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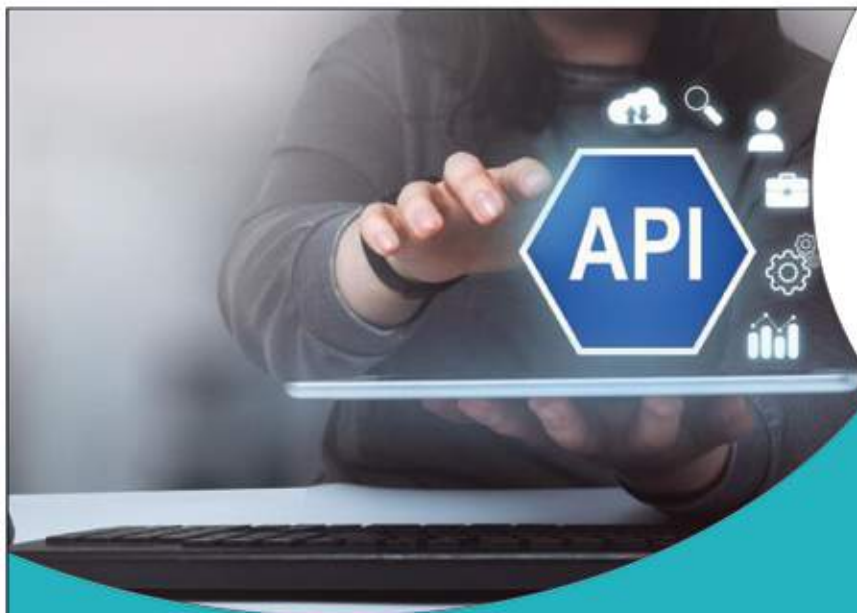


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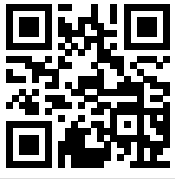
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Industry meet with Minister

In an exclusive interaction with **TRAVTALK**, Suman Billa, Addl. Secretary, Tourism, Govt of India, shares the key issues raised in the meeting between the new Union Tourism Minister and industry associations.



Nisha Verma

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Minister of Tourism and Culture, Government of India, had an all-encompassing meeting with the various tourism and hospitality associations of India, where he addressed the points of concerns and issues plaguing the sector. A total of 27 associations made presentations to the minister and the senior executives of the Union Ministry of Tourism (MOT). **Suman Billa**, Additional Secretary,



Suman Billa
Addl. Secretary, Tourism, Govt of India

Tourism, Government of India, claims that the meeting offered the

right platform to kickstart the exchange of ideas between the MOT and the industry.

Takeaway

Billa reveals that the fundamental idea of having the meeting was to listen to the industry. "As we look at the tourism sector in India today, domestic market is rising significantly, foreign tourists are arriving, and outbound is also growing. On the demand side, India is one of the best places to be in the world. The

Contd. on page 16 ▶

India's wellness travel boom

Wellness is becoming a popular reason to travel for Indians. It goes beyond spa treatments to include a variety of activities. **TRAVTALK** speaks to a few players in the segment to find out details.



R Parthiban
Founder, Swagatam Tours

Wellness tourism provides unique experiences that go beyond typical travel. It can combine ancient healing practices with modern therapies to offer restorative interlude or even entire journeys focused on enhancing physical resilience, managing stress, and adopting healthier lifestyles. Wellness tourism allows guests to prioritise caring for their physical, mental and spiritual health. It is a big thing these days, especially with Ayurveda, a lot of spa facilities available in India are so expensive in comparison to European countries. My guests mainly ask for ayurvedic treatment regarding mental illness, and how to reduce weight. Kerala has done extremely well in this segment.

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'Segment offerings across India'

India's foremost offering in tourism is culture and heritage, but as a sub-continent, the country has a lot to offer, says Manisha Saxena, Director General, Tourism, Government of India, while attending the 17th Outlook & Update Meeting by the PATA India Chapter in New Delhi recently. 'We want to make wildlife a big tourism offering,' the DG says.



Surbhi Sharma

With the new government taking charge at the centre, hopes are high that it will work with the travel and trade industry to develop new products and destinations, work on strategies to facilitate tourism growth and attract more international tourists. Taking the government's vision forward, **Manisha Saxena**,

Director General, Tourism, Government of India, attended the 17th Outlook & Update Meeting by the PATA India Chapter in New Delhi recently. During the event, Saxena highlighted the government's target to increase the tourist footfall and how the Ministry of Tourism (MOT), with the help of industry stakeholders, is preparing a roadmap in this regard. The Government of India has put a lot of em-

phasis on tourism as the driver of economic growth, especially as a means of employment, she said.

Segment offerings

Emphasising that "We cannot offer everything to everyone," Saxena said, "it is important to segment the offerings across India. In India, we have 60 G20 locations, for which we need to curate what

Contd. on page 18 ▶



Manisha Saxena, DG, Tourism, GoI, with the PATA the 17th Outlook & Update Meeting, organised by the PATA India Chapter in New Delhi



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India's travel focus: Home turf

In an interview with **TRAVTALK**, Santosh Kumar, Country Manager for India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Indonesia, Booking.com, shares travel trends for 2024. Along with many other travel segments, sports is also on the upswing, he shares.



Surbhi Sharma



Santosh Kumar
Country Manager for India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Indonesia, Booking.com

Minister steps up to energise tourism

The new Union Minister of Tourism & Culture has assumed office and promptly engaged with tourism industry associations to assess the current landscape. With around 27 associations representing diverse sectors within the tourism and hospitality industry, the discussion covered all critical aspects and issues plaguing them.

A key concern for the inbound tourism sector has been the need for effective overseas promotions and the presence of international representatives in embassies. The inbound operators are keen to restart roadshows and create the right noise in the international markets about India. Additionally, restoring schemes like MDA and providing financial support to tour operators could bring significant changes, they claimed.

Once again, the call for a National Tourism Policy was emphasised, along with the full implementation of industry status for hotels, which has been granted by many states but not fully enacted. We support the industry's proposal for a taskforce to aid in policymaking, potentially transforming India's tourism strategy. Incorporating best practices from all states could effectively promote India globally. The industry also highlighted the distress caused by GST on inbound, outbound, and hospitality sectors.

Domestically, offering tax benefits to encourage travel within the country and making it affordable is a sensible approach. To prevent overcrowding at popular destinations, it was suggested that hotels provide consolidated data on capacity constraints at hill stations during the summer season. With wellness being a \$1 trillion industry for India, there is substantial potential for growth in this sector.

Combining these initiatives with our current connectivity capabilities could significantly elevate India's status as a top tourism destination. The industry is correct in saying: 'Revive the charm of tourism in India'.

Indian travellers are exploring the domestic offerings in an extensive way. From beautiful hill stations to beaches to wildlife reserves, domestic travel in India is gaining momentum due to increased convenience, shorter distances, and lower costs. Foreign trips by Indians have also increased due to improved passport services, visa-on-arrival facilities, regional connectivity, and growing middle-class incomes, says **Santosh Kumar**, Country Manager for India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Indonesia, Booking.com, sharing insights about the growth of the travel and hospitality sector in India.

"As the Indian travel landscape continues to evolve, there has been increased interest in domestic and international travel. According to APAC Travel Confidence Index 2023, 86 per cent of Indians are optimistic about travelling, the top-ranked country in terms of travel confidence within the survey, with 61 per cent having no intention of postponing their plans in the next 12 months, shows the number of aggregate trips in India is expected to reach 5 billion in 2030," he says.

Destinations preferred by Indians

Santosh said, "76 per cent of Indian travellers are determined to use their holidays to cool down in places far from the scorching sun and 74 per cent mentioned that climate change is now a pivotal

factor influencing their vacation plans pushing them towards cooler destinations with hill stations dominating the most searched summer destinations for Indians travelling domestically."

Booking.com

Ooty tops the list of most searched leisure destinations this summer, followed by Manali, Darjeeling, Srinagar and Rishikesh. While domestic travel continues to be a popular choice, Indians are increasingly exploring global destinations within Asia Pacific such as Singapore, Bangkok, Bali, Tokyo and Kuala Lumpur.

In Q1 of 2024, the top searched domestic destinations include metropolises such as New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai and Kolkata, alongside leisure destinations like Jaipur, Goa, Udaipur and Ooty, as well as spiritual destinations like Varanasi, Rishikesh and

Places Indians are travelling

Top 5 summer destinations in India	Top 5 foreign destinations preferred by Indians
❖ Ooty	❖ Singapore
❖ Manali	❖ Bangkok
❖ Darjeeling	❖ Bali
❖ Srinagar	❖ Tokyo
❖ Rishikesh	❖ Kuala Lumpur

Puri. Indians are exploring both short-haul and long-haul destinations with Dubai, Singapore, Bangkok, Makkah and London among the top five most searched international destinations for Q1.

Travel trends of 2024

This year, Booking.com witnessed many dynamic shifts in travel trends. Indians are travelling more

Growth in travel to tier II and III cities has resulted in leading global hotel chains expanding their reach into cities like Jodhpur, and Dharamshala

than ever, for work as well as leisure. According to its travel trends data, Cool Cationers, Culinary Excavators and Reboot Retreaters are trending in India.

Brands ready to open hotels in tier II and III cities

Santosh said, "Travel will continue to be on top of mind for many Indians, with travel expenditure across domestic and foreign trips projected to grow from US \$150 billion in 2019 to US \$410 billion by the end of the decade. The growth in travel to tier II and III cities has resulted in leading global hotel chains expanding their reach into cities such as Jodhpur, Dharamshala, Bodh Gaya, Bilaspur and Coorg with early 70 per cent of upcoming branded hotel properties set to emerge in cities, including Kolhapur, Nashik and Puri. This surge in domestic travel demand is driven by a strong economy, a burgeoning middle class, travel-loving youth and improved infrastructure and connectivity."

Rise of sports tourism

Event tourism is experiencing a remarkable resurgence with travellers increasingly drawn to immersive experiences such as music festivals, concerts and sporting events. Indian sports fans are no longer happy with watching sports action on screen; rather they are keen on watching their favourite athletes live. According to the data, this year, 73 per cent Indian travellers are interested in sports events. They are excited to seize the opportunity to witness their favourite sport live while exploring diverse spots. Based on Booking.com accommodation search data, Paris is among the top five most searched destinations due to the Olympics. Similarly, New York and London also experienced the same as they are hosting the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 and Wimbledon Championship, respectively.



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Wanted: DMCs that know India market

Servicing Indian clients who are constantly looking for something 'new' can be a challenge, especially when one can't find a DMC that knows and understand the India market. **TRAVTALK** speaks to a few holiday designers who say that finding the right DMC for connecting with destinations that primarily serve the US, UK, and Europe markets can pose a problem.



Hazel Jain

As the role of travel advisors continues to evolve, some find the need to directly source tours from Destination Management Companies (DMCs). But which DMC to book with has been an eternal question in the minds of advisors, especially when it comes to newer destinations that have not completely established themselves in the India market. Tourism boards typically refrain from recommending one DMC over another to maintain fairness, as each DMC offers distinct products. Nevertheless, advisors often encounter challenges when their clients require a different type of product or a rate that is suitable for India.

The struggle is real

Gandhinagar-based **Rajan Bhatla**, Director, Yashvi Tours & Travels and Treasurer of TAFI - Gujarat



Rajan Bhatla
Director, Yashvi Tours & Travels &
Treasurer, TAFI Gujarat Chapter

Chapter, has have encountered several challenges in promoting new and exotic destinations like Baku, Vietnam, and Almaty to Indian clients.

"One significant issue is finding reliable DMCs, especially for destinations in the US, UK, and European markets. We overcome this challenge by staying updated



Saurabh Vyas
Managing Partner
Vyas Travels

through attending various road-shows and travel fairs. Additionally, being part of travel associations helps us connect with reliable DMCs through fellow members. These strategies ensure we can offer the best experiences to our clients despite the challenges in sourcing dependable DMCs for new destinations," he explains.



Harmandeep Singh Anand
Managing Director
Global Panorama Showcase

He is not alone in facing this issue. **Saurabh Vyas**, Managing Partner at Raipur-based Vyas Travels, says that finding the right DMC that specifically focuses on the Indian market is challenging. He promotes new destinations like the West Midlands and North-East England, Toulouse, Aix-en-Provence, and Dijon in France, and Utah and

Arizona in the USA. "First, we must shortlist at least five DMCs through internet research and personal networking. Then we contact them individually to understand how they can assist us. This process is time-consuming. With information readily available online, you must dedicate time, effort, and focus. Attending TTFs in India and abroad is crucial to engage with specific DMCs. This also helps explain your market's interests and capabilities to them, thereby attracting their attention to the Indian market and highlighting business opportunities," Vyas adds.

Are tier cities more likely to face this issue? Yes, absolutely, says Vyas, adding "Living in tier II cities presents challenges such as limited attention from tourism boards to educate the local travel fraternity and the agents' lack of knowledge about new destinations." Towards this, **Harmandeep Singh**

Anand, Managing Director, Global Panorama Showcase, has been working hard to bring sellers and DMCs to the tiered cities. He says,



Tourism boards typically refrain from recommending one DMC over another to maintain fairness, as each DMC offers distinct products

"Our aim has been to educate and empower the travel industry. We have grown over the years, bringing more and more exhibitors on to this platform to arrange a

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STB plans 4-city roadshow

Focused purely on leisure, the upcoming four-city roadshow in India by Singapore Tourism Board (STB) will have 50 exhibitors, including a mix of hotels, destination management companies and attractions.



Inviting the trade to be a part of the exciting roadshow series, **Markus Tan**, Regional Director (India, ME, South Asia & Africa), International Group, Singapore Tourism Board, says, "Friends and partners of Singapore! We are bringing to you 50 Singapore tourism companies consisting of DMCs, hotels, attractions for a four-city roadshow to meet the trade in India. We will kick it off with Chennai on July 8, going on to Hyderabad on July 9, Kolkata on July 11 and finally Ahmedabad on July 12." The four cities have direct flights to Singapore.



Markus Tan
Regional Director (India, ME, South Asia & Africa), International Group, STB

Line, which has made Singapore its exclusive Southeast Asian homeport for five years starting next year.

"Singapore is a country that constantly re-invents itself, day to day, minute to minute. And every single time you visit, there is always something special and unexpected that you will discover. It is a city that is brimming with so many surprises," Tan adds. From January to May 2024, Singapore welcomed more than half a million visitors from India. India is a major

tourism source market for Singapore, with direct flights from 17 cities within a 4 to 6-hour range.

As part of the B2B roadshow, STB is also hosting two curated business matching platforms between Singapore wedding suppliers and Indian planners in Ahmedabad and Kolkata. Featuring eight venues, hotels, aviation and cruise part-

Singapore is a country that constantly re-invents itself. There is something special that you will discover every time you visit

ners, and DMCs, these networking events build on STB's continuing efforts in India to spotlight Singapore's selection of wedding venues and experiences.

Asego joins forces with Ancileo

The travel assistance and insurance provider has announced a strategic tie-up with Ancileo with an aim to reshape the insurance landscape, presenting an innovative value proposition to clients.



Asego, one of India's leading dedicated providers of global assistance and travel insurance and Ancileo, provider of end-to-end tech solutions for travel insurance ecosystems, have entered into a strategic alliance. Through this collaboration, both companies aim to reshape the landscape of travel insurance, presenting an innovative value proposition, not just to travellers but also to global distributors, and insurers alike.



Dev Karvat
Founder & CEO
Asego

Dev Karvat, Founder & CEO, Asego, expressed his excitement, stating, "This breakthrough collaboration will enable us to leverage Ancileo's advanced technology and international insurer network to offer Asego's innovative travel insurance products and services on a global scale."

Olivier Michel, CEO, Ancileo, shared his enthusiasm, highlighting the mutual benefits of the collaboration, "This collabo-

ration with Asego marks a significant milestone in Ancileo's mission to empower travel assistance and insurance ecosystems with advanced technology solutions. By combining our strengths, we are poised to provide our partners with a flexible and battle-tested insurance solution in India and abroad."

Why this partnership?

It's an amalgamation of Asego's global assistance and travel insurance capabilities with Ancileo

technological expertise to enhance market penetration in the rapidly growing global travel insurance segment.

- ❖ Provide Ancileo with a strong local partner in India, and enable Asego to expand its presence into the global market.
- ❖ Offer enhanced customer experience through streamlined processes, innovative products, and comprehensive support before, during and after their travel.

Ancileo is a software-as-a-service platform for the insurance ecosystem, offering end-to-end technology solutions for the management of travel insurance portfolios. Ancileo's core capabilities include API solutions, white label, agent portal management, claims automation, and policy management, as well as localised payment solutions for travel insurance premium collection.

TourismNews

Delhi Airport becomes first Indian airport to launch government's ambitious Fast Track Immigration-Trusted Traveller Programme

MOT prioritises training and certification for adventure tourism through authorised certification

88% of millennials and 85% of Gen X travellers who have cruised before plan to do so again, claims CLIA

Wyndham wants to join India's 'fastest growing hospitality' run; plans to have 150 properties by 2025 end

Sales of global sports tourism packages are forecast to increase by 15% this year: Google travel trends 2024

Travel industry will continue to grow at current pace for 4-5 years: Madhavan Menon, EC, Thomas Cook

Himachal Pradesh registers 7.4 million tourists by May 2024

Stay vigilant of cybercrimes: TAFI

Observing rising cases of online frauds among the trade, Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) plans to organise a knowledge session on cybercrime and cyber laws for its members so that they can be forewarned and take necessary precautions to prevent such incidents, especially when multiple staff members are making bookings.



As if there were not enough troubles for the travel industry, there is another threat raising its head – cybercrime. Malicious entities combine phishing techniques and malware to attack hotels and travel agencies, impersonate airlines in a credible manner and defraud the agents. Sometimes, they obtain their access credentials to leading travel booking platforms, impersonate them and defraud travellers who have made a reservation.

To make their members aware about this so that they can take necessary precautions, the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) is planning to conduct a session on this. **Ajay Prakash**, National President, TAFI, says, "Lax cyber security practices can cost you dearly. We use myriad devices to make bookings for our clients and often these devices are used



Ajay Prakash
National President
TAFI

Some of our members have suffered serious financial losses after their accounts were hacked and tickets issued



Jay Kantawala
Chairman, Western Region
TAFI

We had done an exercise on this issue about 2 years ago when we had invited a cybercrime lawyer to speak to our members

by multiple people. Vigilance, therefore, is paramount. Some of our members have suffered serious financial losses after their accounts were hacked and tickets issued in the middle of the night. Changing passwords and



initiating two factor authentication is the least that we can do to secure ourselves against unauthorised access. TAFI is planning to update and educate our members on this critical aspect soon."

Jay Kantawala, Chairman, Western Region, TAFI, adds, "We had done an exercise on this about two years ago when we had invited a cybercrime lawyer to speak to our members and present to them how they can protect themselves against frauds. Recently, one of our members highlighted that he faced some issues

regarding the same – although it was a small amount. And he approached the department, which has shown interest to do something with the association to spread awareness about this issue."

TAFI will approach the concerned authority to fix a time for a presentation for its members and enlighten them on cyber laws.

"Information that comes from the credible authorities will be more authentic and useful and add a lot of value to us," Kantawala adds.

New members join in
TAFI has also managed to add 183 new members over the last two years to its existing 1,400-odd members distributed across 12 chapters. The new members are in chapters other than Mumbai and Delhi, indicating that the trade finds value in TAFI as an organisation.

NTOs lure Indian foodies

Qabuli in Oman, vegetable strudel in Austria, grilled prawns in Thailand, smoked salmon in Norway! These are some of the delicacies Indians love during their overseas journeys. Experts from tourism boards share their views on the food habits of Indians.



Inder Raj Ahluwalia

Christine Mukharji, Director, Austrian Tourism Board, feels the food preferences of Indian outbound travellers depend entirely on their personal tastes, but their horizon is expanding, and they are becoming more adventurous. "While first-time travellers still prefer Indian food, experienced travellers are aware of Austria's rich culinary traditions, and trying out Austrian specialities and sweets. While Austria is known for its signature items like wiener schnitzel and sacher torte, there are also good vegetarian, and even vegan options to explore. A favourite for Indians is vegetable strudel, which is similar to the famous apple strudel," she says.

Akmal Aziz, Deputy Director, Tourism Malaysia - India, says they recognise India's value as a tourist generator, and have worked to create an overall environment suited to Indian visitors. Cuisine plays an important role in this. "Malaysia's strong point is that, being a melting pot of cultures, it offers a wide range of dishes. The fact that Malaysian and Indian food are similar,



Christine Mukharji
Director
Austrian Tourism Board



Akmal Aziz
Deputy Director
Tourism Malaysia - India



Arjun Chadha
Country Manager
Oman Tourism India Office

While first-time travellers still prefer Indian food, experienced travellers are aware of Austria's rich culinary traditions

important for tourists, and plays a major role in their assessment of destinations and holidays. "Food has emerged as being among the top three factors in the tourism sector. This is a great asset and advantage for South Africa. The

Malaysia's strong point is that, being a melting pot of cultures, it offers a wide range of dishes

but there is also plenty for vegetarians," she says.

Pinki Arora, Consultant, Tourism Authority of Thailand, feels today's Indian travellers have evolved, and are keen to explore

Food is a huge factor for Indians, whose tastes, preferences and distinct palates vary depending on their home regions

popular in India as well, travelling Indians are now increasingly eating Thai food during their visits. Awareness is also growing about the fact that Thai food isn't just about tangy taste and unique flavours, but is also a healthy cuisine," Arora says.

Anika Tandon, Manager Sales and Marketing, German Tourism Board, feels Indians travelling overseas are now eager to experience different cuisines, and Germany is high up in their list. "Indian visitors to Germany have now graduated to a state where they want to look beyond Indian cuisine. They are now actively seeking out multi-cuisine options and authentic German dishes to try at every new place they visit. Germany's great plus point is that almost every region in the country offers its own, distinctive type of cuisine. For those keen on Indian food, there are over 2,000 Indian restaurants to fall back on," Tandon says.

Arjun Chadha, Country Manager, Oman Tourism India Office, is upbeat. "Food is a huge factor for Indians, whose tastes, preferences and distinct palates vary depending on their home regions. While some prefer to explore local cuisine, for others familiar flavours are a must and they look out for Indian restaurants while planning their holiday," he says.



Pinki Arora
Consultant
Tourism Authority of Thailand



Anika Tandon
Manager Sales and Marketing
German Tourism Board



Neliswa Nkani
Hub Head
South African Tourism

When it comes to food, Thailand is a world-leader, and has a wide range to offer Indians visiting the country

makes it easier for Indians when they visit Malaysia," he says.

Neliswa Nkani, Hub Head, South African Tourism, thinks food is all-

Indian visitors to Germany have now graduated to a state where they want to look beyond Indian cuisine

country is an understated food story, and its length and breadth offers cuisine to please almost all tourist categories. Those fond of their meats have a huge choice,

Food has emerged as being among the top three factors in the tourism sector. This is a great asset and advantage for South Africa

local food. "This is a positive trend. When it comes to food, Thailand is a world-leader, and has a wide range to offer visiting Indians. Now that Thai food is

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unveils new executive board

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) at its 73rd Annual General Meeting (AGM) elects Peter Semone as the Chair of its Executive Board for the second term. Suman Pandey and Luzi Matzig have been elected as the Vice Chair and Secretary/Treasurer, respectively. The board's six-member committee includes SanJeet, Director, DDP Publications.



The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) unveiled its new Executive Board for the 2024-2026 term during its 73rd Annual General Meeting (AGM). **Peter Semone** was elected as the Chair of the Executive Board. **Suman Pandey**, a well-known figure in Nepalese tourism, was named as the Vice Chair, while **Luzi Matzig** was made the new Secretary/Treasurer.



Peter Semone
Chair
Executive Board, PATA

Addressing the participants at the AGM, Semone said, "It is an honour to be elected by members of the PATA Board of Directors to lead the association for a second term. Thanks to the strong commitment of the secretariat staff and outgoing Executive Board members, over the past two years significant progress has been made in regard to PATA's finances and management. Much work re-

mains to be done and I am confident that the new Executive Board will rise to this challenge."

Semone, a leading tourism development expert specialising in the Asia Pacific region, has served in leadership roles for international donor-funded projects in Timor-Leste, Lao PDR, and Vietnam and is frequently called upon as a

short-term expert for UN Tourism and the Asian Development Bank. He is the founder of the internationally acclaimed Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality (LANITH) vocational school. He has also authored tourism policies, strategies and action plans for destinations at regional, national and municipal levels.

Members of the Executive Board
The newly-elected members of the Executive Board comprise

Much work remains to be done and I am confident that the new Executive Board will rise to this challenge



SanJeet
Member
Executive Board, PATA

Ben Montgomery, Director of Business Relations Management, Centara Hotels & Resorts, Thailand; **Henry Oh**, Chairman, Global Tour, Korea (ROK); **Noredah Othman**, CEO, Sabah Convention Bureau, Malaysia; **Mayur Patel**, Head of Asia, OAG, Singapore; **Gerald Perez**, Vice President, Guam Visitors Bureau, Guam; and **SanJeet**, Director, DDP Publica-

tions, India. Additionally, **Vikram Madhok**, Vice Chairman, PATA India Chapter, has been appointed to the PATA Board, to represent 32 PATA Global Chapters, on the platform, and **Noor Ahmad Hamid** remains on the Executive Board as the Ex-officio/ CEO.

With my role on the Executive Board, I aim to bring India closer to the world and the world closer to India

Underlining the goals and objectives of the new Executive Board, SanJeet, Member, Executive Board, PATA, asserted, "The new

Executive Board is dedicated to revitalising PATA with fresh ideas and concepts, aiming to establish it as one of the world's foremost associations in its field."

When asked about his objectives for the growth of Indian market, SanJeet replied, "India has been a significant market for PATA, and with my role on the Executive Board, I aim to bring India closer to the world and the world closer to India. PATA and India's tourism have enjoyed a very healthy relationship in the past, and we aim to strengthen this relationship while increasing the market share of travellers between Southeast Asia and India." The PATA forecasts that the Asia Pacific will witness an upward curve in IVAs by 2026. With the new Executive Board in place, it would be interesting to see what strategies the association will deploy for the tourism development in the region.

AIX plans Dhaka, Kathmandu flights

Air India Express prepares to embark on its most ambitious journey in its history. Unveiling strong plans for 2024, Alope Singh, Managing Director, Air India Express, says that with its expanded fleets, new routes, and a streamlined organisational structure, the airline is poised to capitalise on India's burgeoning aviation market.



Unveiling the ambitious plans of Air India Express for 2024, **Alope Singh**, Managing Director, Air India Express, recently outlined a series of strategic initiatives that promise to significantly enhance the airline's capabilities and market presence. "We have an enormous expansion in the offing. In terms of capacity, we are going to add almost 40 per cent over the last year's capacity," Singh said, adding that, "20 aircraft have already joined the fleet. Another 30 will come by December. Next year onwards we will head into another phase of growth."



Alope Singh
Managing Director
Air India Express

Singh revealed, "In the international markets we are looking at serving Dhaka and Kathmandu, which will start as early as July this year. Later, during the financial year we will be looking at Thailand."

Highlighting the airline's strategy on the domestic front, he said, "We will be increasing our frequencies and operating to some new airports from existing cities. We will be starting flights from Hindon, which is an airport serving Delhi.

We will be offering daily services from Hindon to Bengaluru, Kolkata, Goa, and Chennai, that is something new and the flights will open for sale in a few days." He also talked about the upcoming merger. "Apart from the network growth and addition of new destinations, we will be completing our legal merger this year itself. AirAsia India and Air India Express entities will come together, and we will have one AOC, one legal entity. So, that is something significant that will happen this year."

AirAsia India and Air India Express entities will come together, and we will have one AOC, one legal entity



Golden age of Indian aviation
Singh expressed optimism about India's aviation future and highlighted growth drivers. "I think, Indian aviation is entering, what I can call, the golden age. All the growth drivers we see point to a huge growth coming up in the Indian market. The demographics are just right, we have a very young population, and we are the largest population in the world now," he said.

"India is hugely underpenetrated market. Even if you compare with emerging markets like Indonesia,

Vietnam or Brazil, the per capita consumption of air travel is barely one-third or half. So, there is so much more room to grow; Indians are travelling, the GDP is growing. So, what we are going to see in the next five years is certainly a doubling of the market that we have today and huge growth opportunities ahead," he added.

Competitive airfares
On the airfares, Singh said, "The airfares are going to be competitive. Given the cost structure that we have got as an industry, we

need to generate a return on what we invest. But the market is going to remain deeply competitive. So, that will make sure that the airfares are competitive, while it is generating an adequate return for the airline companies."

He added, "If we go back many years, perhaps even decades, the airfare increase per capita has barely kept pace with inflation. So, at a unit level, prices have adjusted for inflation and in real terms they have come down and the situation will remain so going forward."



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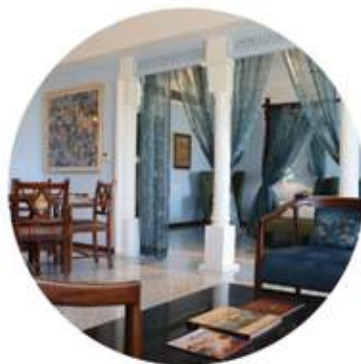


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Wellness remains revenue booster

▶ Contd. from page 5



Sushma Rai
Director of Wellness
The Claridges, New Delhi

“Wellness travel is indeed a growing trend globally, including among Indian travellers, and Fiji, with its stunning natural beauty, serene environment, and numerous wellness retreats, has become an attractive des-

“Wellness offerings are indeed a significant revenue enhancer for our hotel. Our aim is to contribute around 5 per cent of the hotel's total revenue through Cinqtuar Spa services. Currently, we are achieving approximately 2 per cent compared to the F&B revenue, and about 3 per cent compared to the rules. Wellness offerings are not just a complementary feature but a strategic revenue enhancer for our hotel. Our corporate and MICE customers often pre-purchase wellness services.”



Robert Thompson
Executive Director of Regions
Tourism Fiji

“tination for wellness tourism. While wellness might not yet be the primary reason for most Indian travellers visiting Fiji, it is becoming a significant factor. New Indian travellers are seeking wellness experiences.”



Hitesh Golcha
MD, The Leaf Hospitality &
Kavya Resort & Spa

“There has been a noticeable shift in travel patterns, with a substantial number of Indian travellers prioritising wellness and experiences. We cater to leisure as well as corporates and small MICE groups. Our wellness packages range from 2 to 15 nights, offering a holistic approach to rejuvenation. Guests can participate in daily mindfulness activities and personalised spa treatments, hikes, mountain biking, all designed to nourish the mind, body, and spirit.”

“At Hyatt, wellness is paramount, and we are happy to introduce the WellnessAtHyatt campaign, providing guests and members with transformative wellness experiences that nurture their physical, mental and



Deepa Krishnan
Head of Marketing – India and
Southwest Asia, Hyatt

“spiritual well-being. There is a growing inclination towards mindful living and we are committed to meeting this demand by offering authentic wellness options combined with authentic local cultural influences.”



Kamonwan Yungyen
Spa Manager
Kandima Maldives

“Wellness offerings have significantly enhanced our resort's revenue. We have seen a notable increase in occupancy rates since introducing wellness amenities, such as a spa, a fitness centre, and wellness-themed packages. Guests increasingly seek resorts offering comprehensive wellness experiences, leading to higher booking rates. Wellness offerings allow us to command a higher average daily rate. Guests are willing to pay a premium for wellness services.”

“Wellness offerings are becoming an increasingly important component of our guests' experiences as more travellers prioritise rest as a top reason for travel. Today's travellers are seeking wellness



Sandie Johannessen
Group Director of Spa and
Wellness – Asia, Minor Hotels

“treatments and offerings beyond a traditional spa menu to help them return home feeling a sense of self-improvement. Some of our corporate and MICE clients extend their stays to experience our wellness packages.”



Swadesh Kumar
MD
Shikhar Travels (India)

“Corporate, MICE, and leisure guests often pre-purchase wellness services when booking. For properties that have integrated wellness into their offerings, there is often a notable increase in revenue from these activi-

“Wellness is now a big part of travel, and many hotels and resorts include sumptuous spas where guests can unwind and rejuvenate. Therefore, it's essential to have a deep understanding of this specific but expanding niche. For hospitality, it is important to do exclusive wellness as a focused area work and make this offering free. My clients from Germany and Australia always pre-book everything before reaching India for wellness treatments like meditation, and spas including yoga.”



Alefiya Singh
Founder & Director,
IRIS Reps

“ties. Wellness packages also encourage repeat bookings and longer stays with higher average daily rates. Travellers often seek various wellness treatments to enhance their travel experience. Popular requests include spa treatments.”



Rajeev Sabharwal
Chief Executive, Gaurav Travels &
Elegant Weddings

“Wellness travel has increased a lot in the last many years. Despite India being a hub for the wellness segment, people are now looking and opting for destinations where they can have wellness programmes and treatments such as weight reduction and spas. Far East Asia has always been and will be the top destination for wellness tourism. The future of outbound industry in India is pretty good for the next two to three years with new destinations coming up.”

“Wellness tourism is a growing segment, that encompasses a blend of health, fitness, spirituality, and travel. It offers various activities and treatments that aim to nourish the human spirit and promote holistic



Khushvinder Sarna
Chairman
TAFI Northern India Chapter

“well-being and health. Wellness offerings are indeed a revenue enhancer for hotels and agents, as it is an additional stream of income for all of us. Places like Rishikesh and its nearby areas are making their space in this niche.”



Rajnish Kaistha
Sr. Vice President, IATO &
Director, Paradise Holidays India

“Wellness is gradually becoming a significant part of the growing tourism vertical. Globally, people are more conscious of their physical and mental health, including family well-being. Travellers are now seeking destinations offering holistic wellness, either fully or partially. This growing segment benefits not only India but also the global industry. India, with its ancient traditions of Ayurveda, yoga, and meditation, stands to gain considerably.”

“A guest traveling on a wellness itinerary would need a minimum of 5 to 14 nights. This is to ensure that the treatment being opted for is effective and shows results. This helps resorts generate a higher revenue



Ashish Vohra
CEO
Bookmark Resorts

“as the length of stay is longer with specialised treatments and therapy. The pricing of packages also vary based on the detailing of the treatment plans and duration. Tourists pre-book wellness services.”

Compiled by TT Bureau

The Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort

Are you looking to experience staying in a resort that is conveniently close to the hustle and bustle of daily life but far enough to provide a refuge? If yes, you should head to Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort situated in Parwanoo, Himachal Pradesh.



TT Bureau

Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort, located 5,000 feet above the sea level amid the stunning Shivalik range, inspires a sense of oneness with nature. Nestled amid the picturesque landscape of Parwanoo and surrounded by Shivalik ranges in Himachal Pradesh, the property offers a one-of-its-kind wellness experience.

The beautifully laid-out resort boasts 62 deluxe rooms and two opulent family suites each of which has an en-suite bathroom with a bathtub and shower that face out into the Shivalik range. The resort has state-of-the-art facilities dedicated to the enrichment of physical, and spiritual health, beauty and well-being. The therapies offered are a mix of Indian and international experiences.

The surroundings of a retreat play an important role in creating a

one-of-its-kind wellness experience. Guests at Moksha embark on treks of differing intensities, walking along age-old village path-

The resort has state-of-the-art facilities dedicated to the enrichment of physical, and spiritual health, beauty and well-being

ways winding artistically through the lush forests, taking in the fresh crisp air infused with the aromas from the myriads of fauna namely the Pine, Oak, Champa, Lemon, and Rudraksha trees.

The Spa at Moksha

The Spa at Moksha is dedicated to providing its guests with the

complete experience of rediscovering well-being and harmony. Grounded in Ayurveda and Yoga, yet blending with them the best of Western and International contemporary spa therapies, it is dedicated to providing its guests' well-being and a holistic approach to life, based on the integration of the elements of nature to create the ultimate union of mind, body, and soul. Personalised therapies and activity programmes are designed to meet individual needs and health goals along with guidance in the areas of nutrition, exercise, stress management, detoxification, deep relaxation, anti-ageing, and weight loss.

Moksha's well-being experiences are based on age-old practices from around the globe, with the purpose of bringing back balance in one's life. Journeys at Moksha involve both the sciences of Aromatherapy and Ayurveda, sometimes a fusion of both to address an individual's personal goals. Yoga, me-



diation and fitness complete this holistic triangle of disciplines.

Restaurant and Banquets

Dining facilities at Moksha include a fine dining restaurant with progressive Indian, sustainable traditional cuisine that includes Himachali dishes and a spa menu. The restaurant also offers continental and Thai food. Banquet facilities are available at the Mansion Hall, Royal Ballroom and Garden Café.

Outdoor Activities at Moksha

The resort offers a large number of outdoor activities like mountain bicycling, zipline, archery, and Burma Bridge among others. It also has a temperature-controlled all-weather infinity pool overlooking the valley and two hot outdoor Jacuzzis with spectacular views. The infinity view pool is the perfect antidote for tired souls to laze around after a hectic day of travelling.

Location

Located at around 5,000 feet above the sea level near Parwanoo in Himachal Pradesh, Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort is easily accessible by road, rail and air – it's just an hour drive from the Mohali international airport, a short drive from Chandigarh, and a five-hour drive from Delhi. Guests can also use a cable car to reach the resort from Parwanoo.

Fiji targets India's tier-II markets

Robert Thompson, Executive Director of Regions, Tourism Fiji, in an interview with **TRAVELTALK**, discusses India's vast market that extends beyond the major metros. His next trip will, therefore, include strategic visits to tier II cities as well to connect with travel experts in these emerging hubs and gain a deeper understanding of regional travel preferences.



Hazel Jain

You recently met some members of the Indian travel trade in Fiji. Any fruitful discussions?

The recent meeting with travel agents from India yielded many insights like the preferences and behaviours of Indian tourists, including their travel interests, booking patterns, and budget considerations. With this knowledge, Tourism Fiji can now tailor marketing strategies and curate promotional campaigns that resonate with the Indian market.

The discussions went beyond just understanding the Indian market. There was a focus on developing tourism products and experiences that cater specifically to Indian travellers' preferences. A key takeaway from the meetings was a collaborative approach to bridge the knowledge gap.



Robert Thompson
Executive Director-Regions
Tourism Fiji

Can you share your strategy for the Indian market?

Family time is a priority in Indian culture, and Tourism Fiji recognises this. That is why we are promoting Fiji as the ideal destination for your next multi-generational getaway. Imagine grandparents soaking up the sun on pristine beaches while younger generations embark on thrilling adventures

like water sports, diving, or hikes. Nature lovers can even explore eco-tourism options!

By collaborating with Indian tour operators, Tourism Fiji curates experiences that go beyond the typical beach vacation. Activities like the Sigatoka River Safari, cultural performances like the You Hub, or exploring hidden caves and beaches in the Yasawa Islands are just a few ways to keep children engaged. We also understand that 'one size doesn't fit all'. We aim to focus on interest-based travel by working closely with India-based travel agents to design customised packages.

What are some of the things that you believe will work with the Indian market?

Fiji's unique connection to India is a hidden gem waiting to be discovered with a large Indian population in Fiji. Many Fijians of Indian

descent speak Hindi, and cultural influences are evident in local customs and traditions. Exploring a Fijian-Indian market, sampling authentic Indo-Fijian cuisine, or even

We aim to focus on interest-based travel by working closely with India-based travel agents to design customised packages

witnessing a Hindu ceremony can be enriching experiences for Indian tourists. Another key factor that will resonate with Indian travellers is the culinary scene. While Fiji boasts of its own fresh,

local flavors, there is also a wide availability of Indian cuisine. This caters to both adventurous palates seeking new culinary experiences and those who might crave a taste of home during their travels.

What are some of the challenges in promoting Fiji to India market?

Currently, the lack of direct flights presents a logistical hurdle for some travellers. Extended layovers and connecting flights can add significant travel time and potentially deter visitors, particularly families with young children or those seeking a more expeditious journey. However, we believe that Tourism Fiji's proactive approach and inherent charm paints a promising future for attracting Indian tourists.

What do you think of attracting the market that is already visiting ANZ?

Fiji's idyllic location in the South

Pacific makes it a perfect tropical escape, and while conveniently connected to Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand (ANZ), it's best experienced when you immerse yourself for a bit longer, dedicating at least 5-6 nights. Adding to the allure is Fiji's visa-free entry for Indian passport holders.

What is the kind of potential India offers to Fiji?

India's booming tourism industry is a goldmine of potential, and my productive meetings with travel professionals provided invaluable insights to tap into that market. India's vast market extends beyond the major metros. My next trip will include strategic visits to tier II cities alongside the metros. By connecting with travel experts in these emerging hubs, we will gain a deeper understanding of regional travel preferences and tailor our offerings to resonate with the diverse Indian market.

Lords acquires new property in Purulia, WB

Lords Hotels & Resorts has acquired a new property in Purulia, West Bengal. The newly acquired property, Lords Eco Inn Purulia, is part of Lords' expansion plans for 2024 and opens in early 2025. It is conveniently located and well connected by road and rail.

Expressing enthusiasm over the new venture, **Pushpendra Bansal**, COO, Lords Hotels & Resorts, said, "We thank our new partners for their trust in us, as we seek to affiliate with more such owners to offer Lord's exhilarating hospitality to business and leisure travellers."

Vikas Suri, Vice President Operations & Development, Lords Hotels & Resorts, said, "To maximise further growth and expansion opportunities, we are delighted to consolidate our presence in West Bengal with the opening of our second property in this region."

Lords Eco Inn Purulia features elegantly designed rooms. Guests will be able to enjoy a variety of enticing amenities, including a restaurant and rooftop lounge.

Choosing right partner a challenge

► Contd. from page 7

meeting between them and the agents in tiered cities."

Quality DMCs for India

Some travel designers also face a hurdle in promoting India to their inbound clients due to a lack of quality and reliable DMCs. For instance, **Mit Bhatt**, Founder & Managing Partner, The Grand Vacationist in Mumbai, tends to focus more on outbound clients even though he would love to promote Indian itineraries. "Finding DMCs that have maintained certain standards of quality and reliability is always a challenge in India. While we do work with a handful of good ones, they are restricted to a few regions in India. Finding others becomes a challenge, add to this the wafer-thin margins. So, it is not worth the time and effort to sell India for us, even though we would love to sell it more. For instance, we see a lot of potential for the Northeast. We would love to promote specific itineraries where we can be in control and work with reliable suppliers," Bhatt explains.

Trust and reliability are key factors in choosing DMCs. **Ashish Malhotra**, MD, Vacanza Globe



Mit Bhatt
Founder & Managing Partner
The Grand Vacationist, Mumbai

Travels in Ludhiana, says, "Building trust with a new DMC is crucial. Without a proven track record, it can be difficult to assess their reliability and the quality of services they provide. We see a strong inclination to travel to countries like Iceland, Japan and South Korea. In addition, destinations like Mykonos (Greece), Bodrum and Cappadocia (Turkey), Mexico (Cancun and Tulum), have been top selling. We have our suppliers set right mostly, and most of the destinations now want to sell to Indian markets seeing the tremendous growth of outbound tourism. But since some of these destinations themselves are new, there might be less readily



Ashish Malhotra
Managing Director
Vacanza Globe Travels, Ludhiana

available information about DMCs operating there."

Finding the right DMC for connecting with destinations that primarily serve the US, UK and Europe markets can indeed pose challenges. **Ashmi Dharia**, Founder and Holiday Curator, Gypsy Soul Holidays, feels that while getting contacts from trade shows, tourism boards, or networking with experienced travel professionals is relatively straightforward, the real hurdle lies in finding a DMC that comprehends the intricacies of the Indian market. "Indian travellers often exhibit last-minute booking tendencies and demanding preferences, including



Ashmi Dharia
Founder and Holiday Curator
Gypsy Soul Holidays

unique meal requirements and a penchant for frequent changes. This can be unfamiliar to many DMCs. However, by fostering personal relationships with DMC representatives, we can bridge this gap. Establishing trust and rapport enables smoother communication and ensures tailored support for our clients' needs," she says.

Apart from DMC-related challenges, selling new destinations presents its own set of hurdles. Limited awareness necessitates extensive self-education efforts on part of the agent, and proactive engagement to spark client interest. Navigating visa procedures, transportation lo-

gistics, and accommodation availability in emerging destinations can be slightly more difficult compared to established tourist hubs.

Dharia adds, "Moreover, understanding best time to visit and effectively managing seasonal variations, availability, and pricing are pivotal for ensuring client satisfaction. It's tricky to offer new places at a good price while still making them sound exciting. This is especially hard when comparing

Building trust with a new DMC is crucial. Without a proven track record, it can be difficult to assess their reliability to serve the clients

them to popular spots." Addressing these challenges with strategic planning and a client-centric focus enhances the agents' ability to successfully sell new destinations.

AIUla, a top choice for luxury travel

AIUla is evolving as a luxury destination with top-tier hotels and a focus on sustainability. Initiatives like AIUla Academy enhance visitor experiences, while global campaigns attract international tourists. Culinary diversity, corporate retreats, and weddings add to its allure.



TT Bureau

What sets AIUla apart from other regions of Saudi Arabia? It's AIUla's rich cultural heritage, says **Rami Almoallim**, VP - Destination Management and Marketing, Royal Commission of AIUla. "With around 200,000 years of human history and 7,000 years of civilizations, we strive to connect visitors with the land and its storied past," says Almoallim, emphasising on the destination's extensive history. "We curate events and experiences that foster a deep connection to the place, encouraging repeat visits and continuous discovery," he adds.

AIUla has established itself as a luxury destination on the global stage. When asked how do they plan to retain the luxury destination status amid growing global competition, Almoallim replies, "We have partnered with top-tier

strategy. "This year marks phase two, where we unlock AIUla's value proposition in key international markets," Almoallim shares. He highlights the significant increase in international visitors, with 35 per cent of last year's tourists coming from abroad.

AIUla is becoming a sought-after destination for corporate retreats and weddings. "We have seen a rise in corporate retreats and hosted three major weddings so far," says Almoallim. The region collaborates closely with wedding planners and incentivises the

MICE segment by facilitating necessary permits and processes.

Since India is a crucial market for AIUla, the Royal Commission has established an office in Mumbai to strengthen the ties. "We are collaborating with Indian travel trade

partners to promote AIUla and anticipate a growing number of visitors from India," he says.

Almoallim notes that their approach for Indians includes bespoke packages tailored to different customer segments.



Rami Almoallim
VP - Destination Management and Marketing, Royal Commission of AIUla



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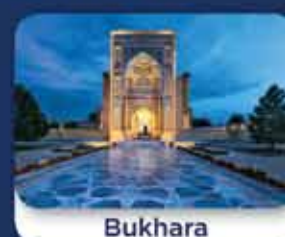
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We curate events and experiences that foster a deep connection to the place, encouraging repeat visits and continuous discovery

hotel brands like Banyan Tree and Our Habitas, and recently opened an ecolodge that combines luxury with sustainability. We will continue evolving in the boutique hotel space, offering curated and customised experiences."

Ensuring a high-quality visitor experience is paramount to encouraging repeat travellers. "We launched AIUla Academy to train frontliners in delivering exceptional visitor experiences in what we call the 'AIUla way'," Almoallim reveals. He also mentions improvements in infrastructure and mobility to enhance the ease of exploring the city. "By continuously introducing new ideas and maintaining authenticity, we ensure visitors return for more," he adds.

AIUla recently launched a global campaign as part of a 15-year

'TCS fair concern for outbound'

► Contd. from page 5

concern that we have today is on the supply side because the infrastructure on the hospitality front is not matching the demand. Hence, the idea was to see what the industry had to say and to understand where the shoe pinches. Also, the idea was to see how to take the tourism sector to the potential that it is capable of fulfilling. The big takeaway was that we need to have a more businesslike approach towards tourism. How do we benchmark where we are today? How do we figure out where India needs to be in 2047? But we need to break that down into a five-year horizon and set a target and then work backwards on how we would arrive at those targets," claims Billa.

Policy update

One of the major demands of the industry was the National Tourism Policy. "Policy has been drafted and there are several iterations of it. However, two things we need to keep in mind and be clear about is—What do we want to achieve through the policy that cannot be done in normal course by us? Because whatever we can do, we can do even without having the policy. This leads us to the second point—What fundamental transformative

idea we want to do through the tourism policy? This means that the entire world view on India tourism will have to get rearranged. Thus, one idea is to see from a business transformation point of view on where we are? What are the targets? And how to go about it? However, we also need to look at what is that

What do we want to achieve through the policy that cannot be done in normal course? Whatever we can do, we can do even without having the policy

single all-encompassing transformative idea that we need to leverage into the new policy," he says.

Priority agenda

Also, instead of so many issues coming from all directions, it is important to have five or 10-point agenda presented to the government. "Even if it is a five-point agenda, there are many things

which are cross-cutting and get covered in that. Thus, we need to stop this mentality of taking a laundry list and trying to cover all the issues under the sun. We should identify what should be our priority. At the end of the day, for the business, as well as for the government, our resources are finite, and our managerial time is also finite. We need to figure out what are the key issues that we need to work on, so that we can deliver results," he says.

Taxation concerns

All associations demanded ease in taxation, both in terms of GST and TCS. Billa shares, "I think TCS is a fair point on outbound because people who are doing business in India are getting disincentivised and people who travel abroad can make the payment and obviate the entire necessity of paying the tax."

Way forward

Talking of the next step, he shares, "We must create a common minimum programme between the government and the industry. The time has now passed for us to think individually. We have the right conditions now. We should set a clear target for the next five years and go all out to achieve them."

90% guests choose boutique stays

Boutique hotels have emerged as a captivating choice for the travellers looking for not just an accommodation to stay but unique experiences that leave a lasting impression.

Janice Alyosius

With a growing inclination towards experiential travel, travellers are eager to spend more to experience more. Boutique hotels are proving to be the right proposition for this. Conversations with several hotels at BRIDGES by RARE, which showcased over 45 owner-run, small hotels from the RARE Community, revealed a common trend - almost 90 per cent of the guests are seeking more immersive experiences and boutique properties for average stays of three to four nights.

RAAS Hotels boasts of a diverse portfolio across India, with properties in Jodhpur, Jaipur, Nimaj, and Udaipur, each offering a unique experience. Catering predominantly to European clientele, these hotels see a high influx of inbound guests, with an average stay of three days in city hotels and two days in camps. With 40 suites available, they



also serve as sought-after wedding destinations.

MANVĀR Kumat, Thar Serenity Camp, nestled in nature, attracts both domestic and international visitors, with luxury tents spread over 10,000 square feet.

Karan Mahal in Srinagar, once the Maharaja's palace, exudes heritage charm with its 100-year-old property offering 10 luxurious rooms. Hosting guests mainly from Mumbai, Bengaluru and Ahmedabad, they can host intimate events and diverse cuisines. Further afield, properties in Ladakh offer bou-

As the inclination of travellers towards experiential travel grows, boutique hotels are proving to be the right proposition

tique experiences with cultural tours and wellness activities, while Glenburn in Darjeeling and Kolkata provides city tours and event hosting for up to 100 guests.

India market under Mexico radar

The recent TAFI meeting sponsored by Trip to Mexico DMC, represented in India by Global Destinations, was a success. It brought together key association members and the Consul General of Mexico in Mumbai, Adolfo Garcia Estrada. Key industry and airlines updates were also discussed before they welcomed new members to the Western India chapter.



Where is the Asian market headed?

The PATA Annual Summit, held recently in Macao on the theme 'Reimagining Tourism', witnessed interesting discussions on the future of Asian market. The summit highlighted the potential areas of growth in the region and trends that are likely to shape the industry in the coming years. Here is a brief summary of the key takeaways from this pivotal event.



Jasper Palmqvist
Senior Director – Asia Pacific
STR

“Hotel performance in the last 12 months has surpassed historical levels, generating substantial revenue that offsets cost increases in areas such as labour and marketing. Consequently, hotels are rapidly becoming an attractive asset class for investors. Asia Pacific is trending towards dominant branded hotels.”



Olivier Ponti
Director – Intelligence & Marketing, Forwardkeys

“In the APAC region, South Asia's international arrivals have transitioned from recovery to growth, with 6 per cent rise in Q1 2024. Similarly, destinations in Central Asia, including Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, have shown growth. Driving force behind this are intra-regional source markets like Vietnam and India.”



Caroline Bremner
Senior Head of Travel Research
Euromonitor International

“Data reveals that 65 per cent of Asian consumers seek curated experiences, highlighting the importance of customisation. Additionally, eco-adventurer travellers are on the rise within the Asia-Pacific region. Furthermore, 23 per cent of APAC travellers prefer brands that prioritise people, planet, and profit.”



David Fowler
Vice President and Head, Cross-Border & Sales Excellence, Asia Pacific, Visa

“The travel industry is on its track to becoming a digital-first landscape driven by AI and technology, facilitating everything from booking and authentication to fraud detection and personalised travel offers. Integration with these technologies is essential for providing seamless, secure, and personalised travel experiences.”



Peter Semone
Chair
PATA

“The first step in reimagining tourism is to foster partnerships: Tie-ups between governments, businesses, NGOs, local communities, and other stakeholders is essential for effective tourism management. Partnerships can facilitate knowledge sharing, resource pooling, and coordinated action towards common goals.”



Daisy Ho
Managing Director
SJM Resorts

“Guided by 3Ps: People, Planet, and Prosperity, we provided over 410,000 hours of career development training, invested US \$23 million on green procurements in the last year alone, and promoted a more even distribution of tourist flow and drove economic benefits to local SMEs.”

Compiled by TT Bureau

Agents facing visa challenges

Siraj Ansari, Director, Avion Holidays, claims that agents find it difficult to access appointments for visa submission after door-to-door visa services were launched in Hyderabad. This may hamper trade practices, he says.

Surbhi Sharma

Termining Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) and portals a bane for tourism trade, **Siraj Ansari**, Founder, United Federation of Tourism Consortium and Director, Avion Holidays, shed light on the plight of travel agents. He said that earlier traditional travel agents lost their trade profits coming from airlines and hotels to OTAs and travel BPOs, and now the visa business is also going away from their hands.

Blaming new initiatives like door-to-door visa services in Hyderabad, Ansari, former President of the Tour Operators Association of Telangana, said, “In the last meeting, I openly questioned the team on why visa facilitators are directly reaching customers through door-to-door and pillar-to-pillar services. In response, they stopped allowing agents to access appointments for visa submission. We have no choice but to use their services to convince clients. This will hamper our trade practices, as the rates they charge us are the same we charge our customers. The real concern is



Siraj Ansari
Director
Avion Holidays

that the visa process has become complicated. Visa service providers have stepped in to facilitate visa acquisition, but this is causing many inconveniences, not only for travel agents but also for corporates and walk-in customers.”

“Earlier, I used to do 650 to 800 visas per year on average to all the countries in categories of business, visit and tourist visas except for countries like Israel, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sudan and Bangladesh. But now the situation has changed and almost 60-75 per cent agents

are managing somehow with petty margins,” he said.

Urging the members of the UFTC, Ansari suggested approaching businesses directly. He said when he mentioned the issue, the con-

In the past, services with consulates were easy and affordable, but the advent of online systems has led to confusion

sortium members strongly felt that the visa facilitators should not discourage the travel agent's role by reaching out to the customers directly. Ansari noted that in the past, services with consulates were easy and affordable, but the advent of online systems has led to confusion and exorbitant charges.

Indians prefer experiences

A dual trend is being seen in the market where online bookings cater to convenience, while longer and experiential journeys booked through travel agents continue to thrive, says Riaz Munshi, President, OTOAI.

Janice Alysius

Riaz Munshi, President, OTOAI and Managing Director, N Chirag Travels, offers a comprehensive overview of the dynamic trends shaping luxury and experiential travel today. “In today's travel market, we witness a constant evolution of how travellers choose to travel. There are people who prefer to book hotels and other services online. However, those seeking experiential travel over longer periods typically engage with travel agents. Both online and offline markets are expected to grow.”

Talking about popular destinations, Munshi says, “Vietnam has garnered considerable attention lately for its blend of cultural richness and natural beauty. Similarly, Portugal and Morocco are becoming increasingly popular choices among Indian travellers looking for authentic experiences.” He adds, “African destinations like Tanzania, Kenya, and Rwanda are particularly appealing. These countries are gaining popularity for their excep-



Riaz Munshi
President, OTOAI & MD, N Chirag Travels

tional wildlife and safari adventures, which remain unmatched in their ability to captivate travellers seeking memorable encounters with nature.” On the complexity of traveller preferences, Munshi asserts, “It's not as complex as it may seem. Many travellers, particularly those with an affinity for safaris, gravitate towards Kenya and Tanzania. The allure of the safari experience they offer is unparalleled.”

Munshi underscores a noticeable shift towards experiential travel, saying, “Today's travellers are in-

creasingly mature and discerning; they prioritise meaningful experiences. We have observed a substantial 20-30 per cent rise in luxury and experiential travel, underscoring a robust demand for high-quality, personalised travel experiences.”

There are people who book hotels online. However, those seeking experiential travel over longer periods typically engage with travel agents

Regarding specific destinations sought after for these experiences, Munshi observes, “Luxury and experiential travel options are abundant across all destinations. Travellers are eager to explore new frontiers, especially those who have already visited popular tourist hubs.”



JULY 2024

Date	Event	Time
1-4	ILTM Asia Pacific 2024	9:00 am
4	Abu Dhabi Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
6-7	10th Travel MICE & Corporate Show	10:00 am
8	Singapore Tourism Roadshow- Chennai	10:00 am
9	Singapore Tourism Roadshow- Hyderabad	10:00 am
11	Singapore Tourism Roadshow- Kolkata	10:00 am
11-14	Travel and Leisure Expo 2024	9:00 am
12	Singapore Tourism Roadshow- Ahmedabad	10:00 am
12-14	Travel & Tourism Fair-Kolkata 2024	2:00 pm
17-19	Gujarat Travel Fair 2024	10:00 am
18-20	Global Travel Marketplace 2024	10:00 am
25	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
25-26	MICE India & Luxury Travel Congress 2024	9:00 am
26-28	IITM - India International Travel Mart Bangalore 2024	11:00 am
29-31	Asian Travel Expo 2024	11:00 am
31	Israel webinar	12:00 pm

AUGUST 2024

2-4	India International Travel Mart Chennai	10:00 am
2-4	India Travel Mart-Jaipur	9:00 am
5-7	Indian Travel Expo-Bengaluru	10:30 am
7-9	Travel & Tourism Fair-Ahmedabad	9:00 am

Crafting tailor-made experiences

Bookurjourney Group has established itself as a trailblazer in the market with a focus on air ticketing, worldwide hotel bookings, and destination management services. The group is set for continued growth and innovation by earning reputation for excellence.

TT Bureau

Bookurjourney Group has embarked on a transformative journey that has seen it expand its reach across four countries. With a steadfast vision centred on delivering unparalleled services to its valued customers, the company strives to offer a "hassle-free lifetime experience" that leaves a lasting smile on every traveller's face.

Reflecting on the company's vision, **Sant Parkash Singh**, Director, Bookurjourney Group, says, "Our vision remains steadfast; to continue innovating, expanding, and exceeding the expectations of our valued partners."

Bookurjourney Group, a subsidiary of Jagman Travel Services headquartered in Calgary, Canada, was founded in August 2011. Since then, it has swiftly risen to prominence in the travel industry. With a focus on air ticketing, worldwide hotel bookings, and destination management services, the company has



Sant Parkash Singh
Director
Bookurjourney Group

carved a niche for itself across four countries. "Our presence was felt at prestigious events like SATTE 2020 and ATM 2023 and 2024, showcasing our commitment to delivering unparalleled travel solutions," Singh states, highlighting the company's global outreach and dedication to excellence.

Central to Bookurjourney Group's operations are its DMC services in Thailand and the UAE. Led by Singh, these destinations serve as vibrant canvases for crafting

unforgettable travel experiences. "Our prowess in Thailand and UAE is unparalleled, thanks to our direct contracting with all major hotels and our fleet that ensures seamless transportation,"

Our vision remains steadfast; to continue innovating, expanding, and exceeding the expectations of our valued partners

Singh explains, emphasising on the company's infrastructure and dedication to quality.

With meticulous attention to detail, particularly in organising MICE groups, Bookurjourney Group has earned a reputation for excellence. Collaborating with esteemed brands, the company

crafts tailor-made experiences that leave a lasting impression. "As we look to the future, our vision remains steadfast; to continue innovating, expanding, and exceeding the expectations of our valued partners," Singh remarks, outlining the company's unwavering commitment to growth and excellence.

With a vision to offer hassle-free lifetime experiences that bring joy at every turn of life's journey, Bookurjourney is committed to anticipating customer needs proactively. Starting with domestic and international flight bookings, the portal plans to expand into hotel bookings, bus bookings, and eventually, holiday packages. The portal aims to distinguish itself through competitive pricing and unwavering commitment to service excellence.

With the slogan, 'Let's tie up to reach new heights', the Bookurjourney Group invites travellers and partners alike to embark on a journey of unparalleled experiences and unforgettable moments.

IN MEMORIAM



Lajpat Rai
(December 15, 1955 – June 14, 2024)

Known for his ever-smiling face and polite demeanour, **Lajpat Rai**, Chairman & MD, Lotus Trans Travel, passed away on June 14 while undergoing treatment at Medanta Hospital in Gurugram. He is survived by his wife, son and two daughters. The news came as a shock to the travel industry.

Rai was a member of many prestigious inbound associations, including PATA and IATO. An expert in inbound Buddhist tours, he founded his company in 1983 and expanded into the hospitality sector by establishing Lotus Nikko Hotels, with proper-

ties in Bodh Gaya, Kushinagar, and Sravasti. In 2018, he signed a deal with IHG to establish a four-hotel portfolio under the Holiday Inn banner. Not only was he a visionary businessman, but his contributions to the industry were also exemplary. He opened many doors for the Japanese market to explore India and continued to address issues and challenges at numerous national and international forums.

We, at **EVENT TALK**, mourn the loss of a distinguished member of our fraternity. His legacy will continue to inspire generations in this industry.

Fully digitalised Incredible India

▶ Contd. from page 5

kind of conference can be held in which convention centre. We also need to work with state governments to create more accommodations as this is a big bottleneck, especially for MICE."

When asked how the government is helping the MICE community in India, Saxena said, "We have done many events to promote MICE tourism in India through campaigns like Meet in India. We are working with the industry to make it easier for them to organise more events in India, so that the country can be showcased as a MICE destination that it can be."

Digitalising Incredible India

Giving updates about the digitalisation of the new Incredible India portal at the meeting, Saxena said that this time it is not only curated by the tourism ministry but has a lot of integration with the OTAs, influencers, bloggers, and people from the travel and tourism industry.

"The new website, which will be launching soon, has several new features, such as a separate section on trips, experiences, and

crafts of India and a content hub for digital creators for social media," she added.

International marketing

Speaking about the ministry's role in the promotion of India abroad, Saxena said, "We are participating in international fairs and festivals, we are working through the Indian Missions to promote India's tourism offerings, and since India is such a vast destination with so much variety, we are also trying to segment the offerings according to the interests of various countries." She added, "With the new government in place, the new budget will soon resolve the reoccurring issues related to our overseas representation, marketing and promotion since we have no tourism offices abroad, including the old OPMD scheme."

Identify new source market

Speaking about India as a source market, Saxena said, "India's foremost offering in tourism is culture and heritage but as a sub-continent, we have a lot to offer. We want to make wildlife a big tourism offering. We need to segment the offerings not only

to the traditional source markets but also to countries in newer regions like Southeast Asia, South Africa, South America and others expressing their interest in India.

We are working with the industry to make it easier for them to organise more events, so that India can be showcased as a MICE destination

And for this purpose, Indian airline companies are launching flights to every conceivable corner of the world to cater to the traffic that must be two-way."

MOT initiatives

Highlighting the MOT efforts, she said, "India has been at the forefront of promoting sustainable tourism. In line with PM Modi's 'Mission Life', we have come up with a sectoral programme, 'Travel

for Life' that aims to create awareness about sustainable tourism and encourage tourists and tourism businesses to adopt sustainable practices and mindful approach in managing the resources."

Expressing her happiness about the upcoming events, she said that the World Heritage Committee meeting is happening in Delhi next month. "Besides working with the state government on varied aspects, curating and refining the product is something that only the travel and trade industry will be able to help us achieve. Also, a conference on Ganga trade, one of MOT's mega-adventure trades will be happening soon," she said.

"The MOT has a destination development division, a marketing and promotion division, and a product development division but a handful of us in the ministry cannot be at every place in the country. Therefore, we are seeking the help and cooperation of the industry people for curating tourism products," she added.

The meeting was attended by the stalwarts of the travel and trade, aviation and hospitality industry.

'Coolcations' to redefine summer travel?

The 'Coolcations' campaign, initiated by the Union Ministry of Tourism, not just promotes India's diverse range of summer getaways but also aims to change the perception about India being a hot-weather destination. Experts in inbound tourism offer insights into the campaign's impact, including the challenge to market India to tourists amid ongoing heat waves.



Janice Alyosius

As temperatures soar across India, the Union Ministry of Tourism's groundbreaking initiative, Coolcations, is set to redefine the country's summer tourism landscape. Launched amid concerns over rising heat waves, the campaign aims to promote cooler destinations, such as hill resorts and coastal havens, among domestic and international travellers.

Commenting on the campaign's initial impact, **Rajiv Mehra**, Director, Uday Tours and Travel, says, "I have not seen much impact so far. Due to lack of publicity abroad, there is a need for extensive digital or electronic marketing highlighting places where people can visit during this period in India."

Expressing his enthusiasm for the initiative, **Ravi Gosain**, Managing Director, Erco Travels, says, "It is a welcome move because it will motivate travellers to visit cooler places in India during hot summers." Emphasising on India's diverse landscape and variable climates, Gosain says, "India is a huge country with varied topography and different weather conditions. So, in my opinion, this kind of campaign will not only showcase India's summer offerings but also change foreigners' perception of India as a hot weather destination."

Gosain anticipates positive outcomes from the campaign, foreseeing increased interest from inbound travellers for hill resorts



Rajiv Mehra
Director
Uday Tours and Travel



Ravi Gosain
Managing Director
Erco Travels



Subhash Goyal
Chairman
STIC Travel & Air Charter Group

Due to lack of publicity abroad, there is a need for extensive digital or electronic marketing highlighting places

and coastal areas offering attractive summer deals. "We need to consider the increasing number of domestic travellers heading to hill stations during summer, which can pose a challenge for inbound tourists seeking suitable accommodations. I suggest promoting the lesser-known hill station retreats to inbound tourists to avoid domestic rush. There are beautiful hill resorts in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Central India that can be widely promoted," he suggests.

Subhash Goyal, Chairman, STIC Travel & Air Charter Group, un-

It is a welcome move because it will motivate travellers to visit cooler places in India during hot summers

derscores the campaign's strategic importance.

"India's vast topography and varied weather conditions make this campaign crucial. It not only showcases India's summer offerings but also challenges the perception of India as solely a hot-weather destination," he says, adding that, "India has 74 per cent of the Himalayan mountains, and apart from Jammu & Kashmir, other destinations in Uttarakhand and the Northeast have not been properly marked or promoted. Even hill stations like

It not only showcases India's summer offerings but also challenges the perception of India as solely a hot-weather destination

Ooty and Kannur on the Western and Eastern Ghats have not been adequately promoted abroad. We need to promote 'Coolcations' or 'Coolvacations' more comprehensively throughout the year for effective results."

According to **EM Najeeb**, Chairman, ATE Group of Companies and Managing Director, Airtravel Enterprises India, "The ministry has launched the campaign to counter the notion that India is too hot for summer travel and to promote destinations with cooler climates, such as hill resorts in the Himalayas."

He emphasised on the campaign's strategic role in attracting tourists despite the challenges posed by extreme heat waves across the country. "The campaign is marketed through various digital platforms and highlights India's cooler destinations, including hill stations like Shimla, Manali, Darjeeling, and coastal areas, such as Goa and Kerala."

He also pointed out the ministry's proactive participation in international travel fairs and exhibitions to effectively promote these destinations globally.

He added, "Unfortunately, until now all marketing efforts of MOT were only focused on domestic tourists and our government has not finalised any roadmap yet to boost inbound tourism. With a budgetary allocation of merely ₹3 crore towards overseas marketing and promotions for FY 2024-2025, what kind of promotion can be expected in international markets?"

"As far as domestic tourists are concerned, all our hills are flooded with tourists, though the global warming has also put a



EM Najeeb
Chairman, ATE Group of Companies & MD, Airtravel Enterprises India



Manoj Matta
Director
Oriental Vacations and Journeys

The Ministry of Tourism has launched the campaign to counter the notion that India is too hot for summer travel

Highlighting a significant shift in tourist behaviour, Najeeb said, "There has been a noticeable increase in demand for the cooler destinations. Tour operators and travel agencies have reported a surge in bookings for hill stations and coastal areas, as tourists seek to escape the intense heat of the plains. Overall, 'Coolcations' campaign seems to be effectively attracting tourists to India's cooler regions."

Manoj Matta, Director, Oriental Vacations and Journeys, adds a global context, saying, "Heatwaves are a global issue, and tourists are adapting by seeking cooler destinations. However, there is a need for comprehensive international marketing to effectively promote India's 'Coolcations'."

With allocation of ₹3 crore towards overseas marketing and promotions for FY 2024-2025, what kind of promotion can be expected?

brake on this to an extent when you could see a temperature of 43°C in Dehradun."

While challenges like timing and international outreach remain, the 'Coolcations' campaign represents a crucial step towards diversifying and sustaining India's tourism industry. By promoting lesser-known hill stations and coastal retreats, the campaign not only supports local economies but also positions India as an attractive year-round destination. As India continues to adapt to climate change realities, initiatives like 'Coolcations' play a pivotal role in ensuring sustainable tourism growth while providing visitors with memorable and comfortable travel experiences. 🌿

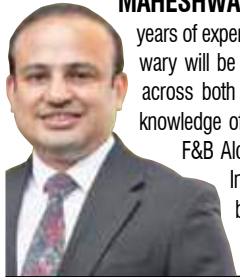


MOVEMENTS

NOVOTEL GOA CANDOLIM AND NOVOTEL GOA RESORT & SPA

Goa

Novotel Goa Candolim and Novotel Goa Resort & Spa appoint **SACHIN MAHESHWARY** as the General Manager. With over 25 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Maheshwary will be responsible for the growth of 270 keys across both the properties, leveraging his extensive knowledge of the Novotel brand and his skills as an F&B Alchemist for Accor in India & South Asia. In his new role, Maheshwary's focus will be to elevate both the Novotel properties through strategic initiatives in F&B.



NAVI MUMBAI MARRIOTT HOTEL

Mumbai

Marriott International appoints **SAURABH DUBE** as the General Manager of the highly anticipated Navi Mumbai Marriott Hotel. Bringing over 20 years of extensive experience in the hospitality industry, Dube is set to lead the new property with his visionary approach and profound industry knowledge. He is a seasoned hotelier whose career began with Oberoi Hotels & Resorts. Over the years, he has advanced through various key roles in leading hospitality brands across Mumbai. His diverse background encompasses leadership in F&B operations, Events & Catering and Revenue Management.



HYATT REGENCY

Ludhiana

Hyatt Regency Ludhiana has appointed **SYED ZULFIQAR ALI** as the General Manager. He has more than 22 years of experience in the hospitality industry. With a focus on leadership, profitability, and enhancing guest experiences, Ali's appointment signals a new chapter of success for the hotel. His impressive career journey includes leadership roles at esteemed properties such as Courtyard by Marriott SBR Ahmedabad, Four Points by Sheraton Srinagar, Fairfield by Marriott Indore, and Westin Pune. His commitment to service excellence has been unshakable and results-driven.



THE LEELA PALACE JAIPUR

Jaipur

The Leela Palace Jaipur has announced appointments to its leadership team, marking a significant milestone in its ongoing commitment to excellence in hospitality. **SWATI THAKUR** has been appointed by The Leela Palace Jaipur as the Hotel Manager. She brings a wealth of experience from her roles at Taj The Trees in Kolkata, Taj Lands End, and The Oberoi Hotel in Mumbai. Thakur is driven by her proactive problem-solving skills, multi-tasking abilities, and prioritisation of business objectives. She holds an MBA in Hospitality Management from Amity University, Mumbai.



BWH HOTELS

India

BWH Hotels has appointed **MEDHA TIWARI** as Head of Sales & Marketing for the regions of India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. Tiwari comes with over two decades of experience in the hospitality industry. She has worked with renowned brands, such as ITC, Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts, Radisson Hotel Group, Lalit Hotels, Interstate Hotels, and The Park Hotels. Tiwari has consistently demonstrated her expertise in driving new business, providing exceptional customer service, and fostering strategic partnerships with stakeholders and executives to enhance commercial value.



CARAVELA BEACH RESORT

Goa

Caravela Beach Resort, a 5-star deluxe beachfront luxury resort in South Goa, has appointed **AJAY PRUSTY** as the Food and Beverage Manager. The strategic appointment underscores Caravela's commitment to enhancing guest experiences and maintaining the highest standards of hospitality excellence. With over 16 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Prusty brings a wealth of knowledge from his previous roles at prestigious establishments such as the St. Regis Goa, Belezza By The Beach Goa, and The Leela Goa. In his new role, he will oversee all dining operations.



PRAKHAR DHYANI has been appointed by The Leela Palace Jaipur as the Director of Sales. With over 15 years of experience in hospitality sales, including positions at Reethi Faru Resort in the Maldives, The Leela Palace Udaipur, and Conrad Bengaluru, he brings a proven track record in client development and retention. His strategic vision and expertise will be instrumental in strengthening the hotel's sales initiatives. Commenting on the appointments, Sharad Puri, Senior Vice President & General Manager, The Leela Palace Jaipur, stated, "The additions strengthen our leadership team."



BAYWATCH STAYZZ

CHENNAI

RISHAB MUNGLANI joins Baywatch Stayzz as the Chief Operating Officer (COO) in Chennai. He has more than 10 years of experience working with luxury hotels, palace properties, airlines and vacation rentals. Over the last few years, Munglani has launched 14 luxury stays and villas, which have been successful in capturing the Bengaluru market. In his new role, his long-term goal will be to build and expand Baywatch Stayzz, using its resources in the best way. He has done BHM, specialising in front office and general management from Christ University, Bangalore.



RADISSON BLU PLAZA DELHI AIRPORT

New Delhi

ANIRVAN GANGULY has joined Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport as the Director of Revenue. He has more than 12 years of experience in the industry. Beginning his journey with The Lalit Hotel, New Delhi, he has made significant contributions to renowned establishments, including Marriott International in Gurugram, Novotel & Ibis Hotel Tech Park in Bangalore, and Intercontinental Resort Balacava Fort in Mauritius. His recent assignment was with the Minor Hotels Group in Thailand. In his leisure time, Ganguly enjoys riding cruiser bikes.



RADISSON BLU BENGALURU OUTER RING ROAD

Bengaluru

Sarovar Hotels promotes **MURALIDHARA KRISHNA** to the position of Associate Director Finance from Unit Finance Controller for Radisson Blu Bengaluru Outer Ring Road. Krishna's elevation recognises his contribution and commitment to the company over the past 13 years. He brings a wealth of experience to his new role, with a total of 22 years in the finance and accounting sector. He began his journey with Radisson Blu Bengaluru in 2008 as an Accounts Executive. His responsibilities included overseeing project purchases, managing licencing processes, and handling comprehensive accounting work.



BENGALURU MARRIOTT HOTEL WHITEFIELD

Bengaluru

Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield has appointed **HIMANSHU KALA** as the Director of Rooms. Kala has an exceptional track record of delivering top-notch guest experiences and propelling operational momentum. In his new role, he will leverage his knowledge to uplift guest experiences, optimise operational proficiency and uphold the highest standards of service. His expertise lies in customer service, office management and administrative support. In his previous stint as a Director of Rooms at Hyatt Regency, Kolkata, Kala spearheaded the operations of the Front Office and Spa & Fitness.



Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport has appointed **JASLEEN KAUR** as the Director of People and Culture. She has more than 20 years of experience, working with many international brands.

Her last assignment was with Roseate Hotels and Resorts as the Cluster Director of Human Resources. Kaur's passion for reading novels, motivational books, and staying abreast of the latest trends in HR and training adds a unique dimension to her impressive profile. The management looks forward to the positive impact she will make on the organisation.





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SpiceJet to raise \$250mn by Aug

SpiceJet has been facing losses in the last few years, but resilience is what keeping it afloat. **Ajay Singh**, CMD, SpiceJet, vouches for this spirit and shares what it takes to move forward by keeping a problem-solving attitude.

 Nisha Verma

The bouncing back of aviation industry post-COVID has been unprecedented, claims **Ajay Singh**, CMD, SpiceJet. "Wherever we are putting flights, they are filling up quickly and yields have been the strongest ever. This environment gives hope and strength to airlines like SpiceJet that faced significant black swan events over the last few years with the grounding of the MAX aircraft, followed by COVID," he shared.

2025 expectations

For 2025, he is equally optimistic. "The idea is to get back into growing our fleet quickly. We barely survived the last two years. The expectation was that SpiceJet would die. As we have shown, it is very difficult to kill SpiceJet. Our



DNA is to fight and stay alive. It is time for growth again. We are restructuring the liabilities that were built up at that time," he claimed.

On the restructuring path

When asked about restructuring, Singh said, "We have gone through about 30 per cent of it so far. Everything else is in discussion. We expect that over the next two quarters, we will completely clean up the balance sheet and be completely poised for growth again. We got about \$150 million as funding and we are raising another \$250 million by the end of July or mid-August.

Government support

Singh has been a strong mouthpiece of the industry in front of the government. Speaking on what the gov-

ernment needs to do, he said, "This government has already made it clear that they are looking for economic growth and simplification of process. While we have spoken to them for the last 20 years on simplification of


simplify that process in a regulatory sense?" he asked.

Unified approach

As an industry, he said that it's important to not give the government a laundry list of issues. "Often, we show up just before the budget and share our demands. It does not form part of the budget as we are too late. Hence, we need to go early and put 2-3 issues and keep hammering on them in unison," he said. To make that voice more effective, Federation of Indian Aviation (FIA) can take the lead.

New airport scenario

Responding to how new airports in Delhi and Mumbai will fare for SpiceJet, Singh said, "The more capacity the better. We hope that it will also be rationally priced. One must first build capacity and then fill it. It's critical to focus on building hubs in our country. We must get this government to focus on ensuring that Indian hubs no longer reside in the Middle East or in the Southeast Asia but reside in our country. The beneficiaries of that will be the entire Indian aviation and not just Air India and IndiGo. We must ensure that Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Mumbai can become international hubs and start to take a portion of the traffic that is currently flowing through Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Singapore." ↴


Our DNA is to fight and stay alive. It is time for growth again. We are restructuring the liabilities that were built up at that time

taxes, getting aviation turbine fuel into GST. It's heartening to note that even before this new government was inaugurated, they were already having meetings with the airlines asking for ideas on how they can get a quick start. In that, there are issues like differential taxation on import of aviation parts. Every part has a different regime and a different tax. Can we simplify that and have a flat 5 per cent tax on all aviation parts? Top priority should be getting ATF under GST. How can we get hubs into our country? How do we



Ajay Singh
CMD, SpiceJet

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