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Kerala rises from the ashes

While the recent floods caused huge devastation in Kerala, it could not dampen the spirit of the tourism industry in the state. With Kerala Travel Mart (KTM) set to be held on schedule, Kerala is ready to receive tourists within a month, claims its Tourism Minister **Kadakampally Surendran**.



Nisha Verma

Despite Kerala facing unprecedented devastation owing to the recent floods in the state, there is no looking back for the travel and tourism industry. In fact, KTM is being held on schedule and is ready to receive buyers from 66 countries. **Kadakampally Surendran**, Tourism Minister, Kerala said, "KTM, the biennial tourism trade fair that showcases the entire spectrum of Kerala's tourism industry to the world, will be organised in a befitting manner to outpace the previous nine editions. Till date, 545 international tourism buyers from 66 countries and 1,090 domestic tourism buyers have registered for KTM set

to be held in Kochi from September 27-30, 2018."

The minister said that the state is ready to receive tourists at all its major tourist sites. "Tourism is a major contributor to Kerala's economy and a significant source for foreign exchange earnings. The floods left the tourism industry in a state of disarray and shock. The state has now bounced back into business with renewed vigour, demonstrating its inherent resilience and determination to overcome the traumatic aftermath of the floods," he said.

Surendran claimed that business is back to normal with restoration and rehabilitation activities going on. "Road

connectivity has been re-established. Flights are operating. Hotels and resorts are up and running. Kerala is back on track. God's Own Country is ready to welcome

“ Road connectivity has been re-established. Flights are operating. Hotels and resorts are up and running. Kerala is back on track and is ready to welcome tourists ”

tourists once again," he said. He further insisted that there is a need to make the travel industry in India and abroad aware about things returning to normalcy in Kerala. In fact, he mentioned that they conducted a 'Tourism Readiness Survey' with a detailed district-wise and destination-

wise analysis of places, roads and other modes of connectivity. It was revealed that only a handful of resorts needed to become operational.

He informed that the reconstruction and repair work of the roads are underway on a war-footing with primary connections have been established. In fact, to reassure the world, the reopening of Cochin International Airport after the floods was telecast live on Kerala

Tourism's social media channels recently.

The minister also shared that tourists have already started visiting Kerala for the upcoming tourist season. "The season's first chartered flight carrying 60 tourists from Australia arrived in Kochi on September 15. Various events scheduled for the coming months will also take place on schedule," he shared.

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KBM) will be held from December 12, 2018 to March 29, 2019. He also informed that they will be promoting the Malabar region in North Kerala after the opening of Kannur airport soon. 🐦



Everything is up and running

Rani George, Secretary, Kerala Tourism, believes that Kerala is back on its foot and is set to welcome tourists with a new zeal and a brand new campaign.



TT Bureau

After the catastrophic floods in Kerala, the state is currently in a rehabilitation process, claimed **Rani George**. "Kerala had to face unprecedented rainfall and floods in July and August respectively this year. This happened after

a period of 94 years. The river banks were flooded, landslides were rife across the state and more than a million people were displaced from their homes. We are currently into the rehabilitation process," she said.

Talking about the impact on tourism, she said, "The

recent floods resulted in cancellation of bookings as a result of which the tourism sector suffered huge losses. As a matter of fact, not much damage was incurred to any of the properties in Kerala. The only damage occurred was to the roads due to which the issue

of connectivity arose. As a result, we lost many bookings by people who were to visit Kerala. We now have a six-month action plan to overcome this loss. During this period, we are going to introduce a new campaign which will be appropriate for post Kerala

floods and give a new image to the state."

She reassured that Kerala Travel Mart will be held as per schedule. "KTM is entering its 10th edition and has been held for the last 20 years. This will be a much bigger event than that of last year's," she claimed. 🐦



Rani George
Secretary
Kerala Tourism



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Kerala keeps up the spirit

Highlighting Kerala's enormous courage during the floods, **KJ Alphons**, Minister of State (I/C), Tourism, informs that the state is bouncing back to normalcy.



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After facing unprecedented floods in the last 100 years, Kerala is coming back to normalcy. **KJ Alphons**, Minister of State (I/C), Tourism, said that he travelled to his home state during the floods and was greatly impressed by the way people were coming out to help each other. He informed, "I was in Kerala for 10 days during the floods, and the way people of the state came together to deal with the situation is a great example for the entire world. I



KJ Alphons
Minister of State (I/C)
Tourism

have never seen such a community spirit anywhere in the world, where everybody was out on the street, in the collection centres, in rehabilitation centres and helping those in need. Even school and college students were working day and night for relief operations without getting any sleep. There were many IAS officers from other states working in relief

camps incognito. Many travel companies also came out to help at that time."

He claimed that currently after the relief operations, rehabilitation processes are on and Kerala is ready for business. "Kerala is the biggest tourist destination in the country and contributes hugely to the economy. I had a word with the Director of Tourism for Kerala and he has assured me that every destination in Kerala is ready to receive tourists. The hospitality industry is also ready for business. Kerala is bouncing back and I urge people to go there and experience it themselves. The inbound operators should inform their Foreign Tour Operators that the state is ready for them. In fact, a rare phenomenon—the blossoming of Neelakurinji flowers, is happening after 12 years in Munnar," stressed Alphons.

Kerala Revives

Every destination in Kerala is ready to receive tourists

The inbound operators should inform their Foreign Tour Operators that the state is ready for them

We're open for business

Kerala Travel Mart (KTM) is believed to provide a much-needed boost to the tourism industry of the state and set the ball rolling for the upcoming season.



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As the 10th edition of Kerala Tourism Mart (KTM) is set to take place, **Suman Billa**, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, believes that organising KTM at this time after the tragic floods in the state is a positive move from the industry's point of view. "Kerala is already bouncing back and we want to convey the message to the world that we are standing tall and are open to business. I am confident that even after this catastrophe, we will be able to emerge stronger. This allows us to look at our existing products and work on ways to improve them to make them world-class and truly competitive," he stated.

Billa revealed that tourism, as the most significant economic activity of the state, accounts for more than 10 per cent



Suman Billa
Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism,
Government of India

of its Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) and 23.5 per cent of its total employment. "Kerala not only needs to rehabilitate its population but also revive its vital economic activities to put the economy in action. To bounce back, work needs to be done on infrastructure, public perception and marketing," Billa suggested.

He said that a positive image needs to be created for the state. "A strong marketing strategy is required to make sure that the tourist season is not lost, and the industry should send out a strong message that Kerala tourism is back in business. There is a need for a creative campaign showcasing the state's important destinations after rebuilding, extending an invitation to people for coming to Kerala, across media platforms, including digital and social media," he shared.

Billa believes that a strong rebound from the tourism sector would create the much-needed buzz and attract the required investments and create confidence among the industry players. He stressed that the government should take an entrepreneurial position to get tourism back on track.



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JTR expects more Indians

With the anticipated VietJet Air flight connecting India with Vietnam to start by October 2018, JTR Events & Marketing is certain that the numbers between the two countries is bound to blossom.



With most Indian travellers looking for a new destination to visit, this will come as good news. A new flight is expected to connect India directly to Vietnam this year. Speaking about this is **Robert Tan**, Executive Director, JTR Events & Marketing Co, whose parent company is Lac Hong Voyages Co—a B2B operator and wholesaler based in Vietnam. He says, “The market right now is slow due to a lack of direct flight connections. We are hopeful that VietJet Air will start flights from October this year. There will also be a new domestic flight that will be launched by mid-October called Bamboo Airways. With the current domestic flights – Vietnam Airlines and VietJet – it will become more convenient

to travel around Vietnam as some Indian travellers look for beaches, caves and UNESCO World Heritage sites.”

On the other hand, he says that the Vietnamese travellers who visit India are also looking to attend trade fairs as well as indulge in leisure and culture tourism while enjoying travelling by train. There is also a rise in family travel with easy visa entry to India.

At present, there are no direct flights between the two countries and few airlines fly to Vietnam via Malaysia – Malaysian Airlines, Malindo Air and Thai Airways. Vietnam’s low-cost airline Vietjet Air, popularly known as ‘bikini airline’, is all set to commence a direct flight from Vietnam’s capital, Ho Chi Minh City to New Delhi four days a week.



Robert Tan
Executive Director
JTR Events & Marketing

For JTR, India has huge potential. “India is a complete destination as it has a lot to offer in terms of history, culture, nature, mountains, beaches, etc. It is a one-stop destination. Some of the cities that work well for us are New Delhi and Mumbai that are the main gateway cities in India for some of the Asian

airlines. “Even the Buddhist sectors hold potential for us,” Tan says.

He has seen the traveller profile to Vietnam and the surrounding countries change over the years. “It is changing but slowly. With direct flights and lower airfares, it

starting to promote India and Nepal in our markets, which may interest the travel trade here,” Tan adds.

Speaking about some of the challenges the company faces, he says, “Pricing, expensive hotels and high visa charges are some of the

They also have no direct air connectivity.”

The company is participating in KTM as it is looking at promoting Ayurveda and the wellness business as well as the backwaters and houseboat tours more aggressively. “I hope that the state will recover from the recent floods and tourism will get back to normal and hopefully improve with the support from the industry,” Tan says.

JTR is working on joint marketing programmes through the tourism department and has lined up familiarisation trips for the agents so that they can understand the destinations. It is working on this programme with its DMC in India – Destinos India – and the Air India office in Vietnam.

“Some of the cities that work well for us are New Delhi and Mumbai — the main gateway cities in India for some Asian airlines. Apart from it, even the Buddhist sectors hold great potential for us”

will improve as most Indian clients are looking to visit Cambodia and Myanmar as well. We may look at adding more destinations to our portfolio and we considering the options. We are also

major challenges we face. We hope for improvements on the Buddhist circuit and more options for winter destinations as the ones now have difficult access and very low inventory.

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Sai Holidays eyes Kerala

Sai Holidays is participating at KTM so that it can have access to the Kerala market on a single platform because one cannot resist God’s Own Country.



Kerala has bounced back like never before, and the trade, specially the inbound players, are excited to sell it. One among them is **Sanjay Borah**, Proprietor, Sai Holidays, who is participating in the Kerala Travel Mart (KTM). Sharing his reasons for participation, he says, “The main reason behind participating in KTM is that we can get access to the entire state of Kerala on one platform. We do a lot



Sanjay Borah
Proprietor
Sai Holidays

According to him, such shows are important as they help the trade learn and grow. “My primary reasons for being a part of such shows as a travel agent are to obtain testimonials, showcase our products, encourage word-of-mouth promotions and also observe what the competitors are doing. It is a huge learning experience for me,” Borah adds.

Located in Guwahati, Assam, Sai Holidays is a travel company that deals in air, train and bus tickets, hotel accommodation, holiday packages, and cruises. It offers a wide variety of tours from adventure, beach and romantic tours to camping. Its domestic packages include the length and breadth of the country including the remote Northeast region and Kashmir. Meanwhile, its popular international packages trip include trips to Phuket, Dubai and Singapore.

“My reasons for being a part of trade shows as a travel agent are to obtain testimonials, showcase our products, encourage word-of-mouth promotions and also observe what the competitors are doing”

of inbound movement and as a buyer, I would love to meet the bestsellers from this state, build my network and do busi-

ness with them. Tour operators are not complete unless they include Kerala in their itinerary. Kerala is a must.”

Perfect catalyst for tourism: KTM

While the preparations for Kerala Travel Mart (KTM) are on in full swing, the state is again ready to beckon visitors and help bring back business to God's Own Country.



Manas Dwivedi

After the massive floods and devastation in various parts of the state, Kerala is once again ready to become a major tourism force of the country. The 10th edition of KTM is envisaged as the perfect platform to bring back a large number of visitors to the state. With preparations in full swing, **Riyaz U C**, Vice President, Kerala Travel Mart, says that the country's largest and most prestigious tourism buyer-seller mart is set to make a comeback with full zeal. "This time, we have almost 1800 buyers, both

both buyers and exhibitors, Riyaz shares that there has been a growth of almost 70 per cent in the number of buyers. He adds, "In 2016, we hosted around 250 international buyers. This year, we have almost 590 international buyers from 56 countries. We have achieved

"In terms of domestic buyers, we had around 700 domestic buyers in the last KTM. This year, the number has increased to 1200 and the growth is immense"

these numbers after following a proper screening process

and approving only genuine buyers," he affirms.

He further informs, "In terms of domestic buyers, we had around 700 domestic buyers in the last KTM. This year, the number has increased to 1200 and the growth is immense. It gives us serious hopes that Kerala is getting back on track quickly. The show will

have around 400 exhibitors in comparison to 300 sellers in the ninth edition of KTM."

Expecting to get the real flow of tourists after the festival season in November, Riyaz also appeals to travel trade fraternity for their support. 



Riyaz U C
Vice President
Kerala Travel Mart

national and international. Compared to the last edition, we have witnessed around 100 per cent growth in the numbers of international buyers," he informs.

"The four-day mega event from September 27-30 will witness a grand inauguration at the newly-launched Lulu Bolgatty International Convention Centre, Grand Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty in the presence of **Pinarayi Vijayan**, Chief Minister, Kerala; **KJ Alphons**, Minister of State for Tourism (I/C), Government of India and several other dignitaries. The opening ceremony will showcase the culture of Kerala to the trade with various performances planned on the day. The next three days are completely dedicated for B2B meetings and networking sessions. The exhibition will take place at Samudrika and Sagara Convention Centre, Wellington Island, Kochi," adds Riyaz.

Terming this year's KTM as bigger and better in terms of

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Growing by leaps & bounds

Anees Afzal, Director, Parveen Travels, believes that their ever-growing fleet and customer service make them stand out in these times of competition.



TT Bureau

With a fleet of more than 1300 vehicles, over 40 domestic and five overseas offices, Parveen Travels is one of the largest DMCs in the country. **Anees Afzal**, Director, Parveen Travels, said, "Our strength is our fleet and offices with dedicated staff. We have one-of-its-kind newly-added fleet pressed into services to meet safety, reliability and comfort of our clients. The latest addition to Parveen Travels is its new 50 luxury coaches



Anees Afzal
Director
Parveen Travels

to its fleet to make travel more comfortable and reliable."

Claiming that they are recording a growth of 20 per cent in revenue year-on-year, Afzal said that they are reaching out to Tier-II and III cities aggressively and have many plans up their sleeves. "We will focus more on visibility and contacting more of customer-engagement

ment activity. We will also run special offers and discounts for target audience in this demography," he claims.

For promotions, Afzal says that they are quite active on the digital front for all their launches, events and initiatives via social networking sites. Sharing plans for 2019, he claims, "We want to reach out extensively to the inbound markets of the Far East, Europe, Mauritius and South Africa to showcase India as a tourist destination, rich with culture and experience. We are also targeting MICE, corporate event handling and wedding events."

Talking about Kerala Travel Mart, he says, "KTM 2018 is one of the biggest platforms to showcase our products to engage customers for domestic and inbound market."

New Markets

Parveen Travels wants to reach out extensively to the inbound markets of the Far East, Europe, Mauritius and South Africa to showcase India as a tourist destination, rich with culture and experience

Trek the Ravine way

Specialising in facilitating trekking and other adventures at picturesque locations, Ravine Trek is now planning to promote the Northeast region of the country.



TT Bureau

Since its inception in 2000, Ravine Trek has evolved over the years to become one of the most popular adventure and leisure companies. Highlighting Ladakh and Lahaul-Spiti region as its core market, the company has been handling more than 5000 tourists every year. Elaborating more on the company's plans, **Shikha Masalia**, Consultant, Ravine Trek, says, "We have planned to promote the Northeast region, specially Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh in the coming 2019 season. We are already working extensively in the northern region of the country by providing all kind of tourism services to trekkers, bag packers, families, groups and solo travellers."

"As part of our various trek-



Shikha Masalia
Consultant
Ravine Trek

king programmes, we also provide high-altitude trekking in Ladakh, Kashmir, Himachal, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Nepal and Tanzania. Now, we are looking to explore new destinations in Ladakh, along with more fix departures on trekking and leisure projects," she adds.

Informing about the company's upcoming plans of




conducting multi-city activities, Masalia tells that they are initially targeting the Gujarat and Maharashtra market. She says, "We have been regularly participating in IITT, GPS and OTM Mumbai. We are looking to organise destination seminar in Tier-III cities of Gujarat and Maharashtra. As of now, we are looking at Surat, Rajkot, Nashik and Amravati. More cities are yet to be planned."

Saluting the spirit of Kerala in standing back again and preparing itself for the Kerala Travel Mart, Masalia says that people of Kerala have truly inspired the tourism industry in the country. "As Kerala has emerged out bravely from the natural deluge, the spirit of all the Keralites have made us look forward in promoting the state in a better way," she concludes.

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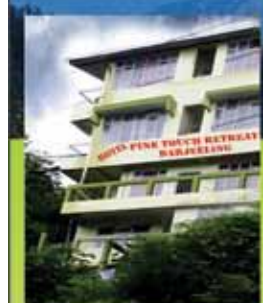
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Up close with Himalayas

Pro India Tourism, now in its eighth year, claims expertise in India inbound with a special interest in the majestic Himalayan region.

TT Bureau

It was on October 2, 2010, the birth anniversary of father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi, when Pro India Tourism website was launched with a vision to showcase its India tours. Based in Delhi, the company also has its presence in Leh, Kashmir and Nepal. In addition to traditional destinations like Rajasthan, Kerala, Goa and Tamil Nadu, it has expertise in the Himalayan region — covering Ladakh, Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand as well as Northeastern destinations like Sikkim, Darjeeling and Arunachal Pradesh.

Ramesh Tickoo, Proprietor, Pro India Tourism, today possesses three decades of personal experience in tourism. He says, "Our local handling agents are stationed at all the major cities so that all



Ramesh Tickoo
Proprietor
Pro India Tourism

your requirements are liaised well with the authorities as well as tour operators. We also support Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) and Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI). With three decades of experience, we work as a consortium to reach the source, so that we can keep our rates competitive, along with an

excellent delivery of services."

As a tour operator, the company organises tours pan-India. "I have travelled the entire length and breadth of India and the subcontinent. However, as the Himalayas are close to my heart, I have added meditation and awakening tours in the Himalayas to our portfolio. Apart from that, we also have a large presence in Sri Lanka and Kerala," adds Tickoo.

Highlighting the challenges industry is facing today, he says, "The fundamental problem is the government policies as this industry has never been treated as a mainstream industry. The unethical practice of pricing because of the online travel agents is also one of the concerns. We need to streamline technology and train our staff to be more tech-savvy." 📌

Riya on expansion spree

Riya Group is looking to open a few more offices in India to spread its reach further because Indian travellers still need a human touch.

TT Bureau

Riya Travels and Tours has stood the test of time. Launched in 1980 as a mere enterprising travel company, it has now become India's largest integrated travel and travel-related services offering end-to-end travel solutions. It continues its expansion in India and international markets even today. Speaking about this is **GMJ Thampy**, CMD, Riya Group, who says, "Most of the consolidators today are stationed in one location and managing the rest of India. We are completely different. We have 64 offices and are looking at opening a few more in India to spread our reach further. In India, customers still need the human touch. Indian passports also require visas for most countries. Fortunately, we are the biggest visa vendor for travellers which



GMJ Thampy
CMD
Riya Group

is why we are growing in the corporate sector as well."

He adds that foreign exchange, insurance and all ancillary products are doing well at Riya Group. The company will soon be opening offices in Tier-II cities of Guwahati, Ludhiana and Rajkot this year but they will be more of a support team for the local partners and

the sales team there and will not service the local market. Palakkad in Kerala will also be coming up soon.

International expansion

Overseas expansion continues for Riya Group as it opens office in Canada in Vancouver, making it the fourth office for them in Canada. They currently have two offices in Toronto and one in Winnipeg. "UAE is also on our radar. We already have an office in Dubai which was opened in June 2018 and we will soon open one in Sharjah too. We work with a lot of partners around the world and we believe in partnerships and collaboration," Thampy reveals.

Thampy shares that the growth area for the group has been its corporate business that is under Riya Business Travel (RBT) as well as our online products under Riya Connect. 📌

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Focus on spiritual tours

With an aim to delight clients with personalised services and a 'feel good' experience, Arpan Holidays is working towards promoting spiritual tourism.

TT Bureau

Right from arranging and managing tours to Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Goa and Kerala, Arpan Holidays specialises in facilitating religious tours in different parts of the country.

Vindit Koul, Director—Sales, Arpan Holidays, says that his company is extensively focusing on encouraging visitors to go on religious tours to explore different horizons of the country. "With a specialised tour to Vaishno Devi, Golden Temple, Kashi Vishwanath and other places, we are providing all kinds of services right from the moment a client books a trip with us," says Koul.

"Apart from religious tours, we also organise yoga and meditation tours, where we attempt to provide visitors an inner elevation through the practice



Vindit Koul
Director—Sales
Arpan Holidays

of yoga and meditation under guidance. We also offer special packages for Leh-Ladakh to our clients and tour operators," adds Koul.

Expressing joy over healthy business in 2018, Koul shares that his company is on a constant growth path with good numbers. He says, "Receiving a positive response from the industry, we already

have a strong network of tour operators in different parts of the country and we are rapidly trying to enhance our reach through various trade shows.

Koul also voices the need of reducing tax rates for travel operators and the industry. Urging the government to provide some relaxation, he said, "A large number of tourists visit Kashmir and other parts of India every year. With such a large inflow of tourists, the government should try and relax GST norms for tour operators."

He further says, "The Ministry of Tourism should also support small tour operators and agencies to become a part of various roadshows which it organises in India and abroad so that they can showcase their products and services on a global platform." 📌

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Surya Reisedienst is committed to providing the perfect trip to its clients, be it leisure or business, individual or group tours, a family vacation or honeymoon. With its world-class services, the company offers a great travel experience.

Speaking about its offerings is **Sam K Varghese**, Director, Surya Reisedienst, who says, "We turn to those who like personal travel experience offering tailor-made programmes that will take into account the specific need and interests of travellers. We offer individual and group itineraries aimed at every type of interest from cultural tours, events and exhibitions, to nature tours and special programme for honeymooners. The experience and professionalism, combined

with a genuine passion for our country put us in a position to offer itineraries with convenient and flexible options for each trip."



Sam K Varghese
Director
Surya Reisedienst

The attention to customer satisfaction and regular monitoring on the quality of the hotels used allow the company to guarantee a unique and memorable experience in this charming country. Surya

Reisedienst incorporated in 1996 as an inbound tour operating company in India is recognised by the Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India, and the major associations of India. It has its headquarters in New Delhi, a branch in Kerala and network member agencies across India, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka.

The company's main source markets are Germany, Italy and the USA. However, it has been able to spread its wings over other European countries like Austria, Switzerland and Poland. "We believe that time has now come to escalate our focus on Latin America too as there are many growing opportunities in the country and we must utilise them. Many tourists are interested in visiting India and tie-up with business partners in the tourism industry," Varghese says.

Out-of-the-Bloo tours

Bloo Nimboo Voyages has overcome its embryonic stages to take form and shape towards its goals of providing experiential tours in the Indian subcontinent.



Bloo Nimboo Voyages is primarily a B2B company active mainly in Europe for whom the Indian subcontinent remains a long-haul destination. At a time when the internet could still not yet replace good, trustworthy dealings, New Delhi-based Bloo Nimboo Voyages has overcome its embryonic stages to take form and shape towards its goals of providing wholesome and experiential tours in the Indian Subcontinent.

Philip Thomas, Managing Director and Co-Founder, Bloo Nimboo Voyages, says, "In May 2016, my French partner and I have started this new boutique DMC as we wanted to add a small 'brick' to improve the concept of good services in the Indian subcontinent. India has not

even scratched the surface for inbound clients and this was potentially a good sector to be involved in."



Philip Thomas
Managing Director and Co-Founder
Bloo Nimboo Voyages

Speaking about some of the challenges they faced, Thomas adds, "We face the same challenges as our colleagues of the industry and unless the Ministry of Tourism rubs its shoulders with us, we cannot counter

the negative perspectives that India has been a victim of. Our strength lies in its people and our history and traditions which like China and Egypt, date back to more than 5,000 years! There is enough to do apart from the Golden Triangle and the oft run circuits."

The company is participating in the Kerala Travel Mart (KTM) as it is one of India's best organised travel fairs for Thomas. "We hope to get an update about various products and forge new relationships. The challenges have been the same for several years, except the domestic tourism part which is growing. I don't think there has been much growth in inbound tours in the last few years to the Indian subcontinent despite few improvements like the introduction of e-visas for India," he says.

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"Starlit Suites is an ideal solution for extended stay requirements. The biggest benefit of choosing our serviced apartments is that we offer a close match to your home. You will not have a restraint to the space you can find here," he says while briefing about the services.

Elated over restoration of tourism in Kerala, Bhattacharjee says that the business is back



Rahul Bhattacharjee
General Manager
Starlit Suites, Kochi

to normalcy. "Tourists have started coming back to Kerala and the government has poured in huge efforts to revive tourism. Kerala Travel Mart will act as a catalyst to boost tourism in the state. With KTM, we are looking to show the world that Kerala is ready again and we want to showcase best of our products to the buyers."

Talking about the growth of his property in last one year,

Bhattacharjee says that Starlit Suites has experienced a handsome growth of around 20 per cent in 2017. "With occupancy close to 70 per cent, we welcomed a large number of inbound visitors from various countries. The response from domestic tourists was also encouraging. We are looking forward to achieve a revenue growth of 20 per cent again this year."

Informing about the upgrades at the property, Bhattacharjee mentions that another banquet hall is set to come up on the fourth floor which can accommodate up to 500 guests.

Facts & Figures

With occupancy close to 70 per cent, Starlit Suites, Kochi welcomed a large number of inbound visitors from various countries

jüSTa signs resort in Delhi

After developing a number of properties across the country, jüSTa Hotels & Resorts has now ventured into the management contract segment with the signing of a resort in Delhi and is now scouting for more properties across the country. **Rohit Katyal**, National Sales Head, jüSTa Hotels & Resorts, shares details.



TT Bureau

For jüSTa Hotels & Resorts, 2018 has already been a year of growth. The brand is now moving into the management contract model. **Rohit Katyal**, National Sales Head—jüSTa Hotels & Resorts, informs, “We are excited to announce that we have signed up our first management contract in Delhi as jüSTa Atrio, Rajokri. The resort is spread across 5 acres with lots of open area and lush greenery around, and is in close vicinity to Gurgaon. With 37 well-equipped rooms and suites, the property has multi-cuisine coffee shop, a bar and swimming pool. Further, a state-of-the-art gymnasium and a spa will be ready by mid-October.”



Rohit Katyal
National Sales Head
jüSTa Hotels & Resorts

Nevertheless, he insists that growth does not come easy. “Growth has its own set of challenges and I think a step-by-step approach has kept us contented. Our loyal customers and employees have helped us maintain our quality standards and delivery of desired hospital-ity services,” he emphasises.

Talking about the Kerala market, he says, “We are keen to explore opportunities to operate a resort in Kerala and are aggressively scouting around for a new project with 50-60 key facilities.”

He also shares that KTM would give just the right awareness about the state of affairs and tourism facilities to everyone. “KTM would definitely expose the travel trade fraternity after what people of Kerala have gone through in the recent past. Hopefully, hoteliers and

travel traders will ensure their full support in promoting tourism to generate source of income for locals,” he stresses.

Sharing his views on the current hospitality scenario

“With 37 well-equipped rooms and suites, jüSTa Atrio, Rajokri is spread across 5 acres with lots of open area and lush greenery, and is in close vicinity to Gurgaon”

in the country, Katyal says, “We are sitting on the tip of iceberg, and in my view, we have everything available from scenic beauty, beaches, mountains, desert, history, food, luxury and hospitality. We have come a long way as

far as hotel industry is concerned, although there is still a huge scope for improvement. About a decade back, there were only structured five-star hotels or unstructured guest-house segment only.”



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KTM to help Kerala prosper

After the tragic floods, the Kerala tourism and hospitality industry is optimistic about attracting business to the state, and believes it is the right time to host KTM to reinforce Foreign Tour Operators.



TT Bureau



EM Najeed
Chairman & Managing Director, Airtravel Enterprises (ATE) Group of Companies and Senior Vice President, IATO

“As most of the affected areas have been rectified and road connectivity has been re-established in the state, Kerala is well-prepared to receive tourists. Further, the Foreign Tour Operators (FTOs) have already started sending their clients to the state. Initially, we were contemplating on whether we should go ahead or not with KTM, but brainstorming with the entire industry prompted us to step forward. The event will take place as per schedule.

All the buyers who have registered for KTM know the state well. It is only when they visit and experience Kerala that they will know that everything is well now.”



Ross Masood
Managing Committee member, KTM Society

“We are delighted to say that the Kerala Travel Mart has received record participation from international buyers this time. We have around 1000 pre-registrations, which is a 100 per cent increase compared to the last edition. In spite of all that has happened in Kerala, I think the participation shows the immense interest that people have in the state. There has also been 60-70 per cent increase in the number of domestic buyers this year. Initially, there were some doubts whether KTM will take place or not, but the industry was assured that it will happen and Kerala will come back in good shape quickly. With KTM, the tourism in Kerala will get a good boost and it will certainly help the business grow again.”



Sejo Jose
President, IATO – Kerala Chapter & Director, Marvel Tours, Kerala

“In the months of August and September, we witnessed a few cancellations. However, October onwards, we are seeing a positive sign as more enquiries are coming in. This being propagated by the government, is giving confidence to the tour operators to send more clients to this side. Even fully independent travellers (FITs) are coming, although the flow is not as big as last year, but from September 15 onwards, we have seen bigger movements, both from domestic and international markets like Spain, Italy, Germany and the UK. Everyone is confident and we believe that everything will be normal by October. KTM has come as a blessing in disguise for us.”

“Organising KTM is a good decision as it would give a positive signal to the foreign buyers. Kerala is ready for tourists despite the recent troubles it has faced. I can see that a lot of buyers are coming for the event. We have positive expectations from KTM as it would reinstate faith in the destination. The buyers also will empathise with the way the state has bounced back and would promote tourism to Kerala, which would be beneficial for all of us.”



Jatinder S Taneja
Managing Director, Travel Spirit International

“KTM is taking place as scheduled, with the inauguration on September 27 and business meetings from September 28-30, 2018 in Kochi. The tourism industry in the state is back for business and we will be showcasing our products and do business meetings at the event. Most of the destinations are not much affected by the floods with damage occurring to just a few roads. The government is working to fix that.”



Abraham George
Chairman and Managing Director, Intersight Tours & Travels

“KTM is taking place at the right time, especially after the floods. The event will give a big boost to tourism in the state and foreign delegates will be able to see everything on their own. Moreover, this event will not only give a boost to inbound tourism for Kerala but also for the entire country. The products in Kerala represent the products for the entire inbound travel industry of India. Many operators from across the country, including Delhi will be travelling for KTM and will be able to interact with the FTOs. It is taking place after two years and I hope that good business will happen there, especially when things are getting normal.”



Rajiv Mehra
Vice President, IATO



Babichan Abraham
Director, Travel Cart India

“We, as stakeholders of tourism in Kerala, have travelled to most of the destinations in the state and I want to say that everything is intact. There was a problem related to connectivity, especially to Munnar, which has been reinstated. We are strongly going ahead with KTM, and the single reason is that now all our FTOs and travel agents who promote Kerala, would love to see it prosper. We are confident that it is going to increase the confidence of people who are going to promote or are already promoting Kerala. It is an opportunity for us to showcase the state in a bigger way and to convince them about our destination.”



Pandian K
Managing Director, Cholan Tours

“This KTM is indeed important for all tourism stakeholders as this is happening right after a massive flood that destructed the whole state. Though the level of devastation was high, the people of Kerala have proved that their hope and spirits are higher than anything else. The Kerala government has really done a commendable job in restoring the state back to its form and has become a role model state in India in terms of handling crisis. Tourism stakeholders and organisers of KTM also have done an excellent job in coordinating the whole event.”



Shuvendu Banerjee
General Manager, Crowne Plaza Kochi

“In a state where 10 per cent of its GDP comes directly from tourism and allied services, an event like KTM, in the light of the recent floods, raises a lot of anticipation. The revival of the economy is relying heavily on service industry and on tourism, in particular. The fact that 500+ international and 1000+ national buyers are visiting Kerala is itself a very positive sign. The reconstruction of the state will gain momentum only when the economic activity resumes its pace and KTM is not only providing an opportunity to let the world know that we are back in business, but also suggesting a way to be a part of reconstruction of Kerala.”

“Kerala is one of the fastest-growing tourism destinations in Asia. The buyers turn-out for the Kerala Travel Mart 2018 is quite promising as most of the buyers decided to visit Kerala and to update themselves about the destination after the tragic floods. This is a great opportunity for the tourism stakeholders to convince the tour operators community that all the hotels and resorts are open and have started receiving guests. Apart from it, this is a great opportunity for the buyers as well, to see the spectacular view of the Neelakurinji flowers which have bloomed after 12 years in Munnar.”



Anish Kumar PK
CEO, The Travel Planners and President, ATTOI

“After the recent floods, we did have a few cancellations. However, 2-3 weeks later, when the western market got to know that our tourist destinations are safe, people and companies who had cancelled their bookings earlier, started rebooking. Kerala is safe. There are some doubts, but these can be cleared easily. When FTOs check destinations like Munnar, Thekkady, Kovalam and the backwaters on the internet, they can easily see that these areas are safe. Our government is planning to promote inbound tourism, especially student expedition groups. I think that will be an added advantage for the tour operators and property owners in Kerala.”



Antony Pius
Proprietor, Kapithan

“The KTM 2018 is always a forum that holistically sells this wonderful destination, Kerala. The networking opportunities and the introductions to new areas of the industry is always a learning. At this point when the state is recovering from the recent natural calamity, this forum adds values to showcase the new Kerala and the revived state to the world. This is the only mart in India focusing on one single destination. Hence, KTM is a wonderful opportunity, especially during this time as it is organised by various tourism stakeholders in partnership with the Department of Tourism.”



Sumeet Suri
General Manager, Kochi Marriott hotel

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Blast from the past: KTM 2016

The ninth edition of Kerala Travel Mart (KTM) witnessed around one lakh business meetings — both scheduled and unscheduled. As its core theme, KTM 2016 focused on 'Responsible Tourism' along with 'Muziris and the Spice Route'.



See more pictures on page 18 ►

The dawn of a new Kerala

► Contd. from page 12

“Kerala Travel Mart will be a superb platform to showcase the stunning hotels with key national and international tour operators and stakeholders from various regions. The magnitude of events we can host and organise will be something to look out for. KTM will also help promote the destination. We have several destination experiences for our guests – from sunset cruises on the Vembanad to treks in Thattakad bird sanctuary. The 10th edition of Kerala Travel Mart would be a great place to get Kerala back on the map of events and itineraries after the recent happenings in the state. I am sure that the passion and commitment of the people will make it a grand success.”



Girish Bhagat
General Manager, Grand
Hyatt Kochi Bolgatty

“This year's KTM is important for the state. In spite of the disastrous floods in Kerala recently causing ambiguities, the organisers are hosting it on the dates planned without any change. These tremendous efforts show the strength of tourism and togetherness in the state. This year, I expect the travel trade fraternity to support and promote the state, especially the airport belt being a gateway to major tourist destinations like Munnar, Tekri and Fort Kochi. KTM is a beneficial opportunity for us to explore and attract markets other than Saudi and the UAE.”



Vikas Kumar
General Manager, Courtyard
Marriott Kochi Airport Hotel

“Kerala Travel Mart has been the backbone of Kerala Tourism for many years. It is a great venture at the national and the international level that has been giving a boost to travel-related promotional activities of our state. After the recent floods, people of Kerala have shown great strength to join hands together, face the situation and help the affected ones, irrespective of caste, colour and creed. The Malayali community, which is present globally, reached out to help with required financial and emotional support. In the larger perspective, the floods were not a story of disaster, but rather a story of unity and social responsibility. It is the dawn of a new Kerala, and can be attributed as a role model for Indian tourism.”



PB Boss
Founder and Chairman,
Osaka Air Travels

Undeterred by challenges

Looking to add more properties to its existing portfolio of 16 hotels, **Geeta Maheshwari**, Owner, H&M Services, talks about the growth of her company.



TT Bureau

Poised to make clients feel special at its boutique properties, H&M Services nurtures a special relationship with all its partner hotels. Briefing about her journey in the hospitality industry, **Geeta Maheshwari**, Owner, H&M Services, says that her company has a strong networking relationship in the industry. "With more than two decades of diversified experience in travel trade, we have shared a strong partnership with all the leading inbound operators for foreign business and also have tie-ups with leading domestic operators, wedding planners and conference organisers," she shares.

She further informs, "Our growth in the number of partner hotels in last three years stands as a testimony of our partners' immense faith in us. The end



Geeta Maheshwari
Owner
H&M Services

user is offered impeccable services at all these hotels, thus turning not only as a frequent customer but also our ambassador."

Speaking about business in the last one year, Maheshwari says that 2017 was tough for the company because of the policy changes. "The hotels have performed reasonably

well over the last year clocking a double-digit development, despite operational hiccups since the country's biggest tax reform was initiated. Nevertheless, the entire industry has incorporated the changes and is again running in top gear. Our faith is rejuvenated in the strength of the hospitality industry," she adds.

On the current marketing and promotional strategy, Maheshwari says that all her partner properties are aggressively using modern tools of marketing and promotion through digital media. Explaining more, she mentions, "The industry has very well adapted to the new technology. Our motto involves the fusion of old-school work ethics with the incorporation of new demands by the industry in an attempt to deliver the best results possible." 📌

A Retreat to remember

Located near the Mall Road, Pine Touch Retreat in Darjeeling is increasingly being favoured by guests for its hospitality and the beautiful landscape around.



TT Bureau

With tourists enjoying the hospitality at Pine Touch Retreat, **K Mukherjee**, Director, Pine Touch Retreat, Darjeeling, shared that the hotel is witnessing good growth, which is not even a year old as yet. Talking more about it, he said, "The property is three-storeyed and has 10 well-equipped rooms with attached bathrooms offering 24-hours hot-water facility for



K Mukherjee
Director
Pine Touch Retreat, Darjeeling

“The hotel has Wi-Fi, sight-seeing facility and great food and beverage options. We also provide pick-up and drop facility from Bagdogra Airport & New Jalpaiguri Station”


guests. Many rooms offer mountain view, while others have balconies with mountain views.”

Those staying at the property can enjoy breakfast on the rooftop and relish the 180-degree view of the mountains. "The

roof-top is the USP of the property, which allows guests to relish the surroundings around. The hotel has Wi-Fi, room service, sight-seeing facility and great food and beverage options. We also provide pick-up and drop facility from Bagdogra Airport and New Jalpaiguri Station for guests. Our prices are competitive as compared to the location we have," said Mukherjee.

Despite being one of the most popular tourist destinations in India, people in Darjeeling make a choice to stay around nature, he claimed, saying, "Our property offers just that, as we are surrounded by natural bounty and pine trees."


Talking about the growth, Mukherjee said, "As per growth, we have witnessed an increase of 20 per cent in the last one year. We are also participating in travel and tourism fairs." 📌



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Kerala gears up to LURE TRAVELLERS

Kerala Tourism repackages God's Own Country as the perfect playground to acquire new and composite experiences. Tagged as 'Come Out and Play', the campaign is aimed at domestic travellers. The campaign also sheds light on activity-based tourism.

Breaking its long-standing identity as a slow-paced destination, Kerala Tourism repackages God's own country as the perfect playground to acquire new and composite experiences. Tagged 'Come Out and Play', the campaign is aimed at domestic travellers who have been seeing Kerala as an antidote to urban experiences and as the antithesis of routine. The new campaign sheds light on activity-based tourism and invites India to come out of the isolation that gadgets induce and to connect with each other and nature. From high mountains and deep-cut valleys to sunny tropical beaches and placid backwaters, Kerala's 38,863 sqkm

holds within itself a variety of landscapes that differ in settings and flavour, each one of them offering an opportunity to relish the outdoors. Several eco-friendly, sustainable initiatives would constitute the high spot of this year's domestic campaign.

"Modern, especially young, travellers come to Kerala in search of true-to-life experiences and this was kept in mind while formulating the new tourism policy and also while shaping this year's domestic campaign titled 'Come Out and Play'. As a part of refreshing the brand and making it more appealing, several new products have been introduced this year. Be it the Kerala

Boat Race League or the Jatayu Earth Centre, all the products are environment-friendly and promote responsible tourism. New products and experiences tailor-made for the domestic traveller are:

Brand new Tourism Policy

With a newly-founded 'Responsible Tourism' mission and Kumarakom bagging the prestigious Responsible Tourism award at the London World Travel Mart, it is no wonder that the new tourism policy focuses in depth on sustainable tourism initiatives. Environment-friendly, responsible tourism is the cornerstone of this policy. A green farm policy will also be implemented to develop farm tourism, focusing on plantations and agricultural farms. Special focus has been given to artisans, traditional craftsmen and to bring up many small-scale museums based on agriculture, traditional occupations, art forms, etc.

A Once-in-12-years spectacle

For those who seek an adrenalin rush, the timing couldn't be more perfect to explore the rolling hills of Munnar. Trek, cycle, bike and explore the purple hues of Neelakurinji, a rare flower which blooms only once every 12 years.

World's biggest bird sculpture

Another example of sustainable and eco-friendly tourism is the Jatayu Earth Centre, spread across 65 acres. The giant statue of Jatayu is 200 feet long, 150 feet wide and 70 feet in height, making it the largest functional bird sculpture in the world. The destination is easily accessible as it is right at the centre of the tourist spots.

India's first Biodiversity Museum

In the last few months, the state has produced several environmentally-engaging and eco-friendly ventures to take pride in. India's first biodiversity museum is tucked away on the outskirts of Thiruvananthapuram. This museum, that was once a boat house, is now home to the state's first-ever Science on Sphere (SOS) system.

Gateway to Malabar

Malabar, the land spooned by seas and shielded by the Western Ghats, is home to the piquant Moplah cuisine. With the upcoming greenfield airport at Kannur, Kerala Tourism hopes to establish Malabar, which shares boundaries with Coorg, Coimbatore and Mysuru, as the new tourism gateway to the state.

A walk down memory lane

For art aficionados, this year-end would bring another edition of the immensely popular Kochi-Muziris Biennale. The state endorses the dreamy lanes of Fort Kochi and a pilgrimage to this biennial which has changed the landscape of contemporary Indian art today and has helped make Kochi the art capital of India.

India's largest Tourism Buyer-Seller meet

For entrepreneurs, the state is gearing up for the 10th edition of a three-day long B2B event. Scheduled in September is India's first travel and tourism mart that has over the years helped showcase Kerala to the world. KTM brings the business fraternity behind Kerala's unparalleled tourism products and services on a single platform.

Voyage through historic ties

For history buffs looking to transport themselves to another era, there is the Muziris Heritage Project. The remains of a once-thriving port frequented by Arabs, Romans, Egyptians as early as the first century BC is today preserved across 25 museums as the largest heritage conservation project in India. Another offering in the historical space is the Spice Route Project that rekindled the 2000-year-old ancient sea links and shared cultural and culinary legacies with 30 countries.

2017 was a landmark year for Kerala Tourism in terms of domestic footfalls, which increased to 14,673,520, translating into an 11.39 per cent year-on-year growth.



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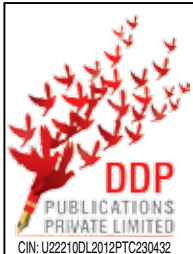
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Warm memories from KTM 2016



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