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Budget to turn a new leaf?

The Union Budget for FY 2023-24 is set to be presented on February 1. The travel and tourism industry, like every year, is pinning its hope on the Financial Ministry and Ministry of Tourism, to which it has made its recommendations. Whether or not these expectations and recommendations will be met or not, is waiting to be seen.

“The tourism sector has been a key contributor to India's GDP and the planned National Tourism Policy intends to target GDP contribution of \$1 trillion by 2047; \$150 billion in 2024. Support from the government would be invaluable in expediting the post-pandemic revival. My key recommendations for the upcoming Union Budget include lowering of TCS for outbound travel and LRS remittances from 5% to 1%, an alternate mechanism for SEIS to be developed to revive the inbound tourism, and granting exporter status to inbound tourism. We also hope for waiver of E-visa fees for 2023-24 aimed at promoting inbound tourism, LTA benefits should be extended to once a year instead of twice in four years to boost domestic tourism, clarification on applicability of Section 1940 on E-commerce. Section 53 of GST should exempt travel agents.”



Madhavan Menon
Chairman & Managing Director
Thomas Cook (India)

“I always have had budget expectations from the Ministry of Finance. They have never taken tourism seriously. They allocate ₹2,000 crores to spend on tourism budget in India and when we start talking to the ministry every year, ₹500-700 crores are completely unspent and the balance that is spent, I'm not sure what we are really doing with it. I have been giving a five-point agenda to the government every year and I will continue to do that this year as well, which is, appoint PR agencies and marketing agencies outside India to market brand India, create last mile connectivity, reduce taxation on ATF, encourage a return of GST and taxation to the foreign operators who bring MICE to India. And give a subsidy of GST to the corporates in India. I don't know why the government is stepping back when it comes to providing adequate budget for tourism and then spending it in the right areas.”



Naveen Kundu
Managing Director
Ebixcash Travel Services

“We always have been hoping that our outbound travel business is given industry status. That is our first demand because everything will start from there. Other than that, I think we just need to ensure a level-playing field when it comes to Online Travel Agents (OTAs), and traditional travel agents when it comes to the GST regime. So, I think other than that, everything is pretty much good and I think barring the first fortnight that we will see the trend wearing off because of the RT-PCR test, which has been made mandatory, especially for Asian countries, we see that the recovery is going to continue and before the quarter 2 of this financial year comes, we will be fully recovered and probably surpass the 2019 numbers as an industry.”



KD Singh
Founder and President
TravelBullz.com

Contd on page 9 ▶

Sustainability to steer industry

ITTA's 5th Convention organised in New Delhi for two days focused on sustainability and at the same time raised issues facing the industry with the centre government.



Bryan

The Indian Tourist Transporters Association's (ITTA's) 5th Convention was organised at the Hotel The Grand in New Delhi on December 22 and 23, 2022. Addressing the convention, **G. Kishan Reddy**, Minister of Tourism, Government of India, focused on sustainability and the potential of spiritual tourism in the country. “In the years to come, the Indian diaspora will eagerly travel to India to witness Ayodhya, Kushinagar, Varanasi, and Amritsar. Also, Char Dham, Kedarnath, and Badrinath are the top attractions for spiritual tourism,” the minister said.

He added, “In the coming years, the tourism department will pro-



G. Kishan Reddy
Minister of Tourism, Government of India

mote 100 IC centres. The department is also looking forward to promote River Tourism.”

Reddy said, “Without connectivity, there cannot be any investment or

development, which is why connectivity is the key to the country's growth. India is the only nation that builds 30 km of national highway every day, thus creating continuous connectivity.”

Talking about the G20 meetings in India, he said, “The G20 country meetings are bound to steer tourism. It is a matter of pride to everyone to have this huge event take place. The event will run for a year and will have 250 meetings in 55 cities.”

K.S. Sawhney, Convention Chairman, Indian Tourist Transporters Association and MD, Bakshi Transport Service, while elaborating on the theme ‘Building Green Pastures

Contd on page 14 ▶

High hopes from domestic biz

Arvind Singh, Secretary Tourism, Gol, while speaking at the IATO convention, acknowledged the UP govt's support and emphasized on the need to expand the infrastructure given the large tourist influx.



Janice Alyosius

Addressing the 37th IATO Convention in Lucknow, **Arvind Singh**, Secretary, Tourism, Government of India, praised the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) for organising the convention. “IATO aims to promote travel and tourism within India and its members have come out in such large numbers to this city, which represents one of the most populous states of the country, Uttar Pradesh,” he said.

Singh acknowledged the UP government's support for organising the convention. Mentioning the difficulties faced by IATO in finalising the state for hosting



Arvind Singh
Secretary Tourism, Gol

the convention, he said, “The (IATO) president was in a state of fix because he was made to run around by several states and possible hosts and UP took the bait. So, I thank Mukesh

Meshram (Principal Secretary Tourism & Culture of UP) and the state government of UP for coming forward and supporting the association, because of their efforts the convention is taking place.” He added that tourism is a key contributor to economic activity and when he joined the ministry as the secretary tourism, the country was reeling under the pandemic's impact. “The Government of India sees tourism as one of the sectors that can bounce back and get jobs and economic opportunities back in the country,” he said.

Singh said that the government is taking a lot of initiatives to revive the industry; one among them is the Mission LiFE. ▶



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Changes in booking window

Tourism industry has changed a lot after the pandemic, but what has changed the most is the travellers' opinion, especially in terms of booking their trip. Industry stalwarts say travellers now consider many factors, including visa and airfares while planning a trip.



Janice Alyosius

According to a Booking.com research, going ahead, early planning will be a popular strategy with 61 per cent of the travellers, particularly Gen X (60%) and Baby Boomers (54%). However, millennials will plan more last-minute trips (53%).

Arshdeep Anand, Co-Founder and CEO, Holiday Moods Adventures, feels that the booking windows are being currently driven by the visa availability for international sectors, airfare and hotel prices for the domestic destinations. "Although a larger booking window is required for international travel, last-minute plans are more prevalent for domestic destinations," she said.

After the pandemic, which instilled fear and uncertainty among the travellers, last-minute bookings have been on the rise. Highlighting the trend, **Rohit Walter**, Vice President, Sales & Operations (NI), Concord Exotic Voyages, said that initially, due to uncertainty about the destination and the post-COVID situation, inbound clients booked closer to the travel date because they did not want to go through the process of cancellation on airfare and hotels, but the pattern



Sunil C. Gupta
Managing Director
Travel Bureau

The traveller's confidence is building up since the COVID protocols are being removed. As a result, last-minute bookings are coming up

"With the e-visa problem sorted out, the last-minute bookings are still in system. But in domestic business due to high demand of



KD Singh
Founder and President
TravelBullz.com

90 per cent to 85 per cent of travellers plan their trips in advance, while 10 to 15 per cent make last-minute reservations because it's easy

Ashok Dhoot, Founder, Harsh Tour & Travels, said, "Travellers are now planning their trips at the last minute, necessitating the need for



Arshdeep Anand
Co-Founder and CEO
Holiday Moods Adventures

Although a larger booking window is required for international travel, last-minute plans are more prevalent for domestic destinations

of 2022, with the majority of travellers making last-minute reservations," he added.

Sunil C. Gupta, Managing Director, Travel Bureau, said, "The traveller's confidence is building up since the COVID protocols are being removed. As a result, last-minute bookings are coming up. Corporate and business travel is picking up and some big conferences are also happening."

On the contrary, **KD Singh**, Founder and President, TravelBullz.com, feels the customers have become much wiser since the pandemic, and they are booking "slightly" ahead of their travel dates. "90 per cent to 85 per cent of travellers plan their trips in advance, while 10 to 15 per cent make last-minute reservations because it's very easy, especially in countries where visas are on arrival or the visa regime is good and they don't need long term planning. However, many travellers now plan much before the travel dates because they know they will get better deals if they book in advance," he said.

Sharing the same opinion, **P. P. Khanna**, Director, Diplomatic Travel Point, said, "Earlier, we used to sell products at the last minute, with the destination of the traveller's choice not always being available, but this has changed since the pandemic. Travellers are now making reservations in advance."



Rohit Walter
Vice President, Sales & Operations (NI)
Concord Exotic Voyages

During COVID, inbound clients booked closer to the travel date to avoid cancellation on airfare and hotels, but the pattern has changed now

has changed and close to 40 per cent of bookings are now done in advance, with the remaining 60 per cent booked closer to the date.



Ashok Dhoot
Founder
Harsh Tour & Travels

There is a shift in travelling time. Travellers are now planning their trips at the last minute, necessitating the need for last-minute booking

popular destinations clients are booking well in advance. Again, in driving down destination still late booking are in existence," he said.



P. P. Khanna
Director
Diplomatic Travel Point

Earlier, we used to sell products at the last minute, with the destination of the traveller's choice not always being available, but this has changed

last-minute booking." According to him, there is a shift in travelling time. "Domestic travel was in high demand during the winter season

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Back to Budget

It is that time of the year again! Just as the industry gets ready for the new year with plans and recovery strategies post-COVID, there lurks another hope or reality check (for many)—the Union Budget.

Now, the Union Budget for tourism industry, in the last few years, is perceived like a phoenix who comes visiting annually, burns down to death with all its expectations, with industry hoping that it will renew itself again next year. Hence, this year too, we have all new expectations, all over again. However, what is special this time is the fact that the Ministry of Tourism, took many steps last year, which made the industry realise that something is happening for them, and MOT is communicating with other ministries on their behalf. With steps like making strategies and guidelines for many tourism segments; taking stock of all pending projects under Swadesh Darshan and PRASHAD scheme and getting the projects completed; taking initiative to ensure tourists' safety through Uniform Tourist Police Scheme; approving more tourism routes under RCS; organising a state tourism ministers' conference; kicking off the formation of National Tourism Board and now putting their best foot forward for G20 summit.

In fact, G20 is the buzzword this year and might just see some announcements in the Budget for tourism as well, since the government is leaving no stone unturned to put its best foot forward for G20 delegates. While taxes and benefits remain the usual demands of the industry, industry status to hotels and the tourism industry at large, remains one of the biggest demands. Both the hospitality industry, as well as the travel and tourism industry are rooting for the creation of the National Tourism Board, which might find mention in this budget. Despite asking for monetary benefits for post-COVID recovery, the industry has already gone into a self-revival mode and are hoping for policy changes that benefit businesses and ease of getting things done, both in the private and public sector.

Undoubtedly, there is an atmosphere of camaraderie and understanding between the government and the stakeholders of travel, tourism and hospitality, which might just see some longstanding expectations and hopes coming to fruition.

Air travel high on recovery path

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has shared that air travel recovery across the world continued through November 2022, with India's domestic recovery catching up with 2019 numbers soon.



TT Bureau

IATA has revealed that the total traffic in November 2022 (measured in revenue passenger kilometres or RPKs) rose 41.3 per cent compared to November 2021. Globally, traffic is now at 75.3 per cent of November 2019 levels. International traffic rose 85.2 per cent versus November 2021. The Asia-Pacific continued to report the strongest year-over-year results with all regions showing improvement compared to the last year. November 2022 international RPKs reached 73.7 per cent of November 2019 levels.

Domestic traffic for November 2022 was up 3.4 per cent compared to November 2021 with travel restrictions in China continuing to dampen the



"Traffic results in November reinforce that consumers are thoroughly enjoying the freedom to travel. Unfortunately, the reactions to China's reopening of international travel in January reminds us that many governments are still playing science politics when it comes to COVID-19 and travel.

Global air passengers, RPK billion

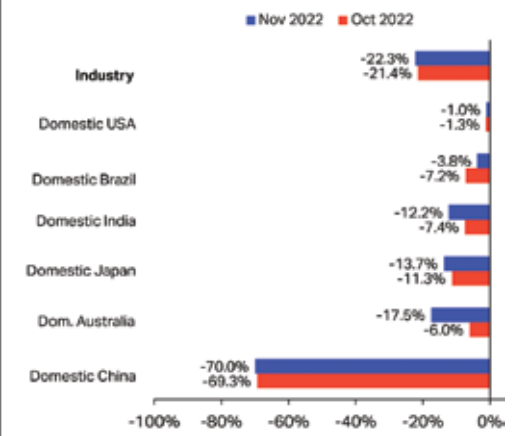


global result. Total November 2022 domestic traffic was at 77.7 per cent of the November 2019 level.

In India, domestic RPKs increased by 11.1 per cent YoY and ASKs by 0.5 per cent. November RPKs were 12.2 per cent short of 2019 results, it was revealed.

Epidemiologists, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and others have said that the reintroduction of testing for travellers from China can do little to contain a virus that is already present around the world. And China's objections to these policy measures are compromised by their own pre-departure testing

Domestic RPK growth (airline region of registration basis), YoY% changes versus 2019



Domestic revenue passenger-Kilometers (%ch vs the same month in 2019)
Source: IATA Economics, IATA Monthly Statistics

requirements for people traveling to China. Governments should focus on using available tools to manage COVID-19 effectively — including improved therapeutics and vaccinations — rather than repeating policies that have failed time and again over the last three years," said Willie Walsh, Director General, IATA.

Rise in seat capacity, strong recovery trend persists

All regions experienced a modest positive development in seat capacity, lifting industry-wide

seat capacity increased slightly in November 2022 in seasonally adjusted terms compared to October. This contrasts with the light contraction in global seat capacity observed previously.

Cabin classes

Recovery trends for international traffic in the Premium and Economy cabin classes remain broadly aligned. Economy class RPKs — which include premium economy (and accounts for 92 per cent of total RPKs) — reached 79.6 per cent of their January 2020 level in July 2022. Premium RPKs — which capture travel in first and business class cabins — fared nearly as well at 74.2 per cent of the January 2020 level. Latest IATA figures show a minor divergence in the recovery between cabin classes. Such divergences are frequently observed during high and low activity periods. Travel in Economy tends to lead during the northern hemisphere's summer, and lag during the winter months.

Air Passenger Market - Domestic November 2022 (%VS the same month in 2019)

	World Share	RPK	ASK	PLF(%-pt)	PLF (level)
Domestic	62.3%	-22.3%	-20.8%	-1.5%	80.7%
Dom. Australia	0.8%	-17.5%	-18.3%	0.9%	84.4%
Domestic Brazil	1.9%	-3.8%	-1.6%	-1.8%	80.9%
Domestic China P.R.	17.8%	-70.0%	-61.0%	-19.2%	64.0%
Domestic India	2.1%	-12.2%	-10.3%	-1.9%	87.9%
Domestic Japan	1.1%	-13.7%	-10.0%	-3.2%	75.5%
Domestic USA	25.6%	-1.0%	-3.1%	1.8%	84.0%

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ATOAI announces Disaster Management Training Course for Adventure Guides in collaboration with NDRF

MOT's first ever Global Tourism Investors Summit 2023 from 10-12 April at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi

'We have witnessed 100 per cent increase in the number of airports': Scindia

J&K expects record tourist arrivals in 2023: Director Tourism, Fazal Al-Huseeb

Need to showcase India as long-haul destination in foreign markets: PATA

Industry status to tourism in Assam will boost private investment: Mallabaruah

GPS to be held in six Indian cities in Q1 2023, to cover 13 cities this year

Akasa Air introduces in-flight safety manual in Braille

Tourism industry must re-learn and re-adapt what Chinese outbound tourism is all about: COTRI

Agents can become England experts

VisitBritain England Expert e-learn platform, launched in partnership with **TRAVTALK** in the first week of October in 2022, has been going strong with more travel agents using the platform to enhance their knowledge of England and its cities, especially West Midlands region & London.



TT Bureau

Shuja Bin Mehdi, B2B Manager – India, VisitBritain, shares how they are using sports as a hook to showcase the popular destinations such as London, Manchester, Liverpool & Lake District to the Indian experience seekers, and the spotlight in VisitBritain England Expert e-learn platform is on West Midlands region - which hosted the Commonwealth Games recently - with Birmingham as the gateway to the heart of England.

Did VisitBritain have any other specialist program? How is this different?

Yes, VisitBritain has its own destination specialist program by the name of BritAgent and the website is under maintenance now. It is also a very successful program for us as over 40 per cent of all BritAgents globally are from India. The current e-learning program titled England Expert is in partnership with **TRAVTALK** and focuses primarily on English destinations,

which can be easily packaged with London.

How will it help agents to sell the destinations better?

We have prioritised curated experiences and attractions, which, we



Shuja Bin Mehdi
B2B Manager – India
VisitBritain

believe, are quite appealing to the Indian audience. The emphasis is on families and promoting 365 days of fun to experience 'Another Side of



Britain', which is our global campaign messaging. We have showcased it in our popular web-series titled #UnboxBritain, which can be viewed on Jio Cinema and Jio TV.

Are there any incentives as well for the travel trade?

A personalised England Expert certificate with a lifetime validity will be issued after successful completion of all six modules. They can get it by registering on <https://vbe-learn.travtalklibrary.com/> and completing the six modules.

partners curate customer-centric itineraries/ experiences.

What, according to you, is unique in this programme?

We have curated itineraries, which have a mix of everything – be it shopping, countryside, food & drink, heritage & sports. The most sought-after destinations, attractions and experiences by the Indian family audience are listed in this programme that helps

Anything else you would like to add?

We would like to thank TravTalk and the team in developing and managing the England Expert programme with us. We welcome all our trade partners across India to enrol and complete this program in greater numbers to be ready to cater to a great year ahead. 🇮🇳

India needs aggressive marketing

Laying emphasis on inbound tourism into India, Ajay Prakash, National President, TAFI, believes that the country needs a new, clear-headed marketing campaign to re-establish itself as a tourist destination on the global map. The association plans to hold a few of its events this year within India to encourage its members to sell Indian packages.



Hazel Jain

Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI, has been a huge proponent of India. While the association did hold its annual convention in Malaysia, its first choice was India. Unfortunately, a lack of support from states forced it to hold its annual event outside India. Speaking his mind about inbound, Prakash says, "The only segment that has not really picked up yet is the inbound. I would say we are no more than 35 per cent at best of where we were pre-pandemic. Even the reopening of e-visas for British nationals came at a time when we had already lost half the season. Today, when everything is electronic, I fail to understand the rationale behind not allowing e-visas to so many of our biggest source markets. Over the last two and a half years, India has done almost zero promotion overseas. Although, the MOT did participate in WTM London, ITB Berlin, as well as FITUR. The Asian region and our

neighbours have been much more pro-active. India has not been on top of everybody's mind for travel this season. And of course, the high airfares have not helped. India needs to have an aggressive marketing campaign to re-establish ourselves and make people aware all over again that India is a safe, attractive and friendly destination."

He adds that we must get our acts together in terms of promotion. "We have lived off the Incredible India campaign for a very long time – I think it's time to re-define, re-tweak, re-orient our global marketing strategy. Improve the perception of the country in terms of public hygiene and amenities. We need to address those at a ground level. We are getting a minuscule share of the global tourism traffic. We need to up that. While the outbound may be hit by the depreciating rupee, inbound may benefit. But it needs sustained efforts, it needs a clear-headed campaign," Prakash says.



Ajay Prakash
President, TAFI

Mini conclaves in India

In the new year, TAFI is looking at doing a couple of mini conclaves in different parts of the country. "We have all discovered the value that domestic tourism brings. It is important for our members to experience these destinations for themselves. To build friendships and collaborations with the local service providers in these different

states, we do want to hold some of our events within India," he says. For its next annual convention, TAFI has already been receiving proposals from a few countries.

"Another thing we want to emphasise on is sustainability in tourism, which we highlighted during our convention as well. Tourism has to be more responsible; it needs to be more aware of its carbon footprint. It must be less destructive of nature. That is going to be the core of our thrust going forward. All things considered anything that happens in 2023 will only be better than 2021-22," Prakash says.

Agility and awareness

For our part, Prakash says, the industry needs to be much more aware and agile now. "That is why we at TAFI have revamped our website and are offering over a 100 free courses to our members – on how to be a better travel consultant, tour planning and a whole lot of soft skills. It's rich in content, including



training on destination modules. No other association in India is offering something like this to its members. Upskilling and training have become critical," he says.

Bilateral tourism with Greece

Sharing some more developments, he says that TAFI was also part of the World Travel Agents' Associations Alliance (WTAAA) meeting held in Athens recently. WTAAA is the global body representing travel agencies and tour operators and has a membership of the largest tourism associations from five continents. Representatives of organised tourism from Canada, Australia, South Africa, the USA, Europe, Latin America, South Korea, Hong Kong, India and New Zealand attended this. They discussed international trends in tourism, resolving issues concerning tourism, and

discussed a modern way of approaching and informing international tourists. "We have signed an MoU with HATTA (Hellenic Association of Travel and Tourist Agencies) as well as the Federation of Hellenic Travel Agencies Associations to further develop cooperation and bilateral tourism between India and Greece. Greece is where democracy originated and India is the biggest democracy in the world today," he says. 🇮🇳

India needs an aggressive marketing campaign to make people aware that India is a safe, attractive and friendly destination

ciation of Travel and Tourist Agencies) as well as the Federation of Hellenic Travel Agencies Associations to further develop cooperation and bilateral tourism between India and Greece. Greece is where democracy originated and India is the biggest democracy in the world today," he says. 🇮🇳

Favourable budget policy needed

Associations



Rajiv Mehra
President, IATO

“IATO has suggested for amendment in the GST law for growth of tourism industry and removal of cascading effect of GST on the industry. As in the case of Air Travel agents, GST may be levied @18% on the 10% mark-up (deemed value) so that effective rate of tax on package cost works out to 1.8% of gross billing with no ITC. Tourism industry should be treated as deemed exporter at par with IT Industry under export of services. Small correction in the conditions prescribed against 5% GST notified for tour operators services. Refund of IGST paid by the tourists leaving India on supply of goods taken out of India - Tax Refund for Tourists (TRT) Scheme to be implemented. Waiver of e-invoicing for tour operators should be done.”

“I am not expecting much direct benefits like tax rebates and any GST concession from the Budget this year. However, tourism is getting enough attention from the highest level in the government. These days most government officials are always talking about tourism, especially after G20 summit was announced. G20 can definitely provide the required push to inbound tourism in India. At the same time, the government is working towards providing an excellent road infrastructure, new airports and new trains to the citizens of the country. As I have always advocated, connectivity is the key to success in our tourism business and with these latest developments, tourism will surely get enough boost.”



Jatinder Taneja
Vice-Chairman
PATA India Chapter



E.M. Najeeb
Senior Vice President, IATO and Chairman -
Airtravel Enterprises Group of Companies

“Budget allocation must increase. As the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister said the investment in infrastructure is the key for tourism. So, for investment to happen, the infrastructure development must be there and for that the government should spend money. Except for hotels and transport, the private investors will not spend money for them, but the public infrastructure investment should happen from the governments, from the Government of India, as well as from the state governments. Most of the states are increasing their allocation to tourism but the central government also should increase its allocation to three times or four times for the tourism segment. Government should also understand the importance of tourism.”

“I think inbound has a lot of scope, it's a value product compared to domestic. I know the government has more focus on domestic tourism, which is good also. But when you see the inbound tourism, the numbers are less, not comparatively similar to the domestic, but of course it brings more value and which helps industry as a whole. So, I think it's very important to grow inbound parallelly to domestic tourism. We really want Indian government to think that tourism should be in forefront, and we are not asking for any concession, just the facilitation and to have serious budget policy. So, there should be some incentive not just in terms of financial incentive but some facilitation in policies also, so that can help tourism industry to grow.”



Ravi Gosain
Vice President, IATO



Jaison Chacko
Secretary General, FHRAI

“One of the key requirements for the industry to gain the much-needed momentum is to be granted Infrastructure Status. This will enable the sector to avail long-term funds under the RBI Infrastructure lending norm criteria and enhance quality accommodation supply, thus stimulating higher global and domestic travel demand. Although industry status has been accorded to tourism and hospitality by many States, the incentives and privileges associated with an industry have not been conferred to the sector. So, the Centre should grant industry status to hospitality industry across the country and set up a corpus fund to incentivize all States to align their policies and set off any losses that may occur due to its implementation. Tourism should be placed on the concurrent list of the Constitution.”

“In India, majority of the travel and tourism industry is composed of MSMEs. In this regard, development of tourism infrastructure is of paramount importance and should be accorded a priority to provide for a better experience, facilities, safety to the tourists, thereby enhancing employment creation in the country and facilitating growth of MSMEs. The budget should provide adequate resources for the development of tourism infrastructure in the country. Further, the hospitality sector had been demanding infrastructure status for last 10 years but unfortunately the government has not paid any attention to this. The hospitality sector has incurred huge losses during the pandemic. The hospitality industry expects some sort of relief.”



J K Mohanty
Chairman - Hotel & Restaurant Association of
Odisha and Chairman - IATO Eastern Region



Pradeep Shetty
President, HRAWI

“India's G20 Presidency is a golden opportunity for the tourism and hospitality industry. At this time, the government should strategize and focus on activities to promote tourism. We urge the government to intensify promotional initiatives under Incredible India to attract as many foreign tourists as possible during the year. The Ministry of Tourism has proposed to launch a global 'Visit India 2023' campaign to draw more international tourists to position India as a preferred tourist destination in Asia. The goal of Visit India is to unite all industry players to achieve a common goal of full recovery of Inbound Tourism by the end of 2023 and attract as many tourists as possible from all over the globe. The hospitality industry is ready to welcome tourists to its warm hospitality and world-class standards.”

“Our recommendations for this Budget include amusement park to be recognized as an industry, to be given social infrastructure status, increase the ECLGS loan term for the hospitality sector for the maximum period. Moreover, there is a non-existence of amusement industry manufacturing hub and this needs to be looked at. We request to enhance the repayment period of ECLGS to 10 years or as per the loan repayment period of the principal loan, whichever is longer. IAAPI through its representation to Finance Ministry has requested to allocate adequate annual budget to Ministry of Tourism for building necessary tourism infrastructure and ensure marketing and promotion of destinations, including that of amusement and theme parks. Government should also facilitate Amusement Manufacturing Hub under Aatmanirbhar Bharat.”



Rajeev Jalnapurkar
Chairman - IAAPI



Prateek Hira
President & CEO - Tomos; Director -
River Rhapsody, and Chairman FICCI
Uttar Pradesh & IATO UP Chapter

“Tightening the purse strings for international publicity is a matter of great concern. I really hope this Union Budget talks of appointing PR agencies in key source markets internationally and allocates liberally to publicity for tourism, it would not only garner business for India but also assert India's soft power internationally. In the light of shutting down of India Tourism Offices internationally, this budget should allocate an impressive publicity and marketing budget for tourism. To handle the surge in domestic market, government should seriously address the issue of shortfall in rooms in many destinations by way of incentivizing new hotel projects and capacity expansion of existing properties. Industry always demanded to have a maximum 12% GST on hotel rooms.”

“HAI expects that the Budget supports the revival and growth of the industry and enable it to become the pillar of development that it is. The proposals given by HAI reflect the felt needs of the industry and are essential elements to make the industry play the part it can play in Vision @47. It is well known that the hospitality sector is one of the largest contributors to the economy, accounting for 5.6% of GDP and 8% of employment. Post-pandemic, HAI had persistently asked for a pragmatic policy for liquidity support, particularly for the SMEs, as well as wage support for preventing job loss. Our recommendations include focus on rationalization of direct taxes; customs and central excise; policy related issues and indirect taxes.”



MP Bezbaruah
Secretary General
Hotel Association of India (HAI)



Shravan Bhalla
Vice President, OTOAI

“As an outbound entity, our expectations are the abolition of TCS, which is just an additional financial burden and time consuming on the travel companies. Over and above GST rate is also a big factor and needs further reduction. Lastly, we expect more contribution towards the international airport infrastructure with introduction of advanced and improved technology in all the major airports. The Travel & Tourism industry is one of the key contributors to the GDP and we expect a great budget announcement for the improvement and betterment. OTOAI has already shared its views with the Finance Ministry, along with relevant issues and challenges that need to be addressed during this budget and we hope this budget will do justice.”

“Like every year, we have a lot of expectations from the Union Budget from creating a national seamless tourist transportation policy to issue of granting income tax rebate on domestic travel, as this is a long-required facility to improve domestic tourism. Government is making all efforts to boost tourism in the country and taking various steps like improving connectivity, providing infrastructure for the growth of tourism and therefore, destinations are witnessing huge footfall of tourists from all across India, and I believe, the domestic tourism will continue to grow this year also and perform better than the last few years. With India hosting the G20 summit, will also act as catalyst to all-round growth to the tourism industry.”



PP Khanna
President, ADTOI

Industry status key demand



Pradip Lulla
CMD, Cupid Travels & Tours
Immediate Past President, TAFI

“In the Budget we expect the Finance Minister to give some sops to the travel industry. Firstly, we expect the GST to be lowered on both the airfares and on service charge by the agent, as it inflates the net cost to the retail non-corporate passengers. In terms of compliance, TCS charges to Indians taking international tours is a deterrent as the passengers booking on international sites are not charged the same. We would also appreciate if Indian residents taking domestic tours are given a tax rebate of say ₹1 lakh per entity to promote domestic tours. We all are aware that the projected growth of the GDP in the economy is 6-5% to 6-7% and any impetus will give a fillip. Travel and tourism constitute 1.5% of the GDP.”

Agents/ Operators

“Given that the inbound tourism industry is just about showing signs of revival after almost 30 months of near zero business, the industry has huge expectations from the government. Needless to say that we continue clamouring for full industry status, and also a hugely increased outlay for the tourism and hospitality sector in the forthcoming Budget. It is time that the government recognizes the potential of the Industry by way of employment, as well as foreign exchange earnings. The government needs to be greatly enhancing the destination's visibility in important markets, and spending far greater amounts on branding, marketing and PR of Brand India overseas.”



Kapil Goswami
MD, Trans India Holidays



Subhash Goyal
Chairman - STIC Travel & Air Charter Group

“Funds need to be allocated for the gaps that are there in India's product range being offered, including heritage circuits not promoted till now, festivals across the country, natural heritage with potential for adventure, eco and cruise tourism through infrastructure and policy development, including connectivity into remote regions, rivers and coastline. Reduction of GST on tourism and hospitality to single digit levels. Enhancement of publicity budgets, including setting up of representations and/ or agencies in major markets. Set up the national tourism board with a wide representation from industry with powers to guide infrastructure, policy and publicity development. Tourism Foreign exchange earnings to be treated as export earnings and exempted from GST and Income Tax.”

“We have a lot of expectations from the budget, basically we want the government to reduce the GST to make our destination more competent in comparison to all other destinations. In the domestic tourism market also, we look forwards to the government not charge GST for inbound tourists. And other thing is that how they can incentivize to promote inbound, so that a lot of foreign exchange earnings for the government happens. Also, how they would incentivize the tour operator and travel agent. We are optimistic and since the last two and half years we have not given up on our hope and look forward to nice budget coming in February. I think, we are in transition phase, and the government has different plans altogether. They have recently announced different plans which are coming after budget.”



Sudhir Patil
Founder and Director, Veena World



Pranav Kapadia
Founder & Director, Global Destinations

“The New Year brings with it new hopes, aspirations and benchmarks. We have set mindful expectations from the annual Budget to further uplift outbound tourism from India and hope we are not left discontented, as in the past. India taking over the G20's Presidency for the year certainly offers a great opportunity for domestic and inbound tourism to showcase and position India as a major tourist destination in the world. However, it doesn't change much for Outbound Tourism from India. Whilst we will continue to support and have faith in government to help the industry emerge from the ramifications faced during COVID-19, it is time the government recognises the significance of not just Domestic and Inbound, but also Outbound tourism.”

Hotels

“We enter 2023 with a positive outlook and great expectations. 2022 was the year of recovery, with the industry returning to 2019 RevPar levels. The demand for hotel rooms and revenues have reached the pre-pandemic levels. We are happy to announce that we are opening our new properties in Gangtok, Siliguri, Sumerpur Ambaji, Basar and Noida in 2023. Nowadays, guests have become more aware and increasingly concerned about the environment. Pandemic forced hotels to push for safety, hence I would make sustainability as my New Year's resolution. It will make our hotels to emerge stronger. May the coming year be a year of steady development, stability, good health and harmony for all of us.”



Pushpendra Bansal
COO - Lords Hotels & Resorts



Raouf Dhanani
Managing Director, Sayaji Hotels

“Union Budget 2023-24 will be crucial for the hospitality industry, which can benefit from the timely initiatives. The Hospitality Industry is seeking lower taxes and incentives. 18% GST for hotels with room rates of more than ₹7,500 must be reduced to 12%. Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Line Scheme (ECLGS) term must be extended from 6 years to 10 years to reap the desired benefits. Granting industry status to the hospitality industry will enable hotels to avail term loans at lower rates. Government must consider enhancing technological developments since it can lower expenses, facilitate easy connections, reduce employee stress and enhance operational efficiency. Modernisation of transport infrastructure is also an important factor for economic development.”

“I am confident that several aspects will be included in the upcoming budget to help the entire sector of 'Travel Tourism & Hospitality' survive, revive, and economically support India in its quest to become the world's largest hub. It is critical that both the central and state governments work together to facilitate this sector and support its inclusion in order to make it more structured. The budget is expected to include long-term initiatives to promote India's travel and tourism industry. The government has been supportive, but it should be more proactive in providing interest-free loans, increased subsidies, and tax cuts. These timely amendments will hasten loss recovery and help the industry recover faster.”



Akaal Singh Manchanda
Founder & Director of Operations
Zuper Hotels & Resorts



Nikhil Sharma
Regional Director for Eurasia
Wyndham Hotels & Resorts

“The tourism and hospitality industry were greatly affected by the pandemic and despite the pick-up in pace, a few small hotel owners and companies are still hoping to further their recovery. It would be great to see if the government offered concessions and allocated a specific budget to support these business owners. India hosting the G20 Summit is a strong opportunity for the sector. It gives India the chance to bring its world-class hospitality standards into the limelight. Various hospitality leaders and tourism groups have recommended a balanced growth for tourism in all verticals with topics ranging from recognising tourism's export status, granting infrastructure status and having a robust forex earnings incentives scheme.”

“A full-blown infrastructure status for the hotel sector and further rationalisation of the GST and a Central single window clearance for hotel projects are some of the major expectations from the Budget 2023. The GST Council in 2019 green-lighted reduction in the rates on the hotel tariffs. The rooms with the tariff of ₹7,500 and above attract a GST of 18 per cent instead of 28 per cent. The rooms with tariff between ₹1,001 and ₹7,500 are taxed at 12 per cent. An 18 per cent GST is still high in this competitive scenario, it would have been better if it was revised to 12 per cent for the rooms with the tariff of ₹7,500 and above. The industry has been clamouring for infrastructure status for decades. The status will enable hotel projects have easy access to cheaper debt.”



Kush Kapoor
CEO, Roseate Hotels & Resorts



Dharamveer Singh Chouhan
Co-Founder & CEO, Zostel

“This year, we are expecting the Union Budget to renew its focus on reviving the travel and hospitality industry further and facilitating growth. Apart from empowering new entrepreneurs and SMEs to build in the sector, we hope to see some focus on indirect means - such as transportation, connectivity, basic infrastructure and remote accessibility - to support tourism in upcoming new and offbeat places as well. Further, there has always been the constant concern about the considerable GST on accommodation and experiences. We are expecting some relief from the government in this regard. The industry can generate more demand at 12% GST. Also, hoping to see more emphasis on eco-tourism.”

“The hospitality business anticipates receiving a consistent industry status from the government across the nation to support the hotel sector. The hotel industry has recovered from the effects of the pandemic, but it is concerned about the high rates GST on hotel rooms and the government's lack of help in the most recent budget (2022-2023). Also, to give us with long-term loans, we ask the government and the ministry of finance. There is a significant gestation phase in the hotel industry, which means it takes three to four years to build a hotel, another two to three years to stabilize, and then the repayment period begins, which is very stressful. Hotel loans, therefore, have a 15 to 25-year term internationally.”



Mehul Sharma
Founder & CEO, Signum Hotels & Resorts
Contd on page 14 ▶

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A new breed of travellers

Post pandemic travel has created a new breed of traveller who is craving unique experiences. But is the industry prepared to cater to them? **TRAVTALK** talks to some of the key decision makers to find out what are some of the unique experiences that they may be developing for them.



Hazel Jain

The guest journey has changed post-pandemic and the industry needs to work hard to meet the needs of the new breed of travellers. With a shift in travel trends from 'when' to 'how', brands will have to adapt to the needs, preferences, and expectations of this new breed of traveller, and find ways to reach and excite them to go on trips.

Neliswa Nkani, Hub Head – MEI-SEA, South African Tourism, says the pandemic taught a great deal, including the demand for sustainable tourism. "It also allowed us the space to bring in disruptions, innovations, adapt sustainable alternatives in the industry, while also using technology to bring about responsible, tangible business solutions and substitutions. We are proud to say that travellers are more conscious of where they spend their money, what kind



Neliswa Nkani
Hub Head – MEI-SEA
South African Tourism

We have enhanced efforts to make our itineraries, properties and transport facilities more sustainable and attractive for the travellers

of accommodation they choose, where they dine, and how they travel locally. We have enhanced efforts to make our itineraries, properties and transport facilities more sustainable. We are also actively showcasing our sustainable product offerings and ecotourism experiences like cycling tours, nature safaris, conservation projects and rural experiences," she adds.



Sakari Romu
General Manager (India)
Finnair

Our customers have already visited Rovaniemi in Lapland, met Santa Claus, and the lucky ones have even seen the Northern Lights

Having understood the Indian traveller well over the past few years, Nkani further adds, "Travellers are also looking to chase their passions! They are travelling for food, long self-drives, marathons, swimming and cycling tournaments, theatre, culture and music festivals and more. There is a sense of purpose, ownership and fulfilment."

Airlines are not too far behind. **Sakari Romu**, General Manager (India), Finnair, says his airlines wants to introduce its Indian customers to the experiences that Finland has to offer. "Many of our customers have already visited Rovaniemi in Lapland, met Santa Claus, and the lucky ones have even seen the Northern Lights. Also, the Helsinki region is familiar to many of our business travellers and those interested in design and architecture. However, our Lake district and the Finnish Archipelago are still unique and unexplored territories to many Indians. In addition to these destinations, we would absolutely recommend a tour in the Baltics or in the Nordics. The distances between the Baltic or Nordic capitals are actually very short. From Helsinki you can fly to Tallin in Estonia in 30 minutes or to Stockholm in Sweden in 45 minutes. If it is a unique experience, you are after, flying to Helsinki for two days, followed by a tour of Sweden and Norway would be our recommen-

dation of experiencing the Nordic nature and culture," he shares.

IndiGo has introduced a host of technology powered initiatives such as RFID tech and electronic documentation to cater to the tech-savvy traveller.

The traditional ideas of travelling are being adjusted all the time, according to Virgin Atlantic. In an email statement, the airlines shared, "The internet is a big part of this, with travellers able to curate their own travel unique experiences by reading blogs and viewing content through social media. There is so much information available which gives people more confidence to travel on their own and then to meet people at their destination. One of the main customer segments which we focus on at Virgin is the 'experience embracers', those who are looking for a premium travel experience which enhances their quality of life. This year, we launched direct flights



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

Our demand trends indicate increasing preference for eclectic stays and unique accommodations like havelis and heritage bungalows

from London to Austin, Texas, and are seeing strong demand from India, with travellers loving the city's food, arts, and music culture."

Longer trips mean more spend Customers of Thomas Cook (India) are planning longer trips and showing interest in exploring offbeat destinations, says **Rajeev Kale**,

President & Country Head, Holidays, MICE, Visa - Thomas Cook (India). "Outdoor activities like hiking, snorkeling and biking trips to destinations as varied as Kashmir, Himachal, Leh Ladakh, Sikkim, Rajasthan, Andaman and South India have become popular across fami-



Daniel D'Souza
President & Country Head - Holidays
SOTC Travell

Customers are also seeking drive-cations and staycations to nearby offbeat drivable destinations to get away from the city

lies, friends and millennials. Our demand trends indicate increasing preference for eclectic stays and unique accommodations like heritage bungalows, havelis/ palaces, forts, in the heart of a desert or bamboo grove, tree houses or tea estates/ coffee plantations. Having unspent travel budgets, travellers have been displaying strong appetite for luxury travel - for that once in a lifetime experience," he says.

Another tour operator echoes similar thoughts. **Daniel D'Souza**, President & Country Head - Holidays, SOTC Travel, says his customers want to open their minds to unique experiences that inspire and enrich them. "This mainly comprises unusual destinations away from the mainstream, offbeat and rugged holidays and in-depth exploration of domestic locales. Millennials and young professionals are keen to explore offbeat experiences and outdoor and adventure activities, hence we see them book itineraries that involve a host of activities right from trekking, paragliding, skiing, white river rafting, kaya-

king, snorkeling, scuba diving, sea karting and biking trips. Customers are also seeking drive-cations and staycations to nearby offbeat drivable destinations to get away from the city," he adds.

Wooing the new traveller

It is certainly true that the pandemic has led to a shift in the way people travel, says **Hussain Patel**, Director, Tripjack. "Nowadays, many travellers are looking to explore and have real and one-of-a-kind experiences. The pandemic has given people the opportunity to reassess their priorities and focus on things that truly matter to them. There is a greater appreciation for local cultures and communities as well when people travel. Apart from our strong offerings in flights and hotels, we have curated holiday packages for international destinations like Bali, Vietnam, Turkey, Baku, Sri Lanka and the ever-popular domestic destinations like Himachal, Andaman, Kashmir, Kerala. We look forward to adding more unique holiday experiences. Cruise experiences is another category we are excited about," he says.



Hussain Patel
Director
Tripjack

Travellers are looking to explore real and one-of-a-kind experiences. There is a greater appreciation for local cultures and communities

Tripjack has now partnered with Resorts World Cruise to offer international cruise experiences.

Iris Reps India is currently promoting a new-age hotel for the new-age traveller. The 25hours Hotels

One Central in Dubai is adventurous, cheeky, innovative, unique, a little crazy and locally connected,



Alefiya Singh
Director
Iris Reps India

The hotel has its own character, fused with the local vibe and culture. Walking through doors makes you feel comfortable and at home

says **Alefiya Singh**, Director, Iris Reps India. "The hotel has its own character, fused with the local vibe and culture. The hotels stand out, walking through their doors makes you feel comfortable and at home. The Museum of the Future is located right across the street from the 25hours Hotel," she says. Her company also promotes unique experience like shark cage diving by Marine Dynamics in Gansbaai, South Africa.

What is trending

- ❖ A research by Google on APAC's four biggest travel markets - Australia, India, Indonesia, and Japan - reveals there is 3X increase in intent to travel internationally among travellers.
- ❖ 61 per cent of the travellers indicated a preference for international travel to future leisure vacations.
- ❖ Majority intend to travel for longer periods; plan to visit one or two nations per trip.
- ❖ Google also saw a 17 per cent increase in the average booking time

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ITTA seeks tax relief from govt

► Contd from page 3

for Safe & Sustainable Tourism' said, "The Government of India and the Supreme Court introduced CNG in 2001. The government will likely start promoting electric and hydrogen automobiles over the next two to three years. For tour operators, this is the beginning of a new phase in which we must plan our own future actions, so that in the next six to 12 months, everyone will be thinking about introducing low-emission vehicles." He added, "Only 2 to 4 or 5 per cent of the pollution is caused by us. Today, we have the most recent models of automobiles."

Prasanna Patwardhan, President, Bus and Car Operators Confederation of India, said, "Sustainability is the word since everyone is committing to a greener environment, a healthier environment, and better health for the people. Therefore, sustainability and safety are also the subjects of the entire event."

Amrit Mann, President, Indian Tourist Transporters Association and Director, Mann Tourist Transport Service, said, "I must emphasise that India is changing extremely quickly, and soon we will have a revolution in electric and



K.S. Sawhney
Convention Chairman, Indian Tourist Transporters Association and MD, Bakshi Transport Service

hybrid vehicles. We must be ready for this transition, as well as for the future, which will also undergo rapid change, and we must be able to adapt to it. In my opinion, 20 to 25 per cent of Indian automobiles will be electric or hybrid by 2025."

Government on POV

Patwardhan said, "According to the government, new legislation will oblige us to purchase electric buses. There are also certain incentives offered for purchasing electric automobiles. Thus, that actually would alter how people travel. Automobile emissions will therefore decrease. There are also



Prasanna Patwardhan
President, Bus and Car Operators Confederation of India

other government projects that will make it greener. Therefore, sustainability and the environment are hot topics."

Sawhney said, "We are working to promote tourism, and our one and the only request with the government is that it helps us financially."

Mann said, "The largest measure of what we are accomplishing is that there are currently no registration costs for vehicles. The second is that the GST is only 5 per cent compared to other cars, which have things like 28 per cent GST and 22 per cent cess."



Amrit Mann
President, ITTA and Director, Mann Tourist Transport Service

Taxation issues

Patwardhan said, "I think because of taxes, public transportation, bus transportation, and actually tourism, is a major difficulty in our nation. People are visiting abroad more frequently since taxes and tourism are getting more expensive. Therefore, there are more travellers from abroad than from home. So, unless we adopt a more optimistic

perspective on taxation, nothing will change."

Sawhney said, "We are extremely satisfied as far as taxes are concerned, the government has implemented a national permit that is on a one-time basis. We have the option to pay on a quarterly, half-yearly, or yearly basis, which is incredibly cost-effective."

Demand from govt

Mann said, "The first is that cargo vehicles and passenger vehicles need to be kept apart. Currently, the motor vehicle statute specifies that a transport vehicle includes both passenger and freight vehicles when they enter the transport vehicle category. We want to separate them. The largest challenge is thus this. The second factor is highway speed. If you want to talk about highway speed, use Taj Express for a Volvo bus travelling at a speed of 65 km/ hour. For big vehicles and passenger cars, the speed limit must be 80 or 85 or 90 km/

hour. Once more, I reiterate that if everything is segregated, everything will be seamless."

Expectations in 2023

Sawhney said that it was perhaps for the first time in 25 to 30 years when there were no foreign tourists, but thanks to domestic tourism, hotels were full and transporters had good business.

Patwardhan said, "So, after COVID, I think we are coming in a big way. More and more people are travelling. We thus think the future is promising. Moving on, everything would be OK."

Mann said, "The plans we are expecting from the government is that if it can come out with some kind of schemes for us, or some kind of subsidy to us, because of the pandemic 35 to 40 per cent capacity is down and it can be built only if the government, the agencies, stakeholders come forward and the decision maker support our industry." 📌

Accor signs Fairmont Shimla Fagu, which will open its doors in 2026. The property will be newly built on a 2.5-acre hilltop plot of land at an altitude of 2,400 metres in Fagu, Shimla. The 105-key luxury resort will be the fourth Fairmont property in India.

'Lower TCS for outbound'

Aviation

“I don't expect anything from Budget right now because it's time for us to understand that the government will support you when they see some momentum happening there. Frankly speaking, and I'm being blunt about it, you build your company, you build your services, you build a product, don't depend on the government with the policies. It will come in your favour or it will not, if it is in your favour, bonus for you but if it doesn't, don't cry about it, it's OK. So, don't depend on the government so much but work on your product. 2023 is going to be a massive year. The only thing is we have to be ready. As I always say plus delta X, you have to have something additional for your clients.”



Santosh Sharma
Co-founder & CEO - Foresee Aviation and Founder BookMyJet

Insurance



Dev Karvat
Founder & CEO, Asego

“Although we saw a minor dip in the tourism budget allocation for the past two years, the Indian tourism sector witnessed an exponential growth in 2022, contributing approximately 5.6% to the GDP. Considering these promising numbers, we are optimistic that the Ministry of Finance will allocate a significant share for the sector in the upcoming Budget. Furthermore, the travel fraternity is investing actively in integrating AI and machine learning into their operational and functional processes, which guarantees rapid expansion of the sector in the next few years. While these decisions will surely be favourable for the travel trade, a revised structure in airfares and rail ticket fares would be a further value addition.”

Technology

“India is one of the largest growth engines for travel and tourism economy in the world. Inbound tourism contributes significant foreign exchange. The government should consider granting deemed exporter status to the tourism, which can help to increase foreign exchange earnings. As the industry has nearly recovered from the impact of pandemic, it is suggested that GST issues may be streamlined for better financial workings and some relief in compliances be granted for lowering the burden of Travel Agencies. A special allocation in the upcoming Union Budget is required towards infrastructure improvement in the country and incentivising plus skill development initiatives for tour guides.”



Sandeep Dwivedi
Chief Operating Officer, InterGlobe Technology Quotient

Inputs by TT Bureau

Korea targets biz from youth

KTO concluded its multi-city sales mission at Radisson Blu Plaza Hotel in Hyderabad, where Young Geul Choi, Director, KTO India, said they will be focussing on young generation, including students and women.

Nisha Verma

The roadshow at Hyderabad was a part of a multi-city sales mission, starting off in Ahmedabad, going to Bengaluru before ending in Hyderabad. The event in Ahmedabad was organised in association with OTOAI, while the two events in Bengaluru and Hyderabad were held in association with SKAL India. The Chief Guest for the Hyderabad sales-mission was **Suresh Chukkappalli**, Honorary Consul General of Republic of Korea in Hyderabad.

South Korea opened for Indian tourists in October only. "As of now around 30-40 per cent tourism has recovered for South Korea, as compared to 2019. Our goal for next year is to recover fully by December 2023," said Young Geul Choi, Director, KTO India.

Speaking on South India market, he shared, "Before COVID the awareness about South Korea was not pan India. Only some people knew about it and we only focused on metro cities like Delhi,



Young Geul Choi
Director - KTO India

Mumbai and sometimes Chennai. However, K-pop and K-drama was so popular globally and India, especially amongst the youngsters and women, that we are going to focus on young generation — not just students, but also people in their 20s-30s and young women. Apart from that, luxury is our main focus and premium HNIs will be one of our target customers as a lot of awareness about Korea has been created. I know that in South India, Chennai, Bengaluru and Hy-

derabad are premium markets and there is a need for packages for high-end HNI customers. Hence, we are going to target that."

Next year, they will organise a B2C event to showcase Korea's culture like K-pop. "We want to show how well the Korea culture is popular in India. Everybody knows about

As compared to 2019, 30-40 per cent tourism has recovered for us. Our goal for next year is to recover fully by Dec 2023

Korea, but we want them to experience it on site together. Although, this is still in plan," said Choi.

Talking about 2022, he said that all information has changed in the last one year. 📌

Industry better set for visa demands

Speaking on behalf of its client governments, VFS Global has said that the diplomatic missions intend to open the visa floodgates in India to cater to the increased demand. Meanwhile, VFS Global is reaching out to tier II and III cities to facilitate travellers apply for visas quickly and easily.



Hazel Jain

When the pandemic hit, VFS Global was caught off-guard as the out-bound travel ceased completely. It did not have pandemic insurance and it had to quickly adapt to the situation. **Prabuddha Sen**, COO-South Asia, VFS Global, says, "We looked at how to control costs, to generate revenue from whichever stream was open at that time. As we crossed over the pandemic tide, the restart for India was quite a challenge. Suddenly, in March 2021 when the floodgates were opened, the demand that we saw in India was higher than what any of us or our client governments anticipated. While VFS Global could ramp up quickly to cater to this sudden demand, we did face challenges in terms of training and development."

But the bigger problem, he adds, was that the demand far outweighed the supply. "We only take care of the administrative task. The diplomatic community had

left India during COVID. So, there was a dearth of personnel handling the visa applications. What we also saw was unfortunately 'visa shopping'. Travellers were running



Prabuddha Sen
COO-South Asia, VFS Global

around trying to figure how and where they could get an appointment easily. Someone who was meant to travel to country A was applying for country B for visa, mostly in the Schengen area. Docu-

mentation was towards one country, which was not really justified. So, people with good travel history were also not getting visas because of poor quality of documentation. These were some of the challenges that we faced," he says.

Diplomatic community geared up now

The good news is that the diplomatic community is now strongly geared up, Sen says. "Due to the current geopolitical situation, out of the three large markets, only one is thriving and people are turning towards India to ramp up their tourist and workforce numbers into 2023. Trust me, when I say this – the diplomatic community present in India have their eyes and ears on the ground. They were fully aware of what was going on. And the complexities of the situation that erupted after the restart in March. We engaged with them deeply and continuously. They have been very accommodating in terms of attending to specific requirements," he says.

VFS Global call centres got 100 calls multiplied by four times during the peak. But there is a scientific limit to how much you can ramp up. "Despite the chaos that prevailed, we were easily handling between 22,000 to 25,0000



VFS Global on its behalf is also increasing its footprint and reaching out to tier-II and III cities with Visa at Your Doorstep product

applications per day across India. The seasonality of travel shifted – people who could not manage to travel during June-July have travelled even leading up to September-December. And this is

bound to continue into 2023 as well," Sen adds.

"The number of client governments and diplomatic missions have put down statements of intending to open the floodgates as far as India is concerned. So, the serious capping issues that we saw last year with the appointments to a great extent should be resolved. That should take care of a lot of demand that will emanate from India. Number two is we do see the seriousness because economically the impact that the geopolitical situation of the West has caused is also being a hindrance, for many a government to utilise the economic flow from wherever it is possible is very high on their minds. They all are also adding staff to cater to this increased demand," Sen reveals.

VFS Global on its behalf is also increasing its footprint and reaching out to tier-II and III cities with Visa at Your Doorstep product. 🇮🇳

In Numbers

400

calls VFS Global call centres received when the demand peaked during the pandemic

22k-25k

applications VFS Global call centres handled per day across India

In 2023

travel demand in the country is expected to continue

ADTOI meets trade over dinner

The Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI) organised a networking dinner for travel partners on 21 December 2022 at Junkyard Cafe in New Delhi. The event provided an opportunity for the travel agents to discuss the industry trends and future plans. Many participants felt that the government support was necessary for the industry to move forward.



Travstarz taps tier-II, tier-III youth

After the pandemic, the industry is focussing on tier-II and tier-III markets, but for Travstarz, these markets have always been their strength. The company is working closely with various Tourism Boards to further tap these markets, especially the youth, which is raring to explore the world.

 Janice Alyosius

Travstarz has been a pioneer in introducing the DMC concept in India since its inception in 2009 and has been instrumental in introducing many destinations in the country. It has been the first company to introduce Azerbaijan to Indian agents in 2017, when it hosted the first luxury Fam for a selected group of Indian agents. As the travel has begun to pick up after a two-year hiatus, the company has relocated to a new place in New Delhi and are now back to full-time operations with a team ready to tap into this burgeoning market.

Tourism post-pandemic

Speaking of the tourism industry post-pandemic, **Sucheta Nagpal**, Director & Chief Executive Officer, Travstarz, said that the pandemic created numerous opportunities for domestic travel and provided a boost to Indian destinations, but it had a significant impact on international destinations. "When

the world first began to open up, airlines and hotels had limited capacity. And they had increased their tariffs to compensate for losses during the pandemic, but



Sucheta Nagpal
Director & CEO, Travstarz

surprisingly, even after the full reopening and relaxation of COVID restrictions, airlines and hotels have not increased capacity or reduced fares, which is extremely disappointing."

Nagpal suggested, "It is very important now for the industry players to keep rates competitive and once again push for higher volumes, which will aide the industry in the long run. Now we hope to see a more positive demand for vacation traffic and hopefully by beginning of 2023 we should see the rising demand for vacation traffic especially the summer of 2023 amid lower fares and tariffs."

India has always been a large and important outbound market, especially for countries like Dubai, Thailand, and Abu Dhabi. Nagpal said, "With COVID on the decline and most countries removing the restrictions, the outbound market looks very promising and has already picked up speed. However, visa delays and exorbitantly high airfares is a big dampener and is affecting the revival in some way. I feel the respective tourism bodies across the world are urging their governments to work on solving these issues, as Indians are keen

travellers post pandemic with a decent spending ability."

Changing trends

The Indian travellers' thinking has changed post-pandemic, as they are opting for better hotels and


It is important now for the industry to keep rates competitive and push for higher volumes, which will aide the industry in the long run

more aspirational destinations. Moreover, the travellers are now opting more for online bookings. "This will have an adverse effect on the offline small and medium sized travel agents in some way.


Having said that the market will always remain robust for the travel agents who offer unique and niche products and not run-of-the-mill packages. This will require some out-of-the-box thinking by the travel agents to win back the confidence of the travellers to offline booking agents and will also result in better products coming to the market for the travellers and will provide opportunity to the agents to earn better margins due to specialization," she said.

Focus on tier-II and tier-III markets

The industry is now focusing on tier-II and tier-III markets, as it feels that there is a huge potential that is yet to be explored. "Tier-II and tier-III markets have always been our strength. Our reach and acceptability in these markets is very high even post-pandemic owing to the good relations we built over the past 10 years. These markets are now majorly driving growth and higher numbers from India and have been our strong sup-

port base after reopening. We at Travstarz have always focused on these markets from where most of our business does originate. A lot of our Tourism Board partners have been working closely with us for tapping these markets where we have a strong foothold, especially with the younger generation in these areas, being now more educated and looking at exploring the world."

China impact

Nagpal said, "Our Investors and shareholders are Rez2b Inc, which is a subsidiary of CTRIP but based out of USA. The closure of China borders for such a long time has definitely impacted the business between our countries, but we have largely remained unaffected by the same. Now, we are glad to announce that we now have a full-fledged domestic division offering B2B rates for all North India destinations, along with all our international destinations, which have all gone live again and restarted operations." 

Concord organises fun-filled evening

Concord Exotic Voyages (CEV) organised a Cocktail and Dinner to felicitate its clients, referrals and partners on 9 December 2022 at The Connaught, New Delhi. M.C. Mani, Chairman, CEV and James Kodianthara, Managing Director, CEV greeted the participants for their contribution to the success.



Making the right moves

After its two destinations entered the UNESCO heritage list, Telangana is making sure that they spread the word around and lure more tourists to the state. Uppala Srinivas Gupta, Chairman, TSTDC, shares what kind of initiatives they have taken in the state to boost tourism not only in its capital Hyderabad, but also beyond that.



Nisha Verma

Uppala Srinivas Gupta, Chairman, Telangana Tourism Development Corporation (TSTDC), shared that Ramappa temple and Pochampalli village have been included in the UNESCO heritage list. "Pochampalli is famous for handicraft, and one sari made there can even be packed into a small matchbox. Ramappa temple is also seeing a huge number of visitors everyday," he said.

Haritha hotels

Informing about Haritha hotels, which come under Telangana Tourism, Gupta said that there are total 50 properties under the brand and all of them have full occupancy at present. "We have Haritha properties in every district of Telangana, including Khammam, Suryanagar and Nirmal, which are good for staying. This allows middle-class people also to stay in a hotel by paying only around ₹1,000-1,500. It is not just meant for luxury travellers anymore."

New projects

He informed that people in Hyderabad can enjoy boating at Durgam Cheruvu suspension bridge. "There are speedboats and around 50 people can be accommodated together in a boat. Other than that, at Tak Bund there are 10 boats, and one can do a function of as many as 100 people, like birthday and conference meeting for around two hours. People can book the boats in advance, where they can do two rounds of the Buddha Statue in Hussain Sagar Lake," said Gupta.

"The chief minister and the tourism minister are making sure that tourism development is happening in every place in Hyderabad. We are developing pharma and medical tourism everywhere. Yoga and alternative therapy resorts are being developed. Business tourism, health tourism, and eco-tourism are also being explored," he added.

Religious tours

He also informed that Telangana Tourism, along with Tirumala



Uppala Srinivas Gupta
Chairman, Telangana Tourism Development Corporation (TSTDC)

Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), has started bus packages, which allows people to travel to Tirupati from Hyderabad for ₹3,700 round trip for one person. "This includes darshan as well as accommodation, travel and food. Around 350 people do darshan daily through this package and in Hyderabad 3-4 buses operate daily for this. There are two to three-day packages. If 50 people are there from

one gated community, pick and drop can be done at the door for them. They don't need to come to the bus stop if they live in 50 km radius of the city," he informed.

Caravan tourism

Telangana is also looking at Caravan tourism. "We will start caravan tourism this year, for which we have acquired two buses. It will be a good product for families," he said.

Eco-tourism

He highlighted that for ecotourism, there is around 70,000-acre forest land in Adilabad and Nirmal districts. "There is also Haritha hotel and boating there amidst lush forests. There is also Laknavaram, which is like an island and the Haritha hotel rooms there are in water and the restaurant serves everything from biryani to South Indian and North Indian food. One can do boating here as well," he said.

Events galore

Gupta informed that while the state

doesn't have its own signature tourism event, they participate in a number of events internationally and domestically. "We are making use of digital media and we are on

We will start caravan tourism in the state this year, for which we have acquired two buses. It will be a good product for families

Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp. We also went to WTM London with the tourism minister, MD and other officials. We did promotions on behalf of Telangana and we had put up a stall of Ramappa temple. We also participated in exhibitions in Washington DC, USA," he shared.

PPP model

There is a lot of development happening in Telangana under Public Private Partnership (PPP). "People are coming forward to open restaurants and hotels, and we are sanctioning money as well for tourism development along with the private sector. While the tourism policy is still pending, in Vikarabad, we are promoting health tourism project spread over 250 acres, where one can opt for Ayurveda, Yoga, Ayush, weight loss, etc. Instead of going to Kerala for all this, now it is possible to do it near Hyderabad," he advised.

Tourism policy

Gupta shared that they can release the tourism policy within a month and they are taking inspiration and adopting best practices from other countries and states. "This would result in profit for both the investor, as well as tourism. We received a number of accolades, including four national tourism awards last year," he claimed.

Canada to host 'GTFF 2023'

'GTFF 2023' will be organised from April 27 to 30 in Canada. The 2023 Festival Edition of the GTFF will be organised in association with the City of North Bay Ontario and Tourism North Bay Ontario.



TT Bureau

The film categories that will be screened during the Global Tourism Film Festival (GTFF) include feature films, documentaries, short films and tourism commercials. Consistent with GTFF 2021, which was held in partnership with the Netherlands Tourism Board, GTFF 2023 will present films extolling a central connection with tourism. Having received entries from almost every continent, GTFF 2023 selections will include films that showcase fascinating world regions and cultures.

The 2023 Festival Edition features a diverse slate of workshops and seminars, sponsored by events partner Canadore College. Event attendees will have access to a suite of educational programming, delivered by expert film industry professionals with credits that include network television and film.

GTFF 2023 will spotlight Canada's renowned film production incentives with invaluable insight into production credits, incentives, and film financing, with workshops con-



ducted by the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), Canada's Telefilm and Ontario Creates.

Hosted in Canada, the 2023 festival theme integrates the country's majestic natural heritage, multiculturalism, and indigenous peoples. Northern Ontario is a premier region encapsulating these attributes with North Bay established as the 'Gateway to the North', only 3.5 hours from Toronto. "On behalf of the Global Tourism Film Festival, I am delighted the GTFF will be held in Canada in partnership with the City of North Bay, which has secured an eminent future serving the film and tourism sectors in exciting ways. I

thank the City, Tourism North Bay and event sponsor, Canadore College for its support in delivering a captivating GTFF 2023," said **Nisha Amin**, Executive Director, GTFF.

North Bay Mayor **Al McDonald** said, "I am so pleased our community has been selected to host the 2023 Global Tourism Film Festival (GTFF)." He added, "On behalf of City Council and the community, we look forward to welcoming GTFF organizers and attendees to North Bay in April. North Bay is very film and visitor friendly, so this festival is a great opportunity to showcase two very important industries."

Meghalaya eyes 15L tourists

Keeping sustainable tourism in mind, Meghalaya is determined to welcome more than 15 lakh tourists by the end of 2024. Here are the measures the state has been taking to attract visitors.



TT Bureau

Meghalaya has been working on a master plan to develop its tourist routes keeping sustainable tourism in mind. The state's leaders have set their sights on the opportunity that tourism offers by establishing it as a regulated sector of the economy. Since Meghalaya became an independent state, its Tourism Department has worked to cultivate favourable conditions to attract visitors from all over the world.

The aim is to invest more capital in the industry and build stronger ties to financial institutions, as well as a focus on capacity training for stakeholders. There is a wealth of educated people and resources in Meghalaya that might help support the delivery systems, and the state's natural scenery is stunning. The government has made it a priority to foster tourism's growth so that it may become a significant contributor to the state's GDP.

Foot traffic from tourists was 12.7 lakh in 2019, and it is anticipated that this number will exceed 15

lakh by 2024. While the number of tourists visiting the area is growing, efforts are being made to enhance the facilities in a way that is environmentally friendly. A comprehensive study of the tourism industry has shed light on problems, one of which is a lack of adequate accommodation options.

The federal and state governments are also making efforts to promote Meghalaya as a destination, with

entice tourists. The government has implemented initiatives, such as encouraging ecotourism and locally developed products, with the goal of making tourism more sustainable.

In addition to these events, the government has launched programs to improve the tourist industry's infrastructure and train workers to serve visitors better. The department's mission training partners



a focus on a variety of elements including adventure, culture, and sustainable and ethical tourism. The government of Meghalaya, together with other government and non-government organisations, has put on a number of events to

include IL&FS Education, B-ABLE, Avenues, ETPL India, IHM & FCI. These collaborating organisations have extensive experience at both the national and international levels, making them ideal for supporting the tourism mission.

'Gender parity must in industry'

Being a part of the adventure industry is thrilling, says Akanksha Garg, Founder Director & CEO (Resorts), Waxpol Hotels and Resorts. She describes her journey from promoting her flagship resort in Sundarbans to the recognition extended by travel industry leaders.

Janice Alyosius

Giving women a voice in the tourism industry is a crucial step in the direction of achieving gender parity in the industry. "Many people did not take me seriously when I started our flagship resort in the Sundarbans — Sunderban Tiger Camp — because I was young and inexperienced, and Sunderbans was thought to be an isolated place with negligible infrastructure," says **Akanksha Garg**, Founder Director & CEO (Resorts), Waxpol Hotels and Resorts.

Sunderban Tiger Camp is India's first eco-friendly wilderness resort. Waxpol Hotels and Resorts, which specialises in soft adventure, includes activities such as animal safaris, nature walks, culinary experiences, bird watching, and cultural immersion.

She said the foundations of her company's success are integ-

ity, responsibility, sympathy, modesty, resilience, adaptability, and foresight. Stating that due to her perseverance and the integ-



Akanksha Garg
Founder Director & CEO (Resorts)
Waxpol Hotels and Resorts

ity, the travel industry leaders began to take note of her accomplishments, Garg said being a part of the adventure industry is indeed thrilling.



While travelling with a group of women, we frequently tend to carry ourselves with unwavering self-assurance and enjoy ourselves to the hilt after the initial ice breaking. When you are on the road with other women who relate to your situation, you feel at ease, she said.

Speaking of supporting women travellers, Garg shared, "We see many women travelling alone and staying at our resorts in the Sunderbans, Dooars, and Pench. Most of our Sunderban's customers want to travel with one of our scheduled group departures. There are many long-term single travellers who frequent Dooars. This is possible because they feel comfortable here. To cite an example, if there is an emergency late at night, a security guard will accompany the employees and deliver the material outside the customer's room. Our drivers have been in-

structed to treat women with dignity and perform their duties with professional conduct, and our staff has been instructed to maintain a professional distance while serving customers travelling alone."

Garg, apart from running her business, is also a member of ATOAI Women's Collective, which has been founded with the goal of creating a community of women who share a passion for adventure.



"There are no fast cuts to success, and so building a successful business requires effort. Having a solid network behind you is essential if you want to succeed as an entrepreneur. As a member of the ATOAI, the national body of adventure tourism, we must provide a supportive environment to other women in the industry to discuss the challenges they face and the resources they need to succeed," Garg said.

Sharing some of her beliefs that have shaped her journey, she said, "Any entrepreneur must learn to deal with criticism and setbacks. With

While travelling with a group of women, we frequently tend to carry ourselves with unwavering self-assurance and enjoy ourselves to the hilt

the right frame of mind, you can accomplish anything. Have faith in yourself and your efforts. To those who are considering giving up, one should not be scared to try and fail. There will be setbacks along the way, but with each one comes the opportunity to learn and grow."

EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



JANUARY 2023

Date	Event	Time
16	Thailand Tourism Forum	9:00 am
18-22	FITUR	10:00 am
18	Assocham 14 th International Conference cum Awards on Civil Aviation	10:00 am
19-20	GPS – Kolkata	11:30 am
19-21	India International Travel Mart	11:00 am
20-22	Matka Expo	10:00 am
21-22	Global Conference on Hospitality, Tourism and Sports Management	9:00 am
22-25	IMPACT Sustainability Travel & Tourism	9:00 am
24-25	GPS – Bhubaneswar	11:30 am
26-28	India Travel Mart	11:00 am
27-28	Utah Travel Expo	2:00 pm

FEBRUARY 2023

2-4	OTM	10:00 am
9-11	SATTE	10:00 am
13-14	GPS – Nagpur	11:30 am
17-19	India Travel Mart	11:00 am
20-21	GPS – Lucknow	11:30 am

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

Odisha's big thrust on sports

Odisha and Hockey India are now set to host the Hockey World Cup for the second consecutive time. Officials of Odisha government and Hockey India have left no stones unturned in the preparations for the FIH Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup 2023.

TT Bureau

Over the past few years, Odisha, under the visionary leadership of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, has undertaken several ground-breaking sports initiatives to transform itself into a preferred global sports destination. From hosting marquee events to developing world-class infrastructure to strengthening sports grassroots programs, Odisha has been at the forefront of supporting all forms of sports. It is also the hub of High Performance Centres. The state has contributed massively to the development of sports is a prime example of sports tourism.

Hockey is deeply connected to Odisha's rich culture. It has produced champions like Dilip Tirkey, Pramod Tirkey, Lazarus Barla, Jyoti Sunita Kullu, Sunita Lakra, Amit Rohidas, Deep Grace Ekka, Namita Toppo, among others. CM Patnaik himself was the goalkeeper for his school team, hence he has a deep emotional connect with the sport. Hockey is

integral to the state and attracts audience in thousands.

Odisha has been one of the pivotal reasons behind Indian



Dilip Tirkey
President, Hockey India

Hockey's success in the recent years. The Odisha government became an official partner of Hockey India in 2018, and since then Indian Hockey teams have significantly improved. Over the years, Odisha has hosted various marquee tournaments

such as Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup Bhubaneswar 2018, FIH Men's Series Finals 2019, Olympic Hockey Qualifiers 2019, FIH Odisha Hockey Men's Junior World Cup Bhubaneswar 2021, FIH Hockey Pro League 2020, 2021-22 and 2022-23.

The FIH Odisha Men's Hockey World Cup Bhubaneswar 2018 was hosted with grandeur at the state-of-art Kalinga Hockey Stadium, which was refurbished with two new galleries, increasing the capacity to 15,000 seats. It received an overwhelming response from hockey followers world-wide. It attracted massive tourists from India as well as around the world. The state received around 2.22 million domestic tourists and an average 15,000 foreign tourists during the 2018 World Cup phase.

Odisha and Hockey India are now set to host the Hockey World Cup for the second consecutive time. Officials of Odisha government and Hockey India have left no stones unturned in the prepara-

tions for the FIH Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup 2023 Bhubaneswar-Rourkela. It promised to be bigger and more exciting as there will be two venues utilised in this edition. This 15th edition of the

15th edition of the World Cup will also take place in the Sundergarh district, where a brand-new Birsa Munda Hockey Stadium has been built

World Cup will also take place in the Sundergarh district, where a brand-new Birsa Munda Hockey Stadium has been built. The premises of the stadium has athletes' accommodation, Hockey Practice Centre, Gym, Swimming Pool, and provision for fan-park and various other event-related activities.

FITUR all set to kick-off

FITUR 2023 is set to start in Madrid, Spain, from 18 to 22 January 2023. Delegates from across the world are expected to attend the tourism fair, as the world looks forward to the revival of travel and tourism.



IFEMA MADRID is all set to organise the International Tourism Fair, FITUR 2023, from 18 to 22 January 2023. It will be held at the Trade Fair Centre in Madrid, Spain. Guatemala will be a 'FITUR 23 Partner' under the new brand 'Guatemala. Amazing and unstoppable', which encompasses the industries



tioning as a tourist destination. We are very much looking forward to working together and joining forces for FITUR 2023."

The latest edition of the event will see the participation of companies, countries and destinations and 10

which in collaboration with the Spanish Association of Manufacturers and Distributors of Sporting Goods AFYDAD will highlight the potential of sports tourism as a driver of sustainable tourism development; FITUR Cruises dedicated to "blue tourism", which is enhanced with a large programme of proposals and B2B and B2C activities designed to promote the meeting of the cruise industry with ports, tourist destinations and the public, and FITUR Mice, which offers its agenda of professional meetings for meeting tourism, expanding its scope for the corporate and associative buyer.

FITUR Techy will offer a full programme of debates and conferences under the title "Journey to the Centre of Tourism" to talk about technology and sustainability and address issues such as the role of Artificial Intelligence, Circular Economy and Digital Twins in the tourism sector; FITUR Know How & Export, will focus on data management, digital transformation and sustainability, with SEGITTUR; FITUR Talent will focus on the evolution and management of talent.



of tourism, economy, investment and culture for the first time. **Juan Arrizabalaga**, Managing Director, IFEMA, said, "For FITUR, establishing this strategic alliance with Guatemala is especially important, as it helps boost its recognition as a preferential destination and its posi-

large sections that will allow professionals to learn about and discover the business opportunities offered by these segments in communication with tourism activity.

Among them, the latest and most unique ones include FITUR Sports,

Finland to promote summers

With the recently-added flight connecting Mumbai to Helsinki, the NTO is now looking to promote summers in Finland to offer Indian travellers more ways to experience the destination.



Finnair, along with Finland Tourism, recently hosted a grand event in Mumbai for its key travel partners on the occasion of Christmas and had invited Santa Claus all the way from Rovaniemi in Lapland, Finland. Speaking at the event, **Sara Sodhi Juneja**, Country Head – India & UAE, Visit Finland, says, "This is the first time Santa Claus has come to India and Mumbai. This has been on our agenda for the last five years, so we are very happy we were finally able to do that this year. The travel agents have been supporting us. There have been a few concerns with visas but it's getting resolved. Year 2022 was just the beginning of reviving tourism for us, though the main positive for us was Finnair starting flights from Mumbai in August. It collectively totals to about 10 weekly flights from India. Mumbai is one of our main market and it was very important that we have this direct connectivity."

Sharing plans for 2023, she adds, "We are receiving tremendous support from partners to push Finland



Sara Sodhi Juneja
Country Head – India & UAE, Visit Finland



Sakari Romu
General Manager (India), Finnair

especially for the winters. We want to build Finland for summer as well and showcase destinations beyond Helsinki. We hope our partners help us."

Co-hosting the event was **Sakari Romu**, General Manager (India), Finnair. Sharing how his airlines survived 2022, he says, "Of course, COVID hit all the airlines very hard. This was in a way a start for the better. We are closing our capacity at 80 per cent compared to pre-COVID times. Also, the number of passen-

gers are fast reaching the number we had pre-COVID. We should do our best to return to the kind of business we had before. It's not just bringing it back but also looking positively to the future to find growth wherever possible." He adds, "We are actively looking for new possibilities. India is a big country full of opportunities and if we were to look at other destinations beside Delhi and Mumbai, it would probably be Chennai and Bengaluru that would follow."

Fortune showcases new offerings

Fortune Hotels has expanded its brand offerings by venturing into new markets. The hotel group has been expanding its leisure business in secondary and tertiary cities. To celebrate its success with the industry people, it hosted a networking event at Fortune Select Global Gurgaon recently.



MOVEMENTS

THE LEELA PALACES, HOTELS AND RESORTS

Kovalam

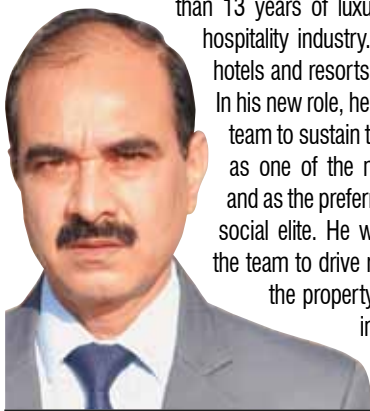
The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts has appointed **BISWAJIT CHAKRABORTY** as the Cluster General Manager of The Leela Kovalam, A Raviz Hotel and The Leela Ashtamudi, A Raviz Hotel in "God's Own Country". Prior to joining The Leela, Biswajit was with Hotelivate as Managing Director, South India. Chakraborty has more than 35 years of experience across major Indian hotel brands such as The Oberoi Hotels and Taj Hotels and also worked for Accor Hotels.



7 APPLE HOTEL

Nashik

7 Apple Hotel Nashik has appointed **PRASHANT SONAWNE** as the General Manager (GM). Sonawne brings with him more than 13 years of luxury experience in the hospitality industry. He has led multiple hotels and resorts as General Manager. In his new role, he will lead the dynamic team to sustain the hotel's positioning as one of the most awarded hotels and as the preferred destination for the social elite. He will focus on steering the team to drive revenue and maintain the property's reputation of having the best turnover in Nashik.



NOVOTEL HOTEL AND RESIDENCES

Kolkata

SIDDHARTHA MEHENDALE has been appointed by Novotel Hotel & Residences Kolkata as the Director of Finance. Bringing more than two decades of experience in finance and accounting activities, Mehendale will be a key stakeholder in the progressive leadership team of the hotel. He has a passion for revenue growth and a steadfast commitment to excellence, alongside his ability to serve as a catalyst for creating new business opportunities as well as overcoming regulatory barriers.



GRAND MERCURE

Bengaluru at Gopalan Mall

GARIMA SINGH joins Grand Mercure Bengaluru at Gopalan Mall as Director of Sales and Marketing. In her new role, she will spearhead the Sales and Marketing department of the premium 212-key five-star hotel. She holds an experience of 11 years in the hospitality industry, catering to many premium clients across the nation. She began her career as a Management trainee at the iconic Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur in 2011 after securing a Bachelor's Degree in Hospitality Management from the Institute of Hotel Management in Ahmedabad.



HYATT HOTELS

Pune

Hyatt Hotels, Pune has appointed **PRADEEP DANI** as Cluster Director of Revenue. Dani brings with him an experience of six years of Revenue Management Strategy. Prior to joining Hyatt Hotels, Pune, he has worked with brands like IHG Hotel & Resorts, Marriott International and Lemon Tree in India. In his new role, he will be supervising the revenue management and distribution strategy of the hotels, along with managing field operations. He is pursuing his Masters of Science in Data Science.



Novotel Hotel & Residences Kolkata has appointed **VOOTAPALLI RAMANAPRASAD** as the Director of Talent & Culture. With more than two and a half decades of rich Talent & Culture management experience and knowledge in the hospitality industry, Ramanaprasad will be responsible for the overall welfare and growth of the entire team in the hotel. He comes with a diverse enriching hospitality experience across brands including Accor, Marriott International, Gitam Deemed University and Wockhardt Super Speciality Hospitals.



FOUR SEASONS HOTEL

Bengaluru

Four Seasons Hotel Bengaluru has appointed **SAVIO FERNANDES** as the Director of Food and Beverage. Born and raised in Mumbai, Fernandes completed his Post-Graduate Diploma in Hotel Management from Goa. He started his hospitality career with Goa Marriott, and then moved as a Guest Service Coordinator in Taj Exotica Goa and over the past two decades worked his way up the ranks as Director of Food & Beverage, with his recent move being to Taj Cidade de Goa.



COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT BENGALURU HEBBAL

Bengaluru

Courtyard by Marriott Bengaluru Hebbal has appointed **AKSHAY VARMA** as the Director of Sales. In his new stint, Akshay will be responsible to drive sales, leading the hotel in achieving its key revenue budget, and will overlook all aspects of the sales and the marketing department. Prior to this, Akshay was associated with Sheraton Grand Bangalore as the Director of Sales. With more than 15 years of rich experience in his domain, he has been instrumental in organising many successful sales initiatives.



Novotel Hotel & Residences Kolkata has appointed **RAHUL MISHRA** as the Director of Sales & Marketing. With more than a decade and a half experience in sales and marketing, Mishra will be solely responsible for driving the business growth of the hotel, along with working towards consolidating Novotel Hotel & Residences Kolkata brand positioning and visibility in regional and national market. He comes with an enriching 18 years of experience in upscale and luxury brands, like Marriott International, IHG and The Lalit Suri Group. His last assignment was with JW Marriott Kolkata. He is excited to start a new journey with the Accor family.



TALKING People

SUDHIR JENA, VP - Corporate, Lords Hotels & Resorts, starts to organise himself whenever he finds stress building up. "I am highly result-oriented so it can get stressful sometimes. During the lockdown, I also made a conscious effort to reconnect with all my friends and family that I had lost touch with. This too helped me gain a perspective and de-stress," he says. Jena is also big on travelling. Sharing his favourite destinations, he says, "One of my favourite holiday destinations in India has to be Goa and internationally it is Dubai. However, my next holiday will be to Ladakh in India and somewhere in Europe internationally," he says.



MANISH DAYYA, General Manager, Sofitel Mumbai BKC, de-stresses with karaoke. "Like many, I was no different and tried my hands at singing, honestly, my rating is 8 on 10 on many occasions! Goa is always fun as it is home which clubs as a great holiday destination. Singapore and Dubai remain my favourites because my kids are small and still enjoy being at theme parks, safaris, and shows and these destinations know it all, about how to pamper kids of their age as both are under 10 years. My move to Mumbai is exciting," he shares.



His children are his biggest stressbusters, says **KUNAL GUJRAL**, Secretary General, Hotel and Restaurant Association of Western India (HRAWI). "A movie night with them at home where I cook for them is my de-stressing routine. Over the lockdown period, it brought me great pleasure in taking care of my fishes and my plants. I learned to appreciate their behaviour and learn from them. Now, they are like kids to me," he says. Goa and Dubai are his favourite destinations but he would like to visit Japan.



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Music to the ears

The wedding industry in **Rajasthan** heaved a sigh of relief when Jaipur Police released a circular stating that licences to avoid Copyright Act infringement will not be needed by hotels or wedding venues for playing music at events.



Nisha Verma

The statement from Jaipur Police has come in response to many local agencies asking for money from the organisers and venues to avoid the infringement of Copyright Act, 1957, claiming that playing songs of any artist/ media company would be considered as violation without their consent. Many facilities had to secure a licence in advance to avoid this harassment at the time of the event. The circular clearly states that under Section 52 (1) (ZA) of Copyright Act 1957, "The performance of a literary, dramatic or musical work or the communication to the public of such work or of sound recording in the course of any bona fide religious ceremony or an official ceremony held by government or local authority shall not amount to copyright infringement. Therefore, no license is required in furtherance of the same."

Interpret the law correctly

The news came with a wave of appreciation for Rajasthan Police from across the industry, including hotels and wedding planners. **MP Bezbaruah**, Secretary General, Hotel Association of India (HAI), said that they welcome the statement by Rajasthan Police. "We are in cognizance of some organisations who have been filing cases regarding the same and two-three cases are still in court. Whatever the final verdict may be, if Rajasthan Police has released such a statement, it would remove any confusions and issues in future. We have always maintained that playing music at social functions should not come under Copyright infringement, and the way it was interpreted by certain organisations, is not correct. We have always contested this case, and now this circular has come as a relief for all of us," he claimed.

Welcome move

Jaision Chacko, Secretary General, Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI), said, "This is a welcome move by the Jaipur Police, which will help alleviate the hospitality industry's pain to a large extent. Section 52(1) (ZA) of the

this to extort money from businesses and patrons. Such incidents peak especially, during the wedding season. We thank the Jaipur Police for issuing the circular clarifying that no licence will be required for hotels or wedding venues in the State to play music during religious events, includ-

done. "Organisations like PPL and NOVEX were extracting money under this guise. It's a law that the Police has now endorsed. It's a great move by Jaipur Police, as they have done what nobody could do. Earlier, people didn't have the understanding. Under Section 52, it is very clear that



MP Bezbaruah
Secretary General
Hotel Association of India (HAI)



Jaision Chacko
Secretary General, Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI)



Rajeev Jain
Founder & MD
Rashi Entertainment

We have always maintained that playing music at social functions should not come under Copyright infringement

Section 52(1) (ZA) of the Copyright Act 1957 provides an exemption on payment of royalty or licence fees for any bonafide religious functions

It's a great move by Jaipur Police, as they have done what nobody could do. Earlier, people didn't have the understanding

Copyright Act 1957 provides an exemption on payment of royalty or licence fees for any bonafide religious functions, including marriage processions and other social festivities associated with a marriage. Yet, certain Copyright licence agencies intimidate hotels and patrons to bully them into paying for licences. Unfortunately, not everyone is aware of this exemption in the law and unethical Copyright agencies are misusing

ing weddings. FHRAI has been campaigning to create awareness about this law and has been reaching out to law enforcement agencies across the country to make them aware of the illegal activities of such agencies."

Appeal for country-wide rule
Lauding the move, **Rajeev Jain**, Founder & MD, Rashi Entertainment, has said that this is a lawful thing that Jaipur Police has

these licences are not required for using music in such events," he said. "We appeal to the Home Minister to go into this issue and understand what it is. Wedding industry is a responsible industry and if lawfully there is any money, we will pay. However, in this case they were extracting money illegally. Jaipur Police's move is appreciated and we appeal that the police should implement this in every city and in every state."



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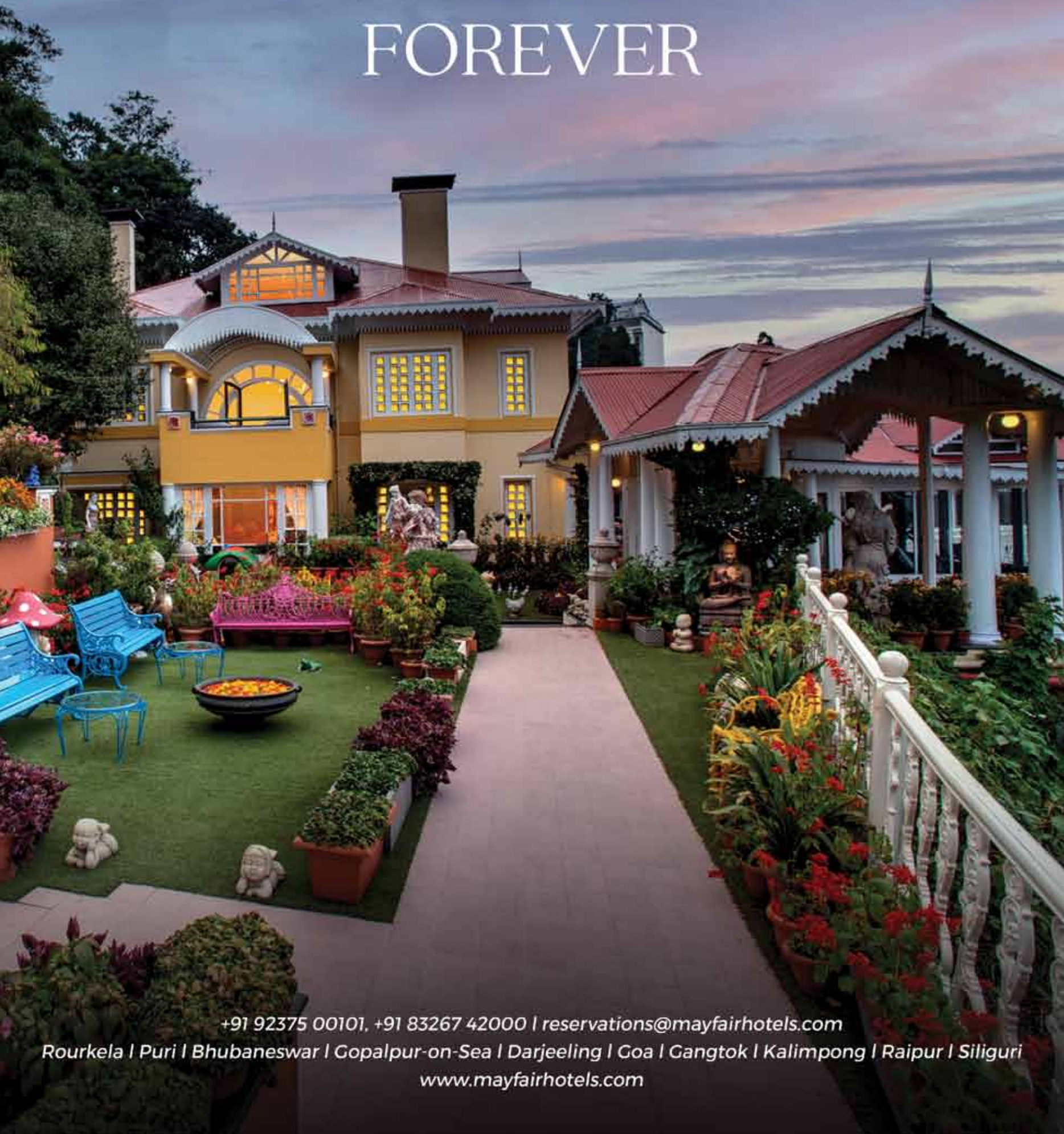
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