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India will bounce back

Mark Willis, Chief Executive Officer for Middle East and Africa at Accor, says that while the pandemic impacted everyone across the globe, business for Accor did not stop or slow down dramatically. The group already has over 25 hotels in the pipeline for India.



Nisha Verma

“It’s been a period of reflection, quite a humbling period as well,” says **Mark Willis**, as he talks about the last 12 months at Accor. And, though the group witnessed a positive period of business in India moving from Q4 2020 into Q1 2021, times are again uncertain and predicting the future is still tricky, he believes.



Mark Willis
CEO – Middle East & Africa, Accor

“Unfortunately, it was difficult to predict last year, and it continues to be difficult to predict this year. In Q4, India showed real levels of improvement within our sector and in Q1, India, from an Accor perspective, had a really good start to the year. But, now that situation is

under threat. The future is particularly hard to predict, however, we remain optimistic, more so with regard to India which is one of those locations which always bounces back wonderfully well from a crisis,” Willis says. This optimism also reflects in Accor’s plans for India, its strong development pipeline

and network across the country. Willis says, “In line with our expansion plan with regard to openings in India, we have over 25 hotels in the pipeline to open over the next 36 months. Apart from the Raffles in Jaipur, other key openings for the year include a second ibis in Mumbai which will open late in the year. So, while the outlook remains shaky today, and particularly uncertain at the moment, we still have a positive feeling about India, our expectations from growth in the country, and increasing our footprint here.”

The CEO believes that India is truly up there with the US and China as a stand-alone market, and is a critical inbound and outbound market. He says, “Even though a very high

percentage of business in India relies on the internal segment, still, outbound business from India has grown dramatically over the years. The country is not only important from a business generation perspective, but also from a portfolio-growth perspective. The expectation from India is high and consequently, we remain committed to developing our brands here.”

A better mix of business and leisure

While Accor’s portfolio in India leans towards the business hotel segment, the group is constantly looking to adapt to the changing consumer demands. Willis says, “Growth in the hotel business is a long-term strategy. It is fair to

Contd on page 6 ▶

Vaccinate to revive

The latest research from ForwardKeys reveals that vaccinations appear to hold the key to reviving international travel.



TT Bureau

Three origin markets, Israel, the US and the UK, where vaccination campaigns are particularly well advanced, have seen outbound flight bookings climb more steeply than elsewhere. Greece, whose economy is highly dependent on tourism, has led the way in announcing a willingness to welcome visitors who have been vaccinated, passed a COVID-19 test or recovered from the disease. That public position has been rewarded in flight bookings from major outbound markets such as the US and the UK. For example, it tops the list of most popular destinations for British travellers this summer; so much so that confirmed tickets for travel between July



Olivier Pont
VP Insights, ForwardKeys

and September are currently 12 per cent ahead of where they were at the equivalent moment in 2019.

Furthermore, analysis of the most resilient destinations in Europe this summer reveals that seven of the top 10 cities are Greek, with the

Contd on page 12 ▶

Times are changing

The industry needs to tighten its seatbelt and remain mentally healthy and strong for the next few months, says the trade.



Mahendra Vakharia
EC Member & Immediate Past President, OTOAI and MD, Pathfinders Holidays

with its own set of opportunities. We are very excited to start a new vertical which will not only complement our services for existing clients but will also help us reach new ones.”

Contd on page 5 ▶

“I strongly believe that for the next few months, we will have to tighten our seatbelt and remain mentally healthy and strong. It is very important not to be bogged down or demoralised with the present situation – pull up all your reserve strength to sustain and endure this period. The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic may have wreaked havoc across the country but surely, in a few months the situation will change. As an optimist I will always say, this period is another Bend in the journey and not the End of the journey. Last year’s challenge came

Register yourself with MOT

In a marathon session of Q&A for its members, TAAI discussed their woes while answering and guiding them on some of their queries. From Air India to bank guarantee, MOT and IATA, this was a no-holds-barred virtual meeting.



Hazel Jain

In a marathon session that lasted about three hours, the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) national office bearers fielded a myriad of queries from its members recently and offered guidance wherever required.

Jyoti Mayal, President of TAAI, who was chairing the session, also urged members to register themselves on the Ministry of

Tourism website. She said, “I have said this before and I will say it again – please register yourself on the MOT website. Very soon, agencies who don’t do this may not be allowed to call themselves a travel agent. We have actually gotten every document simplified. But if you still face any problem with registering, please reach out to us and we will sort it out. We are sure it will happen, may be not in the form of licensing, may be in another form, but it will.”



Jyoti Mayal
President, TAAI

Adding more details to this is **Jay Bhatia**, Vice President,

TAAI, who said, “Our regional chapter chairmen are also taking it up with their respective state governments and our Andhra Pradesh and Telangana chapter has already gotten an approval. It is mandatory to register with the government first. We got that breakthrough because the representation from our chairmen was then submitted to the government – so every person who wants to become a travel agent or a tour operator must

Contd on page 6 ▶



TIME TO ROLL
THE *Dice*

Apply for 'Industry' status

Government of Maharashtra has now announced the criteria for levying taxes and charges at the industrial rate for non-classified hotels in the state that are eligible for 'Industry' status. The application process is now open on the official website of Maharashtra Tourism.



In a landmark decision to bolster the hospitality sector, Government of Maharashtra had awarded the hospitality sector the status of an industry last year. From April 1, 2021, one to five-star hotels registered with the Ministry of Tourism have been able to enjoy tariffs and duties on electricity, water, property, development and non-agricultural taxes at industrial rates. For the hotels which are not registered with the Ministry, an expert committee was appointed under the chairmanship of **Dr Dhananjay Sawalkar**, Director, Directorate of Tourism, Maharashtra, to define the norms for them to avail these benefits. The state govern-

ment has now announced the criteria for levying taxes and charges at the industrial rate for the non-classified hotels, in the special hospitality category. The criteria are categorised in two sections, Annexure-A and Annexure-B.

Annexure-A outlines 50 mandatory 'minimum basic standards' that need to be fulfilled by the non-classified hotels. Some of them include:

- ❖ A minimum of six lettable rooms with windows and/ or proper ventilation
- ❖ Cleanliness of the hotel
- ❖ Effective management of the reception and other public premises
- ❖ Clean and licensed kitchen
- ❖ Special arrangements for the disabled
- ❖ Code of Conduct and



MAHARASHTRA TOURISM

ethical behaviour by the hotel staff

Annexure-B for 'Green Hotel' lists 43 norms. The green hotel status will be given with a view to promote eco-friendly and sustainable tourism practices. If these 10 basic eligible criteria are met, 'green hotel' status can be attained by a particular hotel. Some of them include:

- ❖ Annual training for all hotel staff regarding eco-friendly practices to be followed
- ❖ A rainwater harvesting system to be in place
- ❖ Effective waste management practices (waste

reduce, reuse, separation and composting)

- ❖ No use of plastics
- ❖ Regular efficiency audit of eco-friendly equipment
- ❖ Initiatives taken to spread awareness and motivate customers to follow the eco-friendly practices
- ❖ Seek customer feedback for improvements
- ❖ Introduction of key-cards or main switches to cut off electricity in unoccupied guestrooms
- ❖ Adoption and use of bulbs that save power
- ❖ Use of water and energy efficient appliances in kitchen and laundry.

Application procedure

Interested hoteliers need to visit the official website of 'Maharashtra Tourism' and click on the 'What's New' tab for the form for the industry status registration. The industrial concessions will be applicable from the date of registration certificate of the applicant hotel. They should check the criteria on the official website of the government.

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TRAVELTALK
VIEWPOINT

The present is a wake-up call

'The second wave has been a wake-up call for India, pushing the government to increase its spending on strengthening the medical infrastructure in the country,' says **Mandeep Lamba**, President (South Asia), HVS ANAROCK.

In the hour of need

Perhaps the truest measure of a trusty friend or an ally is whether they show up to help you and guide you in your hour of need. In that sense, the pandemic has been a litmus test for many – whether it is the nation's leader, the ministry of tourism, or the various travel trade associations. Every stakeholder is now closely watching each of these entities and creating a mental balance sheet while questioning themselves: Who can I count as my real friend?

Trade associations, in fact, are the first link in the chain for travel agents and tour operators, and possibly the immediate quarter from where help can arrive. Members are therefore bound to take stock now and reconsider their allegiance to their association(s). The pressure is now on these trade bodies in turn, whether national, regional or state-wide, to prove their worth. In light of this, the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) has been taking proactive steps. It recently conducted an open virtual forum for all its members across India to participate and address their problems to the national office bearers. Every agent was heard and every problem was either addressed by the office bearers or acknowledged and noted. Not just this, its president Jyoti Mayal and her team encouraged members to be more active, ask more questions, and reach out to them for any help. Whether it was an airline issue, an IATA query or a flagging morale, the TAAI team was more than happy to discuss them all. The association has said it will conduct more such sessions periodically to help their members.

Associations have a critical role to play in serving an emerging and different set of member needs during the COVID-19 crisis. It's also a time of opportunity, a time to experiment with new ways of member engagement. The first step is to ask, listen, and then prioritise their needs. Associations won't know how their members are doing and what they need unless they ask them. They also need to schedule virtual meet-ups to discuss these issues. Through this, they will be able to identify critical concerns, do some 'group-think' to address some of them and will help association heads understand what additional resources and information its members need. Associations must also continue to provide credible, trusted information to its members.

In the last decade, India has emerged as one of the leading medical tourism destinations globally. The presence of several high-quality, well-equipped healthcare facilities along with a strong base of highly skilled and specialised English-speaking medical professionals offering world-class treatments at much more affordable costs compared to developed nations are some of the reasons for the growth of this segment in India. Reports indicate that medical treatments and travel in India cost up to 50 per cent less than that in developed western countries. India has also been successful at attracting medical tourists from other

government also set up facilitation counters at major airports for medical travellers and launched a portal to provide comprehensive information on the healthcare facilities in the country. As a result, foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) on medical visas to India have grown at a notable CAGR of over 30 per cent during 2014-19 and accounted for 6.4 per cent of the total FTAs in the country in 2019. The medical tourism segment was expected to reach US\$9 bn in 2020 as per a report by FICCI, however, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related travel restrictions became temporary roadblocks in its growth story. The segment has been witnessing green shoots in the last few months with easing

considerably. India has been one of the few countries to manufacture its own COVID vaccination, which is being used to inoculate not only Indians but also people in other countries, clearly showcasing the country's scientific prowess and capabilities.

Moreover, India continues to be one of the most affordable destinations for medical treatments globally, which will continue to be an advantage in the post-COVID world.

India competes with other Asian countries that offer similar advantages to medical travellers. It is, therefore, imperative to develop effective

on the crumbling healthcare infrastructure in the country. Hotels are providing fresh, packed meals to medical staff and tying up with hospitals

Better healthcare facilities will go a long way in making India a medical tourism hub



developing nations, mainly from Asia and Africa, looking for specialised treatments that may not be easily available in their home countries.

Looking at the potential in this segment, the government introduced the e-medical visa in 2014 which, along with the other competitive advantages mentioned earlier, has provided a significant boost to this segment. The gov-

travel restrictions and the creation of air bubbles, with a number of medical travellers, especially those coming in for critical treatments, gradually picking up.

The current pandemic is an inflection point for the medical tourism segment in India, giving the country an opportunity to become a global medical tourism hub as soon as international travel restrictions are eased

marketing campaigns to create awareness and communicate the COVID safety measures being implemented at various facilities. The campaigns should not only highlight the various healthcare facilities and services offered at a much more reasonable cost but also promote India's strength in alternate medicine and practices such as Ayurveda, Naturopathy and Yoga, which can help patients recuperate after their treatment. India has 37 JCI and 767 NABH-accredited hospitals and it is important to ensure that all these facilities meet the required quality standards.

"The Indian hospitality sector has joined the country's fight against the second wave of the pandemic and is trying its best to help reduce the stress

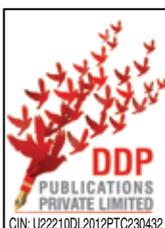
to provide isolation & quarantine facilities to mildly symptomatic and asymptomatic patients, helping reduce the acute shortage of hospital beds in the country.

The second wave has been a wake-up call for India as it exposed the issues in the country's healthcare system, pushing the government to increase its spending on strengthening the medical infrastructure in the country. Better equipped healthcare facilities with a strong base of highly skilled and specialised medical professionals, along with India's reputation of being one of the most affordable medical tourism destinations globally will go a long way in making the country a global medical tourism hub in the future," reiterates **Mandeep S Lamba**, President (South Asia), HVS ANAROCK.



Mandeep S Lamba
President (South Asia), HVS ANAROCK

(The article is co-authored by Dipi Mohan, Senior Manager – Research, HVS South Asia. Views expressed are the authors' own. The publication may not subscribe to them).



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One must keep a cash reserve

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“Any hope for revival at least for the Indian outbound market in 2021 has been laid to rest now. We hope that 2022 shall see the dawn of a new sun rising and bring the travel trade out of oblivion. I believe security (financial and otherwise) for an unforeseen, difficult situation such as this should be planned by each one of us. Only those who had this buffer could sail past this tsunami and the rest are left struggling. I don't think any new business has a long-term outlay currently, though I see lots of my trade colleagues engage in other businesses such as medical, sanitation, etc. We will need to devise a new strategy, innovate and evolve, to suit new business situations and travel patterns.”



Mehernosh Colombowalla
Director, Beyond Borders

“We anticipate a lot of last-minute bookings when the situation eases and things start opening up. I would like to mention here that the percentage of advance confirmations has dropped considerably. As travel agents, we will also be very careful in choosing or recommending hotels and will only promote those that have supported us and the clients during the first phase of the pandemic. One thing I am confident about is that after two years when there is herd immunity, travel will boom and will be the best business to be in. Until then, we must simply cut costs, multitask and hang in there. For those who cannot sustain these times will have an option of closing temporarily for two years and then restart afresh.”



Pradeep Saboo
Partner, Guideline Travels

“COVID-19 has created three clear opportunities. It has demonstrated the need for tourism. It has also shown that a more sustainable model is needed for our region. And thirdly, using digital tools for good destination management will be an essential step for us. Travel experiences will change immensely going forward. So it's less about predicting certainties and more about forecasting possibilities. While tourism remains a means for primary earning, it is necessary to diversify into other priority sectors such as Agri business and outsourcing services. Innovative ways to overcome the impact and thereby survive is the need of the hour. The importance of a cash reserve is a learning.”



Ranjeet Das
Immediate Past President and Adviser, Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA)



Pranav Kapadia
Founder, Global Destinations

“In my opinion, one of the key learnings from the first wave of the pandemic and its eventual impact on business has been adopting resilience as a crisis management strategy. With resilience you can adapt to the environment and new circumstances to mitigate the effects of any undesirable event. So when the dust settled in from the first wave, we not only prepared ourselves but also advised and motivated our stakeholders to be prepared for many such upcoming uncertainties. Another key learning has been that an individual or a business for that matter, has the ability to play many different important roles rather than focusing all energies on any single piece. As an organisation, we consistently invest in skill development.”



Debajit Borah
President, Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA)
Director, Brahmaputra Cruise

Inputs by Hazel Jain

“Most operators are still in the travel business trying out new strategies for survival. We will now have to wait for the situation to improve. Once it does, we will need to be more careful on the travel protocols so that another surge in infections does not happen. Meanwhile, we may need to focus on regional tourism keeping our boundaries tight especially in case of the North-eastern states. Though regional tourism does not help local operators much, it provides sustainability to the other stakeholders. And considering the geographical and cultural trait of the region, travel within the seven states can be a huge support.”

Julia Simpson to take over as chief of WTTC

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) has announced the departure of **Gloria Guevara** after four years of leading the global tourism body. Taking over the reins from her as the Council's President & CEO effective August 15th is **Julia Simpson**,



Julia Simpson
President & CEO, WTTC

Executive Committee Member of International Airlines Group (IAG). Simpson brings with her extensive experience of the travel & tourism sector, having served on the boards of British Airways, Iberia and most recently as Chief of Staff at International Airlines Group.

We are paying for being so lax

With the number of COVID cases and deaths rising every day, Goa could be looking at another lockdown. But **Serafino Cota**, President, Small & Medium Hotels Associations, says that the state government along with the travel trade brought this problem upon themselves.



Hazel Jain

The state had become a holiday paradise – an escape for whoever wanted to get away from the boredom of cities. But Goa is now paying for the swift business it did through rising COVID cases and deaths. Not one to mince words, **Serafino Cota**, President, Small & Medium Hotels Associations, says that just until a month ago, some hotels had started doing good business.

“Then all of a sudden, cases started increasing in Goa which has led to a complete shutdown. To be honest, some of my colleagues were happy with the little business they were starting to get. But that was bad for Goa and its people, and Goa should not allow that. I don't want to sound



Serafino Cota
President, Small & Medium Hotels Associations

rude, but I have been saying this for some time – opening up the state to all and sundry will be very expensive for us. And we are now paying for it. We were allowing people to enter Goa even without a COVID-negative certificate nor checking them at any of the entry points – whether airports, roads or railways. We got greedy for business,” he says. The Goa government imposed additional restrictions till May

10 as COVID numbers surge, with a possibility of extending it further.

He believes that Goa hotels would have done better business, if not the same, had all the stakeholders asked tourists for COVID-negative certificates. “In fact, we would have received better and high-value tourists. Goa offered this as a selling point – not asking for certificates. I would argue with my CM that Goa asking for COVID health certificates could have been a better selling point. This would have ensured that Goa is a ‘Safe Destination’ and the people who are coming in will also be safe. So they know that no one with COVID or COVID symptoms will be allowed to enter the state. If these measures were in place, Goa would have had a better image today,” Cota adds.

Lapse of judgement

Cota is also upset that many people had been coming to Goa not just to holiday but to spend their quarantine days after testing positive.

“Their thought process was better to have COVID in Goa than anywhere else. Moreover, all our offshore casinos have also been responsible for spreading the infection. The Goa government allowed them to remain open even though they were crowded and most of their staff got it. I have voiced my concern about this, requesting the government to at least vaccinate the casino staff on priority. But nothing has been done so far. The virus is spreading like wildfire in Goa,” he says worriedly.

“I apologise to fellow Goans and the trade. This problem came through tourism and

we are its stakeholders so we have to take the responsibility of keeping our citizens safe. The government was looking at it as business. But it could not achieve the quality of tourists who will pay GST and taxes.



Opening up the state to all and sundry was very expensive for us; we are now paying for it

Most of them were staying in rented places – second homes – in the disorganised sector. It didn't benefit the industry nor the state government. I

would like to know from the government how much GST did it earn through room occupancies and on alcohol as far as table service in bars and restaurants is concerned. I bet you nothing! The government should realise that there is no revenue; it is just additional burden on the state,” Cota says.

He suggests that Goa needs a change of image. “We need to make it a ‘safe’ destination at least by December 2021. After making it safe, we need to promote it as a ‘Safe’ destination, ask tourists to book only registered hotels so that every case can be tracked and traced, and ramp up our vaccination drive. Everything needs to be controlled – from entry points to hotels. That is the only way safe tourism can start,” Cota adds. 🐦

Tourism
Breaking News

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- Indian nationals in transit through a French airport require airport transit visa
- Minister Patel says post-COVID, MOT will focus on promoting offbeat destinations
- Assam's Rupsi Airport becomes operational, flybig is first airline to land
- Passengers to Mumbai from 7 states need RT-PCR negative report
- Vistara announces weekly flights to Tokyo from June 16
- Goa prohibits inter-state movement of tourists, provides exceptions to rule
- 2023 is when international tourism will resume in India: IHCL

App-based taxis for Goa

Two trade bodies – one a state-wide travel association and the other a regional hospitality association – have voiced their support for App-based taxi operators in Goa which they think will benefit the end-travellers by way of cheaper rates and better service to begin with.

 Hazel Jain

Showing support for travellers to Goa, two trade bodies are advocating that the state permits app-based taxi operators. Currently, only Goa Miles, the state's local app-based taxi service, is operating in the state which is facing huge protests from the local taxi lobby.

The Hotel & Restaurant Association of Western India (HRAWI) as well as Travel & Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG) have shown their support for this. This comes on the back of the ongoing taxi operators' strike in the state against Goa Miles.

The HRAWI has submitted a representation to the Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and to the Tourism Minister Manohar Aijaonkar requesting the gov-



Sherry Bhatia
President, HRAWI



Nilesh Shah
President, TTAG

 These operators provide services at reasonable fares to tourists and commuters 

 Going online is the need of the hour; that's what these aggregators bring to the table 

ernment to allow app-based taxi service aggregators to operate in the interest of tourists and the

industry. The hospitality industry has expressed that app-based taxis provide good services at

cheaper rates as against the existing taxi operators who charge exorbitant fares to tourists. The industry is of the opinion that lopsided trade practices are detrimental to progress and discourage tourism in the state.

The HRAWI has stated that the local taxi operators' demands are unreasonable and uncompetitive while viable and transparent app-based options are available.

Sherry Bhatia, President, HRAWI, says, "App based cab operators including Ola, Uber, and Goa Miles offer tourists the choice of their ride. These operators provide decent services at reasonable fares to the local commuters as well as tourists, and hence should be allowed to operate. These taxi services are operating in almost every state in the country but not in Goa which is a huge inconvenience

for both the domestic as well as international tourists. We also suggest that the state government implement the use of digital meters on all local taxis. This will bring transparency, and offer convenient and reliable taxi services."

Nilesh Shah, President, Travel & Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG), has also spoken on the benefits of digitisation. He says, "Going online is the need of the hour and that's what these App-based aggregators bring to the table. Since the launch of Goa Miles, the industry has received positive reviews from tourists with regards to the transparency, service, pricing and discipline of the App-based aggregator. This has not only brought transparency and discipline in the taxi business but most importantly restored trust in Goan taxi drivers." 

Desire to travel persists

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say we have a solid business hotel footprint across India. That footprint is growing and yes, the right strategy is to mix business and leisure, more so at the moment when there is limited global business travel and leisure is expected to return faster than the business segment. It is a focus for us and we will continue to grow the luxury segment."

He adds that when it comes to boutique properties, as markets mature and as customers look to diversify their stay and increasingly seek experiences, demand for boutique properties and lifestyle hotels across the



globe will surge. "Accor has a number of lifestyle brands. That is where the new customer is heading, but that is not to say that other segments won't continue to be growth segments. The world is growing, people are looking for something different," Willis shares.

"If you look at the last 10 years of India from a leisure

destination perspective," the CEO continues, "India has been more prevalent in displaying the cultural side of the country. From a business perspective, India, on a global stage, has really come to the fore and that is not going to go away. So the two elements combined together allow you to look at a very broad

 The future for Accor in India looks particularly bright 

spectrum of hotel brand opportunities for growth in the country, which also stimulates the visibility of a brand elsewhere and encourages people to recognise the brand when they are outside India. So, it's vital for Accor to continue to grow its footprint in the country and that is absolutely what we are doing. The future for Accor in India looks particularly bright." 

Business travel: Slow to recover

"This is one element of the future that still remains quite unclear. With different restrictions to travel and organisations across the globe having been negatively impacted financially over the last 12 months, international business travel will be slow to return. If you see a location like India, you can see that there was demand for business interactions face to face. Unfortunately, that has stopped now because of the impact of the pandemic, but once the country gets a hold of the situation with the vaccination programme, etc., you will see that segment of business returning. Zoom and Teams are wonderful platforms, but, as always, nothing is going to replace meeting face to face. The global desire to travel will never go away," says Willis.

'We are trying to help'

► Contd from page 1

now register themselves with the government and needs to be a member of any national recognised association."

Air India woes

Answering questions on Air India issues, Bhatia added that the TAAI team is aware of the situation. "We completely accept and acknowledge the challenges members are facing with Air India. We have taken up the matter with Air India multiple times and we are not stopping. But they don't understand. The same has been highlighted to MoCA. The association has also written to MoCA to help



Jay Bhatia
Vice President, TAAI

resolve matters with Air India bookings multiple times and has sought an online appointment directly with the PM. Even if it's after 15-20 days, we want the Air India issue to be resolved once and for all. They have been taking travel agents for granted for a very long time," he explained.

Adding to this, Mayal said, "We were the first people to get appointments with Air India but now associations are not even getting any meetings with them. I had made a request to consider all our points in my last meeting with them. We continue to talk to them. The new Secretary is too new right now. We need to just continue our talks with Air India which we will do."

COVID task force

Bhatia also shared that some of the TAAI office bearers are now part of a COVID task force set up as part of FAITH, along with other associations and they are working towards plasma donations, oxygen concentrators, etc that may be required by members. There will be a centralised team



that will be available to assist with this. Sharing her perspective on the role of testing for safe travel, Mayal said, "Our regional chapters have been requesting their respective states for lowering the rate for RT-PCR tests wherever possible. At a lot of airports also, we managed to bring it down to ₹600-700. However, we must remember that TAAI is not into business, we are only there to help people." 

 TAAI has written to MoCA to help resolve matters with Air India bookings multiple times 

Sustainable tourism is viable

WTTC and faculty and scientists of the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health have released two case studies on sustainability leadership by The Travel Corporation (TTC) and Intrepid Travel. This collaboration has encouraged the sharing of best practices and has supported sustainability as a core strategic priority to ensure the viability of the sector.



TT Bureau

WTTC and Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health have a long history of collaboration, working towards a more sustainable future for travel and tourism. Together, their work can help raise awareness, shift mindsets, and enact systemic change. Similarly, The Travel Corporation and Intrepid Travel have a mutual understanding that sustainability is a shared

operation and support of one another's efforts to address the topic.

The Travel Corporation Using sustainable development goals to drive strategy

The Travel Corporation's (TTC) case study focusses on the group's efforts to 'make travel matter' and explores the way in which TTC has linked their sustainability strategy, as well as travel experiences directly to the United Nations Sustainable De-



challenge and have championed sustainability for many years. The two believe it is best addressed through co-

velopment Goals. It champions sustainable travel through the setting of measurable sustainability goals, and ensures they are

How 'make travel matter' experiences contribute to the SDGs

NO POVERTY

The experience contributes to ending poverty in all its forms, everywhere

QUALITY EDUCATION

The experience contributes to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education

GENDER EQUALITY

The experience is helping to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women and girls

CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and/or sanitation for all

AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

The experience is contributing to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

REDUCED INEQUALITIES

The experience is addressing and/or reducing inequalities within the country

SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Educates guests on the sustainability and resiliency of community

RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION

Educates guests on sustainable consumption and production

CLIMATE ACTION

Educates guests on the climate crisis and takes action to address its impacts

LIFE BELOW WATER

Contributes to the conservation and sustainable use of marine ecosystems

LIFE ON LAND

Educates guests on the importance of natural ecosystems, wildlife conservation

achieved through an integrated business function approach. The strategy aims to close any potential gaps in the expression of sustainability across the group, ensuring the group's efforts to

achieve its sustainability goals are fully engrained in the way TTC brands operate and how the group supports its efforts through its non-profit foundation, TreadRight, which the group funds entirely from its own profits.

Intrepid Travel: Idea in brief

- ❖ Identifying as a B Corporation (B Corp) has helped Intrepid Travel guide the business to meet the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency and legal accountability.
- ❖ The 'B' standing for 'beneficial', a B Corp is a defined business classification that balances purpose and profit. Becoming a certified B Corp is helping the company to be better and do better – integrating the values, culture, processes and high standards put in place by its founders and leaders at all levels.
- ❖ Intrepid's certified B Corp status entailed external, independent assessment of its interactions with its workers, customers, community and the environment. The B Corp status is not specific for the travel sector; rather it brings Intrepid alongside global brands across all sectors.
- ❖ In setting out on its own journey towards B Corp status in 2015, Intrepid adopted a set of external pressures and standards that encourage the company to continue working towards its social and sustainability goals.

Intrepid Travel Certified B Corporation

Intrepid Travel's case study showcases its status as the world's largest certified travel B Corporation (B Corp). Intrepid's certified B Corp status entailed external, independent assessment of its interactions with its workers, customers, community and the environment. The B Corp status is not specific for the travel sector, rather it brings Intrepid alongside global organisations across all sectors, including leading brands such as Patagonia and Ben & Jerry's, and is an example in the travel and tourism sector.

Expertsspeak

Sustainability is now a growing business priority, with businesses expected to decarbonise and adapt for the future. The COVID-19 crisis has elevated the need for action on sustainability issues. The climate crisis is a risk that no business can afford to disregard, so we must continue to drive this message forward in our sector.

Gloria Guevara
Incumbent President & CEO, WTTC

This is an important collaboration where sustainability, public health and business come together to advance research-led practice in the travel and tourism sector. Given the importance of the travel and tourism sector for people, planet and shared prosperity, academic inquiry in the field is central to inclusive and sustainable growth.

Dr. Wendy Purcell
Lead Researcher for the cases
Harvard TH Chan School
of Public Health

I have a deep respect for Intrepid's long-standing efforts to integrate sustainability into their business and believe that our collaboration with one another on the matter is indicative of the fact that we will achieve much more as a sector than as potential competitors when it comes to truly addressing our industry's footprint.

Brett Tollman
Chief Executive Officer
The Travel Corporation

Our industry does not exist without thriving communities and a healthy planet, and we all have a role to play in influencing a more equitable future. We are proud to stand alongside TTC to help advance the sustainability agenda and create positive change.

James Thornton
Chief Executive Officer
Intrepid Travel

The Travel Corporation: Idea in brief

- ❖ The Travel Corporation (TTC) embarked on its journey to integrate sustainability into the business with the launch of its not-for-profit foundation, the TreadRight Foundation, in 2008.
- ❖ With leadership from TreadRight, TTC adopted a strategic position on key issues including single use plastics, animal welfare and climate change.
- ❖ In 2018, TreadRight and TTC's sustainability efforts were brought together under the banner 'Make Travel Matter', which was adopted by the groups 40 award winning travel brands.
- ❖ In 2020, TTC released its sustainability plan 'How We Tread Right' that presents 11 smart sustainability goals aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
- ❖ The strategy closes any potential gaps in the expression of sustainability across the group, ensuring it is now fully engrained in the way TTC brands operate and how the group employs its philanthropic efforts through its TreadRight Foundation.

WTTC's work in the area of Sustainable Growth focuses on eight key areas

- ❖ Inclusion, Diversity & Social Impact
- ❖ Climate & Environment Action
- ❖ Sustainable Travel & Tourism Partners
- ❖ Sustainability Reporting
- ❖ Destination Stewardship
- ❖ Future of Work
- ❖ Illegal Wildlife Trade
- ❖ Human Trafficking

Tourist guides: Collateral damage

Tapan Kumar Mishra, National Tourism Awardee for Best Tourist Guide (Odisha), discusses the plight of tourist guides across India who have no work since March 2020. He questions if the Ministry of Tourism is willing to lose the pool of expert tourist guides as collateral damage due to the pandemic?

Hazel Jain

Tourist guides are among the worst-hit in the tourism sector by this pandemic with museums, monuments and attractions completely closed. Corroborating this statement is **Tapan Kumar Mishra**, National Tourism Awardee for Best Tourist Guide (Odisha). He says, "Guides are employed seasonally and are not covered by any social security schemes of the government. They (regional-level tourist guides) are issued licences only after they agree with the Ministry's condition of not doing any other job and now they have no other source of income. They are completely empty-handed since March 2020 and will have to starve. Tourist guides are not covered under any social security

schemes, no unemployment allowance, no on-the-job life insurance – nothing."

Mishra adds that while tourism was heading towards normalcy in the early weeks of December 2020, it lasted only for about three months. "Even though there was little movement of western tourists, there were a few domestic tourists who were on move and we were expecting more footfalls as lockdown opened up. But the government decided to close all tourist monuments. They were open in December 2020 for limited tourists but they closed them again from March 2021 onwards. Meanwhile the doors of Lord Jagannath Temple in Puri were wide open for pilgrims, even if they hardly hire tour guides. Why? When political rallies and Kumbh Mela



Tapan Kumar Mishra
National Tourism Awardee for
Best Tourist Guide (Odisha)

were possible, why did the government think that tourist monuments would be hotspots?" he questions.

Guides changing professions

Another issue is the threat of de-licencing which is like the Sword of Damocles. Meanwhile, many tour guides have changed their profession and are venturing into F&B, agriculture, and even driving

taxi. "We have received no help either from the Central Government or from state governments except one or two. Many experienced tour guides are on the verge of changing their profession. At this rate, the Ministry of Tourism will lose a pool of experts unless we are provided a retention fee of at least ₹20,000 per month, depending on the work experience," Mishra adds.

He feels that tour guides are the backbone of the tourism industry and they need to be supported either by retention fee, collateral-free loan or through PMEGP Scheme. "Mere words won't help them unless it is supported by financial means," Mishra insists.

There are various types of guides at the government

level – Regional Level Guides (trained and licenced by the Ministry of Tourism), State Level Guides (trained and licenced by different state governments), Monument Guides deployed at certain monuments (trained

of different state governments). There are approximately 3,200 Regional Level Guides working for five Zones (North, South, East, West, and North-East of India) and 12,000 guides in total, including State Guides, Monuments Guides of ASI and Forest or Nature Guides.

Mere words won't help them unless it is supported by financial means

Mishra also points out that normally licences of Regional Level Guides certified by the Ministry of Tourism, are renewed for three years but since the last two years, it is being renewed only for six months forcing them indirectly to go for 'Tourist Facilitator Course' to retain their licence. "This is a demotion for them to 'Tourist Facilitators' from the globally-accepted 'Tourist Guides'. It's like forcing a civil engineer with vast professional experience to act as a Civil Contractor," he says.

and licenced by Archaeological Survey of India), Forest or Nature Guides (trained and licenced by Forest Department

Greater networking at FITUR

FITUR 2021, that will run from from May 19 to 23, shows promise and hope of the return of travel and business of travel to the region. This year it also has a new addition - LiveConnect - an AI-powered technology that will form the framework of professional and commercial relationships that will take place during FITUR.

TT Bureau

The Madrid Region will be the FITUR 2021 Tourist Destination Partner at this special edition, the 41st. Its theme is 'Tourism is Back'. This is an excellent opportunity for the Madrid Region to position itself once again as a world leader and preferred tourist destination for international travellers.

This year, FITUR LiveConnect platform is the new addition to the show and will showcase an opportunity to create commercial networking and to strengthen the interaction with the international tourist community, beyond the closing dates of FITUR.



María Valcarce
Director, FITUR

The LiveConnect platform, operational from May 5 to June, is developed with artificial intelligence technology, will offer all professionals in the sector the opportunity to be connected and to have an extra special content, with high-interest programming and a contact program aimed at a wide expansion. It will form the framework

of professional and commercial relationships that will take place during the FITUR.

Sharing how FITUR will be different from the last year, **María Valcarce**, Director, FITUR, said it will be the first fair that brings the tourism industry together in person again after the pandemic. "As a complement to in-person participation, the FITUR LiveConnect online platform will allow us to extend FITUR's reach in time and place beyond the event days. On a physical level, logically, FITUR isn't going to reach the record-breaking scale it achieved in 2020. Still, we hope it will be a very professional edition that will contribute to tourism's relaunch," she says.

FITUR will be one of the first major international mobility experiences, and we'll be focusing on tourism recovery. It will also address various cross-cutting issues such as digital transition and innovation, other issues related to sustainable development, and all the industry verticals represented



at the different MICE tourism sections, like health, film, cultural, language, and more. Reminiscing India's participation in FITUR over the years, Valcarce said that India's such a great and wonderful country and has always been a major participant at FITUR. "There's a lot of uncertainty at the moment about India's participation because of the way the pandemic is evol-



ing there. Two Indian states have reservations still pending final confirmation, but we hope that they'll be able to be with us in the end. India's presence at our Fair kept growing in recent years and it's a very popular destination for Spanish travellers and tourism fans worldwide."

Talking about innovation in the FITUR festivals this year, she said, "We've expanded the Festivals section to include other cultural events in addition to the music festivals, which were its initial focus.

We hope to move forward in this direction because cultural events tourism is a significant market driver, one that should be represented at FITUR."

The Madrid Region at FITUR 2021 will present its new brand image and new concept as an international tourism region - Greater Madrid. With this new name, international tourists will be able to grasp the idea of what the Madrid Region is clearly and that its hospitable geographical context has a surprising and extensive wealth of heritage.

An Amex survey reveals that 69% of respondents want to choose an airline or a hotel that values diversity and inclusion, and whose employees reflect a diverse customer base. Travellers expect the brands they support to align with their values.

Technology in a pandemic

Creativity and ingenuity can often shine through when we least expect it. Despite the turmoil that our industry has been witnessing, we are seeing many start-ups being conceived and often take centre-stage. Can we learn a few tricks of the trade from them? This is part two of the start-up series.



Hazel Jain & Manas Dwivedi

StreetGooser Tech

What is it?

A new entrant in cloud-based hotel management software domain, StreetGooser focuses on small to mid-sized properties to provide them with technology that won't break their banks. Most tech providers focus on big hotels and may have features smaller hotels don't need. So it tweaks its technology based on the clients' needs. It is a one-stop shop that integrates several platforms into the umbrella.



Binitha Sreejith
Business Development Head
StreetGooser Tech

'Travellers are changing their planning & execution'

How important is technology for the tourism sector today?

Technology has become the integral part of our life and in the present world technology has reframed the way we think, communicate and approach. This has also influenced the tourism business. There is a tremendous change in planning and execution of travel concepts by travellers who have adopted technology and made travel easier and more convenient.

What challenges did you face while procuring funding?

There were no such major challenges to procure funds. StreetGooser is a tech firm which has unique concepts that are going to be a next level trend-setter in the travel and tourism industry. This distinctive feature has always attracted our investors. Though the pandemic had made a difference in the scenario, we still can find the ray of hope. So those people who always foresee the future trends in the travel market have shown interest and are ready to invest.

How does your technology help your clients?

We tweak our technology based on the clients' needs. The centralised dashboard offers a state-of-the-art, built-in front-desk management system, channel manager, POS functions, housekeeping supervision, rate shopper, reputation management, website builder, payment gateway, booking engine, reports, analytics and more. Accommodation providers can manage multiple properties, operations, business relations, guests, travel agents and corporate clients from anywhere 24x7.

Carvaa Travelers

What is it?

It is a caravan rental start-up based out of Delhi. It was launched in October last year with an aim to offer comfortable travel experience within the country at an affordable price. The plan was to introduce these caravans in March 2020 but it is kept on hold due to the pandemic. The venture is a brainchild of four friends. Their caravans are equipped with all the essentials including a well-stocked kitchenette, wash-room, camping tents, a sofa-cum-bed, and a bunk bed. Bookings can be made for anywhere in India at a nominal additional charge.

'Caravanning needn't be a luxury product'

What was the idea behind starting this?

As per an analysis we did in terms of market demand for Caravans before the pandemic and once the Unlock phase started, we saw a good increase in the number of people wanting to rent a Caravan. However, in this current phase, things have come to a standstill. There is confusion about which places to visit and the restrictions in place. But once the pandemic situation gets better, we suppose things will get back on track.



Jigyasu Joshi
Co-Founder, Carvaa Travelers

What about the cost structure or funding for this?

After months of research, we found out that building a caravan is not so costly and it doesn't have to be in the luxury segment. Travelling in a caravan is the most sustainable way of travelling. Anyway, while we were hesitant as to how people would receive it, to our surprise, there was an overwhelming response to caravans and the caravanning culture in general.

What are your plans going forward?

Ours is not an asset-light model. We're currently operating with two caravans and both of them have been designed by us. In the coming few months, we will set up our own manufacturing unit wherein we will be making caravans for sale. We are currently looking to potential investors for the same.

zingbus

What is it?

Established in May 2019, zingbus is an intercity bus aggregator and has secured an undisclosed pre-Series A investment from Venture Catalysts, Titan Capital, AdvantEdge founders and Arora Ventures. It has expanded its services in West India, Maharashtra and Gujarat. With extended trip designs and hub and spoke models, zingbus model offers a much higher number of connections with a smaller fleet.

'We have specially-designed routes'

What is your differentiating factor?

As this network expands, the customer gets more options and flexibility which in turn drives direct sales and builds a strong differentiator for an operator looking for a wider network and connections. zingbus has built tools for audits, boarding and demand management. We run buses on specially designed routes which enables them to increase the utilisation of assets and cater to more travellers per bus. Despite the travel industry severely impacted due to the pandemic, zingbus has emerged better and leaner and has helped struggling traditional fleet owners in coping with the operational challenges with minimum manpower investment. With 10 mn daily intercity bus rides in India, the market is US\$15 bn in size and is growing at 18% CAGR. About 25% of this market is semi deluxe, air-conditioned buses.



Prashant Kumar
Founder & CEO, zingbus

How important is technology for you and the tourism sector at large?

Our technology gives it a much better online presence as compared to traditional bus operators, and also reaches the end-customers digitally in a more effective manner. Travellers can book a zingbus to their next destination through our app or via our website. Alternatively, users can also book through all major OTAs or through 1000+ offline sales partners.

Your plans for the next couple of years?

In the next three years, zingbus plans to run 2,500 buses across all major corridors in India. We have extended our services in West India and plan to gradually enter South India.

Rajasthan Studio

What is it?

With over 250 artists, this start-up is providing an experiential art platform to art lovers from around the world. Rajasthan Studio is a start-up focused on offering personalised, hands-on, long-forgotten art experiences specially curated by master artists of Rajasthan at their workstations. Launched in 2018, it is a one-stop place for tourists looking to experience Indian art forms. It has another vertical, a non-profit, free-for-all artists platform called 'The Circle', which is now virtual due to the pandemic.

'We want to build a global community of artists'

How did you use technology during the pandemic?

The pandemic led us to take our operations online, and it has now grown to over 2,500 artists from around the world. The focus is to give artists a free-flowing platform for learning and networking. Through Instagram Live, we made sure to connect our followers with the ones who are making an impact in their fields. We also introduced curated virtual art experiences for corporates and individuals. We also organised live performances on our YouTube channel on pay-as-you-like models remunerated directly to artists via online payment channels.



Kartik Gaggar
Founder and CEO, Rajasthan Studio

In what way has the lockdown opened new doors for you?

With our virtual platform, Rajasthan Studio has been able to offer online art experiences globally, not just in India. In June, we held a one-of-its-kind virtual art experience festival, and since July 2020, the growth in terms of the number of artists, the reach, and all other KPIs have been 2x on a month-on-month basis.

What are your plans going forward?

When tourism fully opens up, we aim to curate art experiences in other states too. The start-up is completely bootstrapped as of now. We are working on a long-term plan. With Rajasthan Studio, I had a 10-year vision, but the pandemic has impacted it greatly because it has just taken away two good years to make it a model that is investment-pitch ready.

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An agent of change

Assam-based **Mitali G Dutta**, Founder of Food Sutra by Mitali, has become an agent of change by empowering the tribal women of the state to be an intrinsic part of its culinary tourism.

Hazel Jain

Mitali G Dutta is an entrepreneur based in Guwahati who empowers women both in rural and urban areas of the state through extensive workshops and training in order to be independent and earn a livelihood through cooking. She was selected by the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, Government of India, for Women's Day Recognition on March 8, 2021, along with other women entrepreneurs from different parts of India. She has earlier worked for travel brands like SOTC.

Providing livelihood in the remotest areas of Assam through a sustainable business where no other industry exists is no easy task. She also helps in getting the families



Mitali G Dutta
Founder, Food Sutra by Mitali

of ex-poachers into the mainstream so that they can earn a respectable living. Dutta's focus is also on promoting authentic dishes of the various communities in Assam as it is without any fusion. "Assam is a diverse and colourful state with various tribes and communities with their ethnic food and local recipes. My aim is to revive and preserve the tradition and food culture of our ancestors and promote them in such a way so that it becomes

a profitable business. So these tribal women are helping tourists experience the magic of local cuisines," she explains.

A two-way street

The bond she shares with her culture and region reflects in her culinary sessions. Her training sessions are not only confined to her studio but extend to the rural areas. She believes that people in the rural areas can also be economically empowered through their culinary skills. So to give shape to her belief and to provide an alternative source of livelihood to the rural communities, she curated 'FSM Food Trails' which are culinary tours with training and dining concepts. In these tours, the rural women share different traditional recipes of local cuisines with tourists and later serve the same to them.

This idea of empowering locals of rural areas through a sustainable model had been considerably appraised by celebrity chefs, renowned food

Tour operators are key players who can design itineraries more ethically and responsibly

bloggers and travel writers from India and abroad. 'Manas Spring Festival' is one such noteworthy culinary event. This event not only contrib-



uted to the tourism sector but also economically aided the livelihood of the local tribes. Sharing her views on why community-based tourism has become important today, especially for a destination like India, Dutta says, "With the increasing adverse impact of mass tourism, it is important for destinations such as India to bring more focus on sustainability and community-based tourism."

The trade can do their bit
Urging tour operators to also be a part of this, she says, "They can actually play an important role. They are the key players who can design their itineraries more ethically and responsibly. Marketing strategies adopted by them should be aligned with the needs of the destination. Ultimately, responsible awareness will lead to meaningful experiences," she says.

A salute to the fearless



Indian carrier SpiceJet operated a special charter flight on May 11 to fly some fearless warriors who have put their lives on the line – a team of nurses – from Kochi to Jeddah. The airline's crew also presented them with a token of gratitude for their selfless service.

Cross Hotels' third in Pattaya



Cross Hotels & Resorts has signed a significant hotel management agreement with Kasetsinn Co to open Cross Pattaya Phratamnak. This will be the first property after their luxury brand renaming from X2 to Cross. The 78-key hotel is set to open in August 2021.

Bookings at shorter notice

► Contd from page 1

island of Mykonos leading the list, with summer bookings currently standing at 54.9 per cent of what they were at the equivalent point, pre-pandemic. It is followed by the Spanish island, Ibiza, where bookings are at 49.2 per cent.

The next eight destinations in order of resilience are Chania (GR) 48.9per cent, Thira (GR) 48.1per cent, Kerkyra (GR) 47.5per cent, Thessaloniki (GR) 43.7per cent, Palma de Mallorca (ES) 41.2per cent, Heraklion (GR) 36.6per cent, Athens (GR) 33.2per cent and Faro (PT) 32.8per cent.

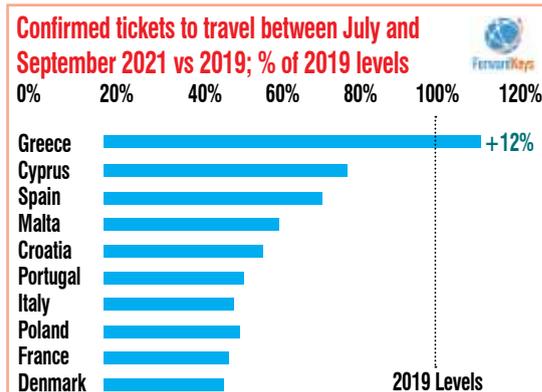
Olivier Ponti, VP Insights, ForwardKeys, says, "Vac-

Relaxed restrictions and vaccination

- ❖ The correlation between the announcement of relaxed travel restrictions and bookings is also dramatically demonstrated by flight tickets issued from the USA to Iceland. On March 26, its government announced that all vaccinated travellers would be exempt from entry restrictions and the level of issued tickets soared to 158 per cent of what they were during the equivalent week in 2019.
- ❖ The correlation between vaccination rates and outbound travel is strong, as consumers gain confidence. Bookings to Europe from Israel, which has vaccinated over 60 per cent of its population, are currently at 63 per cent of 2019 levels and bookings from the UK, which has vaccinated over 52 per cent, are at 32 per cent of 2019 levels.

cinations appear to hold the key to reviving international travel, as countries that make clear promises to welcome vaccinated travellers are

being rewarded by strong surges in flight bookings. We are seeing a revival of confidence in outbound travel from countries where there has been a successful roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines.



Furthermore, if restrictions are eased in both origin markets and destinations, there are grounds for further optimism because there is strong pent-up demand and, during the pandemic, people have shown themselves willing to make bookings at significantly shorter notice than they used to."

40 days in Maldives

Anshu Tejuja, MD, Ashoka Dream Holidays, was on a trip in the Maldives when something unexpected happened and she had to be quarantined for five weeks on the island. This is her story in her own words.

I was quarantined on an island like Robinson Crusoe from March 20 to April 25, 2021, but lived it up like a COVID warrior. This is a narrative about my five weeks of quarantine experience in the Maldives recently. I know Maldives is a beautiful country to be quarantined in. But every day was tough.

My one-week familiarisation trip to the Maldives with eight other travel agents from Mumbai turned into a five-week experience! We were supposed to return to Mumbai on March 27. We were all packed and ready to fly back when we were informed by the hotel that one agent tested positive. As per the rules in Maldives, the rest of us too had to be quarantined for 14 nights, which is 15 days. So we all went into isolation on March

27 and we all had to undergo COVID tests. After three days, two more members of the group tested positive. On the seventh day, two more people tested positive. And then on day 15 – which was my last day of being quarantined – my results also came back positive. In short, eight out of nine got infected while on the trip.

No hotel or hospital will incur your expenses, hence a COVID insurance policy is an absolute must



Initially, before I tested positive, there was a lot of frustration and anger. Imagine one month of complete isolation in a room with no housekeeping! Initially, we thought the rules were too strict. But it started to make sense to me why it is pertinent to have them. The 15-day isolation / incubation period now makes complete sense to me because anyone can catch it within 14 days. HPA (Health Pro-

tection Agency) in Maldives has laid down these rules for everybody's safety and I am thankful for that. If we were allowed to leave without the mandatory isolation, I would have infected my family and so many other people on the way back. We would have caused so much damage.

Gratitude

I am thankful to the entire team at Intercontinental Maldives

that kept me comfortable in a duplex lagoon villa facing the ocean with dolphins saying hello to me for a month. They customised everything to our needs and did a spectacular job – they provided us with everything we asked for. The doctor came to visit us every day to make sure our vitals

Dhirwani, Anoop Kumar, Nishank Syal, Komal Jani and Delna Madon – have now become like a close-knit family.

A word of advice

My virtual exercise classes came to my rescue. I strongly recommend travel insurance for any travel during COVID times because if you test positive or anyone around you tests positive, you will need to be isolated. A good insurance cover and a medicine kit is very important to carry while travelling. No hotel or hospital will incur your expenses, hence a COVID insurance policy is an absolute must. I follow a healthy diet and do yoga regularly which I think helped me a lot too. My advice to everyone – follow the rules, be calm and be patient.



Anshu Tejuja MD, Ashoka Dream Holidays

(Views expressed are the author's own. The publication may or may not subscribe to them.)

Change is afoot for M!CE

Highlighting a significant shift in the nature of M!CE business, Rohit Chopra, Regional Director, Sales & Distribution, Accor India & South Asia, says that business associated to weddings, social events and sports has replaced corporate M!CE, incentives and charters.

What should hotels focus on right now?

The focus has to be on forging the right partnerships to push MICE for hotels in India today. We are looking at new ideas and concepts for our hotels such as Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre, Novotel Hyderabad Airport, Pullman

Hazel Jain

What is your perspective on M!CE segment opening up? Do you see corporates booking for this year?

The M!CE industry almost came to a standstill in 2020 leading to a big dent in the structure, functioning and finances of many businesses. Since the lockdowns have been lifted, we have witnessed a significant shift in the nature of M!CE business. Business associated to weddings, social events and sports has replaced corporate M!CE, incentives and charters, which used to be demand generators in 2019. To encourage demand, one of the key factors in 2021 will be flexibility on commercial terms & conditions, given that these are unique times. Moreover, as international travel restrictions continue, domestic business will be driving M!CE revenues for the near future.



Rohit Chopra Regional Director, Sales and Distribution, Accor India, S. Asia

While we did see a drastic increase in demand for M!CE in February 2021, in the last two months we have also witnessed an increase in cancellation or rescheduling because of the escalation in COVID-19 cases. Business travel and M!CE will be extremely slow, we can expect a revival closer to the festival season, in October, depending on cases and vaccination.

What segment of M!CE do you think is opening first and why? While we can expect spo-

radic demand in segments like weddings and sports, movement in industries such as pharmaceuticals, electronics, automobile, sports, manufacturing, movie production houses and white goods should witness a faster rebound Q3 onwards. Our focus has remained on hygiene and safety assurance, while also keeping in check all local government norms. Trust is the new

Business travel and M!CE will be extremely slow, we can expect a revival closer to the festival season



currency, and our endeavour is to continue winning our guests' confidence.

Have your corporate clients already planned for this year?

We are confident that companies would prefer in-person and socially distant meetings and discussions for business transactions rather than conducting events virtually. Moreover, as international travel restrictions continue, domestic business

will be driving M!CE revenues. For India, we have been receiving some queries from corporates for 100-200 pax from Q3 onwards. But they are also keeping a keen watch on the currently developing COVID-19 situation in the country.

We have been observing queries for Q4 2021 for safer, long-haul destinations, and can expect similar interest for shorter haul destinations from Q3 2021.

New Delhi Aerocity and Sofitel Mumbai BKC. Their expansive space will help us continue to adapt and provide experiences at various levels for all our guests. We have also collaborated with Microsoft to launch ALL CONNECT, a new hybrid meetings concept supported by Microsoft Teams. This will enable corporate customers and meeting planners to combine physical in-hotel meetings with virtual interactions.

A rise in wellness travellers

Growth of global wellness tourism in 2021 will still be largely driven by secondary wellness travellers who seek to maintain their health and well-being while enjoying the experiences of a regular trip or destination getaway, says **Ingo Ronald Schweder**, Founder & CEO at GOCO Hospitality and MD at Horwath HTL Health & Wellness.

International wellness tourism trips grew 12 per cent annually between 2015 and 2017, significantly faster than domestic tourism trips. And despite domestic wellness travel dwarfing international wellness travel over the same period, international wellness trips represented a proportionally larger share of expenditures because the average level of spending for an international trip is much higher. Growth rates will undoubtedly be reduced over the next few years, but a similar or larger growth rate is expected to return, notably at a faster rate than the wider hospitality industry as a whole. This data helps support the claim that wellness has never been more important than in current times.

Wellness as a business driver

As people begin to seek more experiential travel opportunities

and wellness-centric experiences, the hospitality industry has a unique and much-needed opportunity to leverage wellness as a key service proposition. This can lead to the creation of better brand positioning, increased revenue generation and a more sustainable model that has the ability to better react to future crises. This change will engage and more effectively service the needs of both health-enlightened and uninitiated guests alike. The Global Wellness Institute estimates that international wellness travellers spend at a 53 per cent premium over the average international tourist, while domestic wellness travellers spend at a 178 per cent premium over their standard domestic counterparts.

In addition, overall rising consumer interest in extending

wellness experience beyond the hotel and vacation setting into the home and everyday life will continue to create opportunities for the industry, manifesting it-

Well-being is expected to be in focus in terms of physical need & cultural narrative

self in a surge in wellness real estate investments and workplace wellness initiatives.

Benefits of a healthy workforce

The economic burden of an unwell workforce is estimated to

be at 10-15 per cent of global economic output, factoring in medical costs, productivity losses caused by chronic disease, work-related stress, injuries, illness and disengagement. However, worldwide, less than 10 per cent of workplace benefits include workplace wellness initiatives, with the majority of workers more concerned about their employers meeting the most basic needs. Now, primary concern has understandably shifted towards job stability and workplace safety. Soon, concern will shift again to address the post-pandemic need for a maintained state of health and well-being, with greater demand for more comprehensive healthcare benefits and dedicated workplace wellness solutions. Needless to say, as people's expectations rise, the term 'health and wellness' and the practices surrounding it will

become more and more commonplace across all facets of life, and therefore, so must the offering and evolution of wellness in the hospitality sector.

Conclusion

In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, global well-being is expected to remain sharply in focus both in terms of physical need and collective cultural narrative. The World Bank predicts as many as 150 million people will fall into extreme poverty by 2021 and suggests that a number of middle-income countries will see significant numbers of urban dwellers slipping below the poverty line for the first time, identifying a significant shift in the spending power of those who may have previously had the economic stability to enjoy travel and wellness tourism.

The wellness economy's future, and specifically that of wellness hospitality, will be strongly influenced by the significant global changes seen over the last year. Certainly, the predicted growth of the pre-pandemic era will take time to correct, but due to fast-growing trends surrounding health, immunity, and well-being, the hospitality industry is poised to see a fast recovery if the correct steps are taken.



Ingo Ronald Schweder
Founder & CEO, GOCO Hospitality and MD, Horwath HTL Health & Wellness

(Views expressed are the author's own. The publication may or may not subscribe to them.)

Impact of the second wave

Extracts from the latest CAPA Advisory India Aviation Outlook FY2022 reflect how the second wave of the infection will impact key trends in Indian aviation in FY2022. It will take significant time to restore the confidence of inbound tourists and business travellers in India as a destination. Pre-COVID traffic is only expected to be restored by FY2024.

TT Bureau

In early Jan-2021, CAPA Advisory had released a report on 'Key Trends in Indian Aviation in FY2022'. At that time, a steady recovery in traffic was visible, particularly in the domestic sector. For the next couple of months these encouraging trends continued, while the number of new daily COVID cases declined. But since late March 2021, there has been a tragic turn of events, with cases and fatalities from the virus surging.

The re-imposition of formal lockdowns as well as passenger fear has seen traffic numbers halve in a matter



of a couple of weeks, with the likelihood that subdued demand will continue for several months to come. This will deal a body blow to the industry, crushing the optimism that had been emerging in recent months. Most Indian airlines were already very vulnerable prior to COVID, with weak bal-

ance sheets and poor liquidity. COVID inflicted massive losses and an increasing debt burden on carriers that were structurally ill-equipped to absorb this impact. The extent of the challenge is reflected in the fact that Indian carriers under-recovered almost USD70 per passenger in FY21.

The twin shocks of the first and second waves, occurring in the space of a little of over 12 months, will leave a long-term structural impact. Supply-side risks have increased markedly, and were they to eventuate they would likely result in an imbalance in the competitive structure of the industry, possibly creating policy and regulatory challenges.

CAPA India once again urges the Ministry of Civil Aviation to create a new policy framework. The original National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP) released in 2016 was designed for an environment of growth. Post-COVID there is a need for NCAP 2.0 – possibly as an interim measure - to support sectoral emergence from the crisis through the stages of survival, stabilisation, recovery and eventually expansion. This is the time to take decisions and pursue reforms.

Update as of May 2021

- ❖ The second wave is likely to accelerate the process of consolidation of airlines, and to an even greater strategic level. However, the chances of a successful divestment of Air India may be less certain.
- ❖ Supply-side risks have increased sharply as a result of the second wave. If realised, this will create a strategic dilemma for policymakers and regulators.
- ❖ Domestic airline traffic for the full year will be higher than the approximately 53 million passengers in FY2021. The impact will be more pronounced in the international sector. Pre-COVID traffic is expected to be restored by FY2024.
- ❖ The severity and impact of the second wave will virtually close the door for most aviation businesses in terms of access to lenders, in the absence of government intervention, which is unlikely.
- ❖ There is no scope for lifting fare caps and floors in the current environment. They will almost certainly persist for at least the first half of the year, and possibly for most of FY2022.
- ❖ The current 'bubble arrangements' are likely to continue for at least the next six months and well into the second half.
- ❖ It appears more likely that the government may seek to renegotiate bilateral air service agreements to limit the share and growth of sixth freedom carriers. This may lead to a new international aviation strategy.
- ❖ In light of the second wave, the likelihood of IndiGo emerging significantly stronger than its competitors has increased.

IATA has called on governments to ensure that high costs for COVID-19 testing don't put travel out of reach for individuals and families. To facilitate an efficient restart, COVID-19 testing must be affordable as well as timely, widely available and effective.



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EVENT TALK

Media Partners:



MAY-2021

Date	Event	Time
15-16	Maharashtra Agro-tourism conference	09:00 am
16-19	Arabian Travel Market (ATM) Hybrid	Dubai
17-19	ATB Virtual 2021	01:30 pm
22	Indiatourism Mumbai Presentation	04:00 pm
19-23	FITUR	Madrid
25-26	FTE Virtual Expo 2021	11:30 am

JUNE 2021

1	Digital Travel APAC Virtual Summit	TBA
1-4	Routes Asia 2021	11:30 am
4-6	CMT China	Nanjing
10	Spain Tourism Webinar	TBA
8-12	Bali & Beyond Travel Fair	Nusa Dua
16-18	Korea Tourism Virtual Roadshow	TBA
21	International Yoga Day Celebrations	Pan-India
24	Spain Tourism Webinar	TBA
24-27	Korea World Travel Fair	Seoul

For more information, contact us at: talk@ddppl.com

ATM Hybrid ready to roll in Dubai

With a new hybrid format for the first time in ATM history, in-person at the DWTC from May 16-19 and virtually from May 24-26, the show will see 67 conference sessions featuring 145 local, regional and international speakers.



Manas Dwivedi

Now in its 28th year, ATM 2021 will be hosted at the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC), as final preparations are being put in place. A total of 62 countries are being represented on the ex-



Danielle Curtis
Exhibition Director, Middle East
Arabian Travel Market

hibition floor this year such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Germany, Cyprus, Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, the Maldives, the Philippines,

Thailand, Mexico and the US. Onsite, there is a Global Stage which will include a hotel industry summit, dedicated buyer forums for Saudi Arabia and China, an International Tourism & Investment Conference (ITIC), as well as an aviation panel and a special session on Gulf-Israeli ties.

"The theme of this year's show is 'A new dawn for travel and tourism' and the spotlight will be on the latest 'COVID' news from around the world – vaccine roll-outs, the current state of the industry and more importantly, what the future holds," says **Claude Blanc**, Portfolio Director, WTM & IBTM Portfolios. "This underscores the importance of ATM, connecting destinations with their source markets," adds **Danielle Curtis**, Exhibition Director Middle East, Arabian Travel Market. The event will once again play an integral role in Arabian Travel

Week, a 10-day-long festival of travel and tourism events taking place in Dubai and online. In addition to the in-person Arabian Travel Market event, the travel events that are part of Arabian Travel Week are: travel technology exhibition Travel Forward, ARIVAL Dubai for the tours



It is imperative that we include a virtual element



and attractions sector, GBTA's half-day virtual business travel conference, ITIC's Middle East Tourism Investment Summit, speed networking events for digital influencers and regionally-focused buyer groups (including China) and, of course,

ATM Virtual, the online edition of the ATM exhibition.

This year, for the first time in ATM history, a new hybrid format will mean a virtual ATM running a week later to complement and reach a wider audience than ever before. ATM Virtual, which made its debut last year, proved to be a resounding success attracting 12,000 online attendees from 140 countries.

"It is imperative that we include a virtual element. Many industry professionals from around the world may not be able to attend in-person every year, particularly this year with travel restrictions changing rapidly around the globe. Due to Dubai's commitment to maintaining the highest standards of health and safety and its effective citywide management of the pandemic, it was awarded a 'Safe Travels' stamp," adds Curtis.

IN MEMORIAM

Indian hospitality veteran **Rajindera Kumar**, Director at Ambassador, New Delhi - IHCL SeleQtions and Former President, HRANI & FHRAI, passed away on May 6. The 78-year-old Kumar was the son of legendary hotelier Late Sh. Ram Pershad, who was President of FHRAI and HRANI for the longest period.



Rajindera Kumar

1968. His experience of over four decades in the hospitality sector had enabled him to stress on the importance of HRD.

Kumar was one of the longest-serving senior members of the Managing Committee of Hotel and Restaurant Association of Northern India (HRANI). He was elected President of HRANI in 2002-03 and then in 2006-2008. Kumar also led FHRAI as President in 2009-10. He remained a true warrior of the industry all his life. He made invaluable contributions to the advocacy efforts of HRANI & FHRAI, leaving a special imprint across India. Born on January 10, 1943, he was educated at the School of Hotel Administration, Cornell University, USA. He returned to India in

Describing him as "one of our industry's legends and statesmen", **Surendra Kumar Jaiswal**, President, HRANI and Vice President, FHRAI, says, "The hospitality industry has lost an advocate of knowledge-sharing and an accomplished ground breaker, he was definitely a frontrunner in the activities of the association, a man ahead of his time, very disciplined and straight forward."

His work, ethics and wisdom have made an indelible mark.

It is with deep sorrow that we inform you of the tragic demise of **Meenu Sachdeva**, the Founder Member and Managing Director of TI Infotech. She passed away on May 11. Her extensive contributions helped create benchmarks for the industry. She will truly be missed.



Meenu Sachdeva

In a heartfelt note, her colleague and friend **Arjun Sharma**, Chairman, TI Infotech, writes, "We at TI Infotech are left with her vision, commitment towards the TI Family. She served for almost 31 years in the travel, tourism and hospitality sector including organisations like International Travel House, MakeMyTrip and SITA World Travel (KUONI India) before forming TI Infotech in 2005. In this journey, she worked on various projects giving solutions across industries in different parts of the world.

Her problem-solving approach was incredible which has helped not only in TI Infotech but many of our customers

and even to the extent of helping many at personal levels. We have some extremely fond memories of Meenu; she will always be in our prayers and her legacy will continue to guide and inspire us. She was a feisty and strong leader and always passionate in all she did. She cherished challenges and had an amazing problem-solving capability. TI Infotech and the entire team is so committed to her legacy even in her physical absence to continue the journey she left in between. This will be our tribute to her. May God bless the departed soul to his Heavenly Abode and give the entire TI family strength and courage to bear this irreparable loss."



Swapna Guha

With profound grief we inform you of the sad demise of **Swapna Guha**, General Manager - Sales & Marketing, Mansingh Group of Hotels and Resorts.



DK Beri

We regret to inform you of the passing away of **DK Beri**, former Senior Vice President for Business & Corporate Affairs, Taj Hotels, and a true stalwart and industry icon.



Anil Bhandari

A doyen of tourism and hospitality, **Anil Bhandari** passed way due to COVID-19 in Delhi-NCR and is mourned by the industry in India and abroad.



Kamalpreet Singh Bedi

With profound grief and sorrow we inform you of the untimely demise of **Kamalpreet Singh Bedi**, Manager Sales, North India, United Airlines, on May 11.



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JW MARRIOTT

Kolkata

Sumeet Suri has been appointed as General Manager at JW Marriott Kolkata. He brings to the table a huge repertoire of knowledge and expertise in the dynamics of hotel management, administration and operations. Upgrading productivity, ensuring patron satisfaction and strategic initiatives are some of his key responsibilities. Suri has earned his repute over two decades of utmost diligence, and his robust leadership qualities and passion for the industry have contributed to impeccable results across all the properties under his ambit. Prior to moving to JW Marriott Kolkata, he was the General Manager at Kochi Marriott.



SHERATON GRAND RESORT & SPA

Chennai

Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa has appointed **Amit Kumar** as its new General Manager. Kumar is set to take the reins in these unprecedented times and steer the hotel's objective of creating a safe and welcoming destination for guests. With his astute leadership in managing hotels, he will focus his efforts on ensuring the well-being of the hotel team and safeguarding the health and best interests of guests. In the new role, he will work to strengthen the hotel operations while continuing to enhance the stellar services and guest experiences established at the hotel. Prior to this move, Kumar served in the same capacity at Courtyard by Marriott Chennai.



NOVOTEL IMAGICA

Khopoli

Anil Chavan is now the General Manager at Novotel Imagica Khopoli. He comes with almost two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, having worked in operations as well as sales & marketing with a range of brands across India and Dubai. In his new role, Chavan will focus on enhancing the overall guest experience at the 287-room Novotel Imagica Khopoli, and will be responsible for revenue growth and overseeing the management of the operations team. Formerly, he was associated with Park Regis, Goa and was also the General Manager of Royal Tulip Mumbai (Louvre Hotels Group).



The value of IP

UNWTO says the Intellectual Property (IP) system, be it through designs or trademarks, can create a favourable ecosystem for innovation, entrepreneurship and investment in tourism.



Hazel Jain

Promote creativity

While the tourism sector has taken a hit during the pandemic, it will recover and contribute to reigniting hard-hit economies. In this context, IP rights are powerful tools that can be used to boost tourism development and competitiveness. The IP system is designed to promote creativity and innovation and support efforts by individuals, businesses and other actors to differentiate themselves and their products and services in the marketplace.

Protect local communities

The IP system ensures that creativity, innovation, traditions and cultural heritage in tourism are properly protected and commercialised and that the benefits are shared by all. Whether it is producing cheese, tea, pepper, wine or other products, geographical indications and appellations of origin can be used to support the growth of rural tourism and provide benefits to local communities. It can also support the growth of rural tourism by enhancing tourism in agricultural rural areas.

Attract investment

Different IP rights can be leveraged to raise funds. Stakeholders around the globe are using IP rights to add value to tourism services and products, as well as to protect and promote local knowledge, traditions and cultural heritage. Not only does good IP knowledge and management help to make use of the protected



intangibles, but it also attracts investments and leverages fundraising opportunities.

Create a distinctive identity

As IP contributes to the development of tourism products and to the reputational value of destinations, IP protection and management is becoming an increasingly important consideration for NTOs and DMOs. There is growing awareness of the need to protect each destination's heritage and to capitalise on its tourism assets in order to generate value for local tourism stakeholders.



This helps to accelerate the creation and development of SMEs. This in turn improves the destination's positioning and helps to build a strong and vibrant brand identity.

Protect competitive advantage

Ornamental elements found in tourist accommodation in niche markets may be protected by design rights. The strategic use of design registration to protect ornamental or aesthetic aspects of furniture, for example, may indirectly promote a destination's cultural heritage and add value to the tourism experience. Owners and designers can form partnerships in order to introduce contemporary and/or traditional designs into boutique hotels, or to achieve market differentiation and an advantage.

Add a revenue stream

In addition to technological innovations, tourism businesses may also invest in creativity or quality. These investments in

improving goods and services can also be protected through the IP system. Investments in R&D, product differentiation and marketing can be protected by the IP system. ↴

A new travel mindset

American Express Travel asked travellers from seven countries what was on their minds and the results were interesting. There's a clear appreciation for the benefits that travel can bring.



Hazel Jain

Paying for future travel

Travellers are already thinking ahead to how they'll book and pay for future trips. With the increase in flexible booking options, respondents are ready to book now, with 56% indicating they miss traveling so much that they are willing to book a trip even if they might have to cancel it in the future.

In fact, people miss traveling so much that 76% of respon-

was. The extended stay trend varies by region with Card Members in Mexico, Canada and the UK twice as likely to book a stay of eight or more days than those in the US, India, Australia, and Japan.

The new luxury travel

The pandemic has changed peoples' perception of luxury travel with personalized experiences (82%), high cleanliness standards (81%) and privacy (79%) being the most desirable luxury

reinforces this trend, showing a rise in reservations for second-city destinations. American Express Travel consultants are also seeing requests for smaller cities like Porto (instead of Lisbon) in Portugal, and Wellington (instead of Auckland) in New Zealand. Some customers are open to going 'anywhere' they can safely travel right now.

Backing local communities

Travellers want to support small businesses and communities that make a destination



dents surveyed are creating their destinations wish list for future travel even though they might not be able to travel yet.

Rise of the digital nomad

Flexible and remote work policies combined with unique incentives from hotels, like beach workstations and discounts on extended stays, have influenced the rise of the digital nomad - someone who lives and works while traveling the globe.

Fifty-four per cent respondents said the freedom to live and work while traveling is more appealing now than it ever

amenities among respondents. In fact, 80% indicate they are willing to travel to destinations during the offseason so that it's less crowded.

American Express Travel has also seen increased interest in customers searching for unique getaways and spacious, fully equipped villas.

Surge in 'second city' destinations

As many travellers look to avoid the crowds, 69% of respondents are interested in visiting lesser-known destinations. American Express Travel booking data

unique. Seventy-two percent of respondents agree that they are passionate about traveling to destinations to help boost tourism revenue and the local economy, and 77% agree that they want to be more conscious about supporting small, local businesses while traveling.

Brands that prioritise diversity

Sixty-nine per cent of respondents agree that they want to choose an airline or a hotel that values diversity and inclusion, and whose employees reflect a diverse customer base. ↴

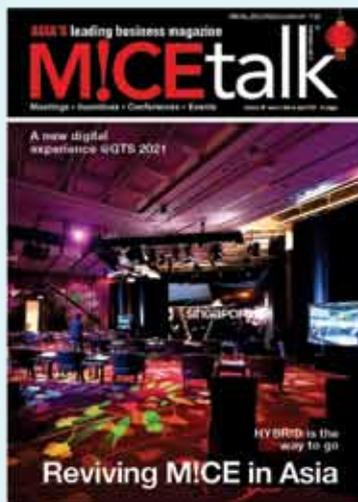
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Emirates is eager to return

UAE's flag carrier - Emirates - has been following all necessary protocols to ensure the safety of passengers and crew. Already covering a network of 120 destinations, Emirates is looking at increasing its capacity further in the coming months.

 Shehara Rizly

Adnan Kazim, Chief Commercial Officer, Emirates, says that for the airline, the focus has been to put together the right measures before re-introducing flights. He says, "We went through a lockdown at Dubai Airport in March 2020, and then on May 9 we recommenced our service with repatriation operations. We took



Adnan Kazim
Chief Commercial Officer, Emirates

the time between March and May to ensure that we put the right measures in place in terms of COVID requirements for the health and well-being of our staff and passengers." These requirements, adds Kazim, included compulsorily wearing the mask, extra sanitisation of flights, mandatory PCR test for passengers travelling on board Emirates irrespective of the destination they travelled from, a second test in Dubai to ensure that people who came to the emirate were safe, and ensuring social distancing at the airport. "We even added the plastic shield so that we could protect our check-in staff at the airport," he says.

Rebuilding the network

While the pandemic has disrupted operations across the world, for Emirates, recommencing operations was a meticulously planned exercise. "Our focus when we recom-

menced was more on rebuilding our network. So, we started with 10 stations back in May and gradually increased that. Now we have over 120 destinations in our passenger network, so we have recovered more than 85 per cent of the network that we had earlier. Our focus now will be on bringing back capacity which will purely be determined by the easing of protocols by countries," he shares.

Kazim adds that as part of this drive, Emirates looks forward to the Dubai Expo as a mega event that will help it achieve its goals. "We are already planning for 70 per cent of our pre-COVID capacity to be re-introduced by then, and we hope that with the vaccine roll-out across the world, things will look much better starting from July-August and then gradually entering the winter with more borders being opened and more people being able to travel without restrictions," he believes.

In the pipeline...

As Emirates looks to vigorously restart its operations in Asia, Kazim says that Bali, Indonesia, is one such example where they would like to soon recover operations in the approaching summer travel season. "Indonesia has signed an air bubble

agreement with the UAE, so when the summer travel season commences in July or August, we are quite keen to reintroduce Bali as a destination. We are also looking at reintroducing our capacity to China, adding more capacity into Asia – including India and Sri Lanka. In India, too, we want to ramp up operations.

 We have recovered more than 85 per cent of the network that we had earlier 

India has an air bubble agreement with the UAE, and we need to gradually reintroduce the capacity that Emirates had here in pre-COVID times, without any restrictions on the flow of people travelling on the visitors' visa. We, as a company, are quite dynamic and agile in responding to requirements as we see more countries opening gateways and easing protocols to re-engage and re-introduce capacity, and linking countries as soon as possible," Kazim says.

India – key source market on hold

As a key source market for Dubai, India's sudden surge in COVID-19 cases has led to closure of borders with the UAE although the two enjoyed a good network with several flights being operated between the two destinations. But, Dubai had to be cautious, being the hub that connects the world, to ensure safety of all passengers and crew, hence, borders were closed April 24 onwards. Commenting on the matter, Kazim says, "First of all, our prayers and thoughts are with India for a fast recovery from what they are going through and I'm sure that the government will put the right measures in place to have that recovery happening as soon as possible. Today, our operations in India are restricted and the air bubble through which we operated 14 daily flights to nine points was not restricted in carrying traffic from Dubai to India. Cargo is also operational and we are extending all the support that India requires from Emirates in mobilising the required COVID equipment. Unfortunately, for the longer term, I can't say much on operations as decisions regarding opening of borders are driven by the government. We do hope to be back soon." 



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