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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**

- **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.**

- **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.**

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**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.**

- **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.**

**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.**

- **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.**

**Challenges**

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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

“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. Sandhu
Manager, 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 Abhout
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.”

Rajan Sethur
Director, Aranbil Air Services

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

“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.”

Sudhir Patil
Founder & Director, Veena World

“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.”

Sarbjit Singh
India Travel Award winner and Managing Director, TravelLife

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Rajat Sethur
Director, Aranbil Air Services

“The international travel 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.”

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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.

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

TT Bureau

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.

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.

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.
The business behind exhibitions

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.

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.

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.

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.

MICE 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.

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 Index (GTTI) 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 3rd 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; a well-defined social safety; 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 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.

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 Mahal, 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.

Bharat Bhushan Atree
Managing Director
Caper Travel Company

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.

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,” opines Patra.

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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 TRAV TALK.

Hazel Jain: How is the inbound traffic for Gujarat?
Jenu Devan: 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 foreign 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 NRIs and 4.05 lakhs foreigners 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.

Hazel Jain: How are you promoting yourself abroad?
Jenu Devan: 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.

Hazel Jain: What are your source markets?
Jenu Devan: We see the entire India as our source market. However, 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.

Hazel Jain: What products are you promoting in the market currently?
Jenu Devan: 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 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 Rs 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.
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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.

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.

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

Flagging off wedding tours

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

O n the occasion of Onam festival, IndiGo has launched two additional flights between Bengaluru and Kochi from September 03-10, 2017, with prices starting from `1468. 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.

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.

Timing Update

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Speaking about the list of destinations the travel division Flag Holidays caters to, Neerja Arora, Director, Flag Holidays informs, “Our in-bound 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, Neerja Arora, Managing Director, Flag Travel Services states, with some amount of drawback faced 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 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.

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 offices.”

Foresee Aviation is looking at charting a new growth path, says Santosh Kumar Sharma, Director, Foresee Aviation.

In terms of dealing with the travel trade, he says, “Foresee Aviation devised 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 the travel partners on the logistics and overall operations of the aircraft charter perspective of the packages.”

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 devised 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 the travel partners on the logistics and overall operations of the aircraft charter perspective of the packages.”
Rann of Kutch
experience the tribes & Culture

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MEETING YOUR HIGHEST EXPECTATIONS WHILE IN NUBRA

Desert Himalaya – The only finest luxury resort in Nubra Valley, spread in 06 acre lush green land, ideally located in the calm & picturesque village of Diskit. Just 07 km from the beautiful Hunder sand dunes, the resort has been specially designed to cater to the up market guests! The resort comprises of 29 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 upto 80 people serving cuisines made from the ingredients from the nearby farms. Resort offers camel safari, exploration by groups of up to 10 people, for half or a full day of exploration, river cruise from two to seven nights can be booked for a honeymoon or for exclusive river cruises on the Brahmaputra. It can also arrange a houseboat 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.

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 percent growth in our ADR in the first few months and expected promising growth during the rest of this financial year. By this positive result, we are hopeful about 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. However, 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 travelers 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. It can also 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.}

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.

However, the domestic market is also growing with rising interest to explore the East and North East Indian destinations. Its clientele comprises travelers interested in immersive cultural experiences, who are interested in learning about the age-old traditions and ancient 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 travelers 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 Singh, an air-conditioned houseboat for exclusive river cruises on the Brahmaputra. It can also 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.

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 travelers alike. The 175-key hotel is fully equipped with the latest facilities and 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 comprises of 29 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 upto 80 people serving cuisines made from the ingredients from the nearby farms. Resort offers camel safari, exploration by groups of up to 10 people, for half or a full day of exploration, river cruise from two to seven nights can be booked for a honeymoon or for exclusive river cruises on the Brahmaputra. It can also arrange a houseboat cruise from two to seven nights or for half or a full day of exploration by groups of up to 10 people.
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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.

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 Taluks in the Ramn of Kutch have also benefited from our various programmes. TCF and Infinity Resorts form the backbone of our conservation efforts in these locations."

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 almost 60 per cent of the land is open space with greenery, this is hard to find these days."

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 Ben-galuru is now coming up as a weekend market due to its proximity," Saran adds.
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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.

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

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

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

3 P’s of Parfait Hospitality

We strive to provide a holiday experience with activities and adventures suitable for senior travellers by making these trips personalised, experiential and participative. Its growth strategy involves 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 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 our clients.

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 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.”

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.

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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.

Shivali Bhargava
Founder, Bucket My List

Raman Tuli
Managing Director, Parfait Hospitality

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. Its growth strategy involves 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 be adding more destinations over time, namely Latin America and Oceania. We don’t believe in offering cookie-cutter holidays,” she adds.

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Shivali Bhargava
Founder, Bucket My List

Raman Tuli
Managing Director, Parfait Hospitality
INDULGE IN LUXURY AT RADISSON BLU HOTEL NEW DELHI DWARKA

Located in the serene sub-city of Dwarka, the Radisson Blu Hotel New Delhi Dwarka welcomes guests with its well-appointed rooms, superior services and a wide range of on-site dining options. The hotel is strategically located within 15 minutes’ drive from Indira Gandhi international and domestic airport. The hotel is a walk away from sector 13 Metro station which serves as the most prompt and convenient commute that interconnects Dwarka to the international airport, railway station and the city's commercial business and shopping hub in Connaught Place.

Accommodation: 219 well appointed rooms including 25 suites.

Dining and Entertainment: Accessible from the lobby level.
- Spring - An all-day-dining restaurant.
- Rice - The Oriental restaurant serving Far East Oriental cuisine
- Dvar - The gateway to India which offers contemporary interpretations of traditional Indian cuisines
- Zeppelin - The contemporary lounge bar
- Atrium - The pastry and confectionary store

Meetings & Event Space:
- More than 37,000 square feet of convention area with a combination of function, form and technology
- A pillar-less ballroom divisible into three parts
- Aab Mahal, a state-of-the-art event space
- Club Lounge meeting space with an outdoor extension to the terrace lounge
- A combination of boardrooms to facilitate meeting and conferences of various sizes

Recreational facilities available within the hotel complex:
- Spa by O2
- Fully equipped fitness center by Anantaa
- Unisex salon by Affinity
- Outdoor swimming pool
- Shopping arcade within the hotel complex

Services & Facilities:
- Complimentary Wi-fi for residence guests
- Laundry & dry cleaning
- Chauffeur driven luxury cars
- Doctor on call
- Rooms suitable for guests with special needs
- In-room dining service available 24 hours a day
- Concierge on-call available 24 hours a day

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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 incorporate 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 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.
Thanking all members of the travel fraternity for their continued support, guidance and acknowledgement helping Caper Group reach the pinnacle of success. It has been a journey I have enjoyed each day and look forward to every morning.

BHARAT BHUSHAN ATREE
CMD
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 Sendra. Fishermen living in the floating islands called Phumdis, in floating huts known as Phumangs, 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.

Kangla
A visit to Kangla at the heart of Imphal city unholds 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. Today, Kangla is developed into a unique archeological and heritage park. The Ima Market, which is counted as one of the largest women-only 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 Burning track in 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 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. Yashyang, Gaan Ngai, Chresoda, Lai-Haroba, Kang, Heikru Hidongba, Kut and Lui Ngaini are just some of the festivals celebrated by different communities in the state. Manipur Sangai Festival, celebrated every year from November 21-30, is a major tourist attraction.

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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.

**At home with homestays**

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

**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**

C

 conveniently located on Flana Pratap Marg, in close proximity to Hazratgani - 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, Man-
gaging Director, Fortune Park Hotels said, “We are delighted to welcome this beautiful ho-
tel to our expanding portfolio of Fortune Hotels. M/s Viraj Constructions’ investment in this property, coupled with our brand’s signature amen-
ties, well-appointed rooms that are tastefully designed, excellent cuisine and efficient service, will lead to an excep-
tional 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 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 connec-
tivity and many more on offer. Fitness enthusiasts can head to the gymnasium or take a dip in the pool where guests can ear-

the Headon Oven and enjoy a sumptu-
ous meal of North Indian and hand-picked Awadhi speciali-
ties. Orchid is the property’s all-day dining restaurant featuring a delightful selec-
tion of Indian, Oriental and Continental delicacies in ad-
dition to Fortune Deli that serves some of the best confectionary items. One

can head to Neptune Bar & Lounge for a variety of cock-
tails and canapes. The con-

ference and banquet facilities at the hotel have the capac-
ity 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.

Fortune Park Hotels is the brand’s presence in the Art and Smart Cities of India.

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

**TT BUREAU**

In the first half of 2017, Ho-
tel Park Ocean managed to attract 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 one of the largest source market for the hotel. Jain says, “We received guests from Ko-

rea, 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 of foreign guests at our ho-
tel 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 on all media platforms and will also be conducting fa-
miliarisation 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 accommoda-
tions will also create employ-
ment for local communities thus making tourism sustain-
able,” adds Jain.

Commenting on the im-
pact 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 ex-

pecting an increase of 5 per cent and targeting 65 per cent foreign guests at the hotel in 2017.

**TT BUREAU**

In a bid to value the contrib-
ution of women at every step, Radisson Blu Hotel New Delhi Dwarka hosted a one-of-a-kind car rally in which over 150 women driv-

ers 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. Ho-

mammed Shoeb, General Manager, Radisson Blu Ho-

tel Dwarka flagged off the race along with Gaurav Ag-

garwal, Ankita Aggarwal, Overseas Radisson Blu hotels, Gaurav Mehta, Di-

tector of Sales & Marketing, Radisson Blu Hotel Dwarka, Ramansh Sheth, Deputy Managing Director, Hella

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 announce-
ment of the winners of the rally and a prize distribution cer-

emony in which the winners took home not just trophies but also salon and jewellery vouchers.

The evening was graced and inaugurated by celeb-

rity chef Kunal Kapur along with the hotel’s key part-

ners who were present at the time of flag off. The par-

ticipants along with their partners were then regaled with comedy sessions, mu-

sic and dance perfor-
mances and

The presence of global brands like F&G plays a crucial role in helping the hotel. According to Banerjee, it puts the place on the map for interna-
tional customers. “Secondly, to the customer the preferred a

The domestic market is not too far behind. New Delhi and Mumbai are its largest feeder markets, but it is lim-

ited to them. “We are also the favourite of the long haul tour-

ists and also corporate groups. According to Shuvendu Baranee, General Manager, Crowne Plaza Kochi, the hotel started the year on a strong note with almost 25 per cent of total guests from outside India. “We are expecting an inbound guest percentage of around 60 per cent for the full year,” he adds. The largest source market for us in the international sec-

tor 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 work 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 as of now we are doing better than last year.”

The award-winning busi-

ness hotel, says Singh, 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 gener-

ated 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. Cutting of such undesirable elements and a focused marketing strat-

ey from the apes could do a lot of good,” Banerjee says.

Gaurav Mehta, Director of Sales & Marketing, Radisson Blu Hotel Dwarka.
The Castle Mewar is Situated in Lap of Aravali Hills, area over 1,50,000 Sq. Ft. with 80 Rooms, Specialized & Multicusine Restaurants, Rejuvenating Spa, Swimmingpool & A 3500 Sq. Ft. Conference Hall with capacity of 350 Pax.
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.

Clarks Inn leads the way

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Located in a commercial hub, Crowne Plaza Ahmedabad City Centre is a palatial property with 200 rooms and suites, making it ideal for big groups and conferences.

Sanjay Kaushik, General Manager, Crowne Plaza Ahmedabad 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 conference, BIMEX and Jewellery Expo. We also received some large and important corporate events and a mega international event ‘Textiles India’ 2017. Our average AAR has been around 60%, with an occupancy level of almost 70 percent.”

Such international events provide a huge boost to the entire city’s occupancy levels, explains Kaushik. “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 for our business are tourists for us are China, Japan, Germany, USA and South Korea. India is growing, as it is getting interest from international investors. Moreover, India Inc has been promoting individual cities, which is 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 catering to every traveler’s needs,” Kaushik adds.

“Of course, in all this, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) has played havoc. 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 in the hotel business directly,”

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

Grose Bindra Regional General Manager, IHG Greater Noida Crowne Plaza Greater Noida is also the only hotel in Delhi/NCR to launch the concept of ‘Wedding Shop’

Grose 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 rejuvenated presence in the market. The focus will be on digital marketing, especially social media owing to the experiments done 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 these markets will remain unaffected,” he adds.

WEDDINGS @ CROWNE PLAZA

Akhil Anand, Group Head, The Tree of Life Resort & Spa, says, “The hotel has changed its 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 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.”

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.

Akhil Anand

Group Head, The Tree of Life Resort & Spa:

“The Tree of Life Resort & Spa, Varanasi, 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 launches this year, we are working on a few projects which will launch in 2018. All our properties in both brands, Tree of Life and Tree Leaf have been launching more than 10% in terms of the business from the inbound segment and 40% per cent from the domestic market.”

Foodies dig in at Mana

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

Rajdeep Bhalerao

General Manager, Mama Hotel:

“Despite 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. Mama Hotel is launching an event at the end of September falls under the lean season for Mama Hotel, Bhalerao elaborates, “Maan Ranakpur is an annual affair. In addition, we will be conducting the first ever food festival in Ranakpur around the 2nd week of October for our local guests.”

Mama Hotel is the flagship property of the company, Tree of Life Resort & Spa Jaipur, performed exceptionally well, with ARR of 15,300 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 year.

“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 these markets will remain unaffected,” he adds.
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