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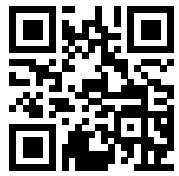
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## Don't forgo chances

Women have left stereotypes behind, but now there is a dire need to encourage entrepreneurship among them.



Nisha Verma

Arvind Singh  
Secretary, Ministry of Tourism

Addressing attendees at the TAAI-WITT and FICCI-FLO webinar titled 'Skill HER for Sustainable Tourism' powered by TRAVTALK, **Arvind Singh**, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism (MOT), began by recognising the change that both society and economy have undergone. Where once a small number of women took up jobs in government and tourism, today they are representing

almost all sectors. "Women have taken full advantage of access to education and other

Contd on page 20 ►

## Women have the power!

Titled 'Skill HER for Sustainable Tourism', the TAAI-WITT and FICCI-FLO webinar, powered by TRAVTALK, advocates the belief that 'Empowered women Empower women'. Women from various walks of life talk about being entrepreneurs and honing skills.

**“** Women have always held a very strong place in tourism and hospitality. Women make 70% of all travel-related decisions and are major buyers and sellers of travel. COVID has impacted women on a large scale in the tourism industry; the maximum jobs lost were among women. Hence, gender equality must be centre-stage as we work together to restart tourism and accelerate recovery. Since sustainable tourism will benefit the local economy as we go forward, we need to see how we embrace women in this pattern, more so in local areas, as this is vital to promote the economy. Also, there is a need to skill women collectively with help from the government. **”**

Jyoti Mayal  
President, TAAI

**“** The 17 Chapters of FICCI-FLO have been working on village tourism. It is the informal sector where women are unrecognised. We have an MoU with MOT and we have been able to work with the communities, for which we have support from states. This section of women in tourism should get its place in the sun, where we work along with men on the journey. At FICCI-FLO, we have three Cs for skilling women: competency, capacity and confidence building. It's not enough to skill, they need a sense of achievement to take this line forward and turn into job creators from job seekers. **”**

Jahnabi Phookan  
National President, FICCI-FLO

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## MOT forms NE committee

The Ministry of Tourism has formed a special committee of stakeholders active in the Northeast, tasked with identifying new destinations and developing itineraries around them among other things. TRAVTALK speaks to three members.



Hazel Jain

On March 19, 2021, active stakeholders from the tourism community of the Northeast region gathered at Radisson Blu Hotel, Guwahati to form a

special committee tasked with promoting the region even more aggressively. They will need to identify new destinations, develop itineraries around them, identify places where events can be organised to create awareness about the region,

and organise workshops and seminars for the local stakeholders in terms of providing them the necessary skills to sell the region.

### Community-based tourism

Ranjeet Das, Immediate Past

President and Advisor, Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA), who is part of the special committee, has made two key suggestions on what needs to be prioritised. He said, "With the pandemic there is

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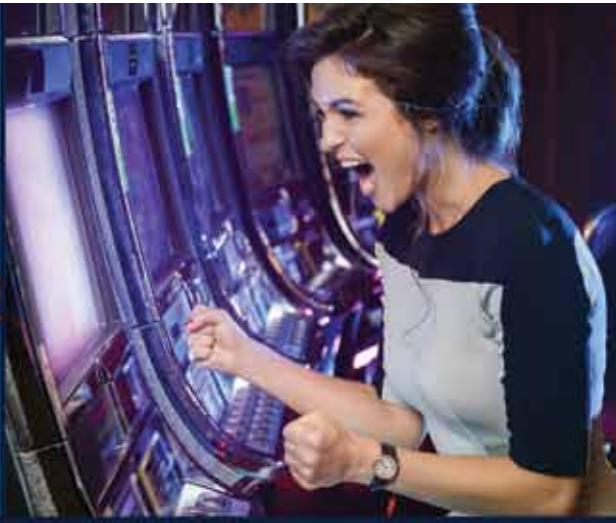
## Prepared for 2<sup>nd</sup> wave?

With the second wave of infections, tourism has seen several cancellations. Is the trade prepared? TRAVTALK finds out.

Himmat Anand  
Founder, Tree of Life Resorts

**“** It is my belief that opportunities do not come your way – they have to be created – and given the present re-emergence of COVID, we really have just two options. One is to go back to webinars, give discourses on the future which no one is sure about. The other is to have confidence in yourself and your organisation, and move ahead cautiously, exploring all possibilities. **”**

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# BULLETIN

## Maha promised, didn't deliver

**Dharmendra Singh Chauhan**, Maharashtra Chapter Chairman, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI), says his members are completely broken now and the help that Maharashtra government promised last year was not fulfilled by them.

Hazel Jain

Fresh lockdowns have brought with them the same problems agents faced last year. Dharmendra Singh Chauhan says that tourist movement from Maharashtra to other states had just restarted and



Dharmendra Singh Chauhan  
Chapter Chairman  
ADTOI - Maharashtra

because of that, a lot of his member agents had attended the association convention at Kevadia recently. "After that,

the bookings had increased rapidly for places like Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir. But since March, all our members are seeing so many cancellations – it is causing chaos and has taken the members by complete surprise. Today, there are very few movements happening from Maharashtra – only those who have cars. Curfew is not hampering road movement. But no inbound into Maharashtra is happening," Chauhan says.

### Government is silent

He is upset that Maharashtra Tourism has not made any effort to reach out to the Chapter members. "They have not shown any inclination to engage us or educate us all this while. It is only India Tourism that has been active – whether by conducting multiple roadshows or webinars for us. In fact, Valsa Nair, Principal



Secretary, Tourism, Excise & Civil Aviation, Government of Maharashtra, had promised

Valsa Nair had promised waiver of state property tax & electricity bills, but nothing was done

us a waiver of state property tax and electricity bills for last financial year. But nothing was

done despite reminders to her. And we are in the new financial year now," Chauhan adds.

This is the time to get bookings for agents whether it is Chardham or Kashmir – all the planning happens now, he says. But now, with this dangerous new strain, everyone is sitting at home. "Even after a year of dealing with COVID, our members are still not ready to handle the situation. They are completely broken – financially and emotionally. Every day I get calls from my members asking me what they should do. All we can do is try and keep their spirits up. They have spent all their savings. What the EC members are doing now is motivate the members and keep their morale high," Chauhan adds.

His team had planned two more outings for members in April including one to Jawahar which is a new tourism destination in the state. But given the situation, they will be postponing them. The Chapter had recently attended a Watermelon Festival at Wada. ↗

In line with the latest directive by the state government, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) is offering the regular RT-PCR tests at a reduced cost of ₹600 (earlier ₹850) since April 1, 2021.

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# TRAUTALK

## VIEWPOINT

### History repeats itself or does it not?

Lockdowns, curfews and a suffering livelihood – were we too eager to think of them as things of the past or things of a soon-to-pass-over future? The second wave of COVID-19 cases wreaking havoc among people and businesses in India and the world over has made us take a step back to re-examine our bearings. Had we, as an industry, been over-joyous about markets and borders opening up and somewhere forgotten the seriousness of the virus?

Year 2021 was to be one of recovery, having survived a devastating 2020. But, we may have been a bit too optimistic. Last year people had been wanting to fulfil the urge to get out of their homes and travel, and so they did. But, now that they have satiated that need for the time being, would they be willing (or unwilling still) to avoid it? Several cancellations have already had travel agents running helter-skelter. Some have not yet received refunds that were due to them the first time a lockdown was imposed in 2020. With the new, deadlier mutations of the virus, the world, including India, is slowly closing down once again, albeit partially. A fresh set of restrictions have been imposed on hotels, events, restaurants, etc., and inter-state travel continues to be subjected to on-again, off-again curbs.

The hotel and restaurant industry has come to a grinding halt in India. Footfalls at hotels have reduced to almost nil and owners are unable to pay their staff. In fact, several hotels have even had to shut down altogether, and those in some of the bigger markets such as Mumbai, Bengaluru and Pune seem to have taken a devastating hit. Combined – a deadly virus doing the rounds and travel being a cumbersome task – it is difficult to predict the future, but what is guaranteed is that this is going to be a long, long year.

The world that exists today hasn't witnessed a pandemic of this sort and so, predictions of the future may be as simplistic as our knowledge of dealing with the virus and its many variants. The vicious cycle continues to turn. But, this time around, we do hope that the experience of 2020 helps us sail through.

# Sustainability is the only way

Only those tourism stakeholders that implement strategic sustainability initiatives that reduce costs, increase revenue and improve guest experiences will earn a competitive advantage, believes **Kingshuk Biswas** who is on the UNWTO panel of Tourism Experts.

**R**ecently I had purchased a Cadbury Silk chocolate from a convenience store. On top of the wrapping was highlighted in bold '100% sustainably

ing sustainable tourism can be the Ministry of Tourism's website which has a section on 'sustainable tourism for India- criteria and indicators'. I think everyone in the Indian

certified green buildings and how many tour operators have a sustainable tourism certification? None of the major global OTAs have a search filter for 'green' or 'sustainable tourism'

schemes for adopting solar power at commercial complexes. States like Delhi and Telangana have exclusive Electric Vehicle (EV) policies which should certainly be helpful to both hotel owners and transport operators. Already, at Delhi Airport one can order an electric vehicle for pick-up and drop-off. Similarly, Gujarat has a separate solar energy policy, which incentivises any business that adopts solar power and there is no ceiling for solar power capacity. The latest tourism policy in Gujarat offers incentives for hotel owners to set up electric vehicle charging stations in their premises. The policy also offers hotels incentives for converting their hotels into green buildings while incentivising green building certifications. For tour operators, it offers part reimbursement of sustainable tourism certification if the agencies qualify for GSTC certification.



sourced Cocoa'. I clearly foresee that in the coming months or years, we will have more and more products and services branded as 'sustainable'. There is also a marked shift towards green, sustainable tourism as more tourists are expected to opt for eco-friendly travel in the post-COVID world.

One of the major misconceptions of sustainable tourism is that it is only related to the environment. But, the subject of sustainability is much wider; any action by tourism stakeholders which provides economic benefits to the local community while preserving their cultural identity is also a step towards sustainable tourism.

**How can tour operators help?** Tour operators are perfectly poised to promote sustainable tourism. This is the time for them to explore unknown destinations, road trips and unique experiences. This strategic investment in creating new unique local experiences would stand a long way in their recovery. Many OTAs now have separate sections on experiences and tours. This is the right time to develop innovative and sustainable tour packages and experiences for the domestic market. A good starting point for understand-

tourism sector should have a serious look at this section. The criteria mentioned are for both hotels and tour operators. These guidelines are based on Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) guidelines.

#### Getting a certification

Worldwide, there are more than 100 international certification agencies related to sustainable

certified hotels. Why so? Most of us in the industry will not be able to answer the question because there is no available data about them.

I am not suggesting that certification is a must for the industry. Just like hotel classification in India, sustainable certification should also be voluntary. But, it would certainly help boost customer confidence in these trying times.

#### State tourism policies

Tourism stakeholders generally are aware of the tourism policies in their respective states. States have been innovative and some of them have launched policies/incentives which support sustainable tourism. States like Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka have an incentive scheme for caravan tourism. Caravans now come equipped with solar panels, too, thus promoting clean energy. However, sustainability is not merely related to the tourism sector as it has implications in practically each and every sector in the economy and thus, tourism stakeholders should look beyond tourism policies in their respective states.

For example, many state governments have numerous

**Increasingly, travellers and travel service providers are seeking confirmation that sustainability practices are in place**

tourism. In fact, one is spoilt for choice. So tour operators who are keen to get their agencies certified have a variety of choices. However, for authentication sake it should only be a third-party certification which tourists can trust. But how many hotels in India are

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**Kingshuk Biswas**  
Tourism Expert  
UNWTO Panel

(Currently, Biswas is with Gujarat Power Corp. that focuses on renewable energy. Views expressed are his own. The publication may/may not subscribe to them.)

# Tourism a priority for ODISHA

During a meeting in Bhubaneswar with HRAO members, **SR Jadhav**, Director & Additional Secretary - Tourism, Government of Odisha, said that tourism was being considered a priority sector by the state and several development projects were underway or in the pipeline.

 Manas Dwivedi

 Expressing his gratitude to Hotel & Restaurant Association of Odisha (HRAO) for organising the forum and facilitating a direct interaction with the travel trade of Odisha, **SR Jadhav** said that tourism is being considered a priority sector by the state. He shared that it would be under the direct supervision of the Chief Minister of Odisha, Naveen Patnaik.

As part of its plan to prioritise tourism projects in the state, Jadhav said that several developmental works were being initiated by the government, broadly divided into category A, B and C.

"Under category-A," he said, "five important destinations have been earmarked, i.e. Satkosia, Hirakud, Bhitaranika,



**SR Jadhav**  
Director & Additional Secretary,  
Tourism, Government of Odisha

Chilika and Puri-Konark, and the necessary bidding and preparation of a master plan are already under process. By the end of 2022 or early 2023, the developmental works at some of these destinations will be complete."

Jadhav added, "Similarly, under categories B and C, master plans for development of Nandankanan, Daringbadi, Simlipal, Udaypur, Talsari, the Buddhist Circuit,

Harishankar and Nrusinghnath eco-tourist destinations, Dhabaleswar, Cuttack and Deomali of Koraput District are under process, which will boost the tourism potential of western and southern Odisha."

In fact, he shared that 46 interior or remote destinations had been identified by the Department and that good connectivity as well as infrastructure in these destinations would be taken up by them.

"These steps will hugely contribute to the tourism and hospitality sector. The tourism department is also giving utmost importance to cruise tourism by developing water sports, houseboat facilities, amusement parks, etc. The government is preparing a master plan for the same. Many other tourism projects are also in the pipeline,

including development of Chandrabhaga and Ramchandi beach, an ecotourism roadmap for Odisha, integrated

Bhadrak, among others," Jadhav shared.

Odisha Tourism will also focus on promoting Odia cuisine, developing eco-cottages at prominent forest and eco-destinations under the PPP model. In association with IDCO, the state department of tourism is also in the process of identification of private as well as government land which will be made available under the land bank, to be utilised for tourism purposes through a single window.

Jadhav also shared with attendees that in the last two years, 15 hotel and 13 resort projects, as well as other projects such as two amusement parks, a day cruise, a houseboat, two water sports, four multiplexes, and four motels/WACs had been approved by the single window clearance authority.

  
  
By the  
end of 2022  
or early  
2023, some  
developmental  
works will be  
complete

development of Mahendragiri Hill in Gajapati District under the Ramayana Circuit, and development of Kantakabi Laxmikant Mohapatra Memorial Park at

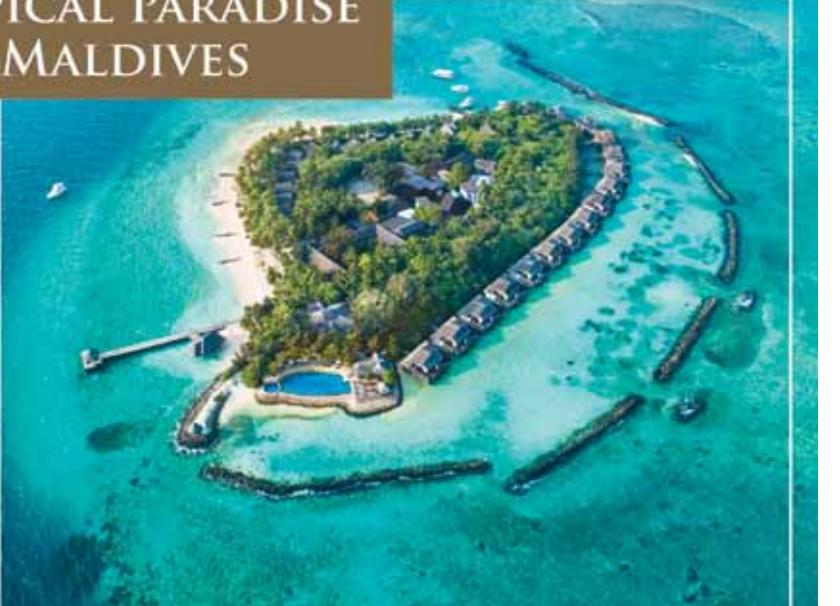
## Tourism Breaking News

- Karnataka accords Industry status to government-recognised hotels in state
- IndiGo launches door-to-door baggage transfer service, starting from INR 630
- Deltin to launch new property in Goa
- Arrive in Mumbai during curfew, move around with boarding pass & ticket: BMC
- Karnataka to develop 6 heliports at tourist spots
- Air India to fly direct between Moscow and Goa every Thursday
- Tripshapers Tourism LLC expands footprint in Dubai, opens new office
- Goa seeks nod to vaccinate all tourism sector workers irrespective of age
- Indians most eager to travel outbound & use digital health passport: Amadeus



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# Emerging trends in air travel

**Neerja Bhatia**, Vice President, Indian Sub-continent, Etihad Airways, discusses some interesting trends that will define air travel in 2021.



TT Bureau

The past year has seen businesses adapt quickly to meet the needs of a reformed world. New travel protocols emerged, air travel restrictions were announced and more importantly, wellness in travel emerged as a top priority. As the scenario stabilizes, the focus is now on reviving confidence in international travel. Several measures were introduced through 2020 to ease the burden for travellers and ensure they have a peaceful



Neerja Bhatia  
Vice President, Indian Sub-continent, Etihad Airways



safe to fly. To that end, Etihad Airways has been working with a variety of different companies, some within the industry, some outside of it, to develop technology required for a global health certification system.

#### Digitalisation at every step

Today, tech-enabled initiatives are leading the way for a 'new normal' in air travel. Due to the pandemic, there has been an accelerated growth in digitalising experiences. This also includes minimising or even eliminating altogether, physical contact at touchpoints, and ensuring contactless travel for guests, with their safety and wellness in mind. Most recently, Etihad updated its mobile application, allowing guests to manage their

journey with even greater ease. The relaunched mobile app lets guests manage their details, book flights with voice search and enrol in the airline's loyalty programme. We also publish digital travel guidelines regularly to ensure that guests are updated with any developments in these dynamic times.



#### Sustainable air travel is the future of flying

Sustainability has had an extensive impact on the world we live in and it is going to have a greater significance in a post-COVID-19 world. While commercial aviation still only represents around 2% of global human-made CO2 emissions, the airlines and infrastructure that support them and can adapt to meet the needs of a sustainable, carbon-neutral operation are those that will survive and lead the future of flying. Shaping the future of sustainability in air travel, Etihad remains at the forefront to pioneer new and effective ways of mitigating avia-

tion's environmental impact to reduce carbon emissions and create cleaner and more sustainable transportation for future generations.

#### Increased flexibility in bookings

With the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic including multiple travel restrictions, having flexibility in bookings will continue to be a focus. The past year has seen a range of solutions and benefits that were introduced to help ease the burden and provide maximum flexibility to guests and partners. As the situation remains dynamic, this is here to stay.



#### Emergence of health visas or wellness certificates

While the situation remains dynamic and one cannot determine how the pandemic will play out through 2021, the world may see some form of wellness certifications. This may see increased vaccination or the introduction of health visas to certify passengers are

Eithad has been working with a variety of companies to develop technology for a global health certification system

# Business has to be re-imagined

**Vishal Suri**, Managing Director, SOTC Travel, talks about the company's journey through the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic and how they tweaked their business model to adapt and sustain. What remained crucial during the time was employee safety, customer connectivity and business continuity.



Nisha Verma

Vishal Suri says that while business suddenly came to a standstill about the same time last year, the three things they realised were very important for them were employee safety, customer connectivity and business continuity. They made sure that all employees worked from home and served the customers by turning into virtual agents. "We encouraged our business leaders and internal teams to start re-imagining their businesses, their processes, and at that point it was very important that we used technology to start giving contactless delivery and interfaces to our customers, allowing them to interact with us. We invested significantly in automation of our processes and technology," he says. They even began controlling spends. "We went back to our airline



Vishal Suri  
Managing Director  
SOTC Travel



partners and started engaging with them at all levels to ask for return of our money. At the same time, we spoke to customers who were seeking refunds and processed these for them, and even gave credit shells as well as vouchers for future travel to those willing to take them," Suri adds.

Now, SOTC Travel is working with stakeholders to regenerate and revive demand. "We are one of the first companies to tie up with Apollo Clinics, and

create an Assured Safe Travel programme. It's a comprehensive set of travel safety protocols in the current scenario, aimed at giving confidence to customers about us as an organisation and travel as an industry. For this, we brought on board players like Marriott and Accor who have their own independent safety programmes as well," he shares.

#### Big MICE movement

Asserting that safe travel is possible, he cited that they had a huge MICE movement of 750 Pax to Dubai in January. "We have groups that are regularly travelling to Dubai and Maldives. We even have groups going to Egypt, there is demand in Russia, and the

biggest segment of business has been domestic movement. There is a lot of demand amongst Indians to travel despite change in restrictions in testing or quarantine requirements," Suri informs.

And while the situation is ever-evolving, the MD believes that revival will be slow and steady. "It depends on how soon international borders open up because we are known for outbound. However, we have tweaked our model to focus in the short term on domestic and short-haul destinations like UAE, where we have been able to also deliver large groups. In domestic, we are already seeing huge demand and hotels are being sold out.

Goa and Kashmir are doing very well. But, there are supply constraints when it comes to domestic travel. International destinations will start opening up as the vaccination programmes take shape. Our view is that July-September, we will

It was very important that we used technology to start giving contactless delivery

testing or vaccine certification. Many questions need to be answered," he comments.

#### Role of government

Suri strongly believes that the government needs to identify outbound tourism as a sector that creates a lot of employment, generates taxes via GST collection, and now even TCS collection from customers.

"Many things have been done, but there is a need for rationalisation of taxes, especially doing away with TCS which is a long-standing demand. Apart from that there is a threat we are facing from players who are based overseas and selling to Indian customers who book directly and pay via credit card or direct payments. This way, these players are able to completely circumvent the GST and the TCS, which puts an organisation like ours at a disadvantage," he concludes.

see a lot more of the world opening up. However, the situation is still evolving—IATA is in the process of defining the travel passport, and there could be new travel documents,

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# Get ready for MICE Engage 2021



JTB India has confirmed key NTOs, global hotel chains and airlines as exhibitors for its B2C virtual platform dedicated to MICE, with Singapore Tourism Board as the Country Partner. To be held on April 28, 2021, the event will see attendance from top corporate companies in India.



Hazel Jain

**W**e planned MICE Engage 2021 this year keeping in mind that we have had a year of lockdown," says **Anil Srinivasan**, Executive Director at JTB India. He adds, "We had been waiting for an apt time to launch our virtual roadshow – MICE Engage 2021 – where we could bring the buyers to meet exhibitors such as NTOs, hotels, airlines, etc. On this platform, buyers can engage with the sellers and understand what the formalities in terms of travel and safety protocols are, and how will they safely take their channel partners across to those countries."

Highlighting how both exhibitors and buyers can benefit from this event, Srinivasan says,



Anil Srinivasan  
Executive Director, JTB India

"The advantage for exhibitors would be a direct connect with the customers, which will also facilitate the entire process of engagement with them, understanding their needs and requirements for future travel, and incorporating those into their offerings when things start to open up. It would also be better for corporates to engage directly with service providers and understand what is happening in each country, how fast the

boundaries could open, and how would the passengers be taken care of on their journey. It will instil some confidence among the corporates."

There are some tourism bodies who have confirmed participation, prominent among them are Singapore Tourism Board, Bahrain Tourism & Exhibition Authority and Visit Finland. "We are also excited to have Dubai Expo as a Platinum Partner for this event, which will give us a big boost in terms of the value we will bring to the buyers. There will be around 30 exhibitors," he adds.

## Contact JTB

For more information on MICE Engage 2021, contact Kritika Kunden at [kritika\\_k.in@jtbap.com](mailto:kritika_k.in@jtbap.com) or Deepali Gupta at [deepali\\_g.in@jtbap.com](mailto:deepali_g.in@jtbap.com).

## EXHIBITORS



Raymond Lim  
Area Director, India (New Delhi)  
Singapore Tourism Board



Olympia Chiang  
Senior Sales Manager  
Marina Bay Sands



Sherene Allaman  
Vice President International Sales & Marketing, Sun International

"The aim is to use this channel as an opportunity to listen to critical information shared by our industry partners and clients and to use this market intelligence to enhance our product offering as well as to ensure Sun International is always top of mind and a first choice for clients when selecting a hotel brand in South Africa."

## Rezlive.com partners with Hilton

**T**ravel Designer Group has entered into a direct dynamic distribution agreement with Hilton to distribute Hilton's global hotel inventory on its B2B hotel reservation platform Rezlive.com. The Rezlive.com portal can fetch real-time availability, best deals and flexible can-



cellation policies and deliver best-in-class fulfilment and support. On the other hand, the agreement makes Hilton properties available to over 22,000 travel agents across the globe with access to Rezlive.com. **Anand Srinivasan**, Chief Commercial Officer, Travel Designer Group, says, "We are very excited to have Hilton on board. We will now be able to open up the wide range of Hilton properties directly to our distribution network, and I am confident that this will create fantastic opportunities for both the brands."

► Contd from page 1



Mamta Verma  
Secretary, Gujarat Tourism

"We need to think how to holistically increase the participation of women and make it more sustainable, while adhering to norms of equality. We need to have the right policies in place, ensure safety and provide better infrastructure for women. They are ready to come out and work. Many women have left metro cities and come to Kevadia, where they are doing phenomenal work. We need to further strengthen this. In the future, we can look at doing some programmes with FICCI-FLO and TAAI, especially in the eco-tourism, wellness, and village tourism sectors along with handicrafts and handlooms that have a lot of potential. It has to be done in a systematic manner and for a specific period."

"The most important issue for me is violence against women and harassment of women in general. UN Women data shows that one in three women globally face some form of violence, whether it's harassment at work, in a bus or in the field, not being letting out of the house and so on. Unless we address that, we are not going to get more participation of women in tourism or generally in business. To take skilling and entrepreneurship to every village and town, we need to tell the Kevadia story through small videos and tell them how to go about it using digital media and self-help groups. Entrepreneurship should be taken to every district, which will be transformative for everyone."



Priya Paul  
Chairperson  
Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels



Kanta Singh  
Country Programme Manager  
UN Women

"There is safety in numbers, which is visible in a sector like aviation where there are many women and they feel secure because they are more in number. Hence, we need to bring in more women in the tourism sector. We need to give them skills that make them employable. We need to think of ways and means to hire, train and deploy rather than leaving training to someone else and hiring someone else. Also invest in safe transport. We need to close all the loops. We can't do one thing and leave the second unattended. Skilling has to be a blended model. Investment and quality management in skilling should also be done by the private sector."



Devika Jeet  
Director, DDP Group



Madhu Jain  
Fashion Designer

"In the new normal, the right leadership will matter in bringing women forward and leading the way to recovery for them. Tourism provides women with more opportunities for workforce participation, leadership, entrepreneurship and empowerment than many other sectors in the country. We aim to lay emphasis on skill development, more flexible-work balance and greater options for entrepreneurship. With MOT, this initiative will seek to engage with women at the grassroots level besides the semi-urban and urban sectors. Community-based tourism activities, promotion of domestic tourism and awareness of sustainable tourism will be at the heart of this initiative."

"People have realised the importance of sustainability owing to the havoc created by climate change. Today, Gujarat is a huge tourism attraction because of textiles, and we can do something to revive fashion tourism in a sustainable way. In Bangladesh, an NGO named Aarong has a unique way of skilling people. They have women come in at dawn, where they are taught all the East Bengal kantha stitches, etc., that were lost to us after partition. They get food and all facilities there, and would go back at sunset. Their products are marketed via Aarong to stores like Macy's and Harrods. This is an example of how skilling can be sustainable while saving a way of life from dying out."

Inputs by Nisha Verma

## Skilling must be a blended model

# Finding the right insurance

Keeping your clients safe while they are travelling and getting them back home without any issues has become even more important today, with cancellations and lockdowns also having begun again. How do you find the right insurance cover for them? We highlight offerings from two key providers.

Hazel Jain

**D**oes Aseg o offer travel insurance for COVID?

Yes, we have launched a unique combo product that covers the travellers' COVID-19-related expenses as well. The product includes hospitalisation, hotel quarantine, cancellations along with other new-age travel protection benefits such as roadside assistance, emergency medical and accidental expenses which not only provides immediate relief in case of travel emergencies but also boosts the confidence of a traveller.

**This is for both domestic and international travellers?**

Considering the highly volatile situation and travel bans still prevailing at many international borders, the aforementioned



Dev Karvat  
Founder & CEO, Aseg o

product is being offered only to domestic travellers. However, we are planning to start with a similar product for international travellers once the borders open up.

**What kind of innovation have you brought in?**

Our clients have been accessing our travel protection products through a dedicated web portal, thus always ensuring 100% contactless transac-

tions. We also employed improved optimisation algorithms to gauge travellers' preferences and provide them best-in-class products. Furthermore, we urged our customers to avail 24x7 telephonic assistance and WhatsApp-based

Our product includes hotel quarantine, hospitalisation, cancellations

communication in case of emergencies. IoT will play a pivotal part in integrating more gadgets into devices capable of sharing real-time insurance data and information.

Hazel Jain

**D**oes TATA AIG offer travel insurance with COVID cover?

Yes, Tata AIG offers coverage for medical expenses related to COVID-19 when the insured is outside India, at no additional cost. We offer comprehensive travel insurance for five segments – leisure travellers (international), business travellers (international), students, domestic travellers and senior citizens.

**This is for both domestic and international travellers?**

We are offering this for both. For policies issued to large pre-defined groups, the coverages are applicable for both international and domestic travellers. For individual travellers, the coverage is available overseas only.



Parag Ved  
Executive Vice President - Consumer Lines, TATA AIG General Insurance

**What kind of innovation have you brought in?**

We are offering more flexibility to our clients to choose from a wide range of products. Additionally, we also provide our patrons with the following:

- ❖ Direct connect with insurer, resulting in lesser grievances for customer
- ❖ Online claim tracking being built for enhanced experience of customer

incept policy later than expiry date

- ❖ Increased capacity to coordinate increasing claim count on account of COVID
- ❖ Complete digitisation of claim document/ claim settlement

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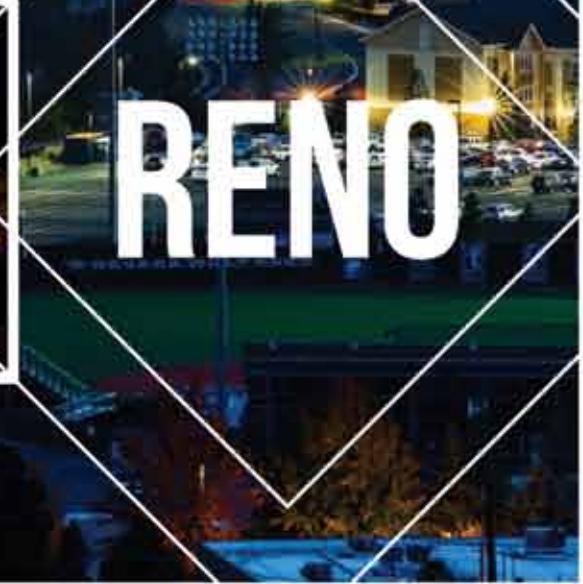
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# CruiseWorld India re-engages trade

Singapore Tourism Board (STB) India successfully concluded CruiseWorld India 2021, recording 300+ attendees. At the virtual event themed 'Charting our Pathway to Cruise Recovery', **GB Srithar**, Regional Director of India, Middle East and South Asia, STB, apprised the trade on initiatives taken by Singapore to make cruise travel safe and hassle free.

Nisha Verma

Playing the foundation for the recovery of cruises via the CruiseWorld India 2021 event, in partnership with Northstar Travel, **GB Srithar** said that with vaccination drives being rolled out across the world, travel and tourism will slowly and deliberately start to gain momentum. But, while there is no clarity yet on any kind of travel or international cruise travel restart to Singapore, the objective of the event was to enable the Indian travel trade to come together to exchange ideas and jointly configure a pathway to recovery of cruise travel to Singapore.



**On-ground situation**

Extending his support to cruise stakeholders when required, Srithar updated attendees on the COVID-19 situation in Singapore. "Singapore has made some progress in its gradual and calibrated return to a certain degree of normalcy. We have entered the third phase of a

safe Singapore transition since December 28, 2020. Our businesses are adhering to rigorous standards of safe management and hygiene, and many have been certified under Singapore Clean (SG Clean) — our national mark of excellence for safety and hygiene. Till date, over 29,000 premises including various tourism establishments have been certified," he shared.

#### Preparedness for cruises

STB has developed the world's first cruise safe certification programme, CruiseSafe, with stringent hygiene and safety measures throughout the passenger journey. "CruiseSafe incorporates global and local health standards, and it is mandatory for cruise lines to obtain certification in order to resume sailing from Singapore. The results have been very encouraging. More than 120,000 Singapore residents have set sail on approximately 90 sailings from Singapore

Since STB started the cruise pilot, we have no reported cases of COVID-19 on board

on board World Dream and Quantum of the Seas. Since we started on this cruise pilot, we have no reported cases of COVID-19 spreading on board," Srithar highlighted.

#### SingapoReimagine

He also shared that STB has embarked on SingapoReimagine — an inclusive platform for the global and local communities to share ideas on how to revive tourism. "We are soon kicking off the 'Reimagine Travel' global conversations as a series of forums around the world to catalyse discussions on reshaping global travel. This year for cruise, we intend to deepen our trade engage-

ment and connect better with our partner friends, as we journey towards recovery. India has traditionally been Singapore's largest cruise market and the third largest market overall. When the time is right, we intend to work with you to bring more cruise visitors to Singapore, deliver fresh, innovative and safe cruise-plus-land-stay holiday experiences and keep India as our top source market for cruises," Srithar asserted.

Finally, reiterating that they are not expecting a quick rebound of visitor arrivals to Singapore, Srithar said, "It will take a while for positive global sentiment to return."

# Indians eager to cruise this year

A poll conducted during CruiseWorld India 2021 had respondents sharing their sentiments on a range of subjects, including priorities of customers when Singapore opens cruises for Indians and the segments most likely to take the trip.

TT Bureau

#### Customer priorities when they may cruise again

**83%** Health, hygiene & safety on cruise

**26%** Quality & variety of on-board experiences

**26%** Affordability of travel

**25%** Convenience & ease of getting around Singapore

#### Expected type and duration of cruise holiday when markets open

**Land & cruise holiday for two weeks or more** **1%**

**Land & cruise holiday for a week or more** **42%**

**Land & cruise holiday for less than a week** **40%**

**Cruise holiday only, with no land programme, 3-7 days** **16%**

#### What is the most attractive feature of Cruise Development Fund support scheme?

**39%**

Supports up to 60% of cost in packaging of land experiences with cruise

**34%**

Eases criteria that requires 2 nights' hotel stay before/after sailing to qualify

**27%**

Supports up to 60% of cost in marketing and promoting cruising

#### Once Singapore reopens borders, how soon will Indians want to cruise?

**3-6 months**  
**47%**

**6-12 months**  
**9%**

Other destinations will be preferred

**Nil**

A year or longer

**2%**

Immediately  
**42%**

#### Segment of leisure travellers most likely to consider cruises

**Families with kids** **50%**

**Couples** **25%**

**Groups of friends** **19%**

**3-generation families** **6%**

# 21 travel trends for 2021

Barring any unexpected catastrophes and a continuation of vaccinations, the travel and tourism industry and society can slowly begin looking forward to shaping futures through a lens of innovation and opportunity. Twenty31 shares the top 21 trends and predictions for travel and tourism in 2021 that destinations and travel operators must consider.

 TT Bureau

## 1 EMBRACING WORK FROM ANYWHERE

Year 2021 will see an entirely new movement of 'untethered' professionals with the opportunity to temporarily relocate to places more beautiful, inspiring and for longer periods of time. Lines will be blurred between DMOs and economic development organisations in attracting the temporary visitor beyond the usual two-day to two-week vacationers.

- ❖ Loyalty programmes and incentives will be required to attract the booming and competitive 'workation' or 'digital nomad' market.
- ❖ The development and marketing of long-stay packages, hotel lobbies as shared workspaces, as well as hotel and experience packages with shared workspace providers that meet the needs of digital nomads will be a tremendous opportunity.

## 2 TRAVEL WITH INTENTION AND IMPACT

Sustainability will be more than a buzzword as people across the globe consider how to travel with a holistically green conscience. 'Regenerative Travel' continues to gain pre-COVID momentum with both companies and travellers seeking to minimise the negative effects of tourism on the planet while simultaneously making positive impact on their host destinations.

- ❖ Clear sustainability goals, strategies and actions will be an essential and required component of every destination marketing plan.
- ❖ The ability to demonstrate alignment and contribution towards the destination's sustainability initiatives will significantly impact business success for travel operators in the future.

## 3 HYGIENE OVER FEES

Travel decisions will be dramatically influenced by cleanliness standards. With increased scrutiny on hygiene due to COVID-19, search data cites that 45% of travellers included enhanced cleaning within their top three decision-making factors. Perceptions of cleanliness, health and safety will rank higher than any other value proposition.

- ❖ Tourism health and safety certified from credible authorities providing health and safety assurances for destinations may be a key destination differentiator and driver of destination choice and attract safety conscious travellers in times to come.
- ❖ Protocol and procedures will continue to evolve based on the recommendations of health authorities, so operators can expect more costs.

## 4 THE RETURN OF CONSUMER CONFIDENCE

Although travel restrictions forced 53% of surveyed travellers to cancel or rebook travel plans this past year, many added international destinations to their future travel wish lists; 43 per cent of travellers have winter trips planned for early 2021, with nearly half (44 per cent) travelling to beach destinations and 24 per cent to more remote ski spots. With travel aspirations returning, deciding where to go, when and how will require deeper levels of decision making as new factors related to COVID-19 have impacted every aspect of travel.

- ❖ All tourism messaging will need to consistently reinforce and build confidence in target audiences.
- ❖ Marketing materials will need to consistently align with key destination marketing messages.

## 5 THE RISE OF RURAL

Search data is already showing that nearly 90 per cent of overall searches are for trips to rural areas; cabin rentals are expected to be especially popular, accounting for 33 per cent of total accommodation searches in 2020, a drastic +143 per cent increase from 2019. Securing rural-based experiences is expected to become increasingly competitive, and likely more expensive as overall demand increases.

- ❖ Destinations must note that there will be significant opportunities to re-develop the tourism industry in ways that can address historical challenges related to overtourism, environmental damage and unequal distribution of wealth.
- ❖ Entrepreneurial spirit, year-round offerings and new community partnerships will be key for business success.

## 6 WELLNESS TOURISM

It's time to embrace the future of wellness travel. The habits of travellers have changed, and more people are favouring a wellness staycation with demands for immunity boosting retreats, socially distanced trips, private jet journeys and personal health and fitness holidays. Self-care travel options will grow exponentially, for individuals, couples and families.

- ❖ Bringing existing wellness tourism infrastructure to the forefront of destination marketing strategy will be a key competitive advantage.
- ❖ As wellness tourism has traditionally been positioned as a luxury experience, this new category of business could represent opportunities to build new, lucrative revenue streams.

## 7 TRAVEL IS A LUXURY

As travel bans lift and borders open, travel will become one of the most valuable investments of time and money as people now see the ability to fly and explore our planet as a privilege. Travel at any level will become more precious, more exotic and more adventurous, and travel experiences will require more time, money and planning on domestic and international levels.

- ❖ Destinations must note that messaging related to 'why travel here' will become increasingly competitive, with unique selling propositions (USPs) more important than ever before.
- ❖ Delivering value and building brand recognition through positive consumer experience will be paramount for travel operators going forward.

## 8 LAST-MINUTE BOOKINGS

When it comes to flexibility, more travellers are booking spontaneous last-minute trips. The average number of days between booking to check-in is now 50 days, down -37.5 per cent from the average pre-pandemic lead time. The traditional mindset of 'planning the perfect vacation' will be replaced by the need to embrace travel from a place of being open-minded, adventurous and flexible.

- ❖ The ability to predict and plan for high and low volumes of travellers will become increasingly complex; investments in new methodologies for data tracking will pay dividends in the years to come, and destinations must take note of this trend.
- ❖ Business models will need to be adapted to absorb high degrees of uncertainty and surge capacity.

## 9 BUSINESS TRAVEL TO BE RESPONSIBLE

Year 2021 will usher in the era of responsible travel, with a particular focus on business travel. Those who must travel - members of the C-suite, salespeople and essential workers - will remain as early adopters with the expectation that travel providers may require disclosure of COVID-19 health status until a vaccine is widely adopted. Business travel will become increasingly personalised.

- ❖ Destinations must allow for quarantines to be replaced with rapid testing programmes to revitalise the business travel industry.
- ❖ The best way planners can support the return to business travel is to listen to the concerns of companies, organisations and business people, and to put new policies in place to help ensure that travellers feel safe.

## 10 NO-FEE TRIP CHANGES

With rules and regulations for travel changing on a daily basis, travellers will require the flexibility to change their hotel or flight booking at no extra cost to book with confidence. For some businesses, this will reinforce the other 2021 trend – doing more with less. Understanding the parameters of cancellation, associated fee and insurance will increase in complexity.

- ❖ Both private and publicly held tourism businesses will continue to feel the financial strain of COVID-19, therefore economic relief will continue to be a necessity.
- ❖ Financial strain will continue, with pressure mounting on booking and rebooking policies and procedures.

## 13 YOUNGER TRAVELLERS

The average age of travellers has dropped precipitously across all categories. As age and generational demographics of travellers shift to Gen-X and those younger travellers that follow, it's likely that other consumer travel trends such as experiences on offer, popular destinations, preferred accommodations and amenities, will follow suit.

- ❖ Understanding the values of younger demographics and effectively communicating with them will be paramount.
- ❖ Piloting new offers to meet the needs of Gen-X and younger travellers in 2021 will form the basis of successful business in the years to come.

## 16 CRUISE CONTROL

The cruise industry has suffered losses in billions. Although the companies have developed stringent hygiene concepts, whether the cruise industry can truly recover in 2021 will depend, above all, on the effectiveness of vaccination. Vaccinated individuals will likely be the first to return to cruising.

- ❖ Revenues from the cruise industry will continue to be minimal, if not obsolete, in the year to come.
- ❖ Cruise lines will need to continue working closely with health authorities to secure the future for the industry while simultaneously pivoting to embrace the younger demographic as the new primary target market.

## 19 TESTING, PROOF OF VACCINATIONS

Many countries will require proof of a negative coronavirus test for arriving international travellers and may impose additional tests upon arrival or few days later. Airports and hotels will add testing facilities, and airlines will enhance Apps to prove negative tests. Testing may continue in spite of proof of vaccinations. Destinations may still require quarantine of up to 14 days.

- ❖ Harmonised testing protocols will need to be established and communicated.
- ❖ Deep collaboration with government, health authorities and industry partners will be required to achieve alignment and consistency around health certification requirements.

## 11 SUPPORTING LOCAL

With many borders still closed, and the potential of provincial quarantines looming, domestic locations in national parks, winter ski and beach towns will gain even more traction as preferred tourist choices. The focus on domestic tourism will continue to signal a massive departure from international and regular seasonal travel over the year to come. Investing tourism dollars in the local economy is a direct opportunity to support regional recovery.

- ❖ Investing heavily in domestic tourism strategies will pay dividends in the longer term.
- ❖ Developing partnerships that reflect 'loving what's local' are a key step towards rebuilding economic stability.

## 12 THE SLOW TRAVEL MOVEMENT

After a year of international lockdown, travel agents predict that, overall, travellers have acquired a taste for a slower pace. Slow travel aims to give travellers a rich understanding of life in their destination through interactions with local people and opportunities to experience a community on a deeper level. Especially important if multiple COVID-19 negative tests are required and long quarantine periods, the quick trip is far less likely.

- ❖ Investments in infrastructure to accommodate new 'travel bubbles' could be essential in supporting travel trends.
- ❖ Integrative, local and authentic experiences that reflect this new aspiration can be marketed at a premium.

## 14 DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The capacity for tourism businesses of all sizes to evolve their business models, adopt digital technologies to effectively participate in global value ecosystems, and take up new ways of data-driven working will shape productivity, social and economic well-being in the future. From health passports to virtual experiences to travel-based Apps, connection to destinations will be dramatically shaped by new technologies.

- ❖ Digital engagement will become the foundation of any successful tourism strategy.
- ❖ Investment in new technologies - and the knowledge of how to use them - will drive business operations forward.

## 15 TRAVEL AGENT VALUE SURGE

The mass chaos and confusion caused by COVID-19 has strengthened the travel manager's resolve to significantly reduce, if not prohibit, unmanaged travel. With travellers less likely to leave home without one, travel professionals will grow their influence exponentially.

- ❖ With travel professionals (re)emerging as strategic business partners, new mechanisms for communicating key information will need to be built into destination marketing sales funnels.
- ❖ Cultivating relationships with travel managers will be an essential component of every business plan and budget.

## 17 VALUE-DRIVEN AUTHENTICITY

The intensity of the pandemic has shed more light on the global issues faced by the collective. As we move into 2021, consumers will re-examine their values and seek the 'new luxury' – brands with a conscious. The travel industry is no exception.

- ❖ Now, more than ever, destinations will need to articulate their unique value propositions within the context of the new paradigm of health, safety, responsibility and equity and how these values align with those of their prospective visitors.
- ❖ Like destinations, operators will need to define and demonstrate their values in authentic ways with a focus on proving 'consciousness' through positive impact.

## 18 'VAXICATIONS'

Pent-up demand for travel, the promise of vaccines for the general public by summer, and border/quarantine restrictions potentially being lifted by internationally coordinated digital health passports will result in a rush of vaccine-enabled vacations.

- ❖ Destinations capable of accepting travellers visiting for the purpose of receiving the vaccine should prepare special packages to maximise spending during the trip. Additionally, they should consider coordination and standardisation of certifications.
- ❖ Operators should work closely with their destination leaders to identify opportunities to cater to this new segment.

## 20 DESTINATION ASIA

As borders gradually open and more people are planning to travel in 2021, destinations within Asia are the most searched for international travel as revealed by the 2021 Expedia Travel Trends Report. With all the positive global media coverage around Asia's early handling of the pandemic, it's no surprise that many are looking east for a glimpse of recovery. Opportunities to travel to and within Asia will significantly increase.

- ❖ Understanding and countering the key benefits of the competition will enable stronger market position.
- ❖ Successful strategies in Asia can be adapted in other destinations moving forward.

## 21 SOLO TRAVEL TAKES A PAUSE

In 2020, the share of bookings for single accommodations dropped by 44% compared to 2019 according to data, with most looking to travel with an average of six companions. That said, solo women travellers are predicted to be on the rise. With the shift to group travel, securing individual experiences could become more challenging and expensive.

- ❖ Investments in infrastructure to accommodate new 'travel bubbles' could be essential in supporting travel trends over the years to come.
- ❖ Offers and packages will need to be reconfigured to support groups and the intrepid single female traveller.



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# Saudi – the true home of Arabia

Saudi is a country of extraordinary natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. Still largely unexplored by international visitors, the country offers a dizzying array of experiences for the curious traveller. This list of Saudi's must-visit destinations offers visitors a journey they've never imagined.



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**T**he Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest country in the Middle East, and fourth most populous in the MENA region. In September 2019, Saudi Arabia opened its doors to leisure tourists from around the world. This historic milestone is a key step in the implementation of Vision 2030, the Kingdom's

economic diversification programme, aiming to connect Saudi to the world.

#### Adventure

Saudi offers awe-inspiring natural phenomena and exciting ways to explore its diverse terrain. The Kingdom boasts quite an itinerary – from desert and water adventures to camping and hiking through caves and craters.



#### Culture

Saudi culture is as rich as it is diverse. Visit the Kingdom's many mosques and traditional markets to experience a rhythm of life that has little changed over the centuries. Explore the different regions to experience the multi-cultural variety of foods, lifestyles and customs. And, for a taste of the modern Saudi, don't miss the urban districts and entertainment centres.



and King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture.

#### Museums and history

Saudi is home to a plethora of museums, castles and cultural institutions. Visitors can immerse themselves in exhibitions and displays that not only highlight the ancient past but also bring to light more contemporary works by local and international artists. Of note are the National Museum in Riyadh, The Antiquities Museum,

#### Souqs and shopping

From old-world souqs to modern malls and boutique concept stores, Saudi has a wealth of shopping options, offering everything from traditional wares to designer items to creative collections and offbeat décor.

#### Heritage

Experience a land where the past comes to life. From the

labyrinthine streets of ancient cities, to the intricate rock carvings of early civilisations, the Kingdom's rich history is written large across the landscape. Explore the ancient ruins and rock-carved tombs of Nabataean Hegra or walk the narrow winding streets of Al-Turaif, surrounded by beautiful Najd architecture.

Today, there are more than 11,000 archaeological sites throughout the Kingdom, telling

the story of the civilizations that lived over the years. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is proud to have five UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

#### Nature

Whether you are sailing the crystalline waters of the Saudi Red Sea, exploring one of the country's many national parks or hiking through the green hills of Al Baha, Saudi will surprise and delight visitors with a wealth of natural treasures.

# 'The idea is to guide the Ministry'

► Contd from page 1

bound to be some behavioural shifts among travellers. One such shift will definitely be the preference to choose nature, wildlife and rural settings over crowded urban areas. Assam and the Northeast abound in these. This is where we can score by marketing our lesser-known destinations, our rural destinations and our Community-Based Tourism (CBT) projects. Though the Northeast is dotted with CBT initiatives, we being from the region know little about these destinations and the activities built around them. A CBT fair can bring them on to one platform to showcase their products and activities." Das also points out a second and a very crucial issue that the committee needs to look at. "A very common concern of a traveller is the high airfare to travel to Northeast. So it is important to explore the possibility for capping the airfare to make us competitive," he says.



Ranjeet Das  
Past President and Advisor  
TOAA



Arijit Purkayastha  
Chapter Chairman  
ADTOI - North East Chapter



E Banium Blah  
President, NEITC and  
Proprietor, Clara Tours

It is important to explore the possibility for capping the airfare to make us competitive

Tourists to the region have to cover long distances; proper paid washroom facilities are a must

We need to focus on circuit development and capacity building for infrastructure, hotels, skilling of manpower

Chapter, has also made a few suggestions to the committee. "Northeast India has always been able to allure tourists as a mystical region abounding in nature standing true to the tagline 'Paradise Unexplored'. Tourists that once come to

the region are enamoured by what they see and experience. Though most of them show a keen interest in revisiting, there are various practical factors that deter them from choosing the region again. One of them is lack of clean public toilets. As

tourists coming to the region have to cover long distances to connect the tourist destinations, proper paid washroom facilities are a must," he says.

He suggests that the first phase to implement this could be in

#### What's already being done

For overall development of the particular destination, the Ministry, under its different schemes such as Swadesh Darshan, PRASHAD, etc., provides financial assistance to the Northeastern states which includes assistance for development of tourist infrastructure, promotion of fairs/festivals, tourism-related events in the region, publicity campaigns, etc. Moreover, one of the Ministry's key initiatives is augmenting tourism infrastructure and connectivity of a destination which plays a vital role. Under the Ministry of Civil Aviation's UDAN scheme, 46 tourism routes got included under RCS-UDAN 3.0 and 78 routes under RCS UDAN 4.0.

Assam, which is the gateway to the Northeast, where upgraded toilets can be made available in petrol pumps. "This facility can be made available at every 50-km stretch on national or state highways," Purkayastha adds.

He suggests that the Ministry can make its Northeast India International Travel Marts one of the grandest marts of India with integrated and concerted effort. So far, eight NE-ITMs have been held. "There is also some confusion regarding two ITMs, viz., International Travel Mart for NE organised by Ministry of Tourism and the other one India Tourism Mart which is organised by FAITH and Ministry of Tourism. The branding of this mart, we feel, should be highlighted as North East-ITM," he adds.

#### Good representation

**E Banium Blah**, President, North East India Tourism Confederation (NEITC) and Proprietor, Clara Tours in Meghalaya, feels that this new committee which has around 20-22 individuals has good representation from both the travel and hospitality industries. He says, "The idea is to guide the ministry as to the main pain points and suggest solutions. I feel we need to focus on circuit development and capacity building in terms of infrastructure, hotels, and skilling of manpower here."

#### Tourist amenities lacking

**Arijit Purkayastha**, Chapter Chairman, ADTOI – North East

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# Travellers may drift to cruising

At CruiseWorld India 2021 organised by the Singapore Tourism Board and Northstar Travel, industry stakeholders concurred that people may opt for cruising as a means to travel and holiday. 'Seacations' are already trending among Singaporeans, making stakeholders realise the growing importance of a consumer-centric approach in the new normal.

## Customer is king



**GB Srithar**  
Regional Director, India, Middle East and South Asia  
Singapore Tourism Board

“Customer-centricity has been the focus as Singapore restarted cruises for domestic audiences, and the cruise lines have continually refreshed onboard programming to appeal to passengers. Ensuring stringent hygiene and safety measures under our Cruise-eSafe certification programme and enabling seamless visitor experiences are critical in enticing cruise travellers back, when the time is right.”

## Learning from domestic

“The domestic customers in Singapore are taking 'seacations', which is encouraging for a cruise line because for 2-3 nights, one can keep guests engaged with various activities and services. We have not had issues with customer experience since cruising started in Singapore. Feedback has been strong and a major difference in booking trend is for The Palace. So if people can pay for luxury, they will buy luxury.”



**Naresh Rawal**  
Vice President, Sales & Marketing  
Genting Cruise Lines

## Opportunity to future-proof



**Varun Chadha**  
CEO, TIRUN Travel Marketing,  
India representative for Royal Caribbean International

“Royal Caribbean's ocean gateways for the domestic market in Singapore have been successful. There are new customers and segments in the offering and we are eager to tap these in the Fly Cruise format, too. Cruise lines have shown resilience and innovation and the opportunity in this crises, is to re-align/re-energise efforts in cruising, which would continue to be one of the fastest growing segments in travel.”

## 1<sup>st</sup> choice is Singapore

“When Indians start travelling, most of them will be vaccinated and hence, travel safety will be one part of it. More important is the experience that we will have to focus on along with affordability. Most suppliers are going to offer special deals to customers. When borders open, owing to its proximity, affordability and hygiene & safety standards, Singapore will be the first choice for cruising. We are looking at the value we can offer.”



**Pradeep Saboo**  
MD, Guideline Travels

## Corporates are eager



**Sanjay Kothari**  
Founder and Managing Director  
Just Holidays

“The corporates are waiting for borders to open. When that happens, they would be the first movers in small incentive groups and conference groups to Singapore for cruises, because Indian travellers trust Singapore and their cruises. There will also be special interest movement, maybe in small sizes. I think, cruising will be the first choice for Indians after borders open. I am sure we will have a lot of selling to do.”

## Safety remains key

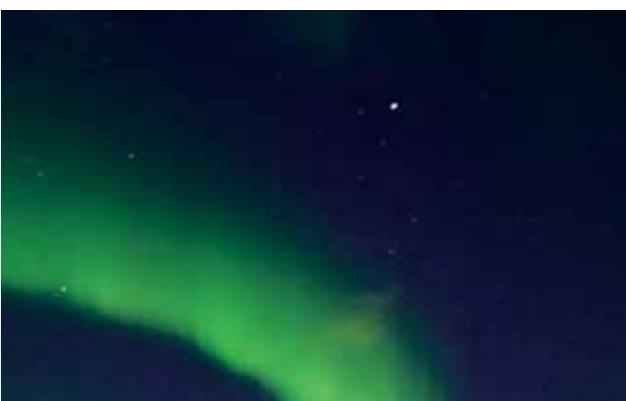
“Itineraries will range from 2-5 days and people travelling with family and friends would stay as a group. Many safety measures have been taken up by leading cruise companies and that's going to help us in inducing people to travel on cruises. Apart from that, the Cruise Development Fund support scheme for the industry will now be used for persuading the customer to travel instead of for promotion.”



**Rajeev Kale**  
President & Country Head – Holidays,  
MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India)  
Inputs by Nisha Verma

# Revenge travel ushers in business

Thomas Cook India and SOTC undertook a group of 28 passengers for a 7 night/8 days' tour to Russia. In addition to Moscow and St. Petersburg, they added the exciting Arora Borealis or Northern Lights experience in Murmansk. Other highlights were a tour of the Metro, Hermitage Museum, Kazan Cathedral, Vodka Museum and Great Russian Circus. Is this a business re-start for outbound operators?



# Connect to Rajkot sans Ahmedabad

Low-cost carriers IndiGo and SpiceJet have started new daily flights to Rajkot from key metro cities of India, fulfilling the demand for enhanced connectivity by the travel trade in the region. Travel to the industrial centre earlier required people to transit via Ahmedabad, adding four to six needless hours to the journey.

 Manas Dwivedi

 Joyous over the new flights, the travel trade fraternity of Rajkot and the region is sure the move will give some much-needed impetus to tourism here.

**Sanjay Mehta**, CEO, Transglobe Travels, says, "The



Sanjay Mehta  
CEO, Transglobe Travels

Mehta says that in the absence of regular flights, passengers had to travel via Ahmedabad

  
**Increased connectivity to Saurashtra's financial capital will boost trade, commerce and tourism**

– Sanjay Kumar



Sanjay Kumar  
Chief Strategy and Revenue Officer, IndiGo

flights from Ahmedabad. Practically six hours were lost in transit," he shares.

Talking about the commencement of IndiGo's Rajkot operations, **Sanjay Kumar**, Chief Strategy and Revenue Officer, IndiGo, says, "Rajkot, known

## Attractions in & around Rajkot

- ❖ Mahatma Gandhi Museum, Ranjit Vilas Palace, Rotary Dolls Museum, Kaba Gandhi No Delo, and Aji Dam are must-visit places in Rajkot
- ❖ To the south of Rajkot, visit Junagadh, Sasan Gir, Somnath and Diu
- ❖ To the north, visit Jamnagar and the marine life in surrounding areas near Surendranagar, as well as Little Rann of Kutch (LRK)
- ❖ To the east of Rajkot are Palitana and Alang (currently the world's largest ship breaking yard), and Ghogha Port where visitors can board a Roro service to Surat
- ❖ To the west lie Dwarka, Porbandar and the famous Madhavpur Beach (near Porbandar)

  
The increased air connectivity will enhance the convenience of passengers and encourage them to travel more

– Sanjay Mehta

increased air connectivity to Rajkot will enhance the convenience of passengers and hence, encourage them to travel more. Tourist arrivals in Rajkot will have a great impact. People residing outside Gujarat will be able to travel directly to Rajkot and then connect to nearby destinations like Diu, Sasan Gir, Somnath, Dwarka, Palitana and Shivrajpur Beach that recently received the Blue Flag certification."

which would add four cumbersome hours to their journey to Rajkot. "Same-day return for corporate travellers was not feasible. Also, it was inconvenient to catch early-morning

for its casting and forging industries, is one of the prime industrial centres in Gujarat. Increased connectivity to Saurashtra's financial capital will boost trade, commerce

and tourism in the region. IndiGo is committed to providing an affordable, on-time, safe and hassle-free travel experience on-board its lean, clean flying machine." 

*Due to an abundance of low-cost connectivity and an increased preference for travel closer to home, intra-regional tourism will play a key role in revitalising ASEAN countries' tourism economies, says data and analytics company GlobalData.*

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# Develop business mutually

Swiss aviation company Air Dynamic is looking to make the most of the growing interest in charter flights among India's high-end travellers by encouraging mutual business development with partners.

 Manas Dwivedi

**R**affaella Meledandri, Managing Director, Air Dynamic, says they wanted to enter the Indian high-end travellers' market through a qualified and professional source on site, which they found in One Rep Global. "Air Dynamic has found a very interesting and enthusiastic partner in India with One Rep Global. We have had a lot of demand and queries for long-haul private jets to India, or from India to Maldives, Oman, etc., as well as for business trips within Europe such as Frankfurt and Geneva. That said, there are no helicopter trip requests for holidays in Italy, Switzerland or the greater EU at the moment, but that is something we would like to expand and promote as well," she shares.

The rapidly growing Indian market is very important for Air Dynamic, and the country has



Raffaella Meledandri  
Managing Director  
Air Dynamic

always been a land of opportunity for the Swiss aviation company. "Over the past few years, an increasing number of Indians have started flying charters. They have seen the advantages of this and thus, this is the perfect time for us to develop it further. We are fully trusting in the marketing skills that One Rep Global brings to the table and we are confident that Air Dynamic is going to become a force to reckon with in India," Meledandri adds. For 2021, Air Dynamic will

focus on strengthening existing partnerships by creating mutual business development concepts. And, as and when time and circumstances allow, the company will return to organising special events for its high-end clientele and propose new products, aircraft models

  
**We are confident that Air Dynamic is going to become a force to reckon with in India**

as well as packages. Meledandri is pinning her hopes on the surge in Indian travellers opting for private air charters. 

# Amritara ready to reboot

Amritara Hotels & Resorts is making sure it reaches both domestic and inbound travel agents in the country by way of lucrative offers and constant communication, respectively.

 Nisha Verma

Amritara Hotels & Resorts is planning to give high margins to domestic travel agents so the group can strengthen its position in all zones.

**Sarvar Hans**, National Sales Director, Amritara Hotels & Resorts, says, "For OTAs as well, we are putting forth summer offers to capitalise on room nights. On the other hand, we are doing vigorous marketing in the inbound market so that when there is a reboot of operations, Amritara is their first choice." To achieve these goals, Hans shares they are focusing more on marketing, promotions and offers on their brand website as well as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter handles. The group is also participating in travel trade fairs to showcase its presence across India.

Now, with people having begun travelling again and the vaccination drive on, Amritara is making sure that travellers are confident of checking into its properties. "Since people have started travelling, we assure them a 100% COVID-free environment. We adhere to FS-



Sarvar Hans  
National Sales Director  
Amritara Hotels & Resorts

cupancy of 48 per cent, it is now anticipating a 20 per cent hike in the second quarter, mainly at its leisure properties and

  
**We are putting forth summer offers to capitalise on room nights**

those situated at hill stations. And, with talk of borders opening for foreign tourists in full swing, Hans optimistically adds, "It's a good sign that the government has started talking about opening borders for foreign tourists because without international travel, the Indian tourism industry is incomplete." 

# Partnerships must ensue

► *Contd from page 1*

opportunities that came their way," he asserted, adding, "The next phase would be to see women who have not had access to these facilities; are from rural areas, small towns and cities; or who are marginalised and not from strong economic groups, come into the mainstream, start by getting into micro entrepreneurship, or take up jobs in the hospitality sector. This way we will be doing a great service to the country and the economy."

Quoting Christine Lagarde, former MD of the International Monetary Fund, Singh said, "When women do better, the economies do better and that is a worldwide phenomenon being experienced by all of us. Tourism has a pivotal role to play in achieving the commitments at the heart of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development."

## Gender-equal tourism

That said, Singh believes that while the potential for a gender-equal tourism industry is promising, there is still much to do to remove stereotypes, enable entrepreneurship and foster leadership by women.

  
**Tourism is one of the routes through which women can be integrated into economic and social life**

will help increase self-reliance as well as better their position within families and society, leading to their empowerment," he suggested. Singh believes that financial incentives and support, technology and infrastructure, capacity building, advocacy and shaping attitudes including talking about gender-sensitive laws, policies and regulations can be a starting point in addressing gaps. 

"A 2015 study by McKinsey found that narrowing the gender gap could double the contribution of women to global GDP between the years 2014 and 2025. A full potential scenario in which women participate in the economy identical to men, that's the situation where around \$28 trillion could be added to the annual global GDP by 2025. Such is the potential of increased participation by women in the labour force. The fact that such a large percentage of women have entered the non-traditional areas is testament to entrepreneurship being boosted not only by programmes and schemes of the Indian government, but by larger efforts of educational institutions and society," he shared.

And what of having special zones for women entrepreneurs or for small businesses by women? Singh claimed that state governments have programmes in place, and the Central government has schemes like PRASHAD and Swadesh Darshan which will have sizeable investments. Furthermore, if TAAI and FLO could coordinate with MOT on the matter, they could develop something at these places. 

# Kevadia great for FTAs

**Nirav Munshi**, Manager, Marketing & Commercial, Gujarat Tourism, believes that Kevadia can easily become more than a two-nighter not just for domestic but also international tourists.

 Hazel Jain

 **How are you promoting SoU among the trade?**

The Statue of Unity (SoU) is being promoted assertively across India. Recently, two big events were successfully carried out here. The Tourism Department organised a convention and familiarisation tour of 400 tour operators pan India for Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI). The second one was the TAAI Conclave and familiarisation tour for 200 tour operators. Overall, we received a very good response from the tour operators during these travel association events.

**How many people have visited SoU and what are your expectations from 2021 for Kevadia?**  
Familiarisation tours are being organised for travel agents and some introductory packages can be offered to travel agents on booking accommodation.



Nirav Munshi  
Manager, Marketing & Commercial, Gujarat Tourism

with colourful lightings. I believe international tourists will also enjoy the attractions at Kevadia, especially since they are well-maintained with high level of cleanliness, security that would suit their standards.

## What changes would the new tourism policy bring?

The new tourism policy has been finalised. Guidelines will be released as per the government.

Lakhs of tourists have visited the SoU since 2018 and the same is expected in 2021.

**Do you plan to conduct B2B roadshows with Gujarat suppliers meeting buyers from other states?**

We conduct B2B roadshows in the beginning of every year in major cities across the nation.

## Can Kevadia be more than a two-night destination?

Kevadia and SoU are two days' destinations; it can be even more as there are many attractions to be visited at Kevadia. A night trip to the SoU is even more fantastic

  
**Lakhs of tourists have visited SoU since 2018; same is expected in 2021**

Two new hotels have come up at SoU, i.e. Ramada and The Fern. And our new tourism policy contains the exemptions, policies, taxes, etc., for the development of new hotels. 

# MMT expands reach in the UAE

**Deepak Rawat**, Senior Vice President, International Markets, MakeMyTrip (MMT), talks about the company's expansion in the UAE market at a time when the pandemic was at play! In the future, he believes, a common health passport and standardised rules will be critical for the growth of travel.



Nisha Verma

**C**onsumer service is what MakeMyTrip focused on when the world came to a halt in 2020 owing to COVID-19.

Now, almost a year later, **Deepak Rawat** looks back and says that for them, the biggest challenges at the time were the aviation and hotel industries where many changes were required by the customer. "Hence, we adapted and focused more on consumer services, ensuring that we reached out to them for any help they needed. Also, we used this to work on technology to serve the customers better, and that started giving us results. Overall, cost cutting and controlling operations cost were some tough decisions we took," he shares.

But, like it was for everyone else, domestic was the ray of

hope for MMT, too. "Now we see that gradually, domestic travel has started doing well. Hence, whenever outbound starts, it will be 'revenge travel' and it will come back with a big bang. The time right now is about patience and ensuring that we do the right things. We are already seeing positive results, which is a very healthy sign," indicates Rawat.

During those hard times, MMT took some new initiatives as well. "During this time, we expanded our offerings into the UAE as a plan of our expansion in the GCC. That is a big achievement for us. We are already seeing some exciting results on the region and hopefully, we will continue to expand in the GCC region," he says.

#### Bowing to technology

With the world embracing technology in this period, even brick-and-mortar agencies



Deepak Rawat  
Senior VP, International Markets  
MakeMyTrip

shifted to online sales, which earlier was a threat to them. Coexistence is the way forward, Rawat agrees, saying, "Technology is something we will have to live with. The virtual world and touchless travel will be more relevant. Anybody and everybody who adapts to the changing world will see the results of the new trends. Going ahead, it's being up to the mark in terms of technology offerings that will help us reach out to customers or give them the experience and



motivate them to come and travel with us. This will decide where the customer will go. Some companies have made good progress already," he informs.

#### Seamless processes

What works, according to Rawat, is giving a seamless experience of booking, ensuring that the right information is given to customers. "By state and country, the rules were changing and giving accurate information to the customer was important for him to decide. There were many things to be considered, including registering

The virtual world and touchless travel will be more relevant

He adds that today, hotels and flights are getting better. The first to catch the eye of the customer were long weekends and driveable locations. "We have worked on those packages as we could see consumer demand for them. We also saw short-stay domestic packages doing very well in pockets like Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Kashmir and Kerala. I believe, with summer holidays, it is only going to grow, as people will be more open to breaks and hopefully, with the vaccination drive going on in full swing, we will see a positive impact on travel," adds Rawat. He believes that standardised rules will also play a critical role in the resumption of travel.

on the Air Suvidha portal and the various quarantine rules in different states. Apart from that, it was critical that we worked closely with hotel partners in developing safety standards," he shares.

New Zealand has banned entry of travellers from India, including its own citizens, amid COVID-19 concerns. The ban, which was applicable April 11 onwards, will continue till April 28 this year.

# Tech will again be a big help?

► Contd from page 1



Sanjar Imam  
Founder Director, Panache World

"We cannot let fear freeze the sector, not for a second time. Unlike last time, the dip in infection rate this time around would also coincide with vaccinations, which are underway. That makes the present situation not as grim as 2020. There are thousands of entrepreneurs and travel businesses that set shop in the last few years and focused only on outbound tourism. They did not know differently; outbound is what thrived over the past couple of decades. They now need to keenly look inwards and educate themselves on what India has to offer as a destination. This opportunity should not be relegated as a short-term solution but more a developing trend."

"Certainly, the tourism industry will not come to a standstill like last year. Currently, there are no restrictions on aviation so domestic tourism is going to continue, but scheduled tours are getting cancelled. It has become essential for the trade to adapt to the situation and adopt technology. Unfortunately, there are still a large number of people who have not accepted the use of technology. This is a big drawback and tour operators are still not fully-equipped to work from home, which makes them underprepared to face another lockdown. Everyone in the trade should come forward and get vaccinated, and be prepared to face the worst."



Harmandeep Singh Anand  
Managing Director  
Jagsons Travels



Mahendra Vakharia  
MD, Pathfinders Holidays

"Honestly, things were looking positive in February and it was expected that the summer season will be good, but rise in cases has come as a roadblock. The experience of last one year will be very useful to face the times now; we had no idea then of what was happening and how long it was to last, but now we are wiser, more aware and better prepared to face the situation. For some time now, we might face this start-again, stop-again situation but it will be good if our industry is mindful of it and is prepared. My suggestion is, take care of your client, keep communication going, keep a close watch on the situation and focus on SMS - 'S'anitising, 'M'asks and 'S'ocial distancing."

"Last one year or so, we utilised the time productively by doing things we had not done for a long time. We were able to enhance our skills on technology and data. All these measures will help us in the future when inbound tourism starts again in the country. I would say yes, we are prepared, absolutely! If we are not prepared now, I don't know when we will be prepared. We are ready, whenever inbound business comes, we are prepared. My belief is, whatever ups and down we face due to the second wave of COVID infections, October 2021 is the time travellers will be ready to travel to India and the route to normalcy will commence."



Homa Mistry  
CEO, Trail Blazer Tours India  
Inputs by Manas Dwivedi

# 7 Cross hotels in Japan

**T**hailand-based hospitality group Cross Hotels & Resorts has expanded its footprint with entry into the Japanese market in a master franchise agreement with AB Accommodation Company.



Harry Thaliwal  
CEO, Cross Hotels & Resorts

Cross Hotels & Resorts currently operates 21 hotels across three distinct brands - Cross, Cross Vibe and Away - in Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia.

It anticipates a rewarding future in Japan with seven properties initially, totalling 844 keys within four years and stretching across Okinawa in the far south to Hokkaido. The



inaugural property, located on Kouri Island, will be called Away Okinawa Kouri Island Resort and seamlessly match the Away brand's 'Escape Everyday Life' philosophy. The resort is a boutique beachfront paradise that will offer guests jaw-dropping views over the East China Sea. It is scheduled to open in July this year.

"With the signing of Away Okinawa Kouri Island Resort we have brought to fruition our stated aspiration to grow our brands in the best markets in the Asia region. The Away brand emphasises the strength of our capabilities, our growth and our commitment to help our owners identify their product position in the marketplace," says **Harry Thaliwal**, Chief Executive Officer, Cross Hotels & Resorts.

# Truly, more than meets the eye



With a focus on changing the perception of the country as a mere pilgrimage or mountain destination for Indian travellers, Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) recently met the travel trade in India, in New Delhi, to educate them on its several tourism offerings. NTB CEO **Dr Dhananjay Regmi** addressed attendees on the day.





# EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



APRIL-2021

Date	Event	Time
15	Spain Tourism Webinar- Andalucia	03:00 pm
16	PATA Update & Outlook Meeting (Virtual)	03:00 pm
21	IATA Webinar on vaccine transport	05:30 pm
22	Spain Tourism Webinar	03:00 pm
27	Webinar on Budget Rental Cars	11:00 am
27-29	MRO-Americas	Orlando
27-29	Virtual PATA Annual Summit 2021	07:30 am
27-29	Virtual German Travel Mart 2021	02:30 pm
28	JTB Corporate MICE Show	10:00 am
28	UNWTO Asia Pacific Webinar	10:00 am
29	CAPA India Webinar	04:00 pm
28-30	World Tourism Forum	Lucerne, Switzerland

MAY-2021

7-9	ITB China- Special edition	Beijing
9-11	BIT Milano- Digital edition	TBA
16-19	Arabian Travel Market (ATM) Hybrid	Dubai
19-23	Fitur	Madrid

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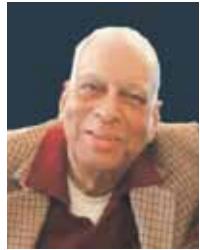
## IN MEMORIAM



Shahul Hameed

We are deeply saddened to inform you about the sudden and untimely demise of **Shahul Hameed**, Chairman of the Southern Region for TAAI and Director of Al Ahwad Travels, on April 4.

## IN MEMORIAM



**Dr Devaki Saran**, a senior TAAI member and Director, Dex Air Transport, New Delhi, has left for heavenly abode. He had also served as Chairman, TAAI Northern Region from 1995-96.

# Air Seychelles records 80% PLF

Air Seychelles resumed its flight operations between Mumbai and Seychelles on April 8 this year, and on the first day itself, departing from Mumbai, recorded a Passenger Load Factor (PLF) of 80 per cent. It continues to now build awareness of its products & services in India.



Nisha Verma

Air Seychelles successfully resumed its commercial passenger flights from Mumbai to Seychelles on April 8 in line with the air bubble agreement between India and Seychelles. The flight on the first day carried 120 passengers, around an 80 per cent load factor for the airline, from Mumbai. Seychelles has opened its borders for tourists from across the world irrespective of their vaccination status. In fact, the East African nation already has 85 per cent of its population vaccinated, posing no threat to tourists. Hence, good air connectivity, fewer travel restrictions and with relevant safety protocols in place, Seychelles is all set to inspire confidence in Indians to travel to the white-sand-adorned island nation.

The new twice-weekly flights departing from Chhatrapati



Remco Althuis  
Chief Executive Officer  
Air Seychelles



"To stimulate demand on this route, Air Seychelles will continue to work with its partners in India to build awareness about the airline's products,

**Our partner agents are combining interesting tour packages with our direct flights**

Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, Mumbai, will operate on Thursdays and Sundays. Return flights from Seychelles International Airport are scheduled for Wednesdays and Saturdays. The schedule has been curated to provide business and leisure travellers the flexibility to book a short or extended holiday in the Seychelles. The airline plans to soon connect to more cities within India.

**Remco Althuis**, Chief Executive Officer, Air Seychelles, says,

services and attractive fares on offer to destination Seychelles. Our partner agents are also combining interesting

tour packages to the beautiful islands and with Air Seychelles' direct flights. If you are tired of being indoors and want to completely disconnect from the bustling city life, Seychelles is the ideal location for your holiday."

### Special fare alert!

Air Seychelles is promoting special all-inclusive fares from Mumbai to Seychelles starting from ₹33,600 for Economy Class and ₹75,000 for Business Class. Tickets can be issued through partner travel agents in India or by contacting Air Seychelles office in Mumbai at +91 2248825816/ 13 or writing to bookingsindia@airseychelles.com.

# ATOAI revamps sub-committees

In a recent interaction with members, **Vishwas Makhija**, President, ATOAI, apprised them on the initiatives undertaken by the Association such as restructuring of the sub-committees, formation of a women's task force, and ensuring more interactive meetings in the future as well.



Manas Dwivedi



Vishwas Makhija  
President, ATOAI

### Website revamp and committee formations

Makhija also shared that his team had finalised a vendor for a revamp of the ATOAI website and that work had already begun on that front. ATOAI committee formations have also been completed. "Volunteer work in various committees is truly appreciated by the members. We need more active participation in our committees as we move ahead and surely, more hands are needed to achieve the goals we have set out for ourselves. I look forward to members'

### ATOAI in Ladakh

"I was invited by the Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh for the second Ladakh Winter Conclave held in Leh. It was a great Conclave with people from a vast spectrum present. Adventure tourism, winter tourism to Ladakh, as well as new outdoor activity options such as bouldering, rock climbing, iceclimbing, skiing, paragliding were widely discussed and ideas exchanged. There was also discussion on requesting the Indian government to open up climbing peaks, border areas for tourism, and for tour operators to get access to satellite phones. For the first time, a GOC from the Army participated in the Conclave and a well laid out, open discussion took place with him on working with support from the Army. I also met **Rigzin Samphel**, Commissioner Secretary, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh, on the sidelines of the Conclave. He showed great interest in ATOAI hosting a members' meet in Ladakh in the coming months; we will be working on this," said Makhija.

that his team is already working on such a meeting either within Delhi or around it. "It



**These are still early days for this team, but steady progress is being made**

participation and being part of the ATOAI journey. The future leadership of ATOAI is within current members," he said.

### Members' meet

The Association President said that it would soon resume physical members' meets and

has been a rather long time since we all got together. The ATOAI team is doing its best to add more value to the membership," he concluded.

*Based on current trends, UNWTO expects international tourist arrivals to be down about 85% in Q1 of 2021 over the same period of 2019. This would represent a loss of 260 million international arrivals when compared to pre-pandemic levels.*

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**IHG HOTELS & RESORTS****IMEA**

**Haitham Mattar**, who serves as Senior Advisor at Saudi Ministry of Tourism, will take over as Managing Director of India, Middle East & Africa (IMEA) at IHG Hotels & Resorts April 18<sup>th</sup> onwards and will be based at their Dubai office. This is Mattar's second stint at IHG, having previously spent 11 years at the company between 2000 and 2011 in different capacities. Mattar is a well-known industry veteran in the IMEA region, with over 25 years of experience in hospitality and tourism. He has even served as CEO of Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority.

**GRAND MERCURE GOPALAN MALL****Bengaluru**

**Sachin Maheshwary** has joined Grand Mercure Bengaluru Gopalan Mall as General Manager. He has spearheaded the opening of the 212-key property and is responsible for leading the operations and business development of the recently launched hotel. A seasoned hotelier with extensive experience in operations and food & beverage, he started his journey with Accor in 2016 following his appointment at the Novotel Mumbai Juhu Beach as an Executive Assistant Manager. Maheshwary has also worked with Taj Hotels and Resorts for over 14 years across multiple disciplines.

**WELCOMHOTEL****Coimbatore**

**Erine Louis** is the new General Manager at the LEED-certified, 103-key Welcomhotel Coimbatore. A dynamic and result-oriented hotelier with exceptional experience in managing leisure and business hotels for over two decades, Louis moves to the role from that of General Manager, The Residency Towers Chennai. He possesses extensive knowledge on every aspect of hotel operations. A compelling communicator and a strong motivator, Louis firmly believes in 'team works'. In the past, he has worked at several southern hotels, including Brunton Boatyard, Marari Beach Resort and Casino Hotel, Kerala.

**MARRIOTT HOTEL****Indore**

Indore Marriott Hotel has appointed **Rishi Kumar** as General Manager. Known for his exceptional leadership qualities complimented by a diverse work experience, he brings valuable knowledge from varied assignments with reputed international and Indian hotel chains. In his previous role as Director of Operations at Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway, Kumar was spearheading the overall hotel operations and was vigorously involved in designing and planning the hotel's business development strategy.

**PARK PLAZA****Zirakpur**

Sarovar Hotels and Resorts has appointed **K Paul Singh** as the new General Manager of Park Plaza, Zirakpur. A seasoned hospitality operations professional, Singh comes with more than 20 years of experience in the industry. He has worked overseas with prominent hospitality brands in the USA, UAE and China, and was most recently the EAM Food & Beverage for Grand Hyatt, Bali, Indonesia. Singh's new role will see him focusing on business development and a strategy for making the hotel a preferred destination for business as well as leisure travellers.

**MARRIOTT HOTEL****Kochi**

**Subhankar Bose** has been appointed as the new General Manager of Kochi Marriott Hotel. A seasoned hospitality operations professional, Bose comes with 20 years of experience in the industry. With his incisive management skills, he will lead this established property to identify new ventures and avenues for profitable business. Prior to his current role, Bose was the General Manager at Renaissance Bengaluru Race Course Hotel where he piloted the property in its positioning activations, elevated guest experience, and accelerated food and beverage reputation.

**Off the Record****Of determination and learning**

From being an engineer to a stock trader to a tour operator, **Sanjay Shah**, Managing Director, Flamingo Transworld, has donned many a hat and gained abundant experience. This is the story of his journey, his passion for travelling and his love for history. And, in his professional capacity, he even shares with us his take on the future of tourism.

 After completing his Bachelor's in Civil Engineering and Master's in Structural Engineering, **Sanjay Shah** began working in Mumbai with a French company called Stup Consultants, while his entire family was into stock and commodity trading. However, as luck would have it, Shah's uncle passed away and things took a turn. "We shifted our commodity business to Ahmedabad and I became a part of it," he shares. But, Shah felt something was still amiss. "We realised that the stock market was basically a game of virtual numbers. Hence, we thought of doing something different and diversified into the travel agency business with Flamingo Transworld, which was started by my wife Meeta Shah with only three women working with her," he says.



time to the travel business and joined his wife in 2002, almost eight years after the company was launched. "We wanted to expand, but instead of ticketing, we wanted to focus on tourism, more outbound than domestic. Hence, we started reaching out to Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Europe, USA, etc," he shares.

By 2001, Shah found himself devoting more and more

when he first took a tour to Europe. "It was a life-changing experience. It was a 12-day tour with 175 Pax, and was full of challenges. Somehow, we managed to not miss a single sight which, according to my DMC partner, was the eighth wonder of the world," he jests.

**Shah, the logophile**

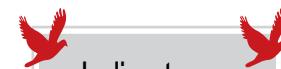
Shah loves to mix with people when travelling, his favourite destination being Israel, but he

also loves to read and write. "I am a man of history and my hobbies are reading and watching social and historical movies. I like writing, too, although I haven't published any book. But, all those who travel with us get a handbook about every destination written by me, describing its history, geography, news, ideas and other details," he shares.

**Taking things one day at a time**

Like everyone else, the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown was a nightmare for him as well. "It is one year lost for everyone connected with hospitality and travel. But, we used the time to do new things. Our company runs on three principles — inspiration, experience and enjoyment. For us, it was the time to expand one's expertise in terms of staff, knowledge and abilities. Most of our staff was retained

and we continue to pay 70 per cent of the salaries. Our focus was on technology and even developed technological projects. We even started a few more verticals, including medi-

  
**Indian tour companies, taking advantage of manpower, tech can capture the int'l market**

cal tourism and a student education division. We also started a software development company," informs Shah.

**Future of tourism**

"Historically, India has been a manufacturer of goods to

the western world, from exporting dyes and chemicals to exporting software in the late 1990s. Now is the time for India to export tourism. International tour companies will soon be burdened with a high cost of manpower, which in India is very cheap, trained, knowledgeable and dedicated. Hence, Indian tour companies, taking advantage of technology and manpower, can go global and try to capture the international market," he believes.



**Guldeep Singh Sahni**  
Managing Director  
Weldon Tours & Travels

(Through the column, Guldeep Singh Sahni highlights the lives of trade partners, beyond business.)



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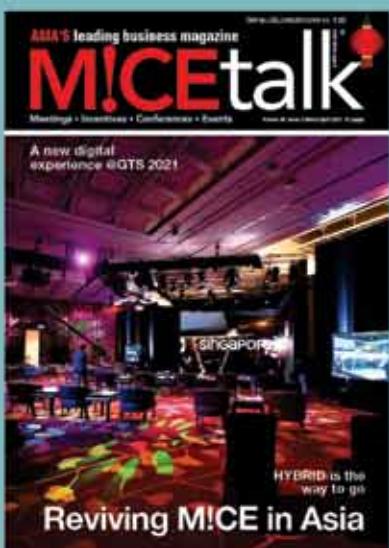


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# #WeMissYou, says Malaysia

Collaborating with the virtual Gulf Travel Show (GTS) for a second consecutive year, Tourism Malaysia says it wants to renew existing partnerships while seeking new connections in India, one of its key source markets.



Manas Dwivedi

In an interaction at GTS 2021, the Malaysian tourism board shared its plans on reopening borders and highlighted the importance of the Indian market.

**Manoharan Periasamy**, Senior Director of International Promotion Asia & Africa Division – Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board, said, "India has been a key source market for us mainly due to the historical and traditional ties we have with them. The month of May is the peak for Indian tourists. Over the past year, the pandemic, however, did hinder the situation, but now we are preparing once again to welcome our friends from India to a safer destination which would provide them what they require in terms of a secure, family-friendly holiday escape. Our partnership for the second consecutive year with the virtual Gulf Travel Show provides us the opportunity to renew partnerships and seek new connections that will help us when the time is right." At the event, Tourism Malaysia had its own pavilion, with

13 booths comprising Tourism Malaysia Dubai, Tourism Malaysia Jeddah and Tourism Malaysia India, with three DMC/ tour operator partners and seven hotels & resorts from different areas in

government would like to review the process of allowing tourists, and this is when there would be a possibility that vaccinated travellers may get a preference. At the moment, we have not opened the borders for regional markets, we are only open now for business travellers," he shared.

in the pipeline and when borders open, we will be engaging the trade as well as consumers in India," he further informed.

The Senior Director also emphasised that Malaysia has a lot of destinations that can cater to the demands of Indian travellers seeking offbeat destinations, adventure tourism as well as eco-tourism experiences. "We are looking at young travellers who are looking to engage in soft adventure activities

We are looking at young travellers who are looking to engage in soft adventure activities

the country. Periasamy added that by third quarter of 2021 the government may look at opening borders for key markets, including India and the Middle East, but only once it is assured that all SOPs are being followed. "We are looking at vaccinating around 60-70 per cent of the population by Q3 2021, post which we might plan to open borders for Indian travellers. The

platforms, he adds, are going to be one of the main areas of emphasis for them and most of their publicity campaigns and engagements with consumers and the travel trade will be on the digital platform.

"India has always been one of the top source markets for Malaysia in terms of tourist arrivals. After ASEAN and China, India is a very important market for us. We are planning to engage Indian tourists in a big way. We already have things



Razaidi Abd Rahim  
Director, Tourism Malaysia,  
South India & Sri Lanka

"The two whole days of networking at the virtual Gulf Travel Show 2021 were simply great! We were able to successfully reconnect with our potential buyers in an effort to restart the Malaysian travel industry in the post pandemic era. The show was definitely one of a kind, and Tourism Malaysia India Office participated for the first time through the office based at Dubai. This 'new normal' virtual platform has given an utterly brilliant opportunity to Malaysia, to be a preferred

destination of travel for Indian guests in the post-COVID world when the international borders open up. Malaysia will always be 'Truly Asia', and we welcome Indian travellers soon."

Manoharan Periasamy  
Senior Director, International Promotion Asia & Africa Division, Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board

