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TAFI Convention enthuses members

Each one of us will look afresh at our businesses during the TAFI Convention 2022 being held in Kuching, Sarawak province, says Travel Agents' Federation of India President **Ajay Prakash**. The team will also deliberate about the several opportunities in leisure, which is the centrepiece of the travel industry, he adds.



Hazel Jain

The excitement is palpable, said **Ajay Prakash**, President, Travel Agents' Federation of India (TAFI), as he



discusses the upcoming convention. "The enthusiasm is remarkable because our convention is happening directly after 2018. The destination is interesting as well as it is a relatively unknown destination for the Indian travel trade. We opened registrations for the Convention on 5 August and within just two weeks we received over 400 registrations already. However, seats are limited, and we are not taking more than 500 people. We are clear that we are only taking members who are involved in the trade," he added.

An interesting spin-off, Prakash said, is that there are several agents who applied for TAFI membership for they wanted to attend the convention. "So, perhaps a convention is a great way to boost membership!" he joked.

Rethinking business

TAFI is looking to have interesting sessions. Prakash shared, "We need to start talking about some of things which we have all learned from COVID. We had a lot of time to think. Therefore, the theme, Build Back Better, is something that we must explore in detail during our knowledge sessions. We will have people



Our convention is taking place after 2018. The destination is quite interesting as well as it is relatively unknown

who have built back brands after COVID and who have re-invented their businesses, it is they who must share their experiences. This will include not just travel businesses, but also hoteliers

and tourism boards. Each one of us has have to look at businesses afresh. "We will look at the alternate revenue streams, which are becoming more relevant now. Ticketing is what many of us survived on for so many years. The tourism pie is much bigger, and interesting and profitable. However, to service that, we also need airline tickets," he said.

The team is also going to discuss the overload of information faced by the end traveler. "The importance of a travel consultants is to help them cut through the online clutter because everything is not as rosy as it seems on the inter-

net. We will also be talking about opportunities beyond leisure. Leisure has been a mainstay of our industry, but there are other niches such as weddings, MICE, and the like.

New chapter in J&K

TAFI recently started its 12th chapter in J&K. "While there have been other associations in J&K, we never had a presence there. The rapport between the trade and tourism dept is excellent in J&K. I think it is a great beginning and I think it will be one of our active chapters. Quite a few members will also be joining us in Malaysia," Prakash added.

Forging ahead with confidence, fortitude



Anil Kalsi
Joint Secretary
TAFI

Managing Committee

"After COVID cases subsided and borders of most countries opened up, the idea was to get our members to Malaysia to have an education session at the convention and have pre-and-post tours to learn about the host country. So the theme, Build Back Better is relevant and a way forward for the people to get together and share their views on the way forward for Brand Building, creating awareness, getting more clients and of course to get more ways of remuneration for the agents."

Contd on page 8 ►



Khushvinder Sama
Chairman
Northern India

Chapter Chairmen

"I think it is time for us to focus on building the industry and get ready to cater to the pent-up travel demand. In our endeavor to build the industry, TAFI is working with government bodies on tourism-related issues. We are focused on promoting domestic and global travel. To this end, this month we are organizing a travel convention in Malaysia for our agents to boost our efforts in building back the tourism industry. Tourism is an evergreen industry—I look forward to the exciting times ahead."

Contd on page 10 ►

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Sarawak for ramping up visibility in India

Delegates participating in the TAFI Convention 2022 will be able to immerse themselves in a full-on Sarawak authentic experience showcasing the best of its culture and gastronomical offerings in order to promote sustainable and responsible tourism.



TT Bureau

To be held for the first time in Kuching, Sarawak from 20-23 September 2022, TAFI convention will highlight Sarawak's diverse ethnicities comprising 28 ethnic tribes, all with their own unique traditions, lifestyles, music, food, and hand-made crafts. TAFI delegates will get to learn about Sarawak as an attractive multifaceted destination for the Indian market.

Among the exciting tribal activities planned throughout the convention are live cultural and music performances, live food demonstrations and traditional handicraft exhibition to maximise their Sarawak cultural and culinary experience during the Travel Agents' Federation of India (TAFI) Convention 2022.

Focusing on building a resilient tourism industry and responsible tourism post-pandemic,



P Manoharan
Sr Director, International Promotion
Division, Asia, Tourism Malaysia

TAFI is incorporating the 'Build Back Better' theme to promote sustainable and responsible tourism practices, conservation, and advanced greening efforts. During the press conference, YB Dato Sri Haji Abdul Karim Rahman Hamzah, Minister of Tourism, Creative Industry and Performing Arts Sarawak, said in 2019, Indian tourist arrivals to Malaysia showed a positive trend with a 15 per cent growth rate, while India ranked fifth in terms of arrivals to Sarawak, marking a

significant potential for Sarawak to tap into the Indian market.

"There has been an increase of 304 per cent in Indian tourist arrivals during January to July 2022 compared to the same period in 2021. TAFI convention is a golden opportunity for us to ramp up Sarawak's visibility in India and to showcase to our Indian travel agent partners why Sarawak should be their next destination of choice when it comes to tourism and business events," he added.

"We will be looking to bringing more Indian visitors to enjoy the delights of Malaysia. Apart from our objective to instil confidence among Indians to feel safe to visit Malaysia again, we hope that this Convention provides a platform for the industry to gather, exchange ideas, and return stronger," said Dato' Zainuddin Abdul Wahab, Director General, Tourism Malaysia.



"I am delighted the resumption of international flights from India has been timely in promoting Malaysia to Indian travelers. We expect a 30 per cent rise in the pre-pandemic arrivals to our country this year. In 2019, the Indian market had contributed 735,309 arrivals (22%) to the country," he added.

Sharzede Datu Haji Salleh Askor, CEO, Sarawak Tourism Board (STB), said, "We are happy to welcome the TAFI delegates to our shores. As we see signs

of recovery, now is the crucial time to Build Back Better, and this process begins by seeing the confidence of a group of key tourism players to gather here in Sarawak."

"Business events such as the TAFI Convention are platforms to initiate change, motivation and collaborations," said Amelia Roziman, CEO, Business Events Sarawak. "TAFI's collaboration with STB and Tourism Malaysia is a strategy for developing the Indian travel market in Malaysia,

and the convention will be a catalyst in bridging the gap between India and Malaysia."

Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI, said, "Sarawak is an unexplored destination for the Indian traveler. We anticipate our members will be inspired to promote tourism to this beautiful province since it can be of venue for destination weddings, family travel and corporate events. We appreciate the support given by STB, Business Events Sarawak, Tourism Malaysia and our official carrier, Malaysia Airlines." 🌸

Safe and secure cruising with Asego

Dev Karvat, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Asego, busts myths about insurance, especially for cruising. He suggests some significant aspects that travel agents should keep in mind, while advising their clients on travel insurance.



TT Bureau

What new trends in cruise travel have you been witnessing?

The surge in cruises could be attributed to the pent-up demand for travel owing to the travel restrictions over the past two years. Travel enthusiasts, irrespective of age, are now seeking unexplored experiences and today's cruise lines provide exotic choices in terms of destination and experiences.

Emphasis on health and safety precautions onboard have encouraged the travelers to pack their bags and explore the cruise travel. Cruise operators have been promoting customised packages, including travel assistance services with special cruise covers, which has instilled a great deal of confidence among the travelers. We are witnessing a rapid increase in people opting for exclusive cruise protection plans that safeguards them

against exigencies not only on the cruise, but also while going on excursions and tours.

Is a regular travel insurance sufficient for cruise travel?

There is a misconception among cruise enthusiasts that a regular travel insurance should be ad-



Dev Karvat
Founder & Chief Executive Officer
Asego

equate to keep them secured, while enjoying the high seas. However, travel insurance does not cover passengers, while on a cruise. For instance, if an accident occurs before one even begins the journey, he/she may



have to cancel his/her trip. The cruise line will not reimburse you, but a dedicated cruise trip protection can. Further, if a passenger is affected with COVID or any other medical emergencies on board, they will be confined to their cabins and eventually miss their excursion. Cruises protection plans such as Asego's exclusive cruise cover does not only safeguard travelers from such losses, but also covers emergen-

cy evacuation and subsequent medical care expenses in case of serious injuries.

What aspects should a cruise traveler consider before choosing an insurance?

We have been in the travel protection space for more than 22 years now, and according to my experience, every traveler embarks on a trip with a different set of preferences and needs.

Hence, they should always opt for a protection plan that can be customised as per their respective travel needs. While holidaying abroad, every second counts and even the slightest delays may cost a bomb. Though weather is one of the most crucial aspects, cruise trips are always prone to glitches such as mechanical issues, human error or improper maintenance that may cause unexpected delays

and detours. Hence, the travelers should consider a cruise protection plan that covers their losses against trip delays, missed cruise departures and other unforeseen emergencies. Also, since we are now living in an age of uncertainties, the trav-

Protection plans for cruises such as Asego's safeguard travelers from losses, but also covers emergency evacuation

elers should ensure that cruise protection plan they opt for covers them against losses due to cabin confinement and new-age travel risks such as loss of baggage and gadgets. 🌸

New booking portal for **RAIL EUROPE®**

Srijit Nair, GM, Rail Europe India, elaborates on how partners can connect with Rail Europe on the B2B portal to book European train journeys and Rail Passes. The new portal agent.raileurope.com allows agents to book train journeys and view special deals, product fact sheets, training, planning resources, brochure, and marketing material.



TT Bureau

What is the current focus area for Rail Europe India right now?

Our current focus is to ensure that all the travel agents have access to our new booking portal ERA – Easy Rail Access – so that they can easily make booking for all the European train journeys. Travel agents can book through our GSAs, as most of them have integrated Rail Europe APIs in their booking platforms. Training has been a focus area and we have been conducting training programmes through our GSAs in tier I, II and III cities within India, thereby educating travel agents and sharing our latest product offerings. Reconnect with travel partners is also one of our top focus areas and we have been attending and participating in various road shows and trade fairs.

What products are you promoting to the India market right now?

As we see an increasing demand



Srijit Nair
General Manager
Rail Europe India

for train travel in Europe, we are promoting all the train journeys within Europe in the India market. Switzerland, France and United Kingdom are the top destinations, and we see travellers taking the high-speed trains such as Eurostar, Thalys and the TGVs. A lot of travelers are opting for regional and intercity trains. Swiss Travel Pass and Eurail Global Pass are promoted and sold in India, as many travelers see value in purchasing these passes, as they come with various benefits such as free or discounted mountain peaks, multiple travel on a single

day, access to famous museums, travel on scenic trains and children travelling free.

Is there any change in preferences of the Indian travelers since COVID outbreak?

Many Indian travelers are opting for longer stays and prefer mono destinations or maximum two

Many Indian travelers are opting for longer stays and prefer mono destinations or maximum two countries to travel at once

countries to travel at once, thereby they can avoid COVID protocols and restrictions, and this has resulted in a huge demand for



passes such as the Swiss Travel Pass or Eurail one country pass or the Eurail Global Mobile pass. There is a lot of awareness among travelers on sustainable travel and they prefer travelling by trains.

Any new development at RE?

This year, we are celebrating our 90th year of operation. Early this year, we gave many offerings in partnership with top European operators, including SNCF, Eurostar, Lyria, Alleeo, TGV Est, Eurail, France-Spain High Speed Deutsche Bahn and Ouigo Spain. We are going to bring such offers

throughout the year as part of the celebration. On the product roadmap, we are continuously adding many new sectors and offers.

Has there been any development on your training programmes?

We have launched our e-learning programme, The Rail Agent Course (TRAC), which is a comprehensive rail training programme. Travel agents and partners can register and complete the assigned modules and contests and win prizes. After completing the course, the agents can earn The Rail Expert certificate. We

are also updating this programme with more rail carrier modules.

What kind of bookings are you seeing from India right now?

There is a pent-up demand for the travel to Europe and we see a lot of leisure and family travelers opting for customised holidays, and we see a shift in business travel as most corporates prefer train within Europe. Indian travelers love travelling to Switzerland and France. Reason why there is a huge demand for Swiss passes on French train SNCF and Swiss -France connecting trains.

(Advertorial)



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Travel sector must tap unexplored areas: MC



Kamal R. Jadhvani
Vice President, TAFI

“The Convention's theme Build Back Better is a challenge for our members where all of us have gone through the tough time during the pandemic and suffered losses. We must be better in every aspect to get our business back to old glory with new ideas and reach greater heights. We at TAFI want our members to reach out to explore new destinations and have life transforming experiences. We introduce you to a new destination, Kuching, which is filled with unexplored natural beauty. We are creating values by shrinking the world bringing them together and having cultural exchanges and bringing awareness to the theme of our Convention. We all need to believe in ourselves to Build Back Better—the theme of the TAFI Convention. Future not only for us but for generations to come. *Selamata Datang* (Welcome) to Kuching.”

“TAFI is all set to organize its Convention at Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia from 20-23 September. We had organized our convention in Malaysia twice, at Kuala Lumpur and at Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. This will be the third TAFI Convention that will be held in Kuching. The Convention's agenda is to help the Indian travel trade discover the untapped potential of Kuching which is in the Sarawak province. The Convention is a golden opportunity in order to ramp up Sarawak's visibility in India and also to showcase its offerings to the Indian travel agent partners as Sarawak is a relatively unexplored destination for the Indian travelers. We anticipate that after the convention, our members will be inspired to promote tourism to this province since it can be a great venue for family travel, destination weddings and corporate events.”



Hitank Shah
National Treasurer, TAFI



Rai Achal Krishna
Committee Member, TAFI

“The agents community has gone through a very turbulent period during the pandemic and the customer expectations have also changed, both with regards to where they want to travel (leisure) and where they want to stay. But as travel and tourism sector revives, and we all get back to business, it is important to implement some of the lessons that the pandemic has taught us. To go back to the single-minded pursuit of profit while ignoring the environmental impact of our actions would not only be suicidal but also an invitation to a disaster. It is imperative that the travel industry rebuilds on this model an approach, which is in synchronisation and is sustainable. The Convention will focus on similar areas and inculcate among its members how they need to approach this paradigm and build a more focused model.”



Abbas Moiz
National General Secretary, TAFI

“We are focusing on a very unusual destination this year—Kuching—to hold TAFI Convention 2022. This has come as a huge relief after the devastation of the pandemic, and borders of many countries have also opened up now. That is why our pre and post-tours were sold out very early on. This Convention is for the tourist and travel business only and a majority of the delegates are our members only. Some members are coming along with their spouses—most of them are also working in the agency. The conventions are events to get big numbers. There has not been so much focus on members. What we are doing now in the TAFI Convention is focusing on members, taking significant decisions, and taking our members to a destination, which is very different. We also have a lot of new members joining us for this Convention from our latest chapter—Jammu & Kashmir.”

“The theme is apt for the current TAFI Convention as the businesses were hit for two years due to COVID. There is a hope that customers will seek agents' services as many have lost or blocked their hard earned money with airlines and hotels and were not able to access the principals through call centres or email. Guidance is required for country-specific visa and COVID curbs, and health registrations. The domestic leisure hotel industry has seen a demand across all segments in India. Travel agencies had cut down on costs and are facing shortage of staff, increased footfalls, and enquiries. Once the airfares come back to its 2019 levels and visa issuances are done, the demand for outbound and inbound travel should increase. Agents should invest in technology to cope with the client needs.”



Lalith Jain
Joint Treasurer, TAFI



Sampat Damani
Committee member, TAFI

“We are getting over the after-effects of the pandemic, cases of which have subsided. We are all looking forward to meeting with each other in person after four years at this convention. In that respect, the TAFI Convention 2022 will be a huge success as it will seek to rebuild trust. Kuching as a destination is unique for the Indian market. Kuching, which is in the Sarawak province, its unexplored potential is immense. We look forward to having a great meeting. It is a requirement and will give our industry a much-needed fillip, which is still reeling from the after-effects of the pandemic. Kuching, in the Sarawak province, as the host city will be a unique one for Indians. It is going to be completely safe to travel to this destination. But at the end of the day, we all will have to live with the situation and take responsibility of our health and safety. This health aspect should not be ignored in the hullabaloo.”

Golden Jubilee year

Belair Travel & Cargo is celebrating its 'Golden Jubilee' year with aplomb. It has a travel expertise of 28 years of being a General Sales Agent for Lufthansa German Airlines.



Nisha Verma

Belair Travel & Cargo has established IATA accredited offices at London and will shortly activate IATA locations globally. Currently, Belair serves many multinational companies, OTAs and



corporates providing them all international and domestic airline tickets, as well as LCC airlines, offering a 'one stop shop' for all international travel services.



Pawan S. Jain
Managing Director
Belair Travel & Cargo



Michael Jain
Director
Belair Travel & Cargo

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'The Best Performance Agency' by almost all domestic and international airlines and awarded the certificate of recognition by the IATA 'for issuing highest number of Air Tickets in India' in 2019. The vision of the company is to be recognized amongst the top 10 travel companies worldwide. 📌

Travelers reconnect to Malaysia Airlines

Malaysia Airlines India deployed curated campaigns and product offerings to cater to the growing demands in local markets. We are reviewing the opportunities in Indian market and will add new routes, increase frequencies, or upgrade aircraft whenever needed, says **Amit Mehta**, Country Manager, South Asia.



Janice Alyosius

Ever since Malaysia re-opened its borders on 1 April 2022, there has been a positive response from travelers eager to resume their travel and 'reconnect' with the world. Since then, ticket sales have shown more than 100 per cent growth, said Amit Mehta, Country Manager, South Asia, Malaysia Airlines India. "We are looking to encourage advanced booking on Malaysia Airlines with 80 per cent load factor on most flights. Cities in Australia, New Zealand, and India, and London are among those

MHBiz Pro and MHBiz Plus programmes. MHBiz Pro is designed for SMEs and organizations that wish to self-manage their corporate travel by enabling them to directly book flights, and manage their flight bookings online. MHBiz Pro customers are able to monitor their travel expenses via the report generating tool provided in the portal. Another programme that provides cus-



tomisation to a company's travel requirements with more benefits is MHBiz Plus." "We are reviewing the opportunities in the Indian market, adding new routes, increase frequencies, or upgrade aircraft whenever needed. We are looking to achieve the pre-pandemic capacity for India by end of the year," Mehta added. 📌



Amit Mehta
Country Manager, South Asia
Malaysia Airlines India



The airline is its capacity in order to mitigate unprofitable routes due to increasing fuel costs

that have registered a healthy load factor for forward booking," he said.

"With support of Malaysia Aviation Group sister airlines, Malaysia Airlines, Firefly, MASwings, and AMAL, we will ramp up capacity and introduce new strategic routes over the coming months, as we anticipate travel demand for international travel to pick up," he added. "All companies in the MAG have taken measures to manage the impact of higher fuel cost. The challenge is to work towards the right level of supply of seats vs the level of demand that is expected to exist in the market. Too much supply, and we are likely to see a unhealthy and unsustainable price war. The airline is managing its capacity to mitigate unprofitable routes due to rising fuel costs," said Mehta.

He said, "To encourage corporate travel, we have introduced






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Promote India abroad, say chapter chairmen



Jitul Mehta
Chairman, Western India

“We are holding this offline convention after a long time and our members are excited our members are looking forward to it. As usually, Western India Chapter is very active in the planning of this event. We are expecting more than 100 members just from the Western India Chapter alone. The host destination—Kuching—in Sarawak province, and the convention centre too is amazing. It has state of the art facilities and has a huge capacity for delegates. We are expecting a lot of international speakers. It will, therefore, be a learning curve for all the members apart from the fun and the entertainment. We want all our members to bounce back quickly and hope to get their business better than pre-pandemic levels. This brainstorming discussions will explore ways and means to just that.”

“We need to think about how to rebuild the tourism industry to reach to the pre COVID levels, hence the theme Build, Back, Better is very relevant. We need to build the confidence of passengers of all categories, business, MICE, or leisure, by backing them with better services and new amenities. The industry is slowly and steadily moving ahead and in this regard, TAFI is organizing their annual convention on 20-23 September 2022 in Kuching, Malaysia. TAFI, Madhya Pradesh Chapter recently held an interactive session for their members in association with the VFS Senior General Manager and briefed the members about the latest developments in the industry and upgraded their knowledge about the pros and cons. We also organized FAM trips to Pune in association with Hyatt Regency and Gujarat Tourism Board to help members to promote tourism potential in Pune and Gujarat.”



TK Jose
Chapter Chairman, Madhya Pradesh



Manzoor Ahmad Pakhtoon
Chapter Chairman, J&K

“As per revival and increase in arrivals of tourists are concerned, we need to do more promotional activities with physical appearance at various tourism events in different parts of the country and abroad, and take advantage of social media, advertisements at major airports, railway stations and areas of public attention. We must put more unexplored tourist destinations in our roadmap to attract more tourists' attention. List of the new events should be published in the beginning of season/s so that tourists, domestic as well as foreign, can plan their tours in advance, and we can get good footfall in each season. Promotion of tourism is imperative to attract tourists in every season if we have new destinations and itineraries, and for all this, the department of tourism is playing an important role in all these events and the TAFI looks forward for their support.”



Sunil Uttam
Chapter Chairman, Pune

“The tourism sector was one of the worst affected by the pandemic, and the trade needs to understand that tourists are ready to explore the world again. They also want the price to be reasonable. There should not be hidden taxes or add ons. The airlines are among the worst purveyors of junk fees. Fees for checking a bag, choosing a seat, in some cases bringing a carry-on, they all need to go. Airlines say, 'Roll them into the fare or dump them.' The airlines are using road/nearby destinations to cut costs and still explore. Despite all the odds, tourism is booming again, but with expectations. They want value-for-money transport, stay options, food joints, all-inclusive group tours, and special interest tours. Clean hotels, homestays, low-cost all-inclusive airfares, need specific group tours are the future.”

“Restoring and increasing international openness and consumer confidence, including investing in health and safety, are topics that matter to me. Our top priority is to create favourable and inclusive working, business, and socio-economic conditions. Factors such as accessible and quality employee education and training, supportive hiring and firing practices, programs for finding skilled workers, flexible work arrangements, and improving worker productivity can help equip T and T companies. Sharing the knowledge with green recovery businesses to Build Back Better, the sector through the webinars or presentations, apart from the TAFI Convention, should be our target. Strengthening cooperation within countries and building more resilient and sustainable tourism is what needs to be focused upon. Restoring traveler confidence is the need of the hour.”



Anil Punjabi
Chairman, Eastern India



Paulose K Mathew
Chapter Chairman, Kerala

“Travel and tourism industry have come to a grinding halt because of COVID. We now face the daunting task of creating a new and charming world. It now becomes our responsibility to find ways for travel, tourism, and hospitality to be reborn. In the future, this process of renewal means that tourism leaders, both in the public and private sector, will have to accept the fact that our world has changed: we hope for the better. They will need to find ways to proceed from pause to renewal. In the near future, travel firms may change into consultancy companies and executives may become travel consultants. Tour operators may become travel advisors and holiday specialists. Travelers will choose consultancy travel portals and digital and online branding strategies, important keys for survival.”



Renuka Natu
Travel Relations

Representation Portfolio



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One Above to launch B2B portal

Rahim Aslam, Director, One Above DMC, discusses upcoming plans and announcements that the company will make soon. It is innching towards opening offices across the globe, he adds.



Hazel Jain

As the tourism industry strives to innovate and expand its horizons in the world after COVID cases sub-sided, so does One Above DMC. Sharing some updates on the new products that have come onboard, **Rahim Aslam**, Director, One Above DMC, said, "The next big thing to look forward to is our B2B portal OA195.com. We have the right people to bring up this portal as one of the most user-friendly Change is a constant process and we at One Above believe in it firmly. Inching towards owning maximum DMCs across the globe, One Above has opened DMCs in Vietnam, Indonesia, Kenya, Kazakhstan, and Bahrain. Next month, we will be opening offices in Oman and Tanzania."

He added the company has ventured into production, B2B weddings and cruises. "One above will be a hospitality solution for all our B2B travel partners across the globe," Aslam added.

ed. One Above is also known for promoting Maldives among trade members. He shared, "As I say, Maldives is not a busi-



Rahim Aslam
Director
One Above DMC

ness, it is a passion for me and my team. We have opened five new DMCs and two more are in the pipeline, hence we are excited to make this announcement in 30 days." Aslam said, "The world has opened for tourism from the Maldives to Malta. Apart from FIT group series, MICE travel has shown growth, and we are happy to share that 2,000 to 7,000 passenger groups are on the move. FIT has global demand from Indian

Ocean, Far East, Middle East to Europe. The series is in demand for Far East and the Middle East. We are seeing MICE movement from India to Dubai, Baku, Mauritius, and South Africa. "Challenges are always there and we, the travel fraternity,

Maldives is not a business, it is a passion for me and team. We have opened five new DMCs and two more are in the pipeline

have always overcome them. I would like to highlight a few challenges that we are facing. One is high airfare, issuance of visa, and shortage of professional manpower at a few destinations," he said.

'Travel trade attracted by our offers'

To upgrade and offer value to its 1,200-strong subscriber base, Tourwiz has come up with two new features. Everything has been built in in-house package module, says **Swapnil Shaha**, CEO.



Hazel Jain

TourWiz has launched two new features: a package builder module and a manual invoicing module for its subscribers. Sharing more details on this is **Swapnil Shaha**, CEO, Tourwiz said, "There is no additional cost for this for our current users. We saw a demand for these features from the travel trade during our interactions with them. These features allow them to build their own packages, upload PDF, images, and share the same via a link with their customers and suppliers for the pricing. Everything has been built in an in-house package module. It is indeed one of the best in the industry."

The second feature is a manual invoicing module, which helps agents create, print, and share invoices with their customers and collect payments. This is a GST-ready invoice. "So, the smaller travel agents need not have any high-tech accounting software—they can just use

this. Our current subscribers are using it and loving both these new features. We are also adding a several features in the coming months and our subscribers get to use the same, and that too at no additional cost," Shaha added.

We are building a package for the travel trade where the agents can place a request and benefit from our wide network of tour operators

'Partner with Us'

Features such as Complete CRM Module, Package Builder, Itinerary Builder, Invoicing, Accounts and Reconciliation, Payments Management (customer and suppliers) are live and currently subscribed by

more than 1,200 users. "The programme is live, and we have around 25 partners to provide the best offers to our subscribers for various places. They can start putting in their promotions



Swapnil Shaha
CEO
Tourwiz

for all our subscriber agents to see and promote them to their respective clients. In essence, we are building a community for the travel trade on our platform where the agents can place a request and benefit from our wide network of tour operators, our partners and other travel agents," he added. Their portal is set to launch in September 2022.



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Kuching an unexplored destination

No other city in Malaysia has such a romantic and unlikely history, nor does it display its charms with such an easy grace than the capital of Sarawak—Kuching. Hiring a *sampan* is the best way to go up and down Sarawak River to get an impression of the city. Travelers must get acquainted with the destination before heading to it.



Residents of Kuching, approximately 680,000, take pride in their city, which is reflected in their attitude. Kuching welcomes visitors warmly, but it does not put on an act for them. Instead, it goes about its own business in a relaxed manner that has not changed in the past 160 years. To make the most of your visit, put on your walking shoes, take to the streets (or the water).

Like all towns and cities in Borneo, the focal point of the unique city and the reason for its existence is the Sarawak River. Hiring a *sampan* to meander slowly up and down the river is the best way to get your first impression of Kuching. From the river you will see the picturesque Malay villages (*kampungs*), a golden-domed mosque, a Victorian fort, anentire street of 19th century Chinese shophouses and a wooden-roofed palace,



A view of the Kuching Waterfront

all set against a background of distant mountains.

Kuching's city centre is well preserved and compact; virtually everything that is worth seeing can be reached on foot or by *sampan*. The narrow, bustling streets are crammed with shops selling all manner of goods, from

the mundane to the exotic. There are ornate Chinese temples, many fine examples of colonial-style architecture, a beautiful waterfront, and many interesting museums, including the historic Sarawak Museum.

There is an excellent range of accommodation, from luxury via

boutique to budget, good restaurants, and nightlife to suit most tastes and pockets. You can try local delicacies such as venison and jungle fern, drink a glass or two of local rice wine (*tuak*), or an array of seafood Kuching has an unusual name—the word means “cat” in Malay. There are many stories as to how this name

came about, but it is unlikely that it has anything to do with cats. The two more likely explanations are that it derives from the Chinese word *kochin*, meaning harbour, or that it is named after the *mata kuching* or cat's eye fruit, a close relative of the *lychee*. Damai, on Santubong Peninsula is Sarawak's main resort area, and

Other attractions

- ❖ Tua Pek Kong Chinese Temple
- ❖ Eat at Kubah Ria Complex
- ❖ Visit Sarawak Timber Museum
- ❖ Explore Semenggoh Nature Reserve
- ❖ Annah Rais
- ❖ Indian Mosque
- ❖ Bako National Park
- ❖ Gunung Gading National Park
- ❖ Old Courthouse
- ❖ Sunday Market
- ❖ Satang Turtle Island National Park
- ❖ Fort Margherita
- ❖ Main Bazaar

agents offer ‘two-centre’ packages for tourists to explore Kuching, visit Bako and the rainforest, and relax on the beach after the rigours of jungle trekking. Local travel agents have a variety of tours, ranging from half-day trips to Bidayuh longhouses, to week-long safaris to Iban longhouses on Skrang, Lemanak and Batang Ai river systems. 🏡

‘It is time to expand our presence’

India has always been a priority market for us. We have been active in the market from 2015 through our representatives, Global Destinations. Thanks to the direct flights between India and Vietnam, we are seeing a surge in demand for Vietnam as a trending destination for India, says **Tom (Tung Nguyen)**, MD, Threeland Travel.



Threeland Travel is renowned as a premier Destination Management Company (DMC) in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar for more than 20 years, delivering high-quality travel packages, value-based travel services and MICE across our region. Undertaking business as a franchisee from Gray Line International (USA) in 2010, our product portfolio is fully completed by offering day trips and activities, shore excursions, airport transfers and other ground services for business travel across our regions.

With two decades of experience, we pride ourselves on the immense knowledge of the destinations and years-proven professionalism with an expert team of in-country consultants. As a dedicated DMC, we have remained being one of top choices for travel agents looking for a specialist in Indochina that crafts one-of-a-



Tom (Tung Nguyen)
Managing Director
Threeland Travel

kind experience, and top-notch services on the ground. In India, we are represented by Global Destinations as our strong sales and marketing arm in this market.

What is the kind of potential you see in the Indian market?

Outbound travel from India has played a vital role for a strong tourism potential in Vietnam, India is always a priority market for us. We have been active in the market since 2015 via our representatives Global Destinations. Now even more in post pandemic, with direct connectivity established be-

tween India and Vietnam, it is time for us to nurture our partnership with travel partners, expand our presence on tourism recovery and growth, especially from India.

Who is your target audience and how do you plan to tap them?

Our strong advantage is having years of experience dealing with India market and understanding Indian culture, faiths, cuisine, and other aspects in both pre- and post-COVID periods, we are seeing diverse demographics of travelers and willing to cater to our client's travel types from couples, honeymooners, families, wedding groups to leisure and MICE groups in the coming months.

Thanks to affordable short-distance, stunning landscapes, the fascinating culture and the vibrant yet sensational life of Indo-China and Myanmar, Threeland Travel's vision has always been to inspire travelers to explore the vigorous yet timeless charm of our destinations, whether you are looking for



classic or adventure travel, beach holiday or cultural exploration, leisure or MICE, luxury or budget, we have something to offer. Our consultancy will help one to plan the most effective and efficient travel services on the ground 24/7. We have also actively supported our partners in India through a series of bilateral conferences and other activities, including FAM trips for businesses and meeting at Travel Trade Fairs to tap into a market,

which has a population of 1.4 billion. With a mission “Simply your best local friend”, our competent and hospitable travel experts love to provide our clients with the best customized experiences in our home destinations.

Will the new VietJet flight help with the numbers?

With travel having bounced back in full, complemented with a new launch of direct flights between

India and Vietnam, we are seeing a surge in demand for Vietnam as a trending destination for Indian. This move has been of great advantage to us and has opened multiple tourism opportunities, making travel to our beautiful destinations convenient and hassle-free.

What kind of bookings do you see coming from the Indian market?

We have seen a remarkable increase of bookings from India due to the pent-up demand from the past two years. We are seeing booking from FITs and Leisure travelers, niche, and special traveler groups such as diving, closed family groups, celebrity travel, cruising requests, MICE, and corporate groups. An average stay ranges between six and seven nights, with 12 nights now gaining popularity. Most itineraries feature the following places of interest—Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Halong Bay, Da Nang, Phu Quoc to name a few. 🏡

Transforming Travel Business Management Beyond Imagination!



SWAPNIL SHAHA
CEO

Over the years, we observed that travel professionals use multiple tools and spreadsheets to manage their day-to-day travel operations and sales. Not only is this time-consuming and leads to costly errors, but it also hampers their sales and growth

potential. So we built a solution!

A cloud-based SAAS platform that helps you to manage your customer's profile, suppliers, create inquiries, packages, quotations, manage bookings, confirmations, and payments with follow-ups in one centralized tool along with reports to identify the performance of your business. Our Customer Portal on your own domain helps you to publish your package deals, have landing pages, manage your clients, and also supports auto-capture of inquiries into Tourwiz CRM.

Being online, information is synced and updated instantaneously so you can be confident that all data reflects the current status of your business and is reliable. Tourwiz fully automates your operations and

allows any company to synchronize the entire back office operations, enabling them to streamline day-to-day operations and deliver increased output and accuracy in a fraction of the time and at a fraction of the cost. Speaking about the value that Tourwiz brings to users, Mr. Swapnil Shaha, says, "With Zero capital investment and technology designed for travel agent's needs 'TourWiz' (www.tourwizonline.com) provides its agency customers the affordability and the ability to get access to technology and global content in a pay as you go model (Starting: Rupees 6k per annum). This allows them to satisfy their customer needs, become efficient and compete with the OTAs who are threatening their identity and existence."



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Awards & Recognition



Getting tourism back on track

Renuka Natu, Founder Director, Renuka Natu Travel Relations, is promoting tourism products that are yet to be explored by the Indian market. She recently hosted an experiential study tour to Oman and is also the India market advisor for the 500 year old Trans Bhutan Trail.

TT Bureau

On the B2B front, Renuka Natu, Founder Director, Renuka Natu Travel Relations, continues to represent three products. One of them is Khimji's House of Travel. It is one of the leading DMCs for the Sultanate of Oman. Just as the countries began to open their borders, Natu hosted an experiential study tour for travel agents from across the country, in partnership with Oman Air.

Another product she represents is GO2UK and Europe. She also promotes the Trans Bhutan Trail (TBT) and "as the India market advisor for the TBT, I am working on an interesting non-profit initiative. The 500-year-old 403 km long trail from west to east Bhutan has been revived for historical and cultural tourism. This trail will be launched on 28 September 2022". Natu said, the Trans Bhutan Trail will be launched on 28 September 2022.

She shared news about adding a new product to her portfolio. "We promote Drifters in the 'Adventure Wildlife' category. The tours are operated in an overland truck



Renuka Natu
Founder Director
Renuka Natu Travel Relations

across southern African wildlife regions. There is an option of staying in camps or in lodges. The trucks are custom-built have a capacity of 16 passengers and two crew members," Natu added. Drifters' journeys are extensive but are economical. Itineraries run from 11-24 days. Drifters' signature itinerary starts in Cape Town in South Africa and ends in

Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe, traversing through Namibia and Botswana. There are single country itineraries too, the one for South Africa runs for 18 days and goes through Eswatini (Swaziland). "Our first B2B group to Namibia

Visitors from India are raring to travel, especially after a two-year hiatus. The wish list is interesting, yet the options are limited

comprised eight pax between 37 and 67 years. All of them enjoyed thoroughly," she said.

Indian demand for Africa
Indians are raring to travel after a two-year hiatus. The wish list is interesting, yet the options



are limited, owing to spokes such as visa, prohibitive airfares, the pandemic hampering their plans. Destination South Africa has managed to regain the Indian travelers' interest. The travel fraternity has been put through one of their toughest phases, firstly surviving with no business at all for over two years, and secondly, to rise above all hurdles and giving their clients an enjoyable holiday. Creating these experiences has been nothing less than walking on eggshells, vulnerable to the crunch of one heavy step after another."

Africa expert
Since 2010, Natu has been promoting different countries from Africa on the B2B platform in India. "African safaris come at a dear price point. The weather patterns and the animal movements determine travel movements. I have always believed in understanding the client's profile, before proposing a safari to the B2B agents. I am happy to bring to the trade the knowledge acquired over designing African safaris for a few prolific Indian personalities and to assist them in creating safari experiences," she said.

In Numbers

403 km long west to east trail from in Bhutan has been revived for cultural and historical tourism

11-24 days Drifters' tour starts in Cape Town and ends in Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe

18 day Itinerary that goes through South Africa. It also touches Swaziland

MSC Europa: trailblazer in ocean cruising

Highlight of ocean cruise industry is new ship MSC World Europa, which will be launched this October and will be christened at a mega event in Qatar in November 2022—first ship in the trendsetting MSC World class fleet. **Rashmi Ahuja**, Commercial Co-ordinator, MSC Cruises India, shares details.

TT Bureau

Can you share some updates from MSC Cruises?
At MSC Cruises, we are bustling with market-steering news always with newer, bigger, and innovative ships being launched. This year too, we are launching yet another ship in Seaside Class—MSC Seascope with a host of design features to enable guests to enjoy new impressive horizons at sea. One of our amusement options, the ROBOTRON, is a thrilling ride that will delight adrenaline-seekers on board. What's more, the highlight of the cruise industry



is our new ship, which will be launched this October and will be christened at a mega event in Qatar in November 2022.

It is the first ship in the trailblazing MSC World class fleet. LNG powered, one of the world's cleanest marine fuels and featuring break-

through green technologies, the ship symbolizes the beginning of a new era of cruising. World Europa will be deployed this w

inter season in Gulf, ex-Dubai/ Abu Dhabi covering UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.

What itineraries are you promoting in the Indian market?
While we are gearing up for Diwali and Christmas holidays, our Mediterranean, Gulf and Red Sea itineraries are most popular in our market and the same are being promoted actively in India.

Have you started seeing bookings from the India market?
Yes, we have seen a surge in bookings for the winters as well as having forward bookings for Next Summer 2023. We serve

pan-India, however Western and Northern India has always been more active. We get families, honeymooners, spiritual groups, and MICE groups. These are our target segments.

How has ocean cruising changed after COVID?
Apart from new normal which has become a way of life, cruise liners are now more pro-active in their approach. This restores confidence in the trade, while actively promoting ocean cruising as holiday option to their clients. It has also given better payment terms and cancellations with date change too.



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Design
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Advertisement Design
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Production Manager
Anil Kharbada
Circulation
Ashok Rana

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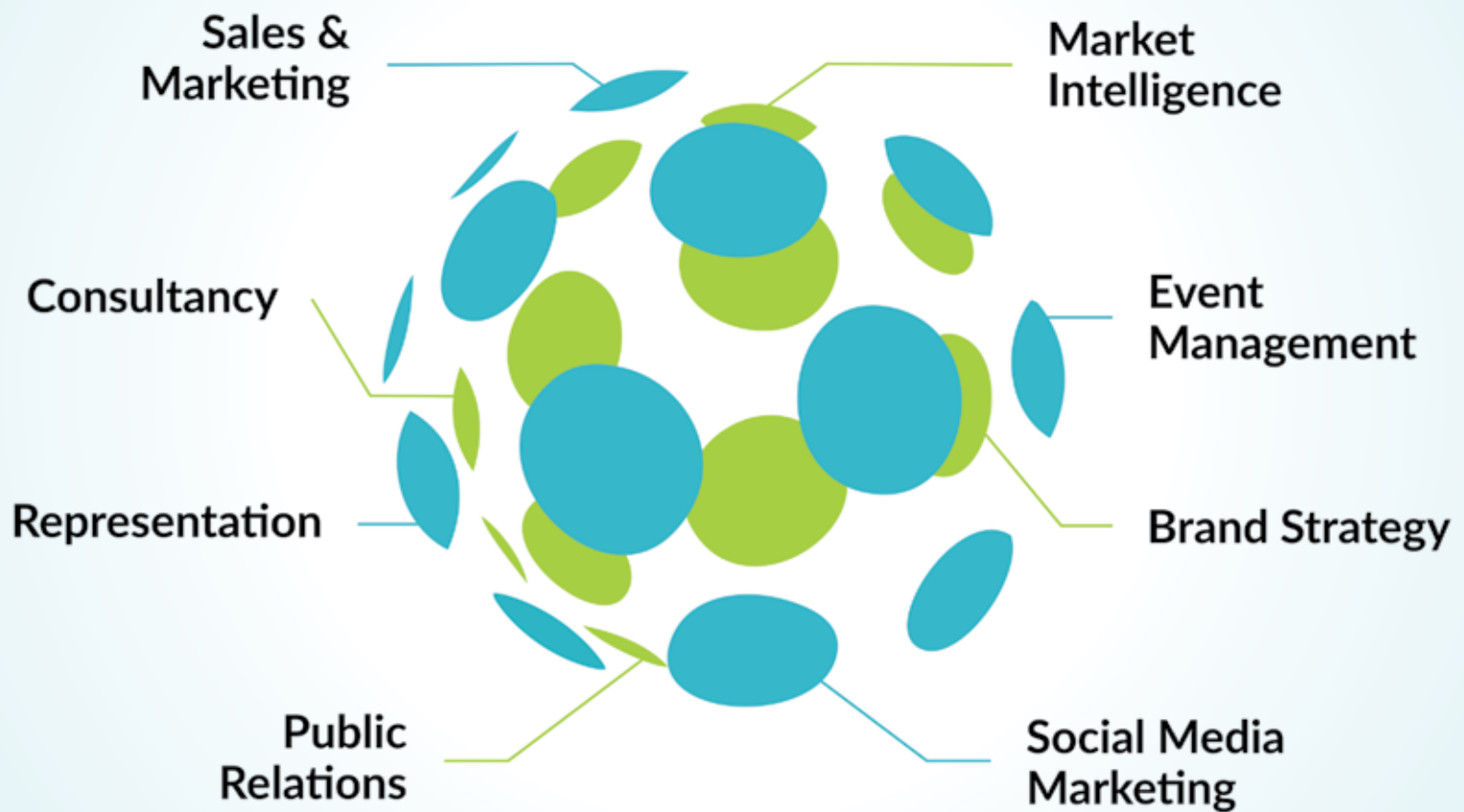
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Mumbai - 400 020, India
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E-mail: mumbai@ddppl.com
MIDDLE EAST:
Durga Das Publications Middle East (FZE)
P.O. Box 9348, Saf Zone, Sharjah, UAE, Ph.: +971-6-5573508, Fax: +971-6-5573509
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