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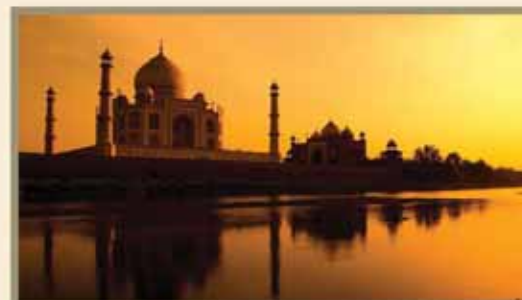
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Regional heads voice concerns

IATO's regional chapters are countering many issues on a daily basis pertaining to local problems faced by travel agents and tour operators. Regional Chapter Chairmen at IATO give a first-hand account of the trials they face and the initiatives that they've taken to overcome these challenges:



Challenges

The Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India, has been aggressively promoting Incredible India, but unfortunately not much is said about the eastern region and Odisha, in particular. Most of the India Tourism offices abroad hardly have any tourist literature on the state. We expect MOT to give more support in terms of publicity, both electronic and print media.

Initiatives

It has been my continuous endeavour to bring the problems to the notice of both central and state governments and to create awareness of how tourism can help the state's economy. IATO meetings are being conducted regularly with members and state chairmen of eastern states for awareness and growth of IATO in this region. With our continuous interaction and follow up, Odisha Government has brought out one of the most progressive tourism policies any state has ever produced.



J.K. Mohanty
India Travel Award winner,
Chairman-Eastern Region
IATO

Challenges

Inbound tourism in the northern region has not witnessed any significant increase as expected after the introduction and further relaxation in e-Tourist Visa. Poor connectivity within the region is a major challenge. Terrible road conditions, lack of proper sanitation and hygiene and unauthorised tour guides are also impediments. To add to all of this is the confusion with GST, which has escalated cost of travel in the region.

Initiatives

IATO as a representative body has been engaged with states and the central departments of tourism on a regular basis which has boosted tourism in the region. UP Travel Mart and few other initiatives like Bird Festival, helicopter flights to Vrindavan are also positive steps. The government needs to provide sufficient funds for development of tourism infrastructure. Agra and Khajuraho need more flights. The road conditions need to be upgraded especially for the Buddhist pilgrimage route. A special fund of ₹ 1000 crore should be allotted to develop infrastructure in Agra and upgrade landscape around the Taj Mahal. River Yamuna needs to be cleaned.



Sunil C. Gupta
Director, Travel Bureau
and Chairman- Northern
Region, IATO

Challenges

This region suffers from mainly two long-standing problems—shortage of authorised, English-speaking tourist guides in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Goa; and lack of air connectivity between Udaipur and Aurangabad. Due to this, a lot of tourists are avoiding going to Aurangabad.

Initiatives

We have been discussing the guide problem with India Tourism and Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation over the last few years. They have just started conducting training for this and have opened online application for certified guide training program for 100 youths each in Mumbai, Nagpur, Aurangabad and Sindhudurg. Pune and Nashik will be started in the second phase. With regards to the Aurangabad flight, we have discussed this matter with Air India who has assured us that they will put an aircraft on the Udaipur-Aurangabad route as soon as they can spare one.



N. S. Rathor
Executive Committee
Member and Chairman-
Western Region
IATO

Challenges

I have not faced any problem in the functioning of IATO activities in the South India Chapter. However, each region has a number of issues to put forward to the state governments as well as the Centre and the chapters are already taking them up.

Initiatives

The South India State Chapters are well networked and connected with the regional chapter and we obtain opinions, suggestions and ideas from the State Chapters. We pool our ideas and suggestions and forward them to the national body of IATO.



E. M. Najeeb
India Travel Award winner
and Chairman- Southern
Region, IATO





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Experiences abundant at exhibitions

International travel exhibitions not only make new and unheard-of products accessible to the Indian delegates but also help build confidence between business partners and nurture a relationship that can last a long time. IATO members share if these exhibitions are just a networking opportunity or bring in some serious business.

HAZEL JAIN & ANKITA SAXENA



Homa Mistry
CEO, Trail Blazer Tours,
India Travel Award
winner

“Relevance of travel exhibitions depends on which exhibition we are discussing, as some are good and others are not. Many international exhibitions are turning out to be the usual networking platforms or they’ve earned a name where industry feels it is a must-to-attend event overlooking what the exhibition actually offers. Many times, sellers do not find the worth of the money they spent on participation as they do not get good returns. The quality of visitors and hosted buyers is going down every year.”



Jatinder S. Taneja
Managing Director, Travel
Spirit International, India
Travel Award winner

“Travel exhibitions are losing their importance these days. The tour operators cannot reach out to every exhibition and therefore, have to pick and choose. Secondly, availability of all information on the Internet is another reason. To add to that is the overall expense is usually quite high and the returns on the same are quite poor. However, I feel that some of the international travel exhibitions are important to visit as they offer a good platform for buyers and suppliers.”



Vikas Abbott
MD, Vasco Travel, India
Travel Award winner

“The international travel exhibitions are a platform to bring the entire industry together under one roof and are instrumental in updating oneself with new trends and products. However, over the years, there are too many of these similar trade shows, and thus people are losing interest. Also, the quality of buyers is poor. These shows have become only networking platforms. The functioning of these shows need major change.”

“I feel international trade shows and exhibitions are relevant only for the new players in the market. However, the old companies have already established their clients in the international market and meet repeat buyers. These shows only serve as networking grounds for them. I firmly believe that if inbound tourism has to be truly promoted, then India should host its own travel show of an international standard to showcase India in its glory and diversity.”



Sarabjit Singh
India Travel Award
winner and Managing
Director, Travellite

“The international exhibitions are no longer very effective in promoting inbound tourism. The hefty amount of money spent does not bring returns. The stalls are not manned professionally. The foreign tourist offices need to be updated with relevant information, digital product material and knowledge of the market where they are promoting India. Rather than having multiple stalls of states, we should do product based marketing and states can display their offerings within these products.”



Rajan Sehgal
Director
Arrivals Air Services



Sudhir Patil
Founder & Director
Veena World

“Though the entire world is going online right now and information is available at your fingertips, the distribution channel for travel and tourism products is still local. To spread awareness about your brand and your products, it is still important to be visible in person and register your presence. International exhibitions offer that platform. It helps us meet and network with potential business partners and more importantly, build confidence between two parties – something that the internet cannot do. I have personally experienced these benefits. A 10-minute meeting has concluded with us signing a million dollar business deal.”

Contd. on page 6 ►



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Maharashtra gets all set to cruise

Three big government entities of Maharashtra have come together to join hands and usher in the era of cruise tourism in India and have been making co-ordinated efforts for the same.



In a first, three large government authorities – Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC), Mumbai Port Trust (MPT) and Ministry of Shipping (MoS) – have come together to announce a collective focus on cruise tourism, originating from Maharashtra.

A high-level delegation from different ministries and government authorities met in Mumbai to announce their

companies. Speaking at the conference, Rawal said, “Maharashtra is pleased to be the homeport of choice for cruises in India. The association, along with the Shipping Ministry, will assist each other to formulate policies to support Maharashtra’s position as a cruise hub. There is huge potential for cruise tourism among domestic as well as international travellers who are keen to experience India.

Mumbai-Kochi from November 2017

Italian luxury cruise liner Costa Cruises, in collaboration with MTDC and MPT, has launched India’s first domestic luxury cruise on the Mumbai-Kochi sector, starting from November 2017. The Mumbai-Kochi cruise will take four nights, the Cochin-Maldives cruise will take three nights, besides the existing option of Mumbai-Maldives via Kochi for seven nights. This comes a year after Carnival Asia—which operates Costa Cruises—brought the first luxury cruise to India by launching a Mumbai-Maldives cruise on its Costa NeoClassica ship.

Cruise tourism will also help the state in earning huge foreign exchange and generating job opportunities.”

Meanwhile, Gadkari identified the reasons why cruise tourism has not yet taken off fully in India. As one of the initial steps, all relevant government agencies, such as port authorities, security agencies, immigration authorities, customs and port health authorities, have been identified and formed into a task force to first assess the current condition and then look at the global best practices.

According to Rawal, Indians are increasingly embracing luxury and leisure lifestyles and the domestic cruise tourism industry is estimated to grow to 1.50 million by 2031. “The opportunity will bring in new prospects and motivate development of the cruise port, which will create opportunities for international cruise liners and improve cruise tourism in India,” he added.



Jaykumar Rawal
Minister of Tourism
Government of Maharashtra

There is huge potential for cruise tourism among domestic as well as international travellers who are keen to experience India

collective plan and focus to develop cruise tourism. Sharing their perspectives were Nitin Gadkari, Minister of Shipping, Government of India; Jaykumar Rawal, Minister of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra; Sanjay Bhatia, Chairman, Mumbai Port Trust; Vijay Waghmare, MD, MTDC and David Dingle, Chairman, Carnival UK.

Titled ‘Dawn of Cruise in India’, the seminar was aimed at encouraging cruise tourism in India, more specifically Mumbai, by improving infrastructure, facilitating quick and easy movement of cruise passengers and easing taxation for cruise

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The business behind exhibitions

► Contd. from page 4



Viney Tyagi
Director, Uni Crystal
Holidays and EC
Member-IATO

“Over the years, most of the major travel exhibitions are losing their sheen. The number of visitors and buyers is declining year on year especially in the Europe and UK based exhibitions. There are hardly any new buyers to promote India

and exhibitions are more like meeting places with existing partners. We need to look beyond these saturated markets and participate in country based travel exhibitions which are the new emerging source markets for inbound tourism for India. We need an aggressive marketing and advertising campaign for brand Incredible India in the emerging markets.”



Subhash Motwani
Director
Namaste Tourism

“International travel exhibitions have relevance to the markets that they address. They are now being segmented under MICE, Luxury, weddings, etc. and cater to specific segments of tour operators, travel companies and service providers. The challenge is to get the right mix of participants at these destinations to optimise the value for both the buyer and the exhibitor. There is also a risk of too many exhibitions happening in one location and that can cause confusion and also dilute the importance of international travel exhibitions.”



Rajat Bagaria
Managing Director,
Shrishi Holidays

“Travel exhibitions are great meeting places. These meetings create a bond and help start a lasting business relationship. IATO has been having wonderful conventions over the past years, wherein we have seen great ideas emerge. These exhibitions are a great meeting place for the domestic tourism industry. Only few states have very active tourism departments, which organise roadshows. Thus, we as an industry, rely on these travel exhibitions to expand our horizon in terms of learning about destinations and to meet with stakeholders from all parts of the country.”

“Technology may have shrunk the globe, and many would say that the end is approaching for international travel exhibitions. However, it all depends upon the planning, structure and content of the exhibitions that will ensure that they sustain in the long race. Many exhibitions have changed their formats to keep pace with the times and quite a few have also reinvented themselves. The travel and hospitality fraternity still looks forward to certain exhibitions which bring in quality buyers, have time-bound and value-added formats, and where the emphasis is on people rather than fancy exhibits.”



Louis D'souza
Executive Director
Tamarind Global
Services

“International travel exhibitions are meaningful as long as there are healthy debates and discussions alongside these exhibitions. Besides, international travel exhibitions are more of a branding exercise. For these shows to be relevant, it is important that tour operators, first-time visitors and younger travel agents take back something in terms of added knowledge, market information and valuable contacts from these shows.”



Hector D'souza
President
Lorient Travels



Nitin John
Director
Riya Holidays


“Attending travel shows and conferences is an important business practice that can benefit tour companies in many ways, including building professional relationships, meeting the media, leveraging tips from other like-minded businesses, learning new ideas from industry experts, gaining an understanding of best practices, and of course meeting new friends along the way.”



Jitendra Kejriwal
CEO
Arika Tour & Travels

“International travel exhibitions are still relevant. One meets a lot of new suppliers, new destinations that we haven't even heard of, as well as new products that we are not even aware of, at these shows. These are real exhibitions and a complete value for money. I have personally benefitted from them as I come back with a lot of business leads. This is in stark contrast to some of the travel exhibitions in India. They are held almost every two months and are a waste of time and effort for everyone.”






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Prioritise tourism to propel inbound

Inbound tourism is passing through a rough patch and the industry needs new ways and means to propel this sector. It's time the industry looks beyond its conventional source markets and develops innovative products to give a breath of fresh air to inbound tourism.

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017, India's ranking in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) moved up 12 positions from 52 in 2015 to 40 in 2017. India is one of the countries that improved the most, however, it still lagged behind its Asian counterparts like Japan and China, which occupied the 4th and 13th ranks, respectively.

India as a country and as an economy has progressed very well in the last decade in terms of its infrastructure. Be it seamless road connectivity; world class airports; hotels of

international standards; power generation; rapidly evolving technology; automobile; advancement in space technology etc., India has gained across various spectrums compared to other countries.

There is an emphasis on training and education as well, and all these advancements have directly or indirectly aided in increasing the travel and tourism competitiveness and growth of India as a tourist destination. However, despite all these advancements, India still lags behind its Asian competitors when it comes to being the most favoured tourist destination among international tourists. This is probably because tourism does not seem to be a priority sector in the country.

Till date, we do not have a well-defined tourism policy and other challenges include

lack of effective promotion at both national and international platforms. To add to it all is the unfriendly tax structure on hotels, which has been aggravated by the introduction of Goods and Services Tax (GST) for the tourism and hospitality sector.

The inbound tourism industry has become very sensitive and unstable. With changing times, the world is going through a major crisis, be it in the form of terrorism, economic slowdown or lack of growth. In India, with the new tax regime, changes in various policies and lack of clear vision for tourism, the industry is in a turmoil. Then there is the unorganised nature of this sector.

There are small fly-by-night operators mushrooming across the country who operate from their homes at no operating cost and lure tourists with cheap prices using free and unlicensed guides

which add to the negative publicity of the country as an unsafe and unreliable tourist destination. I suggest and recommend that the industry must join hands, consolidate and fight these times together.

The industry has a pool of talented professionals and it is just a matter of putting our act together. If young professionals with experience and passion for their profession collaborate, discuss, churn out new ideas, develop new innovative products, explore newer markets, introduce and adapt new technology and also focus on quality education and training, I am sure there are no challenges which cannot be overcome when it comes to propelling India's growth as a tourism hub.

I believe the key lies in the fact that the various stakeholders of both the tourism and hospitality industries need to unite as a single entity to deal with the challenges

head-on, with an element of professionalism. India as a country has everything that a tourist would look for and we too can attract large numbers of foreign tourists if we have the vision and unity amongst ourselves.

As far as our hotel industry is concerned, they are not focusing on the inbound segment as they used to because business has become unpredictable, prices are shrinking and so is their profit margin. That is why hotels are focusing on other verticals like weddings, MICE, corporates, OTAs and domestic tourism.

The tourist season is going to start from October and we have a series of major fairs and exhibitions worldwide. We need to make the best use of these fairs. India Tourism should present itself with a lot of pomp and show like Indian Maharaja, attracting a lot of media eyeballs, both print

and electronic. They should be visible in social media. It should be backed up by the Incredible India campaign on buses and other mediums which was done aggressively in the past. I understand collective planning and effort will create interest and this will definitely increase the tourist numbers.

(The views expressed are solely of the author. The publication may or may not subscribe to the same.)



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Exploring SE Asia market

Toshali Tours is focusing on South East Asia as a potential market, cashing in on the new connectivity between Odisha and Malaysia on Air Asia.



While everybody is suggesting to target new markets for inbound, Toshali Tours is actually practicing it. **Harihar Patra**, Director-Marketing, Toshali Tours, says, "We have started getting inbound from South East Asia because of the increased connectivity with Air Asia's new flight to Odisha. We are focusing on the Southeast Asian market and we are also attending Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents' fair from September 8-10."

Apart from doing inbound tours, they also have their own hotels scattered at all the destinations that come under the Buddhist circuit. "We have properties at almost all the Buddhist sites, we also have tour operators and travel agents in our offices at these destinations which offer packages in that market," informs Patra

There are many challenges for them, both in terms of destination as well as oc-



Harihar Patra
Director-Marketing
Toshali Tours

We want the tour operators to look at Odisha as a new budding destination. We need to promote it as it is now well connected

cupancy. "All our hotels are driven by demand and supply of holiday makers. Odisha as a holiday destination is moderately priced. However, there is some stagnation currently, owing to GST. Apart from that, Odisha doesn't get a lot of inbound tourism.

Whatever comes is also very less, as this depends on the air connectivity. For us, domestic is much bigger than inbound," opines Patra.

For boosting inbound, they are also reaching out to international markets to meet DMCs, as Odisha could be a great destination, especially with the new direct flight to Malaysia on Air Asia, he adds. "We are participating with the government in all the major exhibitions and roadshows," says Patra.

With the IATO Convention happening in Odisha, Patra is hopeful that it would result in good business for Odisha. "We want the tour operators to look at Odisha as a new budding destination. We need to promote it as it is now well connected, and there have been some new products for the customers. IATO is a platform for inbound operators who also do domestic tours, and I would like to request them to focus on the domestic market as well," he shares.



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Exploring Gujarat through its festivals

Gujarat has chosen an interesting way to showcase its various tourist destinations – through its colourful and exciting festivals. **Jenu Devan**, Managing Director and Commissioner of Tourism, Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Limited, shares more details in an exclusive interview with **TRAVTALK**.



HAZEL JAIN

QHow is the inbound traffic for Gujarat?

The gross flow of tourists during 2016-17 was 448 lakhs. It was 16.9 per cent higher than 2015-16. The flow of tourists within Gujarat also increased with a 15 per cent growth. During this period, the NRI and foreigner tourist flow to our state boomed with 22.6 per cent and 31 per cent growth, respectively compared to the previous year. A total number of 9.24 lakhs foreigners/NRIs visited the state during the year which accounted for 2.1 per cent of the total flow. Out of this, NRIs were 5.19 lakhs, while foreigners were 4.05 lakhs. The growth story of Gujarat Tourism began from 2006 onward and hence there is tremendous scope for tapping the potential of inbound tourism.

QHow are you promoting yourself abroad?



Jenu Devan
Managing Director and Commissioner of
Tourism, Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Limited

We get maximum traffic from Maharashtra, MP and Rajasthan. Internationally, UK tops the list followed by USA. We would like to receive more traffic from the SE Asian markets

Gujarat Tourism for the past few years has been regularly participating in mega tourism fairs of WTM London and ITB Berlin and we plan

mega festivals – Navratri in September/October and the Rann Utsav in December/January through Fam trips. Inbound traffic sees its peak in Gujarat between September and February.

QHow big is your domestic market?

About 72.3 per cent of the total flow of tourists this year originated from within Gujarat. The share of other states was 25.6 per cent. In the current year, 114.76 lakh tourists from other states visited Gujarat. Maharashtra continues to top the list (37.2 per cent of other states), followed by Rajasthan (19.4 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (15.6 per cent), and Uttar Pradesh/Bihar (12.9 per cent). Business purpose tops the list followed by religion. Leisure and other purpose follow.

QWhat are your source markets?

We see the entire India as our source market. However,



QWhat products are you promoting in the market currently?

Currently, we are promoting our various destinations through festivals of Navratri followed by Rann Utsav and International Kite Festival. We have recently started Seema Darshan, which is another great example of Border Tourism in India. Infrastructure provided

at the site includes audio-visual room, retreat ceremony area, amphitheatre, VIP lounge, food stalls, public toilets, selfie zone and viewing tower. Special attractions include retreat ceremony by the Border Security Forces (BSF), fusion band performance, camel show and bird watching, Exhibition of weapons, photo gallery and a film on BSF.

The state's Tourism Policy 2015-2020 has become a tremendous success. Till date there are 220 applications for various tourism projects like hotels, resorts, amusement parks, etc worth ₹9,000 crore. So in the next few years Gujarat is poised to have a fantastic tourism infrastructure for both the inbound and domestic tourists.



to participate in these shows this financial year too. We reach out to the inbound/domestic agents essentially during two of our

we get maximum traffic from our neighbouring states of Maharashtra, MP and Rajasthan. Internationally, UK tops the list followed by USA. We would like to receive more traffic from the South East Asian markets as they are short-haul destinations for India.

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IndiGo adds Blr-Kochi flights

In order to cater to the increased demand for the festival of Onam, IndiGo has introduced additional flights between Bengaluru and Kochi from September 3-10, 2017.



TT BUREAU

On the occasion of Onam festival, IndiGo has launched two additional flights between Bengaluru and Kochi from September 03-10, 2017, with prices starting from ₹1498. The new connection would not only aid those travelling for the festival, but also corporate and leisure passengers who wish to travel to these southern markets.

The new flight 6E-708 would depart from Bengaluru at 21:05 hours and would reach Kochi at 22:10 hours. The return flight from Kochi 6E-709 would leave at 22:40 hours and would arrive in Bengaluru at 23:50 hours.



Sanjay Kumar
Chief Commercial Officer
IndiGo

It's our joy and privilege to share the festive spirit with our passengers who fly with us each day

tive spirit with our passengers who fly with us each day. On the occasion of Onam, we are pleased to announce two additional flights to and from Bengaluru and Kochi starting September 03. It is our constant endeavour to provide more flexibility of choice for our customers as IndiGo continues to offer them on time, hassle free and an affordable flying experience."

In addition to that, IndiGo recently inducted two A320Neos taking the total count of aircraft to 138, to speed up the process.

Timing Update

IndiGo's new flight 6E-708 would depart from Bengaluru at 21:05 hours and would reach Kochi at 22:10 hours.

The return flight from Kochi 6E-709 would leave at 22:40 hours and would arrive in Bengaluru at 23:50 hours.

Talking about the new flight schedule, **Sanjay Kumar**, Chief Commercial Officer, IndiGo said, "It's our joy and privilege to share the fes-



Flagging off wedding tours

Flag Travel Services plans to tap the booming wedding industry by soon launching additional services for destinations weddings.



TT BUREAU

Having been in the tourism business for almost two decades, Flag Travel Services has been facilitating travel services primarily for inbound travellers along with selective groups for outbound travel. They work mainly with MNCs and corporates and extend their services to provide visas, flight bookings and cruise holidays, to name a few.

Speaking about the list of destinations the travel division Flag Holidays caters to, **Neerja Arora**, Director, Flag Holidays informs, "Our inbound groups from New Zealand, Australia, the US and Canada have been strongest since we specialise in these destinations. The numbers are encouraging and we expect the trend to continue."

Overall, the inbound season fared well this year, **Vinay Kumar Arora**, Managing Director, Flag Travel Services states, with some amount of drawback faced



Neerja Arora
Director
Flag Holidays

as a result of demonetisation and GST. "The tourists were quite affected when demonetisation was put in place and they faced a lot of inconvenience. However, these disruptions did not impact us too much when it comes to bookings and we sailed through the season," he clarifies.

In terms of outbound destinations, the group is aggressively promoting the Philippines and other popular South East Asian destinations like Bali while the UK and France have always seen a strong demand, he adds. "This year, we have seen a



Vinay Kumar Arora
Managing Director
Flag Travel Services

rise of destinations in East Europe. Luxury holidays for families is our forte and these destinations have made very good options among the Indian market."

Apart from families, the group targets the honeymooners too and with the approaching wedding season, the Flag Travels is gearing up for the coming months. He elaborates, "Around February is when most of the honeymooners travel since the wedding season winds up during mid-Jan. We are keen to tap the destination weddings market and will soon add related services."

Foresee Aviation's new look

With new branding and marketing plans in place, Foresee Aviation is looking at charting a new growth path, says **Santosh Kumar Sharma**, Director, Foresee Aviation.



TT BUREAU

Foresee Aviation has made some major changes in its sales and marketing strategies in 2017. Santosh Kumar Sharma elaborates, "We have changed our logo so that it portrays a more energetic and aggressive look. We are already in talks with few operators in South India where the number of private aircraft is less, to get into a contract for exclusive marketing. In Delhi, apart from our existing fleet of aircraft, we have also added Learjet 60XR, Learjet 45XR and 2 more Super King Air B200s. We are going to capture the corporate fliers based out of Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Chennai apart from reaching some big names in cities like Cochin, Vijaywada, Salem, etc. Our Mumbai office is fully operational now with Sales & Marketing team in place. We have also started our USA and Malaysia office."

In terms of growth, Sharma says that the last one year has been quite interesting for



Santosh Kumar Sharma
Director
Foresee Aviation

Our Mumbai office is fully operational now with Sales & Marketing team in place. We have also started our USA and Malaysia offices

them. "There was a slight dip in both corporate as well as leisure charter business due to global economy slowdown as well as demonetisation in India. During the last six months, though we had a pretty good number of queries but the percentage of

conversion was proportionately less," he informs.

However, with new offers and packages, they know how to deal with both corporate and leisure clients. "We have an impressive list of corporate clients across India and some of the other parts of the world. As a part of our effort to tap more numbers of companies to fly, we have started offering discounts on the number of hours they fly with us. Also, we have been updating all our clients on the aircraft availability at various cities," he reveals.

In terms of dealing with the travel trade, he says, "Foresee Aviation devise its own packages based on private aircraft and helicopters. These packages are being shared with the travel agencies and tour operators during a presentation, wherein, our focus is to primarily educate our travel partners on the logistics and overall operations of the aircraft charter perspective of the packages."

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Look East with JTI Group

JTI Group offers a range of products – from experiential tours, to staying in a jungle lodge and even river and canal cruises on two of the mightiest rivers of India.



TT BUREAU

Offering travel services across East and North East India for the last 27 years, JTI Group consists of Jungle Travels India, which operates wildlife and birding tours in eastern India; Eastern Odyssey, which provides immersive cultural experiences in the region; and Assam Bengal Navigation, which currently operates three cruise ships offering bespoke river cruises on two of the mightiest rivers of India - the Ganges and the Brahmaputra.

It also has a boutique property located in the periphery of Kaziranga National Park – the Diphlu River Lodge. Speaking about its major source markets, **Nirmalya Choudhury**, Executive Director (Operations), JTI Group, says, "Percentage-wise, a majority of our clients are foreign tourists. We work with a number of tour operators in the UK and Europe." The company's main markets in Europe are Germany, Italy and France.



Nirmalya Choudhury
Executive Director (Operations)
JTI Group

We are also building a fourth ship which will be launched in October 2018 and will offer luxury cruises on the Brahmaputra

However, the domestic market is also growing with rising interest to explore the East and North East Indian destinations. Its clientele comprises travellers interested in immersive cultural experiences, who are interested in learning about the age-old traditions and an-

cient practices of the numerous North Eastern tribes as well as wildlife and birding enthusiasts.

"We would like to showcase our products in cities like Mumbai, Hyderabad, Pune, Bengaluru, Chennai and Delhi more often as we receive an increasing number of travellers from these cities. Our two ships offer fixed-departure luxury river cruises on the largest stretch of Ganges, from Kolkata to Varanasi. Our third ship is operating fixed departure for luxury river cruises on the Brahmaputra. We are also building a fourth ship which will be launched in October 2018 and will offer luxury cruises on the Brahmaputra," Choudhury adds.

Eastern Odyssey, a JTI Group company, has also launched MV Rudra Singha, an air-conditioned houseboat for exclusive river cruises on the Brahmaputra. It can be booked for a honeymoon cruise from two to seven nights or for half or a full day of exploration by groups of up to 10 people.

Foraying into online space

Radisson Blu Hotel Greater Noida plans to up their digital presence and targets a 10 per cent growth by the end of this financial year.



TT BUREAU

Radisson Blu Hotel Greater Noida lies in close proximity to the India Expo Mart and the Buddh International Circuit, making it a suitable choice for business and leisure travellers alike. The 175-key hotel is fully equipped with the latest amenities including a spa, an outdoor pool, free high-speed Wi-Fi and a fitness centre, among others, to provide an all-inclusive experience to the guests.

The hotel also caters to the business and corporate sector thanks to the availability of a well-equipped business centre along with the capacity to accommodate up to 550 attendees for larger events.

The hotel's general manager, **Munish Bhatia** reveals that the hotel has witnessed promising growth during the first few months and explains, "We observed a 15 per cent growth in our ADR as compared to the same duration last year. The hotel is entering into peak season and we are hopeful about the prospects."

With the digital wave sweeping in, achieving a solid online presence is one of the aspects the hotel is working on to widen their reach even further. Bhatia comments that their online business has seen considerable growth and adds, "The hotel has seen a growth in its online business by 5 per cent as compared to the previous year. Encouraged by this positive result, we are currently working on achieving strong visibility on social media and digital platforms and target a 10 per cent increase by the financial year end."



Munish Bhatia
General Manager
Radisson Blu Hotel Greater Noida

We are currently working on achieving strong visibility on social media and digital platforms and target a 10 per cent increase by the financial year end

Bhatia states that their long-term plan focuses on growth not only for the property but the city as well. "Our emphasis will be to develop Greater Noida as a destination rather than looking at us as a hotel individually," he explains.



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up market guest. The resort comprises of 25 Swiss luxury cottage tents & 20 deluxe tents with attached bathrooms, a veranda with personal recliner to enjoy the spectacular view & unmatched luxuries, interiors to make your stay a memorable one. The resort has recently

introduced its Ultra Luxury line of tents which are very well appointed and offer an even higher level of luxury and comfort. Resort also has a swimming pool, a fish pond, a Machaan & a jogging track among the other facilities. The in-house restaurant can seat



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On the way to conservation

Founder-owner of Infinity Resorts and Chairman, Conservation Corporation of India, **Dilip D. Khatau**, believes that conservation and sustainability is the way forward.



TT BUREAU

Dilip D. Khatau, who founded The Corbett Foundation (TCF), opened the first wildlife resort in 1991, aided by his wife **Rina Khatau**. Infinity Resorts eventually expanded its operations to other important wildlife areas such as the Rann of Kutch, Bandhavgarh, Kanha and Kaziranga Tiger Reserves.

Sustainability and eco-tourism are their biggest priorities, claims Khatau. "I am proud to say that all our resort managers and staff are employed from the local villages and towns nearby. Till date, we have trained more than 500 staff and many of them have worked with us for more than 20 years. We organise continuous profes-



Dilip D. Khatau
Founder-owner, Infinity Resorts
East India Travel Award winner

sional training programmes to upgrade their skills. I am pleased that we had been awarded the East India Travel Award for the Best Eco-friendly Resort for our Infinity Resorts Kaziranga and I was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award for Wildlife Conservation. Our vision is to be a compassionate and passionate company, delivering the promise that wildlife tourism can bring positive changes in the way we preserve our natural heritage."

While there are many wildlife resorts in the country, Khatau claims that they stand apart because of their focus on conservation. "This is our USP at all our resorts as TCF has a division operating hand-in-hand with them. There must be a delicate way of balancing the peaceful co-existence between human beings and wildlife and the active involvement of these communities as stakeholders is the only way to secure the future of both."

Explaining the kind of initiatives TCF has taken, he informs, "The Foundation reaches out to over 400 villages and an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 villagers living around the tiger reserves of Corbett, Bandhavgarh, Kanha, Kaziranga, Pench and Pakke, the critical wildlife corridors of Central India and the Terai region annually. The villagers in various Talukas in the Rann of Kutch have also benefited from our various programmes. TCF and Infinity Resorts form the backbone of our conservation efforts in these locations."



Taste Kerala at Le Meridien

Le Meridien Kochi is a unique combination of a business hotel and a resort. Little wonder then that the hotels is a favourite among corporate and leisure travellers.



TT BUREAU

Offering a unique proposition to not just MICE groups but also FITs as well as families, Le Meridien Kochi caters to a wide range of travellers. It not only boasts of a perfect venue for MICE with its convention centre but also destination weddings as well as travellers look to relax and indulge in some wellness activities – all this, with the Kerala backwaters serving as its backdrop.

Speaking about the segments that the resort attracts, **Nilay Saran**, Director, Sales & Marketing, Le Meridien Kochi, says, "We are popular with not just the domestic market but also inbound tourists. While our traditional markets have slowed down a bit right now, we are seeing a surge in tourists from the GCC, specially Saudi Arabia and Qatar." What attracts them, he adds, is the beautiful Kerala monsoons as well as the resort's ayurvedic wellness centre. Saran elaborates, "Visitors from the GCC frequent Kerala during the



Nilay Saran
Director
Sales & Marketing, Le Meridien Kochi

monsoon from June to September. It coincides with their Ramadan holiday and they come to enjoy the rains and nature here. The resort is spread over 18 acres, where almost 60 per cent of the land is open space with greenery. This is hard to find these days." The hotel will also be attending ATM Dubai as they get a sizeable amount of travellers from the GCC.

The resort also creates customised packages for medical tourists based on the doctor's recommendation. It offers yoga in the amphitheatre, also, on the menu are river and canal cruises on boats owned by

the property. "This is one property that gives guests a flavor of the entire Kerala. Another focus area is promoting the resort as a wedding destination. Most of the weddings that have taken place in this hotel are from outside Kerala. It has picked up big time and we have seen almost a 25 per cent increase in destination weddings at our hotel in 2016-17 and we hope to see this grow. The design of the hotel also supports weddings since it has beautiful open spaces, and a good number of rooms and suites," Saran adds.

The 223-key resort includes 10 suites and is located just 5 km from Fort Kochi and close to Jew Town. This gives it an edge as far as FITs and leisure segments are concerned. Le Meridien Kochi is now looking at creating experiential products like offering cooking classes for Kerala cuisine. "Gujarat, Mumbai and Delhi remain our top three domestic markets. But Bengaluru is now coming up as a weekend market due to its proximity," Saran adds.




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Weddings rule the roost for Suryaa

Following the liquor ban jolt, The Suryaa New Delhi resorted to a change in plan and is now banking on its Food & Beverage offerings and the wedding segment. The property is making sure they remain ahead of competition.



TT BUREAU

Having suffered a major jolt due to the liquor ban, **Dhananjay Kumar**, General Manager, The Suryaa New Delhi, says, "We took this as a learning and started looking at Muslim and Jain weddings. We, at The Suryaa, keep upgrading our guest facilities. We have recently revamped our public areas, banquet

and conferencing facilities, which allows us to focus in attracting MICE business. We are going to add live entertainment at 'Sampan' our rooftop specialty restaurant, and Atrium Bar, which will be a good value addition for the guests who want to unwind after work hours and during their family outings. We have also introduced new products at our salon and spa."

With increased competition in the capital, the property makes sure that they remain ahead in their game. "In terms of F&B, we have strong guest feedback system in place, which allows us to get instant guest feedback regarding their likes and dislikes and keep customising our menus. On the other hand, in terms of rooms and banqueting, we ensure our

product is up to date and in line with competing hotels. However, our focus is on personalised service and guests' preferences and flexibility. We have also introduced concierge services for all guests who come in groups," informs Kumar.

He elaborates, "We focus on online strategies and run various promotions and

attractive deals in F&B outlets, spa and salon, as well as rooms."

He added that in terms of clientele, he says, "Being close to hospitals like Fortis, AIIMS, and Apollo, we also get quite a few big conferences. As far as leisure business is concerned, we are working very closely with various FTO's



Dhananjay Kumar
General Manager
The Suryaa New Delhi

We took this as a learning and started looking at Muslim and Jain weddings. We at The Suryaa, keep upgrading our guest facilities

from Spain, Italy, UK, Far East, Iran, Latin America, Australia and all major countries," said Kumar

Other than that, they also participate in travel trade shows and have tied up tour operators. "We get good mix of business throughout the year. We are part of their brochure programme to get maximum visibility in the foreign market. We go forward to get FTOs on Fam trips and give them real time experience by making them stay with us."

Coming soon

- ➔ The hotel has recently revamped its public areas, banquet and conferencing facilities, to focus on attracting MICE business.
- ➔ They will also add live entertainment at 'Sampan' (rooftop specialty restaurant) and Atrium Bar.
- ➔ The Suryaa has also introduced new products at their salon and spa

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Small steps in 50+ travel

Boutique travel company 'Bucket My List' empowers travellers aged 50+ with choices and independence by creating solutions to make their holidays enjoyable.



TT BUREAU

A boutique travel company that caters to mature travellers, especially the growing segment of the young-at-heart 50+ age group, Bucket My List is consistently growing. Speaking about the company's USPs, **Shivali Bhargava**, Founder, Bucket My List, says, "We strive to provide a holiday experience with activities and adventures suitable for senior travellers by making these trips personalised, experiential and participative. Tailor-made journeys and unmatched services include places which we ourselves have experienced and believe to be truly unique. This ensures that our customers

are in safe hands with someone who knows the terrain well, speaks the local language, and is aware of their cultural and religious values."

The company treads the off-beaten path and emphasises on extreme localisation. Its growth strategy involves

We will soon be adding more destinations, namely Latin America and Oceania



Shivali Bhargava
Founder
Bucket My List

be adding more destinations over time, namely Latin America and Oceania. We don't believe in offering cookie-cutter holidays," she adds.

The company offers customised tours and experiences as well as small group tours (private as well as escorted). Over time, Bhargava plans to tie up with like-minded partners to run their own travel geography (South American expert, wildlife expert, wine tours specialist, etc.) along with focusing on inbound travel into India, which is a huge market as well. The tours to South Africa and Spain are fairly popular among its clients.

focusing on certain geographies to start with, namely Africa and Europe along with some exotic domestic destinations such as Andamans, Kerala and the North East. "We have an extremely high percentage of repeat clientele and will soon



3 P's of Parfait Hospitality

Parfait Hospitality plans to undertake management of new properties in Shimla and Uttarakhand in 2017. The company saw marginal growth in inbound tourism.



TT BUREAU

Parfait Hospitality specialises in hotel management, enlargement, marketing and branding and is known for profitability, perfection and persistence, believes **Raman Tuli**, Managing Director, Parfait Hospitality. "We provide consistent, economical and comfortable hospitality experience at our hotels. The company operates on three principles, i.e. profitability for owners; perfection in delivering a delightful stay and persistence in sales and marketing." Tuli informs that the company currently operates seven hotels globally and has properties currently contracted and under development. Parfait Hospitality plans to add new properties in Shimla and Uttarakhand.

According to Tuli, the business was very slow in the first three months of 2017 but picked up from April onwards and has been so to date. He points out that the company grew



Raman Tuli
Managing Director
Parfait Hospitality

The company operates on three principles, i.e. profitability for owners; perfection in delivering a delightful stay and persistence in sales and marketing

by 5-7 per cent in the last three months as compared to the same period last year. He says, "International guests at our hotels this

year were far and few and were mostly domestic from states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh."

Commenting on the immediate impact on business due to GST, Tuli laments, "Our partner hotels lost business as there was no clarity on GST and the dilemma on what tax is to be put on what service was a challenge. The industry saw a dip during the implementation of GST. However, the upcoming months of October seem to be promising for inbound tourism, though overall I feel this has been a very slow year for tourism." Parfait Hospitality plans to resort to digital marketing for promotion of its products. "We will try to reach out to the customers to grow business. At the same time we will ensure that the travel trade partners are updated about the products and keep them informed about the latest happenings," he adds.



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- **Rice** - The Oriental restaurant serving Far East Oriental cuisine
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- **Zeppelin** - The contemporary lounge bar
- **Atrium** - The pastry and confectionary store

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Indulge in luxury @The Bungalows

Leisure Hotels' latest venture, The Bungalows, has been recently launched with an aim to be a convenient getaway for family and friends. The Bungalows will offer a luxurious and personalised holiday to its guests.



TT BUREAU

Leisure Group in partnership with the Taj Group opened The Gateway Resort, Corbett National Park last year to rave reviews from the trade and customers alike. The property is setting the benchmark for luxury in the state wildlife tourism, informs **Vibhas Prasad**, Director, Leisure Hotels. Commenting on the latest venture, The

Bungalows, Prasad says, "With technology advancements shaping our changing lifestyles, we felt that the time was ripe to introduce a novel and unique product offering to our loyal customers. Nowadays, most of us are looking for quick getaways for short and long breaks and at locations which are convenient, provide great value for money but come with the backing of a fully serviced hotel chain

so that you know what to expect." He further adds that the company is currently talking to investors and operators alike to monetise other projects of the Group in Uttarakhand for which the company already has land banks.

Leisure Hotels is a dominant player in Uttarakhand's tourism and hospitality sector with its portfolio of resorts and luxury camps that incor-

porate more than 20 properties, offering more than 600 rooms in the leisure and spiritual segment. The individual resorts and camps typically offer between 20-40 rooms, ensuring that all guests get very warm and personalised services.

The Group has a lead in the state due to its history and rich experience in hospitality for over 26

years, feels Prasad. He points out, "Our guests also have the option of using one or more properties in their trip, creating a circuit. We work with the travel trade as a single point of contact for all their travel requirements across the state," adds Prasad. He elaborates that the company works with more than 10,000 agents across the world. "We propose to furnish the travel partners

with updated property details and dynamic pricing (quite similar to the online channels) through an extranet in the next couple of months. Our large sales team is constantly visiting their offices to brief them about new properties and we invite them for Fam trips across the group. We also participate in exhibitions and also offer promotional advertisements and packages



Vibhas Prasad
Director
Leisure Hotels

Our large sales team is constantly visiting their offices to brief them about new properties and we invite them for Fam trips across the group

to boost business through the offline travel trade," says Prasad.

In terms of marketing and promotional activities, the company plans to stick to digital medium. The nucleus of the brand continues to remain the website which is mobile optimised with a cutting-edge booking engine, points out Prasad. "We recently started search engine marketing through PPC, re-targeting on Facebook and Google. Online display ads are another feature that we are evaluating in addition to the usual mode of marketing like print campaigns and BTL (Hoardings)," he adds.



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Manipur

The Land of Jewels

Seek refuge in the quaint state of Manipur and explore nature's bounties, ancient remains of an erstwhile kingdom, in addition to innumerable festivals that reflect the rich culture of the region.



Manipur is strategically located in the Northeastern corner of India bordering Myanmar. Nestled at the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas, the state is considered the Gateway to South-East Asia. The serene beauty of the state, that Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru once described as the 'Land of Jewels', leaves every traveller spellbound. Least touched and least discovered, the state is a promising tourist destination for adventure and nature lovers alike.

TOP THINGS TO DO:

Loktak Lake and Keibul Lamjao

For any visitor, the principal attraction of the state is the Loktak Lake in Bishnupur District. It is a beautiful stretch

of water resembling a miniature inland sea. A day spent at Loktak Lake is a lifetime of memories. Visitors can catch a bird's eye view of the lake from Send-

heart of Imphal city unfolds the proud history of the erstwhile Asiatic Kingdom dating back to 33 AD. The British took over in 1891 and buried their influence on architecture. It is the quintessential symbol of the state's culture and heritage.

Tamenglong also offer a challenge to the intrepid adventurous traveller willing to explore the unexplored.

Shree Govindajee Temple

Shree Govindajee Temple is another historic centre of the Vaishnavites in Manipur. It is a twin-domed temple which attracts large number of devotees who participate in various devotional activities. Tourists are welcomed to come and



Govindaji Temple at Kangla



Loktak lake, Bishnupur District – Pic by Pintu Oinam

of water resembling a miniature inland sea. A day spent at Loktak Lake is a lifetime of memories. Visitors can catch a bird's eye view of the lake from Send-

Today, Kangla is developed into a unique archeological and heritage park. The Imphal Market, which is counted as one of the largest women-only



Pakhangba Temple, Kangla, Imphal - Pic by Thou Mangang



A traditional dance of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo tribe



Kangla Museum

ra. Fishermen living in the floating islands called Phumdis, in floating huts known as Phumsangs, are unique sights of this lake. A part of the lake hosts the Keibul Lamjao National Park, which is home to the Brow Antlered Deer – Sangai, only found in Manipur.

markets in Asia, is a stone's throw away from the Western Gate of Kangla.

Escape to the green hills

Head to Ukhrul district and enjoy the company of the locals—the brave and colourful Tangkhul tribe. It is situated 40 miles away from the Imphal City and is famous for its Shirui Lily – a species of lily found nowhere else in the world other than the Shirui Hill range. The Dzuko track in Senapati and the Bunning track in



Khangkhui Cave, Ukhrul

join in the daily festivities at the historic Govindajee temple and other temples in and around Imphal city.

Celebrate festivals with the locals

Manipur is a land of festivals and almost every month the people of Manipur get together to celebrate various festivals, which reflects the state's rich culture, tradition and religious practices. Yaoshang, Gaan Ngai, Cheiraoba, Lai-Haraoba, Kang, Heikru Hidongba, Kut and Lui Ngaini are just some of the festivals



Tangkhul Piper



Kanglasa



Shirui Hill and its Lilies- Pic by Priyojit Akoijam

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Fortune Park in Lucknow

Fortune Park BBD Lucknow's entry marks the group's 46th property in India. With this, the group is all set to raise the bar for hospitality in the City of Nawabs.



TT BUREAU

Conveniently located on Rana Pratap Marg, in close proximity to Hazratganj - the iconic commercial city centre, Fortune Park BBD Lucknow offers a selection of 63 rooms, including 54 standard rooms, six Fortune club rooms and three suites. The hotel's prime position also makes it a preferred choice for both business and leisure travellers.

Speaking on the development, **Suresh Kumar**, Managing Director, Fortune Park Hotels said, "We are delighted to welcome this beautiful hotel to our expanding portfolio of Fortune Hotels. M/s Viraj Constructions' investment in this property, coupled with our brand's signature amenities, well-appointed rooms that are tastefully designed, excellent cuisine and efficient service, will lead to an exceptional guest experience. The addition of this hotel expands the brand's presence in the Art and Smart Cities of India. Fortune, member ITC's hotel



Suresh Kumar
Managing Director
Fortune Park Hotels

The addition of this hotel expands the brand's presence in the Art and Smart Cities of India

group, is known for providing contemporary accommodation and great value for business and leisure travellers."

The hotel boasts of state-of-the-art facilities with amenities, including 24-hour room service, satellite LED TV, hi-

speed Wi-Fi internet connectivity and many more on offer. Fitness enthusiasts can head to the gymnasium or take a dip in the pool while food lovers can head to the Earthen Oven and enjoy a sumptuous meal of North Indian and hand-picked Awadhi specialties. Orchid is the property's all-day dining restaurant featuring a delightful selection of Indian, Oriental and Continental delicacies in addition to Fortune Deli that serves some of the best confectionery items. One can head to Neptune Bar & Lounge for a variety of cocktails and canapés. The conference and banquet facilities at the hotel have the capacity to accommodate up to 450 guests and is suitable to host some big events and gatherings.

Fortune Park Hotels is a wholly-owned subsidiary of ITC Ltd. and is India's fastest growing chain of first-class, full-service business hotels, with 61 signed alliances and 4500 rooms, across 52 cities in the country.

At home with homestays

Hotel Park Ocean clocked 75 per cent occupancy during the first half of 2017 and is expecting to increase its share of international guests to 65 per cent by the end of 2017.



TT BUREAU

In the first half of 2017, Hotel Park Ocean managed to grab a larger share of the market and clocked 75 per cent occupancy, informs **Sandeep Jain**, Managing Director, Hotel Park Ocean. According to him, the MICE segment played a major role in helping the hotel drive its revenue. International guests contributed 60 per cent of this occupancy, largely from the Far East, which is also the largest source market for the hotel. Jain says, "We received guests from Korea, Japan, China and Hong Kong. Looking at the season time from October onwards and the current business on books, we are expecting an increase of 5 per cent. Thus we are targeting 65 per cent foreign guests at our hotel in 2017."

In order to promote the hotel, the company will be participating in all travel trade shows, both at national and international platforms. The company is also very active



Sandeep Jain
Managing Director
Hotel Park Ocean

We received guests from Korea, Japan, China, and Hong Kong. We are targeting 65 % foreign guests at our hotel in 2017

on all media platforms and will also be conducting familiarisation trips and social engagement activities with its business partners, points out Jain. "With the rapid growth of experiential travel, trends like homestays and village stays would not only extend the

hospitality market and include lesser-known destinations, but also drive volume growth. These alternate accommodations will also create employment for local communities thus making tourism sustainable," adds Jain.

Commenting on the impact of GST, Jain feels that the high taxes under GST will not make India competitive as an inbound tourist destination and foreign tourists will skip the country as a destination. "Currently, MICE clients are looking for alternate destinations such as Thailand, Malaysia and Hong Kong," says Jain.

Fact File

- The hotel receives guests from Korea, Japan, China and Hong Kong
- From October onwards and the current business on books, they are expecting an increase of 5 per cent and targeting 65 per cent foreign guests at the hotel in 2017

Driving women power

Radisson Blu Hotel New Delhi Dwarka along with its key partners hosted its first-ever Women's Car Rally 2017 with over 150 participants and more than 300 guests.



TT BUREAU

In a bid to value the contribution of women at every step, Radisson Blu Hotel New Delhi Dwarka hosted a one-of-a-kind car rally in which over 150 women drivers geared up to flaunt their driving skills. The rally kick-started from Radisson Blu Hotel Dwarka where all the key partners and sponsors flagged off the race. **Mohammed Shoeb**, General Manager, Radisson Blu Hotel Dwarka flagged off the race along with **Gaurav Aggarwal**, **Ankita Aggarwal**, Owners, Radisson Blu Hotel Dwarka, **Gaurav Mehta**, Director of Sales & Marketing, Radisson Blu Hotel Dwarka, **Ramashanker Pandey**, Managing Director, Hella



Mohammed Shoeb
General Manager, Radisson Blu Hotel Dwarka, India Travel Award winner

Lights and **O.P. Khanduja**, Business Head, DS Spiceco.

The route of the rally was spread in and around Dwarka and covered around 37 km. Women drivers, along with their navigators, drove all over and came back to the hotel by 5:30 pm.

The participants along with their partners were then regaled with comedy sessions, music and dance performances and

they were made to participate in games and win a host of prizes and gift hampers.

The fun-filled day came to a close with the announcement of the winners of the rally and a prize distribution ceremony in which the winners took home not just trophies but also salon and jewellery vouchers.

The evening was graced and inaugurated by celebrity chef Kunal Kapur along with the hotel's key partners who were present at the time of flag off. The participants were also treated to mouthwatering delicacies at Radisson Blu Hotel Dwarka's extravagant multi-cuisine buffet dinner, specially crafted by chef Gaurav Mathur, who has very recently joined the property as executive chef.

In addition, the hotel also felicitated six eminent women with excellence awards for their selfless and extraordinary contribution in their respective fields.

Kochi popular with inbound

With as many international arrivals as domestic, Kochi has become an important stop for the inbound market, and Crowne Plaza Kochi is reaping the benefits.



TT BUREAU

With 269 rooms and suites on offer, Crowne Plaza Kochi can serve as an ideal hotel for not just the leisure tourists but also corporate groups. According to **Shuvendu Banerjee**, General Manager, Crowne Plaza Kochi, the hotel started the year on a strong note with almost 52 per cent of its total guests from outside India. "We are expecting an inbound guest percentage of around 60 per cent for the full year. The largest source market for us in the international sector would be the Middle East, closely followed by USA and the UK," he reveals.

However, it wasn't all smooth sailing. Banerjee reminisces, "It was going very well till the order of bar closure. We struggled through the few months without a bar and we tried to make do with what we had, playing to our other strengths like outdoor catering and new business acquisition. Thankfully, now we have the bar license and we are back on track. Overall



Shuvendu Banerjee
India Travel Award winner and General Manager, Crowne Plaza Kochi

as of now we are doing better than last year."

The award-winning business hotel, he says, still needs to work on that pull factor that Europe or South East Asia commands when it comes to inbound tourism. "This can be attributed to an extent to the negative publicity we have generated in media. Law and order incidents, safety of women, communal and political unrest all making global headlines will not help to enhance our image as a tourist destination. Curbing of such undesirable elements and a focused marketing strategy from the apex could do a lot of good," Banerjee says.

The domestic market is not too far behind. New Delhi and Mumbai are its largest feeder markets, but it is not limited to them. "We are also the favourite hotel for grand destination weddings. With amenities concurring to global standards, serene backwater setting and elite F&B offerings we are all set and full of optimism for the next year. Our outdoor catering capabilities and retailing of hampers are finding good foothold in the market which we intend to expand much further," Banerjee claims.

The presence of global brands like IHG plays a crucial role in developing a destination. According to Banerjee, it puts the place on the map for international customers. "Secondly, to the customer the presence of a preferred hotel chain means that no matter where it is they will have access to the facilities that the brand promises, from the customer point of view it is very reassuring and it thus increases the credibility of the place as a tourist destination as no major brands would operate at an insignificant location," he adds.





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Mercure debuts in Dwarka

The launch of AccorHotels' 99-room Mercure Dwarka is evident of how important the Gujarat market is for the hotel giant.



Located in the Devbhumii Dwarka district of Gujarat, Mercure Dwarka is only a short drive from the Dwarkadhish temple, popularly known as Jagat Mandir. Conveniently located from the railway station, Porbandar Airport and a little over two hours from the Jamnagar Airport, the property is just a stone's throw away from Nageshwar Temple, Gopi Talav Theertham, Rukmani Devi Temple and Hanuman Mandir. This will be AccorHotels' fourth property in Gujarat.

"The opening of Mercure Dwarka marks another milestone for AccorHotels' expansion and growing brand presence as the 49th hotel in the region. Gujarat is an important market for us as it enjoys the unique positioning of being a business hub with a rich cultural heritage. AccorHotels is the first international hotel group



Jean-Michel Cassé
Chief Operating Officer
India & South Asia, AccorHotels

Gujarat is an important market for us as it enjoys the unique positioning of being a business hub with a rich cultural heritage

to operate in the holy city of Dwarka," said **Jean-Michel Cassé**, Chief Operating Officer, India & South Asia, AccorHotels

The 99 guest rooms include one suite as well and

offers the best in comfort, state-of-the-art amenities, great design and interiors that are inspired by Lord Krishna's life. The hotel has a fitness centre and an all-day dining restaurant 'Makhan'. For small meetings and events, the hotel features a modern meeting room that can accommodate up to 40 guests.

For Aadil Muscatwala and Rishabh Gupta, Co-founders & Directors of Blue Rock Hospitality Ventures, Mercure Dwarka is the first hotel of Blue Rock's portfolio and marks a commitment to develop branded upper mid-scale hotels across the country.

Vikas Kulshreshtha, General Manager, Mercure Dwarka, said, "We are excited and proud to introduce the Mercure brand to Dwarka. The property is designed in a contemporary and modern style, yet blends perfectly with the local heritage."

Clarks Inn leads the way

Boasting of 80 properties in its portfolio in just over 11 years, Clarks Inn Hotels has certainly leveraged the growth potential that Indian market offers.



Clarks Inn Hotels' motto 'Inns that care' inspires them to attract like-minded independent hotel owners, developers and potential investors. **S. N. Srivastava**, President & Co-founder, Clarks Inn Group of Hotels, is at the helm of this growth story and is positive of further expansion. He informed that the company signed and opened a total of 21 properties, including eight operational, in 2015. This robust growth continued in 2016 as well with the total signed and operational once again matching the 2015 figure of 21 but surpassing the operational numbers that was 12 new hotels last year.

The company signed up several hotels last year, including properties in Bhagalkot, Buxor, Hampi, Mysuru, Patna, Shimoga, Sultanpur, Balan, Kanpur, Ara, Faizabad, Katra, Bijapur, Noida, Vasundhara, Kurloon, Greater Noida, Ujjain, Vrindavan and two in Shirdi. Of these, 12 properties in Alwar, Bhagalkot, De-



S. N. Srivastava
President & Co-founder
Clarks Inn Group of Hotels

Well-established hotel companies are clearly hesitant in entering uncharted territories

hradun, Gangtok, Gwalior, Buxor, Musoorie, Mysuru, Panchkula, Shimoga, Sultapura and Ujjain have already commenced operations.

"Today, the company has emerged as the leading one amongst branded hotels in markets like Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Delhi NCR, Himachal Pradesh and the

list is growing," claimed Srivastava. What's unique is that the company has opened new markets all-across India where not many others have not ventured. "While well-established hotel companies are clearly hesitant in running hotels in uncharted territories and lesser known, far-flung areas and towns, Clarks Inn has clearly shown courage in opening many new destinations like Gadag (Karnataka), Deogarh (Jharkhand), Ara, Buxor (Bihar) and many other such markets, which was later followed by older and well-established companies," shares Srivastava.

The brand portfolio includes five distinguished standalone brands namely Clarks Inn, Clarks Inn Suites, Clarks Exotica, Clarks Residences and Clarks Holidays. The company has also diversified into long stay accommodation with Clarks Residences and most recently in vacation ownership with Clarks Holidays.

Lords enters Bengaluru

Lords Hotels & Resorts will open its 27th property in September in Bengaluru, followed by Gujarat and Nepal, reveals General Manager-Sales **Mayuri Ghosh**.



Known as a true value hotel chain that offers the right mix of budget and luxury, Lords Hotels & Resorts has a strong presence in the North and the West, claims Mayuri Ghosh. "The group has recently forayed into South India and internationally in Nepal by adding new properties. We will be commencing operations of our 27th property in September 2017. Located on Mysuru Road, Bengaluru the new 53-room property would be branded under Lords Eco Inn.

"Apart from this we are in line for completion of a property located in Morbi, Gujarat besides three properties in



Mayuri Ghosh
General Manager-Sales
Lords Hotels & Resorts

Nepal located in Birgunj, Bhaktapur and Budhanilkantha. Apart from adding new properties we have been working towards managing leisure properties as the monsoon season this year has witnessed an upsurge of travellers looking to spend quality time with their family and friends," says Ghosh.

She says that their USP is being a true value hotel offering good services at challenging

prices. "Most of the hotels are located right in the centre of the city in proximity to railway stations, bus depots or other transport options. Our pilgrim properties are located right at the door step of temples providing immense convenience to our guests," she asserts.

Building brand awareness and visibility is core to their promotional strategy. "We engage with our guests and stakeholders through advertisements, online marketing, participation in trade fairs and promotional events, social media marketing and CSR initiatives, among others," she informs.

She agrees that markets are gradually being monopolised by online travel agents. "At Lords Hotels & Resorts we have maintained close relations with both forms of travel agents. While many in the industry have downgraded offline travel agents, we took up the opportunity to build closer ties with them," she claims.

For women empowerment

Le Méridien New Delhi and Joining Hands, a non-profit organisation, have come together to train urban, underprivileged women to join the hospitality industry.



Le Méridien New Delhi and Joining Hands' skill development training programme aims to reach out to a high number of unemployed individuals and increase livelihood opportunities by introducing sector-specific courses. As a step in this direction, Le Méridien New Delhi has designed a fast-track course curriculum which covers all aspects of hotel operations and training. The six-month course titled 'Hotel Operations Training Programme' imparts necessary training and enhances the required skills of women between the age group of 18-35 and thus enables them to find employment in the fast growing hospitality industry, informs **Meena Bhatia**, Vice President-Operations and Marketing, Le Méridien New Delhi.

Delineating the objective of the programme, Bhatia says, "It's heart-warming to see how eager these girls are to strive for a better life and beat all odds to



Meena Bhatia
Vice President-Operations and Marketing, Le Méridien New Delhi

We are proud to announce that all the 22 young girls now are a part of the industry's skilled workforce

find a secure means of livelihood." She also stresses on the growing need to include women in the organised sector and said that the hospitality industry offers great opportunities to women to join the work force. "Women do exceedingly well in the

key areas of Housekeeping, Food and Beverage Service, Food and Beverage Production and the Front Office and the course has been designed in a way to provide both academic and practical knowledge of the key areas and equip beneficiaries of the special skill development programme," adds Bhatia.

The six-month course aims to cover a batch of 22 women, most of whom are first-generation learners and enthusiastic about generating livelihoods for themselves and their families. "The first batch completed the training this January and upon successful completion of their training, a job camp was organised. We reached out to our industry colleagues and received an overwhelming response. We are proud to announce that all the 22 young girls now are a part of the industry's skilled workforce. The second batch of girls started the training last month and are eager to learn and forge a career in the hospitality industry," says Bhatia.





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TT BUREAU

With Ahmedabad now being one of the sweet spots for investments, the city attracts a large number of corporate traffic not just from India, but also internationally. This gives a huge push to the city's business hotels, specially located in its commercial hub. One such hotel is the Crowne Plaza Ahmedabad that is reaping the benefits of this.

This 200-key hotel has a ballroom that is a convenient venue for social functions, family galas, wedding ceremonies and business meetings and conferences. Speaking about how the city has contributed to the hotel's occupancy is **Sanjay Kaushik**, General Manager, Crowne Plaza Ahmedabad. He says, "The hotel has performed very well so far this year due to fact that Ahmedabad was the venue for huge events such as Vibrant Gujarat and AICOG 2017 as well as unplanned events like African Development Bank annual meeting, and a mega



Sanjay Kaushik
General Manager
Crowne Plaza Ahmedabad

Our average ARR has been around `6,000, with an occupancy level of almost 70 per cent

international event 'Textiles India - 2017. Our average ARR has been around `6,000, with an occupancy level of almost 70 per cent."

Such international events provide a huge boost to the entire city's occupancy levels, explains Kaushik. "All in all, we saw a growth in international

guests of almost 60 per cent over the previous year. We expect this trend to continue even this year. The largest source markets of inbound tourists for us are China, Japan, Germany, USA and South Korea. India is growing, as it is getting a lot of international investors. Moreover, India Inc has been promoting individual states, which has led to a rise in awareness about the various states. Each year, new destinations are being added which is encouraging tourism to these states. Our hotel is also contributing by offering different cuisines of different provinces and catering to every traveller's needs," Kaushik adds.

Of course, in all this, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) has played havoc. Kaushik says, "It has affected our day-to-day business as there is no clarity on GST implications for hotels. Even clients are still unclear about GST facts due to which people are not willing to travel. This affects the hotel business directly."

Weddings @ Crowne Plaza

Crowne Plaza Greater Noida has launched an exquisite concept of Wedding Shop which will revivify the experience of organising weddings at the hotel.



TT BUREAU

In spite of demonetisation and liquor ban, Crowne Plaza Greater Noida performed well while retaining its market share. Over and above that, Greater Noida market which is still in its nascent stage of development has been facing location challenges owing to its distance from Delhi Airport, feels **Greesh Bindra**, Regional General Manager, North and West India, InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG). He says, "Trade and exhibition, corporate, and leisure are the major segments from which we receive our guests. Due to demonetisation, our prime segment—weddings and social events—has faced revenue slumps to a large extent. There was a drastic drop in the budgets of the events and the after effects are still prevalent."

To overcome these challenges, the hotel has changed its approach to achieve the revenues. "We're rebranding our identity as a premium wedding destination so as to gain



Greesh Bindra
Regional General Manager
North and West India
InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG)

Crowne Plaza Greater Noida is also the only hotel in Delhi/NCR to launch the concept of 'Wedding Shop'

momentum in social events. Crowne Plaza Greater Noida is also the only hotel in Delhi/NCR to launch an exquisite concept of 'Wedding Shop' which will revive the experience of organising weddings with us," adds Bindra. The hotel has already signed contracts with its key clients under Key

Negotiated Rates for the next year and this is how this segment remains strengthened. Bindra comments, "This is extremely necessary as, on one hand, the government is driving multiple initiatives and schemes to bolster the service and manufacturing sector but on the other hand sudden and unforeseen economic shocks like the recent ones including the dip in the country's GDP make investors quite skeptical."

Bindra further points out the marketing strategy of the hotel for 2017 and beyond is aggressive, and gradually the hotel is moving towards creating a reverberated presence in the market. The focus will be on digital marketing, especially social media owing to the experiments drawn out of it.

"Owing to the recent geopolitical changes across the globe there have been strong speculations regarding the US and Europe but I personally believe that both of these markets will remain unaffected," he adds.

Tree of Life Varanasi in Sept

The Tree of Life Resort & Spa, Varanasi is slated to open this month with 18 Junior Suites. The company recorded good growth in the first half of 2017 with 60 per cent occupancy.



TT BUREAU

The flagship property of the company, Tree of Life Resort & Spa Jaipur, performed exceptionally well, with ARR of `13,500 and a 62 per cent occupancy. The Tree of Life Grand Oak Manor, Binsar National Park, saw increased arrivals from the inbound market and a decent surge in the domestic segment, with revenues increasing by 40 per cent for the same period over last



Akhil Anand
Group Head
The Tree of Life Resort & Spa

year. Tree Leaf Marari Sands Beach Resort, Marari, completed its first year of operation and closed with ARR of `6800 and average 72 per cent occupancy. Tree Leaf Vantara Resort & Spa, Udaipur which was launched

last December witnessed a slow start in the first half of 2017 with occupancy at 32 per cent and ARR of `5300, informed **Akhil Anand**, Group Head, The Tree of Life Resort & Spa.

Commenting on the launch of the new property, The Tree of Life Resort & Spa, Varanasi, Anand says, "This property will definitely set standards in products and services. While there will be no other new launches this year, we are working on a few projects which will fructify in 2018. All our properties in both brands, Tree of Life and Tree Leaf have between 10-20 keys. We receive around 60 per cent of our business from the inbound segment and 40 per cent from the domestic market."

Foodies dig in at Mana

Mana Hotel will host the second edition of 'Maan Ranakpur' towards the end of September and will organise its' first-ever food festival in October.



TT BUREAU

Located in the picturesque town of Ranakpur amidst the Aravalli range is Mana Hotel, around 90 km north of Udaipur.

Rajdeep Bhalerao, General Manager, Mana Hotel, Ranakpur gives a low-down of the season and says, "For the year 2017-18, the period from April to June has been decent in terms of occupancy. The impact of GST has been felt up to some extent. However, the upcoming months of the year look good with the wedding season on its way. The inbound market is picking up gradually and hopefully will reach its peak by February 2018."

The property has a line-up of events in the coming



Rajdeep Bhalerao
General Manager
Mana Hotel

month since September falls under the lean seasons for Mana Hotel. Bhalerao elaborates, "Mana Hotels is launching an event at the month-end called Maan Ranakpur. This event is entering its 2nd consecutive year and we hope to make it an annual affair. In addition, we will be conducting the first ever food festival in Ranak-

pur around the 2nd week of October for our local guests."

Besides Rajasthan and Gujarat, Bhalerao plans to extend their reach to Tier-II and -III cities, and metropolitan cities like Mumbai and Kolkata for additional business. "The note ban, GST transition and political instability in certain parts of our country are some factors which have made India a not so popular choice for inbound tourists. The guest is not willing to bear the increased cost and as a result the hotel has cut back some services. Another factor that has caused more expense for us is the poor distribution of electricity that has led us to use more expensive diesel generated electricity," Bhalerao says.



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