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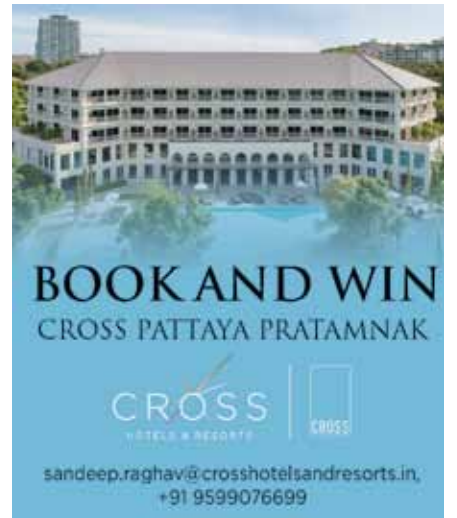
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# MICE and weddings MOT's priority

Arvind Singh, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, believes that G20 has opened doors for India as a MICE destination and that the country has huge potential for becoming an attractive MICE and wedding tourism destination. In fact, MOT is planning a focused event on the segment soon.



Nisha Verma

**A**rvind Singh, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, said that the ministry is aggressively promoting India as a MICE and wedding destination and G20 will aid in this mission. "Even when the Prime Minister addressed the post-budget webinar, he talked about how India must

develop as a MICE and wedding destination. A very important development that has happened over the last few years, and during COVID is that earlier convention centres were only in very big cities and metros, but now convention centres of good quality and size are coming up at many major centres across the country. One very good example of that we are

seeing now is with the G20 meetings happening at 59 locations, and these are international standard meetings. This shows that these venues have the capacity to host big conferences, showcasing India's potential as a MICE destination. Hence, going forward, some policy tweaks at the state level, or giving some incentives will take this movement forward.

We are also planning to organise an international MICE conference in Hyderabad in July this year to take advantage of the tailwinds created by the G20, which will focus and deliberate on how India can develop as a major MICE destination," he claimed.

## National Tourism Policy

A draft on National Strategy on Film

Tourism was released at the third TWG meeting in Srinagar, Kashmir. Speaking on how that will be integrated in the national tourism policy, he said, "For the national tourism policy, we have had a long process of consultation. We have consulted a lot of stakeholders and it has reached the final stage. Once the national tourism policy comes out, these strategies will find men-



Arvind Singh  
Secretary, Ministry of Tourism

tion there, and their key inputs will be present in that policy. Hence, we are awaiting final approvals." 📌

# What do you prefer, cash or credit?

**TRAVTALK** speaks to some travel agents and hoteliers on their preferred mode of payment from clients and why. With an increased clampdown on cash transactions, the latest one being a ban on the ₹2,000 note, more and more businesses are preferring online payments. But will the impending TCS hike hamper this as well?



Reena Sachdev  
Founder, Travel Arena

“Catering to the HNI and evolved segment, our clients are more than happy to pay online as it facilitates smooth, easy and transparent dealings on all fronts. With international travel becoming such a great area of interest for the government, for me as an agent it's always convenient to have these transactions for making the tax procedures streamlined and simple. Commissions were always on published rates and the bank transfer payment procedure howsoever has no impact on it, in fact it avoids any online comparison conflict, as we have preferred partner memberships with most hotels, which enable us to offer more frills and amenities to our clients, yet be transparent in our dealings. For us, it is not a major shift as majority of our clients used their bookings as expense and it was a good tax advantage naturally since travel is a personal expense. Demonetisation in general has impacted all industries like jewellery, real estate, automobiles so travel is just one more expense.”



Anshu Tejuja  
MD, Ashoka Dream Holidays

“I do not accept cash payments from my clients. Instead, I encourage and facilitate online payment methods, such as bank transfers or secure online payment gateways. NEFT payments, bank transfers and payment gateways offer several advantages, including enhanced security, traceability, and convenience for both parties. By promoting official money channels, I adhere to legal and regulatory frameworks, ensuring compliance and transparency. Not only does it provide a secure and hassle-free experience, but it also facilitates efficient financial record-keeping and reduces the risk associated with handling cash. While the preference for online payments is primarily driven by the ethical and legal considerations, it also simplifies commission calculations and transactions. Clear records of online payments allow for accurate commission reconciliation.”

Contd on page 12 ▶







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# Srinagar TWG meet sets tone for Goa

The Ministry of Tourism (MOT) hosted the Third G20 Tourism Working Group Meeting in Srinagar recently. In comparison to the first two TWG meetings organised at Rann of Kutch and Siliguri in the country, the Srinagar event witnessed the highest participation with more than 60 delegates from 29 countries attending it.



Nisha Verma

The third TWG meeting in Srinagar had the highest participation registered as compared to the first two meetings held at Rann of Kutch and Siliguri, informed **Arvind Singh**, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism (MOT). More than 60 delegates from 29 countries attended the event.

## Kashmir kickstart

**Manoj Sinha**, Lieutenant Governor, Jammu & Kashmir inaugurated the meeting in the presence of **Jitendra Singh**, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge), Science & Technology, MoS, PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances, Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space; **G Kishan Reddy**, Union Minister of Culture, Tourism and DoNER, and **Ajay Bhatt**, Union Minister of State for Tourism and Defence. The inaugural ceremony was held at SKICC Srinagar.

The five key priority areas for the Third Tourism Working Group

Meeting comprised Green Tourism, Digitalization, Skills, MSMEs and Destination Management.

Welcoming the delegates, Singh said the meeting gives a unique opportunity to present the rich cul-



**The five priorities constitute the key building blocks for accelerating the transition of the tourism sector and in achieving the UN's SDGs 2030**

ture and heritage of the region. He insisted the third G20 TWG brings huge potential to the tourism sector in the state. "The five priorities constitute the key building blocks for accelerating the transition of the



Dignitaries at the Third G20 Tourism Working Group Meeting in Srinagar recently

tourism sector and in achieving the United Nations sustainable development goals 2030," Singh said.

## Collaborations galore

During his welcome address, Singh said through successful collaborations of the global tourism community it will be possible to achieve outcomes envisioned and strategized through these Tourism Working Group Meetings.

**Dr. Arun Kumar Mehta**, Chief Secretary, Jammu and Kashmir, elaborated on the varied and immersive tourism products that the UT has to offer to the visitors, as well as the warmth and hospitality of its people. Briefing about the current developments in various sectors to have taken place in the UT, he said, "The change is evident, 18.8 million tourists arrived in UT in 2022."

Singh said J&K will soon find its place in the top 50 destinations in the world and it will be on the bucket list of travel of global travellers. "J&K is developing the country's largest book village on the banks of Wular Lake, as the aim is to make the countryside and popular destinations more sustainable and preserve the beauty of fascinating heritage sites. Tourism in J&K reflects multi religious and multicultural

ethos of India. Under the guidance of the Prime Minister, we have ensured that the transition in tourism sector in the backdrop of pandemic focuses on needs of travellers, interests of industry stakeholders, creates job opportunities and promote environmental awareness," he emphasized. Reddy claimed TWG is progressing in the right direction and the joint effort of

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# Travel sentiment positive

International tourism is witnessing a strong resurgence, reveals a report released by Thomas Cook India & SOTC Travel. Despite visa challenges, Europe is a clear favourite preferred by over 46 per cent of respondents, led by Switzerland, France, Spain and Italy.

TT Bureau

The India Holiday Report - May 2023, released by Thomas Cook and its Group Company, SOTC Travel, reflects highly positive travel sentiment with insightful consumer behaviour and travel trends. The survey, conducted throughout the period of a month and administered via the companies' online channels, covered more than 3,500 consumers in metros, mini metros and key tier II and tier III markets. The key findings of the survey are:

❖ **Increased holiday intent:** Travel is clearly back in the minds

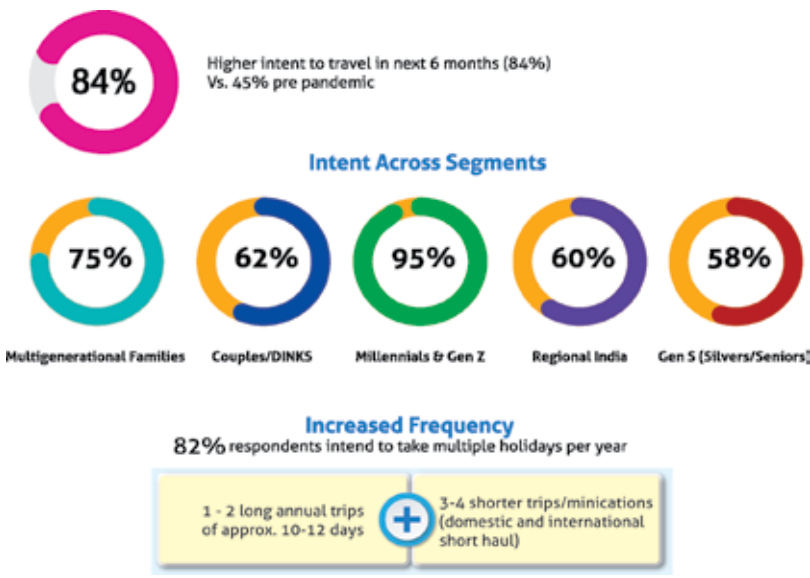


of Indian consumer with over 84 per cent respondents indicating increased intent to travel in the next six months versus 45 per cent pre-pandemic.

❖ **Multiple shorter trips/ minications:** One/ two long annual trips of approximately 10-12 days, 82 per cent respondents indicated preference for multiple (3-4) shorter trips/ minications (domestic and international short haul).

❖ **Higher spends:** Despite supply constraints leading to higher pricing, over 80 per cent respon-

## Increased Holiday Intent



❖ **Travel:** 80 per cent showed confidence in air-inclusive packages, 15 per cent for drivecation and cruise holidays are rising to 70 per cent.

❖ **Hybrid & Omni-Channel Routes:** Digital models pick up pace by 66 per cent, 58 per cent of the respondents want guide or expert and 95 per cent shows prefers phygital channels.

❖ **Sustainability:** People are aware about the issue of sustainability, so 35 per cent respondents are mindful of the environment/ local communities.

On the basis of survey report, **Rajeev Kale**, President & Coun-

## Key Considerations for Travel



millennials; equally Middle India/ Bharat as significant power-centres in the evolution of the sector. "Indians are now seeking immersive travel experiences and wanting to live like a local. This highly positive consumer sentiment will serve a key catalyst to our teams in creating customized holidays and exceptional experiences - that build memories of a lifetime," he said.

**Daniel D'souza**, President & Country Head, Leisure, SOTC Travel, revealed how the report highlights strong appetite of Indians for travel, which is approximately 84 per cent. "With experiential travel being a key driver for over 78 per cent respondents, the deep desire to explore fresh and unique bucket-list op-

**People are aware about the issue of sustainability, so 35 per cent respondents are mindful of the environment/ local communities**

portunities resonated with 65 per cent," he said. He also expressed his views on the increasing demand for consumer convenience and the comfort of human-touch/ expertise, omnichannel/ phygital channels (95 per cent).

## Highlights of the report

- ❖ Increased travel intent in the next 6 months (84% respondents) Vs. 45% pre-pandemic; shorter multiple mini-cations; higher spends
- ❖ Experiences driving demand for over 78%: bucket list elements 65%; gastronomy 45%; outdoor-adventure-fun 50%; culture-history 30%
- ❖ Powerful growth segments: Regional India-Bharat; Young India (Gen Z & Millennial) and Gen S!
- ❖ Key considerations: Entry barriers - Visas (70%); Flexibility with zero change penalties (66%)
- ❖ High demand for Phygital models

# TRAVELTALK

Published from : India Middle East

## VIEWPOINT

### Ease of doing biz still a dream?

Come 1 July and outbound packages might get costlier for travellers, as 20 per cent TCS will be charged on credit card expenditure outside India. The Finance Minister, while moving the Finance Bill 2023 in the Parliament, asked the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to look into ways to bring credit card payments on overseas tours under Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS). This move has not gone down well with outbound operators, for whom the peak season is going on and will be extended beyond July in some cases. On the other hand, inbound operators are questioning the government's decision to scrap SEIS. After multiple meetings and representations, the industry couldn't convince the government to continue this benefit in any way yet. It has now written to the Prime Minister, who is pro-tourism and owing to the thrust he has created in the country and outside, a lot of development is happening in this regard. However, the stakeholders continue to question the government's promises of ease of doing business, which they say is a distant dream with SEIS being out of the picture and an increase in TCS on cards.

### G20 fervour to drive inbound prospects?

Ministry of Tourism recently concluded the third G20 TWG meeting in Srinagar, which saw the government and delegates take forward the five priority areas namely Green Tourism, Digitalization, Skills, MSMEs and Destination Management. While film tourism found focus at the Srinagar meeting, apart from sustainability, the destination itself got a lot of attention. However, it's still a question if the interest in India's 59 destinations where G20 meetings are scheduled would transcend in getting inbound business for the country. The ministry is certain that India's FTAs will go up owing to G20 exposure that the country is getting, but the industry doesn't seem very positive yet. A ray of hope is still there in the form of National Tourism Board of India, which might just do the trick for India's inbound.

## Mode of Travel



dents displayed appetite for higher spends of approximately 20 per cent versus pre-pandemic.

❖ **Multiple Payment Options:** 35 per cent respondents (Travel loans, EMI).

❖ **Health & Safety:** 30 per cent travellers still consider health as an important factor. So, their travel is reduced.

try Head - Holidays, MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India), witnessed rebound with must-do/ non-negotiable for Indians. "Our India Holiday Report - May 2023 reveals that not only are multiple minications back for 82 per cent respondents, but also that they are willing to pay 20 per cent more," he said.

He also commented about noteworthy rise of Young India's Gen Z and

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# What after SEIS denial?

Ever since SEIS has been denied to inbound tour operators, it has become a major issue, with many people raising concerns over destination promotions in foreign countries. The industry is on the same page in terms of getting the benefits back, one way or the other.



Nisha Verma

**P**iyush Goyal, Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, has made it clear that the Service Export Incentive Scheme (SEIS) is not coming back. The news has not gone down well with the inbound tour operators, who claim that they bring in a huge amount of foreign exchange to the country and use the money received as incentive under SEIS for promotion and marketing.

## Urging the PM

After being denied SEIS, **Rajiv Mehra**, President, IATO, has written to the PM requesting him to restore SEIS or introduce an alternative scheme in the new Foreign Trade Policy, as the inbound tourism sector is still suffering and

## Biggest setback

Calling it one of the biggest setbacks for the industry, **Jatinder Taneja**, Vice Chairman, PATA India Chapter, says that the incentive has not been reinstated so far. "SEIS or similar incentive schemes have been going on to support inbound tourism for the last many years in the form of EPCG, SFIS and SEIS forms. This incentive has been helping the industry immensely to stay competitive in the international market and generate better business and earn much more foreign exchange for the country. In the absence of any incentive scheme, the product in India will become more expensive and inbound business would surely suffer," he adds.

## Fingers crossed

**Ravi Gosain**, MD, Erco Travels



**Rajiv Mehra**  
President  
IATO

cause we want either this scheme or any other to come back, as we need it now, more than anytime," he adds.



**Jatinder Taneja**  
Vice Chairman  
PATA India Chapter

positive about that plan. IATO has written to the PM, where we have mentioned all the points and what was discussed with Mr. Piyush Goyal. As a tour operator, I think it's very important for the government to help us because we need hand-holding. Let's hope that our PM can intervene and do something for the tour operators," he adds.

## Unfortunate move

Calling the decision unfortunate, **Deepak Bhatnagar**, MD, Aamantanar Travel Company and EC member, IATO, insists that SEIS was not only a monetary benefit which tour operators were getting.

**'Either SEIS should be restored or an alternative scheme benefiting tourism sector should be announced in the Foreign Trade Policy 2023'**

## Give GST benefit

Saying that India is becoming an expensive destination to market, **Kamleshwaran**, CEO, Southern Skies Tours & Travels, suggests that the government needs to find ways to give sops to the hospitality industry to balance the input costs.

## Need to push inbound

**Manoj Kumar Matta**, MD, Oriental Vacations & Journeys, and EC member, IATO, says, "The overseas marketing offices have been closed. I think government's intention is to only promote domestic tourism. It has been creating infrastructure, which is good for everyone, and they want to make India Atmanirbhar. But why they want only inbound tour operators to be Atmanirbhar?" he questions.



**Ravi Gosain**  
Vice President, IATO &  
MD, Erco Travels

needs hand holding by the government. "Besides, we seek roll-back of TCS from 20 per cent to 5 per cent on overseas tour packages announced in the Union Budget. These steps would place the tourism industry on par with foreign tour operators and help them compete with the neighbouring countries. Also, during the current G20 Presidency, where promoting tourism is one key objective, it would be pertinent that the government extends a helping hand to the tourism sector. Post revival of international flight operations and tourist visa, only 30-40 per cent of inbound tourism to India has been revived, which the government accepts. Thus, either SEIS should be restored or an alternative scheme benefiting the tourism sector should be announced in the Foreign Trade Policy 2023. It took nine years to increase foreign exchange earnings to \$30.05 billion in 2019 from \$14.49 billion in 2010. However, at present we have gone back to 2004 level, which was \$6.17 billion in terms of foreign exchange earnings," he says.



**Sanjay Razdan**  
Honorary Secretary, IATO &  
MD, Razdan Holidays

and Vice President, IATO, claims that SEIS was the biggest incentive for the inbound industry. "Unfortunately, in FY2023, we didn't



**Deepak Bhatnagar**  
EC member, IATO &  
MD, Aamantanar Travel Company

## Need handholding

Agreeing that discontinuation of SEIS by the government was a wrong move, **Sanjay Razdan**, MD,



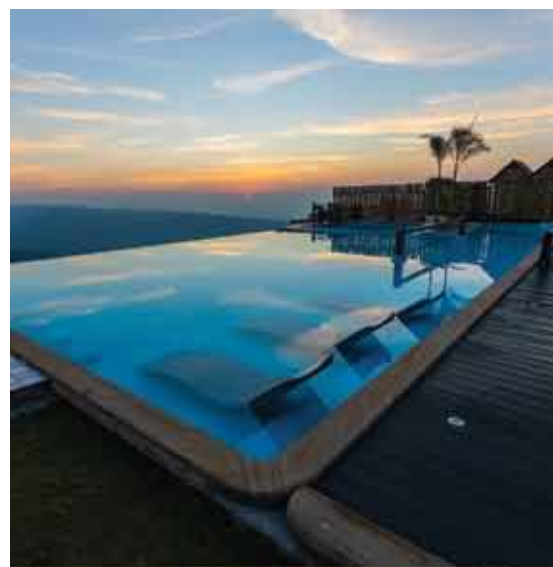
**Kamleshwaran**  
CEO  
Southern Skies Tours & Travels

see SEIS continued. We knew it will be like this, but we were trying with Ministry of Commerce. We held several meetings at secretary level, joint secretary level, and at ministerial level as well. They categorically denied it. Ultimately, IATO has written to the MOT be-



**Manoj Kumar Matta**  
EC member, IATO &  
MD, Oriental Vacations & Journeys

Razdan Holidays and Honorary Secretary, IATO, shares that they have heard the government is giving some duty drawbacks to the exporters. "Since inbound tourism also brings a lot of foreign exchange in the country, we thought that they will listen to us. However, we are not



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Need bilateral understandings with different states to attract more FTAs, says Goa Tourism Minister

If you are planning to expand into a new market, take care of cultural differences: Rikant Pitti

IndiGo bolsters connectivity from Nashik; starts 6 new flights to Wine Capital of India

Travellers willing to spend consciously in 2023: Agoda Travel Trend Survey

FlyArystan starts flight on Delhi-Shymkent route, minimum fare starts at US \$55

Air Seychelles introduces connection SEZCMB, along with the interline agreement with Sri Lanka (UL)

Mishandled baggage soar to 26 million in 2022, nearly triple 2021 figures: SITA

May-September forward bookings show 35 per cent surge compared to same period in 2022

# Indian aviation set to fly high

Jyotiraditya Scindia, Union Minister of Civil Aviation, says that domestic airlines must work towards making India an international aviation hub, and urges them to induct more wide-bodied aircraft, take risk, face global volatility to keep the Indian flag flying in the international airspace.



Nisha Verma

**Jyotiraditya Scindia**, Union Minister of Civil Aviation, recently spoke at the curtain raiser event of Wings India 2024, which is scheduled to be held at Begumpet Airport, Hyderabad, from 18-21 January 2024.

## Unprecedented growth

During his address, Scindia said that the government is giving special focus on creating capacity for the country's fast-growing aviation market, by changing its role from a regulator to a facilitator. "The government has adopted a three-pronged strategy of creating capacities, removing bottlenecks and simplifying processes, that has helped the sector to leap from 74 airports to 148 airports in the past nine years. The number of airports, heliports, and waterdromes will go up to more than 200 in the next three to four years," he added.

Speaking on the growing potential of the industry to become the world's leading aviation market by



**Jyotiraditya Scindia**  
Union Minister of Civil Aviation

2047, he said, "As India sails on its journey from the Amrit Kaal to Shatabdi Kaal (2047), Indian aviation will also transform from being the third largest domestic market/ eighteenth largest international market/ seventh largest domestic and international market, to become the largest aviation market globally."

## International aviation hub

He emphasised on the government's commitment to creating

an international aviation hub in the country and said that many air services and open skies agreements inked between India and other countries would facilitate this growth target.

Speaking at another event recently, he again urged domestic airlines to help set up an international civil aviation hub in India

**Many air services and open skies agreements inked between India and other countries would facilitate this growth target (in field of aviation)**

and emphasised the need for having more wide-body planes to have point-to-point international services for passengers.

"Margins are slim, revenues are slim, but airlines are comfortable competing on the domestic side because volatility is low. The minute you go to the international side, the revenues are high, but the volatility is much greater. I plead to the airlines to take the risk, face volatility because India's flag must fly in the international airspace. For that, we need wide-body aircraft, we need to be able to go point-to-point as opposed to the circuitous route that all our passengers are made

to follow," Scindia said. "It is important for us to expand our international footprint as much as we are expanding our domestic footprint. It is important that the Indian flag is planted internationally through our carriers as well. If we have to do that, then we have to get many more wide-body aircraft," he added.

MoCA is already working with Delhi Airport, IndiGo and Air India to make the airport an international civil aviation hub.

## UDAN 5.1 to enhance connectivity

Ministry of Civil Aviation has launched UDAN 5.1 to further enhance the connectivity to remote areas of the country and achieve last mile connectivity through helicopters. Main features include:

- ❖ An increase in the scope of operations for operators wherein the scheme will now allow routes where one of the origin or destination locations is in a priority area. Earlier both points had to be in priority areas.
- ❖ Airfare caps have been reduced by as much as 25 per cent to make flying in helicopters more affordable for passengers.
- ❖ Viability Gap Funding (VGF) caps for the operators have been increased substantially for both single and twin-engine helicopters to enhance financial viability for operating the awarded routes.

# Technology key to aviation success

Recognizing the immense potential of digital technology, aviation industry is embracing digitalisation in all aspects of operations. This is allowing airlines to leverage data analytics to offer new products and services to customers, engage them in an effective way and address their concerns satisfactorily.



Hazel Jain

Digitalisation has always been at the forefront of aviation industry, as it plays a crucial role in optimising resources, lowering costs, and enhancing customer experience. Today, we see many top airlines investing towards this

in order to be more effective in an extremely competent and cost-sensitive market. Digitalisation is key to keeping Singapore Airlines (SIA) nimble and contributes towards the development of a digital aviation and travel technology global community, says **Sy Yen Chen**, General Manager India for



**Sy Yen Chen**  
General Manager India  
Singapore Airlines



**Salil Nath**  
General Manager, Indian Subcontinent  
Etihad Airways



**Philip See**  
Group Chief Sustainability Officer  
Malaysia Aviation Group

dian Subcontinent, Etihad Airways, says, "As technology continues to proliferate every aspect of our life, it only makes the journey simpler. Understanding that dexterity, Etihad continues to demonstrate ways on how technology could revolutionise the customer's travel experience."

## Enabling faster distribution

Explaining how the technological advancements are helping the industry, **Philip See**, Group Chief Sustainability Officer, Malaysia Aviation Group, says, "In today's world, newer low-cost airlines that do not rely on outdated infrastructure are able to sell tickets at lower prices and generate revenue primarily through ancillary services and additional food menu options. Traditional airlines, burdened by their legacy distribution channels, have struggled to compete and have faced financial difficulties, leading to bankruptcy." Collaborating with IATA, they have introduced a modern direct connect technology called the NDC.

## EXPERT VIEW

In 2016, NDC was a technology that was just introduced into an industry that previously took more than 10 years to move from paper to e-tickets. Adoption was initially slow and further impacted by COVID. Post COVID, we have seen a resurgence in the core values that airlines want to build on with regards to profitability. It has refocused their approach towards airline retailing, for which NDC is a key component in terms of cost savings. We are raising funds to capture the market globally at a fast pace. Verteil has stepped up its efforts to make life easier for its customers, especially in the servicing and support areas for NDC today. We are one of the few NDC aggregators that provide 24/7 support. Knowing the onus on us as an NDC leader, we provide regular training, certifications, and awareness drives.



**Jerrin Jos**  
CEO and Founder, Verteil

Singapore Airlines. "We want to offer the best experience for our customers, while we optimise operations, create new business revenues, and get our employees on board by creating a truly digital workforce through training and skillset development. We began our digital transformation journey in 2018 even before the pandemic, and later KrisLab, our digital in-

novation lab in 2019. In January 2022, we collaborated with the National University of Singapore (NUS) to launch a new digital aviation corporate laboratory." All of this, Chen says, allows the airline to research emerging technologies, roll out innovations, and leverage data analytics to offer new products and services, better engage customers, streamline feedback,

and respond more effectively to their concerns.

## Cloud services need of the hour

On the other hand, Etihad is fulfilling its digital transformation objectives by putting its research into cloud services, data centres, wireless onboard services, and autonomous data management. **Salil Nath**, General Manager, In-



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# MICE travel reimagined in Singapore

Firing up the imagination of corporate travellers, Singapore Tourism Board is reshaping the contours of MICE travel with an array of well-crafted immersive experiences. This year, Singapore became the first country in the world to be recognized as a sustainable destination by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.



Lipla Negi

At the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the Travel MICE & Corporate Show in Chennai, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) showcased uniquely crafted experiences that the country offers to corporate and MICE groups. Speaking on the sideline of the show, **Renjie Wong**, Area Director, India, South Asia & Middle East (Mumbai), STB, said, "The Travel MICE Show has been an effective B2B event which enable us to meet quality buyers from all across the country. This time, we really loved being able to meet a lot of corporates based in and around Chennai and sharing the word about reimagining MICE travel to Singapore."

This is the third time that the STB has participated in Travel MICE & Corporate Show, after the editions in Delhi and Pune.

Pushing the boundaries of imagination, the STB is taking bold steps to present the best immersive experiences for MICE groups of all sizes. Casting away the inhibitions that MICE industry had about recovery of big events post pandemic, Renjie said, "Big MICE groups are back, and they are back with



**Renjie Wong**  
Area Director, India, South Asia  
& Middle East (Mumbai), STB

vengeance. There were worries globally about the ability of the industry to manage big group movements. I am very happy to share that last year, Singapore welcomed two big corporate groups from India – Herbalife (4,000 pax) and SBI Life (2,400pax)." He further affirmed how good responses from the Indian corporates boosted the Singapore MICE sector. "It is really with these mega movements, we were able to showcase the kind of possibilities that Singapore has as a leading MICE destination to reimagine what MICE can be for C-suites, dealers and their accompa-

nying families who are on the trip," he added.

The desire to dive into 'reimagined experiences' is firing up the corporates' appetite for travel. He highlighted, "They want more than just clicking another selfie with landmarks or at tourist spots and look forward to immerse in the culture of the destination and its customised MICE experiences. These trends are what we have observed since MICE travel has restarted."

In March 2023, the STB launched a new platform called SingapoRewards. It is a scheme for all travellers to Singapore, including business travellers, who are eligible to pick one out of the close to 40 reimagined experiences and enjoy it for free."

With an aim to spotlight the hidden gems of Singapore, the STB has been working relentlessly to curate out-of-the-box experiences for travellers that help them explore the country in a different way. Renjie explained, "It is really for us not just a way of welcoming the world to come and experience Singapore with a slew of new experiences, but more importantly understanding what we mean when we say



'travel in a completely different way'. For instance, a lot of these experiences are off the beaten path and immersive. So, whether it is sitting down with one of Singapore's most famous designers GINLEE and making one of her iconic pleated bags, or going fishing in a mangrove swamp on a kayak with a trained naturalist, it is about being able to appreciate Singapore from a completely different perspective. The ability to stir the curiosity and imagination of business travellers with unique experiences makes Singapore a leading MICE destination."

Over the last few decades, Singapore has established itself as a global business and leisure



**The ability to stir the curiosity and imagination of business travellers with unique experiences makes Singapore a leading MICE destination**



**In its commitment to sustainability, Singapore has positioned itself as a green destination, blending biophilic elements with its urban cityscape**

hub. The country hosted several MICE events in 2022, including the Singapore Airshow in February and the Fintech Festival in November, which attracted more than 62,000 attendees from over 115 countries since its inaugural edition in 2016. Singapore also hosted some first-time events such as The World Stroke Congress held in October 2022. Since the pandemic, it was the largest in-person delegation of more than 2,000 people. Singapore continues to build up a healthy pipeline of significant MICE events for 2023 and will host business events like the Gastech Exhibition & Conference, which is the world's largest gas and LNG exhibition.

In a move to reinforce its commitment to sustainability, Singapore has positioned itself as a green destination, perfectly blending biophilic elements with its urban cityscape, so travellers can soak in the beauty of nature while in the heart of the city. In December 2022, STB and Singapore Association of Convention & Exhibition Organisers & Suppliers launched the MICE Sustainability Roadmap to raise sustainability standards across Singapore's MICE industry, encouraging tourism stakeholders to incorporate elements of sustainability into their experiences. This year, Singapore became the first country in the world to be recognized as a sustainable destination by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, a significant step forward for Asia's achievements in conscious travel.

With the modern-day travellers growing ever more tech-savvy and companies aggressively pushing their green credentials, the suite of reimagined experiences, embracing technology and Singapore's recognition as a destination for sustainable travel have further burnished the country's appeal to MICE travellers. 🐦





# UAE gets first marine life theme park

SeaWorld, Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, region's first marine life theme park, features educational elements, entertainment, and expertise of SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment.

TT Bureau

SeaWorld, Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, has opened its doors to the public officially, making it the region's first marine life theme park. The grand opening celebrations on 22 May were filled with star-studded performances by Emirati superstar Hussain Al Jassmi and Scottish recording artist Red, accompanied by a sensational orchestra of 120 musicians.

Developed by Miral in partnership with SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, SeaWorld Abu Dhabi is the newest addition to the renowned Yas Island. The park combines educational elements, entertainment, and the expertise of a leading zoological organization to provide unforgettable experiences. The inaugural event commenced in the One Ocean realm, where guests enjoyed the breathtaking One Epic Ocean show. This multimedia extravaganza, displayed on a massive 360-degree screen, brought the wonders of the ocean to life.

SeaWorld Abu Dhabi, spanned in 183k square metres with five indoor levels, seamlessly combines learning and fun across eight immersive realms

H.E. Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of Miral, expressed his excitement over the opening of SeaWorld Abu Dhabi. He highlighted the park's contribution to Abu Dhabi's tourism vision, positioning Yas Island as a global destination. H.E. Al Mubarak emphasized the park's role in promoting environmental awareness and marine life conservation.

SeaWorld Abu Dhabi, spanned in more than 183,000 square metres with five indoor levels, seamlessly combines learning and fun across eight immersive realms. It offers up-close animal encounters, presentations, entertainment, rides, dining, and shopping experiences.

Scott Ross, Chairman, SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, celebrated the opening as a significant chapter for the organization. Ross expressed confidence that guests would be amazed by the

unique experiences offered at SeaWorld Abu Dhabi.

Each realm in SeaWorld Abu Dhabi represents a different marine environment found worldwide. The One Ocean realm serves as the core of the park, sharing the One Ocean story through immersive media. The Abu Dhabi Ocean realm highlights the marine life of

the Arabian Gulf, while the Rocky Point realm offers a glimpse of the Pacific Northwest's sea lions and harbor seals. The Tropical Ocean realm features a vibrant rainforest and a lagoon inhabited by dolphins, flamingos, fish, and birds. In the MicroOcean realm, guests explore the microscopic world as plankton, understanding the impact of small organisms.



H.E. Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman, Miral; Scott Ross, Chairman, SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, and Mohamed Abdalla Al Zaabi, Group CEO, Miral

The Endless Ocean realm boasts the world's largest multi-species marine life aquarium, housing over 68,000 marine animals and

25 million litres of water. Lastly, the Polar Ocean realm provides insights into the habits of polar species through icy seascapes.

SeaWorld Abu Dhabi offers over 100 animal experiences and presentations, including 10 up-close animal encounters.

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# Safe & secure payment a priority



**Dipti Pradhan Thakoor**  
Director  
Adventure Holidays

“Online payments through the right channels are safe and secured. About 75-80 per cent of our clients pay online. This saves all the hassle of collecting money or for the client to drop it in our office. There have been times with cash payments, at the time of depositing, few notes are fake or faulty and not accepted and this creates lot of trouble. We work with corporates for our outdoor team building activities and they pay online only, never by cash. This keeps a clear GST calculation, if the company has cut a TDS it can be claimed too at the end of the year and records are easy to maintain. Online payment gateways work well too, just that it is important to check the charges and security. Otherwise NEFTs and GPay work best. Given a choice, we would prefer online payments.”



**Jyoti Singh**  
CEO & Director  
Sailor Travel & Tours

“Post demonetisation, we have been encouraging our clients to pay by bank transfer or cheque as it makes business and accounts both ways very clean and transparent. The impact on commissions earned stays untouched and gets transferred into our account as we work professionally and only with those vendors who are willing to pay a price for our dedicated services over and above our commission which is our B2B perk, be it an airline or a consolidator. Looking at the recent ₹2,000 ban, the fear spready on social media by a few people with wrong intentions makes it more difficult for travel agents to run a smooth and happy business. It is a transition for good. If developed countries like the USA can do with US \$100 as the highest denomination, then why can't India?”



**PP Khanna**  
President, ADTOI &  
Director, Diplomatic Travel Point

“Clients have diverse preferences when it comes to payment methods, including both online transactions and cash payments. Cash payments are limited to small amounts, specifically up to ₹20,000 for a single transaction. However, tourists have the flexibility to make cash payments to an agent up to a total of ₹1.99 lakh within a year. On the other hand, online payments can be made through various channels such as Cheque, NEFT, RTGS, Paytm, PhonePe, and more. It is important to note that regardless of the payment method chosen by the tourists, it does not have any impact on the agency commission. Therefore, clients have the freedom to choose the payment method that suits them, without affecting the commission structure for the agency.”



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

“A majority of our clients today pay online, especially since they have been booking with us over the years, and our bank details are already added to their account. They don't want to bear the credit card charges. Some negotiate a lower merchant charge because they want to add points to their card. Some clients prefer cash for reasons of their own. We prefer either an online transfer or credit card payments to be in line with the government regulations. Our onward payments are also online for tickets, hotels, tours and other services. When a client uses the card, we end up bearing a part of the merchant fee. For our old clients, we offer online payment, even if it means giving them some credit, to save on the merchant fee cost. Either we end up with a cost, or we have to give credit.”



**Burjis Mehta**  
CEO  
Skyworld Tours & Travels

“We are largely a corporate travel company. Therefore, our payments are mainly through bank transfers. But at the same time there are many executives who combine their business visits with personal leisure trips. Such executives are very price-conscious and do a lot of research online especially on pricing and pay through their credit cards or cheques or sometimes even want to pay by cash. We as a company policy strictly do not encourage cash payments at all. It is no rocket science that the government is tracking the payments made by individuals for travel and tour packages commensurate to the income tax they are paying. Also, cash payments alone for travel and tours are often misused. My personal opinion is that one should be on the right side of the law.”



**Sanjay Mehta**  
CEO  
Transglobe Travels

“In this part of the country, the travel business has been conducted purely on cash payments for years. However, with the influence of the new generation, that largely buys products and services online, the flow of payment has started to go online. As an agent, we would prefer the online payment by GPay, credit card, through online NEFT or RTGS as applicable since the payment is secured and certain. Moreover, with business growing and the value of transactions going up, digital payment is encouraged by us. The impact of this is that we have become transparent with our clients and our corporate customers in our quotation. We inform them about the transaction fee, and this has boosted our sales since their confidence in us has increased.”



**Tejbir Singh Anand**  
Managing Director  
Holiday Moods Adventures

“It's a digital world now and I think even if the clients wish to pay cash, we prefer only digital payments. Especially for Outbound Tourism, 100 per cent transactions have to be made to the suppliers through the banks (even if through the third party vendors). There are still a few clients who prefer to pay by cash and we do take the payments from them, but along with their PAN card number. Most of the clients are digitally empowered and pay us through bank transfers, which surely is convenient for the parties. The choice of payment method does not impact our commissions at all. A few clients also pay us through credit cards, however, the TDR charges are then borne by the clients.”



**Vinayak Koul**  
Director  
SnowLion Expedition

“Most of our clients prefer bank transfer/ online payment. Only a few sometimes ask for cash payment option. Bank transfers/online payments are very natural and obvious modes for all in today's digital era. Its hassle free, quick and safe. We have been in business for more than three decades now and our preferred payment method has always been bank transfer/ online payment. The reasons are same for us as they are for clients – its hassle free, quick & safe. It also helps us to keep our accounting simple & clear. We believe receiving payments via bank/ online should be everybody's first choice and even if sometimes it gets inevitable to receive cash payments, the payment process should be completed with all required supporting documents.”



**Vaibhav Kala**  
Founder  
Aquaterra Adventures (India)

“Our clients prefer online payments. Cash has actually slowly decreased over the last eight to 10 years. It's easier, it's quicker. People retain the option of making sure their pay, the finance company, the credit card company based on their budgets every month. So a lot of that movement has moved to online payments plus the ease of payments, a lot of our guests are using that. We have online payment gateways on both the sides of our business, adventure travel as well as the hotel side. And that again gets used a fair bit even though it has a convenience fee attached to it and we always give bank transfer options, but a lot of guests do use the online payment gateway. For us it doesn't really matter because we always give an option of bank transfer versus online payment gateways.”



**Nasir Shah**  
MD, Culture & Nature Expeditions  
Tours & Travels

“Tour operators ensure that they receive 100 per cent of the payments through legitimate banking channels, using proper inward transfer systems. The payments are received in the currency of the tourists' own country or their preferred choice, contributing to the earning of foreign exchange for the country. It is important to note that there are no illegal methods involved in this process. Additionally, the tour operators do not work on commissions. Instead, they provide quotes to foreign agents based on rates received from hoteliers, suppliers, and other tour operators. They also add a respectable mark-up considering the competitive nature of the industry. This ensures transparency and fairness in pricing, allowing all parties to operate legally.”



**Amaan Kidwai**  
Area Manager, Welcomhotels North & GM, Sheraton, New Delhi

“Going cashless is among the smarter, faster, and safer ways to transact now. Pandemic has triggered a fundamental shift, leading to greater use of our online platforms including ITC Hotels website and ITC Hotels App for Food Delivery, Room and Table Reservations where our guests have easy access to confirm their payments digitally. Globally, the digital economy is growing exponentially. Likewise, at many of the Welcomhotel properties, we have observed that customers are increasingly opting for online transactions. Brand Welcomhotel properties continue to embrace embedded payments as they play a crucial role in enhancing the customer experience, making the process smoother with a competitive edge in the evolving digital landscape.”



**Sameer Ahmad Baktou**  
Marketing & Operations Head  
India Travel Connection

“Regarding payment methods, clients may have varying preferences. However, the trend in recent years has shown a significant shift towards online payment methods. Many travelers prefer the convenience and security offered by online payment options such as credit cards, debit cards, and digital wallets. Online payments eliminate the need for carrying large amounts of cash and provide better record-keeping. As an agent/hotel, the choice of payment method depends on individual circumstances and infrastructure. While online payments offer convenience, they may also come with transaction fees and potential fraud risks. Cash payments, on the other hand, may require additional security measures and entail the handling of physical currency.”



# Going cashless is way forward



**Zahoor Qari**  
Chairman and Managing Executive  
Air Links Tours & Travels

“In the present scenario, the majority of payments, around 99 per cent, are conducted online, aligning with the country's digital transformation. We, as tour operators, also prioritize online payments and do not prefer cash transactions. Customers themselves are inclined towards online payment methods, and we facilitate this by providing QR codes and ensuring a seamless online payment experience. The implementation of goods and services tax has further emphasized the importance of utilizing online payment methods. Regarding commissions, we adhere to fair business practices and do not engage in any hidden commission arrangements.”



**Pradeep Rai**  
Managing Director  
Skyline India Travels

“We take payments online mostly through NEFT or RTGS. Many of the customers prefer to pay through credit card. However, there are some clients who wish to pay cash. I am also witnessing that in the last decade, people are now more inclined to pay online because of the ease it offers. We also prefer to make all the official transactions online and even try to make personal transactions online. The reason is simple – it saves time and manpower. Also, when dealing with first time vendors or outside vendors, customers prefer to pay online for security reasons and confidence. I agree that digital payments will be the future of travel now; it is already being implemented.”



**Siraj Ansari**  
Managing Director  
Avion Holidays

“Most of the clients make their payments through GPay or bank transfers, which are chargeable now. Payments are not happening in cash as there are restrictions and charges for even depositing cash in banks. Therefore, we prefer bank account transfers and feel safe for all transactions. However, GST charged is very high for every transaction, which clients fail to pay us. However, I believe that digital transactions undoubtedly will be followed by everyone, and most of the people will opt for an easy way in terms of payments. Invariably, most of the industry stakeholders are concerned about GST and many are unclear of the way the taxes should be levied.”



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

“Cash payments are gradually becoming extinct, which is a good development in the industry. Increasing number of clients are now making payments online, thanks to Indian government's digital initiative, which came in effect a few years back. We would always prefer online payments as it minimizes the risk of cash handling and reduces manpower cost. Moreover, it is instinct and effective. According to me, digital payment has already become the accepted way of payment. In future, this will become the only practical and accepted mode of payment, which is a welcome development for the industry.”



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

“We always get the payments either online or via credit card. Cash transactions have almost become nil, as there are plenty of options available even on Gpay and PhonePay as well. In fact, we also prefer bank transfers, as it becomes easy for reconciliation. I believe that digital payments will be the future of travel now. Today, we hardly see cash movement as everyone has smart phones connected to UPI, and all payments are going in through mobile phones, especially because there is a maximum amount of only one lakh transaction per day, and hence the customers pay through bank transfers. I think the future of travel is full of digital transactions only.”



**Guldeep Singh Sahni**  
Managing Director  
Weldon Tours and Travels

“A lot of our payments are happening through online mediums these days as it is convenient for the clients, as they also don't want to deal with cash anymore. It is also convenient for the travel companies if the payments are made digitally. I truly believe that digital payments will be the future of travel industry, owing to the convenience and transparency that it offers. However, the latest update of 20 per cent TCS being charged on credit card payments to foreign vendors is a concern. The government has not given relief to tour operators who generate employment and taxes. Our demand is that the government gives ₹7 lakh exemption per person per annum.”

## Combining modernity with tradition

From captivating Corniche to gastronomic pleasures and bustling ambience of Souq Waqif, Qatar provides one-of-a-kind experience where the past and present exist together. While Lusail City represents the country's future vision, the museums and cultural attractions celebrate the nation's rich heritage while embracing modern innovations.



Janice Alysius

Few countries can beat Qatar's mesmerising attraction when it comes to stunning sites that flawlessly integrate modernity and tradition. This bustling country, located on the Arabian Peninsula's northeastern coast, offers visitors a unique blend of historic legacy and cutting-edge innovation. Here are some examples of how Qatar's modern and traditional treasures meet each other.

### Corniche: Where the past and present coexist

The Corniche in Doha, Qatar's capital city, embodies the country's blend of modernism and history. This lovely waterfront promenade spans for several km and provides a panoramic view of the city skyline and the Arabian Gulf. As you walk along the Corniche, you will notice modern skyscrapers contrasted with traditional dhow boats gracefully cruising the azure waters. This beautiful mix of architectural mar-



vels and historical watercraft exemplifies the harmonious coexistence of old and contemporary.

### Balanced blend of modern and traditional cuisines

Qatar's culinary culture exemplifies the country's balanced blend of modern and traditional cuisines. There are numerous premium restaurants in Doha that serve modern renditions of Qatari food. These restaurants expertly blend traditional ingredients and cooking techniques

with modern presentation and flavour combinations. Local dishes such as machbous (spiced rice with meat) and harees (wheat porridge with meat) are given a modern touch, tantalising both locals and international visitors' taste buds.

### Souq Waqif

Souq Waqif, in stark contrast to the modernity of Doha's skyline, is a monument to Qatar's traditional heritage. With its maze-like lanes, bright shops, and wafting odours of

spices and incense, this lively marketplace going back over a century pours an authentic ambience. Visitors may walk its small alleyways, bargain for handicrafts, and experience the joys of traditional Qatari food, making it a must-see site for those interested in local culture.

### Lusail City

Lusail City is a brilliant illustration of Qatar's aspirations in terms of modernization. The city, located just north of Doha, is diligently

planned and incorporates cutting-edge technology and forward-thinking urban design.

Lusail, Qatar's future city, aspires to be a green and technologically advanced metropolis. The skyline of the city is lined with elegant buildings, and its infrastructure includes cutting-edge transportation systems, smart technologies, and environment-friendly projects. The city exemplifies Qatar's determination to embrace the future while preserving its traditional legacy.

### Museums and cultural sites

The museums and cultural sites of Qatar wonderfully exemplify the country's seamless combination of modernity and tradition. From the famous Museum of Islamic Art to the intriguing Katara Cultural Village, these places provide an insight into Qatar's rich legacy while incorporating contemporary aspects. With its magnificent architecture and rich collection, the Museum of Islamic Art exemplifies the nation's commit-

ment to conserving and promoting Islamic art and culture. Katara Cultural Village, on the other side, is a bustling hub where traditional Qatari architecture and cultural activities coexist with modern comforts.



**The museums and cultural sites of Qatar wonderfully exemplify the country's seamless combination of modernity and tradition**

These Qatar museums and cultural institutions demonstrate the country's capacity to honour its past while embracing modern advances, delivering an engaging experience for visitors seeking a riveting blend of old and new.



# Paris 2024 promises unique offers

In order to create a spectacular sports and tourism experience, 90 per cent of sports at Paris 2024 Summer Olympics are being planned with hospitality offers, for the first time ever. The experience will feature French art de vivre, gastronomy, culture, art, sport, and innovation, which will be a part of the breath-taking backdrop of the city of light.



The official Paris 2024 Hospitality program will meet the needs of fans who wish to watch their favourite athletes participate at the Paris 2024 Summer Olympics, and of customers searching for an all-inclusive hospitality package to enjoy a genuinely unique experience at the games in Paris. The program offers a fantastic and cutting-edge selection of hospitality solutions (including tickets) for various audiences and budgetary conditions. It was developed in close collaboration with IOC, Paris 2024, and the official hospitality supplier, On Location.

**Sheetal Munshaw** – Director, Atout France, India, says, “We do anticipate a demand for travel from India during these major sporting events that France will host. Over the last few years, we have seen a growing interest in sporting events, be it football, tennis, soccer and others. It is more the



**Sheetal Munshaw**  
Director  
Atout France, India

feeling of wanting to be part of a major event that drives people to travel for sporting events in addition to the interest in the sport itself. India’s strong presence in Qatar was a testimony to this in recent times. We are certain that this desire to travel will continue to grow and show positive results for our upcoming sporting events in France. We are also certain that



**Fabrice Favetto-Bon**  
General Manager  
Paris 2024

these events will lead to prolonged stays in France, as we know that travellers going to France to participate in such events tend to explore different regions and experiences of France before or after the sporting event. A press conference that took place during the workshop revealed how France is gearing up for these events and what the visitor can expect in terms of



**Christophe Decloux**  
Managing Director  
Paris Region Tourism Board

hospitality and other experiences, as outlined by our CEO Ms Caroline Leboucher, Mr Thierry Rey – Paris 2024 Special Advisor and Mr Fabrice Favetto-Bon - Paris 2024 General Manager for On Location.”

**Fabrice Favetto-Bon**, General Manager, Paris 2024, On Location, says, “Our Clubhouse 24 offering - a first in Olympic history - is

an innovative concept that allows fans to come together and share in the emotion and excitement of the event within an invitation-only Hospitality environment”. He adds, “In addition to the dedicated On Location sales teams across globe, an extensive global sales network of official sub-distributors in specific regions will deliver customized products, consistent pricing, and a high level of service in local markets”.

Gearing up to host the Olympics 2024, the Paris Region Tourism Board is set to capitalise the opportunity. **Christophe Decloux**, Managing Director, Paris Region Tourism Board, says, “We want to purpose unique experiences during the games. We have positioned sports at the centre of all our activities. We are taking away sports in a big way from the stadium to the city centre at the different monuments and historical sites. It is crucial that visitors who are coming to see the games

have an unforgettable experience in our destination.”

Travel packages are being designed to offer an extensive selection of services to enhance and conclude the stay in Paris. Unique bundles will offer the chance to combine Olym-

**Paris 2024 Hospitality program offers a fantastic and cutting-edge selection of hospitality solutions for various types of audiences**

pic Games, tickets, product components, and program management services for a totally customized and satisfactory experience.

# Bid adieu to travel shopping woes

Travelling requires a lot of planning, and buying a travel plan is one of the complex jobs one has to do. Can travel shopping be as simplified as shopping for clothes? With the right choices provided to the travellers, it just might be possible, says Sandeep Dwivedi, COO, InterGlobe Technology Quotient.



Buying a travel plan often involves a lot of decision-making and if there’s one thing that is the most important for making decisions, it is choice, says **Sandeep Dwivedi**, COO, InterGlobe Technology Quotient. “To put it in simple words, if you don’t have access to ample choices, it is easy to make the wrong call or remain unsatisfied with your decision,” he adds.

## The importance of choice

Dwivedi cites an example to make his point that choice matters. “For instance, you visit a clothing store and have a budget of around ₹5,000 to buy a jacket. You are not sure of the fabric that you want, but you do know that it should fit you well and be of a certain length. In this scenario, the sales representative’s job is to provide you with all the choices falling within or near your range and help you with making the best decisions. He/ she will show you jackets of



**Sandeep Dwivedi**  
COO  
InterGlobe Technology Quotient

different brands with varied fabrics, colours, and prices. You can then easily pick the jacket that fits you the best and might even shell out up to ₹7,000 if you really like the product. That is what usually happens. But imagine if the salesperson only showed you three or four jackets that were way above your price range. Or if he/ she asked you to choose from cheap quality ones,

so that it fits your price bracket. The result would most probably be you walking out empty-handed, or unsatisfied, because you were not presented with enough options and had to take your pick from whatever was available,” he adds.

**We all know the pain that goes behind planning a single trip. People need, and deserve, to be able to choose from many suitable options**

## State of travel shopping

Talking about the state of travel shopping today, he shares, “There is no denying the fact that people enjoy travelling, but we all know the pain that goes behind planning a single trip. People



need, and deserve, to be able to choose from many suitable options and it should not really be a tedious task. But somehow, it is. Travellers often have to consult various websites to compare deals, make bookings through different platforms, conduct research about other deals being offered, and so on. Even then, there is a high chance that they might not get access to all the options available at their dis-

posal, which ultimately results in poor decision making.”

## What can be done?

There is a one-stop solution to this problem, claims Dwivedi. “To get access to the best deals, contact your travel agent and tell him/ her to make your bookings via Travelport+. With this state-of-the-art platform, travel booking and selling is a seamless process and travel agents are equipped with the finest

tools to be able to tell you about the best deals at the best prices. There is a great emphasis on customisation, so that your trip planning can be tailored according to your taste and preferences. Agents using Travelport+ are in a better position to give you options in abundance, sort your travel plans and organise them, so that all that you have to do is board a plane, or a bus, or a car, or a train, and enjoy your travel,” he concludes.



# Understanding travel TRENZ in NZ

New Zealand hosted its largest international B2B travel and trade event, TRENZ at Otautahi Christchurch from 8-11 May 2023. Over three days of appointments, presentations, activities and networking, New Zealand tourism industry leaders and representatives showcased their products and services to high-quality international and New Zealand buyers.





# India priority for Celebrity Cruises

Tim Jones, VP & MD for Asia Pacific, Celebrity Cruises, says that they have a two-fold plan to attract Indian passengers, which includes boosting their numbers from India and promoting India's culture & heritage to the world. Two of its ships – Celebrity Millennium and Celebrity Edge, are set to call in India, which remains an important market for them.



Janice Alyosius

Celebrity Cruises is set to call in India with two of its ships, the Celebrity Millennium and the Celebrity Edge. Tim Jones, Vice President and Managing Director for Asia Pacific, Celebrity Cruises, believes that the Indian market is “incredibly important” for the company for a number of reasons. “The Indian market holds great significance for us at Celebrity Cruises, especially in the Asia Pacific region. One of the primary reasons is the high value that Indian guests bring as a source market. We have noticed that Indian guests tend to opt for our retreat or sweet category accommodations, indicating a preference for a truly elevated and luxurious experience while sailing with us,” he shared.

#### India inbound

Jones also highlighted the importance of India as a destination for international inbound visitors. “The country offers an incredible opportunity for the company

to showcase its offerings to the Indian market and rest of the world. We take pride in offering our guests a comfortable and homely experience on board our ships. India serves as a crucial market for us, providing guests with enriching experiences as in popular destinations like Europe and Alaska, which are the two most sought-after destinations by Indian guests. Additionally, India is also an essential destination for our international inbound visitors. We see this as an excellent opportunity to showcase India's rich culture and heritage to visitors from the US, Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and Europe,” he said.

#### Role of travel trade

Jones stated that the company works closely with the travel trade in India, integrating cruise products into longer tours to Europe and Alaska. Celebrity Cruises also collaborates with terrain travel, the Royal Caribbean Group, to support events, drive



Tim Jones  
Vice President and Managing Director  
Asia Pacific, Celebrity Cruises

FIT through digital and above the line marketing, and set up incentive programs to support travel agents and drive their business. The company attends trade shows and travel shows to talk to a broader travel agent community and business. “Trade and travel shows are fantastic opportunities for us to engage with a wider audience, including travel agents, business leaders, and consum-

ers. We have an incredible story to tell about our brand, products, and ships, and these events allow us to have meaningful conversations with customers and bring our product to life in a way that a brochure cannot,” he said.

#### New vessels to call in India

Celebrity Millennium will operate a series of cruises from Singapore, passing through Sri Lanka, Cochin, Goa, and Mumbai, and back to Singapore, shared Jones. On the other hand, Celebrity Edge will sail to Mumbai on 16 November, showcasing the beauty of the ship to the Indian market. The ship was built in 2018, revolutionizing the way cruise ships are built and offering facilities such as speciality dining, separate private sundecks, exclusive F&B experiences, and separate lounge environments.

#### Two-fold plan to attract Indians

Jones shared, “I believe there are two aspects to consider regarding our plans for the Indian market.



**Celebrity Edge will sail to Mumbai on 16 November, showcasing the beauty of the ship to the Indian market**

Firstly, we aim to encourage more Indians to explore the world with us by travelling on our beautiful

ships in Europe, Alaska, Australia, New Zealand, and potentially closer to home in India and Southeast Asia, where we plan to operate later this year. We see this as a massive opportunity, considering the significant growth of our market in India over the years. Our goal is to restore our passenger numbers to pre-pandemic levels. Secondly, we are excited about the opportunity to showcase India to a broader international audience through our programs, itineraries, and ship deployments. We believe that our initiatives can help promote India's culture and heritage to business leaders and guests from all over the world. So, we have two main priorities in this region - increasing the number of Indian passengers and highlighting India's beauty and charm to the rest of the world.”

*Minor Hotels announces the signing of an MoU with Saudi Arabia's Tourism Development Fund to jointly develop and operate high-quality hospitality and lifestyle projects focused on mountain resorts, wellness resorts in the Kingdom.*

# One ticket, multiple options

Switzerland Tourism is promoting the Swiss Travel System as a convenient and sustainable way to explore the country, which can be accessed with one ticket. The Swiss Travel Pass enables visitors to explore Switzerland seamlessly by train, bus or boat, says Misha Gambetta, Director India, Switzerland Tourism.



Hazel Jain

#### What are your focus areas for 2023 for the India market?

Switzerland Tourism is constantly communicating different aspects of what the country offers through various campaigns detailing our outdoor experiences, as well as sustainable travel experiences. The ‘100% Women’ campaign that we started back in 2021 encourages women to experience outdoor offerings of Switzerland such as hiking, mountaineering and biking, either solo or in groups. Switzerland has more than 12,000 km of standardised, sign-posted cycling routes. The many attractive paths along riverbanks and lake shores, with only minor uphill sections, are a highlight. With easy rentals and inter-connected railways, one can always mix and match a bike experience with public transport to cover this beautiful country. Through these initiatives, we aim to strengthen the posi-

tion of Switzerland as a diverse holiday destination for women. Our popular campaign with our Friendship Ambassador Neeraj Chopra — Indian sports icon and Olympic gold medalist — to promote our spectacular outdoors and numerous adventure activities will continue through this year to show more activities one can do across seasons. We are also heavily promoting the Swiss Travel System as a convenient and sustainable way to explore the country, which can be accessed with one ticket - the Swiss Travel Pass.

#### What are you currently promoting in the India market?

Indian travellers have always been great lovers of train travel in Switzerland, so we are currently promoting The Grand Train Tour of Switzerland. This tour is the ultimate train journey for all rail buffs, as it merges all our panoramic lines into one breathtaking route. The Grand Train Tour of Switzerland, that can be done all year-round,



Misha Gambetta  
Director India  
Switzerland Tourism

covers 1,280 km, taking passengers through the most charming Swiss cities to alpine hotspots, through UNESCO World Heritage Sites and past world-famous landmarks. To enjoy this tour, travellers need only one single ticket: the Swiss Travel Pass - an all-in-one ticket valid across all modes of public transportation in Switzer-

land. The pass is popular among Indian tourists, who are its top two or three buyers worldwide. So, promoting a train tour with the Swiss Travel Pass is key to our marketing strategy in India currently.

#### Do you observe any changes in travel behaviour post COVID?

We are seeing a huge shift in the way people travel, especially Indians. We have a growing young target audience for whom the type of vacation they seek is also evolving. They look at being active and engaged on a holiday across seasons. Destinations and attractions that go beyond the usual clichés are much sought-after. They want experiences that are long-lasting, and which allow them to connect deeply with local culture, food, history and the people. Indian guests spend 340 CHF (Swiss Franc) on an average — per person, per day and their stay can vary anywhere between seven to eight days. The pandemic also made some changes in travel patterns - people

now also want to travel out of season. For these target groups who want to discover lesser-known aspects of Switzerland, such as other seasons, autumn and winter for example, are spoiled for choice on destinations and activities to do outdoors, in contact with nature, in

cities, during these months of the year: winter sports, the gastronomic events typical of the autumn season, where at the level of local products, Switzerland is even more generous and varied, the cities in the Christmas season with its many Christmas markets.”

## Thomas Cook India's take on business

“We are seeing very high demand for Switzerland this season from key markets like Karnataka, Maharashtra, Delhi NCR, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Gujarat. Our data indicate that Indians are staying longer and spending more in Switzerland versus pre-pandemic, and also doing in-depth explorations. Indian travellers are engaging in immersive mountain experiences in Switzerland like visiting Mt. Titlis on the world's first rotating cable car, a ride to visit Jungfraujoch and visiting the Ice Palace and the Sphinx observatory deck to view the longest glacier in the Alps, experiencing the Alpine coaster at Glacier 3000 - the highest situated toboggan run in the world, the stunning lakeside towns and Olympic Museum of Lausanne and Montreux on Lake Geneva, along with some shopping destinations.



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



# Adding sports to MICE experience

The Indian sports tourism market is a booming subsegment and offers substantial possibilities for experiential tourism, corporate, and MICE travel. Amit Vyas, Head – MICE & Sports Travel, DreamSetGo, highlights some exceptional sports-related experiences that the company offers.



Hazel Jain

**What are some of the MICE/ MISE trends that you see emerge in 2023-24?**

In recent years, there has been a shift in the way people travel and experience culture. Moving from traditional to experiential-based travel; Sports events like F1 in Baku, Singapore and Abu Dhabi; Chelsea, Manchester City, Manchester United & Wimbledon in UK; ICC Men's T20 World Cup Australia 2022 and Rugby in European nations have gained popularity. As travellers seek out new and meaningful experiences that go beyond the conventional tourist experience, event-based travel is the future of MICE, with sports travel experiences to premium events gaining traction within this sub-group.

**How is Dreamsetgo making MICE/ MISE more experiential than it ever was? Please share some examples to give travel agents an idea of what they can offer their clients?**

The Indian sports tourism market



**Amit Vyas**  
Head – MICE & Sports Travel  
DreamSetGo

is a booming subsegment of the overall tourism sector and offers substantial possibilities for experiential tourism, corporate, and MICE travel.

Corporates continue to look to sports to provide incentives and build loyalty. We specialise in corporate or incentive travel to reward workers and external stakeholders through our MISE

(Meetings, Incentives & Sports Experiences) segment. We also curate luxury corporate experiences focusing on sports for CXOs and business executives seeking for something different.

With our exclusive sporting partnerships, we provide different experiences like first team training, meet and greet with legends, VIP hospitality and official signed merchandise. While traditional MICE services like high-tea and gala dinners were always high up the list, but with the change in trend, the requirement has shifted and evolved from conventional offerings into extraordinary experiences. We also have a few groups going abroad for board meetings overlooking the stadium exclusively customised for their c-suite executives.

We also partnered with Red Bull to arrange some incredible experiences for F1 fans, including a Fireside Chat with Legend David Coulthard, a Private Tour of the



spectacular RB7 Formula 1 car, Grandstand Seating, and access to the After Party. We have also organised a private yacht dinner with Brett Lee and Michael Clarke, as well as a DreamSetGo Diwali celebration with Venkatesh Prasad, Harbhajan Singh, Aamir Sohail, Mike Hussey, and Gautam Bhimani.

**Why should travel agents choose DreamSetGo for their clients' MISE needs?**

With an array of exclusive

partnerships, DreamSetGo offers premium, end-to-end experiences across football, cricket, tennis, motorsports, rugby, and golf among others.

By offering 'money-can't-buy' experiences with the best premium hospitality access, legend meet and greets, our ability to offer unique services sets us apart. Travel agents can use DreamSetGo's sporting experiences to enhance their clients' experience on the field.

**Please share details of some of the new packages that you want to promote in India?**

Currently, we have partnerships with Manchester United, On Location, ICC Travel & Tours, and Rugby World Cup 2023. We have curated offerings such as High Tea with Ganguly at Lords, among others. There are also a few exciting partnerships that we'll announce soon. Our exclusive packages that cater to diverse sports fans can be accessed on our website at [www.dreamsetgo.co](http://www.dreamsetgo.co).

# J&K to be in top-50 destinations

Contd from page 5

G20 nations, global organisations and invited countries will result in the achievement of inclusive and action-oriented decisive guidelines for the tourism industry.

## Film tourism

A side event on Film Tourism for Economic Growth and Cultural Preservation was held as part of the TWG meeting in Srinagar, where **Amitabh Kant**, G20 Sherpa, India, said the pristine beauty of the UT has the potential to pose itself as a film tourism destination. "There is no better film destination than J&K, which has everything to offer to the film industry," he claimed. Kant highlighted the strides taken by the government in improving overall infrastructure development across the country, especially in J&K and the tourism sector.

Reddy, in his address, said India will be one stop for film production having beautiful locations, talented technicians, state of the art post-production facilities that can create amazing visuals with the world-class sound effects. "The side event is of utmost importance as it will explore the potential of film tourism and its



G Kishan Reddy, Union Minister of Culture, Tourism and DoNER at the the Third G20 Tourism Working Group Meeting in Srinagar

contribution to our vibrant tourism industry. Film tourism is a powerful medium to promote tourism potential, as films have an impact on the travel choices attracting tourists all over the world," he added.

Telugu film actor, producer and entrepreneur, **K. Ram Charan** was also present. He said the beauty of J&K is magical. "It attracts people towards its pristine beauty, magical mountains and what not," he said.

The event also had a panel comprising delegates from Spain, Sin-

gapore, Mauritius, Nigeria, South Africa, Brazil, and India, which presented global perspectives of film tourism and highlighted challenges and country-specific enablers for promoting destinations through films.

A Draft National Strategy for Film Tourism was also unveiled on the occasion.

**Apurva Chandra**, Secretary, Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, highlighted the importance of the Film Facilitation Office (FFO)

in promoting film tourism. "FFO acts as a single window facilitation and clearance mechanism to ease filming in India and create a film-friendly ecosystem and promoting the country as a filming destination," he added.

**Lohita Sujith**, Senior Director, Motion Pictures Association, in a side event on film tourism hosted as a part of the main event presented global perspectives on film tourism that can help India position itself in the domain. **Syed Abid Rashid Shah**, Secretary Tourism, J&K, set

the context for the session on 'The untapped potential of Film Tourism in promoting Incredible India' highlighting the potential of the J&K for being the perfect destination for film shooting remarked about the need of a plan of action involving all stakeholders for implementing the policies adopted to position India as film tourism destination.

## Bringing everyone together

**Minga Sherpa**, Director Information, J&K, presented highlights from the tourism policies adopted by the UT to ease the process of film shooting in the region. He highlighted the government has opened 300 locations across the UT as film shooting locations and made a single window system operational for hassle-free process for film shooting. **Gayatri Rathore**, Principal Secretary, Tourism, Rajasthan, made a presentation and showcased key highlights from the state's policy where they have streamlined the process to help get producers shooting permission within 15 days through a single clearance window. **Sourabh Zamsingh Pardhi**, Managing Director & Commissioner of Tourism, Gujarat, highlighted the development of better connectivity and logistic facilities offered by the

state to the producers have gone a long way in encouraging film tourism in the state. **Sheo Shekhar Shukla**, Principal Secretary, Tourism & Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, told the audience about the film festival hosted in Madhya Pradesh and a comfortable ecosystem developed for facilitating film shooting has been adopted through the policy.

**Film tourism is a powerful medium to promote tourism potential, as films have an impact on the travel choices attracting tourists all over the world**

**Sandra Carvao**, Chief of Tourism Market Intelligence and Competitiveness, World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), made presentation on second draft of Goa Road map for Tourism as a vehicle of Achieving Sustainable Development Goals.



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1-3	Global Travel Marketplace	10:00 am
5-8	International Conference on Tourism	9:00 am
7	Abu Dhabi Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
7	NTB Roadshow - Kochi	5:00 pm
9	NTB Roadshow - Coimbatore	5:00 pm
12	NTB Roadshow - Madurai	5:00 pm
14	NTB Roadshow - Ahmedabad	5:00 pm
14	New Zealand Tourism Webinar	11:00 am
14-17	Bali & Beyond Travel Fair	9:00 am
15-18	The MICE Travel Expo	9:00 am
15-18	Hong Kong International Travel Expo 2023	10:00 am
16	NTB Roadshow - Vadodara	5:00 pm
16-18	Beijing International Tourism Expo 2023	9:00 am
16-18	Tourism Fair - Kolkata	11:00 am
19	NTB Roadshow - Surat	5:00 pm
19-22	4 <sup>th</sup> G20 Tourism Working Group Meeting - Goa	10:00 am
19-22	ILTM Asia Pacific 2023	9:00 am
21-23	PATA Destination Experience Forum and Mart	9:00 am
24-25	8 <sup>th</sup> Travel Wedding Show	10:00 am

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

# 'Aim to hit 1 mn mark this decade'

Tourism Australia's ambitious goal of hitting the one million arrival mark from India could just as well be achieved before deadline, as more and more agents sell Australia and its Signature Experiences that immerse the traveller and lure them to stay back longer.



Hazel Jain

India is now number four in terms of visitor arrivals for Australia for year ending March '23 as compared to number seven pre-COVID, says **Nishant Kashikar**, Country Manager, India and Gulf, Tourism Australia. Since the opening of Australian borders to Indian visitors, which was April 2022, arrivals for year ended March '23 were at 98 per cent of pre-Covid levels. "India is the fastest growing market for Tourism Australia, and possibly the first market to recover to pre-COVID levels. We want to achieve our 2019 numbers, which was 4,00,000, by June 2023. And then continue our journey to achieve a much higher goal of touching a million visitors by the end of this decade," he adds.

Sharing some trends that he sees from the India market, Kashikar adds, "Indians are also staying longer, travelling beyond the key gateway cities, and contributing to the Australian economy in a much more significant manner. At least a couple of weeks or longer on a



Nishant Kashikar and Karen Fitzgerald

holiday. The VFR traffic obviously stays longer. We are confident that this campaign will offer a compelling reason for travellers to plan early and book their next holiday to Australia well in advance."

He was referring to the trade program that Tourism Australia has developed called Signature Experiences of Australia. It packages and promotes Australia's tourism

experiences within a variety of niche areas and special interest categories. **Karen Fitzgerald**, General Manager, Experiences, Tourism Australia, says, "It is a program for the trade, and we have an experiences portal that the trade can get on and find all the 700 experiences by theme. The beauty of Signature Experiences for the luxury travel advisor is that it's a great place to

start. The most popular would be undoubtedly the Luxury Lodges of Australia. That would absolutely be number one. Behind that would be Wildlife and Wine experiences. Cultural attractions, particularly around our sporting



**Indians are also staying longer, travelling beyond the key gateway cities, and contributing to the Australian economy in a significant way**

venues, are also very popular. Soft adventure is also really appealing for Indian visitors." She adds, "The luxury traveller from India is looking to experience Australia through the eyes of the local people. A lot of Indians are adventurous, so there is a lot of self-drive." 🐦

# 'Choice for intimate celebrations'

Rajat Gera, Director of Sales & Marketing, Six Senses Fort Barwara, believes that the property, which played host to big celebrity weddings in the very first year of its opening, is getting popular not only through word of mouth, but also by making sure that the guests get a personalised service experience during their stay.



TT Bureau

Six Senses Fort Barwara is the ultimate choice for intimate celebrations, says **Rajat Gera**, Director of Sales & Marketing, Six Senses Fort Barwara. Sharing why the property is best-suited for such events, he says, "Our opulent interiors and outdoor venues, along with the authentic backdrop of a 700-year-old Zenana Mahal, a step-well, and a historic Radhe Krishna temple wholeheartedly restored to its former glory, are what constitute a unique Six Senses Fort Barwara experience. The fact that all our seasonal and organic customised menus are created with the guiding principles of 'Eat with Six Senses', is what makes us an excellent option for intimate celebrations. As we prepare and store our uniquely infused alcoholic beverages in the minibar, even our alcohol is exclusively crafted for Fort Barwara."

## High expectations

The property played host to big



**Rajat Gera**  
Director of Sales & Marketing  
Six Senses Fort Barwara

celebrity weddings in the first year of its opening, which immediately brought it in people's eyes. Sharing how they are delivering as per such high expectations, Gera adds, "Maintaining and conserving the rich tradition and architecture of Barwara's regal past is largely responsible for our success. The real theme of the rustic chic décor of the fort is highlighted

by the eclectic blending of antique and modern. In an all-suite hotel, the guest experience is everything, so every suite has its own GEM (Guest Experience Maker). For all our guests, it is the host that provides unmatched service and global cuisines on ground."

## Personalised services

He further adds, "As mentioned above, in this 48-suite property, all discerning guests' needs are taken care by GEM from pre-arrival to post-departure cycle. From guiding them about the ex-



**Maintaining and conserving the rich tradition and architecture of Barwara's regal past is largely responsible for our success**



pected weather to taking note of dietary requirements, marking and celebrating special occasions to unpacking all requests are met by our young and diligent team."

## MICE status

Talking about MICE, he says, "We engage in selective MICE business, and our clients are those who are tired of holding meetings in predictable formats. The viewing gallery, the Cortile's enormous fire pits,

and Zenana Bagh's event lawns serve as designated areas for creative outdoor meeting set-ups and team-building activities. Our Barwara State Room is useful for gatherings and parties that go late into the night."

## Business prospects

Gera claims that in terms of promotions, word of mouth has worked well for the property. "Since we first commissioned Six Senses

Fort Barwara, it has only been a 1.5-year journey, but it has steadily built a reputation as one of the top immersive venues for intimate gatherings. Mostly the business comes through referrals. However, some of it is direct. We also offer a Celebrate with Six Senses package, which has a cap on the number of suites that may be reserved. We advertise this offer both on our website and with business partners," he informs. 🐦



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# MOVEMENTS

## MALAYSIA AIRLINES

New Delhi

Malaysia Airlines has promoted **AMIT MEHTA** as its Regional Manager – South Asia, Middle East, and Africa. He will now be responsible for augmenting the airline's operation in Southern Asia, Middle East, and Africa. Mehta has been working with Malaysia Airlines since 2007 and brings with him more than 20 years of extensive managerial and commercial experience in the aviation industry. He has successfully managed diverse portfolios, including profit centre operations, sales, marketing, and revenue management, equipping him to excel in this new role. Mehta said, "I am excited to continue my journey with Malaysia Airline."



## HYATT CENTRIC MG ROAD BANGALORE

Bangalore

Hyatt Centric MG Road Bangalore appoints **ADITYA SABHARWAL** as the new Revenue Manager. He will be responsible for ensuring the strategic goals of the hotel are met through a methodical approach to pricing, while maximizing revenues and yield. Before this, Sabharwal was a Senior Revenue Analyst with Marriott International in the Goa Cluster. With around eight years of experience in various hotels, Sabharwal brings with him a clear understanding and expertise of business in the hospitality sector. As a Revenue Manager, his role will be to closely monitor and predict market trends and respond accordingly to changes in demand.



## GREEN SPACES

Nashik

Green Spaces, creators of Eco-Retreats in Nashik, has appointed **REEMA KHAN** as Group Head for Grape County and Viveda Wellness. Reema will be instrumental in achieving the resort goals of strengthening the brand's imagery, elevating unique and unforgettable experiences for the guests with strong focus on eco-tourism and minimizing environmental impact. A seasoned leader with a track record of envisioning and implementing ideas that have fuelled market presence and driven revenue for multiple hotels and resorts, her appointment comes at a time when the eco-resort group gears up for growth.



## HYATT PLACE

Vadodara

Hyatt Place Vadodara has appointed **NEHA KAPOOR** as the new General Manager. This will be her first stint as General Manager as she joins the property from her previous assignment as Assistant General Manager at Hyatt Place Hyderabad Banjara Hills. Having started her career as part of the Front Office Team, she has risen through the ranks steadily and brings in over 19 years of hospitality experience. Neha has spent more than 13 years with Hyatt and has worked for various brands under the Hyatt India umbrella. She has also worked with JW Marriott Mumbai, Sofitel Mumbai (Pre-opening) and Palladium Hotel Mumbai.



## HILTON

Chennai

**SARAVANAN** has been named as the new Commercial Director for Hilton Chennai, a 204-room unit of Empee Hotels Limited, situated in Guindy. He will lead the execution of the commercial strategy, sales and marketing while supporting the hotel's mission to provide outstanding service to guests. He holds 15 years of valuable experience with a diverse portfolio in the hospitality industry and has worked with well-reputed brands in India such as the Oberoi Hotels and Resorts, Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts and Marriott International. Saravanan has vast experience in Food and Beverage, events planning, sales and marketing.



## HILTON GOA RESORT

Goa

Hilton Goa Resort elevates **ABISHEK CHANDRAN** to Cluster Director of Marketing & Communications. Chandran has demonstrated exceptional skills and knowledge of the hospitality industry, as well as ability to lead effective marketing and communication strategies for Hilton Goa Resort and DoubleTree by Hilton Goa at Arpora. His remarkable achievements in his previous role as Cluster Marketing & Communication Manager have been instrumental in driving the success of the Hilton Goa Resort and DoubleTree by Hilton Goa, Arpora - Baga. He has delivered exceptional campaigns, managed brand standards effectively, and built strong relationships with stakeholders.



## NOVOTEL

Pune

Novotel Pune appoints **HEMANT PIMPLE** as the new Sales Manager. With more than 12 years of experience in sales and marketing, Pimple brings a wealth of expertise and knowledge to his new role. He will be responsible for developing and implementing sales strategies to drive revenue growth. He will lead the proactive sales team in identifying new business opportunities and building strong relationships with customers to deliver exceptional service and value. Hemant's previous experience includes working as the Regional Sales Manager at Pride Group of Hotels. In the past, Hemant has been associated with many other prominent hotels.



## NOVOTEL VISAKHAPATNAM VARUN BEACH

Visakhapatnam

Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach welcomes **PRAVEEN C** as the new Food and Beverage Manager. With 16 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Praveen brings a strong passion for excellence and a drive to achieve the highest quality and service standards. In his previous role as Assistant F&B Manager, Praveen showcased exceptional skills in coordinating marketing and promotions, leading and evaluating his team, and managing the overall F&B budget. His collaboration with various departments resulted in successful presentations, revenue packages, and F&B promotions.



Hilton Goa Resort has promoted **SIDDHANT SALGAONKAR** to the position of Director of Sales. He joined the hotel group in March 2019. In his new role, apart from overseeing all the sales operations of Hilton Goa Resort, Salgaonkar will also be in-charge of a diverse portfolio that encompasses proactive sales, reactive/catering sales, reservations, and revenue generation. His mandate will be to align sales plans with the overarching business strategy, identify potential risks, and implement robust measures to mitigate any budgetary exposure. Additionally, he will be working with the revenue strategy team to stay abreast of market trends.



## TALKing People

**NIKHIL SHARMA**, Market Managing Director, Eurasia, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, likes to go on long walks and listen to podcasts. "It evokes a sense of serenity and improves my focus and productivity. The lockdown gave me time to reflect and unleash my creative side in writing. I finally co-authored a book titled 'Rumi & Kabir Consulting', which talks about the two different worlds of spirituality and corporate hustle. I love to travel and explore new places around the world. So far, Jaisalmer and Maldives are my favourite holiday destination picks," he says.



In order to wind down after a day's work, **ABHISHEK MUKHERJEE**, Director of Sales, Fairfield by Marriott Kolkata, takes breaks, spends time with old friends, and enjoy moments away from work to relax. "During the lockdown, I developed a new skill and hobby of cooking, which I thoroughly enjoy and find fulfilling. Goa is my preferred holiday destination in India due to its beautiful beaches, rich culture, and vibrant nightlife. For my next vacation, I am planning to visit the picturesque Spiti Valley to explore its stunning landscapes and unique culture," he says.



**GIRISH MENON**, Associate Director – Business Development, Sayaji Group of Hotels, loves watching his favourite movies or going for a long drive, which helps lower his stress hormones every time. He says, "During the lockdown, I learnt the art of making different fruit juices at home, which helped boost my immunity. I love travelling. Nature is what I like, hence Canada is my favourite holiday destination internationally and within the country it is Tawang in North-East India. My next holiday will be to the vast wildlife reserve of India, Ranthambore in Rajasthan."





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# Competing for global visitor

New Zealand, a niche tourism destination, is working hard to provide a great visitor experience and sustainably develop international tourism while creating employment, protecting heritage and replenishing nature.



TT Bureau

In an incredibly competitive market, New Zealand is working hard to find ways to stand out from the crowd. They aim to drive the desire for destination New Zealand and convert demand into bookings. TRENZ, a significant international travel trade event for New Zealand’s tourism industry, was held in Christchurch to showcase their products and services to high-quality international travel buyers. During the event, **René de Monchy**, Chief Executive, Tourism New Zealand, to understand his vision for the sector. Here are the excerpts:

## Fierce competition

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on global tourism. With borders now open and tough economic conditions around the globe, destinations are competing fiercely for visitors. Tourism is critical to many countries’ economies and New Zealand is no different.

Tourism New Zealand is influencing the quality of international visitors for the long-term benefits. “We target visitors who are more likely to positively contribute to Aotearoa New Zealand’s culture, nature, society and economy. By 2030, our vision is that all visitors to New Zealand are high-quality and lead to a more productive and regenerative Aotearoa New Zealand,” Monchy said, adding that high-quality visitors are not about high net worth, but travellers engaging with our culture, those that will undertake a range of experiences while they are here and travel at different times of the year.

## Tourism earnings

Prior to COVID, tourism was New Zealand’s number one export earner, delivering \$40.9 billion to the country. Tourism made a significant positive impact on regional

economies by supporting employment by directly employing 8.4 per cent (229,566 people) of the New Zealand workforce.

Since the pandemic, pent-up demand for New Zealand and airline connectivity supported a strong start to New Zealand’s tourism recovery with total holiday arrivals at 57 per cent of the pre-COVID levels in January.

“Preference for New Zealand among those actively considering visiting it is at an all-time high of 44.8 per cent, giving us a highly motivated group of people to reach with our campaign activ-

ities,” he said. “However, tough economic conditions and fierce global competition mean recovery is expected to plateau. We have seen this already with visitor arrivals at 53 per cent in February. We are also seeing flight sales made through our offshore travel agents, plateau for future travel in May and June,” he added.

“To stay top of mind for travellers, look after our home, provide a great visitor experience and support the country’s economy, New Zealand needs to work harder than ever before. In a nutshell, while off to a strong start, international visitation is expected to plateau and we will need to work hard to support visitation, competing with other destinations that have bigger budgets to keep New Zealand top of mind,” he said.

## Strength

Monchy said that New Zealand’s key strengths also include positioning the destination as a place to escape, relax and refresh, that is clean with many unique experiences. “Travellers who are interested in doing more, seeing more, and engaging more deeply with Aotearoa are more likely to be higher-quality visitors – those who want to

engage in our natural environment, and those who want to experience our culture,” he said.

“Our research also shows that consumers are increasingly looking for destinations that can simply and authentically demonstrate sustainable practices. We are confident the New Zealand tourism industry can deliver on this. We aim to ensure that we deliver on the promise of the holiday of a lifetime,” he concluded.

**Holiday visitors are spending \$610 (16%) more on average. Between July and December, these visitors contributed 1.5 bn to the NZ economy**

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However, holiday visitors are spending \$610 (16 per cent) more on average. Between July and December, these visitors contributed 1.5 billion to the New Zealand economy. “While preference for international travel to New Zealand remains high as a result of work in markets, we do



René de Monchy  
Chief Executive  
Tourism New Zealand

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