

Cruise**talk**

Pages 24

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Cruise^{talk}

NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

As an emerging hotspot in the Asian market, the Indian cruise industry — which has largely remained untapped in the recent years — has vast potential to grow. The launch of India's first-ever passenger cruise ship service from Mumbai to Goa is one of the many initiatives set to change the dynamics of luxury cruising in India. The five major ports in the country— Mumbai Port, Mormugao Port, New Mangalore Port, Cochin Port and Chennai Port have received more cruise ships as per the programme of various cruise companies as a port of call.

During 2017-18, 1,62,660 cruise passengers and 139 cruise ships visited India at six major ports. The Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for cruise vessels have been revised and operationalised for hassle-free entry and exit of cruise passengers at major ports. The e-visa facility has been extended to cruise passengers, while immigration counters have also been set up at five major ports visited by cruise ships. Cruise tourists arriving in India with e-visa have been exempted from the requirement of biometric enrolment for a period of three years facilitating expeditious immigration clearance. Further, the Sagarmala programme of the government promises to modernise the country's ports with world-class terminals.

In this issue, you will find how Mumbai is turning into a hub of modern cruising, along with some exciting activities to enjoy on a luxury cruise vessel and various other factors that boost cruise tourism in India.

EDITORIAL

Devika Jeet
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Raashi Ajmani Girdhar

MARKETING

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Karishma Khanna
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Gaganpreet Kaur

COVER PICTURE:

Norwegian Cruise Line

NEWS IN BRIEF

SEVEN SEAS EXPLORER TO VOYAGE TO SOUTH AMERICA

Regent Seven Seas Cruises' luxury ship — Seven Seas Explorer is set for its maiden voyage to South America in early 2019. After cruising the Mediterranean, Caribbean, Northern Europe and Africa during her first two years, Seven Seas Explorer will now visit picturesque ports in 10 South American countries from January through March 2019 during five highly-anticipated voyages. **Jason Montague**, President and CEO, Regent Seven Seas Cruises, says, "Seven Seas Explorer sailing this region of the world for the first time gives her guests the opportunity to experience Seven Seas Explorer in a new way, while providing guests with the beauty of South America's destinations aboard the most luxurious ship ever built."



Halong Bay's largest five-star cruise sets sail

Luxury Vietnamese cruise operator, Lion Asia has put the first of two President Cruise ships on the waters at the UNESCO World Heritage site, Halong Bay. The five-deck, 1200-ton steel craft has made its debut with its 46 spacious cabins, a piano bar, spa and two expansive sun decks. It is also the largest overnight ship to ever ply Halong Bay's waters. **Franco Muzzone**, General Manager, President Cruises, said, "Our new President Cruise is full steam ahead with our unrivalled entertainment, dining and relaxation options."

River cruise from Kolkata to Bangladesh

A trans-boundary river cruise operation is expected to start from Kolkata in March 2019 through Sunderbans to Bangladesh first, and then towards the Northeast.

SVK Reddy, Member, Inland Waterways Authority of India, informed, "At bilateral secretary-level meetings between India and Bangladesh, it has been decided that a river cruise operator would begin operations from Kolkata."



The dawn of Cruise Tourism

With its vast and beautiful coastline, India has a great prospect to develop and prosper in cruise tourism in the country. With the government announcing cruise tourism development as a project of national importance, the future of cruises in India sure seems bright.

MANAS DWIVEDI



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QUOTE UNQUOTE



"Indian tourists are spending heavily on cruising. They love to stay in luxury suites and balcony cabins, which tells that today's discerning traveller is going gaga over cruises."

NEERAJ SHARMA
Managing Director, Cruise Carrot



"The market from India is growing at a healthy rate of 15 -20% every year because of larger ships and larger inventories. The per diem rate is also coming down."

MANOJ SARAF
MD, Gainwell Enterprises



"The government is playing its role in recognising cruising as an economic multiplier and catching up with the rest of the world in terms of policies and infrastructure."

VARUN CHADHA
COO, TIRUN Travel Marketing



"Indians require customisation and flexibility in a product. Brands that understand this factor are doing well in the market."

RICHA GOYAL
Director-Group Business Development, STIC Travel Group



"The potential of cruising in India is tremendous – we are right at the point where an increased volume and interest of cruising is taking off!"

NISHITH SAXENA
Founder & Director
Cruise Professionals

The Government of India has identified cruise tourism as one of the key thrust areas to be implemented across all key ports as a priority. To showcase their preparedness for hosting cruise vessels and sensitise stakeholders about promoting cruise tourism, a number of actions have been taken by the authorities, including proposals to link Mumbai and other port cities with major cruising hubs of Southeast Asia.

In its plan to position the country on the global cruise map, the government has announced cruise tourism development as a project of national importance. An international cruise terminal is under construction at Mumbai Port at an estimated cost of ₹300 crore. Capitalising on a vast and beautiful coastline of almost 7500 km, the country can attract up to 700 cruise vessels from its present strength of 70 vessels a year. Additionally, the rich historical and cultural heritage can make India a fabulous tourist destination for cruise tourists.

INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

As a top source market for cruise tourism worldwide, the volume of cruise travellers sourced



Capitalising on a vast and beautiful coastline of almost

7500 km, India can attract up to 700 cruise vessels

from Asia has quadrupled since 2012. With China making rapid strides in the industry in terms of developing infrastructure, India seems to have missed the boat. More than 60,000 Indian tourists a year fly to Singapore and other South Asian countries to join cruises. India faces a challenge in retaining travellers from going out for cruising while developing roadmap for providing world-class cruising in the country.

According to **Neeraj Sharma**, Managing Director, Cruise Carrot, the cruise industry in India is touted to grow leaps and bounds in coming years. "The cruise industry in India is headed for a bright

future ahead as Indians love to stay in luxury suites and balcony cabins. This itself says that today's discerning traveller is going gaga over cruises nowadays," says Sharma. He further adds, "The government should take initiatives to make India a hub of cruises. More dedicated efforts from the government will pay way for generating more employment in the industry as well as in bringing more inbound tourists."

On the growing Indian market, Sharma says that his company is getting cruise travellers from distinct parts of the country. "We are getting demand from all major cities. I am happy that people from Tier II



and III cities are also getting curious about cruising; the market is growing with each passing day. We might see some new cruise liners in the Indian market which will further lead growing number of cruise passengers,” he adds.

Manoj Saraf, Managing Director, Gainwell Enterprises feels that the Indian cruise market is now moving towards an experiential and longer-duration cruise. He says, “India is celebrating 25 years of international cruising. Prior to that, the number of Indian passengers cruising abroad was negligible. The market from India is growing at a healthy rate of 15-20 per cent every year because of larger ships and larger inventories. The per diem rate is coming down, making it more affordable for Indian passengers. With one of the largest coastlines in the world, India has the potential to become a cruising hub in Asia. However, we have a long way to go to develop our infrastructure, including ports, passenger terminals and a cruise-friendly tax policy.

“There is a strong possibility that next year might become a landmark year in the history of Indian cruising, provided the new domestic cruise is inaugurated by the summer of 2019. This will provide the next-generation growth to the cruise



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There is a possibility that next year may become a landmark year in the history of Indian cruising, provided the new domestic cruise is inaugurated by summer 2019



industry in India. A domestic cruise will ensure that no passports are required. Opening up this segment will open the gates of cruising to a much larger audience in the country," affirms Saraf.

Commenting on the growth of cruising in India, **Varun Chadha**, COO, TIRUN Travel Marketing says that cruise tourism has started coming of age as there is more relevant deployment, along with more people who have cruised in the last three years. Chadha tells, "Today, cruising is becoming popular with more and more cruise brands deploying their ships closer to home. The government is playing its role in recognising cruising as an economic multiplier and catching up with the rest of the world in terms of policies and infrastructure. Once we see the advent of home porting, this vacation experience becomes accessible to many more as it eliminates the need to fly to various destinations."

Richa Goyal, Director-Group Business Development, STIC Travel Group believes that cruising is no longer a niche category in leisure travel and Indian travellers are making good

use of it. "Indians require customisation and flexibility in a product. Brands that understand this factor are doing well in the market and as a result are expanding the size of the market in the cruise category. An increased consumption of cruise holidays will encourage more in the industry to focus on this segment," she tells.

Nishith Saxena, Founder & Director, Cruise Professionals, believes that Indian cruising industry has a huge potential. "We are right at the point where an increased volume and interest of cruising is taking off but not all business falls into your lap just because it is at your doorstep. Cruising was looked upon as a segment which is expensive and is for a certain age group in India. The perception is gradually fading as in 2018, major cruise liners have witnessed significant growth from the Indian market," he affirms.

He further adds, "A demand for more experiential cruising would be high next year as people now are shifting towards things that are offbeat and tourists are willing to go out of their comfort zone to have that one-of-a-kind experience."



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Up the **cruise** ladder

Despite being a late-bloomer in cruise tourism, India has already climbed up to the sixth position among the Asian countries. **Peter Kollar**, Head — International Training & Development, CLIA, gives a status quo.

The latest cruise passenger numbers that were revealed by Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) indicate a rapid growth from the India market. Figures show that it now ranks sixth in all Asian markets with 172,300 passengers. This is almost four per cent of the total Asians cruising right now. This was also a 16.1 per cent increase from the 2016 numbers. However, there was reportedly a six per cent decline in cruise visits in 2018 scheduled into Indian ports, which is a concerning fact given that evolution of all strong cruise markets around the world and the economic benefits that come with it have come historically off the back of their respective thriving domestic markets. Until such time as India can plan, develop, promote and engage in this local endeavour of bringing ships to its wonderful coastline, and more importantly, invest in the turnaround appeal, further increase will depend on whether the fly-cruise product will continue its gains in this sector of travel.

For those of you selling cruise, if your cruise business increased more than 16.1 per cent in 2017, congratulations on gaining market share against your competitors! Anything less, even if positive, means you are missing the boat, so to speak. In both cases, I would still suggest further education of agents about understanding the value proposition of cruising. Despite the growth, the potential is still very much untapped in India, especially when you consider the greater trend towards cruising that is occurring around the world, specifically other Asian markets which have taken to cruise in the past few years. Just over four million Asians took a cruise in 2017, which now accounts for 15.3 per cent of the



PETER KOLLAR
Head of International Training
& Development
CLIA

“
Indian passengers
tend to be some of the
youngest in the world,
with an average age of
37 years in 2017

”

26.7 million passengers worldwide. This is the highest market share ever for Asians, with 59 per cent of the passengers just from mainland China.

RANKS & FIGURES

Government officials and Ministries need to work with knowledgeable stakeholders such as the recently-formed India Cruise Line Association (InCLA) on plans and reforms towards not only operational measures for vessels like tax breaks and streamlining the passenger experience, but there also need to be investment and incentives provided to the very people filling these ships, the travel agents and their cruise education.

Currently, Mumbai is the only port scheduled for turnarounds this year (nine cruises) and will see the most calls at 48, followed by 32 in Cochin. However, India ranks 12th of all Asian cruise destination markets with just two per cent of Asia's total calls. Given the coastline and port potential, this is an area that needs great attention. Mumbai is currently ranked 36th in Asia for volume of port cruise traffic.

As for the Indian passengers currently sailing away, a majority of them chose up to three-day cruises, resulting in an overall average of 3.1 days in 2017. Indian passengers also tend to be some of the youngest in the world, with an average age of 37 years in 2017 (down from 37.5 in 2016).

Overall, these are positive numbers, and though there is still so much more work to be done and gains to be made, it's a move forward which is great news for the industry.



Figures show that India now ranks sixth in all Asian markets with 172,300

passengers. This is almost 4% of the total Asians cruising right now

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FLY or SAIL? Take your pick...

Genting Cruise Lines has played an integral role in the evolution of cruise business in Asia. It now plans to cater to the needs of the modern travellers, reveals **Naresh Rawal**, VP — Sales, Genting Cruise Line.

MANAS DWIVEDI



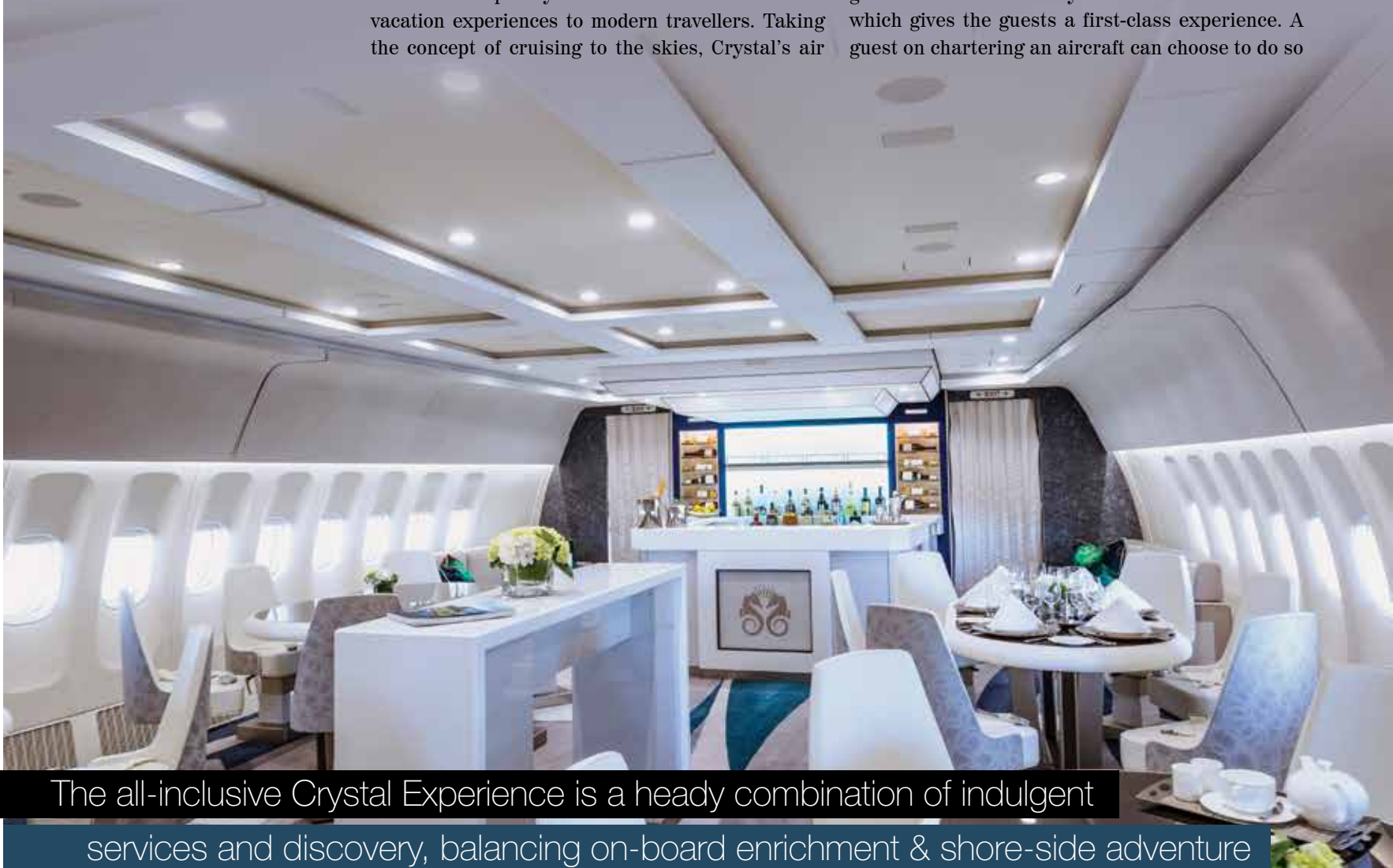
NARESH RAWAL
Vice President—Sales
Genting Cruise Line

While keeping pace with the needs and preferences of a modern traveller, cruise lines around the world are modifying their products and offerings to provide the traveller with a 'wow' experience. With the current trends, a new standard of private luxury travel is set to soar high above all others across the globe.

As a pioneer in the Asian cruise industry, Genting Cruise Lines' brands have played an intrinsic role in the evolution of the cruise business in Asia and around the world. With its family of popular brands — Star Cruises, Dream Cruises and Crystal Cruises — the company provides a range of varied products from contemporary cruises to ultra-luxurious vacation experiences to modern travellers. Taking the concept of cruising to the skies, Crystal's air

cruises are redefining the experience of flying while taking it closer to the experience of sailing on the sea. The all-inclusive Crystal Experience is a heady combination of indulgent services and enriching discovery, carefully balancing on-board enrichment and shore-side adventure to create the most magnificent luxury experience at sea, river, and on air.

Crystal AirCruises owns a Boeing 777 long-range wide-body airliner that offers guests everything from bespoke luxury to exotic worldwide destinations. The celebrated Crystal Experience shines above the clouds, amidst exquisitely-crafted amenities and spaces created to be used exclusively by the guests. The aircraft only houses 88 flatbed seats which gives the guests a first-class experience. A guest on chartering an aircraft can choose to do so



The all-inclusive Crystal Experience is a heady combination of indulgent services and discovery, balancing on-board enrichment & shore-side adventure



In addition to air cruises, Crystal also has ocean, river and yacht offerings.

Rawal further shares that India is one of the leading 'fly-by' markets for cruising globally. "We are expecting an exponential rise in the number of Indian passengers who board our ships. Guests nowadays are always on the lookout for 'Instagram-worthy' experiences; hence

The celebrated Crystal Experience shines above the clouds, amidst exquisitely-crafted amenities

for a 5-night or 10-night itinerary. The cost of chartering an aircraft is inclusive of all peripheral charges.

Briefing about changing preferences of travellers on cruises, **Naresh Rawal**, VP — Sales, Genting Cruise Line says that cruising companies have to constantly evolve to keep up with the expectations

of passengers. "The cruising experience has now moved towards a whole holiday package where guests have to be entertained while being served the best cuisines from across the world to suit their palate. Keeping this in mind, a cruise ship has to be a perfect amalgamation of fitness, leisure and recreational activities," he adds.

cruising companies have to ensure that the activities on board their ships give passengers an experience of a lifetime. As visa application processes are now digital, we have seen a rise in the number of Indian passengers travelling to the countries from where our ships disembark. This increases our horizons for potential customers on board our ships," he quips.

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Norwegian Bliss hosts excitement around every corner and delights its guests with thrilling activities spanning the entirety of the ship. Get set and pack your bags for a blissful journey!



Norwegian Cruise Line's sixteenth ship 'Norwegian Bliss' has been designed for the ultimate cruising experience and it will make her way to Miami to offer seven-day cruises to the Eastern Caribbean, with calls to St Thomas, US Virgin Islands; Tortola, British Virgin Islands and Nassau, Bahamas through March 30, 2019.

Andy Stuart, President and Chief Executive Officer, Norwegian Cruise Line, said, "Norwegian Bliss's inaugural season surpassed anything we could have imagined, with guests and travel partners alike championing her innovation and beauty." He further added, "Miami has long been home to Norwegian Cruise Line, and we are excited to bring Norwegian Bliss and one of our most innovative vessels, to the East Coast for a winter of Caribbean cruising."

Take a look at the exciting activities available on board offering luxurious accommodations, gourmet dinners, live entertainment and more.

TWO LEVEL ELECTRIC-CAR RACE TRACK

Enjoy the blue sky above and turquoise waters below from the largest competitive race track at sea, a first for any North America-based cruise ship. Put your driving skills to test and experience a thrilling ride on the two-level competitive race track built at the top of Deck 19 with amazing views while twisting and turning.

OPEN-AIR LASER TAG COURSE

Experience the first-ever open-air laser tag at sea. Get your friends and family to join you on a mission to search an abandoned spaceship and shoot for the stars in galactic laser tag.

HEART-RACING WATERSLIDES

The ship's Aqua Park includes two multi-story thrilling waterslides — the Ocean Loop, which

is a free fall slide with exhilarating loops that stretch down to the deck below; and the tandem Aqua Racer slide that allows guests to race side-by-side on inner tubes for more than 360 feet, both offering stunning ocean views.

KID'S ZONE

Little cruisers, aged 6 months to just under 3-years old, have a dedicated space to enjoy aboard Norwegian Bliss with the fleet's largest Guppies playroom. For children between 3 to 12 years, Splash Academy offers fun activities while children from 13-17 years can enjoy with their peers and make new friends at the entourage.

ULTIMATE PAMPERING EXPERIENCE

After glacier trekking in Alaska or discovering hidden caves and sea pools at the Baths of Virgin Gorda in the Caribbean, Norwegian Bliss's guests will be able to revive, refresh and recharge at the ship's Mandara Spa that offers an ultimate pampering experience with its 24 treatment rooms, a full-serviced salon, barber shop and thermal suite.

NIGHTLIFE, CASINO & ENTERTAINMENT

Norwegian Bliss brings the best of live entertainment, electrifying deck parties and an expansive casino featuring hundreds of slot machines and table games to suit the likes of novice and professional gamblers alike. The Social Comedy & Night Club features sets from today's popular stand-up comedians, and then transforms into a nightclub late in the evening. Enjoy Broadway-style live musicals like Jersey Boys, theme parties, grab a drink and groove to the music at legendary clubs on the cruise.

180-DEGREE OBSERVATION LOUNGE

Guests will be in sheer awe at the 180-degree indoor observation lounge offering expansive views at sea and featuring a full-service bar, so that they can toast colourful sunsets with their favourite cocktail.



Put your driving skills to test and experience a thrilling ride on the two-level competitive race track built at the top of Deck 19

"It has been a satisfying year with a growing demand for cruises, especially on Dream Cruises ex-Singapore and Norwegian Cruise



Line ex-Europe. A new trend suggests that passengers are now repeating their cruise experience to newer destinations. Next year shall be a revolutionary time for cruising in India. Not only will it be for the first time in 2019, when more than one ship shall be home-ported in Mumbai, that is, Angriya and Jalesh, but the whole market pie of cruisers shall grow both within India and outbound. The ships in India shall give them a first-hand experience which shall then lead to increase in international cruisers from India. So, there are many reasons to look forward to an exciting year."

PRADEEP SABOO
Managing Partner
Guideline Travels

"Data shows that cruise vacations are steadily on the rise with a projected 27.2 million passengers expected to set sail in 2018



globally. We see three key trends emerge. Cruise lines have recognised the need to bring their best ships and amenities to the Asian region. Within a five-six hour flying radius from India, there are now world-class ship available from ports such as Dubai, Hong Kong and Singapore. Globally, the on-board offerings on cruise lines are being tailored to Asian guests aimed at multi-generational families, high-end shopping, and adapted menus. The total cruise outbound travellers from India are still less than one per cent of the total outbound traveller."

TARIQUE HUSSAIN
Co-founder
Cruise Club

"Avalon's Suite Ships have made a splash in river cruising. This has been a good year for cruises with many new clients opting for river cruises due to our innovative marketing campaigns. Though older travellers have been opting to travel on river cruise, the river cruise demographic has been gradually changing to a younger audience. Accordingly, every itinerary throughout Europe in 2019, Avalon Waterways is adding an Avalon Adventure Host to all 2019 European cruises. Through this, cruisers can choose to bike, sail, hike or even kayak. In April 2019, author Elizabeth Gilbert will christen our newest ship Avalon Envision on the Danube River in Budapest and we are looking forward to this."



VARESH CHOPRA
Regional Director
Avalon Waterways – South Asia & Middle East
Globus Family of Brands



"India has begun its journey as an emerging market for international cruising and there is huge potential for everyone. Besides the popular Bahamas, the Caribbean islands and Alaska, destinations such as the Mediterranean region, Australia, and Bermuda did well for us in 2018. The Indian traveller has been cruising since the last 20 years or more and certain segments have graduated to become connoisseurs of cruising undertaking expeditions and small ship cruising, while a large segment undertakes cruising as a part of their vacation. MiCE and special events onboard will continue to be high point of 2019."

DIPTI ADHIA
Director (Sales & Product Head)—Cruises
Discover the World - PSA for Carnival Cruise Lines

India, propelled

Cruising as an experience has never been so popular among Indians and this suggests that the numbers are up for grabs.

HAZEL JAIN



“We at MSC experienced a very strong trend where MiCE groups are concerned along with a substantial increase in our individual traveller booking ratio. We have been experiencing consistent growth on our West Mediterranean sailings not only because of the ‘value for money’ offerings provided by MSC, but also because of the new ships being deployed in this region. Indian travellers have been excited about the new prototypes of ships being launched and considering our ambitious plans to launch ships every year till 2026, we are ensuring we capitalise on this trend from India. We are launching two ships in 2019 – MSC Bellissima in March & MSC Grandiosa in November.”



KUNAL SAMPAT
General Manager – India
MSC Cruises

“While the overall sales figures in 2018 were average, we saw a big growth in our partner relations with a growth of 26 per cent gross revenue from new agents. We also witnessed a high growth in offbeat destinations and also popular destinations at low season times. We brought to our portfolio new and exciting brands on the oceans and the rivers to give great options to our partners. The new year will be interesting as India is getting on the cruising map with its very own luxury cruise. While this is news for the domestic market, I am sure that this development will also grow the cruising appetite for the outbound cruise market. We are conservatively looking at a 25-30 per cent growth in our sales for 2019.”



IAN BANERJEE
Director
Global Anchor Cruises

“Indian cruisers are actively looking for weekends cruise options from short-haul destinations and this trend helped us to achieve 20 per cent growth as compared to last year for sectors like Singapore on our major selling cruise Genting Dream. We catered to over 50,000 pax until October this year. European and Mediterranean sectors have done fairly well as we noticed 12-15 per cent year-on-year growth for Norwegian Cruise Line. Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Hong Kong top the chart among Indians, given the proximity. Indians are keen on an ocean cruise. Larger ships, on-board activities like gaming, casino, waterslides, entertainment and dining option have their own appeal for Indians.”



KISHAN BIYANI
Managing Director
Ark Travels



Safe Sailing

“We definitely see an increase in demand for the cruise cover as more and more Indian travellers are opting for cruise vacations. Further, the cruise travel companies appreciate that safety is of utmost importance, and hence, are looking to provide customised packages, based on customer preferences. With all these factors coming into play, we have seen close to 20 per cent growth in our exclusive cruise product in 2017-18. Cruise companies are working closely with travel protection and ancillary services providers to design customised products. At our end, we are focusing on enhancing our portfolio and are targeting to hit the market with differentiated cruise travel benefits next year. Overall, we are continuing to keep the momentum of growth from FY 18 into FY 19 as well.”

DEV KARVAT
Founder & CEO, India & Emerging Markets
TravellTag Cover-More





The Online connect

With cruises going online, the dynamics of the B2B cruise market would certainly change. Here's how the online players are turning a new page in cruise sales.

NISHA VERMA

As Indian travellers are increasingly opting for cruises, service providers and cruise companies leave no stone unturned to capture the market. While the traditional representatives and sales agents of cruise brands have been providing the cruise inventory to travel agents and other B2C channels with a growing interest in the market, the B2B business is now going online with TBO Cruises as well as Travstarz Global Group. Although the two companies have distinguished ways of doing business, it would be interesting to see how they both help change the dynamics of the B2B cruise business with time.



TBO CRUISES

Ankush Nijhawan, Co-Founder, TBO Group, claims that TBO Cruises is going to be one-of-a-kind platform that brings cruises online. "What we will enable for travel agents include booking cruises real-time with transparency, seamless transaction, and enabling the travel agent to see the inventory in a much wider and more elaborate way. Hence, I think it's going to be a game changer for cruise sellers in India and I am sure it's going to

With their distinguished ways of doing business, TBO Cruises and

Travstarz Global Group would help change the dynamics of cruise tourism

help the travel agents who already use TBO for their hotel and airline requirement,” he shares.

Gaurav Bhatnagar, Co-Founder, TBO Group, adds, “TBO Cruises is an aggregated platform for booking cruises globally and everything will be available on one platform. So, with the same login and same cash limits, travel agents can now book cruises too.”

Nijhawan insists that by bringing an offline product like cruises online, they will bring scalability in the market. “A lot of travel agents in Tier V, VI and VII cities, that were not selling cruises will start selling them. I believe that cruise market is one of the fastest-emerging niche markets, which has grown in the last couple of years and will continue to grow in India,” he elaborates.

He also emphasises that by making the availability of cruises online, the market scenario might change. He also shares that they are not only looking at the market within India, but outside as well. “I don’t know what’s going to happen, but for us at TBO, there is no boundary. TBO Cruises will not only sell in India, we will be selling it across the world. Thus, as of now, we cannot say whether a PSA will get a share or

not. At present, we have started it in India, and we will be taking it to Middle East and then to the entire world. Apart from it, we have already signed contracts with NCL, Star Cruise, Genting Cruise and MSC. Once they go on board, we are sure rest will follow,” he states.

TRAVSTARZ GLOBAL GROUP

The latest product to be added in the Travstarz Global Group portfolio is cruises. In fact, **Sucheta Nagpal**, Co-Founder, Travstarz Global Group, reveals that they are the Preferred Sales Agents (PSA) for Dream Cruises as well as Star Cruises. “We are on board and sailing now. There are many new interesting and exciting itineraries, whether they are ex-Singapore or ex-Australia,” she says. Adding further, she informs that being an online platform would give them an advantage in this business. “We brought cruises online because being an online portal and having cruises on our platform makes things easy for travel agents. Along with hotels, flights, sightseeing, visas and travel insurance, they can now find cruises online too. Moreover, if a travel agent is sitting with any B2C client, he can just open the portal, check on the inventory and book it as and when required. We are actually bringing it to another level by getting cruises online and making it more easy for our agents,” she claims.

QUOTE UNQUOTE



“TBO Cruises will not only sell in India, but we will be selling it across the world.”

ANKUSH NIJHAWAN
Co-Founder, TBO Group



“Having cruises on our platform makes it easily accessible for agents.”

SUCHETA NAGPAL
Co-Founder
Travstarz Global Group



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A tribute to tradition

CGH Earth's Spice Coast Cruise houseboat enables travellers to get intimate with the bewitching waterways of Vembanad Lake in Kerala, informs **Michael Dominic**, Chairman, CGH Earth Experiences.

HAZEL JAIN



HOW WELL IS THE RIVER CRUISE DOING?

The Spice Coast Cruise Houseboat Experience that we introduced in 1996 is a hit among international tourists, particularly the British, Australians, Swiss and the Scandinavians. What they look for is an authentic local cruising experience. Our cruise packages are designed in such a way that one gets to experience village life, see the temples, schools, local markets, craft and more. Spice Coast Cruises gets guests who stay for a period of four days up to even two weeks.

WHAT DOES THE EXPERIENCE INVOLVE?

During the cruise, they make stops at the local village, go out into the market with our boatmen, buy fish, vegetables and more for their meal and



MICHAEL DOMINIC
CEO
CGH Earth Experiences

come back and have it cooked in a traditional manner. The kettuvallam even has bicycles on board which guests ride to the village, giving them a taste of the local life. At times, when the package is for a long duration, homely meals are arranged at a local house, which the guests get to part-take in, as part of that day's trip.

WHAT SETS THIS CRUISE APART FROM OTHER RIVER CRUISES IN INDIA?

In this day and age when the rest of the market makes larger and more conventional houseboats, we've stuck to the original and maintained our kettuvallam the way it was, for the simple reason that it gets to traverse the narrow canals, as this is where life happens, and this is what makes our guests keep coming back.



CGH Earth's Spice Coast Cruise packages are designed in a way that one experiences village life, see temples, schools, local markets, craft and more



CGH EARTH IS USUALLY ASSOCIATED WITH HOTELS. WHAT LED TO THE INTRODUCTION OF THIS PRODUCT?

Spice Coast Cruises is unlike traditional properties tourists holiday at. A typical 'property' is a hand-made houseboat called kettuvallam, a large traditional boat made of sturdy wood logs tied together by coir which takes you on a journey through the waters of the Vembanad Lake. Kettuvallams have been an essential part of Kerala's history and culture. They are said to have been built thousands of years ago and were traditionally used for transporting merchandise like rice and spices, as well as to ferry passengers. As time passed, they gave way to faster modes of transport and the houseboats started taking the role of cultural relics of the past, now turned into tourist attractions.

IS THIS CRUISE ALSO A GREEN INITIATIVE?

The Spice Coast Cruises is a representation of ecotourism focusing on three main elements - being one with the local ethos, caring for the environment and working with the local communities. The location (route, in this case) of the property is something else that makes it unique, as Spice Coast Cruises are centred around the 90 km expanse of Vembanad Lake.

It is a large inland lake on the backwaters of Kerala with a unique ecosystem unlike any other water body in the world. The lake is a natural habitat to several species of fauna and flora, a lot of which can be spotted on the cruise.

You will see a lot of them at the Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary on its eastern shore. As you cruise along the backwaters, you'll come across several species, both marine and non-marine.

Moreover, the lake is home to thousands of people who live along its edges and are sustained by it in



Life on a kettuvallam

There's a lot that tourists can experience while on their cruise starting with the experience of staying on a houseboat itself, all the way to socialising with folks from the villages that exist along the banks of the lake, while getting to live a day in their life as well. In that sense, the houseboat or the kettuvallam in itself is the most significant attraction of the property.

many ways. What will delight the tourists is the old-time charm of life that's still intact. That's to say, life here moves in its own slow pace.

WHAT DOES CGH EARTH DO TO ENSURE THAT THE ENVIRONMENT HERE REMAINS INTACT?

CGH Earth is aware of the great burden upon Vembanad through the various activities it supports. Thus, CGH Earth is deeply committed to its care and ensures that the water is not polluted with waste, and it is duly treated before disposing off. Apart from being the pioneer and catalyst of ecotourism, the property practises sustainability to create a shared value that benefits all key players.

At Spice Coast Cruises, we work with the community and ensure our guests get the real picture of the scenario and encourage them to go back and continue these practices.

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PACK RIGHT FOR *Cruising*

Ready to hit the high seas for cruise, but have you got your checklist right yet? We have put together some suggestions to enhance your on-board experience.

Choose the right time

According to the Cruise Lines International Association, cruise ships can take you to more than 500 ports around the world. For example, summers are ideal for sailing to Europe and Alaska, while winters are perfect to cruise in Australia and South America. December through April is the best time to sail for Caribbean.



Keep your cruise card handy

Once you board the cruise, you will quickly learn that it is a cashless system. Upon check-in, you will be given your personalised card. This is your ID, room key and payment card. You will need it to get on-and-off-the-ship for your own security. So, whatever you do, try not to lose it!



Pivotal Paperwork

Check with your cruise line to find out what documents you'll need for the trip. Be sure to carry all the necessary travel documents, identifications and medication documents on board.

Packing smart

Pack wisely and keep a small day bag with one set of clothes, medicines, documents and toiletries while waiting for your checked bag to be delivered. Also, don't forget to pack at least one set of formal clothing that you will need for the main dining hall.



Remember the basics

Most cruise ship cabins don't come with alarm clocks. So, it would be better if you bring your own. In case you are using your cell phone for this job, keep it on airplane mode, so that you don't incur roaming charges in foreign waters. Carrying other items such as sunscreen, ear plugs, power strips and plastic bags for transporting liquids can prove pivotal, if you don't intend to buy them on board at a higher cost.





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Phuket

Get your swimsuit ready in the paradise for water sports lovers, or visit the bustling street markets to experience the energetic soul of Phuket.



Miyakojima

Known for its lovely beaches and excellent coral reefs, Miyakojima's tropical climate makes it a popular year-round destination.



Ha Long Bay

Hear the tale of this region as you glide through waters, among more than 1,600 limestone isles and pillars that form the mesmerising seascape of Ha Long Bay.



Fireworks at Sea

Be dazzled by spectacular live fireworks displays during our 3-night and 5-night cruises. Watch the colours burst as you revel on the main pool deck or Zouk beach club.



The Palace

Our private ship-within-ship concept featuring over 140 lavish suites, 24-hour dedicated butler service, and exclusive privileges and facilities.



Zouk Beach Club

Party the night away at the first ever Zouk club at sea with world-class DJs or enjoy a new bowling experience: neon-coloured balls and glow-in-the-dark pins at Glow Bowl.



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