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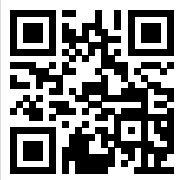
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Spotlight on Northeast tourism

The 11th International Tourism Mart in Shillong, Meghalaya, aimed to unite stakeholders, showcasing Northeast region's rich cultural heritage and biodiversity.



Janice Alyosius

The 11th edition of the International Tourism Mart (ITM), organised in Shillong (Meghalaya) from 21-23 November, showcased the Northeast's tourism potential, rich biodiversity, unique heritage, and cultural offerings, besides providing an interactive platform for the domestic, as well as in-

ternational stakeholders. Inaugurating the mart, **Shripad Yesso Naik**, Union Minister of State for Tourism, highlighted Meghalaya's potential in adventure and eco-tourism and emphasized on ITM's role in facilitating interaction among stakeholders. "Northeast India has emerged as a sought-after destination for adventure, culture, and nature enthusiasts," he said.

V Vidyavathi, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, stressed on the mart's goal of showcasing the region's untapped potential to foster sustainable tourism. "We have 28 international delegations from 18 countries today. We also have 50 buyers from different parts of the country. These include tourism professionals, media opinion makers, tour operators, and par-



Shripad Yesso Naik, V Vidyavathi & Conrad K Sangma at the 11th International Tourism Mart in Shillong

ticipants from the hospitality industry as well. This demonstrates a growing interest to travel to the unexplored destinations of the country," she said.

Conrad K Sangma, CM, Meghalaya, thanked Naik for selecting Shillong for the 11th ITM. "The kind of economic growth that we are witnessing in the Northeast is

unprecedented. There is a strong and special focus to ensure that the Northeastern states progress in unison with rest of the country," he said. 📌

Skilling: A stitch in time

In consumer-centric sectors like tourism and hospitality, people skills are critical for success on the job. Travel trade members share their views with **TRAVTALK** on how they are dealing with this aspect.



Prabuddha Sen
COO
South Asia, VFS Global

“In our business, ensuring that both our customers - the client governments and the applicants - are satisfied of their experience with us, is paramount to us. Constant reinforcement through training ensures that our front-end employees always have the 'customer first' mindset. This also ensures new employees seamlessly integrate with this philosophy. It helps us keep a culture of service. Upskilling ensures that our workforce is proficient in the latest tools and technologies, helping our business stay competitive and efficient. Our employees are given constant opportunities to work on business-critical projects.”

Contd. on page 10 ▶

Boost to India-UK tourism

'Destination Britain India 2023', VisitBritain's first trade mission was held in India after three years. The three-day event connected 75 top Indian buyers with UK travel service providers.



Janice Alyosius

Travel trade and industry suppliers from Britain showcased the country as a premier travel destination during the VisitBritain's trade mission to India. The three-day event, titled 'Destination Britain India 2023', was held from 19-21 November in Delhi. It facilitated crucial interactions between over 75 top Indian buyers and a multitude of British industry representatives, ranging from hotels and retailers



Alex Ellis
British High Commissioner to India

to tour operators and transportation providers. The trade mission, first in over three years, highlighted the growing significance of India as a key market for British tourism.

Alex Ellis, the British High Commissioner to India, underscored the enduring and multifaceted relationship between the UK and India. "The ties between the UK and India are deeply rooted in shared cultural affinities, mutual

Contd. on page 7 ▶



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Incentives for shooting abroad

International destinations are attracting Indian film production houses not just with rebates, but they are incentivising them to shoot in their country by offering ease of business and easy group visas. Abhijeet Patil, Chairman, Raja Rani Travels & Globe Hoppers, highlights these destinations and their offerings.



Hazel Jain

The main focus of **Abhijeet Patil**, Chairman, Raja Rani Travels & Globe Hoppers, is film and wedding tourism vertical. Having interacted with a lot of National Tourist Organisations (NTOs) and Film Commissions of various countries, he underlines some of the key ones that offer huge incentives to lure the big machinery that is Bollywood, Tollywood, and OTT platforms. He says, "International tourism boards and their film commissions have addressed the potential of film shoots scientifically and post-COVID I see that Indian films and weddings have been given top priority by them. Generally, a destination approaches film producers with many aspects that actually go into a successful shoot. They generally fall into four or five categories. The first one is rebates or incentives and we have success



Abhijeet Patil
Chairman
Raja Rani Travels & Globe Hoppers

stories of shoots in the UK, Abu Dhabi, Mauritius, Thailand, Austria, and Spain – all having successful rebate mechanisms that are methodically implemented."

Ease of business

He says that a lot of other coun-

tries such as Turkey and Eastern Bloc ones are following up with their own rebate mechanisms.

"A lot of them are putting paramount importance on ease of business, which is vitally missing in India. Single-window clearances and ease of business is something the Indian Ministry of Tourism and our states use very callously and casually. Their intentions may be right but at the end of the day nothing is really implemented. We really need to look at international case studies and how they are attracting Indian producers. But internationally, ease of business is very well understood," Patil adds.

For instance, Mauritius has a healthy 30-40 per cent rebate mechanism, and it is a visa neutral destination for Indian passport holders, and very film shoot

friendly. "Globally, everyone needs to form a company in that country and a bank account to be eligible to receive rebate as per laws. That becomes cumbersome. So, with-



Rebates do become a key focus point for many, but it should not become the base of understanding film tourism

in 48 hours, Mauritius addressed this issue and offered us the option to open a bank account at State Bank of Mauritius HO here in Mumbai. This is ease of business!" Patil explains.

Rebate not everything

Yes, rebate does become a key point but it should not become the base of understanding film tourism, Patil says.

Sri Lanka had a rebate mechanism before their economic meltdown. But they bring in other aspects like easy visas, proximity to India and great infrastructure.

"It also depends on how big the production house is. For someone like Yash Raj Films, every destination lays down the red carpet. Moscow is currently not offering any rebate. UK and Mauritius have their own central policy. In Spain, various destinations and regional tourism boards offer their own rebates. Similarly, Italy various incentives or barter or shoots are handled by film commissions of various regions in Italy. Likewise in Russia, Moscow

has its own independent mechanism to attract production houses," Patil explains.

"When a big-ticket entity like Yash Raj shoots in St Petersburg, the apex body of the Russian cultural arm steps in and handholds it. But otherwise, destinations in Russia would be addressed by their local city or local region heads. So, as of now, there is no rebate mechanism but what they are offering are phenomenal other aspects. It's not only about rebate. There are a lot of other factors that go into it like ease of visa processing, Russia has just made theirs an e-visa. Similarly, they are building not one, not two but three world-class film cities. Huge money is being put into the infrastructure and they are giving a patient hearing to Indians to map Indian sensibilities in those film cities," Patil explains. ↴





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Travel for LiFE thrust for NE

When International Tourism Mart (ITM) started more than a decade back, Northeast India was still coming up at the forefront and needed the much-required push from the Ministry of Tourism, which came with a dedicated event for promoting the region. The MOT pavilion at various international shows as well was dedicated to the region to attract foreign visitors to the seven sisters. The pristine beauty and natural resources there have always been coveted by tourists, both domestic and international, and the region has seen numbers increase, with which the infrastructure has also grown during these years— what with new hotels, be it budget, 5-star or boutique properties coming up in every state. In fact, the Northeast is popular for its homestays as well, which the MOT has also been promoting in the last couple of years.

All these projects, coupled with itineraries covering unique aspects of this region's resources are a hit throughout, especially for nature-loving and ecologically conscious tourists. When it comes to sustainability and executing the ethos of green tourism in practice, Northeast rules the roost and still holds potential to develop it further following the eco-friendly norms, thanks to still being away from huge crowds.

Hence, more than ever before, the MOT, with its Travel for LiFE initiative can make the Northeast its flagship destination for overseas promotion for the campaign. The destination fits the bill perfectly for being promoted with a new zeal. The packaging for India needs to change and new places, destinations and attractions need to be brought to the fore. Travel for LiFE, although has been talked about at various platforms, in action it will only add value if proper education, awareness and execution happens at the ground level and both stakeholders and consumers are well aware of the products in question. It is a perfect match, if only the momentum continues.

Strategic sunshine for hoteliers

A study published by Booking.com in partnership with Statista reveals optimism for hoteliers and holiday rental operators. Nearly 50 per cent of hoteliers feel 'positive' about their current economic development and future prospects, the study reports.



As the Indian tourism industry slowly returns to normal, the travel accommodation sector is becoming confidence with nearly 50 per cent of hoteliers feeling 'positive' about their current economic development and future prospects; and more than half sharing this view with respect to the past six months, according to a report on 'Indian Accommodation Barometer 2023'. The report has been released by Booking.com, the hotel booking portal, in collaboration with Statista - a business intelligence firm.

Business sentiment among Indian accommodation providers continues to remain strong with nearly half (49 per cent) reporting



to book less expensive rooms and 60 per cent opt for more restrictive cancellation policies to save money. Just over half (52 per cent) of the respondents stated that guests are spending less on extras and 42 per cent avoid peak season stays.

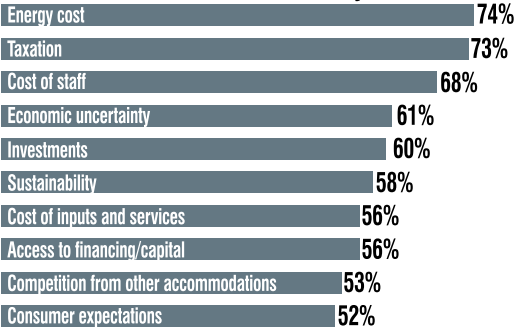
food and beverages make a significant contribution to the business while only 5 per cent mentioned that serving food and beverages reduced revenue. Less than a quarter

The Indian accommodation industry faces a multitude of challenges, however, concerns about operating costs are currently most front-of-mind. For respondents, the top two challenges were the cost of energy (74 per cent) and taxation (73 per cent). These are followed by staffing costs, economic uncertainty and the cost of investments.

Santosh Kumar, Country Manager for India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Indonesia at Booking.com, said, "2023 has been a year of recovery and optimism for the Indian hotel and holiday rental operators."

Claudia Cramer, Director Market Research Insights, Statista, said, "Following initial signs of revival in 2022, travel and tourism continue on the recovery course in India in 2023. Despite ongoing challenges, Indian hoteliers are excited about

Leading challenges for the Indian accommodation industry



an increase in average room rates and an even higher number (55 per cent) reporting an increase in occupancy rates over the past 6 months. The gradual return of international travellers, along with the opportunities presented by digitalization and interest in sustainable travel, also bolsters this more upbeat mood.

Consumer Spending Trends: Shorter stays and longer booking windows

According to the survey results, when it comes to the consumer spending trends observed by hoteliers in India, they have reported that more than two-thirds of guests (67 per cent) are booking shorter stays, closely followed by 66 per cent who are booking further in advance. According to what they are seeing, 63 per cent of customers prefer

Opportunities and challenges heading into 2024

Eagerly awaiting inbound travel to return to normal, Indian accommodation providers see international tourists as providing the most growth potential. 88 per cent of respondents see attracting international tourists as one of the biggest business opportunities in 2024.

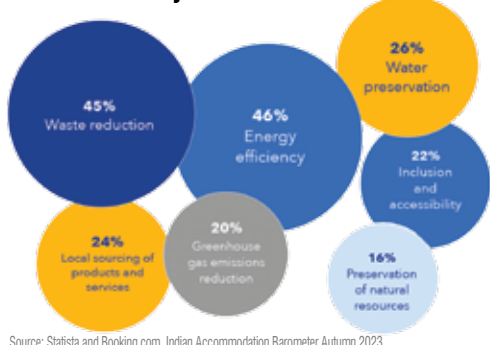
Attracting families (78 per cent), offering local experiences (72 per cent), attracting more domestic travellers (72 per cent) and spiritual tourism (64 per cent) are the other leading opportunities Indian hoteliers are excited about going forward.

Gastronomical experiences play an important role in the industry's profit margins, with 39 per cent of accommodation providers claiming

Business sentiment among Indian accommodation providers continues to remain strong with 49 per cent reporting an increase in average room rates

(16 per cent) claimed that they do not serve food or beverages at all. Adapting to changing food preferences is also important with 41 per cent of accommodation businesses

Where Indian hoteliers are investing in sustainability



Source: Statista and Booking.com, Indian Accommodation Barometer Autumn 2023

stating that featuring vegan and/or vegetarian food on their menu is becoming more important.

the return of international tourists and are embracing the digital and green revolution."



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Cuba enthrals Indian agents

MGM Muthu Hotels, Destinos Gaviota, along with Tourism Ministry of Cuba, recently organised a mega Fam trip for tour operators from India and around the world to Cuba. The hotel chain is now looking at expansion and tapping the Indian market with new packages.

 Nisha Verma

Cuba, despite being a small island, is a melting pot of history, culture and people, which makes it a must-visit destination for everyone. The MGM Muthu Group has properties in the country ranging from four to five-star, and prides itself in providing comfortable stays and caters to the demand from all kinds of travellers, including Indians, who have specific food and service requirements.

The Fam trip was aimed at putting Cuba on the travelling map of the world, especially India, from where around 150 delegates were in attendance. Kevin Maran, MD, MGM Muthu Hotels, Cuba, shared, "We wanted to open the doors of Cuba to not just India but to as many countries possible, because the country has such rich culture, food, great people, arts and many of the most wonderful beaches in the world. While many Indians may have heard about Cuba because of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, but they don't know more than that and this trip opened those doors."



Kevin Maran
Managing Director
MGM Muthu Hotels, Cuba

Feedback from travel agents
Maran claimed that reaction from the travel agents was "fabulous". "People have been very happy and claiming to have had a wonderful time in Cuba. Now, we want them to bring their family, friends, guests and clients. There has been a very positive reaction overall for the destination," he shared.

Next step
However, the real work starts after the destination showcase, as one waits for the ROI. Talking

about the same, Maran added, "We have already given packages to all the travel agents to promote the country as much as possible. We will organise another Fam trip next year, even bigger and better. We are planning to do it in a different way. We have been constantly talking to the travel agents in this trip as to how we can bring more people here. We have come up with

 **We wanted to open the doors of Cuba to not just India but to as many countries possible, because the country has rich culture & food among other attractions**

appropriate packages to attract clientele with not just the hotels in focus but everything that Cuba has to offer, be it salsa lessons, cocktail making classes, Spanish speaking classes, and so many things the destination has

to offer. There is a lot more in the pipeline. Especially, cubabooking.com really helps travellers to book with more ease, not just hotels, but taxis, private car hire, and activities to do in Cuba.

Connectivity boost
Plans to launch Muthu Aviation were also shared at the event. "All the major destinations in Cuba will be connected, including Havana, Holguin, Cayo Guillermo, and Cayo Coco," Maran shared.

India connect
Opened by an Indian origin person, MGM Muthu Hotels are ready to cater to Indian tastes, food, and hospitality. "Three of our hotels have Indian restaurants and in our upcoming hotels we are planning to have Indian restaurants, as well as Indian nightclubs. We have Indian chefs on board and are planning to bring more soon. Also, we are planning to use the chefs to train more local people in Indian food. The idea is to bring more comfort for our Indian guests. We do Bollywood nights to get the whole vibe of India within Cuba," he informed. 

VB's trade mission to India

 Contd. from page 3

love for various aspects of culture, food, and sports, particularly cricket. About a third of all our visas go to Indian nationals, totalling 550,000 visit visas in the last year alone. India is one of the most significant countries for the UK, reflected in the massive flow of people, including students, skilled workers, and tourists," Ellis said.

He added, "India is undeniably one of the most important countries for the UK, alongside major powers like China and the US, making it an absolutely essential partner. Our unique human connection is exemplified by the fact that the UK Prime Minister, residing in 10, Downing Street, celebrates Diwali by lighting a diya in an extraordinary way. It's heartening to know that a significant portion of tourism from India comprises good spenders who enjoy exploring various parts of the UK. Many Indian tourists venture to Scotland, Wales, the Southwest, and even



Louise Bryce
Partnerships Director
VisitBritain

Northern Ireland, showcasing the beauty and diversity of the entire United Kingdom."

Louise Bryce, Partnerships Director, VisitBritain, emphasized on the strategic significance of such events, stating, "Destination Britain India is part of a series of events that bring key UK industry representatives to meet with prominent buyers in our key



Vishal Bhatia
Country Manager-India
VisitBritain

markets. It's about showcasing the narrative of Britain, its diverse regions, and the wide array of offerings available. This approach has proven successful in generating new business and educating the local industry on innovative products and experiences."

Regarding the outlook for Indian tourism, Bryce noted a robust recovery, with a significant increase




in spending forecasted. "The market from India is showing strong recovery trends, fuelling the overall resurgence of tourism in the UK. In 2022, we witnessed a spend of £764 million, which is projected to rise to a staggering £1 billion by 2024. This growth is attributed not only to pent-up demand but also to robust trade relationships, cultural ties, and the increased air capacity to key UK airports," she said.

Vishal Bhatia, Country Manager-India, VisitBritain, emphasized on the shifting travel behaviours of Indian visitors. "We have observed a shift in travel behaviour among Indian visitors, which seems to be a global trend as well. There is a growing preference for single-country itineraries, and Britain is no exception to this trend. On average, visitors spend approximately 27 days in the UK. Notably, they are choosing to spend more nights exploring regions outside of London, immersing themselves in local experiences," he said. 



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'India key market for Oman'

Arjun Chadha, Country Manager-India, Oman Tourism, underscores India's pivotal role for Oman tourism. India stands as the second-largest source market for the country, only after the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which comprises six member countries, he says.



Janice Alyosius

Arjun Chadha, Country Manager for India, Oman Tourism, highlights the pivotal role that India plays in Oman's rapidly growing tourism sector. "India stands as the second-largest source market for Oman's tourism, only after the GCC, which comprises six countries," he says.

The strategic focus on the Indian market has provided boost to Oman's tourism efforts across diverse segments, including weddings, leisure, luxury, and MICE. "We have not only surpassed the pre-pandemic figures but have also exceeded them up until September this year, 2023. This year, our aim is to comfortably exceed half a million Indian arrivals in Oman. This progress signifies the success of our efforts in showcasing Oman as an unexplored gem in the Middle East," he says.



Arjun Chadha
Country Manager-India
Oman Tourism

Describing Oman's rich offerings, Chadha says, "From the Ministry's perspective, we offer itineraries ranging from three nights to 14 nights, ensuring a diverse array of experiences without repetition throughout the 14-day period. Oman boasts of unparalleled diversity, from pristine white beaches to the highest mountains in the Middle East, stunning emerald

green wadis, crystal-clear waters, vast deserts, and rich wildlife. Its landscapes offer an abundance of natural beauty, establishing Oman not merely as an addition but as a standalone destination. Indian travellers are increasingly recognizing its potential as their dream vacation spot."

Chadha also emphasizes on collaborative efforts with Indian stakeholders. "We are actively collaborating with key travel trade stakeholders in India, engaging in pan-India joint marketing campaigns and tailored initiatives for regional players. The Ministry conducts regular Fam trips, including biannual trips for wedding planners, as well as for MICE and leisure segments. Additionally, we organise roadshows across multiple cities and conduct sales missions, with a particular focus on tier II and III cities. Itinerary training workshops for travel agents in these cities beyond the metros are part of our strategy," he shares.



Speaking about connectivity and visa facilitation, Chadha says, "Indian passport holders with valid US, UK, Schengen, Australian, Japanese, or Canadian visas enjoy a visa-free entry to Oman for up to 14 days at no cost. For those without these visas, obtaining an Oman visa is both economical and efficient. As for connectivity, Oman Air, the national carrier, offers direct flights from over 10 cities in India. The flight duration from Delhi to Muscat is comparable to Delhi

to Mumbai or Delhi to Chennai, allowing travellers to land in Muscat around noon, thus providing ample time to explore the city." He adds, "Oman's excellent connectivity and hassle-free visa processes make it an easily accessible and enticing destination for Indian travellers, not just from major cities but also from various other cities across India. This concerted effort by Oman Tourism underlines its commitment to fostering an enduring partnership with the Indian travel market."

Expolnn eyes corporate & MICE biz

Expolnn Suites & Conventions has a tremendous potential to grow due to its strategic location in Greater Noida (UP). Barun Gupta, the recently appointed General Manager of the property, says he will look for new avenues of business, explore untapped markets, and offer a world full of opportunities in terms of weddings, get-togethers and formal meets.



Suhani Sood

Expolnn Suites & Convention, by virtue of its strategic location, has a tremendous potential to grow. The property is located at Knowledge Park II, Greater Noida (Uttar Pradesh). While the property already has a captive audience, it gets business from the events booked by the holding company, India Expo Mart.

The exponential facilities existing within the halls can take care of thousands of guests, and this is what the owners want their corporate clients to know.

Besides, several new corporates are coming up in the vicinity of the hotel and all of them will have potential to ask for services, if not for accommodation, definitely for meetings, conferences and get-togethers. Sharing his plans, **Barun Gupta**, the recently



Barun Gupta
General Manager
Expolnn Suites & Conventions

appointed General Manager of Expolnn Suites & Conventions, says that his endeavour will be to introduce new avenues of business, explore untapped markets, and offer a world full of opportunities in terms of weddings, get-togethers and formal conventions.

Highlighting features

Expolnn Suites & Convention is a brand-new, luxury hotel and, in consideration of its seamless connection with the exhibition halls, has the potential to emerge as the best located and most sought-after business property in the coming years.

"My plan would be to extensively highlight these features, as I see many opportunities emerging in this segment," Gupta says. "Backed by the tremendous commercial activity that we see around the hotel, I am justified in saying that the 134 rooms that we currently possess will fall short and we may have to, in the near future, think of adding another property with equally big inventory," he adds.

Seamless connectivity

The seamless connection of the event halls to the 134-key hotel makes it convenient for the pa-



trons to just walk across to the area of their exhibition, to network with the buyers and prospective clients within the hotel till late in the evening. Highlighting the features at the Expo Centre, Gupta highlights, "It consist of a wide range of air conditioned exhibition halls, parking areas, broadcasting & secretarial facilities, security,

surveillance and are designed to handle masses of any magnitude. This, coupled with the extensive parking areas at the property, which can accommodate thousands of vehicles (with electric vehicle charging station) and helipads for three copters, are the features that all MICE organisers usually look for."

Seeing is believing trend

One of the most prominent and emerging trends across all industries is the art (and the need) to showcase one's products or services, right in front of the targeted customers. The commercial world (B2B or B2C) firmly believes in the thought 'Seeing is believing', he claims.

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People skills critical for tourism

► Contd. from page 3



Meha Vashi
Director
Nivalink Holidays

“With increase in remuneration, it is important for team members to be able to work smarter i.e. more efficiently within the time available, for which constant upskilling is a must. There are different types of training. Seniors guiding and sharing knowledge and expertise for specific enquiries. This is a constant process and with every type of query.”



Renuka Natu
Founder Director
Renuka Natu Travel Relations

“The travel workspace is extremely dynamic. Our competition is with the abstract intangible online space, which is evolving rapidly. Nevertheless, human touch is still very important. The travel professional who wins today is the one that can provide information which is not available on the online space. Hence, upskilling is crucial to the industry.”



Ajay Prakash
President
TAFI

“TAFI is now offering 100-plus online courses for free to our members – from how to be a better travel consultant, how to be an effective counter staff and also many soft skills. It is rich in content and we hope our members will take advantage of this. TAFI has also tied up with another firm to provide 100+ skilling courses on various subjects.”



Rajiv Mehra
President
IATO

“The travel and hospitality industry is facing shortage of skilled manpower, especially at the middle management level. Many of the trained workers have left the tourism industry during COVID and joined other sectors. It is an opportunity lost rather than a threat, especially when we are well into the recovery mode post the COVID nightmare.”



Pranav Kapadia
Founder
Global Destinations

“We consider skilling a crucial part for our work culture. Different individuals have their own strong points and we try and identify their strengths at an early stage. Based on this, we organise in-house brain-storming sessions, as well as external trainings conducted by professionals. We also ensure that salespersons know the destinations.”



Sameer Karnani
Managing Director
Arunodaya Travels

“With fast changes happening in the industry, we find that our clients have more information than us every day. We, therefore, need to be updated. We, as owners, are updated by meeting the industry colleagues on a regular basis, but the staff is left behind, and thus we need to update our team so that it can cope up with the scenario.”

Contd. on page 12 ►

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Crafting Dreams, Marketing Realities

DreamSetGo stands as a pioneering force in the sports tourism fraternity, seamlessly blending the thrill of sports with the allure of premium travel. Through strategic partnerships, pioneering marketing campaigns, and well-aligned brand associations, DreamSetGo has skillfully etched its mark in the dynamic domain of experiential sports travel.



TT Bureau

Let's delve into the marketing strategies that have fuelled DreamSetGo's ascent to prominence.

Strategic Partnerships with Tourism Boards:

DreamSetGo's collaboration with tourism boards stands as a testament to its commitment to promoting sports tourism on a global scale. By joining forces with entities like Tourism Australia, Visit Victoria & Western Australia, DreamSetGo actively participates in major sporting events, such as the ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup Australia 2022. This collaboration allows DreamSetGo to showcase its brand and offerings, leveraging the appeal of world-class sporting spectacles to attract travellers seeking unique, luxurious and immersive sports travel experiences.

Nishant Kashikar, Country Manager, Tourism Australia said, "Modern-day travelers seek not just destinations but also the thrill of marquee events along their journey. Sports travel plays a pivotal role in boosting destination tourism during these noteworthy occasions. Our successful collaboration with DreamSetGo during the ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup Australia 2022 exemplifies how strategic partnerships can seamlessly amplify these experiences, offering travelers an ideal



Farshid Master
Head of Marketing
DreamSetGo

We highly cherish our partnerships with tourism boards, creating a seamless blend of sporting events and attractions that each destination has to offer

fusion of destination allure and spectacular events."

Farshid Master, Head of Marketing at DreamSetGo, adds, "We highly cherish our partnerships with tourism boards, creating a seamless blend of perfectly timed sporting events and the myriad of incredible attractions that each



destination has to offer. These extraordinary experiences are collaboratively curated with the invaluable assistance of tourism boards, enriching our offerings for our discerning customers."

Sourav Ganguly: The Super Captain of DreamSetGo:

DreamSetGo has fortified its marketing prowess by securing the legendary Sourav Ganguly as its esteemed brand ambassador, infusing a stellar touch to its promotional endeavors. Mr. Sourav Ganguly's alliance transcends conventional endorsement, positioning him as a distinguished thought leader with formidable credibility and influence. This distinction resonates throughout DreamSetGo's marketing arsenal, whether in captivating brand films or the creative brand campaigns

meticulously delivered to targeted audiences across diverse social media platforms.

Innovative Marketing Campaigns:

DreamSetGo has introduced two distinctive marketing campaigns, each designed to captivate sports enthusiasts and travel aficionados alike.

❖ "Dream Beyond the Game" is their unique intellectual property, meticulously crafted to immerse individuals in the unparalleled realm of Sports Hospitality. Through this innovative initiative, they offer an exclusive journey alongside sports celebrities, providing a firsthand glimpse into their experiences before, during, and after a sporting event. It's a captivating showcase that not



only embodies the essence of top-notch Sports Hospitality but also unveils the extraordinary exclusivity intertwined with the live, pulsating energy of the sporting world. They've successfully orchestrated two exemplary campaigns, the first featuring sports anchor Gautam Bhimani during the ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup Australia 2022, and the second showcasing the vibrant journey with influencer Viraj Ghelani during the ongoing ICC Men's Cricket World Cup India 2023.

❖ Champions' Sport-Cast: The podcast format has become a powerful medium, and DreamSetGo taps into this trend with its Champions' Sport-Cast. Founder and CEO Monish Shah conducts insightful interviews with sports celebrities at iconic venues, ex-

emplified by the interview with Sourav Ganguly at the legendary Lord's Cricket Ground. This podcast not only provides unparalleled insights into celebrities' lives but also contributes significantly to DreamSetGo's engagement, fostering greater brand recognition and recall.

DreamSetGo's success in the realm of sports tourism marketing can be attributed to its adept celebrity endorsements, innovative campaigns, and steadfast commitment to promoting tourism along with marquee sporting events. As the company continues to explore new horizons and forge strategic alliances, it remains poised to shape the future of experiential travel, offering sports enthusiasts a passport to unforgettable adventures.



Upskilling staff key to stay ahead

▶ Contd. from page 10



Rajat Bagaria
Managing Director
Shrishti Tours & Travels

“ We need to adapt to the changes in technology on a regular basis. It's also required to be able to work better, with fewer resources. We advanced from paper ticket to email ticket itineraries and now to mobile itineraries. Tour booklets, and itineraries have been replaced with webpage itineraries and e-vouchers, and further to mobile apps. We need to keep updating. ”



Sanjay Arya
CEO
KFT Corporation

“ Upskilling is the secret weapon to stay ahead of the curve. With the continuous evolution of consumer preferences, and global trends, we believe a well-trained and nuanced team is better equipped to adapt to these shifts, providing our clients with the highest level of service. Personalization is key and being up to date ensures that our team can cater to the evolving needs. ”



Jurgen Bailom
President and CEO
Waterways Leisure, Cordelia Cruises

“ The importance of training and upskilling our staff at Cordelia Cruises is paramount in today's dynamic and competitive landscape. In an ever-evolving industry, staying ahead requires a skilled and adaptable workforce. Investing in the development of our team ensures that we maintain the highest standards of service, safety, and innovation. ”



Smeeta Gulvady
Director
AdhVaAn Knowledge Hub

“ The tourism industry is people focused, and the quality of its people determine the value of the product. The soft skills include language, communication expertise, mindset and attitude qualities. Clients are now willing to pay a premium for alternative offerings and your employees need to be equipped with the appropriate skills and product knowledge. ”



Sarbendra Sarkar
Founder & MD
Cygnett Hotels & Resorts

“ According to industry estimates, it is believed that approx. 25 per cent to 30 per cent of the skilled and experienced workforce in the hospitality industry permanently transitioned to other occupations during the pandemic years, with no intention to return. To address this challenge, we need comprehensive training programmes that help individuals develop the necessary skills. ”



Sachin Sharma
Managing Director
ASCEL Group

“ Training highlights the imperative of adapting to rapid technological changes, evolving skill landscapes, and global competition. The emphasis on continuous learning not only addresses these challenges but also brings about benefits such as enhanced job satisfaction, a culture of innovation, and a workforce adept at navigating change. ”

Contd. on page 22 ▶

A celebration of partnerships

Travelbullz and Centara Hotels & Resorts co-hosted Diwali Jalsa, a vibrant celebration of friendship and partnership, uniting hotel representatives, customers, and travel agents in New Delhi. This event served as an expression of gratitude for the industry's unwavering support. The aim was to rejoice in the spirit of coming together and fostering camaraderie.



Still 3-4 months for Manipur revival

Expressing concern over communal issues plaguing tourism in Manipur, H Radhakrishna Sharma, State In-Charge, IATO, Manipur, says that it will take another three-four months before the situation improves.



Suhani Sood

Manipur, called 'Switzerland of the East' for its serene natural beauty, forested hills, and architectural temples, has tremendous tourism potential. The state, which used to attract flocks of domestic and international tourists, suffered a setback due to the communal conflict in the state and is now limping back to normalcy.

Developments in Manipur

Air connectivity has played a major role in boosting tourism in Manipur. Now, the capital city Imphal can be

Manipur has evolved as a state with infrastructure development, improved connectivity, and immersive experiential destination. However, it has not been able to gain tourists due to the communal problems. "Manipur's tourism graph was going up, but due to the

crisis it has disturbed and frightened a lot of tourists, who have stopped coming. It is very disturbing to know that the situation will stay the same for another 3-4 months," says **H Radhakrishna Sharma**, State In-Charge, IATO, Manipur. "I think Manipur also

needs promotion like other states. Major tour operators from all over India should come and see by themselves, and know what exactly lies here in term of infrastructure and hotels, and start including the destination in their packages," he said.



H Radhakrishna Sharma
State In-Charge
IATO, Manipur

reached any day from almost any part of India — be it North, East, West or Southern states. Improved connectivity and infrastructure development has made the city more accessible to the tourists. And the increase in tourist footfall has brought opportunities for generating



Imphal can be reached any day from almost any part of India. Improved connectivity and infrastructure has made the city more accessible to the tourists

more employment in many tourism related areas, directly or indirectly. If not for the present crisis, Manipur would have been one of the major destinations in the itinerary of all the major tour operators and tourists who planned to visit the Northeast region of India.



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McArthurGlen honours partners

McArthurGlen Group celebrated a successful year in the India market with some of its top performing partners in Mumbai recently. Sabina Piacenti, its International Markets Manager, flew down to honour some of the key partners such as Thomas Cook India, SOTC, Ebix, Thrillophilia and Akbar Holidays, who managed to send good numbers to McArthurGlen's designer outlets.



VisitBritain in 'mission' mode

VisitBritain recently hosted its first trade mission to India in more than three years. 'Destination Britain India 2023', organised from 19 to 21 November at the Grand Hyatt Gurgaon, saw suppliers from UK travel industry meeting 75 top buyers from India and showcasing their offerings. The UK delegation included hotels, retailers, visitor attractions, tour operators, and transport providers.



Customizing MICE packages

With a history of rendering exceptional services, Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Centre brings a sense of trust and reliability. Varun Mehrotra, Director of Sales & Marketing for the property, shares about the number of events lined up, engagement with MICE agents, and demand from clients.

Suhani Sood

Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Centre carries a legacy in pioneering the hospitality sector. With a firm belief in the power of collaboration and connection, it strives to be more than just a hotel or place to stay. **Varun Mehrotra**, Director of Sales & Marketing of the property, says, "We host events in our 15,000-square-foot convention centre—from corporate events to wedding celebrations and intimate family gatherings with comprehensive AV technology, custom catering and a team of expert event planners."



Varun Mehrotra
Director, Sales & Marketing
Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield
Hotel & Convention Centre

Customizable packages

Mehrotra highlights that they offer customizable packages for each MICE group depending on the type of people on the trip and their reason for travel. "We make sure that offered package reflects their budget and travel needs. We also

provide substantial discounts on group travel to retain our customers for the long-term business," he says.

Leading hospitality trends

Mehrotra says, "From personalizing marketing efforts to catering

to individual guests' preferences, we have been following up with the new trends in social media and digital marketing to reach potential guests, mobile optimization and using user-generated content such as guest reviews and social media posts are some foremost hospitality marketing trends for 2023."

We make sure that offered package reflects their budget and travel needs. We also provide substantial discounts on group travel

Another new trend is the use of virtual and augmented reality to

give potential guests a taste of what it's like to stay at a five-star hotel which can help to drive room bookings. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and chatbots can be used to improve customer experience by providing quick and convenient answers to guests' questions. Also, to keep up with the latest trends, it is important for hotels to stay up to date with industry news and innovative performs.

Asked about what MICE customers are looking for, Mehrotra says that the segment is increasingly looking for flexibility, state of the art technology, and sustainable practices. They seek customizable event spaces, hybrid event capabilities, and integrated technology solutions, he shares.

Net-Zero targets

Emphasizing on the importance and need of having sustainable practices, he said, "Sustainability is a core value for us. We are com-



mitted to our vision of becoming a Net-Zero GHG Emission Company by 2050. To ensure sustainability in events, we follow a structured approach. This includes implementing residential bath amenities, sourcing cage-free eggs, offering a significant portion of plant-based food options, and tracking food waste."

Attracting repeat clients

In a competitive market, Sheraton

Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Centre recognizes the importance of attracting repeat MICE events. "To achieve this, we focus on delivering exceptional service, maintaining consistent quality, and offering a range of incentives to returning clients. Our loyalty programs, personalized event planning, and the ability to tailor packages to meet the evolving needs of our clients play a pivotal role," he said.

India top market for Ajman

The Ajman Department of Tourism Development is encouraged by the numbers it sees from the India market and wants to further develop this market – not just leisure but weddings and MICE as well – to capture a bigger share of this pie. For this, it is also working on creating an events calendar with its partners from the private sector in Ajman.

Hazel Jain

H.E. Mahmood Khaleel Alhashmi, Director General, Ajman Department of Tourism Development (ADTD), was in Mumbai recently to promote Ajman as a tourist destination. He says, "The numbers from India are encouraging for us. It is number two in terms of tourist arrivals, and second only to the UAE. We see a lot more potential and, therefore, we are here to develop the market further. Year on year we are seeing more than 5 million people visiting UAE from India and some percentage of that is visiting Ajman." ADTD recently completed a three-city networking evening series in Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, and Mumbai. Delhi was covered earlier this year.

Neeti Sharma, Director, Intrepid Marketing & Communications, adds, "We are delighted to showcase Ajman to the travel fraternity in Bengaluru, Ahmed-



Neeti Sharma
Director
Intrepid Marketing & Communications

abad and Mumbai through the three-city networking evenings. It has been an absolute honour for us to have H.E. Mahmood Khaleel Alhashmi grace the occasion and convey Ajman's readiness for the India market. Ajman is host to luxury accommodations, experiences close to nature and holidays that can be enjoyed at one's own pace.



Amr Morsy
Tourism Development & Marketing
Expert, ADTD

A perfect place to enjoy a short honeymoon, a family holiday or hosting an Indian wedding, Ajman caters to all. In the coming months we aim to successfully establish Ajman's footprint in India."

Underlining the importance of this market, **Amr Morsy**, Tourism Development & Marketing Expert,



H.E. Mahmood Khaleel Alhashmi, Director General, ADTD, (right) at the event in Mumbai

ADTD, shares, "India is our main international source market. We are receiving more than 65,000 visitors from India and it is growing year on year. The Indian market represents 12 per cent of the total market mix into Ajman. According to our figures, the number of international arrivals into Ajman for the first time exceeded the local/ Indian UAE residents this year. This is a very good indication, which shows that Ajman is now on the tourist map for Indians."

He added that the NTO's main focus is on the leisure segment but it is also looking at developing and improving weddings, events and MICE segments from India. Ajman Tourism is also developing

its events calendar. "For this, we are also working with our partners from the private sector in order to come up with ideas and projects to support these segments," Morsy adds.

Know Ajman - the capital of Ajman emirate

Ajman is the capital of the emirate of Ajman in the United Arab Emirates. It is the 5th largest city in UAE. There is no airport in Ajman. It is located at the heart of the UAE and, therefore, enjoys easy access to the other emirates. It is 30 minutes from Dubai International Airport.

Floating fest charms tourists in MP

Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary, Department of Tourism & Culture, Government of Madhya Pradesh & Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, shares about the Gandhi Sagar Forest Retreat, an annual extravaganza organised in the scenic backdrop of Gandhi Sagar Dam in Mandsaur district.



Can you provide an overview of the Gandhi Sagar Forest Retreat and its significance in promoting tourism in Madhya Pradesh?

The Gandhi Sagar Forest Retreat is an annual extravaganza organised by the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, set against the scenic backdrop of Gandhi Sagar Dam in Mandsaur district. This remarkable five-day event combines elements of adventure, culture, and culinary delights, offering visitors a diverse and memorable experience. The festival takes place on the serene backwaters of the Gandhi Sagar Dam, one of the largest reservoirs in India.

The event is a remarkable showcase of the natural beauty, cultural richness, and adventure possibilities that Madhya Pradesh has to offer. It brings together people from different backgrounds and



Sheo Shekhar Shukla
Principal Secretary, Dept. of Tourism & Culture, Government of Madhya Pradesh & MD, MPTB

provides a unique platform for them to connect, celebrate, and experience the best of this beautiful region.

What are the main attractions and activities that visitors can expect during the festival?

One of the festival's highlights is the wide range of adventure activities that it offers. Visitors can partake in thrilling land, water, and air adventures. Land activities include cycling, rope course, jungle safaris, night jungle walk, ATV, air gun shooting, paint ball, trekking and stargazing, providing opportunities for adrenaline aficionados and nature enthusiasts alike. Water activities such as kayaking, jet skiing and speed boating let guests enjoy the beauty of the backwaters while engaging in water sports.

For those who crave adventure in the sky, there are options for para sailing, hot air ballooning and para motoring. As night falls, the clear skies over the Gandhi Sagar Dam make for an ideal setting for stargazing. Guests can gather around bonfires, share stories, and make memories under the canopy of stars, creating a truly magical atmosphere.

How has Madhya Pradesh Tourism worked to ensure the comfort of tourists attending the festival?

For those seeking an opulent escape in the midst of natural beauty, the festival offers a unique and luxurious glamping experi-



Five-day Gandhi Sagar Forest Retreat combines elements of adventure, culture, and culinary delights, offering visitors a diverse and memorable experience

ence. A tent city comprising 50 lavish all-weather tents is set up along the picturesque backwaters of the Gandhi Sagar Dam, provid-



ing visitors with the perfect blend of comfort and nature. These luxury tents are not your average camping accommodations. They are spacious, well-appointed, and equipped with modern amenities to ensure a comfortable and extravagant stay. Guests can expect cozy beds, air conditioning and heating, private bathrooms with hot and cold water, and even a private deck overlooking the serene waters. The attentive and dedicated staff is committed to ensuring that your glamping experience

is nothing short of extraordinary. They cater to your every need, making your stay memorable and stress-free.

Are there any special performances planned for the festival to showcase the local culture?

The Gandhi Sagar Forest Retreat celebrates the diverse cultural heritage of Madhya Pradesh. Throughout the event, there are various cultural programmes showcasing the state's traditional music, dance, and art forms.

Understand the traveller

In this age of hyper-personalization, travel advisors must take time to understand their customer – the traveller for whom they are artfully crafting an itinerary. What is their purpose? Are they thrill-seekers or do they prefer a laidback holiday? Sunita Amarnani, Executive VP, vexplora, takes a deep dive into the minds of the evolving holidaymaker.

Planning a trip is unique with each client, and the key to it lies in understanding the traveller. It's not just about choosing destinations and booking flights, it's about getting to know their preferences, interests, and aspirations.

Firstly, it's crucial to understand the purpose of their journey. Are they celebrating a milestone, seeking an adrenaline rush, or perhaps yearning for a serene escape? Knowing the why helps me sculpt the perfect experience. A honeymooner's trip would differ significantly from that of a solo backpacker or a family with young children.

And so, I start by asking questions, not just about the places they want to visit but about who they are. Are they thrill-seekers or laid-back explorers? Do they want cultural experiences or are they more into nature and wildlife? By understanding their personality, I can tailor the journey to match their expectations.



The more pieces I know - their likes, dislikes, travel history, and even the little quirks that make them who they are, the clearer the picture becomes. A personalised itinerary isn't just a list of destinations, it's something that unfolds according to the client's story.

Delving into their travel history also provides valuable insights. Have

they explored ancient ruins, or is this their first foray into international travel? Understanding their past adventures helps me build an itinerary that complements and enhances their travel story.

Think, think, think!
Let's say they love history. I wouldn't just recommend any old historical site, I would dig deeper to find the hidden gems, the lesser-

known tales that would resonate with them the most. Or if they are foodies, it's not just about booking a table at a popular restaurant - it's about introducing them to local flavours.

In travel, personalization is the way to create unforgettable experiences. It's not about one-size-fits-all packages, it's about creating a journey that aligns seamlessly with

the traveller's dreams. This level of understanding doesn't just happen, it requires conversations, listening intently, and sometimes even reading between the lines.

Technology plays a significant role in modern travel planning. Analysing data and trends helps me stay



Analysing data and trends helps me stay ahead of the curve, but it's the human touch that makes the real difference

ahead of the curve, but it's the human touch that makes the real difference. As the travel industry evolves, the demand for personal-

ized itineraries is on the rise. Travelers don't just want to see the world, they want to connect with it in a way that is uniquely their own. And that is where the magic happens. By understanding the client on a deeper level, I can pre-empt their needs, exceed their expectations, and turn a trip into a transformative experience. So, I'm here to craft not just vacations, but memories that linger and a personalised journey that resonates with the soul.



Sunita Amarnani
Executive VP, vexplora

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

Attendees on toes at GPS Indore

The Global Panorama Showcase (GPS) has been making its mark in tier-II and tier-III cities across India. **TRAVTALK** takes a peek into the Indore edition of the prestigious travel exhibition, which took place from 27-28 October at the Indore Marriott Hotel. The event saw attendees networking over tabletop meetings and letting their hair down at the evening soirées.



Ovolo: In tandem with Indian taste

Ovolo Central, a designer hotel with luxury rooms, in Hong Kong is popular for its nightlife and dining. In an exclusive interview with **TRAVELTALK**, Horace Siu, General Manager, Ovolo Central, shares about the unique selling points of the property, importance of Indian market for them, and their upcoming campaigns.

 Suhani Sood

Ovolo Central, situated on Arbutnot Roads at the crossroads of Lan Kwai Fong and SOHO, is famous for nightlife and dining in Hong Kong. It is a 42-key spacious property, designed for guests to relax and rejuvenate from the check-in to check-out. Each room is kitted out with personal touches to enhance stay, including slippers, designer toiletries and free minibar snacks.

Horace Siu, General Manager, Ovolo Central, highlights specific unique selling points of the hotel. "We provide effortless living for guests, which means relieving the guests of stress and anxiety when they are travelling, especially to Hong Kong for the first time. We do not only provide the basic amenities but also some perks like social hours (5pm-7pm), complimentary mini bar, self-service laundry, sweets



Horace Siu
General Manager
Ovolo Central

corner, gym access and more perks," Siu said. "All the Ovolo properties accommodate FAME (Fashion, Art, Music, and Entrepreneurship). Particularly, music is very critical part for our property, as people like to vibe on rock songs, and different genres," he added.

Location is always an important criterion for guests while choosing their accommodation place. Emphasizing on the importance of location, Siu mentioned, "Ovolo Central is located very conveniently at the crossroads of Lan


We provide effortless living for guests, which means removing stress from guests when they are travelling, especially to Hong Kong for the first time

Kwai Fong & SOHO, which is famous for nightlife and dining. All restaurants and bars are situated within walking distance of the hotel. It is just 5-minute walk from



Central MTR Subway Stations and Man Mo Temple, and the airport is 40-minute drive from the hotel."

India huge market for Ovolo
India is a source market no country can ignore or neglect. Siu said, "We have hired staff who understand and speak fluent English. Indian guests are easily able to communicate with the staff. Elaborating upon

our strengths, we have smaller property and the guest to staff ratio is smaller. Hence, we can have a closer interaction with our guests from a one-on-one perspective—they can have close interactions with our staff as well, as well as a personalized experience. To cater to vegetarian Indian guests, we also have VEDA which provides good vegetarian food options."

Demands by Indians
Asked about the specific queries from Indian guests, Siu said, "I think if it is the first time in Hong Kong, they will probably ask most recommended attractions and how to get around easily. All our hotels are centrally located. We are working with a local company which provides us with complimentary maps showing all the cool attractions." 

One Above celebrates Diwali

Key members of the travel trade in Mumbai received a VIP invite by One Above DMC to celebrate Diwali in a grand way. The atmosphere was that of festivity and everyone was dressed to the nines. Of course, there was talking shop and networking, but having fun was on the top of the agenda, with their three partners playing the perfect host.



Oz allures with biz presentation

Dreamtime 2023, Business Events Australia's signature incentive showcase from 7-9 November in Adelaide, saw Indian MICE agents experience the various product offerings first-hand. From exploring Canberra on an electric scooter; a personalised visit to the Australian Parliament as an event venue; to climbing the roof of the iconic Adelaide Oval, the Indian delegation savoured it all.



<div># 1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP</div> <div>SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY</div> <div>EVENT TALK</div> <div>Published from : India Middle East</div>		
<div>Media Partners:</div> <div> <div>Travel</div> <div> </div> </div>		
DECEMBER 2023		
Date	Event	Time
1-3	India International Travel Mart Hyderabad 2023	11:00 am
5-6	GPS-Guwahati	10:00 am
5-7	India Hospitality Fair	9:00 am
8-10	India Travel Mart 2023-Lucknow	9:00 am
14	Cross Hotels Webinar	3:00 pm
15-17	Tourism Fair Siliguri 2023	1:00 pm
16-19	ATOAI 15th Annual Convention	10:00 am
23-25	India Travel Mart-Chandigarh 2023	9:00 am
JANUARY 2024		
5-7	Holiday Expo-Coimbatore 2024	9:00 am
11-12	Accessible Travel and Tourism International Summit 2024	9:00 am
12-14	Tourism Fair Durgapur 2024	1:00 pm
15-20	Outbound Travel Roadshow Delhi 2024	11:00 am
19-21	India International Travel Mart Cochin 2024	11:00 am
19-21	Tourism Fair Nagpur 2024	9:00 am
20-21	Travel MICE & Corporate Show	10:00 am
24-28	FITUR 2024	10:00 am
For more information, contact us at: talk@ddppl.com		

(Fitur) expects 100K attendees

FITUR 2024, planned in 1.5 million sq.ft. area, spanning nine halls, aims to bring together more than 9,000 companies and attract over 150,000 professional visitors from 145 countries. Additionally, more than 100,000 individuals are expected to attend the trade fair over the weekend.

TT Bureau

The 44th edition of FITUR, the international tourism trade fair organised by IFEMA MADRID, is scheduled to be held from 24 to 28 January 2024, at Madrid's trade fair centre.

Maria Valcarce, Director, FITUR, has expressed optimism about the upcoming edition, expecting significant growth. Anticipated expansion plans project the fair to encompass more than 1.5 million square feet, spanning nine halls. This edition aims to bring together over 9,000 companies and attract more than 150,000 professional visitors from 145 countries within the global tourism industry. Additionally, it is estimated that approximately 100,000 individuals will attend FITUR over the weekend. Emphasizing on the trade fair's importance, **Jose Vicente de los Mozos**, Chairman, Executive Committee, IFEMA, said, "The role played by IFEMA MADRID as one of the major players and promoters of international tourism is important, as is the special



significance of FITUR, which has become IFEMA MADRID's main ambassador in the world and a major reference point for the Spain Brand." Mozos added, "We are immensely proud of FITUR's world leadership. It is the only tourism fair that ran uninterrupted during the pandemic, surpassing every other major event on the international circuit, in terms of participation." Tightly focused on business, the common thread of the major proposals from companies and destinations, as well as the specialised sections and activities

Common thread of the major proposals from companies, as well as the specialised sections and activities at FITUR, will be centred on sustainable development

at FITUR, will be centred on sustainable development, in its economic, social and environmental

aspects, as well as on innovation and all the cutting-edge content that will mark the development of the tourism industry. FITUR continues to advance in its line of specialisation, helping to promote the different industrial sectors that have an impact on tourism. In addition to all of this are the wide range of activities organised by FITUR Next, FITUR's sustainability Observatory, which this year is highlighting how tourism can contribute to the revitalization of territories. Ecuador has proposed to be a 'FITUR 2024 Partner Country' at IFEMA.

Invest in employee skilling

Contd. from page 12



Gaurav Khanna
Associate VP, Products & Industry Relations, FCM Group

“The travel and tourism industry is a high-touch service industry that relies heavily on skilled workers. The lack of skilled workers is indeed a serious problem as it not only puts pressure on the existing manpower and resources but ultimately leads to an increase in costs. Poor customer experience affects a company's reputation and can result in the loss of customers.”



Kunal Vasudeva
Co-founder & MD, Indian School of Hospitality

“For India to truly take a leading role, we need an educational system that equips the next generation with creative skills, ethical grounding, and global awareness to curate such unique experiences. This involves reimagining curricula to include interdisciplinary studies, emphasizing emotional intelligence, and fostering a deep understanding of consumer needs.”



KK Pant
Principal, IHM Pusa

“With hotels underlining the acute shortage of skilled workforce, efforts are being made to re-establish hospitality as a viable career option among youth. A disproportionate hue and cry has been created about it in the media. The hotel industry is registering record revenue numbers and impending growth, assuring that the future appears even brighter.”

Compiled by Hazel Jain

Meeting social responsibility

Sumit Mitruka, CEO, Summit Hotels & Resorts, believes in businesses that bring positive change to the area, creating job opportunities, and infusing money into local economies.

TT Bureau

In our ever-changing world, it is not enough to be a good business, bringing the very best to your customers, but business trends are leaning toward social responsibility. Clients look for businesses that make a difference in their communities, protect the environment, and promote good practices.

Sumit Mitruka, Chief Executive Officer, Summit Hotels & Resorts, also believes that working in lesser known, rural communities can bring positive change to people's lives outside the big cities. Mitruka is leading the way in showing how luxury boutique hotels and “posh hostels” nestled into the heart of the Himalayan Region of India can bring positive change to the area, creating employment opportunities, infusing money into local economies, promoting tourism and raising awareness about lesser known



Sumit Mitruka
CEO, Summit Hotels and Resorts

but beautiful village destinations in the Himalayas.

The Darjeeling District and Sikkim Himalayan region is known for hospitality, rich culture, beautiful landscapes, tea and appreciation for the land. With views of the stunning third highest mountain in the world, Kanchenjunga, this area

boasts a beauty that other regions do not possess. In the tourist seasons, both, Indian and foreign tourists, flock to the hills of Darjeeling and Sikkim to enjoy the moderate climate, the exquisite views, and the slower pace lifestyle. These areas attract honeymoon couples

The Darjeeling District and Sikkim Himalayan region is known for hospitality, rich culture, beautiful landscapes, tea and appreciation for the land

looking for the romance of the misty foothills, trekkers looking to connect to nature in the national forest treks and families looking to escape the city chaos.



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MOVEMENTS

WELCOMHOTEL BY ITC HOTELS

New Delhi

AMIT KUMAR returns to the national capital as Area Manager (Welcomhotels-North) & General Manager, Welcomhotel Sheraton, New Delhi. He moves from ITC Grand Goa where he helmed the premier leisure destination property and created an array of guest friendly concepts that attracted new travellers while ensuring the loyal guests kept coming back. Already a strong driver of initiatives that strengthen guest satisfaction, he shall heighten focus on customer acquisition through unique experiences and endeavours. The strong North footprint covers Welcomhotels at Manali, Corbett, Katra, Chail, Shimla, Amritsar, Pahalgam, Mussoorie, Chandigarh and both Welcomhotel Dwarka and Sheraton in New Delhi.



ITC HOTELS

New Delhi

AMAAN KIDWAI is now ITC Hotels Area Manager for Luxury Hotels (North) & General Manager – ITC Maurya. Kidwai has been entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing ITC Hotels' operations in the Northern region of India while also helming operations at ITC Maurya, New Delhi. In his new role, he will be responsible for driving operational excellence across all ITC Hotels (ITC Maurya-New Delhi, ITC Grand Bharat-Gurugram, ITC Mughal-Agra & ITC Rajputana-Jaipur) and properties under brand Mementos in the region. An alumnus of IHM Mumbai, Kidwai has an extensive background in Food & Beverage service and has steered transformative initiatives pan India.



NJCC & JECC

Jaipur

Novotel Jaipur Convention Centre (NJCC) & Jaipur Exhibition and Convention Centre (JECC), managed by Accor, has appointed **MANUJ RALHAN** as the new General Manager. With a wealth of experience in the hospitality industry and a proven track record of excellence, Ralhan brings a dynamic and visionary leadership style to lead both these prestigious venues. He has put up a young, energetic and passionate team together in a short time to create memorable experiences for guests of all segments and position NJCC as the premier destination for events and accommodations in Jaipur. He holds a Diploma in Hospitality from the American Hotel and Lodging Association.



O BY TAMARA

Coimbatore

O by Tamara has appointed **UMAPATHY AMIRTHAM** as the General Manager – Operations for the recently launched O by Tamara Coimbatore. Bringing an impressive 27 years of hospitality expertise, Amirtham adds significant value to this pivotal role within the Tamara Leisure Experiences brand. With a distinguished career history, Amirtham has occupied key positions in prestigious hospitality establishments, including The Leela, Hyatt International, and ITC Brands. His most recent position was as Hotel Manager at The Leela Gandhinagar. He has demonstrated his ability in implementing brand standards across diverse departments.



JW MARRIOTT BENGALURU PRESTIGE GOLFSHIRE RESORT & SPA

Bengaluru

JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa appoints **ARY KUSUMANINGRUM** as the Director, Spa and Recreation. Kusumaningrum's addition to the resort's team brings a new dimension of wellness and recreation to the luxurious establishment, as she brings with her a wealth of expertise and a distinguished career in the spa and wellness industry. Her journey in the wellness field has been marked by her founding of the Qi Wellness Naturopathic Program, where she championed ancient and traditional treatments that complement modern medical practices.



TAJ HOTEL AND CONVENTION CENTRE

Agra

Taj Hotel and Convention Centre Agra appoints **RAJESH CHAKRABORTY** as the General Manager. An accomplished leader in the hospitality industry, Chakraborty brings a wealth of experience and a proven track record of success to his new role. With over 26 years of dedicated service within the IHCL, he has held pivotal positions across various hotels in India and internationally. Prior to this, he served as the General Manager of Vivanta By Taj, Aurangabad, Maharashtra. He completed his Diploma in Hotel Management from Kolkata Catering College in 1997 and Masters in Personal Management from Dr Babasaheb Marathwada University, Aurangabad, in 2020.



THE RITZ-CARLTON

Bangalore

The Ritz-Carlton, Bangalore, has appointed **NISHAL SEEBALUCK** as the Hotel Manager. Hailing from a diverse background, Seebaluck brings a wealth of experience, beginning his career in finance and obtaining a post-graduate diploma from The Oberoi Centre of Learning and Development (OCLD). With an illustrious 18-year tenure, he has handled key leadership assignments in F&B in Mauritius with Sun Resorts and The Oberoi Mauritius. He has also played a pivotal role in steering the luxury resort success at The Oberoi Marrakech, Morocco, as the Executive Assistant Manager. Nishal is recognized for his strategic leadership and commitment to operational excellence.



SIX SENSES FORT BARWARA

Rajasthan

Six Senses Fort Barwara appoints **AARON MCGRATH** as Regional General Manager. Holding a Diploma in Hotel Management from Hotel Institute Montreux, Switzerland and an MBA from Ecole Hoteliere de Lausanne, Switzerland, and a career spanning over three decades in the international hospitality industry, McGrath brings a wealth of knowledge, expertise, and a dynamic leadership approach to lead Six Senses Fort Barwara's team into a new era. His pragmatic leadership style, marked by a calm and composed demeanour under pressure, sets the stage for excellence in service delivery and operational effectiveness. He has a strong track record of identifying and resolving organisational challenges.



SOFITEL MUMBAI BKC

Mumbai

Sofitel Mumbai BKC has promoted **DHIRAJ AMIN** to the position of Director of Sales. Previously, he worked as the Director of Magnifique Meetings. In his new role, he will be leading the MICE and room sales team, under the direction of the hotel's Director of Sales & Marketing. Before joining Sofitel Mumbai BKC, Amin was the Associate Director of Sales at the Hyderabad Marriott Convention Center & Courtyard Marriott. Prior to that, as Senior Sales Manager at JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar international Airport, he handled strategic MICE accounts for the hotel, created marketing plans that enabled the sales teams to meet revenue targets, and managed to exceed catering revenue goals.



TALKing People

CHANDAN CHOWDHURY, Director of Food & Beverage, Hotel Royal Orchid Bangalore, finds solace in mindful meditation, focusing attention on the present moment, identifying the source of stress, and actively working towards a constructive resolution. "Additionally, I indulge in experimenting with seasonal exotic flowers in my backyard garden whenever I get the opportunity. Haflong in Assam holds a special place in my heart. Renowned for its breathtaking hills, picturesque valleys, and majestic mountains, it's a paradise for campers, nature enthusiasts, and a haven for ornithologists" he says.



TEJUS JOSE, General Manager, Hilton Bangalore Embassy Golflinks, believes that taking a brisk walk or engaging in a good workout helps him de-stress and find his calm. "Goa holds a special place in my heart, and I believe it's not just my favourite but possibly a top choice for many in India. The combination of sun, sand, and the warm hospitality of the Goans always makes me want to revisit. And, let's not forget, Goan food is absolutely irresistible. On international front, Scotland embodies freedom for me. The expansive and stunning road network makes driving there a sheer pleasure," he says.



When it comes to holiday destinations, there is no place like Ranthambore in India for **HEMENDRA SINGH KUSHALGARH**, General Manager, The Claridges New Delhi. "I have a great fondness for safari adventures, and Ranthambore allows me to immerse myself in the beauty of wildlife while also offering a peaceful escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life. Internationally, Italy has a special place in my heart. I'm captivated by the country's incredible diversity in terms of landscapes, but what truly makes it extraordinary for me are its enchanting beaches," he shares.





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India #2 for Rail Europe

India has managed to climb to number two position in terms of turnover for Rail Europe this year, says Florence Pasquier, Chief Commercial Officer, Rail Europe. She is excited about the growth form the market in the new year.



Hazel Jain

Florence Pasquier, Chief Commercial Officer at Rail Europe, recently visited India to reconnect with key trade partners after a long gap. "It has been an amazing year in India for Rail Europe and we owe it all to our network of GSAs. We have 10 GSAs here in India, some of whom have been with Rail Europe for the last 20 years. We have a very strong network here and they are all using our APIs, making them extremely tech-savvy. As we know, many B2B markets are still hybrid and not fully digital, and that is where we need the expertise of GSAs. India is one of the rare markets that is highest in B2B business for us — almost entirely B2B business. This reflects the dynamism of our partners and our network," she says.



Florence Pasquier
Chief Commercial Officer
Rail Europe



Underlining this with numbers, she reveals that this year India managed to climb to number two position in terms of turnover, just behind the US. "It is normally always in the top five or top six. But this year has been very strong and we did even better than 2019, in fact we did plus 9 per cent," Pasquier adds, attributing this success entirely to the travel agents. She is expecting a minimum of 10 per cent increase next year from the India market.

Training is important

Rail Europe has successfully managed to train more than 5,000 agents this year together with its NTO partners and GSAs. "We have visited more than 20 cities already this year through roadshows. In addition, we conduct webinars every month. Education is key and it's one of the reasons for our success here — it is because of our network in

India, our local marketing, education, and, of course, technology," Pasquier says.

New products for promotion

Pasquier believes there is still a lot of scope for growth and plenty of opportunity for the company in India. "India is a dynamic market. Indians love to travel,

It is normally always in the top five or top six. But this year has been very strong and we did even better than 2019, in fact we did plus 9 per cent

and they love Europe. That is why we are working closely with all the NTOs here like France, Switzerland, Spain, Germany, to inspire Indians to travel to new places, or travel differently to the same place in Europe, or even combine different countries with Rail Europe. We will add new products soon. We are adding the Austrian Railways, which will prove to be a key product in India. We will also add Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg and a

bit of Denmark, offering the possibility to combine journeys," Pasquier adds.

Changing travel behaviour

Highlighting some shifts in the way travellers from India make travel bookings, Pasquier notes that one growing trend is point-to-point journeys. "The Swiss Travel Pass remains an iconic and strong product in India. Switzerland is beautiful and there is a lot to see. We also have a lot of repeat travellers to Switzerland. So, that remains the number one product for us. But we are also selling a lot of French, Italian, and Spanish, and, of course the Eurostar between London and Paris. All these products are growing in popularity," she adds.

Rail Europe is also working to promote group travel post pandemic. "We have big numbers from groups from India and we are now trying to add more segments — with certain groups we are doing only coach. We are encouraging our partners to incorporate at least one segment by train. It's more comfortable, convenient, provides a better experience, and is sustainable. So, may be keep the coach where they cannot replace it, but add one leg like London-Paris," she says.



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