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# Enjoy the Maldivian side of life









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Dear Friends.

While it is obvious that 2020 has thrown many a curveball and starved the tourism industry of potential boom, over time, we have braved the pandemic and innovated ourselves to do things differently. Over time, we have noticed a strong revival of interest from customers who have been waiting to get back to what they love: travel. And people like us who wholeheartedly live and breathe tourism will once again create memorable travel experiences for those struck by this wanderlust.

Adding up, in the past weeks, several COVID-19 vaccine candidates have achieved breakthroughs and have shown a glimmer of hope in the flailing travel industry.

The aim of our year-ending issue is to offer more hope and optimism through our stories, and it is great to notice that there are positive thoughts coming from contributing Industry stakeholders too. Thus, as we bid adieu to 2020, we also hope that 2021 will put more injection of confidence into the tourism industry in all aspects of travel to resume soon.

### Merry Christmas! And a blissful New Year!

Happy Reading!

Ravi Sharma ravisharma@sampanmedia.com







### Nijhawan Group appointed as the Indian Representative for Burj Khalifa and Emaar Entertainment

Group has been ijhawan appointed as the official Sales & Marketing representative for Burj Khalifa and Emaar Entertainment (L.L.C) in India. A subsidiary of Emaar Properties, Emaar Entertainment is dedicated to delivering top-quality entertainment, led by un-matched industry expertise. The Entertainment chain carries a distinctive portfolio of attractions that are ultra-modern and transcend into entertainment and leisure. Its assets include some of the city's most unique entertainment venues including At the Top, Burj Khalifa, Dubai Aquarium

and Underwater Zoo, Dubai Ice Rink, KidZania®, VR Park, Ekart Zabeel and the ultra-chic performing arts platform, Dubai Opera.

On this occasion, Priyanka Nijhawan, Director- Representations, Nijhawan Group said, "We take pride in announcing that Emaar Entertainment is the newest addition to our brand portfolio. India is the largest source market for Dubai and carries a huge potential that is yet to be explored. We are prepared to help magnify and pave the path for the biggest entertainment chain in the country to enhance its reach in the b2b space."

### United Airlines starts daily Delhi-Chicago nonstop flights

nited Airlines launched its Delhi-Chicago nonstop on December 12, 2020. The airline will operate a Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft between the Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi and its hometown hub at the O'Hare International Airport in Chicago.

With the introduction of the service, United will operate four daily nonstop flights from India. The airline additionally operates daily year-round services from Mumbai and New Delhi to New York/ Newark, and from New Delhi to San Francisco. United also expects to introduce a new daily nonstop service between Bengaluru and San Francisco from May 08, 2021.



### Maldives welcomes the 100,000th tourist since the border reopening

ince the reopening on July 15, 2020, there has been a gradual increase in tourist arrivals with the establishment of travel bubbles between the Maldives and other countries, as well as greater connectivity in terms of flight operations. Over 18 airlines are currently travelling to and from the Maldives, from all around the globe. On December 06,

Maldives broke the record of daily arrivals since the reopening, which was a total of 3,006 tourists, whereas the air traffic movement on this date was 352.

Surpassing the milestone of 100,000 tourists in advance of the projections is truly an achievement, which is the outcome of a unified #MaldivesApproach to a global challenge.



During a grand event held on December 12, at Velana International Airport, the 100,000th tourist was identified by the Ministry of Tourism, together with Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC), Maldives Immigration, and Maldives Airports Company Limited (MACL). The 100,000th tourist, Jasmin Burki, arrived from Switzerland via Emirates. On arrival, she was escorted outside by officials of MMPRC and Maldives Immigration, and greeted by the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Tourism, Managing Director of MMPRC, Controller General of Immigration, and CEO and Managing Director of MACL. The Controller General of Immigration, Mohamed Ahmed Hussain, also handed over a special gift to her.

It is anticipated that the 500,000<sup>th</sup> tourist of 2020 will arrive by late December and that the country will reach peak arrival rates during the year 2021.

### Incredible India

Gujarat Tourism Khushboo Gujaval-ki

The sand is exactly as white as shown in this picture.

The ocean of white sand stands out stark and pristine in its colourlessness, interrupted only by passing hoards of camels.

On moonlit nights, the desert reveals another colour.

Something that can hardly be described in words.

Which colour of Kutch will catch your eye? Maybe one that I couldn't find!



# Emphasise on cross industry and cross business partnerships to boost inbound and outbound sales

A realistic, yet optimistic overview of how the travel industry and institutions should adapt, survive and re-emerge from the pandemic are much needed. In an exclusive interaction with TTJ, Sandeep Dwivedi, Chief Operating Officer, InterGlobe Technology Quotient, discusses varied topics that have resulted because of the disruption caused by the pandemic.

### **Prashant Nayak**

# With the second wave in progress, what according to you would be the actual timeline to achieve normalcy and recovery?

As the first pandemic of the 21st century, with no past records to relay a forecast, it is hard to state a vision of normalcy, especially when a vaccine hasn't entered the market yet. Even if that were the case, we are still slightly far from normalcy, as the current state of the market is not to change overnight. But to state my expectations for the upcoming year, it is likely that more people will choose to travel and engage in out-of-home activities now for having witnessed a range of safety measures undertaken both at individual and business level, and their affirmative responses. With more and more people gaining a sense of the risk and adopting the right measures to abate the risk, a steady pace of activities is expected to be achieved anywhere between the first and third quarter of 2021. If we look at a global scale, many economies are still struggling with the PMI (Purchasing Managers Index) in the service sector, for some it is staggeringly on the low side of 50, especially the European economies due to the latest restrictions levied across, including France and the UK. So, to achieve absolute normalcy, we need to wait and watch.

### What does the vaccine announcement mean for the travel and tourism industry?

It is hopeful news indeed, but saying it would change the course entirely within months, would be peak optimism. Yes, the first wave of vaccine shall bring subtle faith in crossborder travel and may lead to the resumption of international travel, something many in the industry are eagerly waiting for. This shall bring tourism and related businesses back on their toes. It will further, albeit slowly, reinstate the flow in the hospitality sector. Business travel may also turn wheels, especially in the manufacturing sector, considering PMI in this sector is growing impressively. But the fact that a vaccine would not be immediately available to the masses poses its own detriments and may delay the progress. That does, however, indicate there will be progress



in a positive direction. Domestic aviation back to 80 percent of pre COVID numbers, India will continue to witness double-digit growth in aviation.

With standard hygiene SOP's put into practice almost everywhere, yet the threat still alive, according to you what is now most needed to reassure passenger safety and security post-COVID?

What SOPs have done is bring a rise in elements of value and instigate the use of new products and services by customers, thereby making them appreciative of the value proposition. As we move further in our fight against COVID, bringing an impressive rise in mobility, businesses shall need innovative ideas to convince more customers of safety in travel, including air travel which has better air circulation and HEPA filters. The long association of air travel and F&B will be the first to pick this race for reassurance. And businesses with more scientific reports to convince of safer consumption in a particular environment relative to business shall tread farther sooner than the others. For reassuring customers post COVID-19, again science and technology are going to play a major role, bringing innovations to the forefront. We will likely see advanced versions of airplane

filters and automated services that reduce human-to-human contact.

Technology has played a significant role during COVID. Tell us about the tech or infrastructure investments needed by the industry to bounce back?

There is a huge pool of opportunities in the SaaS (software-as-a-service) segment for the travel and tourism industry. So far, industries like healthcare and logistics have seen an upstart that has transformed SaaS within India to a multibillion-dollar industry with wide adoption by consumers, especially during the pandemic and lockdown. Today, we have a scope of leveraging this new wave in the travel sector with innovative software for airlines, airports, travel education and even travel trade. Investments are welcomed today in the automation sector as well, more so with robotics and 3D printing being in high demand. Wide deployment of AI in the sector shall prove immensely advantageous, especially in helping travellers find safer destinations to travel that are unlikely to be swarmed by people during a particular timeline.

# Going into 2021, what support is needed for the survival and revival of the Indian travel and tourism industry?

Well, there is a new wave of optimism in the industry for having survived the worst few months in the history of travel and tourism. It is fair to highlight the distance we have covered from the first lockdown to this last month of 2020 with resilience and perseverance, despite much support. Yet, to speak of support, I cannot emphasise enough on the emerging need for cross-industry and cross-business partnerships to bring a safer travel environment for both inbound and outbound travellers, and F&B consumers in the hospitality sector. This cross-dimensional inter-industry support shall prove highly advantageous for businesses, including technology and travel business partnerships to offer advanced products and services to consumers, and bring more safety and comfort. The government should focus on a better tax regime and benefits to the travel industry by way of special status.

# India witnesses encouraging travel recovery, but there is more to go

Presently, coming up with innovative solutions and implementing the right strategies is crucial for all stakeholders in India for the survival and revival of the tourism industry. Madan Kak, COO – Tours, Minar Travels India, feels that while the industry is in a path of slow and gradual recovery, it is now more important for the industry stakeholders and the Government to focus on some key areas to restore travel confidence in the people.

### Rachita Sehgal

he second wave of COVID-19 pandemic emerged at a time when India is almost fully unlocked from the restrictions put earlier. There was a resurgence of cases, but the spike was restricted to not many states. People have now learned to live with this virus.

Speaking of revival, Kak says, "We do see a positive trend in the revival of domestic tourism. Domestic tourism has always been a very big segment of Indian tourism, and with people staying indoors for a long time, the urge to travel has become stronger."

Places such as Jaipur, Udaipur, Agra, Corbett, and Goa are witnessing good volumes of domestic travellers. Places in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, are humming with travellers during present times. And Kashmir is not lagging, though the numbers are not as big as other tourist places. Destination weddings, with all protocols and guidelines observed, are happening and during the auspicious marriage dates during this time, many hotels in Jaipur are sold out.

"However, the trade is now, looking forward to the opening of Indian borders for tourism and restoration of international flights, so that inbound tourism starts again, which will bring much-needed help to this industry, which was closed since the middle of March," mentions Kak.

With the announcement of a breakthrough in COVID-19 vaccine and the announcement by governments of Britain and Russia, that the first doses of the much-awaited vaccine will be administered to the citizens of both countries, in immediate future, the beleaguered travel industry has got a big boost and now at least, finally, see some light at the end of the tunnel.

"This will start many countries to open borders to holidayers when the vaccine is rolled out in more and more countries.



We hope that the Government of India will also open borders to as many countries as is feasible so that the much starved and most affected travel industry gets some succour," shares Kak.

With SOPs already in place and practice, the results of people taking to a New Normal are encouraging. The virus is on the decrease and following the two basic rules enumerated by our health experts, i.e. wearing masks and social distancing, domestic tourism is increasing. Business travel is happening again and MICE is getting back slowly. Once the government starts the process of vaccination against this virus, the travel industry will start bouncing back slowly.

The key areas for reassurance passenger safety according to Kak is to remain focused on safety, security and efficiency and to promote public health and confidence amongst travelers, aviation and hospitality industry workers and the general public.

The WFH norm is going to stay for

some more time, technology will become a platforms important component industry operations. In addition to understanding traveller's new habits, travel companies have to be on top of the customer's digital experience, in order to present offerings seamlessly. On this Kak adds more, "The travel agencies/ destination management companies have leverage the advances of travel technologies, such as recognition, virtual reality and mobile app's to offer an updated user experience. Usage of chatbots on the websites for customer support will be considered to be more important in the future."

The travel industry was the first casualty of COVID-19 and we all know that this industry will be the last to revive. The travel and tourism business especially is on its knees worldwide. As per estimates, India has over one lakh travel agents and tour operators. The number of tourist transporters and hospitality companies runs into hundreds of thousands.

Kak highlights that the trade looks forward to receiving help from the Government of India in the following key areas:

- a. To restore SEIS for duty credit of 10 per cent to the tourism industry.
- b. To finalise and implement an aggressive Incredible India Market plan which will help drive traffic to India when borders open again. This can be done by offering zero visa fee for FY 2021-22, a waiver for landing fee for charter flights to Goa which will encourage the comeback of charter flights to Goa.
- c. Reduce the taxation on hotels, restaurants, monument entrance fees, and interstate taxes on tourist vehicles.

# Expanding customer-centric initiatives to build customer confidence in travel

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, Thomas Cook India Ltd (TCIL) continues to drive meaningful innovation and initiatives to build customer confidence in travel. Changing customer behaviours and needs keeps them nimble and flexible in seizing opportunities and converting them into viable business opportunities. Rajeev Kale, President & Country Head – Holidays, MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India) Ltd, shares more on their business and their customer-centric initiatives in the ongoing pandemic.

### Prashant Nayak

t TCIL, they expect to see an effect on business pick up in the coming quarters of 2021, with recovery only towards the latter half of 2021 and a full recovery in early 2022. Despite the limited reopening of international borders, they are already witnessing green shoots in bookings as well as queries. Domestic travel has played a key role in driving demand recovery, and their recovery is at approx. 30 per cent with peaks during the festive weekends and extended weekends.

"Announcement of the vaccine signals hope and revival for the travel and tourism sector and positive consumer sentiment is driving demand- our November bookings saw a 30 per cent surge in sales. Roll out of the vaccine will be phased and while we remain hopeful and cautiously optimistic, we also stay realistic in our outlook. Domestic Tourism will continue to be a strong focus in 2021 until the reopening of international borders and will be the pivot of our recovery plan," tells Rajeev.

Rajeev shares more, "We have already seen green shoots with physical events for the volume driver Corporate MICE segment and this augurs well for 2021. Travel will see the evolution of an increasingly touchless world and technology will be at the forefront of much-needed initiatives such as the planned IATA digital Health passport. We look forward to the expansion of our meaningful customer-centric initiatives under our Assured Safe Travel Program and services such as Safe Holiday Helpline, COVID-negative certification services and Doctor on Call service."



Rajeev Kale

It is essential to have meticulous Health and Safety protocols at every step in the customer journey, from prebooking, booking-sales and servicing- to on ground and this should cover the entire ecosystem from transportation, airports, attractions/sightseeing and hotels and partnerships towards collaboration are vital.

At Thomas Cook India, they have taken meaningful initiatives such as:

Assured Safe Travel Program: In partnership with Apollo Clinics, the Assured Safe Travel Program ensures meticulous health and safety protocols, across every touch-point and to further

assist their customers. program defines a series of comprehensive health and safety measures in place across every travel touch-point from airports, airlines, local transportation, hotels, restaurants and attractions encompasses and employees suppliers, sellers and channels, including franchisees customers.

Safe **Holiday** Helpline: Yet another meaningful consumer initiative, Safe Holiday Helpline is a free service to support customers safe holiday planning offering comprehensive, country-specific information across visa-immigration

regulations, health & safety protocols, on-ground destination updates, etc.

COVID-negative Certification
Services: They have tied up with ICMR
accredited labs to offer seamless endto-end COVID-negative certification
services with contactless facilitation
across India

**Doctor on Call Service:** This service reassures and builds customer confidence in travel and lays a strong foundation towards the revival of travel in this COVID era.

Further, their strategic partnerships with reputed brands such as Marriott

### Tradeline

International and Accor to launch their Holiday with Confidence and Holiday Safe packages have helped reinforced their combined focus on health, hygiene and safety during travel.

The pandemic era and lockdowns have also accelerated the demand for virtual and contactless sales and service. As customers seek safe, contactless and personalized service to assist them through the complexities of holiday planning, it is imperative that the industry build user-friendly interfaces that help facilitate holiday planning, booking and payments. It is also important to ensure a seamless omnichannel experience for customers. Another key investment would also be in cyber security to ensure data safety. Greater application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) will further drive automation to improve cost efficiency & productivity.

"At Thomas Cook India, we have also used technology and conceptualised Virtual Outlets and our Virtual Agency Network that enables contactless services to customers by equipping our teams (sales and servicing) with

technology - to interact with consumers, as also access our critical internal systems for seamless delivery. For those who prefer our contactless services, we are assisting them via phone, chat or video call. We also launched India's first Virtual Holiday Store and our dedicated team of travel experts will be available over video chat 365 days, from 8 am to 12 pm, to guide customers with their entire travel requirement," assures Rajeev.

To support corporates, their business travel process was redeployed as an offsite model with bots for invoicing, refunds, streamlined processes and automated credit flow on a single platform. Their model of Centralized Service Delivery Hubs ensures seamless remote delivery. Also, their Retail Foreign Exchange counters and Wholesale Forex business restarted in May 2020, while Virtual Branches were activated to extend reach for contactless services and to serve customers anywhere. A unique Virtual Branch model was successfully implemented to facilitate contactless customer servicing. They have also operationalised a corporate and B2B booking tool to extend the reach and

seamless transactions.

"Given the challenges of large-scale physical events due to the current pandemic restrictions that limit in-person engagements and large gatherings, our MICE teams have used the period of the lockdown to re-imagine our MICE business to conceptualise vibrant virtual/ digital models and platforms, advanced health & safety measures and new-age technologies. These are working very well with our MICE Corporates - to engage with their top performers and key stakeholders. We have successfully delivered exciting hybrid models and digital R&R events- our digital platform allows seamless engagement across a variety of business functions and can be scaled up to include over 100000 attendees, with every aspect of it being customisable. We expect this model to become a key tool enabling our corporate customers to engage with their business channels and employees in the new COVID era. The strong positive feedback and the number of events confirmed give us added confidence in our product," concludes Rajeev.

# Safety, security, and hygiene to dominate all travel trends

Even though the demand for travel has started, it is pocket wise. Recovery is bound to happen but it will take its own course considering the ups and down in the nature of this pandemic. Guldeep Singh Sahni, Managing Director, Weldon Tours & Travels and former President OTOAI, shares his views with TTJ.

he second wave has definitely delayed the recovery path, but people are no more panicking. Safety measures and personal hygiene are becoming part of day-to-day life. Well experienced people have started travelling to self-drive destinations and also to countries which do not have many restrictions yet have hygiene and cleanliness as the top priority.

"The vaccine news has definitely raised hopes, but we still have to wait and watch. If the results are positive, there will be no looking back. Travel companies will have to be ready to recommend hotels, resorts, optional tours, etc which are adhering to standard hygiene SOPs. Surely, all tour operators are looking forward to it," mentions Sahni.

Looking at the nature of the pandemic where cases tend to fluctuate, it has become more important to reassure travellers. "First of all, travel consultant's knowledge of places and hotels they recommend will come handy

### Prashant Nayak



Guldeep Singh Sahni

here. Next, we will have to be confident that we are sending our customers to a safe place. Knowledge of standard SoPs will be the winning game, as this will be the major concern

of the travellers. A list of recommendations handing out along with itineraries will become a norm. Asking customers to carry their own sanitizers and masks in abundance will be advisable," shares Sahni.

Sahni also adds, "IT companies which understand the financial constraints of medium to small companies will bring a revolution in the industry as the millennials are first going to research about the travel consultants before they start working with them. The relationship between travel companies and IT companies is going to flourish. Travel companies are going to invest largely in technology."

No one company or no one player in the market can beat this kind of pandemic. To support recovery, the government has a big role to pay. "I fail to understand why the Govt. of India does not see the employment and taxes that tourism companies are generating. A huge financial package to revive the industry will bring in large investments, generate employment, and will impact the GDP in a big way," assures Sahni.

## In a nutshell: 2020, the year that brought about momentous change

As we draw the curtains on a year filled with numerous challenges and usher in a decade filled with hope and promise, it seems like a good time to pause and reflect on the year gone by.

Neliswa Nkani

020 was unlike anything we ever witnessed before, with major trials and challenges. However, it also brought alongside it a myriad of lessons and opportunities. It was the year of the unknown and the new-the year that set the stage for innovations and ingenuity in our systems and processes, the year that accelerated the future.

The pandemic was tough on the travel industry and was the biggest challenge we faced in terms of impact and reach. It stood out from other challenges the industry usually has to face, because this time we were fighting and trying to contain the unknown. There were financial and job losses in every sector, which initiated a ripple effect in a situation that was already fluid and constantly shifting.

While it took away some things, the year also forced us to grow, evolve and gain a new perspective. The earth finally had some breathing space and a chance to restore. We saw carbon emissions fall sharply, and wildlife reclaimed niches they once called home even as the air became cleaner and quieter. 2020 gave us the opportunity and space to reinvent ourselves. It allowed us the time to bring in disruptions, innovations and adopt sustainable alternatives. In South Africa itself, we had interesting examples of penguins wandering around the streets of Simon's Town, and lions napping on empty roads in Kruger National Park-one of the largest national parks in Africa.

### Lessons for a lifetime

The lockdown provided a lot more time and fodder for introspection. I realised that we lose alignment in the daily hustle-bustle of life, and we also lose sight of what is truly important. On the personal front, I was able to reorient and focus on all dimensions of personal wellness-physical, spiritual, mental and emotional. This means that I now make conscious efforts to



Neliswa Nkani

meditate, exercise more often, be mindful of my diet, read voraciously and spend quality time with friends and

I have also learnt to look withinwe can only give what we have, so to make an impact on society we must first work on ourselves. Happiness is not too complicated or aspirational, and joy can be found in the smallest of things if we remain purposeful and positive.

Another thing I am taking away from the experience is this-always put people first. In South Africa, we center our belief system around the principle, Umntu Ngumtu Ngabantu, which translates to 'I am who I am because of others'. This calls us to look out for the community and each other. The safety of our colleagues, citizens, and potential visitors is a top priority.

pandemic has prominence to the economic inequality that exists across the globe. I am thankful to have a roof over my head and food on the table, and have learnt to give back to society, especially to those who live alone, and are without means to support themselves.

It has also provided me the opportunity to step out of my comfort zone. I am a big believer in the power of personal interactions however social distancing measures have pushed us to innovate. Everything from the way interact within teams, to the way we sell and promote South Africa changed.

I have a bunch of optimists for a team. However, the

one thing we all missed was human interaction - it was imperative to hold everybody together via video calls and meetings. Little things matter, and we learnt that it was important to reach out to our colleagues and immediate teams with empathy. It could be as simple as asking about their day, and actively listening to what they have to

### Charting a new course

In South Africa, we remained committed to the safety and health of our visitors. Over the last few months, a lot of consultative work and focus was placed on both, de-risking the sector and putting health & operational protocols in place for the safety of all tourists and employees.

South Africa has plenty of USPs for the evolved and cautious post-COVID traveller. For example, the appeal of a safari holiday has increased given its natural ability to support

### **Guest Column**



social distancing. The seclusion from concrete jungles, fresh air, and the wilderness – all aid in the perfect social distancing experience. Travel consultants are now helping couples, families and small groups plan private and safe vacations to luxury game lodges.

With the natural world as its stage, the essence of a safari has not changed. However, guests will experience enhanced sanitisation policies, regular temperature checks for guests and staff, smaller camps and smaller game drive groups to ensure social distancing is maintained even in the safari vehicle. These safety and hygiene protocols can be expected across as all adventure, culinary and cultural attractions as well.

Given that travellers are predicted to seek offbeat destinations, with good connectivity and a large number of activities within confined areas, we're heavily invested in promoting our New Regions. For the next couple of months, travellers can enter through cities that have restored international connectivity, so either through the Mother City - Cape Town, Johannesburg, or Durban, and use these cities as a gateway to the rest of these picturesque new regions, including the stunning and relatively unexplored Port Elizabeth, Robertson, West Coast, the Drakensberg in KwaZulu-Natal, Panorama Route (Mpumalanga) and Garden Route.

We have internationally benchmarked bio-safety systems in place at all private game lodges and government-owned national parks, shopping hubs, restaurants and accommodation facilities. These safety initiatives include a lesser number of tourists in a safari vehicle to promote social distancing, digital menus, touchless parking, e-payment systems, hand-sanitisation and disinfection stations, individually sanitised and packed takeaways/room service, etc.

Travellers intending to visit the country will be expected to produce a PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test that is not older than 72 hours from the time of departure from the country of origin to South Africa. Travellers can also expect precautionary and sanitation measures at various

other transit touchpoints including international and domestic airports, and car rentals.

# Going the sustainable route

The pandemic has taught us a great deal; people are now more conscious and responsible towards the environment. Travel is changing for the better, and this gives us hope for the future.

We anticipate that the immersive travel trend will continue in a post-COVID world, with a greater focus on sustainability. This means that travellers will be more conscious of where they spend their money, what kind of accommodation they choose, where they dine, and how they travel locally.

At South African Tourism, we have enhanced efforts to make our itineraries, properties and transport facilities more sustainable. We also intend to showcase our sustainable product offerings and ecotourism experiences, like cycling tours, nature safaris, conservation projects and rural experiences.

The year was the time of restoration and a chance for us to reconsider, include the environment in our plans and begin anew. Going forward, we are going to have to be responsible, sustainable tourists and tourism sellers.

Neliswa Nkani is Hub Head – Middle East, India and South East Asia, South African Tourism.



# Tripjack Travel Agent Fantasy League winds up on a cheerful and successful note

Travel Agent Fantasy League hosted by Tripjack turned out to be a thrilling and memorable event for all their travel agent partners who participated and won a medley of prizes. The event brought back the enthusiasm to this otherwise gloomy year. An elated Hasan Patel, Director, Tripjack, shares his delight at the success of the event.

### **Prashant Nayak**

### How successful was the event for your company?

Fantasy cricket is one of the biggest growth drivers in India. With IPL 2020 organised from September 19 to November 10, the Travel Agent Fantasy League attracted a huge number of users to participate and they enjoyed playing the fantasy cricket. In a way, it was a big achievement for us.

### Did you achieve the required mileage?

Yes! Definitely, there were some huge thoughts put in to come up with a new concept in the travel industry which no one has thought of before this and it has turned out to be a huge success. And we were able to deliver and achieve the best of it. I would like to thank the entire team and all our travel partners for the warmth and enthusiasm throughout the games.

### For our readers again, tell us about the format of the Travel Agent Fantasy League? What do you think was unique about the concept?

You had to make teams daily before the matches and get a chance to win some exciting prizes. Especially, the weekend matches with the bumper prize, along with qualifier and final match with the mega prize of free tickets, vouchers and hotel stays. Tripjack is the only and first brand to launch this concept in the travel industry and to drive the fantasy app as an engagement exercise was brilliant

### How many of your travel partners participated in this contest? How many more could you reach out to due to the contest?

We saw a big total of 3500+ participants playing the Fantasy League this season. There was a



Hasan Patel

referral bonus scheme announced as well at the start of the games so we did see new user engagement as

### What were the types of prizes given out? What was the overall number of prizes won?

Daily match winners won up to 1 lakh to 3 lakh TJ coins, which can be redeemed on Tripjack.com for flights and hotel bookings. Weekly and mega prize winners received free flight tickets, vouchers, and free hotel stays. Overall, we had more than 2000 winners.

You had TJ coins as prizes and as the IPL is over, how can the winners redeem the TJ Coins or any other prizes?

TJ Coins are available in the

tripjack.com agency account and they can easily be redeemed online for discounts on travel bookings. We have also sent communication through email to all the winners on how to redeem the TJ coins Tripjack.com. They can also email us at iplfantasy@ tripjack.com to know more about the prize redemption.

#### What other events like this do vou have in mind for the near future?

We are currently running а new incentive campaign for hotel bookings, and participants can win Amazon vouchers. We are getting а good

response for this campaign as well, and we have new interactive ideas to surprise our partners.

#### What are your strategic operational plans for the company for the next year?

Technology is a major focus area for us at Tripjack. Our travel agents' experience is central to all decisions we make for our technology investments. In the coming year, you will see a lot of new improvements on our platform which will help our travel agents with ease of doing business. We are working towards making operational efficiencies as well as new products for our travel partners to empower them to grow to the next level.

# ACCOR

# **Building a safe travel environment**

Safety is the biggest barrier to booking right now, so hotels must first focus on transparent communication and reassure potential customers that the proper measures have been taken to maintain the safety of their staff and guests. Kerrie Hannaford, VP-Commercial, Accor India and South Asia, speaks to TTJ on the strategies implemented by their hotels during COVID to ensure top-level safety and hygiene standards in every aspect of their business.

Sonika Bohra

ith the second COVID wave progress, kind impossible predict recovery as there is no clear sight for the pandemic to end. We all are hoping that the worst is behind us. However, Kerrie says, "As a large domestic market, India will recover better than compared to countries that are reliant solely on international travellers. At Accor, we have managed to limit the impact of the crisis on our performance by taking immediate steps to protect our human resources through our Heartist® program and by reducing cost immediate support measures."

The continuous pandemic has hit the travel sector intensely, and at Accor they are positive that the vaccine announcement will give a sigh of relief to all industries. Gradually, international flights will resume, boosting outbound travel again and all business and leisure segments will slowly flourish.

The hospitality industry is adapting every possible measure to instil confidence in their guests collaborating with like-minded brands to better communicate cleanliness protocols to their guests. However, with standard hygiene SOP's put into practise almost everywhere, yet the threat still alive. "Undeniably, when it comes to health, it is difficult. However, we want our guests to know that we are there for them," assures Kerrie.

At Accor, they have channelised all their resources into ensuring high standards of safety and hygiene across their properties. Accor's ALLSAFE initiative represents industry-leading cleanliness and prevention standards, launched in association with Bureau Veritas. It is based on 16 guiding



Kerrie Hannaford

principles and commitments, consists of over 35 actionable guidelines and 200 SOP's, keeping cleanliness and safety at the helm of our policies. The label rolled out across all properties covers critical areas such as enhanced cleaning protocols, enhanced staff training, new quest contact measures, enhanced food safety measures and much more. Every hotel also has an ALLSAFE Officer 24/7 available to ensure all protocols are followed.

Kerrie shares, "As an industry, this is the time to show solidarity and work together, reassuring guests that it is safe to travel. Hence, to reassure and communicate our stringent safety and hygiene measures to a wider range of guests, we have partnered with Thomas Cook India and SOTC to launch 'Holiday Safe'. This collaboration aims at building a safe travel environment for our patrons. The holiday portfolio has comprehensive health and safety protocols incorporated

via Thomas Cook India & SOTC's Assured Safe Travel Program in partnership with Apollo Clinics, together with Accor's Cleanliness and Prevention ALLSAFE label."

Speakingoftheuseoftechnology in COVID times, Kerry feels that the foremost priority currently is bringing back customer's trust by incorporating top level safety and hygiene standards in every aspect of the business. Contactless services are the need of the hour, and the hospitality industry must aggressively embrace this technology and automation. Customer-facing tech tools need to be deployed to provide remote access to front-desk, concierge and customer-service functions, starting from booking the room to check-in, check-outs, F&B orders and payment procedures;

everything has to be contactless. Some key infrastructure elements include facial-recognition engines comprising mask-detection, infrared temperature readers, infrared walls, UVC technology that can be used to eliminate up to 99.9 percent of surface and airborne pathogens in indoor settings.

When asked about the support needed for the Indian travel industry going into 2021, Kerry speaks, "Hospitality industry is one of the largest employers for a broad spectrum of staff, both skilled and unskilled. To help with the domestic drive, we definitely need a national approach with consistencies in communication. Currently, the responsibility has fallen on each state, curfews, partial lockdowns do become very confusing for the consumer. Of course, support from the tourism offices will be very welcomed when the time is right."

### 'The vaccine will herald a new beginning, to a now restructured travel industry'

Even in difficult times, there is a lot to look forward to in our industry. The world will travel again, and we hope that the travel industry will come out of this even stronger. Abinash Manghani, CEO, WelcomHeritage shares his expertise with us, as he discusses some current aspects of the COVID situation in the travel industry.

### **Prashant Nayak**

elcomHeritage, a joint venture between and Jodhana Heritage, represents

some of the finest traditions of heritage hospitality and tourism in India. WelcomHeritage offers 41 exclusive destinations, ranging from grand palaces to traditional Havelis to magnificent forts and quiet nature resorts. Sitting in regal poise all over the country, all of these destinations are gateways to the finest of Indian legacy and culture. The intrinsic philosophy of WelcomHeritage exists in identifying heritage properties in distant locations and helps to restore them. WelcomHeritage offers exclusive experiences, thus delivering extra value to guests, and each of their hotels has a secret to share and a story to tell.

While speaking about the second wave in progress, and the actual timeline to achieve normalcy and recovery, Manghani says, 'It is conventionally accepted today that the Indian travel & tourism industry will display a semblance of normalcy by October 2021. However, the domestic leisure segment is already showing robust signs of growth; this is expected to be followed by corporate travel, groups and MICE later. With the

as announced by MOCA, then we can expect the recovery to gain stronger legs. Weddings incidentally are doing rather well as a segment albeit with smaller numbers in 2020."

The news of a potential vaccine holds promise for travel in 2021. Manghani shares, "This brings a much-needed 'Ray of Hope' to this beleaguered sector as it brings confidence to the global recovery process. Closer home, Indian equity and property markets are showing a handsome V-shaped recovery and other economic indicators including GST collections are moving up smartly. In a way, vaccine heralds a new beginning for, to a now restructured travel industry to begin the planning process for 2021."

We all have been witnessing that the standard hygiene SOPs are being put into practice almost everywhere and evermore in the hospitality industry, yet the threat is still alive! So guests and customers have to be reassured even more since domestic travel is picking up. According to Manghani, almost everybody has a protocol in place, so it is important to know that COVID protocols are not really a differentiator. Consumers are looking for trust and in such a scenario, they prefer branded hotels to individually run establishments. There is a flurry in developed markets and a lot of





Mentioning technology which has played a significant role during COVID, Manghani says, "Without a doubt, technology has now become a buzzword in the travel industry. Airlines, airports, Hotels are catching up to frontline technologies that were considered arcane merely a year ago. Every facet of the customer's travel path has now had an IT component. The mobile is now the new passport from reservations to check-out. Cloud computing has gained respectability and organisations are reworking their organisational structures to reposition for the New Normal. It is expected that employees work from anywhere and have access to technology since COVID can cause acute disruptions to a work schedule."

"The Indian travel industry is a function of discretionary consumer demand. I am confident that this will begin to manifest in the medium term in India and subsequently in International markets. In the meantime, the Indian Government must provide support to this crucial sector as it not only provides employment but also projects India's 'Soft Power' in the region," shares Manghani while speaking about the support needed for the Indian travel industry going into 2021.

### "The Mountains are calling & I must go."

juSTa Mukteshwar is a destination itself.

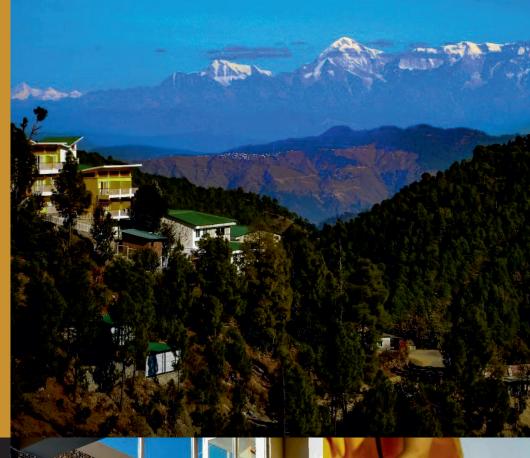
It is for the evolved traveller seeking solitude and the quiet. Time Stands still, a good book and a walk in the crisp mountain air, communing with nature or just bird watching, is the order of the day.

# EXPERIENCE PARADISE

Breathtaking in every sense









Situated in Mukteshwar at 7,500 feet with majestic & spectacular views of Nanda Devi, Trishul & Panchchuli range of the Himalayas & reserve forest.

An ideal getaway rooms with private balcony, Alfresco dining serving world cuisine, indoor heated pool and a comprehensive Wellness & Spacentre, offers holistic treatment to realx, revitalise & rejuvenate the mind, body & spirit.

Board room and fully equipped conference hall is an ideal space to host events, meetings & social gatherings

### Simple three click booking experience with OYO

For today's consumers, safety is the topmost priority. Therefore, hygiene-focussed innovations that enable social distancing will continue to be a top focus for the tourism and hospitality industries. Shreerang Godbole, SVP & Chief Service Officer, OYO Hotels & Homes, in an interaction with TTJ, shares that their goal is to enhance customer-centricity across OYO's customer journey and to achieve this; they are working towards re-imagining the whole customer journey.

### **Prashant Nayak**

### Tell us about OYO's initial reaction to the pandemic globally and in India?

2020 was tough. The pandemic is the single biggest challenge we have ever faced. However, we did have a head start on being aware of the full impact of COVID-19 as our China operations were impacted significantly. When it comes to India, in the early phase of the pandemic and related lockdown, we did see our numbers dropping. And that's when we started working towards strengthening our resilience, preparedness and our commitment to serve the communities we live in.

We launched 'Sanitised Stavs' initiative to ensure a higher standard of hygiene and sanitation across OYO properties, tied-up with 24+ state ministries as well as local authorities to offer some of our properties to asymptomatic individuals, front liners and stranded tourists as pay per use quarantine, self-isolation facilities & accommodation at affordable prices, among other initiatives.

However, most of all, to ensure that we meet the expectations of our evolving consumers, we started listening to them - their worries, aspirations and requirements and then implemented it across the length and breadth of our consumer experience journey. For instance, owing to these insights, we launched several initiatives such as 'Sanitised Stays' and 'Sanitised Before Your Eyes' with Sonu Sood, who is not just our brand ambassador but also an OYO hotel owner for some time now.

### According to you, what would be the actual timeline to achieve normalcy and recovery?

Sofar, post-unlocking, our occupancy has recovered to 40 per cent of pre-COVID level with room nights sold increasing 30 per cent m-o-m. This is a small but significant green shoot for us.

In November, the festive season came as a breather for us and the industry at large with rising consumer confidence

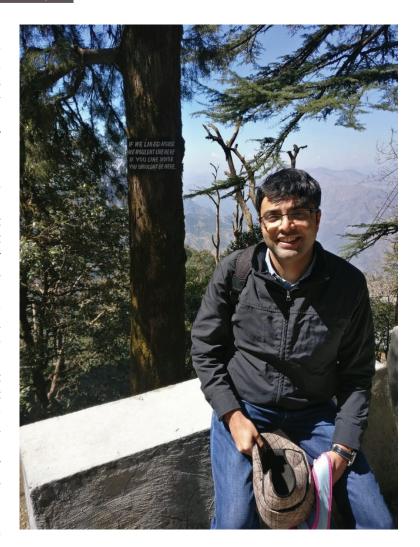
Currently, are witnessing that the intent to book is at almost 100 per cent the levels when compared to pre-COVID consumers the OYO platform the traffic is at over 50 per cent pre-COVID levels and this continues to spill into the holiday season. There's uptick bookings across leisure

destinations like Goa and

Himachal Pradesh for December 30, 2020 and January 01, 2021. However, with the rising cases across certain states, travel may take a step back in these regions.

Having said that, the pandemic isn't over yet and the bounce back highly depends on government regulations and consumer willingness to travel in the coming days. To do our part, we continue to strengthen our preparedness to welcome travellers back safely and seamlessly.

With SOP's put into practise almost everywhere, yet the threat is still alive, according to you what is now most needed to reassure



### passenger safety and security post-COVID?

Besides hygiene, with consumer optimism on the rise, the industry needs to enable seamless consumer experiences - making the decisionmaking process more convenient for consumers. This requires companies to rethink the customer journey from the very beginning - starting with discovery until the post-booking phase. It's about being on this journey with your guest right from the moment they think about travelling or choosing to stay with you.

When we recently conducted our consumer survey, we understood that a majority of respondents (57

### In Conversation

per cent) wanted to travel for leisure after spending months in lockdown and out of these, 61 percent had already decided their next travel destination. So, how can you be a part of this journey?

At OYO, for instance, we rolled out Traveller Assistance on our app. This feature gives users access to statewise COVID-19 guidelines as well as enables COVID-19 testing for those who book destinations where carrying tests were/are necessary. This makes the decision-making process simpler and gives customers the confidence to go ahead with their desire to travel safely, responsibly. Similarly, stemming from real-time consumer insights, we also launched initiatives such as Sanitised Before Your Eyes (an initiative wherein the guest can request hotel staff to sanitise high touchpoints right in front of their eyes) and Contactless Check-ins (guests can check-in from anywhere without the hassle of physical checkin formalities at the hotel reception on arrival) to boost consumer confidence.

Such efforts combined with the flexibility of cancellations, offering value for money, quality stays and seamless experiences give customers the ease of mind to travel safely.

Tell us about the immense challenges faced by the hospitality industry. What does the vaccine announcement mean for the industry?

Historically, as we know it, the travel and hospitality ecosystem is a high touch one full of greetings and gestures. This year, with restrictions and fear around travel, we were among the worse impacted industries across geographies. The pandemic pushed us to buckle up, reinvent ourselves and implement all the necessary protocols and measures to enable social distancing, ensure hygiene and digitise efforts to eliminate processes that require physical contact. This was the biggest challenge as well as opportunity for the traditional hospitality industry.

At OYO, we've been a tech-driven hospitality chain since Day 01. However, as we are working to circumvent the realities of today's world, we are now focussed on becoming a tech-led organisation vis-a-vis technologically enabled hospitality chain. We strongly believe this will help us establish a deeper engagement with our asset owners, customers as well as employees.

When it comes to recovery, even preannouncements about vaccines, there has been some strength in the markets - mainly owing to the gradual lockdowns and the relaxation of restrictions across several states. Having said that, a vaccine would definitely help all industries, including aviation, tourism and hospitality emerge faster out of a pandemic with a trajectory that's lasted as long as COVID-19.

OYO had recently introduced the 'Contactless Check-in' programme to lessen human contact. What's next in customer experience at OYO?

We aim to deliver great experiences to our consumers across both 'discovery & booking' and 'fulfilment' stages. We are therefore focussed on driving higher affordability, enhancing ubiquity, ease of booking through a simple 3 click booking experience, ensuring reliable quality, and owning end-to-end experience. Through these interventions, we are confident to achieve higher customer trust, loyalty, and conversion in the coming year.

The hospitality industry is based on personalised engagements. According to you, does the Contactless approach have the ability to re-define customer experience?

Yes, absolutely. It provides ease of mind to consumers while choosing to stay with a hotel. Organisations that are able to provide consistent hygienic and tech-enabled experience to guest's right from check-in to checkout, will definitely stand a higher chance at recovering faster and more sustainably. To provide our guests with the safest experiences, besides Contactless Check-ins, we have also launched Yo! Help, our real-time 24\*7 chat assistant, in order to nudge the customer to adopt self-serve product features rather than call for queries. In the long-term, such digitisation efforts to eliminate processes that require physical contact have the potential to re-define customer experience.

# During the pandemic, how did OYO work to stay as a first-class customer product?

At OYO, customer satisfaction is at the heart of everything we do. And that's why customer feedback matters the most. Besides our initiatives to drive a higher standard of sanitation, improving customer-centricity across the customer journey and tech-led innovations to eliminate physical processes, we have also taken a

conscious decision as a brand to be more responsible.

In line with this, to ensure higher transparency and provide consumers with the most trusted and accurate ratings, we're extremely delighted to share that all OYO hotels are now rated according to ISO standards under the QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM ISO 9001:2015. The scope of the ISO certification will include hotel display ratings on the OYO app, web calculation process, and feedback collection process globally.

In today's world, safety and quality have become the topmost priority for one and all. This means all OYO hotels are now rated according to ISO standards, thereby giving our guests the power to make informed stay decisions.

# Tell us about the tech or infrastructure investments needed by the hospitality industry to bounce back?

As we continue on our path from a 'resilient brand' to a 'resurgent brand', we have utilised the lockdown period to become a tech-led organisation visavis technologically enabled hospitality chain and also establish a deeper engagement with our asset owners, and customers. We have therefore utilised the past few months to focus and strengthen our core capabilities - proprietary technology, operational excellence, world-class revenuemanagement suite, data analytics.

For the hospitality industry to emerge stronger, hospitality players must use technology to deliver the best and improved customer and partner service. Having said that, players should maintain a balanced combination of service quality, technology and operating efficiency, our services can be taken to enough customers and partners. After all, tech without the right human intervention won't be enough to drive change in a highly human-interaction driven industry like hospitality.

# Can you tell us about the support needed for the Indian travel and tourism industry going into 2021?

As we take a leap of faith and step into 2021, subsidised domestic tourism initiatives, measures to improve financial health of the ecosystem due to the slump during the precautionary nationwide lockdown, and consistent synergy with players and industries (big & small) will pave the way for long-term economic revival of the tourism and hospitality ecosystems.

# Rove La Mer Beach Redefining Guest Expectations

Rove La Mer Beach is Rove's first beach resort and is situated in the popular entertainment district on a private and eclectic beachfront in Jumeriah with wonderful attractions such as Mercato Shopping Mall, City Walk, Dubai Aquarium, Underwater Zoo and Wild Wadi Water Park. Paul Bridger from Rove Hotels Management gives more insights to TTJ on the trendy property which marks the newest addition to the growing portfolio of Rove Hotels properties in the UAE.

**Prashant Nayak** 

Tell us about Rove Hotels and what are the brand values of Rove Hotels?

Rove Hotels is an award-winning lifestyle hotel brand, offering welldesigned hotels in connected locations. Designed for the traveller who likes to explore without borders, receive fussfree service, and some touches of local culture. Rove Hotels defines a new niche in the ever-evolving global hospitality sector.

Rove Hotels are reliable, modern, and efficient. Regardless of their location, Rovers (guests) will always find locally inspired modern interiors, relaxed service, and all the essentials to enjoy their stay.

Born in Dubai, Rove Hotels is a joint venture between Meraas Holding and Emaar Properties PJSC. The first Rove hotel opened in Downtown Dubai in 2016, and the brand now has over 4000 rooms open or under development across the Middle East.

Which are the segments that Rove La Mer Beach is ideally positioned to cater to?

Rove La Mer Beach, our brand-new hotel, is set to



### Hotel in Focus



redefine people's expectations about resorts by offering fuss-free hospitality with all the essentials and accessible rates. The hotel is located at the La Mer beachfront, one of Dubai's coolest 'playcation' spots and just 10 minutes away from Downtown Dubai and City Walk.

Therefore we expect the leisure segment in this hotel will be quite strong. However, we do see plenty of interest on our monthly rate packages and social event celebrations. Due to its great outdoor setting, location in the city and relaxed ambience we expect Rove La Mer Beach to be a popular venue for small weddings, celebrations and social gatherings.

# Tell us about the challenges of launching the resort in these unprecedented conditions?

Beach properties in Dubai have been performing very well over the last six months thanks to an increase in the demand for staycations. For that reason, we are quite confident about the performance of Rove La Mer Beach from the time of opening.

This property is Rove Hotel's first on the beach, and it adds a unique value proposition to Dubai's leisure market. In fact, since we've announced the brand new location, we have seen lots of interest in it.

We believe people are fascinated by the idea of an affordable beachside stay. Considering the great location, accessible price point, and quality of the product, we believe Rove La Mer Beach will be a successful opening – attracting staycationers and international travellers alike.

# Please highlight the unique facilities, ambiance, and environment that the property aims to offer the guests?

The hotel has modern facilities, a quirky design and a very chilled and relaxing vibe. The main highlight of the property is the beach, where we will also offer a number of activities and watersports. Additionally, there are two Rover Room types, one with skyline views and the other with sea views featuring all the essentials plus a Juliet balcony to admire the city's picturesque views.

Food and beverage is also an important part of this property. We have various food and beverage options indoors and outdoors at the hotel terrace, overlooking the beach. Guests can grab refreshing beverages at the Drink Truck, vibrant music, cocktails, spirits, and more at the Beach Bar, or enjoy all-day dining at Rover's favorite, The Daily.

One of the main features of the hotel is definitely its location. The La Mer neighbourhood has plenty to see and do, with a waterpark, cinema, inflatable playgrounds, watersports, boutique stores, 50+ gourmet restaurants, lounges, outdoor sports facilities, and more.

### Are there any inaugural offers at Rove La Mer Beach?

Yes! As a special opening offer, if guests book a stay at Rove La Mer Beach through rovehotels.com, they can avail of a special opening offer of AED 299++ per night, including a sea view upgrade, late check-out, and 30 per cent off food and drinks.

# What are the new and extensive COVID-19 precautions to be followed at the property post the opening?

At Rove Hotels, we've always taken pride in our cleanliness and hygiene standards, but these days, we're extra careful to make sure our Rovers are as safe and comfortable as possible. Guests must wear a mask at all times and will undergo quick, hassle-free temperature checks to make sure our Rovers (guests) and team are presently in good health. Additionally, our rooms are thoroughly sanitised before guest arrivals, shared spaces are kept spotless at all times, and we encourage our visitors to utilise contactless payment methods.

Due to our strict safety measures, Bureau Veritas, a world leader in testing, inspection, and certification (TIC) services, named Rove Hotels the first mid-scale brand in Dubai to receive its SAFEGUARD Label. This certification means that all guests can be reassured that Rove Hotels have full compliance under global safety, hygiene, and cleaning requirements. It's truly an outstanding achievement for us at Rove.

### As a beachfront resort, what are the other attractions in and around Rove La Mer Beach for the leisure guests?

Rove La Mer offers guests Dubai's eclectic beachfront right at the doorstep with a waterpark, inflatable playgrounds, boutique stores, and over 50 gourmet restaurants and lounges. La Mer is one of Dubai's most exciting outdoor destinations, offering plenty of activities to delight solo adventurers and families alike. Rovers can look forward to a world of options and attractions, including Laguna Waterpark and Roxy Cinemas, along with a wide selection of boutique, concept, and department stores, water sports such as jet skiing and kayaking, outdoor gym equipment and a volleyball court, and games like foosball and ping pong.

# Tell us if there are any special facilities and innovative concepts for MICE business and events planned at the resort?

Rove La Mer Beach is an excellent spot for those freelancing or working remotely. The hotel has working areas and Dubai's first-ever co-working space on the beach. Additionally, with the expansive outdoor space in the hotel, Rove Hotels are looking forward to hosting micro-weddings and social events that will be beach-facing.

# Familiarising guests with signature Hilton Hospitality



In November 2020, Hilton announced the opening of its third property in Goa which was supposed to be launched earlier in the year but was delayed due to the ongoing pandemic. Located atop the scenic, terraced slopes of Saipem Hills, overlooking the Nerul River, the resort extends Hilton's signature hospitality and tranquil retreat to leisure and business travellers. Amandeep Grover, General Manager, Hilton Goa Resort, Candolim shares details on the hotel strategies to attract guests and how the hotel is emphasising on ensuring the highest level of safety.

Prashant Nayak

### What has been your biggest challenge in navigating COVID-19 to date?

The biggest challenge for the industries across sectors has been maintaining the operational rhythm, and it has been the same for Hilton Goa Resort as well. We have used this time to elevate our training, priorities guest safety and put measures to enhance the guest experience. Now that domestic travel has resumed and tourism in Goa is bouncing back to

pre-COVID times at a fast pace, we have opened the doors and launched the Hilton Goa Resort for guests. Both leisure and business travellers are considering safety as their top priority, and with Hilton's CleanStay initiative and trust, we have seen significant demand in bookings. While domestic travel demand has put the industry on track, outbound tourism has taken a beating, and the revival of the industry will still take

What are you most focused on right now?

The current focus remains on providing safe accommodation to all our guests. We have put all the necessary protocols and measures as part of the global initiative of the Hilton CleanStay program for the safety and well-being of our guests. Another focus area for us has also been to build brand connect and create awareness for Hilton Hotels & Resorts. Being a Hilton Resort

### Hotel Plug



property in India, there is much excitement, and we are focused on familiarising guests with our signature hospitality. We have curated various touchpoints for our guests to ensure they get to explore the unexplored. The priority is also to ensure the safety of team members as well and we are following all protocols required to ensure their safety.

What actions are you taking now to ensure that you are ready to get leisure and business travellers back?

We have also utilised this time apart to study the evolved consumer behaviour and patterns and have

put together a slew of measures welcome guests in the COVID era. safety takes topmost priority, we have taken strict safety and sanitation measures at the property. Upon arrival, guests will have to break the Hilton CleanStay Room Seal before they enter, delivering complete satisfaction peace of mind during their stay. Similar sanitisation protocols follow for sanitisation of public spaces for a worryfree experience.

Hilton Goa Resort

is also fully equipped with contactless arrival with Digital Key technology, providing easy access to rooms directly from one's smartphone.

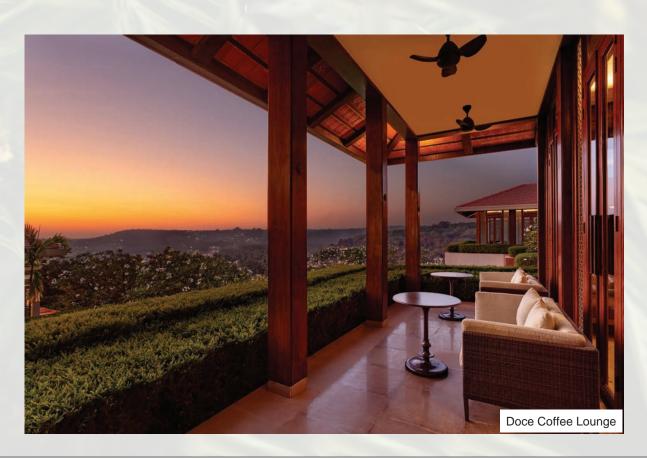
We also identified that as travel resumes, there is a rise in family travel. Towards this, we have ensured that guests across age groups have a memorable stay experience at Hilton Goa Resort. We have curated handpicked experiences, which can be availed from our round-the-clock concierge service and customised for both on property and destination experiences.

Moreover, we offer the largest room

size in the category along with private balconies, making it ideal for family stays. We have also created unique @YourBalcony experiences such as wine tasting, yoga, BBQ, cocktail making, and culinary masterclasses to extend comfort guests. For guests looking for adventure, resort offers bicycle trails, underwater escapades, luxury cruises along the backwaters of Goa. There are many activities for our little guests too with a dedicated

Kids club for them.

As our celebratory opening offer, we have introduced special packages that include a two-night stay with complimentary breakfast, airport coach transfers, happy hours, and a 20 per cent discount on food and beverage and laundry. As part of the 'Great Small Breaks' staycation package, guests get complimentary breakfast, one meal or INR 1000 resort credit per person, per night, a unique Goan Masterclass experience, and a 20 per cent discount on food and beverage and laundry.



# **KEDARKANTHA TREK**

### **Explore the best of winter trekking**

The winters are here and if you ever dream to walk in the serene wilderness amidst white snow, then the Kedarkantha trek is the one amazing discovery waiting for you. Located in the Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand at a towering altitude of 12500 feet, the trek surely comes as a delight for all travel and adventure enthusiasts.

Team TTJ

he Kedarkantha trek is one of the most popular, enthralling, and a classic winter trek in Uttarakhand. The week-long trek provides a great opportunity for trekkers to see the scenic beauty of the region and experience the village life of Garhwal. On this adventure, one can also be mesmerised by the astounding beauty of the Himalayan mountain ranges.

At an altitude of 3800 meters which is framed with picturesque mountains,

ringed glaciers, the trek has also epic tales to tell about Lord Shiva meditating here and this can transcend you into a metaphysical world of possibilities and spirituality.

The base camp for the trek is in Sankri village, which is in the Govind Wildlife Sanctuary National Park. One has to travel from Dehradun to reach Sankri. The roads

are quite good and local buses/taxis are also available from Dehradun.

Sankhri has that mystic charm which is without a doubt that you will definitely want to visit it again and again whenever you are in the region. The place captivates each one, many trekkers who had been to Sankri feel it was their second home. The place indeed has some amazing views with the backdrop of the gigantic Garhwal Himalayan peaks.

One can easily get affordable homestays/hotels or guest houses





### India's Best

present in Sankri before commencing the trek. Homestays are in demand as there are a lot of queries from trekkers wishing to seek a pleasant stay and enriching food experiences before going on the journey ahead.

Most of these tourists and trekkers are from Delhi, Gujarat and Mumbai. Trekkers usually urge homestay owners to serve them authentic local food, for which the owners also take them to nearby villages to taste the unique delicacies of the region. The district of Uttarkashi is known for its outstanding cuisine in travel communities. At Sankri village and nearby, one can find many local authentic

dishes like 'Koda ki Roti', 'Palak ka Saag' among many others.

After proper rest, most of the treks start from Sankhri in the mornings. The first stop is 'Juda ka Talab' at an altitude of 9100 ft. It takes approximately five hours of trekking to reach here. One can halt at this place for an overnight rest and can start to climb towards the summit of Kedarkantha the next morning. Ahead there are several base camps where one can avail tents and sleeping bags on rent on different legs of the trek.

Though the Kedarkantha trek can be conducted almost the whole year, the aspiring views that it provides in



the winter months from December to April cannot be compared with summer times. The snow clapped trekking trails and the sloping snow at the base of the pine trees are some fascinating sights to savour and which remains only available during the winter days. In fact, for the locals, the winter months are a time for rejoice and they enjoy a number of festivals during this time.

Kedarkantha is easily the popular trek amongst seasoned trekkers and beginners alike and is not to be confused with the pilgrimage to the Kedarnath Temple. The trek's difficulty level is easy to moderate, with gradual ascends and descends. Only the

uphill climb from Kedarkantha base camp can be a little strenuous. During the winter treks, you will require snow boots, very warm clothing, special jackets, a walking stick, and trekking equipment, which you need to carry in your backpack.

Presently, after travel curbs were lifted by the government, the tourism department has witnessed a good footfall of tourists. They expect more enquiries in December. They are also taking care of all the given guidelines and SOPs and are asking locals and trekkers to take necessary precautions while trekking or serving food.





Dilip Jawalkar Secretary, Uttarakhand Tourism and CEO, Uttarakhand Tourism **Development Board** Kedarkantha is the most opted destination for adventure seekers Uttarakhand. As winter is approaching, we welcome all the

visitors and newbies to trek around

Kedarkantha peak.

# Plan a relaxing Tea.Plantation Holiday in Assan

Assam, a major tea plantation state offers tea tourism where many tea estates design their own packages for tourists to experience the refreshing 'tea' experience - right from plucking the leaves to drinking the fresh brew. The sights and sounds of an Assam tea estate are of a unique kind, different from the landscapes that confront tourists elsewhere in India. There are around 400 large tea estates, most of which were established by the British - truly magical destinations complete with old heritage bungalows where you get the feel of the old-world charm.

ea is an integral part of the Indian identity, India being the largest tea producer and consumer in the world. The story of Chai in India started with the British army officer Robert Bruce, who discovered tea growing naturally in a remote village in Upper Assam. The Singpho tribal community living there used to make and drink tea in their own traditional methods.

The tea industry of India started with a few tea gardens in Upper Assam to the present almost 400 gardens across the state. Many of these gardens are more than 100 years old and some of them still have the old wooden bungalows where the Tea planters used to stay. Some of these bungalows have been converted to boutique hotels and heritage stays where guests can relive the teagarden experience of the colonial era. Many of these houses are known as 'Chang Bungalows' as they were built on stilts, taking inspiration from houses of local tribes built on raised platforms. Most of the Tea Bungalows come with fireplaces, vintage wooden furniture like four-poster beds, and other colonial-era charms.

### Tea Destinations in Assam

Dibrugarh in Upper Assam is known as the Tea town of Assam. On the banks of the river Brahmaputra and



### **Domestic Discovery**

surrounded by Tea Gardens, Dibrugarh is a historic town with the credit of being the place having the first commercial tea plantation in India. Visitors can stay in a Heritage Tea Bungalow and relax in a soothing environment. The Bungalows are exclusive properties with very few rooms, so they are ideal for families and groups of friends. Evening barbeque/tandoor, cultural program, etc. can be arranged on request. Dibrugarh Airport is connected with all major cities in India.

Jorhat is another town in Assam having some great Tea Bungalows each having its unique history. It also has Assam's only golf resort, which is a tea estate property converted into a resort. Jorhat has an airport connected to Kolkata and Guwahati.

### Activities at a Tea **Plantation**

Tea Garden visit and tea leaves plucking: Guests can visit a tea garden



and see how tea leaves are handplucked by the tea pickers. One can try plucking the two leaves and a bud on their own.

Tea Factory visit: The process of



manufacturing tea can be seen by a visit to a tea factory. Guests can see firsthand how the tea leaves from the gardens are converted into the famous Assam tea known world over for its aroma and flavour.

Tea Tasting: Different types of teas like Orthodox, CTC, Green tea, etc. are manufactured from the same plant. These types are further graded according to their quality. Just like wine tasting tea tasting reveals the quality of a particular tea. Guests can see how different types of teas are tested for

> **Excursion Singpho** to tribal village: Guests can also go on an excursion to a Singpho tribal village, the place where the Tea story of India started. The Singphos are original tea drinkers in India who introduced

quality.

Tea growing naturally in the region to the British in India. They still make Tea in their traditional methods. Having a traditional styled Singpho lunch in a nice bamboo cottage here is an experience not to be missed.

Cycling (Half Day): Cycling through lush tea gardens, paddy fields and picturesque villages will definitely give great opportunities to adventure and nature lovers for some insta worthy pictures.

Golf: The Kaziranga Golf resort in Jorhat has a world-class 18 hole golf course. It is a Tea plantation property converted into a resort where one can enjoy a round of golf amidst the lush green tea gardens.

Other activities: Visitors can avail of a Sibsagar day trip from both Dibrugarh and Sibsagar, Majuli day trip from Jorhat, visits to weaving centre, excursion to Dibru Saikhowa National



Park for birding and Dhola Sadiya bridge (India's longest bridge) from Dibrugarh, visit the local village and trying local cuisines, etc.



### **Madhusmita Khound** Partner, Avani Travel Services

Tea plantation getaways Assam is a specialty experience curated by Avani Travel Services which is a destination management company for Northeast India based in Assam, run by me and my husband Sudarshan. In this tour, the guests get an opportunity to experience the life of a tea planter of bygone days and also spend a few days in a tea bungalow in Assam in the midst of greenery and serenity away from the hustle and bustle. The highlight of the tour is an interaction with a tea specialist who shows and explains how tea is manufactured, graded and tested before it goes out to the consumers. Guests can also enjoy many optional activities like cycling through tea gardens, playing golf, birding, cooking class, horse riding, village visits, excursions to nearby places of interest depending on the place of stay. Avani also specialises in organising tours that showcase the rich culture, tribal heritage, festivals, handicrafts, textile, food, wildlife, etc. of Northeast India. Avani also organises international caravan tours.

# RANN UTSAV

### An amalgamation of nature's marvel and cultural extravaganza

Rann Utsav celebrated in the Great Rann of Kutch region of Gujarat kick-started on November 12, 2020 and will end on February 28, 2021. The wholesome package of nature's splendour, fun, entertainment, adventure, leisure, sightseeing, and the cultural connect is waiting to be explored.

Team TTJ



he Great Rann of Kutch is known not only for its contrasting and awe-inspiring landscape but also for its four-month long desert festivity, the Rann Utsav. The festival glorifies the colourful culture and traditions, aesthetic art and crafts, and generous Kutchi hospitality of the region. Organised by Gujarat Tourism every year during winter, the desert plains of Rann of Kutch transforms into an oasis for domestic and foreign tourists. Rann Utsav, the carnival of music, dance and folklore, offers an excellent opportunity to tourists to indulge in leisure, pleasure, and merriment.

The Rann Utsav truly is a unique manifestation of the varied cultural ethos of the region which is known for the ethnic flavour and celebrative zest. The festival provides an exclusive opportunity to witness the creative ingenuity of the artisans and craftspeople, the assorted array of folk music and performances, mixed representation of culture and



### Incredible India

communities, along a vast diversity in ecology. This Utsav under the tutelage of Vibrant Gujarat has been a unique opportunity for people around the world to visit Kutch and experience the true flavour of the region.

The expanse of the celebrations is grander than one can think. It begins in Bhuj, and the entire district goes gala during the celebrating months. The finale of the festival is put up at Rann Utsav tent city, a city made of more than 400 AC and non-AC tents. It is set up near a small village called Dhordo, easily accessible from the Bhuj Airport.

During the full moon night in the winters, amid the awe-inspiring and contrasting landscape, the three to four-day final festive extravaganza brims with hospitality, vigour, and traditional flavour of the area. This carnival organized at the various locales within Kutch takes one the natural grandiose around while introducing the visitor to the indigenous cultural and ethnic flavour of the people. The shimmering night landscape because of the moon gives the enchanting moments of this fest, which feels like 'Heaven On Earth' during these days.

Semi parched grasslands of the Banni hosts the most magnificent display of vernacular architecture as the exhibition platform for the varied range of arts and crafts of the region. While an array of folk music and dance performances organized in the shimmering moonlit landscape

provides the most enchanting experience. The colourful fairs held near the beach or the banks of a lake swings one with the spirit of festivity, fervour and flamboyancy.

There are plenty of things to do during the Rann festival during the camp stay including participation in Golf Cart, ATV Ride, Camel Excursion, Para-motoring, Cart Meditation, Yoga and enjoying local Gujarati culture. One of the largest districts in India, Kutch offers a variety of attractions in addition to this famous festival. If a trip to Rann Utsav 2020-2021 is on the cards, there are plenty more to explore in Kutch. In fact, it's a family holiday destination to explore fun moments and store

that in cameras for a lifetime.

Tourists can explore the Rann the white serene desert expanse that lies along the India-Pak border. Considered to be the largest salt desert in the world, White Rann under the moonlight offers stunning creations of nature. The endless sea of salt shimmers like thousands of gems scattered on land when the moonlight merges into the white desert. The wonderful White Rann is a treat for all tourists looking to take a long walk during sunset hours and get mesmerised by the thousand hues of orange, or those who simply want to sit back to gaze at the neverending white stretch of salt desert embellished by the moonlit splendour.





### Incredible India



Other than the moon, the rising and setting sun casting pale golden hues and making fiery shades of reds and oranges is an everyday view at of Kutch. This nature's canvas is a wonder to witness. Birds abound at White Rann, lakes and grasslands, while endangered mammals like the wild ass, caracal, wolves and chinkara gazelle can be seen in the Rann and the Banni grasslands. all, visiting the White Rann is experience for the tourists to cherish for a lifetime.

Gujarat's Rann

From the Rann of Kutch, tourists also visit nearby attractions like Kalo Dungar, Siyot Caves and Kutch Fossil Park. The palaces of Bhuj house incredible treasures, art and scores of

fortified villages are worth-visiting for their heritage. There are also places like Mandvi, Narayan Sarovar, and Lakhpat to explore along with historical sites, Museums, Palaces, Forts and also the Little Rann of Kutch Wild Life Sanctuary (famous for Wild Ass). Around 290 km from Dhordo, is the archaeological site at Dholavira which offers an insight into the 5000-year old Indus Valley Civilisation.

The Tent City set up at Dhordo, will remain open for visitors till February 28. In this pandemic, the organisers have taken several measures to keep coronavirus infections at bay. New cleaning and disinfection procedures, with a higher focus on common spaces such as vehicles, reception area, dining hall, 'haat' area, adventure sports zone, among others have been taken care of. In view of the pandemic, the staff will have to wear face masks and protective gear and the authorities have made proper arrangements to ensure social distancing and regular sanitisation of the premises.

Rann Utsav is that one time of the year when natives of the region, domestic and international travellers along with Government administrative officers all together come along to celebrate the mystical magic of Kutch and its diversity. During the festival, Gujarat Tourism arranges various tours with transport, accommodations, food and guided sightseeing. Do not miss this chance of a lifetime to visit one of India's most colourful regions.



# YouGov: Half of urban Indians are planning a domestic holiday over the next 12 months

In the face of the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, many urban Indians are looking ahead to travelling over the coming year, new research from YouGov reveals.



international research and data analytics group. Their mission is to supply a continuous stream of accurate data into what the world thinks, so that organisations can better serve the communities that sustain them. Each day, their highly engaged proprietary global panel of over 11 million members provides them with thousands of data points on consumer opinions, attitudes and behaviour. They combine this continuous stream of data with our research expertise to provide insights that enable intelligent decisionmaking and informed conversations. With operations in the UK, Americas, Mainland Europe, the Middle East,

ouGov

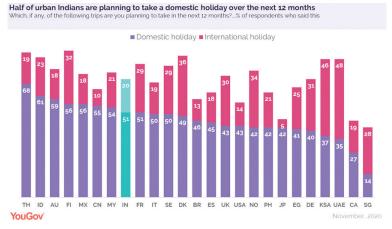
is

The data, collected by YouGov's Global Travel Profiles tool from across 25 countries, shows that half (51 per cent) of urbanites in India plan to holiday domestically in the next 12 months. Despite this local wanderlust, far fewer (20 per cent) plan to holiday

India and Asia Pacific. YouGov has

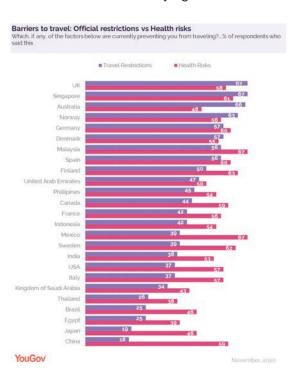
one of the world's largest research

networks.



abroad next year. Some (15 per cent) do not intend to travel at all in the next 12 months.

Even though there is an intention to travelinthefuture, YouGov's data shows that many urban Indians currently feel they face twin barriers to making such trips. Over half (53 per cent) think the health risks of travelling are a barrier, while nearing four in ten (38 per cent) believe the travel restrictions they face are a hindrance to holidaying.



Note: Results based on a nat rep sample of around 16,000 respondents from the 25 surveyed markets, including 785 respondents from India.

Global Travel Profiles is a new research tool which tracks global consumer sentiment and attitudes every day across the largest travel and tourism markets. It is created so that those in the tourism industry

can analyse how to best target their audiences for growth - identifying who is ready to travel when, and what kind of travel they are planning.

Fully customisable by geography, subscribers can discover emerging trends on intended travel habits and behaviours for the forthcoming 12 months. It provides a holistic view of the travel market, including granular consumer insights

> locations, preferred booking methods, accommodation and transportation preferences. YouGov Global Travel Profiles is connected to YouGov's marketleading depth and breadth of consumer data meaning it provides a much wider dataset than just isolated travel attitudes. It is an extension to YouGov's connected data solutions and is complementary to YouGov DestinationIndex.

Eva Stewart, YouGov

"YouGov Global Travel Profiles is vital to industry insiders looking to understand traveller expectations in the current climate as the tourism industry readies itself to step into the post-COVID world. It is the perfect, costeffective resource for strategic,

operational and marketing activities, delivering the most up-to-date, robust data on changing attitudes to travel."

### When Travel resumes...

# Go for a familyapproved holiday to the Czech Republic

If you are looking for a family-approved destination, then look no further because the Czech Republic hosts many outdoor activities and indoor experiences for families with children.

Team TTJ

iking, Cycling and beautiful exploring towns - this is a good recipe for family trips and the Czech Republic is an ideal destination for active holidays because it has several sites where both children and grown-ups can spend an interesting day without ever getting bored. Here are some activities in the Czech Republic which can be enjoyed with your family:

Downhill skiing: The ski centers in all mountain areas of the Czech Republic offer fun and adventure. You will find slopes for experienced skiers in the Czech mountains and training slopes where children will feel at home. Ski centers also offer lots of new things every year, ranging from sledging, snow tubing and new snow parks, right through to new cable cars. The most popular ski centres in the Czech Republic are Skiresort





Černá Hora and Skiareál Špindlerův Mlýn in the Krkonoše Mountains. Great skiing can be enjoyed with children in Skiareál Lipno.

Cycling experiences: If your bike has become a constant partner on trips through the flatlands and hills, the Czech Republic has lots of great tips to offer you. You can set out by bike from Vienna to Brno or from the German borders along the Ohře or along the banks of the Elbe right up to its source. The witches' cycle path will take you past places where inquisition trials were held in times long past. Singletrack trails will take you to places where you really can give your body a thorough workout and all lovers of adrenaline sports will be supremely jealous of you; discover these in the Rychleby and Jizera Mountains with your family.

### Go Global

National and natural parks: Explore caves and rock cities, climb to the tops of mountains and observation points. The promise of summer scenery of warm rock walls and floodplain meadows is in the Podyjí National Park, while you can check out the cold world of our highest mountains in Krkonoše National Park.

In Bohemian Paradise, you will find rock formations and rock cities with romantic lookouts and stroll through mysterious bottomland forests in the Pálava Biosphere Reserve.





recorded in newer experiences such as Heritage Cities of Olomouc, Litomysl, Kutna Hora, and Kromeriz, which have old-world atmosphere and abundant sites protected by UNESCO.

Explore Joyful Cities of Karlovy Vary and Liberec that offer experiences that are ideal for families and couples. For example, the Jizera Mountains, located at Liberec city will simply take your breath away with their scattered peaks, forests of spruce and beech, tall cliffs, picture-

Czech cities have been hosting an increasing number of visitors from India, and the numbers are increasing with every passing year. Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, is one of the world's great architectural jewels. Like a city from a children's storybook, the place conjures up images of romantic fairy stories and folk tales.

While Prague and its attractions remain popular among travellers, an increased interest has been





perfect valleys, mountain villages and countless chapels, churches and cottages. Here you can discover the history of the Czech Republic's northernmost mountain range and leave with memorable experiences.

The happening cities that are young and dynamically developing are Brno and Ostrava, and of course, Prague, these cities never sleep. Choose your motivation, and choose your city, in the Czech Republic!

### When travel resumes...

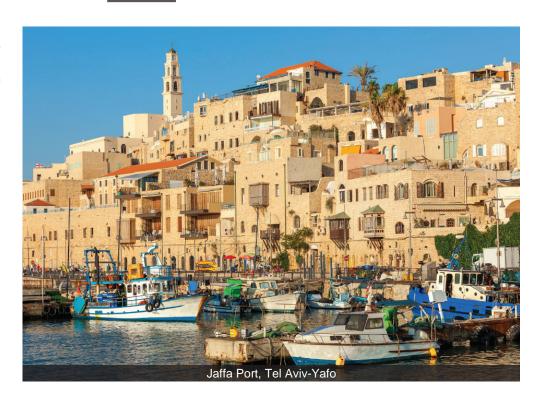
# **Israe** The ultimate holiday destination

Israel is a country that most people know of, but few really understand the incredible wealth it offers as a tourism destination. As a country large in the diverse landscape but small in size, you could drive from North to South in less than seven hours and East to West in about two hours. Immerse yourself in a culinary adventure with the local Israeli cuisine, a fusion of Middle Eastern, Asian and European fare, representing the immigrants that have contributed to the country's population over centuries.

Team TTJ

srael offers a plethora of things to do and see to cater to the discerning traveller. From the historical city of Jerusalem to the beach city of Tel Aviv; the lowest point on earth - the Dead Sea, to the marvelous underwater marine life of the Red Sea in Eilat and the World UNESCO Heritage sites all across the country, Israel is truly a dynamic destination.

The first stop in Israel should be the vibrant, modern, fashionable and cosmopolitan city of Tel Aviv-Yafo, located on the eastern Mediterranean coastline; the city is more than just beaches, shopping and nightlife. Jaffa, better known to the locals as Yafo, is an ancient port city that is also the oldest part of Tel Aviv filled with open-air markets and street fairs on the cobblestone streets, which are surrounded by historical architecture covered in street art created by some



of the most well-known graffiti artists in theworld. Boastingunique architectural



attractions, the collection of over 4,000 Bauhaus buildings are designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the thriving art culture in the many avantgarde neighbourhoods and make up this modern city.

The capital city of Israel is also the spiritual capital of the three major monotheistic religions - Judaism, Islam and Christianity, all of which have important religious sites here. As you enter through the walls of Jerusalem's magical 'Old City' and make your way down the stone cobbled streets, you find yourself walking through four thousand years of history, leaving you humbled yet excited as you connect the modern twenty-first century present with the simple beginnings of the past where old meets new beyond the walls in this unique world capital.

### Go Global

Located approximately 427 meters below sea level, the Dead Sea is the lowest point on Earth. Heavy with salt and rich with minerals, both the water and the mud along the shores are fantastic for numerous skin conditions and certain health issues. Crystal shape salt formations, cobalt blue waters, a compelling history and modern mineral spas along the banks of this unique lake, create a perfect combination to rejuvenate the body and refresh the mind, making it a famous holiday destination for locals and tourists alike.

On the southern tip enjoy the resort city of Eilat located on the Red Sea. Take the family diving or snorkelling and explore a





it is a night of dancing with new friends at bars, clubs and lounges or a lively beach party enjoying the local wines and beers. Fun in Israel doesn't start only after dark. There are several wineries and local craft breweries in and around the major cities. Visit local wineries and enjoy award-winning wines either on a wine tour, at their restaurants or a wine tasting - which is usually paired with local cheeses or chocolate.

Israel is a country that is full of adventures that will keep all age groups entertained, in all seasons. Whether you choose to go on a solo or group backpacking trip or an adventure, a family vacation, lazy resort holiday, soulful escapade or a spa retreat, Israel is the place for you!

magnificent combination of various types of corals and an abundance of colourful tropical fish, swim with the dolphins at the Dolphin Reef or go tandem skydiving for a once in a lifetime experience overlooking Israel and her neighbours. If a sea adventure is not your cup of tea, go jeeping in the Negev Desert where you will see the change in terrain and wildlife in their natural habitat. Enjoy evening walks on the café and restaurant-lined promenade running alongside the beach while taking in the sunset reflecting a red glow of the sea on to the nearby hills.

The nightlife in Israel is prominent throughout the country something for everyone whether



### When travel resumes...

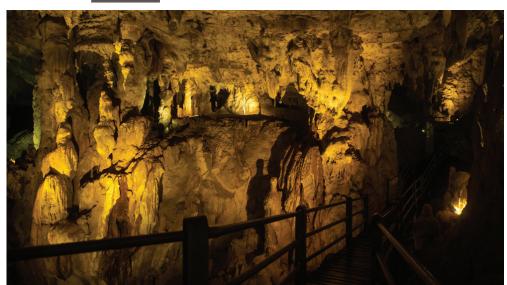
# **Explore the unexplored** in Malaysia

Malaysia, the beautiful country in Southeast Asia provides diverse experiences for visitors and locals alike. Its combination of rich heritage culture, landscapes have enabled a unique amalgam of designs and cuisines, making Malaysia truly a one-of-a-kind place and a world-class destination with a treasure trove of fascinating places to explore when travel resumes.

### Team TTJ

### Mulu Caves, Sarawak

If you want proof of Mother Nature's blessings, this is the place to see it. Sheer limestone cliffs rise like the tower(s) of Sauron over the quiet, verdure, unsuspecting rainforest. The two caves — Deer Cave and Clearwater Cave — are massive with an array of natural limestone formations and sleeping bats. Small waterfalls offer a refreshing view while making your way through the forest.



### Mount Kinabalu, Sabah

Home to the tallest mountain in Southeast Asia nowhere can compete with Sabah when it comes to hiking. Hikers typically set aside two to three days to conquer all 13,435 ft (4,095 meters) of Mount Kinabalu, and it's advisable to book lodgings in advance. For the less adventurous, Kota Kinabalu (fondly known as 'KK') also offers a variety of other attractions, including the Gaya Street Sunday Market and the Klias River Cruise.

### Sipadan Island, Sabah

One of the most amazing diving spots in the world, Sipadan Island is the ultimate destination for scuba divers and marine biologists from all over the world. The crystal clear waters and abundance of sea life are worth trading the luxury of a fancy hotel room.



### Pulau Perhentian, Terengganu

Both the 'big' and 'little' islands feature lush greenery, refreshingly clear water and fine sand on the shores. If you've always wanted to test your snorkeling, diving and kayaking skills, this is the place to do it.



### Sky Mirror, Selangor

Kuala Selangor Beach is better known as "Mirror of the Sky" as the shallow waters of this "Secret Island" reflect the sky in all its glory, thus creating many unique photography opportunities. The place is a unique tourist attraction that is only accessible when low tide. Departure timing varies every day and unable to reach and land there when high tide. Most of the time, it is submerged underneath the sea, which makes it uncharted on the world map. It is when the tide is ideal that this sand bar emerges, Malaysia's own "Salar de Uyuni".

### Stadthuys, Melaka

Characterised by salmon red walls, the Stadthuys was once the official residence of the Dutch governors and their officers. The building is a fine example of Dutch woodworking and masonry, and presently houses the History and Ethnography Museum as well as the Literature Museum. Built in 1645, the Stadthuys is the oldest remaining Dutch building in Southeast Asia.





### **Pangkor Island**

Pangkor Island lies just off the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. It is known for beaches such as Teluk Nipah, Coral Bay and Pasir Giam, which connect to coral-ringed Giam Island at low tide. The best way to explore Pangkor Island is by motorbike or car on rental. Water sports and other activities are plenty around Pangkor Island. You can also visit Fu Lin Kung Temple, a Taoist temple that has been built at the foot of Pangkor Hill near the town of Sungai Pinang Besar. You can enjoy a boat ride and light trekking too.

## **Thailand Tourism's** 'Amazing Thailand Plus' Offers

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), in collaboration with Thai Airways International (THAI), Thai Hotels Association (THA), and Association of Thai Travel Agents (ATTA), is launching an 'Amazing Thailand Plus' offer for foreign visitors wishing to enter Thailand during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Team TTJ

Amazing Thailand Plus offer gives visitors wonderful value-added benefits while ensuring safety and health for both themselves and the Thai people. However, every foreign traveller to Thailand must undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine and follow all rules and regulations set by the Ministry of Public Health, just like every Thai national returning home from overseas.

Amazing Thailand Plus comes with over 400 packages, inclusive of special fares on international and domestic flights, rooms at government-accredited Alternative State Quarantine (ASQ) hotels, and post-quarantine tours or transfers. Accommodation options are available at 70 ASQ hotels and over other 100 hotels in designated destinations. Bookings and airfares must be made through Thai Airways International by selecting either package A, B, or C. Terms and conditions apply.

Package A: Bangkok Extra offers a stay at ASQ hotels of one's choice and comes with a complimentary postquarantine half-day or a one-day city tour of Bangkok, Nakhon Pathom, or Ayutthaya.

Package C: Bangkok and Beyond (flyin) covers a stay at ASQ hotels of one's choice. It includes an option between a complimentary round-trip domestic ticket post-quarantine when travelling to Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Krabi, or Phuket with Thai Smile Airways, or a 3,000 Baht post-quarantine discount on a round-trip ticket when travelling to Ko Samui with Bangkok Airways.

offers are available from December 2020, until March 2021, while the travelling period starts from December 2020 until

Travellers wishing to visit Thailand during this time need to apply for a visa which can include Single-Entry Tourist Visa (TR) or a Special **Tourist** Visa (STV)

April 2021.

currently available for non-Thai citizens from the COVID-19 low-risk countries (according to the Ministry of Public Health, which may change without prior notice). It is highly recommended for interested travellers to enquire at the Royal Thai Embassy or Consulate-General in their home country before making any bookings. This is because the application for both the TR and STV is to be made only in the traveller's country of origin at a Royal Thai Embassy or Consulate-General.





# Mobility Services in the age of pandemic

The fact is that COVID-19 has also given a huge setback to the car rental segment, but over time, travellers are preferring personal or mobility services vehicles over public transport because of the flexibility and freedom to travel and which is expected to bring a new ray of hope for car rental industry.

### Sunil Gupta

ntil the outbreak of the novel coronavirus pandemic early this year, the travel and tourism industry was variously described as 'thriving' and 'booming'. Rapid urbanisation, a rise in disposable income of people, and an increase in the number of Gen Z travellers were a few factors attributing to the growth of the travel and tourism industry worldwide. But then the pandemic happened.

With that came a complete grounding of airlines to hotels and hospitality operations virtually coming to a halt, as countries sealed their borders to prevent the spread of the deadly virus. In fact, the impacts of the pandemic-induced lockdown resulted in economic distress. In no time, the brunt of the chaos unleashed by COVID-19 was felt by almost all industries, including travel and tourism as well as car rental sectors.

### Pre-COVID-19 landscape

In 2019, the travel and tourism industry in India witnessed massive growth with people spending more on tourism that significantly supported the growth of the car rental market. Further, a report also suggested that last year more than 50 per cent of car rental revenue came from travelers traveling to and from the airport. Clearly, the tourism sector was growing rapidly, leading to a massive spike in the market volume of car rentals. Unfortunately, everything turned upside down in a matter of a few months. With a travel ban, players in the car rental and leasing segment faced significant challenges in terms of bookings this year vis-a-vis the previous year.

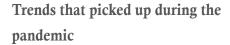
### Did the tables turn?

Yes! However, the pandemic caught the world in frenzy, the travel industry along with the car rental segment began to witness green shoots in July. Gradually overcoming the negative effects of the COVID-19, players in the car rental sector identified early indications of improving demand, leaving them optimistic for the rest of the year. In the absence of a personal vehicle, renting or leasing a private car to other modes of public

transportation became the buzzword, and new mobility trends started to emerge subsequently.

As the economy began to reopen and travel restrictions were eased, the car rental industry experienced a renewed demand from its customers. In light of the current situation, people are turning to mobility services that are offering unique advantages such as privacy, safety, hygiene, and door-todoor convenience. Here

is where car renting or leasing is playing a significant role.



Since the lockdown restrictions have been eased and traveling was allowed, the tourism industry has been witnessing signs that customers are willing to travel again even before a vaccine is available at scale. A large-scale transformation has been observed within the travel market. Confined to their homes for more than five months, most people are now planning for a vacation. However, the idea of a vacation is gradually shifting more towards staycations or short -trips and driving holidays to nearby destinations. People also prefer to travel in smaller groups as compared to before. Thus, there is a paradigm shift towards the spectrum of 'safe experience' rather than an 'adventurous' one. As a result, self-drive rental car service and booking a chauffeurdriven vehicle have seen a sudden surge in demand as soon as the lockdown was lifted and offices as well as other activities resumed.

It is without a doubt that in such times of duress, work-life balance becomes a key priority for most working people. A key trend that has picked up is working-from-hills. So, people are slowly moving away from metros to their favorite hill stations to enjoy the scenic beauty while still maintaining a healthy



Sunil Gupta

work-life balance. Keeping these changes in mind, players in the car rental segment are cashing on this trend and curating suitable mobility options for their customers.

### Enhanced tech facilities

More than ever before, brands in the car rental segment have pinned their focus on providing a safe travel experience to their customers. Leveraging new-age technologies like Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, and Data Analytics, players in the segment are offering advanced features such as keyless entry systems and real-time updates on vehicle sanitisation thereby ensuring their safety during the journey. In addition, app-based and online booking facilities are helping people to book services while sitting in the comfort of their homes.

In the years to come, car rental players will further adopt more and more car rental software and self-service technologies to boost competitiveness and quality of service. Despite its challenges, 2020 gave car rental players an opportunity to flourish with innovation. This shall continue in 2021 and in the years to come and will go a long way as the global car rental market is expected to reach a valuation of USD 131.0 billion by 2025.

Sunil Gupta is the MD & CEO of Avis India

### MOT revises guidelines of MDA Scheme to promote domestic tourism

he Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, has announced the revised Market Development Assistance (MDA) Guidelines for the promotion of domestic tourism in early December 2020. These revised guidelines have come into force with immediate effect. Under the MDA Scheme, financial support will be provided to tourism service providers approved by the Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India for the promotion of domestic tourism. The tourism service providers would include travel agents, tour operators, tourist transport operators, hoteliers, bed & breakfast units, home-stays, motels, guest houses, tented accommodation units, standalone restaurants, convention centers and online aggregators.

#### Extent of financial support permissible:

For Participation in Travel Fairs / Exhibitions

- 90 per cent of economy class airfare / IInd AC train fare.
- 90 per cent of the cost of built up/ furnished stall and participation fee.

Upper Ceiling: ₹ 1,35,000 /- per trip including GST/Taxes and subject to actual (including air/train fare - ₹ 35,000/-, cost of stall I/ participation fee- ₹ 1,00,000/-)

Number of applications permissible:

A maximum of three tours in one financial year, with only one tour to a particular State. One additional tour will be permissible for visiting any State in the Northeast region, J&K and Ladakh. Service providers from States in the Northeastern region, J&K and Ladakh will be eligible for four tours in one financial year.

#### Notes:

- a. The tour to a single city/state or a group of cities/states shall be for a minimum of three nights stay at the destination(s), excluding journey period and the assistance shall be permissible to only one person for each tour undertaken.
- b. Prior approval from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, to be taken before undertaking the tourism promotional activity.
- c. Application for re-reimbursement claim in the prescribed format to be submitted to the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, immediately on completion of the activity with all documents and positively within a period of one month of completion of the activity. All documents have to be uploaded as per prescribed norms online.

This support will benefit the travel trade members who will be attending conferences organised by other trade bodies, Chamber of Commerce, and State Governments in India, etc.

# International travel can safely restart without waiting for vaccines: WTTC



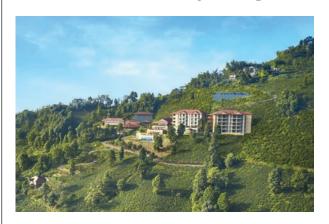
he World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) and major international industry bodies like Airports Council International (ACI), the World Economic Forum (WEF), International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), have joined forces to call for the immediate restoration of international travel using proven processes and without waiting for or requiring vaccinations.

WTTC recognises that public health is paramount and welcomes the recent rollout of the game-changing vaccines, which in the long-term will play a major role in combating coronavirus and restoring international travel.

Together, they have identified four key measures, which need to be implemented to restore international travel safely, including globally recognized testing regimes before departure. Common health and hygiene protocols that are aligned with globally established standards set out by ICAO (and the WTTC Safe Travels protocols and Airport Health Accreditation), a risk management regime, and internationally consistent and recognized travel passes.

WTTC and the industry bodies warn against the introduction of so-called 'health passports'—as opposed to internationally-recognized travel passes currently being considered—which would only further delay the recovery.

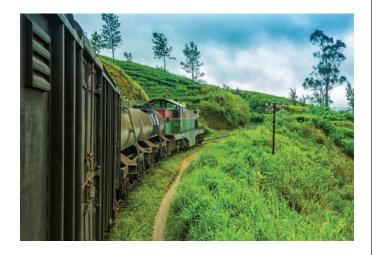
# Taj Chia Kutir Resort & Spa debuts in Darjeeling



ndian Hotels Company's (IHCL) brand, Taj, recently announced the opening of Taj Chia Kutir Resort & Spa, Darjeeling in the state of West Bengal. The resort is situated in the world renowned Makaibari Tea Estate, founded in 1859, and home to the world's first tea factory. Nestled amidst sunkissed tea gardens, Taj Chia Kutir Resort & Spa is spread over 22 acres. The 72-room resort, often enveloped in mist, has panoramic views of the rolling hills. The design is inspired by the meandering tea terraces and blends with nature.

The culinary choices include The Chia Veranda, the all-day diner, perched in the natural surrounding serving world cuisine. Sonargaon, the fine dining restaurant, offers North West frontier, Punjabi and Bengali cuisines. Guests can enjoy an elaborate high tea and tea tasting session with the Tea Sommelier at the charming Makaibari Tea Lounge. The elegant all-glass bar offers enchanting views of the tea gardens. Taj Chia Kutir offers immersive destination experiences. Guests can enjoy plucking and tasting tea at the Makaibari Tea Estate or nature trails with naturalists in the hills.

## Aitken Spence Travels gets 'Safe Travels' certificate from WTTC



eeping abreast with the global travel norms and primarily ensuring the safety of the operations, Aitken Spence Travels, a Destination Management Company (DMC) in Sri Lanka has been certified for 'safe & secure travel' by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC).

The certification determines the highest levels of global protocols of safety and hygiene that are being followed by a destination. A first of its kind, stamp was developed to help in restoring the confidence of the travellers and aims to revive an ailing travel sector in Sri Lanka. The certification entails an independent assessment by KPMG through the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) considering a comprehensive audit of safety standards adopted by the organisation, covering all procedures inclusive of a wide-ranging study on complete tour operations.

# Meghalaya to reopen for domestic tourists from December 21

fter nine
months of lockdown,
Meghalaya is all set to reopen for tourists from December 21. The Meghalaya government



has also issued a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for tourists. Tourists will be required to produce an original copy of the COVID-19 negative report, and the report is valid only if they were tested within 72 hours of their arrival at the entry point. The RAT negative test is not valid for Tourists who are entering the state.

All tourists who wish to visit Meghalaya will have to register on the Meghalaya Tourism app and generate an E-invite for the proposed itinerary. The app is available on the Google Play Store for Android and the Apple Store for IOS, and the E-Invite can also be generated on 'www.meghalayatourism.in'. A valid photo ID card needs to be uploaded on the app, including that of other members who are travelling in the group. Members travelling together can register and generate one E-Invite.

It is also mandatory to book at least two nights' stay (hotel/homestay/guest house) for the first two nights and declaration of the complete itinerary for the E-Invite to be generated. The services of registered tour operators listed on the Meghalaya Tourism website can also be used to obtain the E-invite.

### Discover Qatar launches its very first expedition cruise

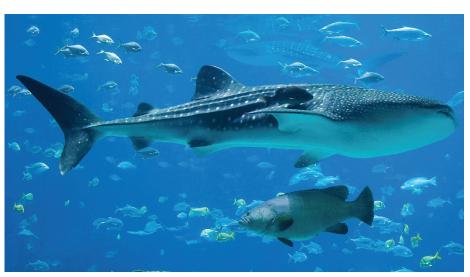
iscover Qatar, the destination management subsidiary of Qatar Airways, has announced the launch of its very first expedition cruise series, which will offer guests an awe-inspiring experience while travelling in luxury and comfort around Qatar's coastline. The cruises, which are designed for seasoned and adventurous travellers, provide a unique opportunity to observe the largest gathering of the world's largest living fish—the Whale Shark. Between the summer months of April and September, during their annual migration to the region, Whale Sharks are found feeding in groups of hundreds in the Al Shaheen marine zone

within the Arabian Gulf, which lies 80 km off the northern coast of Qatar.

The Discover Qatar expedition cruise will give passengers the privilege of accessing the Al Shaheen restricted marine zone, and witness the majesty of the Whale Shark gathering, as well as a unique coastal exploration adventure. From observing Whale Sharks, snorkelling in coral reefs, exploring mangroves to gliding through the turquoise waters of Khor Al Adaid channel, a team of expert guides, marine biologists, naturalists and ornithologists will lead guests to identify local wildlife, offer a cultural perspective on the sites explored and ensure a memorable

expedition experience.

Discover Qatar offers customers an eight-night, nine-day expedition cruise package on board a luxury expedition ship on full-board basis. Guests will enjoy five-star services, elegant accommodation, sight-seeing discoveries and exploration adventures, while the highly trained crew will ensure safe travel in comfort and style. Discover Qatar has partnered with PONANT to offer this cruise series. Cruise season will start in April 2021 and will run seven consecutive weekly departures. Prices start from USD 5,295 per person.



### LEGOLAND® Dubai reopens

EGOLAND® Dubai reopened its theme park gates to the public on December 1, 2020, welcoming families with children aged 2-12 to build awesome new memories together. Maintaining visitor health and safety as a top priority, the team at LEGOLAND Dubai has been working hard to ensure hygiene and safety measures are enhanced throughout the Park, including temperature checks on arrival, enhanced cleaning, one-way systems, social distancing markers at ride queues, shops, restaurants and more. These measures, in line

with government regulations and global standards, provide peace of mind for families as they continue having fun within a safe environment.

Families can once again LEGO-themed enjoy the rides and attractions across 6 lands-whether it's conquering the exhilarating Dragon Coaster, recovering a pharaoh's stolen treasure in Lost Kingdom Adventure, or letting their creativity run wild in IMAGINATION and LEGO CITY. LEGO fans will love visiting MINILAND to see Dubai's iconic skyline and key iconic landmarks from around the Middle East and international destinations, all made up from over 20 million

LEGO bricks.

Visitors can also purchase their favourite LEGO-themed souvenirs from the Park's retail stores while stopping by the LEGO-themed restaurants for a quick snack. The theme park will be open from 10 am–6 pm from Saturday to Wednesday, and 10 am–8 pm on Thursdays and Fridays. The LEGOLAND Dubai Annual Pass can also be purchased with an awesome 3 months free when you buy online–15 months for the price of 12 months.



# Fortune Hotels expands its footprint in India

ortune Hotels has signed four individual operating agreements for hotels in Haldwani (Uttarakhand), Candolim (Goa), Deoghar (Jharkhand), and Tirupur (Tamil Nadu). With these new signings, all four hotels enjoy a distinct positioning and address the growing accommodation demand for branded hotels in these destinations.

Fortune Inn, Haldwani, situated in the immediate foothills of Kumaon Himalayas, is slated to be a mid-market business hotel. Located atop a popular mall of the city, just off NH109, the hotel is anticipated to open in October 2022.

Fortune Select, Candolim, Goa, comes with an immersive inventory of over 100 well-appointed rooms. Poised to open towards the mid of 2022, this swish upscale property, just 800 metres from the Candolim beach, is located in the heart of Bardez -North Goa and is 15 km from Panjim.

Expected to open in 2024, Fortune Park, Deoghar, Jharkhand, is set in the pilgrim city and will be a 100-room hotel, conveniently located in the heart of the smart city, home to Baidyanath Temple one of the 12 Jyotirlingas shrines in India.

Fortune Park, Tirupur, Tamil Nadu is a 62-room hotel, located just 50 km from Coimbatore. Positioned as a preferred mid-market destination catering to accommodation demand from corporate/business traveller, the hotel is anticipated to open its doors to guests in the summer of 2021.

# India now has Air Bubble Agreement with 23 countries

irlines have been permitted to operate special international flights under the Vande Bharat Mission since May this year and under the bilateral air bubble pacts since July. Thus, India has established such pacts with 23 countries, including Nepal as the recent addition. The other 22 countries are Germany, France, Maldives, Canada, Japan, Bahrain, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Qatar, Iraq, Oman, Bhutan, Kenya, Bangladesh Ethiopia, Ukraine, Nepal, Rwanda, Tanzania, the Netherland, the UAE, the US, and the UK.

On newer developments, India MoCA has also allowed Nepalese and Bhutanese nationals to travel on special international flights that are being operated under air bubble arrangements established between India and 11 other countries. These 11 countries are Ethiopia, France, Germany, Iraq, Kenya, the Netherlands, Qatar, Rwanda, Tanzania, Ukraine, and the UAE.

The aviation ministry also said that airlines can now carry certain categories of sixth freedom passengers. Now, passengers travelling under air bubble arrangements with France, Germany, and the Netherlands can further travel to EU/ Schengen area, South American, and African countries. Similarly, travellers of air bubble arrangements between India-Qatar and India-UAE can further travel to South America and Africa. So, passengers travelling under the air bubble arrangement between India and Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania can also travel to any country in Africa. To date, airlines operating flights under the air bubble pact were not permitted to carry sixth freedom passengers from India.

# COVID-19 test mandatory for tourists visiting Nainital, Mussoorie

he Uttarakhand High Court has ordered mandatory COVID-19 test of tourists visiting Nainital and Mussoorie. In an order dated December 9, Acting Chief Justice Ravi Kumar Malimath and Justice Ravindra Maithani of the high court said tourists visiting the two popular tourist towns should be tested for coronavirus at the time of entry. The order to resume testing of tourists comes ahead of Christmas and New Year holidays when large inflow of tourists is expected in Nainital and Mussoorie.



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### Etihad Airways launches Global Student offer

tihad Airways is making it easier for students to travel between university and home or to discover new horizons and cultures, with the launch of its Global Student offer. Students who book before March 31, 2021, for travel by September 30, 2021, will save up to 10 per cent on Economy tickets and 5 per cent on Business class tickets.

Family members who want to jet off as well can benefit from the same discount provided their tickets are booked under the same reservation and they travel with the student. Travellers who book using this promotional fare will have an increased baggage allowance of up to 40kg in Economy and up to 50kg in Business, or one additional checked bag if travelling to/from USA or Canada.

For additional peace of mind and flexibility, one free date change is permitted up to 96 hours prior to travel. To book visit etihad.com/studentoffer and enter the promo code STU10. Students must present a valid student ID or official university acceptance letter at check-in.

### The Park Mumbai reopens with safety precautions and unique offerings

he Park Mumbai, a boutique luxury hotel located in the heart of Juhu, reopens its doors to guests with enhanced hygiene, cleanliness and safety measures in accordance with the guidelines followed by the government, health authorities and THE Park Hotels S.H.I.E.L.D programme.

All guest rooms, Saffron Banquets, THE Walt – Dramatic Whisky Bar are operational at the hotel. The PanAsian restaurant Meishi, rooftop lounge Flyt and Home delivery are slated to restart its operations this month. The fitness centre and swimming pool at the hotel will subsequently open post directives by the government.

THE Park Mumbai has implemented strict hygiene and sanitization protocols under an all-encompassing safety program called S.H.I.E.L.D – which is developed in partnership with Diversey, the global leader in hygiene and cleaning technologies. Every team member of the hotel is undergoing mandatory safety procedures and processes training through online and offline modes by training managers and domain experts. Temperature checks of each employee are monitored at the entrance. Face recognition attendance system are installed to ensure safety of the employees with this contactless authentication. Each of the team members are equipped with personal protective equipment such as masks and gloves.

Special care has been taken for staff dining with partitions installed at the cafeteria encouraging social distancing norms and hot beverage offerings like kadha, honey, turmeric, lemon and cinnamon water has been stationed for the employee's health and wellbeing. The 'new normal' guest experience offerings include in-room personal amenity kits, sensor-based touchless sanitizer stations in public spaces, contactless checkin, digital menus and E-payments.

The hotel is also launching the Happiness Menu—a customised delivery option for a seamless contactless experience, Immunity Booster Drinks Menu, Bartender/ Chef Services at home, Weddings by The Park—a one stop destination for intimate wedding experiences backed by our talented culinary team and the city's best wedding planners. The hotel has introduced a splendid 'staycation' offer at only Rs.4,500 plus taxes to attract its patrons.





# YEARS OF INPACT