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Technology key to dynamic industry

Can we make the tourism industry a dynamic one? Yes! And we must. The best way to get there is using technology. Digital advancements are going to be the key enabler of efficiency and market dominance, and innovative SaaS start-ups that build the right solutions will be a good investment option.



TT Bureau

There is tremendous dynamism in the Indian start-up arena today. With the year ahead expected to push the Indian economy towards a strong revival, there is likely to be good growth in most sectors. However, the biggest beneficiaries will be industries with faster and widespread digitization. Similarly, infrastructure development is bound to get a big push from the public as well as pri-

vate sector in the next few years. Another high potential investment area will be the SaaS (software as a service) companies; today, the Indian domestic SaaS market is witnessing a rapid surge in demand from almost every segment.

Artificial Intelligence (AI), Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and ChatGPT, the latest buzzword, is set to revolutionise businesses, including travel industry. The post-COVID world is not

only learning about these tools, but also trying to integrate them to their businesses, both to reduce costs and manage manpower.

Times are changing and travel is changing with it. To delve deeper,  speaks to key decision makers in the tourism and hospitality industry, as well as travel technology providers, to get their perspective and to understand what they are doing towards adopting technology in their businesses.



Deepak Narula
Managing Director
GRNConnect

“Technology is one big enabler in the travel industry in today's time. It helps us to improve our product, distribution and also aids in supply side of the business. By embracing technology, one can move from being a small-town travel company and become a global company. There is no end of innovation in technology and new products are being introduced everyday to make it easier for our travel partners to do business. There are Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools available to study the pattern of future bookings, current trends, etc. in the travel industry. Technology helps us to plan our product line accordingly. We at GRNconnect are constantly working towards bringing the best in technology to our travel partners at every stage. Very soon, we will be launching a series of new features, which will further improve the experience of booking on our portal www.GRNConnect.com.”

Contd on page 10 ▶

IATO promises constant support

Rajiv Mehra thanks IATO members for re-electing him as President, says electing six office-bearers unopposed is 'unprecedented in IATO's history' and promises that his team, elected for the two-year term, will try its best to do whatever it could do for the travel fraternity.



Nisha Verma

The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) office-bearers were elected unopposed and voting took place for the Executive Committee (EC) members recently. Out of 378 eligible members, 278 cast their votes. The Returning Officer was Homa Mistry.

Rajiv Mehra, thanked the members for their support. “I am overwhelmed with the support of IATO members, by first electing all the office-bearers unopposed and then all eight EC members from my dream team with over 200 votes each. However, being re-elected means that we must work harder than before. Electing six office-bearers

unopposed is an achievement that is unprecedented in IATO's history. I am grateful and we will try our best to do whatever we can for our fraternity,” he said.

Mehra said that they will meet Union Minister Piyush Goyal. “We will take up the matter of SEIS or any refined version of that soon,” he added.

Next in line is the convention, which will be held at Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar. “The convention will be held sometime in September and the dates will be officially announced soon. I would like to clarify that rooms and flights are not a problem at the destination. We already have an inventory of 375 rooms confirmed. Aurangabad or

Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar is a city that has two airports now - one is Aurangabad airport and second is Shirdi Airport, which is just 40-minute drive. We are hoping it to be a successful convention and we are getting full support from Hon. Chief Minister of Maharashtra, along with Deputy CM, Hon. Speaker, Leader of opposition, and Tourism Minister.



Rajiv Mehra
President, IATO

All of them will be present at the convention,” he shared. ▶



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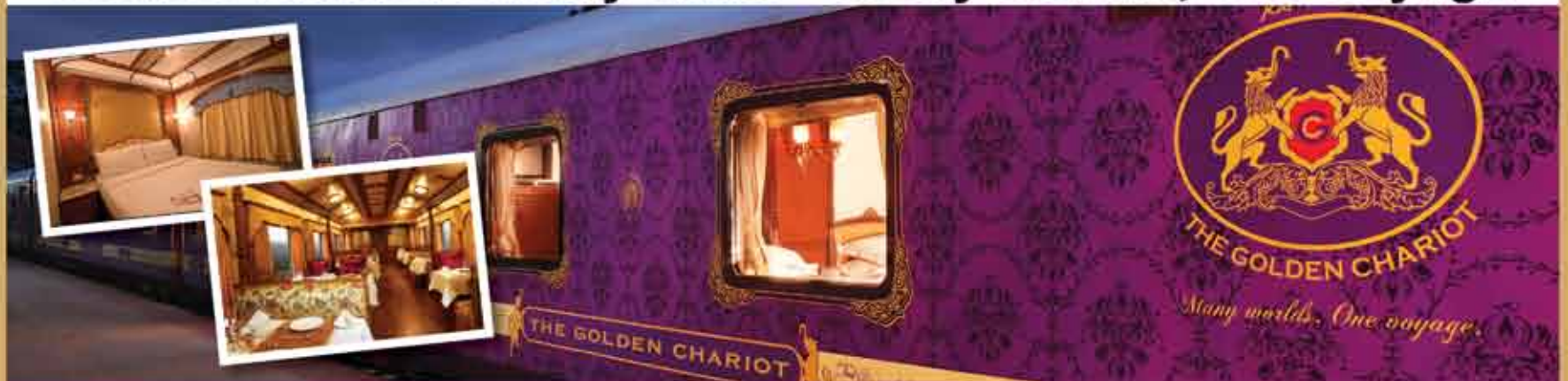
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M!CE must for hospitality: Poddar

Sudesh Kumar Poddar, President, Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI), claims that urging the government to bring more events and boost M!CE industry in the country will be his key focus, which will not only bring business to hotels across India, but will also create better tourism infrastructure.

Nisha Verma

Sudesh Kumar Poddar, Director, Manthan Bar & Restaurant and Natraj Hotels & Resorts, has recently been elected as President, Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI). The association has got a President after five years. "The last FHRAI President retired in 2018 and after that the position has been empty for the last five years. Within this time, we have seen the pandemic and a sea change in the hospitality industry," says Poddar.



Sudesh Kumar Poddar
President
FHRAI

M!CE is key

In his new role, he claims, the key area of focus will be to urge the government to have more M!CE tourism on the lines of G20, as well as national and international games in India. "Once such mega events happen in the country, the direct benefit goes to the transport and the hospitality industry. Recently, the 2023 Men's FIH Hockey World Cup happened in Bhubaneswar. All the hotels were

full for almost 45 days and with the G20 meetings happening in the country, right from Arunachal Pradesh to Leh-Ladakh-Kashmir, and down to Kerala, all the hotels in small and big places are being benefitted. Thus, the government should focus more on M!CE tourism, so that the hospitality sector gets its share of business," he suggests.

Manpower challenge

He says the biggest challenge in the hospitality industry is shortage of manpower, which would be another focus for him. "To me, it appears that this shortage is due to the lower payscale in the hospitality industry. The people working in the hospitality industry are skilled workers, like a lawyer, MBA, engineer or skilled workers from any other industry. This includes chefs, captains, stewards, and front office managers, as they all come from hotel management institutes. However, their pay is on the lower side. Hence, my focus would be urging the hotels and restaurants to increase ₹10-120 on a plate of food or drink and then increase the salary structure, so that people from other fields are keen to work in hospitality industry. Currently, there is an exodus from this industry and people are going to different industries, resulting in acute shortage of manpower," he adds.

Hospitality future

Claiming that hotel rates have gone

up and availability is an issue, he says, "Any tourism place in India today has acute dearth of hotels. As we are poised for a huge growth in the hospitality industry, we are trying to request more en-

Once such mega events (on the lines of G20 meetings) happen in the country, the direct benefit goes to the transport and the hospitality industry

trepreneurs to come into the hospitality industry and bring more hotels, homestays, guest houses and places of accommodation."

Post-COVID changes

Saying that the industry has changed drastically after

COVID first hit the world, Poddar suggests, "The most important thing we have learnt is not to jump and not go overboard in terms of money. During COVID, many industrialists or hoteliers who did not have big pockets, had to shut their business. We cannot repeat this mistake in future. Hence, our expenses should be limited as far as day-to-day running of the hotel is concerned. Also, we must look into our pockets and then go for expansion."

Spotlight Northeast

Poddar says that Northeast is closest to his heart. "All my business is in Northeast and Eastern India. The region has so much to offer for tourism and now with PM Modi's focus for growth of tourism there, I am sure there will be a growth boom. Be it Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Kaziranga, Kolkata, Darjeeling or Sandakphu, Northeast is going to be the sought after destination for all the tourists in the country and abroad. Most importantly, it's virgin," he mentions.

Government demands

On behalf of FHRAI, there are many demands from the government, and Poddar will be taking them forward. "We have been talking about industry status and infrastructure status for the hospitality industry. We are doing a lot about it and many states have already given infrastructure status to hospitality. While these things will come eventually, for the hospitality industry to thrive and do well, people in huge numbers must come to the country. G20 is a game changer. This is my topmost priority and very soon we are meeting the Hon. Tourism Minister also for the same agenda. We will ask the government to continue doing this," he shares.

PPP mode

Speaking on the importance of public private partnership (PPP), Poddar suggests, "There are thousands of properties with the government which were either lying idle or not being run properly. The only option in such cases is PPP, which can help develop them."

TRA VEL HANGAR

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Exhibitions helping biz?

Travel exhibitions can be highly beneficial for businesses in the travel industry, but is India experiencing an overkill of events? Since the beginning of 2023, we are witnessing an average of two events a day across the country. There are conferences, networking evenings, exhibitions, roadshows and conventions. But are the agents making the most of this? While travel events can help businesses improve, it's important to prepare well and go with a set agenda. We list a few opportunities to maximise at each travel exhibition.

Networking Opportunities: While this is a great platform for businesses to meet and network, it's best to identify people in advance and prefix meetings; **Brand Exposure:** Events can help businesses gain more exposure and increase brand awareness; **Market Research:** One can conduct market research by observing competitors and gathering feedback from potential customers; **Product Launches:** One can generate interest around their new offerings by showcasing new products.

Technology for Tourism

Technology has a significant impact on the travel industry, transforming the way people plan, book, and experience their trips. One of the most significant impacts of technology on the travel industry is the rise of online booking. Customers can now research and book flights, hotels, rental cars, and other travel-related services online from the comfort of their homes.

But technology is not only for the end users. It is influencing the travel fraternity as well. Virtual and augmented reality technologies are being used to provide immersive experiences before a trip to help travellers get a sense of what to expect before they arrive. Travel companies can use big data and analytics to better understand customer behaviour and preferences. This helps provide tailored recommendations, improving sales.

Technology has revolutionized the travel industry, making it easier for travel companies to reach and engage with travellers.

Wellness high in demand

When it comes to relishing their holidays, Indians are increasingly exploring destinations which offer luxury experiences as they are willing to spend more this year on personal wellness and detox from social media while on a holiday.



TT Bureau

It's not about ticking the checklist of sightseeing for Indians anymore. When it comes to relishing their holidays, Indians prefer spending on personal wellness and luxury experiences. It has been revealed in the latest American Express Travel 2023 Global Travel Trends Report. The report is based on survey data from travellers across the United States, Australia, Canada, Mexico, Japan, India, and the United Kingdom.

According to the results, 90 per cent surveyed Indians are prioritising travel plans focusing on



personal wellness with 87 per cent planning on spending more money on luxury experiences than conventional luxury goods this year.

"Indians are planning to travel for gaining new experiences, learning about a city and its culture, breaking away from monotony and trying new food or cuisine. New trends like solo and bleisure travel is also picking up amongst Indian travellers. With the ongoing demand for travelling, we are backing our card members with compelling offers and benefits, helping them get better value for their trips and creating



joyful memories," says Sanjay Khanna, CEO, American Express Banking Corp India.

Pop culture influence

It was also revealed that pop-culture and social media are

influencing the rise of set-jetting.

The top sources of travel inspiration for surveyed Indians include Instagram (63%), Facebook (63%), online blogs (49 per cent) and TV shows (49 per cent).

A total of 48 per cent Indian respondents agree that they have been inspired to travel this year by a recent TV show/movie, with Game of Thrones and Emily in Paris topping the list.

95 per cent surveyed Indian GenZers agree that they are inspired to visit specific travel destinations after seeing them featured on TV shows, news sources or movies.

Culinary experiences

Apart from that food preferences are driving the travel preferences of Indians.

Highest amongst all the surveyed countries, 86 per cent Indian respondents shared that



48 per cent Indian respondents agree that they have been inspired to travel this year by a recent TV show/ movie; Game of Thrones tops the list

they typically book travel destinations based on popular restaurants located there. Participating in the local restaurant scene and food festivals are top experiences they are looking forward to during their upcoming travels.

When it comes to food inspiration, more than 98 per cent surveyed Indians agree that they are open to venturing out of their comfort zone and trying new foods while traveling.

Sustainability on mind

Also, supporting local communities and the environment is on the minds of Indians while traveling.

97 per cent are interested in going on a vacation that supports local communities in 2023. 94 per cent of surveyed Indians say that they are more mindful of the environmental impact of their travel decisions compared to a year ago.

Going for hidden locales

Another preference was exploring lesser-known destinations and traveling on off-the-beaten path.

98 per cent surveyed Indians want to travel to a place they have never been before.

Indian respondents are seeking hidden gems as 94 per cent agree that they want to explore lesser-known destinations and 95 per cent agree that they want to travel to a destination that is off-the-beaten path.

90% Indians are prioritising travel plans focusing on personal wellness with 87 per cent planning on spending more on luxury experiences



Emirates' bold approach to India

Tim Clark, President, Emirates, says the airline's focus is on robust business model and commitment to meeting customer needs. He highlights the need for innovation and flexibility in the dynamic aviation market.



Janice Alyosius

Emirates airlines has emerged as one of the most resilient and innovative airlines in the aviation industry. "The airline's strong network, which serves almost every city on the planet, allowed it to weather the COVID storm and emerge as the most profitable in its history," shared, **Tim Clark**, President, Emirates.

Emirates' resilience

Emirates had previously experienced economic and geopolitical challenges, which helped the airline to remain confident that the aviation industry would recover from the pandemic. Speaking of the resilience in the times of crisis, Clark said, "The airline was prepared for the end of pandemic and was able to reactivate its fleet and rehire staff as early as 2021. The successful implementation of an all-cargo operation helped Emirates become cash positive by mid-2021. The airline's strong network allowed it to weather the



Tim Clark
President
Emirates

COVID storm and emerge as the most profitable in its history."

Lessons learnt from COVID

Clark said despite being the most severe global economic crisis since World War II, the aviation industry successfully navigated through the pandemic. "Lessons learned from this crisis will enable the industry to sustain and manage through any future crises that may arise. The

Emirates management team holds the firm belief that challenges can be resolved or will eventually come to an end and is confident in its ability to tackle any obstacle that comes its way," he said.

Emirates' India strategy

Clark disclosed the Emirates' strategy for India and said, "Emirates recognizes the immense potential in India, and we need to adopt a bold and courageous approach, leveraging emerging technologies such as AI to improve our ability to engage with our present and future customers."

Consumer behaviour and preferences

Clark observed that there is a strong demand for air travel, with over five people showing interest in purchasing every seat offered by Emirates. As a result, passengers are willing to pay more than they did in the past. This provides valuable insights into consumer behaviour and preferences, but Emirates cannot be

complacent and assume that prices will remain high indefinitely. "The demand for air travel has always been high, particularly for full-service carriers on long-haul flights," he said.



Experiencing challenges in the past helped the airline to remain confident that the aviation industry would recover from the pandemic

Creating value in value chain

Emphasizing on the creation of a value chain, Clark said that a robust business model, consistent product development, and unyielding commitment to meeting customer needs are crucial in today's economy. 🐦

For Yas Island, India #1 market

Liam Findlay, CEO, Miral Destinations, highlights the importance of Indian market for Yas Island and says their focus is on promoting the destination in India, improving ties with the travel trade, and tapping MICE & wedding segments.



Janice Alyosius

Liam Findlay, Chief Executive Officer, Miral Destinations, highlighting the importance of Indian market for Yas Island, said the country has become the number one inbound market for them in the last 10 years. He shared the strategies to ensure a promising year for the destination.

Promoting Yas Island in India

To tap into the Indian market, Yas Island has been working on a five-year roadmap. "The brand ambassador for Yas Island in India is Ranvir Singh, and the destination has done a lot of work with him to promote Yas Island. We have recently launched our third campaign to target the summer season and have done brand association with Master Chef, had five episodes on Yas Island, and we will have the IIFA again this year," he shared.

The destination has also planned concerts and activities around Diwali to target Indian guests.



Liam Findlay
Chief Executive Officer
Miral Destinations

Tapping into MICE, weddings

The MICE and wedding segments have been an interesting market for Yas Island, with MICE being the first to recover from the pandemic.

"The MICE industry, particularly in India, has shown a remarkable recovery from the pandemic, and we have witnessed significant growth in this sector. At Yas Island, we have taken proactive

measures by allocating dedicated resources and forming a specialized team to provide lucrative incentives to attract MICE companies and events. In addition, we offer similar incentives for weddings, which is a fascinating and substantial market, especially for Indian weddings. With the Indian wedding market being a long-stay market, we have recruited specialized personnel to target this market and offer tailor-made services to our Indian clients," he shared.

Working with travel trade

Yas Island sees the travel trade as the most important element when it comes to their Indian strategy. "We have increased our resources in the Indian market from three people to 10 people and do a lot of lower co-op marketing with the travel trade to build the brand of Yas Island. The travel trade is essential to help convert business for Yas Island," shared Findlay.

Increasing the length of stay

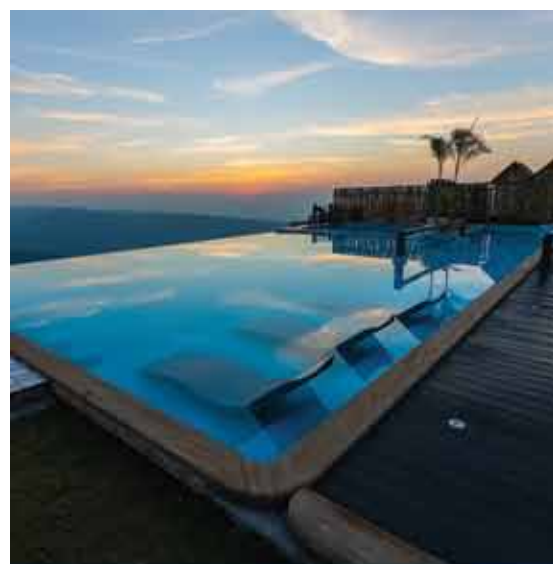
Yas Island's main KPI is length of

stay, and they have been working to increase it. The destination has built more hotels in the last two years, with another thousand rooms on the island.

"We have also introduced more attractions, such as Warner Brothers Theme Park, Climb, the Yas Bay Arena, and a culinary destination with over 30 restaurants specializing in Indian cuisine. Our aim is to increase the length of stay to three to four nights for Indian guests," he said.

Collaboration and partnerships in the pipeline

Yas Island has a lot more partnerships and collaborations in the pipeline, with some exciting news coming up soon, shared Findlay. "The Indian market is essential for Yas Island, and we are committed to tapping into it. With more investments, promotions, and incentives, Yas Island is well on its way to becoming a top destination for Indian tourists," he said. 🐦



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India plans 50 new tourism destinations, 59 new air routes: Arvind Singh

Rezlive, TravTalk & Turning Points to host networking evening on 2 May in Dubai

66 per cent Indian travellers believe sustainable options too expensive: Booking.com

Holiday Moods announces offers for Antarctica air-cruise programs on its 20th anniversary

Marriott to open 15 hotels in South Asia this year, to debut Moxy brand in India in 2024

Rajasthan to re-develop 23 airstrips with PPP under rural tourism policy, says Tourism Minister

Delhi, Mumbai must plan 3rd airports; aviation policy to aim capacity for next generation: CAPA India

MAG does a turnaround

Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG) posts a turnaround in operating profits at RM556 million from RM767 million a year ago. Its passenger traffic and capacity increased by 5.7X and 6.9X, respectively year on year and recorded an average load factor of 75 per cent for 2022.



TT Bureau

Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG) registered one of its best ever quarter performance in the past two decades. The Group attributed the successful results to the robust demand, higher yield across passenger and cargo business segments, as well as effective cost management and cashflow optimisation, despite higher fuel prices and labour costs, weaker ringgit (MYR) and lower than prepandemic flight capacity levels. It achieved a record net profit of RM1.146 billion in Q42022 after interest and tax. For full year 2022, the Group recorded a net operating profit of RM556 million, while a net loss after interest and tax for the year reduced 79 per cent to RM344 million from RM1.65 billion a year ago. Cash balance stood at RM4.6 billion on 31 December 2022.

The Group also saw improvement across all its business segments during the year. Its cargo subsidiary, MABkargo Berhad



Captain Izham Ismail
Group Managing Director
Malaysia Aviation Group

(MABkargo) recorded marginally weaker performance compared to a year ago amid softening of global freight demand and increased capacity in the market in the 2H22. Total revenue of its main airline, Malaysia Airlines Berhad (MAB) tripled compared to the year before, underpinned by strong demand on the international sector for both passenger travel and cargo freight.



continues to accelerate its Sustainability Blueprint agenda in all sectors, inspiring positive change through various initiatives. In ad-

Captain Izham Ismail, Group Managing Director, MAG, says, "MAG has emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic on a strong financial footing and is charting an upward financial trajectory. However, there are still many areas for improvement, especially in OTP and customer experience. The Group is fully committed to addressing these gaps and delivering an unparalleled customer experience."

Travel demand outlook remains strong in the near term, although macroeconomics environment remains challenging with sustained high fuel prices, volatile forex, higher operating costs due to inflation, labour constraints, recession and geopolitical risks. With China's border reopening in

January 2023, MAB aims to regain the remaining capacity for its entire network, which currently stands at 85 per cent, and fully recovering services to China and North Asia by the end of 1H23. This will spur economic growth between Malaysia and China, boosting the overall business and trade links between the two countries. In line with its Long-Term Business Plan 2.0 and continuing the growth of Firefly jet operations, MAB will be transferring in phases intra-Borneo services and Kota Kinabalu international services to Firefly, as a result of continued positive demand recoveries across all the markets.

MAG looks forward to taking delivery of four out of 25 Boeing 737-8 from 3Q23 onwards. The Group

Malaysia Aviation Group has emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic on a strong financial footing and is charting an upward financial trajectory

dition to supporting the United Nations' 13th SDG (Climate Action), these initiatives target three other SDGs: Goal 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), and Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).

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Leveraging technology's strength



Rakesh Verma
Additional Secretary
Ministry of Tourism

“Digital and technology remain an important area, where we need to build competencies and capabilities for marketing and promotion of tourism. We are looking at over ₹1000 crore to be given to the National Tourism Board of India for implementing the marketing and promotional campaigns. It will cover different channels and the focus will be on country specific strategies and on digital platform. Digital marketing will be a very important pillar of our approach and there is a significant allocation for digital marketing in the next two years. We've engaged two agencies— one for branding and one for providing a very strong adobe platform. Our website portal will also undergo a massive change and there will be many digital marketing efforts from our side.”



Manisha Saxena
Director General
Ministry of Tourism

“In earlier days, when you planned a trip, you consulted a travel agent or you spoke to someone who has been on that side of the world. Now everybody just picks up their phone or laptop and browse. Hence, a digital presentation of your strengths is very important as a destination and a lot of states have done some very good work on it. Almost everyone has a website and a tourism app. While digitalization is challenging, it's important to know how to combine all of it with the places where all the action is. We are working very keenly on it, and we would bridge that gap. We are leveraging the strength of social media and using digital media, AR, VR, evidence-based studies from the visitors from various countries. It will throw up some very good insights”



Dr. Satya Ramaswamy
Chief Digital & Technology Officer
Air India

“We want to create a sustainable competitive advantage in our operations by adopting the world's best in digital technologies. The scope of the technology transformation at Air India is extensive and covers every aspect of the airline including commercial, engineering, operations, ground handling, finance, human resources, and corporate functions. We are empowering employees across the company, ranging from frontline flying staff to ground crew with the best technology capabilities to help them excel at their jobs. We are adopting a cloud-only, mobile-friendly, design-rich, AI-infused, digital-first approach to all our technology initiatives that we are executing with speed. The modernisation of Air India's digital & technology landscape will benefit group airlines including LCCs.”



Amit Madhan
President & Group Head – Technology & ESG, Thomas Cook (India)

“Technology is a crucial part of the travel industry. It helps businesses run efficient day-to-day operations while constantly improving customer experience. Organizations across travel & hospitality sector now have access to real-time data from multiple sources to help improve demand forecasting, guest profiling and resource planning. AI & Machine Learning have elevated to an advanced level of sophistication. With the introduction of Chat GPT and generative AI, the industry is rapidly adapting and scaling up its tech advancements to offer customers with innovative solution/services. At Thomas Cook, we have chatbots that are live on our websites, we are exploring Chat GPT and generative AI to use them to our advantage & further strengthen our tech prowess.”



Anuj Bang
CIO
Stuba.com

“With huge digital advancements over the past two decades, it's almost impossible to operate now without technology, no matter the size of travel business. As well as online/mobile presence, it covers a broad spectrum of internal tools and data handling from an itinerary builder/ quotation generator to mid-office platforms handling finance and CRM functions; to more clever reporting, analytics & AI. AI is the next frontier everyone is trying to master. Already some great strides have been made in adopting AI across different verticals of travel business, including here at Stuba - be it for curating right product for the right customer, marketing, customer services, etc. There is also endless scope for back-end process automation by using Robotic Process Automation (RPA).”



Mani Ganeshan
Global Head, Engineering, Travel Distribution & Centre Head, Amadeus Labs

“Personalisation has become the key to success in the industry, and with the integration of IoT, VR, Robotics, and AI/ML, we can facilitate this transition seamlessly. The use of data analytics and AI allows us to gain insights into guests' preferences, enabling us to tailor services accordingly and provide recommendations that lead to higher guest satisfaction and loyalty. Technology also improves operational efficiency by automating tasks, reducing human error, and freeing up staff time for more critical tasks like guest service. It creates new revenue streams and opportunities for upselling. There are many hotels owned by franchisees. Our solution brings innovation to this industry by offering Hospitality Solutions that operate on the Cloud.”



Hina Sheeraz
Director
Sheeraz Tours

“Technology, especially AI will determine the holiday preferences of customers in the future. Powerful AI platforms will help holidaymakers select destinations & attractions offering the best discounts on limited budgets. Technology has transformed the travel industry in numerous ways and is the way ahead for not only booking tickets but planning an entire holiday. Some of the ways that technology is shaping the future of travel include online booking; mobile apps; AI, which is making travel more personalized and efficient; and VR, which is transforming the way people research and plan their travel experiences. Overall, technology is making travel more convenient, efficient, personalized, and sustainable, and it is likely to continue shaping the way we travel in the future.”



Nicholas Maratos
Vice President, Commercial
Dusit Hotels & Resort

“Technology plays a significant role in enhancing both the booking and guest experiences. By removing friction from the booking process, technology can simplify travel arrangements, from airfare to accommodation. It can reduce the time spent on administrative tasks by hotel staff, allowing them to focus on providing quality service to guests. By leveraging technology, hotels can streamline their operations and allocate more time to interactions with guests. This, in turn, can result in a more personalized and enjoyable experience for travellers. Ultimately, technology can enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and improve the overall travel experience for both guests and hotel staff. The use of technology in travel industry is key to create memorable & satisfying experiences for travellers.”



Vinod Bhat
Chief Information Officer & Chief Ethics Counsellor, Vistara

“The swift pace of technological advancement, increased penetration of internet & smartphones are revolutionising the industry and altering the way we travel. From choosing a destination to booking hotels to flying, every aspect of travel has been witnessing increased utilisation of technology, which promises even more interactive and exciting experience. Mobile Application, virtual reality, AI chatbots, voice search, robotics, contactless payment, biometric based touchless services, IOT, 5G and Edge computing are some of the noteworthy technological interventions that are playing an increasingly active role in the industry today. More and more travellers are opting for online, self-service tools for seamless end-to-end transactions, including ancillary service bookings.”



Abhilasha Negi
Co-founder
Sankash

“COVID accelerated the demand for technology and adoption for a digital transformation. Today, as the industry rebounds, this transformation becomes more vital than ever. Currently, travellers demand and use technology right from the start of their journey by using mobile check-ins to ending their travel with online social media posts and reviews. Travel & hospitality brands therefore have opportunity to distinguish themselves by adopting digital transformation. AI and Chatbot based bookings and reservations, contactless payments and alternative payment methods, personalization of travel experience using big data and predictive analysis as per traveller's past data and mobile first technology for booking and contactless experience, NFTs entering the industry.”



Harminder Singh Ari
Vice President, India Sales
WebEngage

“Emerging technologies can transform the industry by improving efficiency, personalization, sustainability, and overall customer experience. IoT devices, like smart locks, sensors, & wearables are being used to enhance security, improve communication, and personalise guest experience. Blockchain is being used to enhance security, streamline payment processing, and facilitate transparent and trustworthy transactions. Robotics technology is being used to optimize and streamline human effort by automating repetitive tasks such as room service, cleaning, and luggage handling, etc. We have introduced a host of innovative features in our tech-stack like Recommendation & Catalog, App Personalization, and Predictive Segments & Engagement Score, etc.”



Manish Rath
CEO and Co-Founder
IntraCity SmartBus

“Tourism growth is significantly dependent on ease of intercity mobility especially Tier II & III cities connectivity with nearby metros. The Indian National Highways has seen 2X growth since 2011 and will be near 3X by 2025 with 200K KMs in length. The highway expansion has enabled growth on private intercity bus market which has already grown more than 2X between 2017 to now. Intercity buses are a \$30 billion industry servicing over 40 million travellers every day, serving as a critical enabler of economic growth. Over the years, technological advancements have helped travelers & SME bus operators plan their trips in a more efficient way. With the help of telematics backed mobility platforms, 'Connected Bus' is helping SME bus operators provide better experience to travellers.”

At the cusp of transformation



Harmandeep Singh Anand
Managing Director
Global Panorama Showcase

“Technology is the only way forward. There is no other way for anyone. Even if you are a small organization, you need data and net connectivity to stay connected with your vendors and clients. Chat GPT is one of most recent innovations. At GPS itself, we have tied up and have brought in quite a few products. We have Next Cellular that offers e-SIM cards. Then there is another company called Tourways, which is giving complete CRM solution on a tech based platform with more than 500-600 IDs are readily available and the queries of smaller buyers being addressed and answered. In fact, when COVID hit, we were the first persons in the country to shut shop and start work from home as everyone in our office had a laptop and data connectivity.”



George Ettiyil
Senior Director Sales
(South Asia), Lufthansa Group

“Back in October, SWISS became the first airline in the world to deploy the innovative AeroSHARK technology on its passenger services. The transparent AeroSHARK film which has been applied to its aircraft's fuselage and engine nacelles replicates the hydrodynamic skin of a shark to reduce aerodynamic drag and, as a result, lower both inflight fuel consumption and carbon dioxide emissions. The annual CO₂ emission savings of this new technology is up to 15,200 tonnes. We have not spared any effort to halve our 2019 net CO₂ emissions by 2023 and aim to achieve net carbon zero by 2050 through a variety of measures. With Lufthansa Group having committed to €2.5 billion SAF purchase in next 3 years our airline group is the largest SAF customer in Europe.”



Bjorn Bender
Chief Executive Officer
Rail Europe

“We sell one ticket every 12 seconds, which is a result of the technology that we have developed. Everything is linked to technology today and that is why our current focus is to ensure that all travel agents have access to our booking portal ERA – Easy Rail Access – so that they can easily make booking for all the European train journeys. Travel agents can book through our GSAs, as most of them have integrated Rail Europe APIs in their booking platforms. This is also why Rail Europe's B2B platform is the technical heart of the company. We are developing it currently because we are increasing offers month by month. We see demand for newer offers in terms of technology is increasing. We are integrating seat reservations for Eurail passes.”



Saurabh Mehta
Co-Founder & Mentor
Tourwiz

“The pandemic forced businesses to rethink their strategies and adapt to a new world of touchless interactions. One thing that has emerged as a clear winner in this new landscape is technology. With its help, hotels, and tourism companies can streamline and automate almost all aspects of their business. This not only increases efficiency and reduces staff workload but also enhances the overall customer experience. But it's not just about automation - technology can also provide a more personalized experience for customers. Through data analytics and AI, companies can gather information on customers' preferences and tailor offerings accordingly, resulting in increased customer satisfaction. Virtual and augmented reality can provide immersive experiences for travellers.”



Manoj Saraf
Managing Director
Gainwell Travel & Leisure

“In today's time, manpower is the biggest cost for the travel industry and the only way to manage the same is by adopting technology for our businesses. The travel industry is taking a major leap forward in developing and adopting technology. While on one hand, airlines are moving to NDC, on the other, consolidators are moving to self-booking engines enabling travel agents to book and pay online. Agents at their end are using various tools to automate itinerary building and saving time on customised products for their clients. Gainwell Travel & Leisure is also adopting visa & data management tools and enabling our corporates to book tickets on their own. I believe that technology is the only way forward to scale up and survive in any business, and it is the only way forward.”



Pragasen Pathar
Chief Information Officer
Sun International

“Our industry has experienced a significant impact over the last few years due to the pandemic. However, it has also highlighted the need to accelerate our focus on digital capabilities so we can enhance our guest experience. This includes making use of data and technologies to improve existing processes and provide a tailored and personalised experience. Virtual queues, keyless and cashless/ contactless payments are some of the enhancements we are looking at currently. While these might be basic in need, it still requires some thought as we have to ensure security of our customer data is top of mind. These services are complimented by our existing mobile app which was launched in 2022. We have seen a huge increase in conferencing demand.”



Jurgen Bailom
President and CEO
Waterways Leisure

“Technology, as we all know now more than ever, is humankind's greatest enabler and especially so at present. It has helped connect, remain connected, produce results, manage inventories, communicate effectively and a lot more. Our human resources are our pride and asset. Empowering lives and livelihood has always been a top of the line priority for us at Cordelia Cruises. Hence, now with ever evolving technology, we as an industry are able to not only reach that many more in our audience but also cater to them in a much more effective and efficient manner. Whether it is learning about cruising, making an inquiry, confirming a reservation, arriving at the port, coming on board, accessing our services and offerings on the cruise, every single step of the way, we have technology to support our experience.”



Sanjay Ghare
Founder & MD
Vervotech

“Software as a Service (or SaaS) products are giving companies an edge. Tourism industry is going through digital transformation. Pandemic has pushed a transformation further. SaaS-based solutions for TMCs, B2B, B2C, DMCs like white label solutions, payment gateway aggregations, supplier aggregations helping travel businesses to leverage it for digital transformation. Today's travellers need everything at their fingertip and need flexible options, ability to research and personalized recommendations, which businesses are able to offer with SaaS solutions. Vervotech offers a unique solutions to travel companies around the world. Every travel business aggregates hotel rates from multiple suppliers in order to offer the best rates. This results in duplicate hotels, rooms, rates on their website.”



Dr. Ameet Patil
Founder & CEO
Ecobiliz

“Depending on what type of a trip it is, the client will need multiple types of services for which he may keep on using different avenues of payments. Technology like Ecobiliz is an innovative digitization platform that uses AI to capture, read, and accumulate documents and data in real-time for managing the system using advanced business process automation and to churn this data for generating valuable insights for the business. Ecobiliz is aiming to build up a way for business operations without the usage of paper and make contactless business easy. AI is an essential element that is influencing the way the hospitality sector operates, aiding in streamlining key business procedures and assisting in strategic decision-making, with minimum turnaround time for the business owners.”



Ankush Rana
CEO and Co-Founder
ParaBooking

“Like any other business, to implement processes or to function seamlessly, technology has to be integrated into your business. It has become inevitable. We have become dependent on technology and rightly so as it improves efficiency, saves time, and brings in standardization and consistency. Our adventure and tourism industry is no exception, and we saw a boost in technological advancements during the pandemic when people could not travel. We witnessed a boost in travel technology trends booming in 2022 be it augmented reality, virtual reality, or IoTs. In the industry, we are witnessing adopted contactless check-ins/ payments. Most groups are using property management software on cloud, in an attempt to be more sustainable and shed light on our locals. We also cross sell localized services.”



Amit Dutta
Managing Director
BLADE India

“The real game-changer is Urban Air Mobility (UAM). The movement of people and cargo using electric vertical aircrafts is the new way forward. With eVTOL manufacturers like BETA, EVE, Jaunt already in successful flight-testing phases, and support from battery manufacturers and policy makers, governments worldwide are recognizing UAM as the next big disruption in travel. UAM not only reduces travel time on roads, but also enables critical medical evacuations within cities, saving lives. Moreover, it improves cargo deliveries, making it more efficient than ever before. Technology is making our lives easier in every aspect, and UAM is at the forefront of this transformation in the tourism industry. The UAM industry is experiencing an unprecedented wave of technological innovation. We are grateful to the government.”



Sumit Prakash
Country Director
India and South Asia, Collinson

“It's important to ensure that each journey is made seamless and stress-free. Globally, we have recently added new digital services such as smart queue management and at-table ordering to our owned and networked lounge portfolio. We have also increased our investment in Servy, the largest e-commerce platforms in airports worldwide, to provide a more connected, contactless and seamless airport experience. India has been, and will continue to be, an important market for us. Last year, we launched Priority Pass Access India, a dedicated domestic lounge experience program that enables eligible cardholders to enter over 50 lounges across major cities in India by simply swiping their payment card. We formed two strategic partnerships in India. The first is with PineLabs, a domestic platform.”

Inputs by TT Bureau



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Are agents still relevant?

In an age when more and more travellers are booking their trips online, many principals have started to go direct to the consumers, or at least started to think in that direction. But there are some things that only a travel agent, or rather an advisor, can do. **TRAVELTALK** speaks to key decision-makers from both sides of the fence to get their perspective.



Vasundhara Gupta
Business Development and Marketing Head, Lotus Aero Enterprises

“Travel agents have and will play a very important role in our success. They are not only great in helping us know where we are doing well, what we can do better, but they are instrumental towards engaging with the many customised needs of the Indian customer. However, to stay ahead of the race, especially within cruising, which is growing aggressively within India, travel agents will need to make sure they are open and well aware of the cruising products on offer, new itinerary developments, latest features offered by ships.”



Bilen Aretaine
Regional Director
India Subcontinent, Ethiopian Airlines

“There are several reasons why we choose to use B2B channels when booking travel. We offer attractive offers including higher commission, dynamic service charge application, confirmation priority for waitlisted bookings and group bookings. B2B platforms enable businesses to automate and streamline their procurement processes, which can save time and reduce costs. B2B platforms allow businesses to provide their customers with a more convenient and user-friendly purchasing experience.”



Jitul Mehta
Western India Chapter
TAFI

“These days, the principals like hotels and airlines have started approaching clients directly by-passing their trade partners. They think they will earn higher revenue with direct clients, so they offer huge discounts and freebies to them. But they don't realise that 90 per cent of these clients are coming to them directly only because of the discounts and freebies. This move is affecting their profitability and their bottom line. The moment they stop all these discounts, the clients will move away and come back to us.”



Romil Pant
Executive Vice President & Business Head
– Holidays, Thomas Cook (India)

“For Thomas Cook, our B2B partners play a very important role in the ecosystem. They reach to customers who trust them for all their holiday needs and provide the best-in-class products to their customers when they sell our products. This is a win-win for all parties, as customers get great products, the B2B agent gets excellent commissions, along with the assurance of perfect on ground delivery and Thomas Cook can connect with customers who may in the past would not have access to our services and products.”



Pradeep Saboo
CMD
Guideline Travels

“India is a large country - almost a continent. With diversity in language, preferences and importance on trust in our thinking, most travellers prefer to travel with someone they know. Here is when the local travel agent spread in every corner of the country come into play. They are the most important influence in the decision making of the traveller. If our travel partner is familiar with our products, he can convert the sale. The traveller looks upon them for advice and many times follow what regular travel agent suggests.”



Neliswa Nkani
Hub Head – MEISEA
South African Tourism

“India is a major source market for us and collaborating with multiple B2B channels, such as travel and tour agents, has helped develop our growth trajectory. They have always been an essential part of our strategy for promoting the overall destination and attracting visitors; their expertise and networks are invaluable, and we are grateful for their partnership in this effort. The travel trade fraternity is the backbone of the travel and tourism industry that helps facilitate reaching a wider audience for potential visitors.”

Inputs by Hazel Jain

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IRCTC showcases luxury on wheels

Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), the public sector undertaking, operates exclusive trains to offer varied experiences for travellers and promote rail-bound domestic and inbound tourism in India.

TT Bureau

The Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) is a pioneer in religious tourism, regional tourism, and luxury trains like Buddhist Circuit Special Train, Golden Chariot Luxury Train, Maharajas' Express.

Buddhist Circuit Train

The latest achievement in religious tourism is IRCTC's Buddhist Special Tourist Train, which has already completed its Crystal Anniversary being in operation for 15 years since inception. After being suspended due to COVID-19 for two years, its operation has been resumed with its departure on 11



kitchen car, which serves an array of specialty international and local cuisines for the on-board guests. The 7 Nights/ 8 Days package

over several centuries. Each guest carriage has four deluxe cabins with a mix of twins and doubles. The guest cabins are a mix of 13 Double Bed Cabins, 30 Twin Bed Cabins and 1 Cabin for specially-abled. There are two restaurants — Ruchi and Nalapaka and a bar Madira. Also, Arogya the Spa cum Fitness Centre combines traditional Ayurvedic Spa therapies with modern workout machines.

There are three carefully selected itineraries:

- ❖ Pride of Karnataka (5 Nights/ 6 Days) - Starts from Bengaluru covering Bandipur, Mysore, Halebidu, Chikmangalur, Hampi, Goa and back to Bengaluru.
- ❖ Jewels of South (5 Nights/ 6 Days) - Starts from Bengaluru covering Mysore, Mahabalipuram, Thanjavur, Chettinad, Cochin, Chertala and back to Bengaluru.
- ❖ Glimpses of Karnataka (3 Nights/ 4 Days) - Starts from

Golden Chariot Luxury Train operates in the South of India and covers various states with an aim to connect some key historical places

quisite facilities onboard, the train offers 23-carriage long train and houses four different types of accommodation viz. Deluxe Cabins, Junior Suite Cabins, Suites and Presidential Suite.

The train offers four trips:

- ❖ Indian Splendour (6 Nights/7 Days) - starting in Delhi covering Agra, Ranthambore, Jaipur, Bikaner, Jodhpur, Udaipur and ending in Mumbai.



March 2023 for the season. The next season departures of Buddhist Circuit Tourist Train shall commence from 21 October 2023.

Also, IRCTC has come up with an all-inclusive Buddhist Circuit Train Tour of 7 Nights/ 8 Days from Delhi Safdarjung covering the various important destinations associated with the life of Lord Buddha such as Bodhgaya, Nalanda (Rajgir), Varanasi (Sarnath), Lumbini, Kushinagar and Sravasti. The journey ends with a visit to Taj Mahal, a UNESCO World Heritage and one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

Passengers can experience IRCTC's fully air-conditioned deluxe tourist train comprising 12 state of the arts ergonomically designed brand new LHB coaches equipped with modern amenities. The passengers have an option of travelling on specially designed AC-I coaches or AC-II coaches as per their choice. The AC-I coaches, besides being cozy with spacious cabins and coupes, have been fitted with in-room amenities like individual lockers for tourists. The train also has spacious AC-II Tier coaches, which have been modified to have spacious and comfortable cabins. The train also has two aesthetically designed dining cars. The train has a fully equipped

starts from a price of ₹90,240 per person or US \$1,144 per person on twin sharing basis.

Details of the train and tour package price are available on exclusive portal of the train www.irctcbuddhisttrain.com.



The Golden Chariot Luxury Train

Owned by Karnataka Tourism, the Golden Chariot Luxury Train is marketed and operated by the IRCTC. The train operates in the South of India and covers various states with an aim to connect some of the important dots that have shaped the history of South India through several centuries.

The guest carriages of the Golden Chariot train are named after the dynasties that ruled South India

Bengaluru covering Nanjagud, Mysore, Hampi and back to Bengaluru.

Maharajas' Express

Also owned and operated by IRCTC is the Maharajas' Express, which started in 2010 and has been one of the most prestigious luxury trains in the world during the last 12 years.

Carving a niche market for itself for its enriching journey experiences coupled with ex-

- ❖ Heritage of India (6 Nights/7 Days) starting in Mumbai covering Udaipur, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Jaipur, Ranthambore, Fatehpur Sikri, Agra and ending in Delhi.

- ❖ Indian Panorama (6 Nights/7 Days) starting in Delhi covering Jaipur, Fatehpur Sikri, Ranthambore, Agra, Orcha, Khajuraho, Varanasi and ending in Delhi.

- ❖ Treasures of India (3 Nights/4 Days) starts in Delhi and covers Agra, Ranthambore and Jaipur.

TITLIS GLACIER MOUNTAIN

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IN THE HEART OF SWITZERLAND

Marketing & SEIS priority for IATO

The new team of Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), which is the dream team of re-elected President Rajiv Mehra, is excited to put up an equally better performance in its second innings. The focus of the association remains on international promotions and Service Exports from India Scheme (SEIS) of the government.



Most members in IATO's team have been re-elected, which speaks a lot about the faith of the members in the office-bearers and executive committee. Now, the team is all geared to make sure that they deliver their promises.

Restarting roadshows, marts
Rajnish Kaistha, Senior Vice President, IATO, says that they will continue from where they left and would like to accomplish much more in the next two years. "Ours has been the most beleaguered industry as far as tourism, particularly leisure inbound, is concerned. Since the government has shut down all their Indian offices abroad, we have asked the embassies that all tourism officers who will be joining there, should train with us before going for postings abroad. Secondly, physical roadshows must start immediately, because that is the need of the hour. While we have



attended some tourism exhibitions and international marts like ITB and WTM, we want to go for many more on a regular basis with the help of MOT," he claims.

Apart from that, he informs, "Budget for overseas marketing is being worked out and is in pipeline. The Indian tourism website is being revamped as a holistic website that should be soon ready. SEIS and other schemes are gone, and hence government

should come up with something new for tourism—any incentive to our industry by way of direct and indirect support, so that not only do we bring tourism, but also foreign exchange."

Reviving businesses

Ravi Gosain, Vice President, IATO, insists that getting re-elected is not just a prize, but an achievement of what we have done in the past. "We will leave no stone unturned in future to make IATO members

proud. The first thing we must do is to revive our businesses. Hence, we are working closely with MOT to go with overseas promotions. Thus, as soon as possible, we need a lot of visibility for India," he adds.

Ready for new regime

Sanjay Razdan, Hony. Secretary, IATO, claims that they hope to further the agendas of the last two years. "We have tried to fulfil all the aspirations of our members to the

best of our capabilities. Now we must continue the requests and demands we have made with the government in the last two years, including tourism promotion. I think the government is listening to us. After the closing of India tourism offices abroad, new regime is taking place. After that we would know how government is going to promote India. We are after the government to tell us the roadmap and we are giving them our suggestions. In fact, IATO has suc-

ceeded in bringing back the MDA scheme, which was stopped for some time. We are now trying for SEIS to come back," he says.

Global media campaign

Viney Tyagi, Hony. Treasurer, IATO, says there is tough time ahead for inbound. "Overseas

Budget for overseas marketing is being worked out. The Indian tourism website is being revamped holistically and should be soon ready

marketing is one issue. We are going to pursue MOT to build up the tempo about the same, so that we have more clients in the next season," he adds.

Technology changing way of travel

Sandeep Dwivedi, COO, ITQ, believes that technology is the way forward for travel, not only in easing the complicated businesses, but also for companies to remain relevant. Technology offers immense potential to enhance the tourism industry and make it more accessible, efficient, and sustainable for all, he says.



Sandeep Dwivedi, Chief Operating Officer, Interglobe Technology Quotient (ITQ), said that technological advances have changed the way we travel. "From the advent of the mobile boarding pass to the rise of the Online Travel Agency (OTA), technology has changed the way consumers plan, pay for and go on trips, and these new developments promise an even more interactive and exciting experience. The Global Passenger Survey 2021 conducted by IATA showed that passengers are looking to new technology to give them more control, information and improve efficiency when they travel, but the human touch remains important. Around 43 per cent of passengers prefer to use a travel agency, travel management firm or corporate travel department to book their flights," he said.

Way forward

He pointed out that the travel industry, among so many others,



Sandeep Dwivedi
Chief Operating Officer
Interglobe Technology Quotient (ITQ)

underwent an overnight transformation owing to COVID-19, as flights were cancelled in record numbers and borders started to close. "When the pandemic started, travel and hospitality were still undergoing a digital transition and the situation at that time clearly indicated that technology is the only way forward for tourism. In

response to the pressing requirement, ITQ made use of its VR3 application, which allowed travel retailers to amend any pre-booked ticket with only a few clicks by enabling PNR void, reissue, refund, and revalidation. Another ITQ innovation, the E-ticketing application, allowed them to create an e-ticket and transmit it all at once to the client from the website. The distinct features of these two projects helped manage the time to preserve all the PNRs data locally and provided a solution to the main issue facing the travel industry and travellers following the pandemic," he added.

According to studies conducted by Google, Dwivedi mentioned, only 13 per cent of travellers still use travel agencies to organise their journeys, while 74 per cent plan their trips online, and remaining of them still depend on the traditional methods. "This is a glaring proof that travel has dramatically shifted its paradigm towards the

use of technology. Today's travellers are adept at using technology for their benefit, know exactly what they want, and expect their travel agents to present them with an abundance of choice," he claimed.

He underlined that smart travellers of today look for platforms

Around 43 per cent of passengers prefer to use a travel agency, travel management firm or corporate travel department to book their flights

that offer a one-stop shop for all their travel requirements, from booking flights to booking hotels, something that makes their travel

hassle-free and cost-effective. "This is where technical advancements play a role. The advantages of technology innovation will give travel retailers an edge to understand the need and requirement of their customers and plan their itinerary accordingly. The most recent developments in digital transformation, ranging from IOT, AI, Augmented Reality, and Virtual Reality will help the travel retailers provide more focussed services to their customers, making travel more experiential based than destination driven," informed Dwivedi.

Innovations

When it comes to new technologies entering the travel industry, Dwivedi said, "The introduction of new technologies to the travel sector has been greatly aided by the pandemic. With the emergence of artificial intelligence and mobile devices, customers expect a much greater level of personalization than ever before. These are

the main reasons why the travel industry is consistently striving to find new and innovative ways of integrating breakthrough technologies into its operations. Advanced travel search engines, AI dynamic pricing engines, dynamic scheduling systems, internet of things, augmented reality and virtual reality, contactless amenities, AI chatbots, and UV-light-sanitizing robots for hotels, aircraft, and airports are all examples of the technological innovations that are ruling the industry today."

Aiming for ease

Sharing details on tech innovations at ITQ, he said, "We are constantly working to use technology to streamline the complicated nature of the sector and make travel retailing quicker, simpler, and more up to date. Our official partner Travelport has developed a technologically advanced platform called Smartpoint Cloud, which will soon be introduced to the Indian market."

Abu Dhabi beckons Indians

A three-day India roadshow by Experience Abu Dhabi and Abu Dhabi Convention and Exhibition Bureau (ADCEB), featuring visits to Chennai, Ahmedabad, and Kolkata, showcases unique and diverse experiences.

TT Bureau

Experience Abu Dhabi and Abu Dhabi Convention and Exhibition Bureau (ADCEB) recently wrapped up a successful three-day roadshow in India, which included visits to Chennai, Ahmedabad, and Kolkata. The roadshow was aimed at showcasing the unique and diverse experiences that Abu Dhabi has to offer Indian travellers, while also paving the way for long-term partnerships in the tourism sector.

Over 730 travel trade delegates attended the roadshow across the three cities, where they were able to learn about Abu Dhabi's attraction as an all-year-round destination, with a wide range of events and activities available for visitors. The Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) led the way with a program of one-on-one meetings and presentations, which highlighted the emirate as a leading tourism destination for leisure, business, and incentive travel.

The three-city India roadshow was aimed at showcasing the unique and diverse experiences that Abu Dhabi has to offer Indian travellers

To make travel seamless to these cities, Etihad, Air Arabia, and IndiGo announced direct flights from India to Abu Dhabi. Etihad started a daily flight service to Kolkata, providing a total of seven weekly nonstop services to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport (CCU). Air Arabia also launched direct flights from Abu Dhabi to Kolkata three times a week, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays. Additionally, IndiGo also announced its direct daily flights from Hyderabad to Abu Dhabi and Chennai to Abu Dhabi.

The roadshow also aimed to strengthen existing relationships and build new connections with travel trade partners. With this in mind, the DCT Abu Dhabi, along with 23 key partners, including Etihad Airways, the national carrier of the UAE; Miral Destinations, the one-stop trade, and promo-

tional partner for Yas Island and Saadiyat Island, showcased a range of destination highlights at the event. Throughout the roadshow, partners learned about Abu Dhabi's attractiveness as an all-year-round destination, with an action-packed line-up of events for the summer season. Some of the highlighted events for the summer season include the iconic

Indian International Film Academy Awards (IIFA) that will take place in Abu Dhabi this May, the unrivalled family fun at Paw Patrol Live in June, Guns N' Roses' performance at Etihad Arena on June 1, and the UFC Abu Dhabi Showdown Week and UFC 294 in October. The roadshow also highlighted the many family-friendly features of Abu Dhabi and the variety of experiences that are on offer for Indian holidaymakers, from the tranquillity of Al Ain Oasis and the Al Dhafra desert to the thrills of Yas Island's range of unique theme parks and attractions.

As an added incentive for travellers, a limited time deal of 'stay more, pay less' is available for trips booked between four and

seven nights. Valid from 1 May to 30 September, travellers can choose from a getaway nestled in the city, a gorgeous resort surrounded by turquoise waters, or

a family escape for the kids to enjoy at an amazing value. This India roadshow was significant as the DCT Abu Dhabi targeted tier II cities in India.



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Industry overdoing marketing?

Bizzare TV commercials! Celebrity travel programs! Myriad statistics...! With the industry booming today, one sees more intense marketing and promotions. Is the travel industry overdoing its marketing? Is it an 'overkill' situation? Is a balance needed? Here is what the representatives of various national tourism boards think on the issue.

Bizzare TV commercials! Celebrity travel programs! Myriad statistics...! With the industry booming today, one sees more intense marketing and promotions. Is the travel industry overdoing its marketing? Is it an 'overkill' situation? Is a balance needed? Here is what the representatives of various national tourism boards think on the issue.

Christine Mukharji, Senior Representative, Austrian National Tourist Office (ANTO), says, "Tourism's surge after the pandemic has seen concerns expressed about 'over-tourism', and a search for the right approach. There is a louder call for more sustainable tourism.



Christine Mukharji
Country Manager, ANTO

Tourism's surge after the pandemic has seen concerns expressed about 'over-tourism' in the country, and a search for the right approach

We need more sustainable mass-tourism in tourism. The line of thought is whether it is possible to reduce volumes (overnight stays) while maintaining added values. And how can such a system work in a tourism destination mainly reliant on local jobs. The population doesn't share tourism profits, but has to bear negative consequences. Obviously, we need to involve local population more closely."

Sheetal Munshaw, Director, Atout France India, says, "In the current post-COVID tourism landscape, promotional activity by destinations has significantly increased in their bid to recapture their market seg-

ment and restore tourism numbers. What most destinations have smartly implemented as effective marketing strategies is the showcase of different themes and different aspects of the touristic offering. This is crucial in



Sheetal Munshaw
Director, Atout France India

In the current tourism landscape, promotional activity by destinations has significantly increased in their bid to recapture market segment

revealing multiple facets of the destination, allowing a targeting of a larger genre of travellers."

Abraham Alapatt, President & Group Head - Thomas Cook (India) and SOTC Travel, says, "The COVID factor has instilled a sense of urgency in the industry. They had to overreach to bounce back, because they realised that such setbacks could recur. With the industry booming today, one sees more intense marketing and promotions. The market will find its balance, and we have to keep adapting to situations on the ground."

Akmal Aziz, Deputy Director, North & East India, Tourism Malaysia, says, "Tourism marketing in the present scenario is a necessity and definitely not an overkill, as destinations and businesses are eager to recover lost revenues. All destinations have sharpened their focus on India and see it as their key source market. They are aggressively increasing flight frequencies, launching new sectors and penetrating tier II and tier III Indian cities. To succeed in the competitive outbound lei-



Abraham Alapatt
President & Group Head - Marketing, Service Quality, Value Added Services & Innovation, Thomas Cook (India) and SOTC Travel

COVID has instilled a sense of urgency, as the industry had to overreach to bounce back, because they realised that such setbacks could recur

sure market, it is imperative to aggressively market and promote one's destination. Since the re-



Ellona Pereira
Head, Aviareps India

It is a known fact that tourist boards engage in several marketing techniques to sell their locations' value proposition and features

opening of borders in April 2022, they have aggressively and successfully promoted Malaysia as a leisure, MICE, wedding and golfing destination."

Ellona Pereira, Head Aviareps India, says, "It is a known fact that tourist boards, in their never-ending pursuit of positioning their country as 'top-of-mind recall' for outbound travellers engage in several marketing techniques to sell locations' value proposition and features. This, in turn, automatically inspires many more people to visit that country of choice. Today, using engaging tools like social media, influencers, television programs and films, we can easily create the perfect marketing strategy for a specific destination or country/ region. However, an



Akmal Aziz
Deputy Director, North & East India, Tourism Malaysia

Tourism marketing is a necessity and definitely not an overkill, as destinations and businesses are eager to recover lost revenues

overdose has more downsides than benefits. Hence, it is crucial to know when to halt and not go overboard."

Pereira adds, "Therefore, it is imperative to strike the right balance in marketing strategies, as the final end-game is to ultimately ensure that destinations creates a positive impact and memorable tourism experiences."

Lubaina Sheerazi, CEO & Co-founder, BRANDit, opines, "Overkill in tourism marketing can have both advantageous and adverse consequences. However, with the global tourism industry hit hard by the pandemic, the past year has been critical for the industry to recover, grow, and go back to



Mahendra Vakharia
Managing Director, Pathfinders Holidays

Sometimes oversupply of information can reduce the interest levels, as happens with frequent WhatsApp blasts and promo mails

pre-pandemic levels. We learnt from the pandemic to evolve and adapt, so while we take advantage of destinations that are now open to travellers, we should do so with



Lubaina Sheerazi
CEO & Co-founder, BRANDit

With the tourism industry hit hard by the pandemic, the past year has been critical for the industry to recover, grow, and go back to pre-pandemic levels

caution. It is also critical that the quality of the visitor experience is preserved and that visitors respect local environment and culture."

Pinki Arora, Marketing Representative, Tourism Authority of Thailand, says, "Considering the fact that the pandemic virtually closed the international tourism business for two years, I don't feel there is any 'overkill' in today's tourism marketing. Regular marketing is necessary to keep destinations and tour-



Pinki Arora
Marketing Representative, Tourism Authority of Thailand

Considering that COVID virtually closed international tourism business for two years, I don't feel there is any 'overkill' in today's tourism marketing

ist products 'alive' and in the news. Otherwise, one can lag behind in today's highly competitive tourist marketplace."

Mahendra Vakharia, Managing Director, Pathfinders Holidays, says, "Today, it definitely looks like there is a marketing overkill, as it keeps hitting you frequently. Sometimes oversupply of information can reduce the interest levels, as happens with frequent WhatsApp blasts and promo mails, which are often considered spam."



Inder Raj Ahluwalia
Travel Journalist & Author
(Views expressed are the author's own. The publication may or may not subscribe to them.)

Rail Europe: Unlock connections

Talking about the company's new logo and new tagline 'Unlock Connections', Srijit Nair, General Manager, Rail Europe India, says the new logo redefines the company's identity, and its new colours have a symbolic meaning—magenta brings luminosity and energy, while black indicates stability.



TT Bureau

Please share details of the new logo. How is it different?

The redefined identity of Rail Europe is an opportunity for a new start. The new and fresh colours have a symbolic meaning – magenta brings luminosity and energy to the brand while black establishes stability. The new tagline 'Unlock Connections' is an expression of the brand's promise. We are a simple, accessible, modern tech travel company, truly defined by our new logo.



We (at Rail Europe) are building an identity of our own while remaining true to our values and what we want to convey worldwide

What was the idea behind changing the logo?

We are building an identity of our own while remaining true to our values and what we want to convey worldwide. The new visual identity highlights our desire for simplicity and modernity. Structured around

a conversational bubble, the new Rail Europe logo is also a reference to the great care with which Rail Europe has treated customers over the years, as well as our ambitions for the future.

How does Rail Europe keeps innovating and stays relevant in today's times?

It is important to know how your



brand is perceived by audience worldwide and we are proud that Rail Europe has always been seen as an accessible technology partner. We innovate by implementing new technologies and want to truly transform by perfecting the secure

tech tool that users have come to trust. We have already taken a big step forward by moving from paper tickets to e-tickets and we always want to be a step ahead.

What does this mean for the travel trade?

A rebrand does not mean a complete change in identity. It means a re-alignment with our mission,

and position. Only a technology designed by people for people can make train travel in Europe easier. If Rail Europe was a person, it would be a close friend, who listens to you, reassures you, gives you advice, helps you when you have a problem and creates great memories with you. We strive to be that person for our partners and audiences worldwide. 📌



Srijit Nair
General Manager
Rail Europe India



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Minor Hotels to open Anantara Jaipur in India

Minor Hotels, a hotel owner, operator and investor, currently with a portfolio of 530 hotels and resorts in 56 countries across Asia Pacific, the Middle East, Europe, the Americas, Africa and the Indian Ocean, announces the upcoming debut of its luxury Anantara brand in India. The new-build Anantara Jaipur Hotel will launch in Q4 2023 and is set to become a spectacular venue for weddings and celebrations.

Anantara Jaipur Hotel will feature 150 luxurious guest rooms and suites, including four Terrace Suites with private plunge pools and a 160-sqm Royal Suite with a large terrace and private pool. Dining options will include a specialty Indian fine dining restaurant and terrace.

Tailored holidays for Indians

Saffron World B.V., the Netherlands based Destination Management Company (DMC) handling Foreign Independent Travel (FIT), Leisure Groups and MICE to Europe, is making sure that they are catering to specific requirements of Indian travellers, as they gear up for better business after reorganising and revamping the office as well as the sales team.



TT Bureau

Saffron World B.V. is the Netherlands based DMC handling foreign independent travel (FIT), Leisure Groups and MICE to Europe and is working towards recreating its hold on the market. **Ravi Gosain**, Managing Director, Saffron World B.V., claims that they are strategically placed in the Netherlands, which has better connectivity to all parts of Europe.

"We have set up this company in late 2018 and did good business from India and other parts of the world before COVID hit tourism sector. We have now reorganized and structured our back office and sales team in India to handle B2B clients," he said. "All our products and services are built as per the requirements of Indian travellers. Our sales teams are based in Delhi and Mumbai to help travel agents and tour operators for services in Europe," he added.



Ravi Gosain
Managing Director
Saffron World B.V.

He mentioned that most of the European DMC's either have less staff or no time to handle FIT business. "This makes us different from them because we have full-fledged sales team to reply to clients effectively. Saffron team is doing direct sales calls, attending various travel trade marts, and doing roadshows in all major cities as well as Tier II & III cities to network with existing

as well as new customers. Presently, we are getting excellent response from B2B agents, especially after exhibiting at SATTE 2023 and we are quite hopeful to do good business despite challenges like delays to get appointment for Schengen visa and expensive flights tickets.

We have set up this company in late 2018 and did good business from India and other parts of the world before COVID hit tourism sector

To make further headway in the market, Gosain informed, "In last one year we work hard to create our supplier across Europe and contracted with many

hotels, transport companies to curate best value packages for our customers. We are focused to specialize in tailor made packages which is time consuming but have a great business opportunity. We have set up the targets to get sizeable share of this segment and working hard on strategies to achieve that."

Talking about the Indian market, **Kumar Utkarsh**, General Manager-Sales, Saffron World B.V., said, "India is one of the important outbound market for us and we are very happy to see that travellers demands are expanding beyond traditional tourism products and destinations. The most important for us is to understand tour operators or travel agents' requirements, which they send us on behalf of actual travellers."

He further added, "Thus, unless we have good destination knowledge and experience, it is impossible to create an appropri-



Kumar Utkarsh
General Manager-Sales
Saffron World B.V.

ate or rather saleable product for them. Our management invests maximum time in searching for good places to stay, local tours and experiences, food choices, transport etc and get the best available options to maintain quality and provide best value for every single rupee travellers spend on their holidays through Saffron world."

He shared that they have strategically planned activities to market their products in India by rebuilding the sales team in major source markets.

"We also take part in different city roadshows and trade fairs

We are very happy to see that travellers' demand from India is expanding beyond traditional tourism products and destinations

like SATTE and OTM. Similarly, our online presence and activities are moving with its pace and will get required impetus depending upon future demands and market growth," he added.

Marriott's global reps share ideas

Marriott International brought together its global representatives to share their ideas with the industry at an event organized recently at Le Meridien in New Delhi, as a part of its three-city 'The Exchange - India Roadshow 2023'. The participants gained insights on the latest industry and company updates to make informed business decisions.



Air Peace launches Mumbai flights

Expanding operations to India, Nigerian airline Air Peace has launched two weekly flights from Mumbai to Lagos. The airline plans to rope in other Indian carriers also with an aim to connect Africa to the East, South, and North of India. Olajide Oluwatoyin, COO, Air Peace, highlights the exclusive promotions and offers for the Indian passengers.



Janice Alyosius

Nigerian airline Air Peace has launched its scheduled operations to India with its first flight after the COVID-19 pandemic taking off from Mumbai on April 1. Air Peace began its operations in India in 2020 during the pandemic and has repatriated more than 8,500 Indians from Nigeria to India since then, shared **Olajide Oluwatoyin**, COO, Air Peace.

Flight expansion plans

The Nigerian airline is currently operating two flights per week from



geria. She said, "The two countries have a strong trade relationship,

and many Indian companies are well established in Nigeria. There

is also a lot of traffic between Nigeria and India, including medical tourism. Air Peace is removing the discomfort and long travel times for passengers by offering flights from Nigeria to India that take only nine hours."

Tie-up with other carriers

Air Peace plans to partner with carriers in other markets also. "Air

Peace has a GSA, Minar Group, in India, and is running promotions exclusively for the Indian market. Passengers can buy five business class tickets and get one free, and the airline has launched affordable ticket prices for the Indian market. These offers are exclusive to the Indian market and can be accessed via the airline's website or through Minar Travels offices," she shared.

Trade partnerships

Air Peace's expansion into India offers a significant boost to the trade relationship and partnership between Nigeria and India. The airline's expansion plans and partnerships with other carriers in India will provide a more comfortable travel experience for passengers and open up new destinations. ✈️



Olajide Oluwatoyin
COO
Air Peace



Air Peace is removing the discomfort and long travel times for passengers by offering flights from Nigeria to India that take only nine hours

Mumbai on Tuesdays and Saturdays in the afternoon connecting Mumbai with Lagos. Air Peace is the only carrier connecting direct India to West Africa on a wide body aircraft B-777 with Economy, Business and First Class configuration. The direct flight takes around 9 hours to Lagos. The airline also has plans to expand its network to other parts of India by partnering with other big carriers in the country. Oluwatoyin shared, "Air Peace wants to connect Africa to the East, South, and North of India to provide passengers with a better travel experience. Talks are already underway with some of the carriers in India to achieve this goal."

Importance of Indian market

Oluwatoyin emphasized on the importance of Indian market for Ni-



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A single portal for Cozmo

With a renewed focus on holiday packages as a segment and its net revenue as a business model, Cozmo Travel is currently building a single portal for its travel agent partners that will have everything from packages, visas, and hotels to car rental and many new services.



Hazel Jain

Santosh Kanchan, Country Head – India, Cozmo Travel, is clear about his company's new priorities after the COVID-19 pandemic. He says, "COVID is the time when we changed our model completely – from a focus on turnover and volume, to a more revenue-based model. The focus is now only on those products or segments, which are our strong points. We have also moved to a more cash-based model rather than credit-based B2B ticketing."



Santosh Kanchan
Country Head – India, Cozmo Travel

Cozmo Travel is a General Sales Agent (GSA) for Air Arabia. It started its own travel company in India seven years ago called Cozmo Travel World, which offers end-to-end travel services. Kanchan shares another area that the company has underlined – holiday packages. "We are doing this differently than other travel companies. Since Cozmo is a GSA for Air Arabia for their entire network, we have an advantage of having our

own offices in many of the countries we are selling. This includes the Middle East of course, as well as Egypt, Oman, Armenia, and Jordan. The airline flies from a lot of GCC and CIS countries," he says.

More than 75 global offices

In effect, Cozmo is not a DMC because it has its own offices in these countries. "So when the clients of our travel partners



travel to say Egypt, they will see a Cozmo office there. Therefore, in terms of service, we are better able to take care of their clients in these countries. We are, therefore, focusing on holiday packages only in those countries where we have our own offices. We will soon open one in Georgia

as well," he reveals, adding, "So if any travel agent asks us for a US or a Thailand package, we will have to decline that business because we don't have offices there. We want to be in a place where when a travel agent thinks of Egypt or Oman, they will think of us."

The company has a presence in more than 30 cities and 11 countries, including India. All these offices will be headed by a country manager, who is from that country. Explaining how this will also give Cozmo an upper hand, Kanchan says, "This will help us in the sense that when we sell a package,

we will get better support from the government bodies when we have a local person at the helm. This also helps us build better contact with the government agencies, which helps us promote packages, albeit in a different way," he adds.

All-in-one TravTrolley

Cozmo is currently focusing on developing a one-stop-shop for all its services called TravTrolley. "TravTrolley will have holiday packages, visas, and hotels, all

TravTrolley will have holiday packages, visas, and hotels integrated. We need one single portal for our agents – whether it is visas, or any other service

integrated in one portal. We need one single portal for our agents – whether it is visas, hotels, holiday packages, our own car rental company plus any other new service that we introduce. On this portal, agents only need to deposit money or use any other pay-out and buy any of our services on this portal," Kanchan shares.

Mauritius: Island of niche experiences

From being a mecca of water sports activities to exclusive experiences peppered with the famous Mauritian hospitality, this paradise island is rejigging its offerings to attract the luxury, mature travellers who know what they want.

TRAVTALK speaks to half-a-dozen people from the trade and industry to know their views about the destination.



Manu Kashyap
Director
Windmill Holidays

“Mauritius has rich history and cultural heritage. The island has a unique blend of African, Indian, Chinese, and European influence, which can be seen in its architecture, food, music, and customs. The beautiful tropical climate and stunning natural landscapes include pristine beaches, crystal clear waters, and lush green forests. The island offers a diverse range of activities, including water sports, hiking, and golfing. It is known for its luxury resorts and spas. We welcome you to a safe and welcoming country.”



Lady Sara Moollan
Owner
Solis 360

“Business to Mauritius is picking up and our plan is to get more high-end visitors from India. This used to be a trend a long time ago. These visitors opt for activities that are exclusive and not mainstream in the Indian market – flying in a helicopter to see the undersea life, and cruise. They tend to do things that are authentic in Mauritius, like visit an old colonial house and have lunch even if it is expensive. They will visit places that are a bit out of the way. They will travel on a yacht or on a catamaran and dine at specific places.”



Rajiv Dunneram
Chief Sales & Marketing Officer
Solis 360

“Solis 360 is an experiential DMC in Mauritius and India has great potential for niche travel business. It does not always mean expensive; it may also mean good experiences and we are very much focussed on that. Our role is to showcase and promote Mauritius differently. There is a cliché about the island, but this is a destination that is hiding from Indian travellers. It is a niche destination in the sense that it has always been promoted as a popular honeymoon destination, but it is very rich in niche experiences.”



Atul Bhatara
Manager India & South Asia
Subcontinent, Air Mauritius

“Right now we have a wide-body aircraft from Mumbai to Mauritius with six weekly flights conveniently timed, which suits the hotel check-in and check-out. We are adding Delhi to Mauritius from May 4 with two more flights taking the total to eight weekly flights flying direct to Mauritius. We also have codeshare arrangements with Air India and Vistara, so if visitors are coming from other cities, they have great connectivity from India to Mauritius. More and more airlines are joining the fray.”



Nisha Maistry
Sales Manager
Heritage Resorts

“Heritage Resorts offers a palette of luxury hospitality designed with the perfect blend of superb beach, luxuriant nature, history and adventure boasting the best championship golf course in the Indian Ocean, exceptional spas, a nature reserve and varied culinary concepts in 12 restaurants, including a 19th Century historic plantation house offering gourmet French cuisine. We hope to woo the discerning Indian traveller to discover off-the-beaten-track, holiday experiences within our domain of Bel Ombre.”



Arvind Bundhun
Director
Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority

“Mauritius is one of India's all-time favourite destinations with easy accessibility and tourism experiences that caters to all segments. Tourist arrivals from India have soared since the resumption of international scheduled flights from March 2022. With the launch of our new campaign 'Feel our island energy' focused on the life, pulse, and energy of Mauritius in addition to the increased number flights by Air Mauritius and Vistara from India, we foresee a steep rise in tourist footfalls.”

Inputs by Hazel Jain

The ripple effect

From one rowboat to 95 years of fulfilling travel dreams on the roads, rivers & rails of the world, the Globus family of brands has covered a long journey.



TT Bureau

“On his rowboat by Lake Lugano, Antonio Mantegazza had a dream to show travellers the world,” says **Scott Nisbet**, President, and Chief Executive Officer for the Globus family of brands. “And in 1928, when he launched Globus, he did that – and so much more. From creating the world’s first European touring vacations and unveiling value tours for cost-conscious travellers to designing Suite Ships that changed the tide in river cruising, the Globus family of brands has a 95-year history of creating life-enhancing journeys across the globe. As we look back on our history, we are celebrating this very real, very ‘today’ current of change.”

Rowing since 1928

Throughout Globus’ history, the company has been a difference-making leader. Here are just a few of the travel industry-wide changes the company initiated in touring, among others.



Switzerland’s Lake Lugano has rippled into a robust portfolio of independent, touring, and cruising vacations across six continents

❖ The first to create “modern” European Touring vacations.

❖ The first to unveil Panorama Touring-itineraries: Vacation packages highlighting multiple countries.

❖ The first to develop Circular Touring: Touring vacations that start and end from the same gateway, creating cost-savings and seamless experiences for travellers.

❖ The first to create value-focused touring vacations, in the form of a new brand – Cosmos!

❖ The first to develop Regional Touring - vacations, providing an immersive experience in the same destination.

❖ The first to name and unveil Local Favourites: Opportunities for travellers to experience the sites

and activities just the way the locals love, in addition to seeing the “must-see” landmarks.

GLOBUS
family of brands

❖ The first to set up the most exciting & first of its kind rewarding club for supporting agents – Globus Family Club

While inspiring travel innovations on the roads and rails of the world

with Globus and Cosmos, the company also made significant ripples on the globe’s rivers with the launch of Avalon Waterways in 2004. Since then, Avalon has elevated the cruising experience with a plethora of industry transformations, including:



❖ Designing award-winning Suite Ships, featuring two full decks of 200-square-foot Panorama Suites.

❖ Developing Open-Air Balconies, available in every Panorama Suite,

featuring windows that open 11 feet wide to invite the outside-in, without sacrificing the living space.

❖ Doubling down on views with beds facing the views for which

river cruising is famous in 80 per cent of all staterooms, fleetwide.

❖ Creating Active & Discovery - itineraries on every major waterway in Europe. And More! 🏴‍☠️



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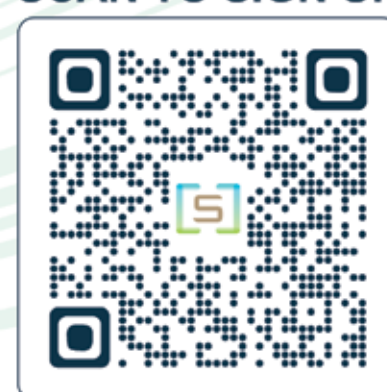


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Swosti's Puri resort to open in 2024

Swosti Premium Beach Resorts is set to open in Puri in early 2024 and the brand continues to get accolades for its luxury property—Swosti Chilika Resort.



TT Bureau

After completing an eventful year, Swosti Group will be unveiling a world-class 5-star luxury beach resort "Swosti Premium Beach Resorts" on the banks of the Golden Beach, Puri, a famous tourist destination of Odisha. The property is located at a distance of

60 km from Bhubaneswar on the shoreline of Bay of Bengal. Puri is one of the few destinations that offer spiritual salvation, along with the thrill of nature. The beach offers tourists the solitude and serenity to soak in the mystical charm of the city.

The beach resort will have 125 luxury rooms (including 3 luxuri-

ous suites and one presidential suite) all overlooking miles of the Bay of Bengal, banquet/ conference halls (suitable for weddings, conferences and exhibitions), multi-cuisine all day dining restaurant, food court, infinity swimming pool, along with a plunge pool on the second floor, water sports activities, open air party lawns, spa, gym, game zone, sky



lounge bar at the 13th floor rooftop, and innumerable amenities has been planned to be among the best. The site is located in the prime tourist seashore area in the heart of Puri and has all infrastructure facilities.

The huge open-air garden lawn situated on first and third floor, overlooking the beach will give a feeling of standing inside the sea to the guest. The all-day dining, along with game zone for children and adults, and spa, all overlook

With its luxury cottages and lush green landscaping, Swosti Chilika Resort of the Group has already made name as one of the best resorts in India

the Bay of Bengal. Swosti Group will be the first in the Puri town to come up with a 5-star Luxury Beach Resort. With all modern technologies and state-of-the-art facilities, Swosti Premium Beach Resorts will provide a unique ambience for its guests with the largest convention venue for conferences at Puri.

Swosti Chilika Resort, situated in the scenic setting of the famed Chilika Lake, is another luxury property of the Swosti Group. With its luxury cottages, lush green landscaping, facilities of speed boat, houseboat and other water sports activities, has already made name as one of the best resorts in India. It has been widely acclaimed across the globe and has become a major tourist destination of the State. VVIPs from different places, domestic and foreign tourists, who have visited the property, have highly appreciated the resort and its top-class hospitality.

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Redefining MICE to MISE

Pioneers in the Sports Experiences, Hospitality & Travel fraternity across sporting genres, DreamSetGo is redefining the traditional MICE concept by putting a sporty spin to it. Their innovative approach to corporate events is revolutionizing the industry and creating unforgettable experiences for clients, setting a new standard in the world of sports travel and hospitality.



TT Bureau

Traditionally, the acronym - MICE stands for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences & Exhibitions. Such business travel is also highly regarded as a sub-sector that significantly contributes to a country's tourism & hospitality economy. However, after a two-year hiatus from travelling, there was a major shift in the mindset of the post-pandemic business traveller. Remote and hybrid work models led to the rise of several travel trends like revenge travel, bleisure (business + leisure) and staycations. With rising customer aspirations and disposable income, the intent of experiential travel also paved the way for business travel with a sporty twist. With DreamSetGo, business travellers now have access to experience MICE centred around sports.

DreamSetGo is set to revolutionise experiences in sports by bridging the gap between Indian sports fans and global sporting events

Let's take a step back before we dive deeper into DreamSetGo's unique proposition for the discerning Indian business traveller.

DreamSetGo is the luxury sports travel experiences platform from the house of DreamSports - India's leading sports technology company. With the vision to 'Make Sports Better', DreamSports has several sports-centric brands under its belt, including the likes of Dream11, FanCode, and Dream Game Studios, among others.

Founded in 2019, DreamSetGo is set to revolutionise sports experiences by bridging the gap between Indian sports fans and global sporting events. It aims to offer greater access to domestic and global sporting events through exclusive partnerships with world-class sporting events and athletes. The platform curates bespoke hospitality, heartfelt interactions with legends, watching your favourite train in-person and providing the best seats across stadiums and race tracks. This extends to a variety of sporting genres such

as cricket, football, motorsports, tennis & golf. DreamSetGo has fantastically encapsulated the true meaning of luxury & exclusivity with its top-of-the-table offerings.

Entering the MICE space, DreamSetGo breathes a new lease of life into 'MICE' by swapping conferences and exhibitions with Sports and experiences which in turn spells out Meetings, Incentives, Sports & Experiences (MISE). With the company's unique MISE offering, DreamSetGo levels up the conventional 'MICE concept' with a much more experiential offering that leaves you with memories of a lifetime. A trip is memorable only if you are able to create these special 'money can't buy' moments. DreamSetGo manages to hit it out of the park when it comes to tailor-made experiences curated to suit your complex requirements. They believe in going that extra mile to make sure every intricate detail is catered to the traveller's experience..

There are plenty of players in the industry when it comes to traditional MICE travel but are the polar opposite of what DreamSetGo is trying to achieve as a sports experiential organisation. The exclusive tie-ups with global clubs, sporting bodies and DMCs across markets make them stand out. To list a few of the elite alliances, they have partnered with English football league giants - Chelsea as their Official Indian Fan Experience Partner, Manchester City as their Official Partner, & Manchester



Monish Shah
CBO & Co-Founder
DreamSetGo



Amit Vyas
Head - MICE & Sports Travel
DreamSetGo



An exclusive Meet & Greet with Michael Clarke on a private yacht

Imagine a meet & greet with legendary athletes in a private setting, with a once-in-a-lifetime oppor-

ucts cater to the requirements of today's MICE travellers. Combine this with the fact that 'Sports' has

DreamSetGo's MISE offering, companies can tailor offerings to deliver larger-than-life experiences and help employees celebrate in a unique way," says Amit Vyas, Head - MICE & Sports Travel, DreamSetGo

Adding to the above, DreamSetGo CBO & Co-founder, Monish Shah says, "Indian sports fans don't have a reliable one-stop solution to witness LIVE sports. We try to make sports travel better for passionate fans and corporate travellers, offering them VIP hospitality experiences including prime-viewing seats, on-site

partners. A lot of this has come after DreamSetGo curating official experiences at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2022 in Australia. Alliances with Olympic Games Paris 2024 as the official sub-distributor of 'On Location' for the sale of hospitality products in India and with Gujarat Titans curating VIP box experiences have proved to be pivotal. Apart from adding alliances such as this, they've also added another asset to their arsenal. It's getting Sourav Ganguly on board as their brand ambassador a.k.a. 'Super Captain' as he fondly goes by at DreamSetGo. Adding another feather to their

hospitality, merchandise, meet & greets, stadium tours, access to training sessions, and tailor-made experiences to global sporting spectacles."

DreamSetGo prides itself on providing end-to-end solutions. Right from planning and curating the entire itinerary to assisting you with visa, air and land transfers, they cater at every step. They have nothing but some of the most unmatched and epic sporting experiences as mentioned earlier. Acquiring top talent with a wealth of experience from niche travel genres, they are the trusted teammates you look for. Be it contracting, operations or even curating the entire tour from scratch, they are well-equipped to handle requests in every field.

Over the past few years, DreamSetGo, has witnessed been an uptick in requests for MISE travel with corporates now seeking new and innovative ideas to incentivize and reward their employees and

We try to make sports travel better for passionate fans and corporate travellers, offering them VIP hospitality

hat was winning the ET Travel and Tourism Annual Conclave recognition award for 'Best Sports Travel Operator'.

All of the above is just a glimpse of what will take you beyond a regular MICE experience.

The norm will have you host MICE conferences in ballrooms at hotels. With DreamSetGo, your meetings become business at unimaginable stadiums and arenas.



From L to R: Harbhajan Singh, Monish Shah (CBO & Co-Founder, DreamSetGo), V.V.S. Laxman, Nishant Kashikar (Country Manager, Tourism Australia)

United, as their Official Supporter Travel Supplier in India. Last year, DreamSetGo served as the 'Official Travel Agent' for the ICC T20 World Cup, Australia. In motorsports, the company offered the best seats at race tracks and exclusive behind-the-scenes access. They followed a similar suit in the biggest tennis tournaments and Rugby events.

tunity to interact with your role models. Their MISE packages can be done from both, the corporate perspective and from the sporty perspective.

"Today, India is an emerging experiential-travel first market. Consumers expect more from their journeys than just sightseeing, even on business trips. Their prod-

the power to elevate experiences. Imagine a team of engineers on a MICE trip to the UK, who are also die-hard Manchester United fans. Combining MICE with an added element of sports experiences can help companies motivate teams through meet & greets with athletes, while also making it a highly rewarding experience that can help retain employees. With

GPS 2022-23 concludes with Pune show

Global Panorama Showcase (GPS), a business meeting point for tourism professionals and service providers, was held at Sheraton Grand in Pune recently. The event, last in a series of shows planned in 10 cities in the country for the year 2022-23, focussed on sustainability and use of technology for better future of the industry.



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Hotels, convention centres key to biz

Hotels or convention centres? No one business is better than the other. The key is to create an ecosystem for the collective growth of the convention and exhibition industries in India. That is how Jio World Convention Centre has been envisioned. Representing India as the destination of choice for prestigious global events is our aim.

While in the past, hotels have been serving the purpose, as India's global position strengthens, our aspirations have also grown into bigger spaces. At the Jio World Convention Centre, we aim to make room for these new ambitions and possibilities, preparing India and the world for the best that the industry has to offer.

To accommodate the same, we need dedicated venues of global standards, with amenities, infrastructure and guest services that

support an undisturbed circulation of discerned guests. That is where modern spaces come in.

Not only does the industry drive employment and revenue for ancillary and tertiary industries, but it is also an important source of tax revenue and has a significant impact on boosting travel.

As far as CEC (convention and exhibition centre) business is concerned, its performance is an indicator/ reflection of the country's



economic progress. Whenever we pitch for a business/ event, we are

not only promoting our venue, but also the country, the destination, location, proximity to hotels, airport, recreational options, and amenities, as any booking has a direct trickle-down effect on boosting these ancillary businesses.

For example, our modular venues at Jio World Convention Centre – a venue for best-in-class exhibitions, conventions, meetings, and social events – are technologically advanced spaces equipped to simultaneously host physical, virtual and hybrid events. With in-house capa-

bilities such as a majestic ballroom, 25 meeting rooms, culinary prowess to craft 18,000 gourmet meals a day, 6,200 car and bike parking bays, we have hosted 615 events over the course of the last year since launch. Out of these, mar-

as a funnel for facilitating direct and indirect foreign investments into the economy.

We need to think and deliver from our customer's perspective, whether an event planner, organiser, or a retail customer. The aim is to offer a holistic experience to all our guests and host the best of India and the world on one common platform for the exchange of ideas, innovation, and culture.

We need to think and deliver from the perspective of our customer, whether an event planner, organiser, or a retail customer



Devendra Bharna
CEO, Jio World Centre

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

Air Mauritius celebrates resumption

Air Mauritius, in partnership with the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, hosted a Networking Gala Evening at Hotel Imperial in Delhi recently to celebrate the resumption of direct flights between Delhi and Mauritius. Among the dignitaries were the High Commissioner of the Republic of Mauritius to India, CEO of Air Mauritius, and the Director of Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority.



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Red Carpet to launch digital platform

With a view to replicating the volume of business coming from metros in tiered markets, Red Carpet Travels has created a portal that will not only increase the smaller agents' efficiency levels, but also educate them about destinations, thereby empowering them, claims Rajesh Kakade, Founder & Global Director at Red Carpet Travels.



Hazel Jain

Rajesh Kakade, Founder & Global Director at Red Carpet Travels, is a man with a vision. Having grown his business from a scratch over the last eight years, he now wants to help the travel agents in tier II, III, and even IV cities to grow. He says, "The FIT leisure and family travel are fast-growing segments. But the challenge is that people in tier II, III, and IV markets still need to understand how to create itineraries, how to price them, the destination on ground, and how to promote them. Agents in these smaller markets face problems, especially during season time, in that they don't get quick response from the DMCs because they are busy. They are not on priority and the revert on queries happens after three or four days."

To resolve this issue, his company has developed a digital platform for the agents. "I'm sure this will change the dynamic of the travel



Rajesh Kakade
Founder & Global Director
Red Carpet Travels

industry. The portal offers various things to the agents, whether it is a basic itinerary of a destination or a customised one. We will be doing a mega launch for this later this year. Until then we will be testing the portal to iron out the bugs. We will start with promoting this in smaller markets like tier IV cities to do test runs and get feedback. If these agents can manage to use



this portal to design itineraries, then it will be easy for us to get into bigger markets and metros," Kakade adds.

Agents can bring in efficiency

On an average, agents get about 100 queries and about 20 convert to business. "This platform will also help them give their clients a quote on the spot without wasting time creating the itineraries and without involving Red Carpet or a DMC. It's that easy. This is for FITs and small family groups. They can either pick from readymade itineraries, or alter it as per their convenience, or create an entirely new programme. If the agent is not aware of a particular excursion, the system will guide them and show them a video. So, there will be a lot of tools to help the agents. This is not just a selling tool; this portal will also educate them about destinations. The intention



here is to help and educate them. In turn, I will also get more business from them if they understand the destination and how to sell it. If they are able to sell the itinerary, I too will get more business!" Kakade explains.

Tiered markets have huge scope

There is huge potential in tier II, III, and even IV cities, Kakade says. "Here, the agents don't always get support and information from DMCs. They still need handholding, especially given the fact that

business in these markets is huge! And I want the agents in smaller towns like Amravati or Satara to get big clients. An agent from a metro city who was giving three to four FIT clients six years ago is today giving me more than 20-30 FIT business. This is huge growth! We want to replicate this kind of growth from tiered cities with this new digital portal," he adds.

Sharing a quick recap on how this portal will help the agents,

Kakade explains, "This will help the agents convert their queries into bookings faster. If it's a ready package, agent can give a quote within 3-4 minutes. If it's a customised one, maximum 30 minutes. Efficiency levels will skyrocket with this tool."

Red Carpet Travels recently celebrated its eighth anniversary. The company started from a small office in USA and has added destinations like Scandinavia, Australia, and Europe. 🇺🇸

B'luru hotels lead in sustainability

Bengaluru hotels are increasingly adopting sustainable practices to minimize impact on the environment. Some hotel owners in the city share how their properties are committed to implementing eco-friendly initiatives to reduce energy consumption, water usage, and waste production, and collaborate with local organizations and communities.



Janice Alyosius

As we celebrate Earth Day 2023, it's essential to acknowledge the role hotels play in promoting environmental sustainability. In Bangalore, many hotels are leading the way in implementing eco-friendly practices. They have made significant strides towards reducing their carbon footprint and minimizing their impact on the environment. These hotels prioritize sustainability by utilizing renewable energy sources, reducing waste, and conserving water. By adopting such practices, they not only contribute to a sustainable future, but also provide guests with a luxurious experience while promoting environmental responsibility. As we move towards a more eco-conscious future, it's inspiring to see how these hotels are setting an example for the rest of the hospitality industry to follow.

Hotel Royal Orchid Bangalore

Talking about the various eco-friendly initiatives they have taken to



Vivek Sharma
General Manager
Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield

reduce the impact on environment, **Vijay Krishnan**, Vice President of Operations, Hotel Royal Orchid Bangalore, says they are utilizing glass water bottles, offering open-air seating restaurants to reduce the reliance on air conditioning, using solar panels, recycling water within the premises, incorporating natural vines to cool the building,



Vijay Krishnan
Vice President of Operations
Hotel Royal Orchid Bangalore

and providing fresh air, using natural building material like terracotta, and maximizing the use of glass for natural lighting to minimize electricity consumption in living spaces. The hotel is also collaborating with local organizations and communities to promote environmental sustainability in the region. Future initiatives include introducing bio-



Abhay Kanwar
Director of Sales & Marketing, Sheraton
Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway

degradable material for packaging and glassware for serving drinks and takeout containers.

Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield

Vivek Sharma, General Manager, Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield, highlights their commitment to implementing sustainable practices

such as utilizing 96.79 per cent of their electricity from exclusively renewable sources, specifically wind energy, in CY-2022, operating as a Zero Discharge Hotel, repurposing wastewater for ancillary use, and providing on-site EV charging to support sustainable transportation for guests. To reduce energy consumption, the hotel has adopted measures such as installation of low approach cooling tower, IoT-based chiller modulation, and ambient temperature and humidity monitoring, HVAC control through BMS, occupancy sensors for restrooms, staff restrooms, energy cards for the guestrooms, VFD for pumps, 100 per cent LED indoor lights, timer for external lighting, and heat recovery wheel for fresh air intake. The hotel also uses dual flushing, sensor tap, and flow restrictor for water conservation and follows no single-use plastic in all areas of operation. Future initiatives include having a chemical-free cooling tower for water treatment, rainwater harvesting for water neutrality, and planting saplings on Earth Day.

Abhay Kanwar, Director of Sales & Marketing, Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway, talks about their implementation of numerous eco-friendly initiatives to reduce energy and water consumption. These include installing

These Bengaluru hotels prioritize sustainability by utilizing renewable energy sources, reducing waste, and conserving water at their properties

energy-efficient lighting and water-saving fixtures, segregating waste for recycling and composting, and eliminating the use of plastic straws and bottles, providing guests with reusable glass water bottles and metal straws instead. 🌱

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Customised hospitality for guests

Dusit Hotels offers a personalised experience with focus on providing a local feel while catering to different groups of Indian travellers. The Thailand based brand, which emphasizes on wellness and sustainability, and specializes in hosting weddings and MICE events, plans to expand its presence in India and Nepal working with travel trade partners.

Janice Alyosius

The Indian travel market has become an essential part of the business mix for Thailand based Dusit Hotels. With more Indians travelling to destinations like Thailand, Maldives, and UAE, Dusit focuses on providing a personalized and tailored experience to service different groups of Indian travellers. This includes small touches like Indian breakfast items, up to hosting Indian weddings, a popular choice for couples from India.

More than just a hotel stay

Dusit Hotels aims to provide a local experience, which is beyond just Thai hospitality. **Nichlas Maratos**, Vice President Commercial, Dusit Hotels and Resorts, said, "An Indian traveller going to the Maldives is looking for a Maldivian experience, and Dusit Hotels aims to bring these experiences to life in all their hotels, providing guests with a local



Nichlas Maratos
Vice President, Commercial
Dusit Hotels and Resorts

feel for where they are staying. The brand ensures that every location offers a local feel for the guests to immerse themselves in the culture and traditions of the place they are visiting. The brand's focus on Thai hospitality is renowned, but we also offer a Maldivian experience for Indian travellers going to the Maldives."

Wellness and sustainability

The pandemic heightened awareness for personal well-being, leading the brand to place a greater emphasis on wellness. "Our focus on wellness extends beyond the traditional spa services and can be incorporated throughout the entire guest experience, such as providing wellness elements in corporate meetings or overnight stays that are not necessarily spa related," said Maratos. Dusit Hotels is also committed to sustainability and providing a sustainable experience in their hotels. "Sustainability is another area of focus for us, which has gained even more importance post-COVID. We believe that it's not just about taking care of ourselves, but also about taking care of the planet, environment, and the communities where we operate. Therefore, we are committed to providing a sustainable experience in our hotels, which benefits everyone involved," he added.

Expanding presence in India and Nepal

Dusit Hotels views India as a crucial source market and an attractive location for new hotels. "India is not just a significant source market for us, but also a vital location for our upcoming hotels. We are thrilled to an-

An Indian traveller going to the Maldives is looking for a Maldivian experience, and Dusit Hotels aims to bring these experiences to life

nounce our plans for the launch of DusitD2 in Shimla later this year, marking our entry into one of India's most scenic hill

stations. In addition, we have plans for the opening of Dusit Princess Residences in Kolkata either later this year or next year. We are also actively pursuing various other opportunities in India, both in resort locations and urban destinations," said Maratos, adding, "Additionally, we have two upcoming hotel launches in Nepal, including one in Kathmandu and another in Dhulikhel, located just outside the city. These developments indicate exciting prospects for the subcontinent."

MICE and weddings

Dusit Hotels provides ample space and facilities for meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) across their hotels in the Middle East and Thailand. The brand focuses on delivering an immersive experience rather than just a meeting for MICE events. "Dusit Thani Hua Hin is a famous wedding venue in the Indian market,

and the brand specializes in hosting Indian weddings. We have dedicated experts in many of our hotels who possess the knowledge and expertise to cater to Indian weddings. This presents a significant opportunity for us, not only in Thailand, but also in other locations. We have observed a rise in smaller weddings taking place in destinations such as the Maldives, which we believe is an opportunity worth focusing on," he said.

Working with travel trade

Dusit Hotels sees the travel trade as a valuable partner to deliver business from the source market to their locations. They partner with travel agencies and tourism authorities to attract consumers to their hotels and destinations. Recently, they had conducted roadshows in India, partnering with various tourism authorities and travel agencies in Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai.

Dusit showcases offerings in Delhi

Dusit International, the Thai multinational hospitality company headquartered in Bangkok, presented its portfolio of hotels and resorts at the India Roadshow 2023 at The Leela Palace in Delhi recently. The company showcased its worldwide properties, catering to weddings, honeymoons, business, and leisure, while also exploring opportunities to bring its brands to India.



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Discover Doha: A family destination

As families seek adventure and culture in their trips, Doha, the capital of Qatar, has become a popular destination. From exploring the city's desert landscapes to immersing themselves in Qatar's rich culture, families can find something for everyone in Doha. With luxurious hotels visitors can unwind and recharge for another day of adventure.



Janice Alyosius

As the world becomes more connected, families are increasingly seeking out destinations that offer a mix of adventure and culture. One such destination that is quickly gaining popularity is Doha, the capital of Qatar. Doha is a city that has something for everyone, especially families, with adventure offerings that will leave them wanting more.

For families seeking adventure, a visit to Doha's desert landscapes, including the breathtaking Khor Al Adaid (Inland Sea), is a must-do. The city's deserts provide a variety of activities, such as camel rides, dune bashing, sandboarding, and quad biking. Families can opt to explore the desert on their own or go for a guided tour to ensure they make the most of their experience.

Doha's coastline is also a paradise for water sports enthusiasts. Families can enjoy a range of activities, including jet skiing, parasailing, kay-



aking, and snorkelling. The warm waters of the Arabian Gulf make it an ideal location for families to enjoy a dip or two, and there are plenty of beaches to choose from.

For families interested in immersing themselves in Qatar's rich culture, a visit to the National Museum of Qatar is a must.

The museum showcases the country's unique history and offers a glimpse into its past, with interactive exhibits and stunning architecture that is sure to impress. From traditional Bedouin life to modern-day Qatar, visitors can explore the country's evolution through the ages. It's an experience that will leave a lasting

impression on families seeking a deeper understanding of the local culture.

Another cultural highlight is the Souq Waqif, an ancient marketplace that has been restored to its former glory. Families can wander through its narrow alleyways, haggling with traders over spices,

silks, and handcrafted souvenirs. There are also plenty of restaurants and cafes where families can sample traditional Qatari cuisine.

Doha is also home to the Katara Cultural Village, a sprawling complex that is a melting pot of art, music, dance, and theatre. Families can spend hours exploring its many exhibitions and performances, immersing themselves in the local culture.

As the sun sets over the city, families can retreat to Al Messila, A Luxury Collection Resort & Spa Doha, among the many luxurious hotels in Doha, where they can indulge in the ultimate experience. With its world-class spa, outdoor pool, and elegant rooms, guests can unwind in style and recharge for another day of adventure in Doha. From exploring the city's cultural gems to taking on thrilling outdoor activities, families can make the most of their time in this magical city. And as they drift off to sleep, they can do so with the satisfaction of knowing

that they have a beautiful oasis to return to at the end of the day. For travel trade professionals looking to promote Doha to their clients, it's important to highlight the city's unique blend of adventure and culture. Doha is a destination that offers something for everyone,



The warm waters of the Arabian Gulf make it an ideal location for families to enjoy a dip or two, and there are plenty of beaches to choose from

whether they are seeking thrills or looking to immerse themselves in a new culture. And with its proximity to India, Doha is a perfect choice for families seeking adventure close to their home. ✈

Innsbruck targets Indian FITs

India is a priority market for Innsbruck Tourismus. They are making sure that Indians know about the destination and engaging with the travel trade to create the right buzz around it.



TT Bureau

Mag. Andreas Reiter, BA, Märkte, Partner & B2B Management, Innsbruck Tourismus, says that India is a priority market in Innsbruck's market strategy.

"Before COVID, numbers of overnights were increasing every year. In 2019, we counted more than 60,000 overnights of Indian guests," he adds.

He informs that they have several plans for the Indian market.



Mag. Andreas Reiter
BA, Märkte, Partner & B2B
Management, Innsbruck Tourismus

In terms of targeting specific kind of travellers, he shares, "We mainly focus on FITs in our campaigns. Due to Innsbruck's geographical location in the middle of Europe, many group series make a stop in Innsbruck. However, the focus of our promotion lies on FITs."

"Furthermore, we have been working together with Robinville as Innsbruck's representative in India. CEO Ishvinder Maddh and his team are in touch with TATO, doing sales calls and setting up events," he highlighted.

They also have some campaigns together with the Austrian National Tourism Office in India.

He also pointed out that for FITs, their Innsbruck Card (24h/ 48/ 72h) is a must to visit the city. "It is great value for money and offers 22 sights, two cable cars like the Nordkette, entrance Swarovsky Crystal Worlds + Swarovski shuttle from/ to Innsbruck, public transportation," he informed. ✈

"In terms of B2B, there are co-operations with tour operators and travel agencies. Fam trips are also being organised to get to know the Innsbruck region. For B2C, Innsbruck has already a long history in Indian Film Business (for instance Pardes Mein Hai Mera Dil, Tiger Zinda Hai, Saaho). Media film is very important for Innsbruck Tourism to attract potential Indian visitors," he adds.



Before COVID, numbers of overnights were increasing every year. In 2019, we counted more than 60,000 overnights of Indian guests

Mobile app for emergency aid

India Assist is an innovative system that provides emergency assistance to travellers. With its expansion plans, it is set to become a crucial player in the emergency assistance market for travellers.



Janice Alyosius

Travelling is a way of life for many people, whether it's for business or pleasure. When people plan their travels, they usually book flights, hotels, and other travel-related services. However, there is one aspect that is often overlooked, and that is emergency assistance. In case of an emergency, travellers often find themselves without any centralized system to reach out for help. This is where India Assist comes into the picture. It is a system for travellers that provides emergency assistance whenever they need it.

The mobile application

India Assist is a mobile application that travellers can download on their smartphones, shares **Harish Khatri**, Founder and MD, India Assist. "Travellers can connect to India Assist's call centre by pressing a button on the mobile application. Based on the traveller's requirement, India Assist provides assistance as per its own protocols. The system



Harish Khatri
Founder and MD
India Assist

is very user-friendly and has six-seven buttons, each with a name such as medical emergency unit, police support unit, lost and found support, transit support, lodging-boarding support, and 24x7 helpdesk," Khatri explains.

Lack of awareness

One of the biggest challenges faced by India Assist is the lack of awareness and acceptance of emergency assistance in the

tourism sector. "The concept of emergency assistance is relatively new, and it took some time for people to realize its importance. However, over time, people have



Travellers often find themselves without any centralized system to reach out for help in case of emergency, this is where India Assist comes into picture

started appreciating India Assist's services, and there has been a growing acceptance of the importance of emergency assistance in the tourism sector," he informs.

Collaboration for expansion

India Assist is working with travel agents across India for the expansion of its services. ✈

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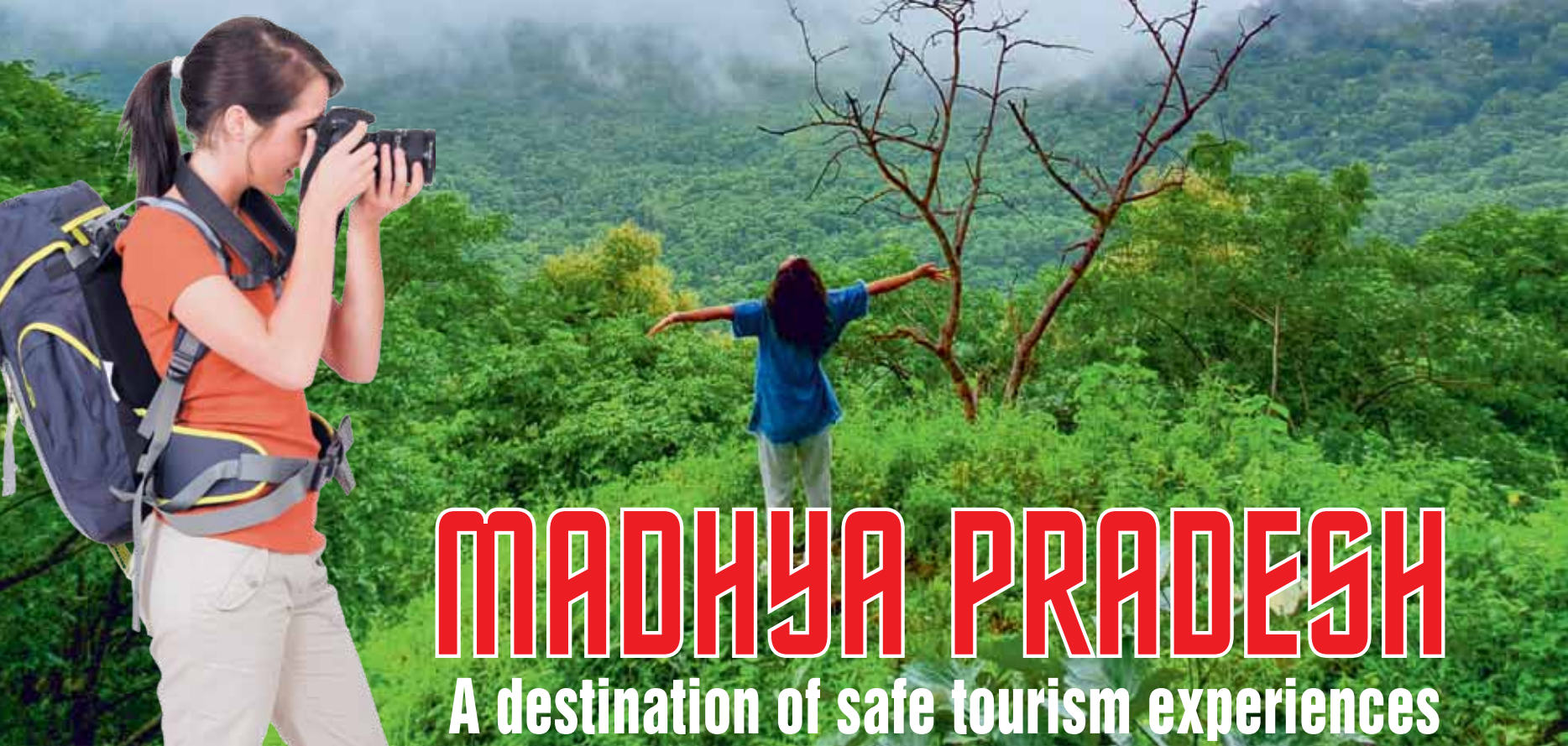
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The eclectic state of Madhya Pradesh, the region that lies in the centre of India has swiftly surfaced as one of the most sought-after destinations in India. MP offers a varied range of verticals that can quench the thirst of any traveller from wildlife to culture



The heart of Incredible India

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, under the RTM, has been aggressively working on the safety of the tourists and especially solo women travellers

to heritage or be it pilgrimage. What makes Madhya Pradesh so unique is the fact that it is one of the biggest states of the coun-

try and still a major part of it left undiscovered. The very fact that the majority of the state is covered in forests provides a more 'closer to nature experience' for visitors and at the same time it opens the door for a question like, is it safe to travel in Madhya Pradesh?

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, under the Responsible Tourism Mission (RTM), has been aggressively working on the safety of the tourists and especially solo women travellers. MP is a state that is dedi-



cated towards the involvement of women in the tourism industry, be it from Gypsy drivers and forest guides from Shivpuri, Pachmarhi and Tamia, boatmen and story tellers from Jabalpur and Gwalior, women safety guards from pilgrimage places like Ujjain, Chitrakoot or Maihar

MP govt works closely with its departments to create a more accommodating atmosphere for the people of the state and tourists

and Segway drivers to hospitality professionals in Khajuraho. The government of Madhya Pradesh works closely with several departments, including Police, Women and Child Development, Urban Administration Department, Transport, Education and Skill Development, to create a more accommodating atmosphere for the people of the state and the tourists visiting the state. MP Tourism conducts safety audits and infragap assessments at every tourist destination with the coordination of local bodies

and district authorities, which ensures the safety of women service providers and tourists.

The idea is to make safer tourist destinations for women where even a solo female traveller can feel at home. Tourism is one of the key drivers of socio-economic development and it's integral for tourists to have a safe and secured environment. Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board has nominated several bodies to support in the conduction of baseline surveys and situation analysis under the "Safe Tourism Destinations for Women" project, which is a part of Responsible Tourism Mission of Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board. It includes the following activities –

- ❖ Capacity building, orientation & training and sensitization
- ❖ Strengthening of safety mechanism
- ❖ Skill and Employment generation
- ❖ Safety audits and fulfilment

of infrastructural gaps at the tourism destinations with regard to women safety

- ❖ Self-defence training
- ❖ Community participation and awareness
- ❖ Formation of legal bodies and federations
- ❖ Monitoring and evaluation

MP Tourism Board works in convergence with other departments, including NGOs and CSRs, to ensure women safety and, in fact, Madhya Pradesh is the pioneer state in India to take efforts for women safety and uplift in the tourism industry. It also inspires local youth of the villages and suburbs to make a career in the hospitality industry and contribute to the development of their local region.

Enjoy your visit to Madhya Pradesh with a sense of freedom and security and embrace the state's unique wildlife, heritage, pilgrimage and culture. Blend in with local cultures and rejoice the uniqueness of the Heart of Incredible India.



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Full house at IATO election

Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) elected its new team for 2023-25 at Ashok Hotel, New Delhi. The office-bearers were elected unopposed and voting was done for the executive committee. Members turned out in huge numbers and Rajv Mehra, who has been re-elected as President, thanked everyone for their support to the team.



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30 Apr-3 May	Global Meeting & Incentive Travel Exchange	9:00 am
1-4	Arabian Travel Market Dubai	9:00 am
2-3	ILTM Arabia	9:00 am
4-7	Seoul International Travel Fair	10:00 am
6-7	Domestic Tourism Fair- Finland	9:00 am
8-11	TBEX Europe- Greece	9:00 am
9-11	Africa's Travel Indaba	10:00 am
9-11	Trenz	9:00 am
9-11	AdventureELEVATE	9:00 am
9-12	ILTM Latin America	9:00 am
10-12	International Wellness Tourism Expo- Japan	9:00 am
17	FICCI Digital Travel, Hospitality & Innovation Summit	9:00 am
17-19	Global Tourism Investors' Summit-Delhi	9:00 am
18-20	Dhaka Travel Mart	10:00 am
18-21	Thailand Dive Expo	11:00 am
19-21	Guangzhou International Travel Fair	9:00 am
22-24	Riyadh Travel Fair	3:30 pm

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

Six hidden gems of Indonesia!

Indonesia is a traveller's paradise with numerous captivating destinations. Santhosh Bhhandarii, Director, Travel Hangar, recommends six destinations which have something for every type of traveller, from tranquil lakes to ancient temples, and stunning beaches.



Janice Alyosius

Indonesia is a treasure trove of stunning and captivating travel destinations that offer more than just the typical tourist attractions. **Santhosh Bhhandarii**, Director, Travel Hangar, emphasizes that although Bali is a well-known destination compared to other parts of Indonesia, the country has a lot more to offer beyond what is commonly advertised. He recommends that travellers look beyond the standard tourist offerings and explore new places. Here are six Indonesian destinations with unique highlights that one should consider visiting.

Lake Toba, situated in North Sumatra, is an ideal destination for those seeking a tranquil and serene environment. The lake is renowned for its crystal clear water and beautiful hills, making it a perfect spot for outdoor activities like hiking, camping, and fishing. Visitors can explore the traditional Batak villages, learn about the Batak people's fascinating history and customs, and appreciate the unique architecture and culture

of Samosir Island located in the middle of the lake.

Borobudur Temple, located in the central Java region, is an ancient temple that boasts intricate carvings and statues. The temple's unique architecture has earned it



recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and visitors can climb to the top for a breath-taking view of the surrounding landscape.

Komodo Island is famous for its unique inhabitants, the Komodo Dragons. Guided tours allow visitors to witness these majestic creatures in their natural habitat.

Additionally, the island has gorgeous beaches, crystal clear water perfect for snorkelling and diving, and stunning scenery.

Likupang, situated in North Sulawesi, is a hidden gem that offers stunning beaches and an

Bali is a world-renowned travel destination that offers a diverse blend of culture, nature, and adventure. The island has breath-taking beaches, stunning scenery, and a rich cultural heritage. Visitors can explore ancient temples, witness traditional cere-

monies, and learn about the local customs and traditions. **Mandalika**, a newly developed destination in Lombok, is famous for its beautiful beaches and rich cultural heritage in Indonesia. The area offers an array of outdoor activities such as surfing, snorkelling, and diving.

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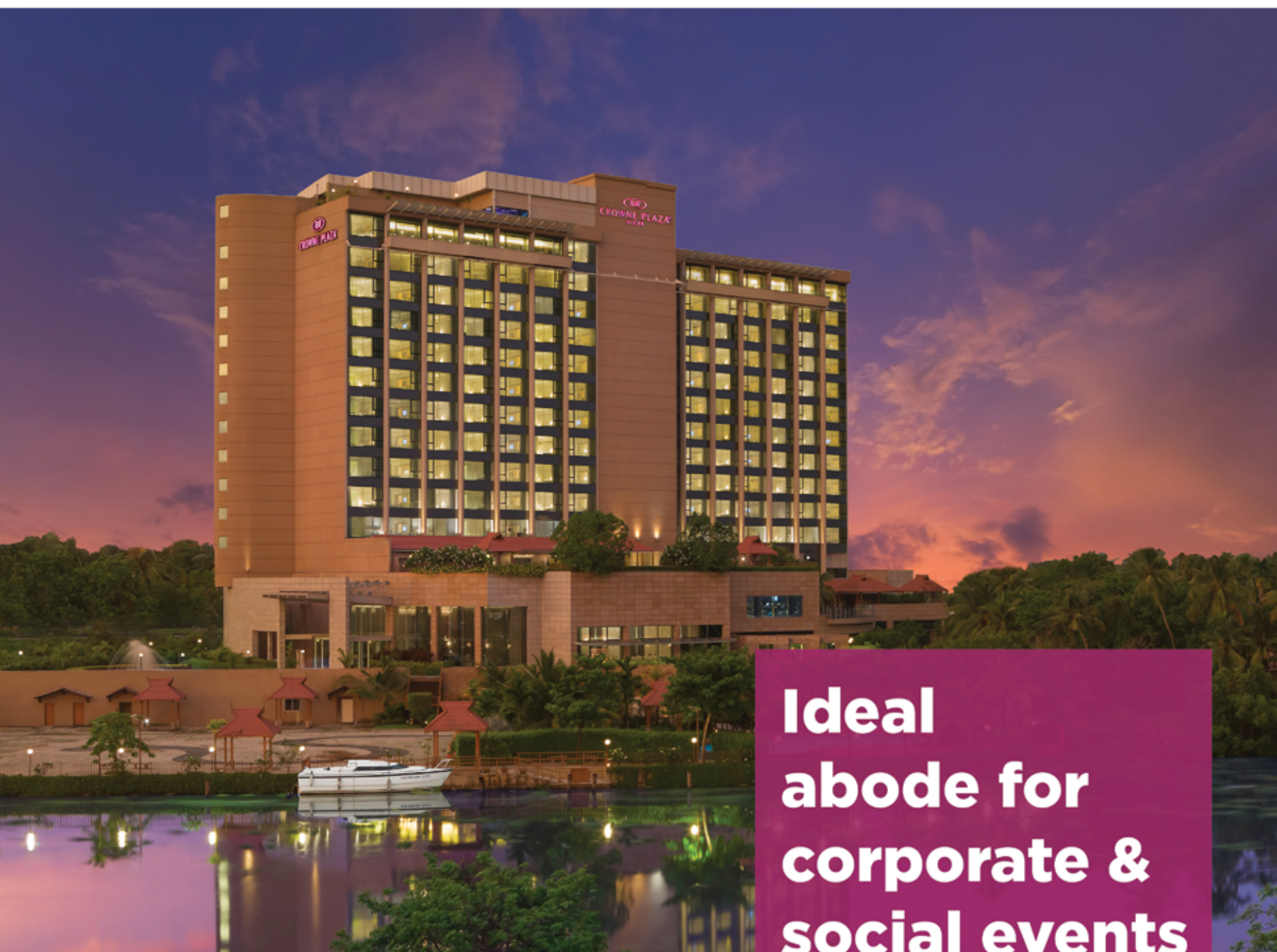
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MOVEMENTS

THE LEELA GANDHINAGAR AND MAHATMA MANDIR CONVENTION & EXHIBITION CENTRE

Gandhinagar



The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts has announced the promotion and appointment of **VIKAS SOOD** as the General Manager of The Leela Gandhinagar and Mahatma Mandir Convention & Exhibition Centre managed by The Leela. A seasoned and versatile hospitality professional with a career spanning close to two decades, Vikas has worked with brands like Taj, Hyatt, Accor, Marriott. Sood joined Mahatma Mandir Convention & Exhibition Centre managed by The Leela in 2019 as Director of Operations.

ANANTA HOTELS AND RESORTS

New Delhi



GAGAN KATYAL has been promoted to Vice President, Sales & Strategy, Ananta Hotels and Resorts. Katyal is an accomplished hospitality professional who has made a mark in the industry with over a decade of experience. He has worked with some of the leading hotel chains and has held various positions throughout his career. Starting his career as a Sales Manager at Hyatt Regency, Gagan gained valuable experience in the industry before moving on to Marriott International, where he worked as the Director of Travel Trade Sales for India. In 2017, Katyal joined Ananta Hotels and Resorts as the Head of Sales & Marketing.

NOVOTEL KOLKATA HOTEL & RESIDENCES

Kolkata



Novotel Kolkata Hotel & Residences appoints **ARPITA MUKHERJEE** as the Learning & Development Manager. Arpita joins from Fortis Healthcare, where had been working as Head of Learning & Development (Eastern Region). She has more than two decades of enriching experience across diverse brands, including Nike, Flipkart Health Plus (Sasta Sundar), Café Coffee Day, JIS Group, Jet Airways and Gulf Air. In her new role, she will be responsible for building and driving the overall training and growth for all the Heartists of Novotel Kolkata Hotel & Residences. She will also be working on optimizing the Accor training programs.

RADISSON HOTEL GROUP

Chennai

The Radisson Hotel Group has appointed **NISHANTH NAIR** as Cluster Commercial Head for Radisson Resort Pondicherry Bay, Radisson Blu Temple Bay Mahabalipuram, Radisson Blu GRT Chennai, and Radisson Hotel Bengaluru City Center owned by GRT Hotels and Resorts. He has more than 15 years of experience in sales working with various reputed hotels, including Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty, Hyatt Regency Thrissur, Hyatt Regency Trivandrum, SKS Group Qatar, Dream Hotel Cochin, Carnoustie Hotels and Resorts, THR Hotels and Resorts, Vythiri Village Wayanad & Kadavu Resort Calicut.



RENAISSANCE AHMEDABAD HOTEL

Ahmedabad

Renaissance Ahmedabad Hotel appoints **ROHIT DASGUPTA** as the new General Manager. He is a hospitality veteran with more than 25 years of qualitative experience and expertise in guest service excellence, revenue management, hotel pre-opening and new projects, hospitality training to a diverse workforce, and profit center operations with luxury hotels in India. He started his career with New Delhi Hilton and has worked with award-winning hotels such as The Oberoi Group, Taj Hotels and Resorts, The Imperial and Radisson Hotels. Dasgupta has a proven track record of success at a hotelier.



JW MARRIOTT

Chandigarh

VISHAL SINGH has been appointed as the General Manager of JW Marriott, Chandigarh. Singh is a passionate hospitality professional with more than 25 years of diverse experience with leading hotel chains across various cities in the country. Some of the properties he has worked with are Hyatt Regency Delhi, Grand Hyatt Mumbai, Park Hyatt Goa, Hilton Chennai, Hyatt Regency Pune, and Hyatt Regency Gurgaon. His last assignment was as Executive Vice President at Pidge, a last mile city logistics and SaaS company, where his key responsibilities were driving business performance, overall operations, strategy development and execution.



ALOFT BENGALURU OUTER RING ROAD

Bengaluru

Aloft Bengaluru Outer Ring Road appoints **SRIKANT KODALI** as the Director of Sales and Marketing. His core responsibilities will include planning and implementation of the hotel's sales and marketing strategy, maximizing hotel's revenues and exploring business development opportunities. He will lead the business retention and expansion efforts of the Sales & Marketing team in order to drive revenue growth and will also play a key role in catalyzing the branding and communications efforts of the hotel. A graduate in Business Administration with a Master's degree, Kodali comes with more than 11 years of experience in the hospitality industry.



AVIS INDIA

New Delhi

Avis India, a mobility service provider, appoints **AMAN NAAGAR** as the new Managing Director. Naagar replaces Sunil Gupta, the former CEO and MD. Naagar joined Avis India in 2000 and has an experience in the car rental industry of more than two decades. Ascending from within and carving out his career, he was appointed COO of the Rent-a-Car division in 2015. Reflecting on his new role, Naagar said, "It is a moment of pride in my professional career. Being a part of the organization and recognized for my contributions fills me with delight and humility. I look forward to building Avis India as the best mobility company in India."



NOVOTEL VIZAG VARUN BEACH AND THE BHEEMILI RESORT

Visakhapatnam

LAKSHMI SRIDHAR has been appointed as the new General Manager of Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach and The Bheemili Resort. With more than 28 years of experience in the hospitality industry and having served as Operations Manager at Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach since June 2020, Lakshmi brings a wealth of knowledge to her new role. As GM, she will oversee the overall operations of both properties, providing leadership, strategic oversight, and direction.



TALKING People

ANIRBAN DE MUNSHI, Director of Marketing & Communications, Novotel Kolkata Hotel & Residences, says that he believes in maintaining a healthy balance between work and life. "Besides the regular thrill of our daily hustle, I enjoy occasionally indulging in PC games, or experimental cooking, or binging on series or movie marathon, as it helps me to rejuvenate and take my mind off the daily stress. Being part of a diverse industry, it gives us a free hand to travel, experience new things and cherish new memories in different spaces. Still, if I had to pick and choose, I will really like to travel through the serene and picturesque Kashmir," he says.



For **MEGHNA TRIVEDY**, Director of Four Seasons Bengaluru, listening to music is always therapeutic. "However, my preferred method for relaxation is spending time with my dog, Junior. He is such a source of happiness and comfort for me, and I love nothing more than playing with him and taking him for walks. For domestic travel, I love Goa, even though it may be a bit of a cliché. It has stunning beaches, a laid-back atmosphere, and amazing food. Paris has always been a dream destination internationally. I plan to celebrate my anniversary in Bali in July," she says.



When it comes to destressing, **SIDHARTH KOUL**, Director of Sales & Marketing, JW Marriott, Bengaluru, tries his best to put away all electronic gadgets around him. "But if that is not possible, a long walk with music usually does the trick for me. During the lockdown, I discovered a new hobby, which was going out for long runs or walks. This helped me stay active and focused and has stuck with me even after it's over. When it comes to favourite holiday destinations, Goa in India is my go-to spot due to its casual and carefree vibe. Internationally, I really enjoyed Singapore," he says.



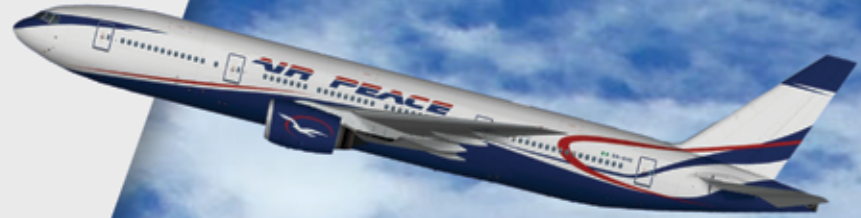
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'A golden age of travel'

Ramesh Daryanani, VP (Global Sales), Asia Pacific, Marriott International, is optimistic about 2023 being the year of travel. After north-bound recovery fuelled by MICE, the brand is prepping to open new hotels across India.



Hazel Jain

Leading the Marriott delegation at its recently held annual show called 'The Exchange Event', **Ramesh Daryanani**, VP of Global Sales, Asia Pacific for Marriott International, says, "It is an opportunity for Marriott International to connect with its customers, partners, and stakeholders. This year we had over 70 hotels with representation from Europe, the Middle East, Asia Pacific and the US." In 2023, the event series will be hosted through April to July, commencing in India followed by Greater China, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and concluding in Southeast Asia. In India, it was held in Chennai, Mumbai and New Delhi.

Aggressive plans for India

"We have some very aggressive plans announced



Ramesh Daryanani
Vice President of Global Sales
Asia Pacific for Marriott International

by our President & CEO Anthony Capuano recently when he was visiting India. We plan to open 250 hotels by 2025. Its an aggressive target but one that, I think, is certainly achievable given



A lot of our corporate guests are staying longer. We are seeing longer business where the average stay ranges from four to seven nights

in the interest that we are seeing from various ownership groups to partner with us to open new hotels in new destinations. We see strong demand not only for the luxury tier, but also for upper-upscale and select tier, especially in secondary and tertiary locations, which are a new area of growth for us," Daryanani adds.

India is certainly at the top of the list in terms of the recovery that the group seeing. "In fact, we have already surpassed our 2019 levels. India is leading the way in terms of how quickly its accelerated from the pandemic. We are seeing strong demand from the Indian consumer, both for our domestic and international hotels. At the moment, the flavour of the month is Eu-



rope, closely followed by Vietnam and Australia and Thailand in the Asia Pacific that travellers want to visit," he adds.

Corporate staying longer

He believes that the corporate demand will return stronger than ever. "A lot of our corporate guests are staying for longer durations. We are not seeing day trips; we are seeing longer business where the average length of stay ranges from four to seven nights. This is also fuelled by a lot of corporates wanting to take a vacation followed by their business trips. With business and leisure combined, leisure is a theme that we are seeing in corporate travel and that is fuelling a lot of our occupancies in this segment," Daryanani says.

He says MICE is being predominantly driven by pharmaceutical companies, professional services and consulting companies, as well as the manufacturing sector where a lot of the demand is

fuelled by incentives and companies wanting to get their teams together. "We are also seeing a lot of leadership meetings take place to strategise and build on the camaraderie. So, at a senior leadership level, we are seeing more frequent and intimate meetings. Sustainability is also a predominant part of our focus today for corporates, as they ask us about our sustainability efforts. At Marriott, we take that very seriously. As we look at these trends in the first quarter, we certainly seem to be in golden age of travel" he says.

The company is focusing on advancing development in secondary and tertiary markets. It has launched brands in locations such as Mussoorie, Pushkar, Mahabalipuram, Raipur, Siliguri, Bilaspur, Tiruchirappalli and Shillong, where Marriott was the first international brand to enter the market. It plans to expand its portfolio in markets such as Corbett, Coorg, Shimla and Pahalgham.

Plan to be in 50 cities in two years

"Marriott is excited to advance the hospitality industry throughout India," said Anthony Capuano, President & CEO, Marriott International. "We are committed to India's economic growth and have plans to be in more than 50 cities in the next two years, creating 10,000 new jobs." Capuano was in India recently to open JW Marriott Goa, its 150th hotel in South Asia as well as the Mulberry Shades Bengaluru Nandi Hills, A Tribute Portfolio Resort. In addition, the company announced its plans to open 15 hotels this year in South Asia across its luxury, premium and select brand segments. Marriott also has plans to launch the brand debut of Moxy in India with the anticipated openings of Moxy Bengaluru Airport Prestige Tech Cloud and Moxy Mumbai Andheri West in 2024.



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