry of Tourism's commendable initiative provided valuable opportunities to stakeholders, and today we are reaping the benefits of these webinars. We express our gratitude to the Ministry of Tourism," he says.

During and after pandemic, these initiatives also kept increasing in the Department of Tourism, Govern-



Arijit Purkayastha
Director
Koyeli Tours & Travels

The Ministry of Tourism's initiative provided valuable opportunities to stakeholders, and today we are reaping the benefits of these webinars

ment of Assam. A notable instance is the release of 'Aparup Assam,' by Assam's Tourism Department, travel guides in two volumes featuring 'Lesser-known Destinations of Assam'. Purkayastha adds, "The tourism department deserves appreciation for their initiatives that showcased the products of Assam beyond Kaziranga. Hard work and dedication from both - the Tourism Department of Assam, along with the tour operators of Assam - have undoubtedly played a key role in the growth and success of tourism in Assam."



Vishakha Sethi Kotyan
Founder
Vima Holidays, Mumbai

Indian tourist is now more adventurous and likes to visit unexplored destinations. Assam has its own unique culture and is very beautiful

Tour operators in Mumbai are also promoting Assam to their clients. **Vishakha Sethi Kotyan**, Founder, Vima Holidays, says, "The Indian tourist is now more adventurous and likes to visit unexplored destinations. Assam has its own unique culture and is very beautiful. Most of the time the guests come to us pre-decided about the destination they wish to visit. At times when they ask our suggestions, we recommend the Northeastern India - Assam, Sikkim, and Meghalaya - simply because of its raw unique beauty and diverse culture. The clientele who is open to visit these destinations are usually the well-travelled adventurous ones, nature lovers, youngsters to middle age segment as travelling to this destination involves lot of road travel especially on hilly terrain."

Kotyan adds that the government is also working on improving the infrastructure in these regions, which make them easily accessible to the tourists.

"It's very unfortunate that the turmoil in Manipur has sadly affected the tourist travel to this state. Guests prefer to travel to other Northeastern states now like Sikkim, Assam, and Meghalaya. I was also planning to visit Manipur, but instead travelled to Darjeeling, Gangtok, Pelling and Kalimpong recently," she adds.



<div> <div># 1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP</div> <div>SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY</div> </div>		
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AUGUST 2023		
Date	Event	Time
17	Switzerland Webinar	3:00 pm
18-20	Holiday Expo-Vadodra	9:00 am
18-21	Taiwan International Travel Fair 2023	9:00 am
21	Abu Dhabi Tourism Roadshow-Bangalore	10:00 am
22-24	Travel Trade Maldives 2023	10:00 am
23	Abu Dhabi Tourism Roadshow-Mumbai	10:00 am
23-24	Indonesia Smart Travel Technology Expo 2023	10:00 am
23-25	Travel & Tourism Fair-Ahmedabad	9:00 am
25	Abu Dhabi Tourism Roadshow-Delhi	10:00 am
25	Visit Finland India Workshop	11:00 am
25-27	Global Travel Marketplace West 2023	9:00 am
26-27	Africa Traveltech Summit & Expo 2023	8:00 am
SEPTEMBER 2023		
1-3	Philippines Travel Mart 2023	10:00 am
1-3	Tourism Fair Mumbai 2023	11:00 am
7-9	International Travel Expo Ho Chi Minh City 2023	9:00 am
9-10	Travel and Tourism Fair - Hyderabad 2023	9:00 am
12-13	Global Panorama Show - Jaipur	10:00 am
For more information, contact us at: talk@ddppl.com		

Destination Britain India in Nov

Vishal Bhatia, Country Manager (India), VisitBritain, says that they are planning to conduct their sales mission from 19-21 November at Grand Hyatt, Gurugram. The destination has received amazing response from the travel fraternity this year.



TT Bureau

VisitBritain is planning to organise a sales mission this year in November. **Vishal Bhatia**, Country Manager (India), VisitBritain, said, “We are planning to conduct our sales mission called Destination Britain India from 19-21 November at Grand Hyatt, Gurugram, which will see around 30 suppliers from Britain engaging with hosted buyers from across India over B2B meetings and seminars.”

The National Tourist Organisation (NTO) was recently awarded as the best European tourism board at the Indian Travel Awards (ITA) North, which is a testament to the extraordinary work they have done in the past year.

They regularly organise sales missions around the globe, bringing the UK tourism industry together with key players in the international travel trade. They build knowledge of Britain among key influencers by deliv-



Vishal Bhatia
Country Manager (India)
VisitBritain



Shuja Bin Mehdi
B2B Manager (India)
VisitBritain

We are planning to conduct our sales mission called Destination Britain India from 19-21 November at Grand Hyatt, Gurugram

We look forward for the travel trade in India to interact with the suppliers from the UK at Destination Britain India

ering workshops and seminars across their overseas network and attract agents and operators to Britain to showcase the best of the destination.

VisitBritain actively promoted Birmingham and West Midlands region at the time of the Commonwealth Games.

The destination has received fantastic response from the travel fraternity post-pandemic and are continuing to get increasing number of visitors from India. “The fraternity has chosen UK as one of the top travel destinations in Europe and we have seen massive influx of tourists, as well as students and business visitors,” said **Shuja Bin Mehdi**, B2B Manager (India), VisitBritain. “We look forward for the travel trade in India to interact with the suppliers from the UK at Destination Britain India,” he added. After being honoured at the ITA, Mehdi said, “I think it is a huge vote of thanks from industry for giving us this honour.”

S'pore eyes young travellers

While families, M&I and weddings will remain traditional strongholds for Singapore Tourism Board, it is actively trying to woo the young Indian traveller through various initiatives.



Hazel Jain

Singapore Tourism Board has revealed that tourist arrivals from India until June 2023 was 5.35 lakh, which is close to 72 per cent of the 2019 numbers. It's a good record to have, says **GB Srithar**, Regional Director – India, Middle East, South Asia & Africa, Singapore Tourism Board (STB). “We are on track, and we hope to finish the year with a stronger recovery. Visitor arrivals from India has been strong, not just from key metros like Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, and Chennai, but across from secondary cities. The latest flight from Bhubaneswar takes the total to 17 direct connections from India into Singapore! We are back to full capacity of 2019,” he reveals.

New (age) traveller segment

Singapore is now actively pursuing the young Indian traveller. Srithar says, “While we want to continue capturing families, and, of course, cruise travellers, along with M&I, which are our traditional strongholds, we are also trying to tap into the young Indian audiences. Almost



GB Srithar
Regional Director – India, Middle East, South Asia & Africa, STB

67 per cent of Indians today are under the age of 35 years, which makes it a huge segment. To them, we are presenting Singapore as a fun, hip destination with worldclass events. We have been doing a few interesting activities towards this. One of them is a taste obsession series with Theobroma to bring the taste of Singapore to India. Through this, Theobroma outlets will have Singapore-inspired food products.” Another interesting activity that is

coming up is an interactive OTT web series, which will make STB among the first NTO to do so. In this, the viewer will be able to choose in which direction the story plot goes. This will be launched by August end. “Earlier in the year, we also did a web series with Tripoto called ‘On My Own’ that featured a solo woman traveller to Singapore.

Almost 67 per cent of Indians today are under the age of 35, which makes it a huge and attractive travel segment for Singapore

All of these are our efforts to woo the young Indian traveller,” Srithar reiterates. After a long hiatus, STB is also engaging tier cities like Jaipur, Pune and Coimbatore, along with 40 Singapore stakeholders.

TGI Hotels signs 6 new hotels

TGI Hotels & Resorts, which owns 20 hotels across 15 locations in India, has signed six new properties, three in Bengaluru, and one each at Sakleshpura, Mandu, and Haridwar.



TT Bureau

Moving a step closer to achieving its goals for 2023, TGI Hotels & Resorts has signed six new properties, three in Bengaluru, and one each at Sakleshpura, Mandu, and Haridwar, during the months of March and July. All properties are set to open in September this year, says **Amit Kumar**, Chief Marketing Officer (CMO), TGI Hotels & Resorts. The signings strengthen the group's position in India, where it is already operating 20 hotels across 15 locations.

Sharing about the group's new brand ‘Trishvam’, Kumar said, “We have signed our first property under our new brand Trishvam at Sakleshpur, Karnataka. A popular yet offbeat hill station in Karnataka flanked by the Western Ghats. There is something for everyone, from the dense rainforest, hiking trails, historical temples and an old fort, mountain peaks and waterfalls. The luxurious cottages are spread across a 24-acre coffee plantation to be launched by September this year.”



Amit Kumar
Chief Marketing Officer
TGI Hotels & Resorts

With seven properties in Bengaluru, TGI Hotels has a strong brand presence in the city. The newly added three hotels have a total of 210 keys as a cluster on the Outer Ring Road.

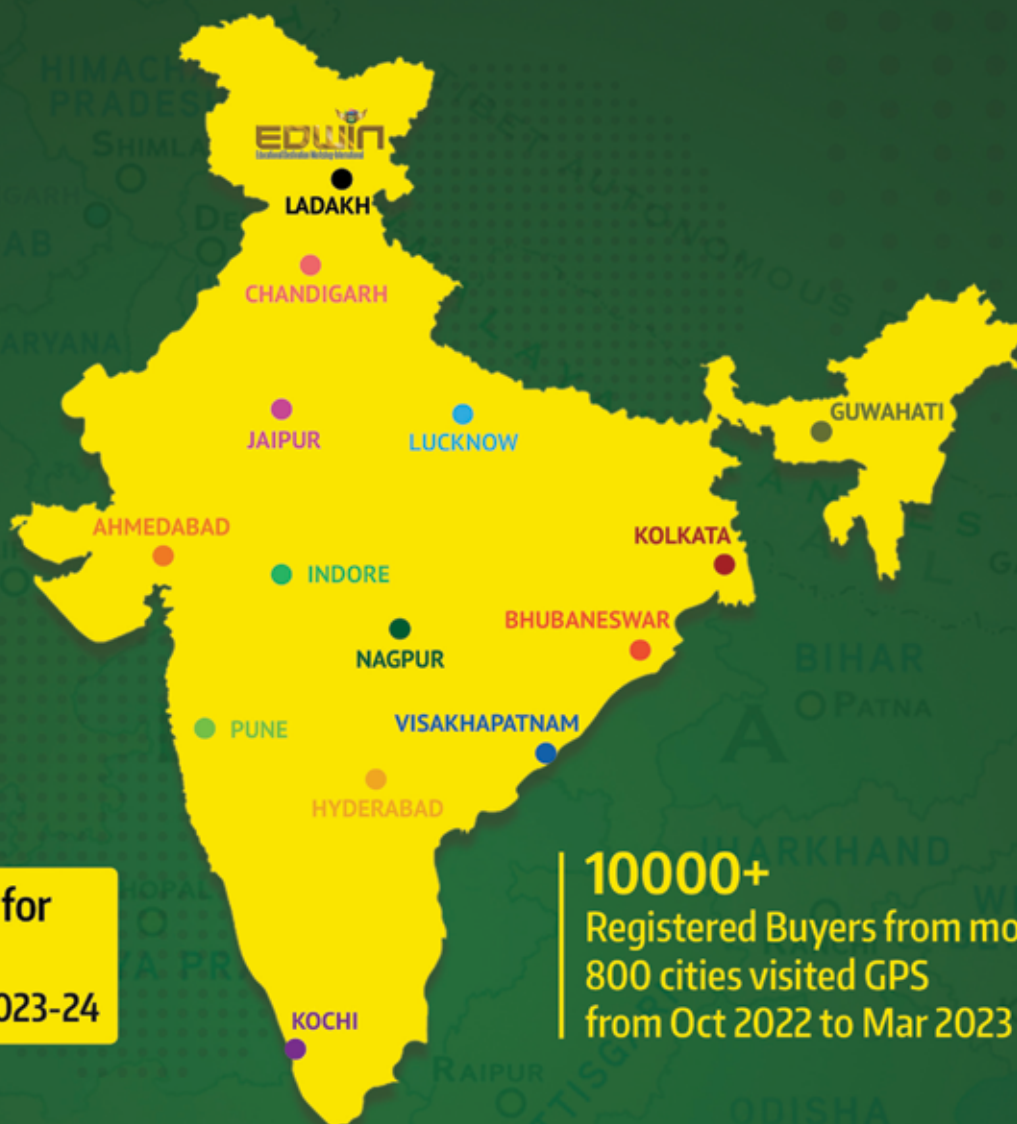
Talking about the need to enter Haridwar, Kumar said, “We chose to start operations in Haridwar since it is the gateway to all of Uttarakhand's tourism locations, as well as a major pilgrimage centre. The hotel is scheduled to open

on 1st September with 32 rooms, a restaurant, and a banquet hall.” Similarly, the TGI resort in Mandu is scheduled to open after renovation on 1st October with 23 rooms, a restaurant, banquet hall and a lawn for weddings. Taking pride in a nine-year track record of continuously expanding and offering top-notch accommodation to

TGI is focusing on doubling its footprint by 2024 and continue to look for right partners to open brand-defining hotels

visitors from all over the country, Kumar said, “TGI as a brand is focusing on doubling its footprint by 2024 and continue to invest in discovering right partners for opening brand-defining hotels.”

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MOVEMENTS

NOVOTEL MUMBAI JUHU BEACH

Mumbai

VISHAL GUPTA has been appointed as the General Manager of Novotel Mumbai Juhu Beach. He gets on board to oversee day-to-day operations and provide strategic guidance under his leadership. He has 24 years of international hospitality experience in four countries. He started his career as a Management Trainee with Marriott International by joining pre-opening team of 748-room Baltimore Marriott Waterfront in 2001. He joined Hilton Worldwide as a General Manager in 2015. He did his Bachelors of Business in Hotel Administration from Hotel School, Southern Cross University, Australia and passed out from IHM Chandigarh in 1999.



THE MANOHAR

Hyderabad

The Manohar, Hyderabad, has promoted **CHANDAN KUMAR CHANCHAL** as Vice President – Operations. In his new role, Chanchal will be responsible for overall hotel operations, new projects and brand expansion. He will be accountable for streamlining constructive sales strategies, demonstrating a creative approach for optimizing revenues, guest experiences and enhancing the brand's visibility. Renowned for its cuisine across the globe, Hyderabad holds a historic importance. Popularly referred to as the City of Pearls, the city is home to several tourist attractions such as Ramoji Film City, Charminar, Hussain Sagar, Golconda Fort and Birla Planetarium.



7 APPLE HOTEL PRATAP NAGAR

New Delhi

7 Apple Hotel Pratap Nagar appoints **MANVENDAR SINGH TOMAR** as the new General Manager. With more than 25 years of experience in the field, Tomar brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to lead the hotel toward new heights of success. A seasoned professional with a strong background in client servicing, overall hotel operations management and administration, Tomar has a proven track record of driving business growth, enhancing revenue and profitability and delivering exceptional guest experiences. Prior to this, he held important positions at renowned hotels, including Choice Hotels, Mansingh Hotels, Sarovar Hotels and Hotel Park Prime.



SUMMIT SWISS HERITAGE RESORT & SPA

Darjeeling

SIVASHANKAR HARIHARAN has been appointed as the General Manager of Summit Swiss Heritage Resort & Spa, Darjeeling. Hariharan will be accountable for all aspects of the hotel operations and work in close partnership with Rooms and Food & Beverage departments to ensure a seamless five-star guest experience. His other responsibilities include building a high-performing and highly engaged team, implementing revenue optimization strategies, working in conjunction with the sales and financial controller, P&L analysis, monitoring actual versus budgeted expenses, keeping payroll costs under control, appointing, developing, and promoting an effective team of department heads.



THE FERN RESIDENCY, TURBHE

Mumbai

SUBHRO MUKHOPADHYAY takes over as General Manager of The Fern Residency, Turbhe. Mukhopadhyay's career in the hospitality sector spans over 21 years, during which he has amassed a wealth of experience and expertise. He played a crucial role, as part of the pre-opening teams for The Fern Residency in Calangute (Goa) and The Fern Residency Subhash Bridge in Ahmedabad. In his new role, his primary focus will be on achieving operational excellence, ensuring exceptional guest satisfaction, and fostering robust stakeholder relationships for boosting profitability. Subhro has held significant leadership positions in past.



NOVOTEL VISAKHAPATNAM VARUN BEACH

Visakhapatnam

Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach appoints **MANISH KUMAR PATHAK** to the position of Operations Manager. He will oversee the hotel's operations, fostering seamless coordination between departments, upholding unwavering standards of excellence, and orchestrating an unparalleled experience that transcends the expectations of guests. His previous tenure at Novotel Ahmedabad as Director of Food & Beverages saw him successfully overseeing food and beverage operations, implementing strategic marketing programs, and ensuring the highest standards of quality control. The hotel offers well-appointed rooms with dazzling views of the Bay of Bengal.



GRAND MERCURE BENGALURU, GOPALAN MALL

Bengaluru

SOURAV CHAKRABORTY joins Grand Mercure Bengaluru, Gopalan Mall to lead the front office operations of the 212-key hotel. He has more than 12 years of experience in the hospitality industry across the globe. He has a deep understanding of customer service and the importance of creating memorable experiences for guests. Chakraborty began his hospitality career at Hyatt in 2006 after completing his Diploma in Hotel Management at the NSHM Institute of Hotel & Tourism Management. In the past, he has held key positions in the Front Office department in various hotels, including Hyatt Regency Gurgaon, Airways Hotel Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, and Jumeirah Vittaveli Maldives.



HYATT CENTRIC MG ROAD BANGALORE

Bengaluru

Hyatt Centric MG Road Bangalore has appointed **KULPREET KAUR** as the new Director of Sales & Marketing. With a decade of experience in the hospitality industry, Kaur will strengthen the leadership team and contribute to maximizing market share and revenue growth. Her deep industry knowledge and track record of successfully driving revenue growth and establishing a strong brand presence will play a crucial role in the hotel's success. She began her career in food and beverage operations at Taj Exotica Goa and Taj Yeshwantpur. Each chapter of her career has showcased her expertise and commitment to excellence.



THE FERN HOTELS & RESORTS

Mumbai

GILBERT J BUTHELLO has been promoted to the role of Director of Sales at Fern's Regional Sales Office in Mumbai. He joined The Fern Residency, Chembur (Mumbai) in 2014. In 2017, he made a significant impact by becoming an integral part of the regional sales team. In his new role, he will lead the sales initiatives in the Mumbai region driving revenue growth across Fern Hotels' network of more than 100 properties pan-India. With extensive experience in sales and marketing, Gilbert brings a proven track record of exceeding targets and building strong relationships with clients and partners. His deep understanding of the Mumbai market will contribute to the brand's success in the region.



TALKing People

For **SOMRUP CHANDA**, Director of Operations, Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield, his favourite holiday destination in India is Kashmir, especially during the winter or autumn seasons. "I find the landscape to be absolutely heavenly, with its ethereal beauty heightened by the frosty air or the fall colours. The sense of hospitality in Kashmir is remarkable, and the deep feeling of belongingness I experience there is truly warming. On the International front, I am enchanted by Santorini. The Greek island offers a perfect blend of sea and mountain views, an amalgamation that I find appealing," he says.



VANDITA SINGH, GM - Marketing & Communications, The Fern Hotels & Resorts, has developed a few practices that help her de-stress. She says, "Yoga and meditation, and spending time with my loved ones helps me maintain strong support systems and cherish meaningful connections and unplugging from technology: Disconnecting from electronic devices for a while each day allows me to be present at the moment and reduces screen-related strain. During the lockdown, I found solace and joy in nurturing plants at home. Gardening has been a deeply fulfilling and therapeutic experience."



VIVEK SHARMA, General Manager, Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield, says, "Two of my favourite holiday destinations are Palampur and Chicago. Palampur stands out for its aromatic tea gardens, breathtaking views of the Dhauladhar mountain range, and charmingly beautiful temples. On the other hand, Chicago impresses with its world-class museums, iconic skyline, and vibrant neighbourhoods that offer a rich and diverse experience. For my next holiday, I have set my sights on Japan, a country renowned for its incredible natural landscapes, including majestic mountains and serene countryside. I am eager to witness the cherry blossom season."





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Oman to tap into tier II, III cities

Asma Al Hajry, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Oman, says the destination witnessed a 114 per cent growth in tourists from India compared to the last year, and they aim to tap into tier II and III cities.

 Janice Alyosius

India is a crucial market for Oman, and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism of Oman is eyeing on leveraging the potential that the country has to offer. **Asma Al Hajry**, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Oman, expresses the importance of India as a vital source market for Oman. To strengthen the business ties between the two countries and upskill the Indian travel trade about their offerings, Oman has been conducting a roadshow in India. “We have seen great results from last year’s roadshow and until this year we have seen very interesting growth in terms of numbers as well,” she shared.

To further boost the numbers, Oman is conducting a four-city India roadshow in Delhi, Jaipur, Kolkata, and Mumbai. Emphasising on the potential of Indian cities, Asma Al Hajry said that they play a pivotal role in the Oman-India tourism connection. “The number from India market is increasing, it is a booming destination, we have seen 114 per cent increase in numbers from last year to May 2023, so market is growing very well.”

Additionally, she highlighted the importance of tier II and III cities. “There is a huge potential for Oman in tier II and III cities and that is why this year we are focusing on them. There is a huge demand and inquiries for weddings also. So, this is a segment that Oman tourism is targeting from these cities,” she said.

Emphasising on the wedding segment, Asma Al Hajry shared that the segment holds immense potential with Oman positioning itself as a captivating wedding destination. The period from December to February is particularly promising for Indian weddings in Oman,



creating a unique blend of tradition and picturesque landscapes. “We have conducted many Fam trips for wedding planners, and we

 **Indians with Schengen, Canadian, or US visas enjoy 14-day visa exemption. Others can conveniently apply for e-visas online**

are continuing to do so, we have another one planned in August 2023 for top wedding planners to visit Oman and I believe Oman is a destination where you need to step into, to understand the beauty of the country. Oman is not a destination that can be shown through slides and presentation. Our objective is to bring all the partners, not only wedding planners, but also MICE operators, tour operators, DMCs a part of the Fam trip plan,” she said.

One of the most important criteria for attracting visitors from all segments is seamless connectivity and visa facilitation. While many places fail to do this, Oman provides convenience for both, earn-

ing it a spot on the traveller’s list. Highlighting the ease of travel for Indian visitors, Asma Al Hajry shared, “Indians with Schengen, Canadian, or US visas enjoy a 14-day visa exemption. Others can conveniently apply for e-visas online, with quick processing times.”

Oman is a destination rich in terms of providing different types of experiences when it comes to FITs and leisure. Speaking of the destination’s offerings, Asma Al Hajry said, “Currently, we have launched the zipline in Musandam, which is an exceptional experience as well. Adventure tourism in Oman is aggressively growing and there is so much to be offered in Oman when it comes to experiences. Starting from the wadi, the mountains, and the beaches, anyone who comes to Oman has something to do in Oman.”

Emphasising on their pursuit for

new partnerships, Asma Al Hajry shared, “We have been working closely with our top producers in Indian markets. We are also looking for new partnerships, while we are here, and we are looking for the best.” 



Asma Al Hajry
Deputy Director General, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Oman

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