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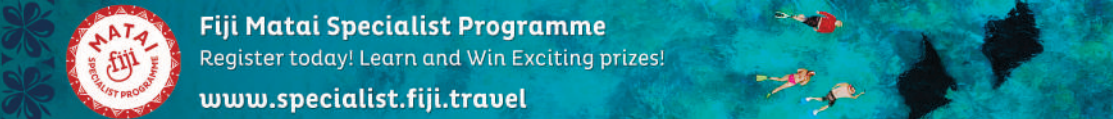
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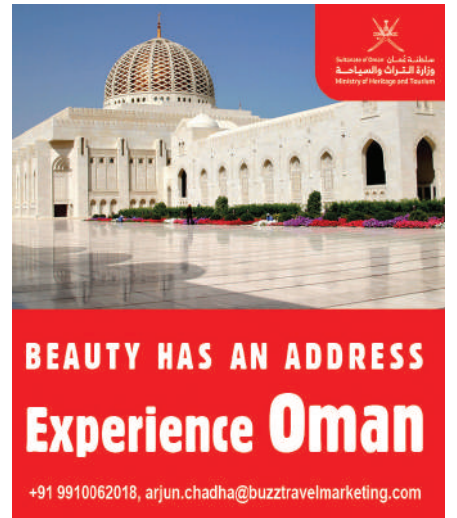
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Collaboration key to growth of MICE

MICE professionals across India are positive about its appeal as premier MICE destination. Barun Gupta, President, SITE India Chapter, believes G20 will be a game changer for India's growth of exhibitions and incentives across states.



Janice Alyosius

Collaboration, marketing efforts, and simplified visa processes are seen as factors to improve India's MICE image. With a diverse range of experiential destinations and captivating experiences, India aims to attract a wide range of visitors. As it invests in infrastructure, India's rise as a global MICE destination offers opportunities for success.

Reflecting on the post-pandemic scenario, **Barun Gupta**, President, SITE India Chapter, expressed optimism this year. Attributing growth to India's participation in the G20 and the increase in exhibitions and incentives across cities and states, he said, "This year is promising and exciting for the MICE industry, with ample opportunities for both domestic and international travellers."

India ideal MICE destination

Naveen Kundu, MD, EbixCash, said the macro-economic indicators, ongoing infra development, and the government's vision will position India as an ideal MICE destination soon. Kundu added, "India is an emerging market and is rapidly on way to become the favoured destination in APAC." He averred the country's vision along with its ability to offer short-haul

and long-haul MICE experiences thereby luring visitors from nearby Asian countries, as well as European and American nations.

Aggressive marketing

Kundu stressed the need to market India aggressively as a MICE destination and spoke of the changes that have taken place in India's convention sector in the past five years, with several convention



Naveen Kundu
Managing Director, EbixCash



Barun Gupta
President, SITE India Chapter

centres in the pipeline. Kundu said, "Within the next decade, India will have large and medium-

scale convention centres in 30 cities, providing ample supply for
Contd on page 10 ►

What's luring visitors from tertiary cities?

Indian travellers are being most sought after by various destinations, and people are not just travelling from bigger cities. People from tier III and IV cities are also making sure that they explore the world. And they are not disappointed. Big movements are happening from these regions to different domestic and international destinations.



Puneet Bharti
Director, Global Dream Travel Consultants, Ludhiana

"Dubai, Bali, and Singapore are currently selling like hot cakes, with Dubai attracting a significant clientele from Punjab. Although air connectivity is available from Amritsar and Chandigarh, there has been a temporary cancellation of flights from Amritsar for a week. We have encountered no major issues with customs and immigration procedures so far, and our clients are enjoying the abundance of attractions in Dubai. Bali is another popular destination, known for its appeal to honeymooners. Singapore, with its Dante Cruise, is a must on many people's travel bucket lists. Among domestic travel destinations, first and foremost is Goa, which is a favourite among Indian and foreign travellers, followed by Himachal Pradesh, which has the enticing Shimla, Kasauli, and Manali. Of late, many travellers are opting for the UT of J&K, which is another sparkling destination. With air fares having risen of late, people from Chandigarh, Amritsar and surrounding cities are choosing to travel by road."



Anil Punjabi
Director, AR-ES Travels, Kolkata and TAFI Chairman, East

"The most popular destinations for our clients currently are the UT of J&K, Darjeeling, Goa, and Rajasthan. We are getting a lot of queries for these destinations. We have noticed that the clients are now more inclined to travel for leisure or just to get out of hustle and bustle of the city. These are the few of the destinations that are in demand now. There is direct connectivity to all these locations, both via flights as well as by rail. The factor of direct connectivity to the destinations does help with the traveller bookings. Clients want to get to their desired destination as fast as possible, but with doable ticket rates. Travelling has become an essential part for the upcoming generation, as they are more likely to explore destinations, cultures, and cuisine. The country has a lot to offer, and West Bengal has a several hidden gems or places that are yet to be explored. Our main goal is also to promote these destinations further."

Contd on page 8 ►

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MoCA focuses on rationalizing air fare

India's aviation market has witnessed remarkable growth, becoming the third-largest domestic market globally. MoCA has focused on promoting regional connectivity through UDAN scheme. The sector faces challenges such as seasonal fluctuations and capacity constraints. Efforts are being made to rationalize pricing, with reductions on key routes.



Janice Alyosius

India has emerged as the third-largest domestic aviation market globally. The number of domestic passengers has doubled from 60 million in 2014 to 143 million in 2020. International passengers have also shown substantial growth, marking an increase of almost 50 per cent, rising from 43 million to 64 million. Despite challenges posed by COVID, the number of aircraft have risen from around 400 in 2014 to 723 in 2023, said **Jyotiraditya M. Scindia**, Union Minister of Civil Aviation, celebrating the MoCA's achievements on the completion of nine years of the BJP-led NDA government in New Delhi.

Airport expansion, connectivity
Progress has been made in expanding airport infrastructure across the country. The Minister said, "Until 2014, only 74 airports were operational in India. The Union government has operationalized an additional 74 airports, helipads, and

water aerodromes by March 2023, with an objective of reaching a total of 220 airports. This expansion ensures improved connectivity and accessibility for passengers."

Regional connectivity through UDAN

Over the past nine years, the ministry has operationalized 11 greenfield airports. Under the UDAN scheme, 180 Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) airports, including 25 water aerodromes

Despite challenges posed by the pandemic, the number of aircraft in the country have risen from around 400 in 2014 to 723 in 2023



Jyotiraditya M. Scindia, Union Minister of Civil Aviation

and 40 helipads, have been identified to facilitate regional flights in India. Currently, 475 RCS routes out of the awarded 1,152 routes are operational, connecting 74 airports, including nine heliports and two water aerodromes. He highlighted, "The RCS UDAN scheme has enabled 121.67 lakh passengers to travel, with ₹2585.25 crore released as VGF to select airline operators. The recent launch of Udan 5.1 focuses on enhancing helicopter routes, further expanding regional connectivity."

Birth of new airlines

Emphasizing the significant growth in India's aviation sector, with the emergence of new airlines after a span of 25 years, Scindia said, "For instance, Akasa Airlines started with only two aircraft and now boasts a fleet of 16 planes. The Udan Yojna has operationalised many regional airlines, including Star Air, IndiaOne Air, and FlyBig. It is crucial to highlight these success stories to inspire others to contribute to the growth of the aviation industry."

Seasonal schedules, capacity constraints

The minister acknowledged the aviation industry, like the rest of the world, operates in seasons. "The high season in India occurs between October-January during the festive season, followed by a low season between February-April. The holiday season between May-July marks another high season, which transitions into another low season with the onset of the monsoon. The current surge in demand can be attributed to excess operations and capacity constraints caused by airlines such as Go First suspending services. This combination of increased demand and limited capacity has resulted in a tremendous influx of passengers and higher seat load factors, ranging from 94-95 per cent," he said.

Rationalize pricing

At a meeting with all airlines to address the issue of high air fares, Scindia stressed the importance of rationalizing pricing, particularly on sectors that have experienced

maximum pressure due to unforeseen incidents in locations such as Manipur, Odisha, and Bhubaneswar. "Following the meeting, significant reductions in air fare were observed, with prices drop-

Akasa Airlines started with two aircraft and now boasts of 16 planes. The Udan Yojna has operationalised many regional airlines

ping between 14 per cent and 61 per cent on Delhi-Srinagar, Delhi-Leh, Delhi-Pune, and Delhi-Mumbai routes. The DGCA and we are monitoring ticket pricing daily," he said. The MoCA remains committed to facilitating the growth of the aviation sector, Scindia added.



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Transition to Artificial Intelligence

ChatGPT has taken the world by storm, and every industry is seeing its use, as well as threats. It has become a harbinger of immense possibilities in every type of market, including travel and tourism. Virtual assistants are already offering tailor-made itineraries for clients. Apart from that they are in action everywhere from booking flights, checking in baggage, hotel coordination in any language possible and giving virtual tours of cities one aspires to visit. This means reduced overheads for travel firms, which might be a boon in the post-pandemic world, where everyone is looking to cut costs. Another plus is that travellers are enjoying these automated functions at their fingertips. However, the downside is huge job losses, which might take place in every industry, owing to reliance on AI in the future. In travel, which saw a huge manpower crunch after it revived post-COVID, it can be a deterrent. While the industry needs AI-enabled functions at the back-end, it is a human touch industry, and needs people when servicing clients. Hence, one must look for a balance, where humans and chatbots can co-exist.

Narrowing down on sustainability

The Union Ministry of Tourism had released the National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism last year, under which certification for sustainability was to be put in place for accommodation units, destinations, and operators. The MOT held many events in all states to sensitize stakeholders about the need for certification and has promoted the Travel for LIFE initiative, which the Hon'ble PM had unveiled. While the attendees had signed the pledge, progress still needs to be made for the certifications to be issued. The MOT has been propagating the idea of SCTI certification as one of the strategic pillars of National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism to mainstream sustainability into tourism sector. India's G20 agenda is also to promote green tourism and achieve the UN sustainable development goals 2030. But how the industry perceives it needs to be known.

'Airlines to post profits in 2023'

Airline profitability outlook will strengthen this year, reveals a recent report by IATA. After COVID, a net profit margin of 1.2% is something to celebrate, avers Willie Walsh, Director General, IATA. Recording a 0.6% net profit margin is indeed a challenge for the industry.

TT Bureau

Stronger profitability is supported by several positive developments. Cargo revenues remain above pre-pandemic levels even though volumes have not. And, on the cost side, there is some relief. Jet fuel prices are still high, but have moderated over the first half of the year, said **Willie Walsh**, Director General, IATA, while mentioning how financial performance of the airlines is beating all expectations this year.

Revealing statistics, Walsh said, "The net profitability has returned with 1.2 per cent, which is a major achievement. It was



achieved at a time of economic uncertainties, and secondly it follows the deepest losses in aviation's history (US\$183.3 billion of net losses for 2020-2022 for an average net profit margin drop of 11.3 per cent in that period). It should be noted the airline industry



entered the global health crisis at the end of a historic profit streak that saw an average net profit margin of 4.2 per cent for the 2015-2019 period."

Commenting about the economic uncertainties, the IATA director general said, "The uncertainties have not dampened the people's



After the losses borne by the industry during the pandemic, even a net profit margin of 1.2 per cent was something to celebrate

desire to travel, even as the ticket prices absorbed elevated fuel costs. After the losses borne by

Outlook drivers

- ❖ Industry revenues to reach US\$803 billion in 2023
- ❖ Expenses are expected to reach US\$781 billion
- ❖ Jet fuel costs are expected to average US\$98.5/barrel in 2023
- ❖ Industry profitability is fragile and could be affected by factors such as inflation, Russia-Ukraine conflict, and regulatory cost burdens among others

Resilience is the story of the day and there are many good reasons for optimism. Achieving profitability at an industry level after the depths of the COVID crisis opens up much potential for airlines to reward investors, fund sustainability, and invest in efficiencies to connect the world even more effectively. That is a big 'to do' list to achieve with just a 1.2 per cent net profit margin. That is why we call on the governments to keep their focus on initiatives that will strengthen safe, sustainable, efficient, and profitable connectivity," said Walsh.

Tourists are counting on efficient and profitable airline industry. A recent IATA poll of travellers in 11 global markets revealed 81 per cent of them emerged from the pandemic with a greater appre-

With the industry earning US\$2.25 per passenger on an average, providing investors with sustainable returns will continue to be a challenge for many

ciation of the freedom that flying makes possible. He listed some priorities for 2023, including SAF production to reduce net zero emissions, integrating CORSIA as economic measure applied to global aviation, removing inefficient air traffic management, and application of global standards.

Highlights

- ❖ Airline Industry net profits to reach \$9.8 billion in 2023, which is more than double the previous forecast of \$4.7 in 2022
- ❖ Airline operating profits are expected to reach \$22.4 billion in this year. It has improved as compared to December forecast of \$3.2 billion
- ❖ 4.25 billion people travelled in 2023, which is fast closing in on the 4.54 billion who flew in 2019
- ❖ Cargo – The volumes are expected to be 57.8 million tonnes, which has slipped below the 61.5 million tonnes carried in 2019
- ❖ Total revenues will grow 9.7% y-o-y to US\$803 billion. This is the first time that industry revenues will breach the US\$800 billion mark
- ❖ Expenditure growth may be contained to an 8.1% annual growth

Extend TCS exemption please!

All-India Association of Authorized Money Changers & Money Transfer Agents appeals for level-playing field in overseas transactions. It has asked for foreign currency bank notes, forex prepaid cards and wire transfers into TCS exemption to debit, credit cards under LRS.



Hazel Jain

The money exchange industry has asked the Union Government to extend the Tax Collected at Source (TCS) exemption given to debit and credit card transactions under Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) to other forex instruments such as foreign currency bank notes, forex prepaid cards and wire transfers.



TC Guruprasad
Vice Chairman, All India Money Exchange and Money Transfer Association

The demand comes after the Union Finance Ministry stated that, from July 1, transactions carried out overseas using debit and credit cards will be exempted from the 20 per cent TCS up to ₹7 lakh per financial year. But no specific guidance has been issued regarding other widely used global payment options, including foreign currency cash, wire transfers through banks, prepaid forex cards, and various other modes of global transactions frequently used by individuals during overseas trips for both leisure and employment purposes.

TC Guruprasad, Vice Chairman, All India Money Exchange and Money Transfer Association, said, "The notification will have a direct impact on individuals travelling abroad for work, especially the labour/ working class, who belong to the low-income group and have no access

The industry requests the government to extend the TCS exemption to the purchase of cash, wire transfers, and prepaid forex cards

whatsoever to card payment facilities. This group generally procures cash from the money exchange outlets operating at international airports or city outlets and a levy of 20 per cent TCS on such trans-

actions will be a blow to them as they do not fall under the income tax bracket."

The industry seeks the government to extend the TCS exemption to the purchase of cash, wire transfers, and prepaid forex cards. The association remains committed to advocating for a fair and equitable environment for all individuals engaged in overseas

transactions and practices, it stated. The money exchange industry expects the Union government to ensure a level-playing field for all overseas transactions, regardless of the mode of payment used.

Travellers use options such as foreign currency cash (within the permissible limits of US\$3,000 or its equivalent), prepaid forex travel cards, wire transfers, debit, and



transactions. It is imperative to address the concerns of economically weaker sections, first-time travellers, and the labour and working classes to ensure inclusive poli-

credit cards. It must be noted the common man, particularly first-time travellers, often lack awareness about the forex requirements while travelling abroad.

Good to know

According to immigration data published by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), more than 60 per cent overseas travellers are travelling for the first-time, primarily from blue-collar backgrounds and fall outside the income tax bracket.

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Roshan Jain
Founder and Sales & Marketing
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Kuldip Sondhi
Partner
Sondhi Travels, Ludhiana

“People from this part of Punjab are known to travel around the world, especially to destinations such as Türkiye, Dubai, Phuket, and Singapore from Amritsar. Sea cruises are also popular with the travellers here. Of late, owing to weak Indian Rupee value, all the foreign destinations have become quite expensive—as much as 25-30 per cent. Though these destinations have become expensive, they are still within a traveller's budget. Moreover, the flight connectivity to these destinations from here is quite good. In fact, direct air connectivity from the city of Amritsar in Punjab to Dubai in the Middle East and Singapore, which is a very popular cruise destination, has generated a lot of demand among the people of the state.”



Anish Kumar P.K.
CEO
The Travel Planners, Trivandrum

“Post-pandemic, people are travelling to hill stations such as Munnar, Wayanad, Vagamon, Coorg, and Ooty in South India and Manali and J&K in North India. Cool climate, striking greenery, and the opportunity to connect with nature are the parameters, travellers give priority to while choosing destinations. We have also seen a rise from domestic family holiday travellers to Kerala, the god's own country. Combination of Munnar, Thekkady and Kumarakom backwaters make a popular domestic tourism circuit. Hill stations, great wildlife, and backwaters of Kerala is a unique travel experience for people who opt for short tours, say, for a period of 4-5 days. Connectivity and airfares are main factors while choosing destinations. We have seen rising interest in luxury stays by domestic travellers.”



C K Gopinathan
Proprietor
Tarmac Travels, Coimbatore

“It has become an annual routine with religious travellers who prefer going on pilgrimage tours to Kedarnath, Varanasi, Haridwar and Rishikesh. This tourism circuit is quite popular. Travellers of South Indian states prefer going on pilgrimage destinations. Get flights and lodging in hotels are easy. There are also direct flights to many destinations from Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, which helps us a lot. Kashi Yatra commences from here, and once the Ayodhya temple is thrown open to public, it will also get several pilgrims. Most domestic flights are going full due to business and pilgrimage tourism. Our business is improving, and one can cover many places. In fact, if we send a request in the morning, the suppliers give us the information by the afternoon.”



Harpreet Singh Grover
Director
Destinations Unlimited, Ludhiana

“Currently, Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam are most sought after destinations. The rising popularity of Vietnam as a new travel destination has intrigued many Indians, prompting them to explore the country. The vibrant cruise industry of Singapore has also captured the interest of several travellers. These destinations boast excellent connectivity and offer direct flights, enhancing their appeal. On the domestic front, Goa and J&K are gaining traction among the travellers. However, the current air fares play a significant role in travel planning. Air fares are on the higher side presently, influencing clients to reconsider their travel arrangements. One of my clients had planned to visit Phuket but had to cancel plans due to the exorbitant air fare when compared to other destinations.”



Irshad Hazari
Director
Euphoria Travel Services, Srinagar

“People in the UT of J&K like to travel between April-June in summer and spring seasons and between Dec-March to escape the winter season. While 85 per cent of Kashmiris travel within Kashmir, the remaining 15 per cent go to Jammu and Ladakh. The people do not use local transport but go by MUVs such as Toyota Innova or SUVs such as Sedans, and tempcos. Kashmiris do travel internationally, but not much. Only 10-15 per cent of population travel outside India. Within Kashmir, they prefer travelling to Srinagar, Pahalgam, Sonmarg and Gulmarg. These places in Kashmir have always made the region rank among the best tourism destinations in India and the world. All these places have very good connectivity and best infrastructure.”



Harsimran Singh
Director
Cozy Tours, Chandigarh

“Shimla, Manali, Dharamshala, and Dalhousie are currently the most popular destinations. These destinations have a pleasant weather and beautiful landscapes as compared to the hot climate of Chandigarh and Amritsar. Kullu, Shimla, and Dharamshala facilitate air connectivity, with people opting to travel from Chandigarh. Customers are leaning towards customized trips, tailoring their itineraries to suit their preferences. Some people prefer a focused seven-day tour to explore Shimla and Manali, while others choose the Amritsar-Dharamshala-Dalhousie-Amritsar circuit and those travellers seeking a longer trip, the Chandigarh-Shimla-Manali-Dharamshala-Amritsar circuit is preferred. With the travel business booming, the bookings are jam-packed.”



Bobby Bhatia
Managing Partner
Travel Experts, Delhi

“For me, the most selling travel destinations domestically are J&K and Goa, while internationally, Dubai, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam take the lead. These destinations are favoured by my clients due to direct flight connectivity and comparatively affordable prices. Despite the high air fares, people are still opting to travel to these destinations, mainly because of the pandemic. For a very long time, the clients were not able to travel and now since these destinations have opened, they are travelling even if it means paying slightly higher airfares. Typically, clients choose to stay for an average of 5-6 nights. Since this is the vacation time, majority of these clients consist of families looking to spend quality time together while enjoying a well-deserved break.”



Pradeep Rai
Managing Director
Skyline India Travels, Varanasi

“The most popular destinations on pilgrimage circuit are Varanasi, Prayagraj, Ayodhya and Chirakoot. Srinagar, Goa, and Himachal Pradesh are popular for leisure in the domestic market. Dubai, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam are coveted in the outbound market. Varanasi, Prayagraj, Ayodhya, Chirakoot are the most popular due to their significance. Currently, these locations boast better infrastructure, direct flights, and connectivity from major cities. Due to the support of Uttar Pradesh Tourism, these destinations have become popular among domestic travellers. Dubai, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam are popular luxury travel destinations, more so due to their proximity to India. Visa processes at these places are easy in these destinations. One can get e-Visa very easily.”



Vikrant Hankare
Director
Rajas Travels, Mumbai

“In Kerala, my clients want to visit Munnar, Thekkady and Alleppey. The state continues to maintain its famous tagline 'God's Own Country'. For us, this season has been beneficial. Kerala impresses domestic and international tourists. Kerala's various cities have their own speciality such as Munnar's evergreen tea plantations and Thekkady's Yodha Culture Village, Periyar Lake and its national park. Alleppey is known for its backwaters and houseboats. We are promoting Wayanad, Kannur, Trivandrum, Kovalam, and Bekal; we are being encouraged by local drivers, hotel staff, guides, and Kerala Tourism. The state is connected from Indian cities and global cities because of which we are getting more and more leads for Kerala, and we are converting them into actual bookings.”



Alok Singh
Director
Enriching Journeys, Delhi

“Inbound tourism is spreading, and the idea of the exploration is spreading. We use Rajasthan as one of our bestselling destinations and it has unique properties. It is time for experiences, which means that the travel basically is not about anything else, but more of experience. They are not just going there to stay. They have a good meal and come back, but do not stay there for at least two to three nights. They do their best to spend more time outdoors rather than being indoors. We have been working in the inbound business for a long time, try and use properties, which are not more known or commonly popular. Hence, we try and limit that for a few properties. All these properties are well connected with major cities, which have direct flights from metros.”



Palak Jain
Sales Team lead
Intrepid travels, Delhi

“In terms of inbound tourism, the most saleable destinations are Delhi, Agra, and Jaipur, which come under the Golden Triangle. Many cities in Rajasthan and Kerala are selling like hot cakes. Apart from all these, we do have queries for distant Ladakh. All these destinations are very well connected. As tourism is improving and growing, we have a lot of upcoming flights to all these destinations, and from Delhi, we have great air connectivity, including rail. Vande Bharat train is also the upcoming train facility the government is coming up with, and we have a lot of good connectivity throughout. In terms of age, it is a mixed crowd. We have groups from 18-29 and 50-60 age group. For inbound, it is a mixture of both.”



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13 routes were proposed in International UDAN Scheme, of which 4 have been awarded

Odisha targets 2.5 lakh foreign tourist arrivals by 2025, double of pre-Covid levels: Sachin Jadhav

H&M Services has been named as The Tattwa Corbett Spa and Resort's only sales partner

India deserves to have non-stop flights to more overseas destinations: Air India CEO

Promoting Korea beyond Seoul

In addition to Seoul, Korea Tourism Organization is keen to promote regional destinations such as Busan, Gangwon province and Jeollanam-do province in the Indian market. Keeping this in mind, it became the first NTO recently to launch an incentive scheme for leisure packages in the country.

Hazel Jain

This year is special for Korea and India as it marks 50 years of the Korea-India diplomatic relations. Taking advantage of this milestone, Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) is activating the market further. Sharing more details is **Myongkil Yun**, Director of KTO India office, says, "To mark this occasion, we launch this special K-Incentive Scheme for travel agents in India. The scheme's main benefits include providing travel agents with prizes of USD 30 per passenger as well as support for quick, and hassle-free visas for visitors to Korea between June and December 2023. This is the first time any NTO is launching an incentive scheme for leisure travel packages in India."

To be eligible for this scheme, travel agencies had to share their marketing plan. Ten travel agencies will be chosen for this. In addition to Seoul, KTO is keen to promote regional destinations in Korea, including Busan, Gangwon province



Myongkil Yun
Director of KTO India office

and Jeollanam-do province. Any of these regional destinations in the itinerary would be a condition to be eligible for the benefits of the K-Incentive Scheme, he added.

Yun says, "Seoul has the Han river so there are a lot of Han river dinner cruise. It is also one of the unique venues for MICE. In 2016, we received 1.9 lakh arrivals from India but in 2019, it fell to 1.4 lakh. The good news is that the recovery

post COVID is close to 70 per cent and we hope to reach 90 per cent of pre-COVID by December 2023. Our target number this year is to cross 1.3 lakh arrivals from India. MICE traffic from India makes up for almost 70 per cent of the total numbers. To encourage this, we will develop new packages targeted at leisure travellers."

KTO will conduct a big roadshow in Delhi this August bringing in local agents and DMCs from Korea to meet Indian travel agents

KTO will conduct a big roadshow in Delhi this August bringing in local agents and DMCs from Korea. Yun says, "This year, South



Korea is seeing a surge in visitors from India, and we are keen to further boost that with the launch of the K-Incentive scheme. The Korea wave is very big in India today and we are ready to support travel agents who promote our destination."

Direct flight connection is good for increasing numbers, India currently has direct flight only from New Delhi into Seoul, he says. "It is difficult to manage big groups without good air connectivity, so we normally get between

100-200 pax groups," the KTO Director says.

Riaz Munshi, President, OTOAI, says, "Korea has enormous potential to grow from the Indian market and I am confident that together we can generate good numbers for the destination. On behalf of OTOAI. I would like to thank Korea Tourism for specially curating this incentive programme. I would like to request all the members to wholeheartedly support the destination by recommending it to your clients."

G20 exhibits potential of MICE industry

Contd from page 3

global events, conferences, meetings, and incentive travel. Pointing out to India's thriving exhibition market, he said, "The market is experiencing growth, attracting exhibitors from across the world. The population has become a consuming force, making India an ideal market for a wide range of products."

Marketing campaigns

Kundu said global buyers assess the appeal and potential rewards of a destination before making their choices. He shared, "As India focuses on extensive marketing drives to promote its products and experiences globally through government initiatives and private sector efforts, more and more MICE events will be attracted to the country. India has something to offer for everyone, and with proper marketing strategies in place, the abundance of offerings can be communicated to the global market". Expressing confidence in the government's plans, he believed they will achieve the desired outcomes."

Kundu called upon professionals to be optimistic about India's potential as a MICE destination.



Nitin Sachdeva
Member, International Board of Directors
SITE Global

"Rather than focusing on challenges, our focus should be to recognize the opportunities that lie ahead. With a united effort to market the country aggressively, collaborate across sectors, and dispel misconceptions, India can position itself as a premier destination for MICE," he said.

Meeting buyer expectations

Acknowledging the importance of meeting buyer expectations in the MICE industry, **Nitin Sachdeva**, member, International Board of Directors, SITE Global, said, "When it comes to meeting



Manpreet Bindra
Vice President, MICE
FCM Travel Solutions India

buyer expectations, safety and security are paramount for MICE destinations. To enhance India's image, we need to focus on perception that often outweighs performance. Public relations activities, conducted by government offices and tourism boards, can play a vital role in shaping this perception. The government and stakeholders are planning to introduce i-MICE, which can be a step in the right direction. Through joint efforts between corporate entities, the government, all stakeholders in India could establish itself as a favoured MICE destination."



Jyothi Varma
Advisory Consultant
Travel & Hospitality

Analysing the outbound travel market, Sachdeva shared, "The outbound travel market has witnessed significant expansion, particularly in terms of group sizes. Previously, we had around 2,500 passenger groups, but now we are seeing groups of 10,000 to 12,000 travellers, indicating a massive growth trend. Incentive travel has gained traction for employees and sellers of various firms. Post pandemic, people have developed a stronger desire to travel and seek new experiences rather than focusing on sav-

ing for their future generations. This shift in mindset has led to a surge in domestic travel in the Indian market, resulting in high demand for flights, trade, and competitive hotel pricing."

Highlighting the impact of G20, he said, "The government's investment in the MICE industry, particularly with its involvement in G20, is encouraging. This commitment demonstrates its recognition of the MICE industry and its growth potential. If this momentum continues, there is potential for the MICE business to thrive in India."

Govt must promote India

Manpreet Bindra, Vice President, MICE, FCM Travel Solutions India, stressed the need to promote India as an attractive destination for inbound and corporate MICE events. Highlighting the government's efforts to invest in infrastructure and improve the perception of India as a tourist destination, he said, "Organizations must collaborate with the government and motivate people to choose India as a destination for MICE events." He said the importance

of simplifying visa processes to attract more foreign visitors is a must, citing examples from countries such as Australia and Singapore.

Gaining popularity

Jyothi Varma, Advisory Consultant, Travel & Hospitality, acknowledges India has everything needed to be an attractive MICE

Organizations must collaborate with the Union government and motivate people to choose the country as a destination for MICE events

destination. Recognizing that the market perception needed improvement, she said there is need to spread awareness about India's offerings and collaboration to unlock India's brilliance in the MICE industry."

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Are embassies ready for promotion?

The responsibility to promote India Tourism falls on embassies and tourism officers' shoulders. Are they equipped for the job at hand? Or is it only a temporary move before the National Tourism Board comes into action. The tour operators are not happy with the lost connections and are trying hard to help embassies take the reins in their hand.



Nisha Verma

The Union Ministry of Tourism has closed its overseas tourism offices, and now the task of promoting India abroad falls on Indian embassies' shoulders, where tourism officers have already been appointed. However, once the National Tourism Board comes into being, onus will be on it to take up the job.

Jatinder Taneja, Vice Chairman, PATA India Chapter, said, "If the government has closed the tourist offices overseas, they have to



Rajiv Mehra
President
IATO

ism was showcasing on its own. I was the only tour operator with them. Someone from the Indian High Commission came to meet and said that they are promoting tourism. They had old advertising and promotional material. It was complete chaos; they did not know anything. I think it may take years for them to be able to learn or we need to begin promotion on our own. That is the best way, as I see it," he claimed.

When asked about the National Tourism Board, which will promote and market India abroad, he



Sanjay Razdan
Managing Director
Razdan Holidays

its sleeve to ensure that we do not suffer. I am sure the Indian embassies will do their job and I think we need to train the officers assigned to the job of promoting tourism. We, as IATO, support them whenever they need us for whatever promotion material they want. I am sure soon they will get equipped and do the job assigned to them," he claimed.

Still in dark

Manoj Kumar Matta, MD, Oriental Vacations & Journeys, said, "One needs a dedicated person in a source market who could promote India. Recently, it was mentioned these source markets need to appoint 34 to 36 tourism officers, but only two of them have been appointed. People are willing to travel, but they do not know whom to approach. The internet does not give updated information. Things change all the time, and it is the responsibility of



Manoj Kumar Matta
Managing Director
Oriental Vacations & Journeys



Jatinder Taneja
Vice Chairman
PATA India Chapter

More than 60 embassies are in touch with us for information and details, and we are regularly providing them with the required data



Ravi Gosain
Managing Director
Erco Travels

We are in the dark as to what the embassies will do. We are urging MOEA and MOT to appoint a nodal officer with tourism background

have appointed tourism officers, which is at the first secretary and second secretary level. These officers are not well equipped, nor do they have knowledge about tourism. While they know India well, they are not well-versed with the tourism part of it. We are trying to help and coordinate with them daily, and have suggested the ministry to give more funds, so they can organize physical events in the respective embassies or the cities."



Deepak Bhatnagar
Managing Director
Aamantaran Travel Company

Govt to ensure that high commission and embassies should have at least three to four dedicated staff with thorough knowledge about India

ensure that all high commission and the embassies should have atleast three to four dedicated staff who have thorough knowledge about India."

Dealing with embassies

The travel industry, especially the inbound tour operators, have started working with the embassies recently. In fact, **Rajiv Mehra**, President, IATO, averred, "Over 60 embassies are in touch with us for information and details, and we are providing them with the required data. I and **Ravi Gosain**, Vice President, IATO, have been addressing many meetings being held at embassies for foreign tour operators, and sharing information about India," he shared.



K Pandian
Managing Director
Cholan Tours

The tourism ministry has assured us they will have someone from India tourist office or a nodal officer to help us. We only hope for the best

The tourism officers know India well, they are not well-versed with India tourism. We are trying to help and coordinate with them daily

said, "I do not know if politicians will be on the board, or stakeholders would be a part of it. So far, whatever they have done is enough. It is time to move ahead. If they are trying to do the same thing as they did for 50-75 years, it is a waste of time. They should consider today's scenario and adjust accordingly. Look at other countries, neighboring countries, and see how smartly they are doing it. We should do better than anybody because we have Incredible India with us, but alas!"

Big dent

Ravi Gosain, MD, Erco Travels, said the closure of Indian tourism offices was a disadvantage for inbound tourism. "The job is now given to Indian embassies. They

Competing with neighbours

Sanjay Razdan, MD, Razdan Holidays, says, "We are in dark as to what the embassies are going to do. We have been requesting the MOEA and MOT to appoint a nodal officer with an Indian tourism background. People approach embassies for information earlier done by India tourist offices. However, it is in the transition period and MOT has assured us they will have someone from India tourist office or a nodal officer to help us. We still do not know whether it is going to happen or not. We can only hope for the best. We need a push in the source markets."

Fingers crossed

Deepak Bhatnagar, MD, Aamantaran Travel Company, "This transition is not encouraging. I think the government should have a plan up

People are willing to travel, but they do not know whom to approach. The internet does not give updated information all the time

enough. "The embassy officers cannot equal the MOT ones. The internet has shrunk the world and there is enough information at the



Kamleshwaran
CEO
Southern Skies Tours and Travels

The government must have a plan up its sleeve to ensure that we do not suffer. I am sure the Indian embassies will do their job

the counsel generals, embassies, or the authorities to disseminate this information and to let them know. We have been facing a lot of problems wherein embassies, instead of asking the tourism ministry."

Wrong move

Kamleshwaran, CEO, Southern Skies Tours and Travels, says the embassies are overloaded with

The embassies are overloaded with work. The embassy officers cannot equal the MOT ones. Shutting tourist offices abroad is a wrong move

click of a mouse. Shutting tourist offices abroad is a wrong move," he claimed.



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Changing outbound travel landscape

As the world recovers from the pandemic, the outbound travel industry in India is witnessing notable changes. A surge in travel demand, shift towards luxury and experiential travel, changes in client behaviour such as enhanced resilience and increased travel frequency, are some of the key travel trends, observed by the industry leaders.

 Janice Alyosius

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the travel industry worldwide, and India is no exception. As the world recovers from the crisis, the outbound travel industry from India is experiencing significant changes. **TRAVELTALK** spoke to industry experts from Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) to gain insights into the changing travel landscape.

Shift towards luxury and experiential travel

Riaz Munshi, President, OTOAI and Managing Director, N. Chirag Travels, highlights a significant



Riaz Munshi
President, OTOAI &
Managing Director, N. Chirag Travels

Travellers now prefer multiple trips throughout the year, staying longer in one or two destinations to have a more immersive experience

change in travel patterns with a shift towards luxury and experiential travel. "Travellers now prefer



Arshdeep Anand
EC Member, OTOAI and Co-founder & CEO,
Holiday Moods Adventures

Luxury travel has seen a revival, but even the middle-income group is making a comeback. COVID has taught everyone to cherish life's experiences

multiple trips throughout the year, staying longer in one or two destinations to have a more immersive experience. Slow travel and local experiences have gained prominence, allowing travellers to explore off-the-beaten-track destinations," he said.

Surge in travel demand

Arshdeep Anand, Executive Committee Member, OTOAI and Co-founder and CEO, Holiday Moods Adventures, attributes the current boom in travel on the people's eagerness to explore the world once again after the pandemic. "Luxury travel has seen a revival, but even the middle-income group is making a comeback. The pandemic has taught everyone to cherish life's experiences, leading to a focus on bucket list travel and activities. Bleisure travel, combining business trips with leisure experi-

ences, has also gained popularity," she said.

Shift in client behaviour

Shravan Bhalla, Vice President, OTOAI and Chief Executive, High Flyer, notices a drastic change in client behaviour. "While earlier people sought budgeted holidays for a short duration, they now prioritize experiences and longer stays. Even first-time travellers are opting for unexplored destinations, seeking novelty and authenticity in their travel experiences," he said.



Shravan Bhalla
Vice President, OTOAI &
Chief Executive, High Flyer

Travellers now prioritize experiences and longer stays. Even first-time travellers are opting for unexplored destinations

Resilient travellers and visa preferences

Guldeep Singh Sahni, Member, OTOAI and Managing Director, Weldon Tours & Travels, highlights the post-pandemic resilience of travellers. "Despite increased

fares, people are determined to travel. Visa requirements play a crucial role in destination selection, with travellers favouring countries offering visa-free entry or easy processing. Travel agents are consulted by a majority of travellers to navigate visa regulations, while those with long-term visas often prefer online travel agencies (OTAs)," Sahni said.

Increased frequency and diverse choices

Sidharth Khanna, General Secretary, OTOAI and Managing Partner, Travel Engineers & Khanna Enterprises, observes a surge in travel frequency among Indian travellers. "Compared to the pre-pandemic trend of one or two trips a year, people are now embarking on multiple journeys annually. In addition, winter activities and emerging destinations like Vietnam and Cambodia are gaining popularity," Khanna said.



Sidharth Khanna
Gen. Secretary, OTOAI & Managing Partner,
Travel Engineers & Khanna Enterprises

Compared to the pre-pandemic trend of one or two trips a year taken by travellers, people are now embarking on multiple journeys annually

Buoyant outlook and optimistic travellers

Tejbir Singh Anand, Member, OTOAI and Managing Director, Holiday Moods Adventures, sees a buoyant outlook for the travel industry. "Optimism is high as the world recovers from the pandemic. Experiential journeys, active travel, adventure tourism, and short frequent breaks are on the



Guldeep Singh Sahni
Founder President, OTOAI &
Managing Director, Weldon Tours & Travels

Visa requirements play a crucial role in destination selection, with travellers favouring countries offering visa-free entry or easy processing

rise. The categories of women and senior citizen travellers are expected to see significant growth," he said.

Popular and emerging destinations

When it comes to popular destinations, Dubai remains a favourite among Indian travellers. Other Middle Eastern destinations such as Oman, Abu Dhabi, and Bahrain are also attracting more visitors. Vietnam is gaining popularity, while Singapore and Thailand are also on track to reach their pre-pandemic visitor numbers. Saudi Arabia is an emerging destination, and Mauritius is expected to see an increase in visitors with the introduction of direct flights.

Less frequented European countries, self-drive tours in Iceland and New Zealand, and Northern Lights explorations in Norway, Finland, and Arctic Canada are emerging destinations that are capturing the attention of Indian travellers.

Impact of visa challenges

Visa requirements continue to pose challenges for Indians planning to travel. Riaz Munshi highlights the difficulty in securing visa appointments for Europe. "The United Kingdom stands out with its efficient visa processing system, assuring submission appointments

within five days and processing times of 10-15 days. Consequently, the UK is expected to witness encouraging numbers of Indian travellers this summer," he said.

Sharing similar views, Arshdeep said, "Manpower shortages at embassies and limited appointment slots at visa processing centres like VFS have dampened the outbound travel spirit. Countries that offer visa-free entry, e-visas, or visa-on-arrival facilities are attracting more Indian travellers."

Shravan Bhalla mentions the high demand for European countries such as Italy and France, as well as Canada and the USA, where



Tejbir Singh Anand
Member, OTOAI & Managing Director
Holiday Moods Adventures

Optimism is high as the world recovers from the pandemic. Experiential journeys, active travel, adventure tourism, and short frequent breaks are on the rise

visa appointment availability remains a significant issue. "In contrast, destinations with easier visa processes, such as visa-on-arrival or no visa requirements, are benefiting during this peak holiday season," he said.

Khanna also agrees that visa requirements continue to pose challenges, especially during the summer months. "Despite a strong recovery from the pandemic, obtaining US visas for fresh applications remains particularly challenging, with appointment dates stretching into 2024 or the end of 2023," he said.



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Rolling the red carpet for Indian MICE

Keeping in view the demand from Indians, who are keen to explore the world for MICE and leisure travel, the international hospitality industry is adapting to their demands. The key to success is to anticipate their requirements and provide them services to suit their needs. The leisure travellers segment is likely to change, say experts.

 Janice Alyosius

With the rise in disposable income and flexible visa regulations, Indians are exploring the world for both leisure and Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) travel. **Michael Hope**, GM, The Westin Warsaw, believes Warsaw is benefiting from the geopolitical situation right next to Poland, leading to a lot of government business and corporate travellers coming to the city.

"The leisure traveller segment has been soft, a trend that is expected to change in the summer months. Warsaw is loosening visa curbs, making it easier for Indians to visit the city," said Hope. "Hotels are adding value to their offerings, such as Indian breakfast items, venues in the hotel free of charge, and Tai Chi classes for conference guests. Hotels are offering perks such as extra rooms free of charge and upgrading rooms to attract more business," he added.



Michael Hope
General Manager
The Westin Warsaw

Lorenzo Battaini, Director, Group Sales, Hotel Arts Barcelona, said the MICE segment is growing in Europe due to easy visa policies, with Spain being a popular destination. "MICE events are growing in Europe, and it is easy to get a visa for Spain compared to other Schengen nations," Battaini stressed. Weddings are a big part of their business, and they are focusing on anticipating the guests'



Lorenzo Battaini
Director, Group Sales
Hotel Arts Barcelona

needs and culinary preferences. "The hotel understands the significance of the culinary aspect of weddings and the desire for guests to experience local cuisine. Hence, we are keen on employing staff from India to provide guests with the expected service," he said.

Augustina Tandun, Director, Sales and Marketing, Renaissance Bali Uluwatu Resort and Spa, said they



Augustina Tandun
Director, Sales and Marketing,
Renaissance Bali Uluwatu Resort and Spa

have global sales offices in Mumbai and Bengaluru to attract more business from the Indian market. "We work with local DMC in Bali and attend B2B events to meet directly with agents in India."

Renaissance Bali Uluwatu Resort and Spa offers flexible incentives based on the clients' requirements, including discounts on hotel rooms, meeting packages, and



Gaide Ilyassova
Group and Leisure Sales Coordinator
The Ritz Carlton, Almaty

meals. Their one-stop destination provides 208 rooms, meeting facilities, party spaces, and Biscrap, with no noise limitations for Indian groups that like to party late.

Gaide Ilyassova, Group and Leisure Sales Coordinator, The Ritz Carlton, Almaty, believes Almaty is a great location for luxury, leisure, and wedding groups, with many natural attractions. "As a destina-

tion, we offer many nature sightings, making it an ideal location for luxury, leisure, and wedding groups, MICE groups, and events. Indians can stay for 14 days, completely visa-free. Also, the distance from Delhi by air is hardly three hours away," Ilyassova said. The Ritz Carlton, Almaty is the lone Marriott International property in Almaty. It has a lot to offer for events, weddings, and MICE. "We also cater to dietary preferences, offering vegan, vegetarian, and Jain options. We are promoting Almaty through Kazakhstan tourism," she added.

The industry is adapting to the requirements of the growing demand from Indian MICE and leisure travellers. The key to success is providing tailored services to meet the needs of clients, including dietary preferences, flexible incentives, and anticipating their needs. Destinations that can provide unique experiences and visa-free entry have an advantage in attracting Indian travellers. 

Spirited India-Scotland connect

Saltire Executive Travel, a Scottish DMC, recently organized a whiskey tasting session for the travel trade in New Delhi to promote Scotland as a destination for whiskey connoisseurs.

 Nisha Verma

The event saw a presentation from VisitBritain, where they highlighted the offerings in Scotland and a whiskey tasting session was organised by Diageo.

Speaking on the session, **Neil Forbes**, Managing Director, Saltire Executive Travel, said, "I think Scotland is a huge destination for Americans and Canadians, but not for Indians, as they seem to focus on London more. However, I think there is a huge market and a great connection with Indian people and Scottish people through whiskey and hence we wanted to promote Scotland through whiskey, which is the way forward."

Indian market

Speaking on the Indian market, he claimed whiskey is the ideal way to promote Scotland in India. "India is the biggest market for Scotch whiskey and when they drink whiskey they do not know the roots of whiskey. By bringing people to Scotland and making them identify the roots, understand the belief and enjoyment

about it, which is in Scotland, it is the perfect thing for this marketplace," he claimed.

He added they are concentrating on the executive market. "We are looking at anyone who wants to stay, experience history, the whiskey, the bagpipes

everybody must visit once," he advised.

Sudepto Banerjee, Senior Sales & Operations Manager, Travel Solutions, said they want travel agents and tour operators to experience it and then sell the same to the clients. "Everybody wants




Neil Forbes
Managing Director
Saltire Executive Travel

and everything about Scotland. It is a very small country, but Scotland has brought many things to the modern world and



Sudepto Banerjee
Senior Sales & Operations Manager,
Travel Solutions

to do bucket list things such as the Big Ben and Tower of London. They should see all other places, including Scotland," he added. 

Holiday packages for the aged

Start-up firm SeniorWorld designs customized and assisted tours for senior citizens. They are among the first few to cater to this segment, says MP Deepu, Founder, SeniorWorld.

 Hazel Jain

Founders MP Deepu and Rahul Gupta started SeniorWorld in 2016 keeping in mind that a much-ignored segment of senior citizens could blow up and offer a lot of business potential. Now, this seems like a phenomenon waiting to happen. The company was started with a vision of promoting positive ageing. Post lockdown, they restarted SilverWings Travel services for seniors, with holiday packages specially designed for them.

MP Deepu, Founder, SeniorWorld, says, "We understand that seniors have different needs when it comes to travel, so we have developed a range of features catering to their needs. Our guided tours help them meet new people and make new friends. Anticipating our customer's needs comes naturally to us at SeniorWorld. This approach helps us create services that cater to their needs. This demography is still comfortable with phone calls, so we make sure we have associates who are trained to interact with seniors."



MP Deepu
Founder
SeniorWorld


Although SeniorWorld has been bootstrapped since its inception in 2016, it is now looking to raise funds through venture capitalists to take it to the next level.

"With new funds, we plan to introduce cutting-edge technology, including an app. We plan to expand so as to cover more locations, hire a larger team. We will enhance the safety features in the travel services, such as medical emergency response plans and advanced safety protocols," he added.

Trends in senior segment

"The senior travel market is growing at a rapid pace in India, with an expected annual growth rate of 15-18 per cent. There is also a trend towards sustainable and responsible travel, where they can have a positive impact on the communities they visit. Many travellers are breaking stereotypes by seeking out new travel experiences, such

 **Anticipating our customer's needs comes naturally to us at SeniorWorld. So we make sure we have associates who are trained to interact with seniors**

as adventure sports among others. The market is demonstrating age should not be a barrier to lead a fulfilling and adventurous life," he said. Presently, we are exploring B2B distribution channels. 

Rise in domestic air traffic

FCM Consulting has revealed Asia has had highest seat growth of 12.2% and India witnessed 13% rise in domestic air traffic from January to March 2023 against the same period in 2020.



TT Bureau

FCM Consulting's latest Global Trends Report has revealed the first quarter of FY2023, in line with the positive momentum of second half of FY2022, will continue in both business and leisure travel with demand across the world forecast to be at 85.5 per cent of 2019 levels this year. Also, the report also revealed that Q1 2023 corporate travel demand remained strong despite the mixed economic conditions, with securing options and booking lower prices driving corporate travellers to book online, early.

India rising

Gaurav Luthra, MD, FCM India, believes the future of Indian aviation looks bright. "Air India ordered 840 planes, which is one of the largest orders by an airline. IndiGo is looking to expand with 500 new aircraft ordered. New airlines entering the aviation space provide more options to travellers—there has been a 13 per cent rise in domestic air traffic for the period of January to March 2023 versus 2020. I am



Gaurav Luthra
Managing Director
FCM India

positive global traffic will recover once we have the air capacity back to what it once was," he said. Mumbai to London saw the highest increase, 26 per cent, in discounted economy fares, while business class fares from Dubai to Shanghai increased by 47 per cent.

Domestic trends

Domestic booking for Q1 2023 versus Q1 2022 saw a 27 per cent rise in online adoption, the advance booking days extended from 17 to

19, and average days away held firm at 2.9. The report showed in-person meetings were the reason for corporate travel. Global hotel occupancy for the quarter was 60.46 per cent, four per cent below the occupancy levels of 2019.

Corporate travel demand remained strong despite the prevalent economic conditions. Air travel is likely to stabilize in H1 2023

Asia lift-off

It was revealed that the Asia saw the highest seat growth in Q1 2023 versus Q4 2019 with a 12.2 per cent increase, with most regions averaging two per cent growth. Exception was Europe, which saw an 8.7 per cent decline as the region balanced changes in demand.

UK is icing on the cake!

The UK is favoured destinations for Indian travellers this summer and the ease in visa process during peak travel season is fantastic, says Shuja Bin Mehdi, B2B Manager, VisitBritain.



Nisha Verma

Shuja Bin Mehdi, B2B Manager- India, VisitBritain, is ecstatic about summer travel to the UK this year from India. "April to July has always been the peak travel season for Indian visitors to the UK. We hope that this year is not going to be any different. We are going to break all the records. In May, we had the King's Coronation, followed by the Euro Vision Song Contest in Liverpool, where we had performers from across Europe and the world coming to the city," he added.

Ease of Visa

The visa process for UK has eased to a great extent. "We want to thank our partner UK Visa and immigration for doing a fantastic job. Last year was a bit challenging due to some understandable reasons. Still, last year saw 2.8 million visas issued for the UK globally, out of which one-fourth, about 700,000 were given to Indians, which is the highest for any country in the world. We have seen very good numbers from January to March.



Shuja Bin Mehdi
B2B Manager- India
VisitBritain

We are hopeful to break all records of 2022 and 2019 this year. Currently, the visa processing time is 12-15 working days and I hope it continues," added Mehdi.

Trade ready

VisitBritain is set to organise its sales mission around year-end. "We are planning a sales mission towards the end of the year. It is subject to participation from the UK industry, who are excited about the market and want to meet the

travel industry in India. The trade will soon hear about our plans to have a destination Britain India event sometime in November. We are excited about hosting our UK Partners back in India again," he shared.

"We would like our travel trade partners, customers and clients in India to come to our channels,

Last year was challenging due to some unavoidable reasons. Still, 2.8 million visas were issued globally, including 700,000 to Indians

VisitBritain.com as well as our Facebook and Instagram pages to get inspired and find more reasons to travel to the UK now," he suggested.

India sixth largest market for SA

India moves to become the sixth-largest source market for South Africa, thanks to the post-pandemic robust recovery measures taken by South African Tourism. The destination witnessed more than 200 per cent surge in travellers from India in 2022, welcoming more than 50,000 Indian tourists to the Rainbow Nation.



Hazel Jain

Neliswa Nkani, Hub Head – MEISEA, South African Tourism, is optimistic about the India market. Post COVID-19, India has moved up two spots to become the sixth-largest inbound traveller market for South African Tourism. She says, "Led by our robust recovery efforts, we witnessed over 200 per cent surge in travellers from India in 2022, welcoming more than 50,000 Indian tourists to the Rainbow Nation. Out of the overall arrivals to South Africa, one in every four visits were motivated by MICE."



Neliswa Nkani
Hub Head – MEISEA
South African Tourism

As South Africa continues to witness an increase in inbound traffic from India, Nkani believes that direct flights between the two nations will serve as a crucial remedy for leisure and business travellers who currently have to layover at an international airport. "Once established, the direct route has the potential to propel a multi-fold increase in travel between the two nations. Being an active member of the global econo-

my, South Africa proudly boasts the presence of many Indian MNCs, and direct connectivity will only simplify trade prospects for both countries," she adds.

Speaking about MICE, Nkani shares that the NTO is witnessing a huge demand for MICE tourism to South Africa from leading corporates in India. "More often we receive long lead enquiries from group sizes varying from 2,000

to 4,000 pax, especially from the financial, information technology, beauty, insurance, coal and mining, pharmaceutical, entertainment, and sporting sectors in India," she adds.

South African Tourism has received 64 per cent forward bookings from Mumbai for January-June 2023. Witnessing strong momentum in

South Africa proudly boasts the presence of many Indian MNCs, and direct connectivity will only simplify trade prospects for both countries

leisure travel after relaxation in pandemic norms, South African Tourism aims for 35 per cent increase in MICE travellers.



To propel the momentum further, South African Tourism, with the help of its 35-member trade delegation, organised roadshows in key Indian cities – Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Mumbai recently and showcased innovative offerings. Participating exhibitors represented key regions such as Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Limpopo, and Eastern Cape aspiring for partnerships.

In 2022, India moved up two spots to become the 6th largest international source market for driving tourism in South Africa.

The tourism board is now aiming to achieve a substantial increase of 72 per cent in Indian travellers in 2023 over their previous year's target. South African Tourism celebrates the completion of 30-year

of bilateral relations with India. At present, several stop-over flights fly from India to South Africa, including Emirates, Qatar Airways, Ethiopian Airlines, Kenya Airways, and Air Seychelles.

Numbers up and up...

- ❖ India moves up two spots to become 6th-largest international source market in 2022
- ❖ SAT aims to achieve an increase of 72 per cent in Indian arrivals over previous year's target
- ❖ It is also eyeing an overall increase of 35 per cent in MICE travellers from India
- ❖ South Africa witnessed highest number (64 per cent) of forward bookings from Mumbai for January-June 2023

Aviation heading towards duopoly

The rapidly evolving competition structure in India's aviation landscape is likely to give rise to a duopoly scenario with IndiGo and the combined Air India entity emerging as the dominant players in domestic market, says Manvi Hooda, Practice Lead, Consulting and Research, CAPA India.

With the privatisation of Air India, the industry is now heading towards a duopoly with two big players having 80 per cent market share. Other players have quite a small share among the remaining 20 per cent. While there is a possibility of a third major player/ consortium emerging, a lot is dependent on factors such as the financing ability of the players, fleet inductions (which in turn is dependent on OEM supply chains), and ability to handle periodic engines issues.

Akasa has had a good start with over two per cent market share and a fleet of 19 aircraft in less than one year since the launch of operations and has the potential to become a third big player with further consolidation or exit of some incumbent carriers.

Scenario post Air India-Vistara merger

The merger, along with the rapidly evolving competition structure in



India's aviation landscape, is likely to give rise to a duopoly scenario with IndiGo and the combined Air India entity emerging as the dominant players in domestic market. As the only Indian FSC, the combined entity would leverage each other's strengths to gain product, cost, and operational efficiencies. With Vistara's superior inflight product, customer centricity and processes complementing Air India's substantial network and coveted slots in domestic and in-



ternational airports, a world class product might get created that will enable it to compete effectively in domestic and international markets. Moreover, economies of scale and other operational

synergies, might reduce unit-level operating cost for the entity, eventually translating into lower fares for passengers.

Critical assessment of RCS

The Regional Connectivity Scheme - UDAN aligns with India's National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP) 2016 and has a duration of 10 years, with a target of achieving total domestic ticket sales of 30 crore and 50 crore by 2022 and 2027 respectively. Despite falling short

of the target in 2022 and the likelihood of missing the 2027 goal, the potential for growth under the scheme remains substantial.

Despite falling short of the target in 2022, the potential for growth under Regional Connectivity Scheme-UDAN remains substantial

deed achieved its set objective along with the issues/ challenges such as utilization, and airline's financial viability, that still exist despite of the scheme. In CAPA India's view, India has a unique regional air connectivity framework with two policies, RCS and RDG, aiming to serve the same objective of regional air connectivity. An integrated and robust policy framework is required to achieve the connectivity objectives.



Manvi Hooda
Practice Lead, Consulting and Research, CAPA India

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

Indo Jaya gives a sneak peek of Bali

Indo Jaya, the biggest destination management company (DMC) in Indonesia, organized a FAM trip for as many as 40 agents from India to Bali between 18 and 23 April 2023. VietJet Airlines served Indian meals onboard, arranged by several hotel and restaurant partners. Agents were taken to Kintamani & Aloha Heaven Swing & Devdan Show at Nusa Dua.



Fly Mauritius direct from Delhi

Air Mauritius has started second direct flight between India and Mauritius. The bi-weekly flight on Airbus A330 from Delhi will further boost air connectivity between the two destinations.

Suhani Sood

Air Mauritius, the national carrier of Mauritius, recently started direct flights from the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi to boost air connectivity between Mauritius and India. "It has been 50 years since Air Mauritius has been operating in India from Mumbai. We are proud that direct flights from Delhi to Mauritius will provide seamless connectivity and boost tourism. Being the national carrier, Air Mauritius is meant to promote the country," said **Kresimir Kucko**, CEO, Air Mauritius. The bi-weekly flight on Airbus A330 can carry 254 passengers under economy & business class.

Arvind Bundhun, Director, Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA), expressed his happiness over the start of second direct flight from India, saying that, "It is a milestone towards increasing tourism from India to Mauritius." He said, "India is one of the key markets for Mauritius. Pre-pandemic, it used to be around 8



Kresimir Kucko
CEO
Air Mauritius

per cent annually. Post-Pandemic, we see demand rising gradually. I believe that these two additional flights from Delhi will enable visitors from the northern and eastern parts of India to commute to Mauritius easily."

MTPA has been actively collaborating with the travel trade in India. Eighty per cent of the bookings from India are generated through the travel trade. Bundhun said that they are trying new marketing



Arvind Bundhun
Director, Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, (MTPA)

campaigns with the travel agents.

Mauritius as MICE Destination

With a bunch of high-quality accommodation options and beautiful event venues, Mauritius truly stands out as an ideal MICE destination. According to Bundhun, easy access, favourable climatic conditions, high-tech facilities, and exciting recreational activities like ziplining, mountain biking, and canoeing make Mauritius perfect for events and conferences.

Bonding families through golf

My Golf Tours recently conducted a tournament in three cities of India with an idea of promoting family golf tourism, helping families to bond in a unique way through the elite sport.

TT Bureau

The National Family Golf Tournament 2023 was a celebration of bonds and sportsmanship, promoting family golf tourism. The event was a remarkable gathering of families in three vibrant cities of India: Pune, Kolkata, and Mumbai. The tournament



Golf guru Indrajit Bhalotia (centre) flanked by Arun Iyer (right) and Shyam Iyer (left), the core team of My Golf Tours and Protouch Sports at the National Family Golf Tournament 2023 in Mumbai

National Family Golf Tournament 2023 left an indelible mark as a celebration of familial connections and shared sporting experiences

was organised by My Golf Tours, an award-winning golf vacation company, and Protouch Sports, one of the largest golf academies in India. The tournament, organ-

ised with an idea of promoting family golf tourism, witnessed a participation of 280 golfers and showcased the spirit of togetherness and friendly competition.

The tourney format featured a thrilling two-ball scramble, where Parent-Child Teams, Husband-Wife Teams, and Sibling Teams showcased their skills and bonds on the golf course. Parents guided their children, couples strategized together, and siblings competed in a sportsmanlike manner. The event created a platform for fami-

lies to strengthen their relationships while enjoying the beautiful game of golf. From the serene golf courses of Pune to Kolkata and Mumbai, the National Family Golf Tournament 2023 left an indelible mark as a celebration of familial links and shared sporting experiences. The event was supported by HSBC, Equipped Golf Apparel, Mayfair Cruises, Flash Tour Golf Balls, Shangri La Hotels, Keventer and Ballantine's Glassware. **Arun Iyer**, MD, My Golf Tours, shared his vision to make the tourney an annual pan India event.

Cordelia touches Sri Lankan shores

India's only premium cruise line, Cordelia Cruises made its way to Sri Lanka for the first time, touching the ports of Hambantota and Trincomalee, from Chennai. Present in its debut cruise were Sarbananda Sonowal, Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways. The new route marks a new chapter in India's maritime tourism industry.



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Travel

WEDDING SHOW

JUNE 2023

Date	Event	Time
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 th 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 th Travel Wedding Show	10:00 am
28	Oman Tourism Webinar	11:30 am

JULY 2023

7-9	Tourism Fair-Ahmedabad	1:00 pm
11-13	Global Travel Marketplace West 2023	9:00 am
12-16	SITE Incentive Summit-Slovenia	12:00 pm
13-16	Travel and Leisure Expo	9:00 am
21-23	India Travel Mart-New Delhi	11:00 am
25	India Travel Awards	7:00 pm

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

Now, fly to Kazakhstan by FlyArystan

FlyArystan, a low-cost carrier under Air Astana Group, launched its first flight between India and Kazakhstan on 22 May 2023, offering affordable air fare, beginning US\$55. Indian travellers can now explore Kazakhstan visa-free for up to 14 days and visit Shymkent.



Janice Alysious

On May 22, 2023, FlyArystan, the low-cost carrier under the Air Astana Group, successfully operated its first flight between India and Kazakhstan. The Airbus A320 aircraft embarked on its maiden journey, flying the Delhi-Shymkent route.

The airline offers a minimum cost between two major metropolitans starts from US\$55 for a one-way flight. To facilitate seamless travel, tickets on this route can be conveniently booked through the FlyArystan mobile app or the flyarystan.com website until October 2023. The minimum ticket cost includes a system-assigned seat and a single piece of hand baggage weighing up to 5 kg, with dimensions of 56x23x36 cm. Passengers can also opt for the 'Comfort' and 'Comfort Plus' flight packages during online booking, which offer tickets with additional baggage (up to 20 kg) at a 60 per cent discount compared to separate selection or check-in counter purchases.

As per new regulations, Indian citizens traveling for business, private, and tourism purposes can enter Kazakhstan without a visa for up to 14 days from the moment of

"Since the cancellation of the visa regime for Indian citizens entering Kazakhstan, the flow of tourists has increased substantially. Therefore, we have decided to

educational, or business opportunities can find various avenues in the country".

By this year-end, FlyArystan aims to expand its fleet to 19 aircraft, including new additions. The airline achieved a landmark in 2022 when



Pom Komutanont, Senior Director, Operations, FlyArystan and Serik Rys-Uly, Senior Regional Manager India, Indian Subcontinent and Gulf Region, Air Astana

crossing the border. This option enhances the accessibility for Indian travellers to explore the Shymkent, located, a three-hour flight from Delhi. Shymkent's popularity has been on the rise among tourists, with its proximity to Turkestan, the spiritual and historical center of Central Asia.

Pom Komutanont, Senior Director, Operations, FlyArystan, said,

pursue to provide affordable, convenient, and high-quality air transportation options, while taking in the passengers to travel between countries." She emphasized that Kazakhstan's natural beauty, wide range of outdoor activities, and renowned hospitality have made it a popular destination among Indians. With a focus on education and attracting global students, Indian travellers exploring

To facilitate seamless travel, tickets on this route can be conveniently booked by FlyArystan mobile app or by flyarystan.com

it received a high 4-star rating from the Skytrax quality audit, thereby becoming one of the 12 low-cost carriers worldwide to receive such recognition. Over the next four years, FlyArystan ferried 10 million passengers, establishing links Kazakhstan and Georgia, Armenia, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, the UAE.

Al Habtoor invites Indians

Dubai's Al Habtoor Group showcased its three hotels—Hilton Dubai Al Habtoor City, V Hotel Dubai and Habtoor Palace—and unveiled offerings at an event in New Delhi recently.



Suhani Sood

Dubai's Al Habtoor Group showcased Al Habtoor City - The City of Dreams – and unveiled its offerings at its Meet & Greet event, held in New Delhi recently. Through a video presentation, the group highlighted its three luxurious properties at Al Habtoor City - Hilton Dubai Al Habtoor City,

offerings and benefits for corporate travellers and how Hilton Dubai Al Habtoor City Hotel and V Hotel can play a perfect host to corporate and MICE events. "We are committed to providing our guests with unforgettable experiences, whether they are travelling for business, seeking a luxurious getaway, planning their dream wedding, or simply

hotel with world class facilities. "The newly refurbished room suites have the newly introduced V hub, consisting of check in pods,

Among the Al Habtoor Group's offerings, 'Stay More Pay Less' offer allows guests to pay for three nights and stay for five nights

cuisines from around the world and sipping cocktail from V Lounge to beat the heat," she said.

The presentation also emphasized on how Al Habtoor City Hotel Collection is a perfect wedding destination for Indians with its grand ballrooms and fairytale-themed weddings. The detail is designed meticulously by specialists for bride, groom and guests.



Al Habtoor Hotel Collection Team at the 'Meet & Greet' event in New Delhi

V Hotel Dubai and Habtoor Palace – and exciting travel offers related to MICE and weddings.

The event started with an interactive presentation by the Al Habtoor team, which showcased

looking for a memorable leisure escape," said Farah Bootwala, Marketing and PR, Al Habtoor City Hotel Collection.

The group also put spotlight on Habtoor Palace Dubai, the luxury

GTFF concludes in Canada

The film fest held at North Bay in Ontario witnessed seminars and aimed at encouraging screening of destination films, and an understanding of tourism sector.



TT Bureau

The Global Tourism Film Festival (GTFF) 2023 was organised to draw together moviegoers, travellers and experts of the travel and film industry. The main highlights of the film festival were presentations from tourism

ing party, which showcased various cuisines of the countries. GTFF radiated a spotlight on Canada with 'Cinema Canada'; a segment of Canadian produced film promoting the destination's heritage.

The program also included tours of Canadore College's post-produc-

of North Bay like Heritage Railway, Carousal Company, Canadian Forces Museum of Aerospace and the Dionne Quints Museum telling the story of the quintuplets

GTFF saw the world premiere of 'Closer to Heaven' directed by Zara Janjua, which received Women Filmmaker Award. The other award



Four-day long GTFF 2023 concluded in North Bay, Ontario, Canada

agencies (national and international), workshops for professional growth and event programs by film boards on filmmaking as well as indigenous culture.

The event was completed with unique elements, including open-

tion facilities, local visit to studios and North Bay animation production seminar that touts the city as emerging film production hub of Canada.

Professional received first hand introductions to touristic landmarks

The film festival saw the world premiere of 'Closer to Heaven' directed by Zara Janjua, which received Women Filmmaker Award

winning films were: Kumari – Global Cine Award (India); Visit Cascais – Best Tourism Commercial (Portugal); Southwind Blows – Best Short Film (Taiwan); and Blueback – Best Feature (Australia).

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MOVEMENTS

CROWNE PLAZA TODAY GURUGRAM

Gurugram

VAMSI KRISHNA has been appointed as the new Operations Manager at Crowne Plaza Today Gurugram. In his new role, Krishna will be responsible for overseeing all aspects of hotel operations, developing new strategies to ensure smooth workflows, fostering operational growth, and driving innovation to provide exceptional guest experiences. He will work closely with the Regional General Manager, Norton Pereira, and facilitate key movements in the hotel, events, best practices, revenue generation, sales, operational requirements and brand audits. Vamsi has worked with renowned brands such as Hyatt Hotels & Resorts, and Six Senses.



ESPIRE HOSPITALITY GROUP

New Delhi

Espire Hospitality Group names **AKHIL ARORA**, the hospitality company's Chief Operating Officer, as its next Chief Executive Officer. Akhil is an industry veteran with more than 20 years of experience in hospitality and is qualified as a 'Certified Hotel Administrator' from the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute. In his new role, he will spearhead the company's overall business, continuing to focus on the expansion plans. His diverse knowledge in hotel operations and business strategy adds great value towards the growth objective of the company. Arora joined Espire Hospitality Group in May 2021.



THE RITZ-CARLTON

Pune

The Ritz-Carlton, Pune, has appointed **LALIT DADHEECH** as Director of Engineering. With more than 22 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Dadheech has gained a wealth of knowledge working in the Engineering department at renowned hotel brands such as Marriott International, Taj, Hilton and Accor. Most recently, he served as the Director of Engineering at Raffles Udaipur. In his new role, he will be responsible for ensuring the smooth and efficient operation of all the electrical, mechanical and civil work in the hotel. Lalit holds a degree in Electrical Engineering and MBA in operations management.



COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT

Shillong

Courtyard By Marriott, Shillong, has appointed **PAWAN KUMAR** as the new Food and Beverage (F&B) Manager. An accomplished management professional with a remarkable career spanning over eight years in food and beverage operations, Kumar has consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to financial and regulatory compliance objectives, while strategically planning and executing budgets, forecasts, cost-reduction techniques, and safety initiatives. With a Bachelor's degree in Hotel & Hospitality Management and Catering Science from College of Hospitality Administration, Jaipur, he has achieved notable certifications.



GRAND MERCURE

Bengaluru Gopalan Mall

RITUPARNA GHOSH joins Grand Mercure Bengaluru at Gopalan Mall as Marketing and Communications Manager. In her new role, Ghosh will be responsible for enhancing brand positioning, developing and implementing effective marketing plans to support the business goals of the premium 212-key five-star hotel. A graduate in Advertising Sales Promotion and Management from Gokhale Memorial Girls College, Calcutta, Ghosh began her career in 2017 as a Management Associate at MSL Group-Publicis Groupe. Prior to joining Grand Mercure Bengaluru, she was Manager, PR and Branding Manager at S. P. Retail Brands.



LORDS HOTELS AND RESORTS

Mumbai

Lords Hotels and Resorts has promoted **RAKHI PUROHIT** to the position of Assistant Vice President of Revenue and Distribution. In her new role, she will oversee brands' online budgets and drive revenue growth across the organization. Rakhi has played a pivotal role in the growth and expansion of Lords Hotels and Resorts over the last two years. One of the fastest growing and leading mid-segment hotel chains in India and Nepal, Lords Hotels & Resorts has become an eminent name within 10 years of its inception. It believes in unprecedented luxury, combined with the essence of a rich heritage that defines their true values.



NHCC AND HICC

Hyderabad

Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre (NHCC) and Hyderabad International Convention Centre (HICC) appoint **SAURAV BATABYAL** as the Director of Sales for the property. In his new role, Batabyal will be responsible for charting and executing the sales strategy of the hotels, driving revenue growth, and exploring new business opportunities. He brings with him a wealth of experience in the hospitality industry, having held various leadership positions throughout his career. Prior to joining NHCC and HICC, he served as Director of Sales at Le Meridien Hyderabad and was previously associated with HICC as Associate Director of Sales.



CYGNETT HOTELS & RESORTS

New Delhi

Cygnett Hotels & Resorts has appointed **ANANT CHAUHAN** as the new Corporate Human Resources Manager. In his new role, Chauhan will be responsible for managing employee development policies, with a focus on creating a work culture that will support Cygnett's ambitious growth plans. An experienced professional, Chauhan has been a part of the industry for more than a decade. Prior to joining Cygnett Hotels & Resorts, he has been associated with many hospitality brands, including Royal Orchid, Wyndham, Sarovar Hotels & Resorts, and Sterling Holidays. He has a PG degree in Human Resource Management from SCDL.



W HOTELS

GOA

W Hotels has promoted **SHAILESH MORDEKAR** to the position of Director of Services at W Goa. In his new role, Shailesh will be responsible for overseeing all operational departments of the hotel, including guest services, housekeeping, engineering, and security. A hospitality veteran, Mordekar is a proven leader with more than 20 years of experience in managing a diverse range of facility and rooms management in different hospitality segments namely Luxury Resorts, Business Hotels, and Cruise Lines. He has worked with leading hospitality brands such as Taj, ITC, Hyatt, and Starwood. At W Goa, Shailesh has demonstrated exceptional leadership skills.



TALKing People

AKSHAY VARMA, Director of Sales, Courtyard By Marriott Bengaluru Hebbal, says, "At the beginning of the lockdown, I had no bookshelf and scattered books. Today, I have a bookshelf I put together myself with almost 100 books. I have also started writing poetry in English and Hindi/Urdu. My goal is to be a published poet one day. Now that travel is back, I am also enjoying travel. I like to seek out local experiences and slow down when travelling. I like to immerse myself in the flavour of the place, spend time with locals, and experiment with local cuisine."



NISHA SINGH CHAUHAN, HR Manager, Sayaji Pune, recently visited Coorg, which has become one of her favourite vacation spots in India. "Coorg is a charming hill town nestled in the middle of nature and is sometimes referred to as the Scotland of India. It is one of South India's most stunning hill towns. I have never narrowed down a list of places to go on a holiday, but this time I am planning to go Kerala—a state in Southern India. It is known as a tropical paradise of waving palms and wide, sandy beaches. Kerala is also known as God's own Country," she says.



Being in the industry for a decade, **AYODHYA NATH TIWARI**, Director of Revenue Novotel Kolkata Hotel & Residences, has mastered the art of enjoying work and relaxing too. "Still on days when there is a need to break the shackles, badminton or just simply hitting the roads for a good run brings back the stability. Lockdown being a testing phase, being away from family, one of the key things I picked up as a skill was playing Sudoku. It being a logical game helps keeping my mind on the edge and its exciting. Traveling to different places in India has always fascinated me a lot," he says.



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Leaving Footprints Behind

After serving at the Union Ministry of Tourism for over two years, especially during COVID, Tourism Secretary Arvind Singh has superannuated. V Vidyavathi, Director General, ASI has stepped into his shoes.



Calling his tenure in tourism and aviation, "interesting and challenging", **Arvind Singh**, on his last day in office at the Ministry of Tourism, said he came to Airports Authority of India (AAI) as the Chairman within a few months of India after encountering COVID first wave.

"Majority of my tenure was how to battle COVID and get domestic aviation back on track, which we were able to do in 2020 itself. In January 2021, I shifted to MOT and then came delta wave of the pandemic, which had a serious impact on both aviation as well as travel and tourism with widespread job losses, loss of revenue, and loss of business opportunities. There was a period of intense crisis and distress for sometime, but luckily the tourism sector started bouncing back, especially domestic tourism. All major destinations are reporting very large footfalls, flights are full, roads and railways network is also being utilized fully. Hotel accommodation is very difficult to get at popular tourism destinations because people are travelling in large numbers. That is a heartening situation, and because of all this, major companies and other businesses are reporting encouraging numbers and financial results every year," he shared.

Advantage G20

He attributed the surge in numbers to India's G20 Presidency and is hopeful that the momentum will rub off on inbound numbers too. "The G20 tailwinds are helping the sector overall and projecting India as a major center for holding international conferences. It will help to get more inbound into the country in future. Most countries are known to have benefitted from the G20 presidency and I am sure

India will also reap the benefits. I am sure the G20 Presidency will help us to gain our pre-COVID levels and surpass them this year. Then it is on us to devise the strategies, marketing campaigns and promotional campaigns to capitalise on the gains," he added.

Tenure highlights

He said during his tenure at MOT, the G20 was the major highlight in India. "Organising the three working group meetings was a great experience as one had to really plan a lot, work in close coordination with other ministries, the MEA, G20 Secretariat, and with the state governments where the

There was a period of intense crisis and distress for some time, but luckily the tourism sector started bouncing back, especially domestic tourism

meetings were organized. We got excellent responses from the government at Rann of Kutch, at Siliguri-Darjeeling, especially the last meeting at Srinagar was because there were many challenges. However, at the end, it went off successfully and we had excellent participation," he said.

Talking about other assignments, he said, "We could streamline ongoing schemes, push work on the National Tourism Policy a little bit further to take it up for industry consultations. We took it to the stage of approval, and now it is at the final stage. I think, the proposal should see the light of the day soon. Similarly, the work on creation of National Tourism

Board, the planning of a new media promotion strategy and overseas promotion strategy, was also very satisfying," informed Singh.

Overseas promotions

With overseas tourism offices closing, India's overseas promotion policy is set for a huge change. He said, "Once approval comes, the National Tourism Board will be co-ordinating the work of the overseas promotions. Till then, the ministry will be doing its work through the missions and as and when it will get the nod to appoint private agencies in some countries and the developed countries too. Right now, it will be the tourism ministry and the missions, and once the national board comes in, it will be working on the same with whatever agencies it wants to work with along with the missions."

Addressing infra needs

Apart from the G20 push that will take India's tourism to the next level, Singh said, "We should capitalize on G20 to showcase India as a better destination and a 365-day destination. Apart from such campaigns, investment in infrastructure is required to build up tourism infrastructure at some new locations such as new accommodations or skilling facility, because that will be required when we build tourism to the one trillion-dollar level in next 25 years."

Travel industry

"Some are related to the Union Ministry of Tourism. We are in constant dialogue to sort out these procedural issues, or any other scheme related issues that we may have with the tourism industry. Many issues relate either to the finance or the commerce ministries. We try and facilitate the interaction of the ministry itself or we try and get the industry to get an audience at the appropriate levels. It has worked at some levels, but not in all cases. However, we try to help facilitate the presence," Singh shared.

Message for industry

Singh further said, "Good times are ahead for the sector and there are only growth prospects in the future." ↓



Arvind Singh
Ministry of Tourism (MOT)

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