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TTJ Travel Trade Journal

Vol. 11 | Issue 04 | February 2021 | Pages 40 | ₹50

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Photographer	:	Parth Sharma
Asst. Manager Administration	:	Kuldeep Singh
Accounts Manager	:	Priyesh Ranjan

Email: info@sampanmedia.com

Editorial and Marketing Office :
Sampan Media Pvt. Ltd., B-7/114A, 3rd Floor, Safdarjung Enclave, Near Sukhmani Hospital, New Delhi - 110029 Ph: 9560264443, ravisharma@sampanmedia.com

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Owned and published by: Ravi Sharma, Editor & Publisher, 18/3, Railway Colony, Sarojini Nagar, P.S. Chanakyapuri, New Delhi 110021 and printed on his behalf at Polykam Offset, C-138, Naraina Industrial Area, Phase-1, New Delhi-110028.



Dear Friends,

The New Year has given us all a hopeful start with the industry reviving with domestic travel. The segment is providing a much-needed boost to help sustain many tourism destinations and businesses and will continue to be a key driver of recovery in the short to medium term. In the same way, we all hope for the revival of all verticals of tourism in due course.

TTJ's February 2021 issue has a few pages on Aviation. Though there continue to be uncertainties ahead, we at TTJ are confident that many airlines will continue to execute their plans, optimise capital structure and fleet, and emerge as a better, more efficient airline. Also, similar confidence reflects with the few people we have spoken to in the airline industry.

So while we think about more interesting topics in the coming months,

Take Care and Be Safe

Happy Reading!

Ravi Sharma

Ravi Sharma

ravisharma@sampanmedia.com

Editor's Desk

Honeymoon Travel

- Beautiful Greece (8 Nights)
Greece | Athens | Mykonos | Santorini
- Exquisite Italy (9 Nights)
Rome | Naples | Amalfi Coast | Florence | Paris | Venice
- Idyllic Maldives (4 Nights)
Maldives

Family Travel

- London, Switzerland and Paris (10 Nights)
London | Paris | Basel | Interlaken | Lucerne-Zurich
- Astounding Dubai (5 Nights)
Dubai | Abu Dubai
- Singapore with Sentosa Island (4 Nights)
Singapore | Sentosa Island

Friends Travel

- The Natural Treasure, Indonesia (6 Nights)
Bali | Ubud
- Epic Land of Spain (9 Nights)
Barcelona | Ibiza | Palma | Madrid
- Splendid Towns of Amsterdam (10 Nights)
Amsterdam | Berlin | Prague | Budapest

Solo Travel

- Splendorous Turkey (6 Nights)
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Maldives records over 100,000 tourist arrivals during the first 35 days of the year



On July 15, 2020, Maldives reopened its borders to tourists of all nationalities with the reopening of several resorts and liveaboards. Currently, there is no mandatory quarantine for arrival, but all tourists are required to fill an online health declaration form within 24 hours prior to departure and submit a negative COVID-19 PCR test result, conducted a maximum 96 hours prior to departure to Maldives.

For Maldives, 2020 ended with the celebration of over 500,000 tourist arrivals for the year, and over 100,000 tourist arrivals since the reopening of borders. On February 04, 2021, a total of 102,107 tourist arrivals were recorded. According to the Ministry of Tourism, 10,004 arrivals were from 1st to 4th February, with a daily average of 2,501 arrivals. The top source market for tourist arrivals is Russia, followed by India and Ukraine. Other top source markets include Kazakhstan, Romania, France, Germany, United Kingdom, Czech Republic, and the United States.

Currently, there are over 140 resorts and over 330 guesthouses in operation, along with over 135 liveaboards and 11 hotels. 27 airlines are connecting Maldives to the rest of the world.

On February 01, 2021, Maldives commenced the administration of the COVID-19 vaccine. President Ibrahim Solih stated that the government aims to provide free COVID-19 vaccine to all citizens and residents of Maldives, in the coming months, and also emphasised the importance of individual responsibility and caution even during this time of renewed hope. Recently, the Ministry of Tourism also launched an initiative to vaccinate people in the tourism sector to create an even safer scenario for the industry. This was initiated at Male' Social Center. The Minister of Tourism, Dr. Abdulla Mausoom, stated that vaccination arrangements will be made in resorts for the convenience of resort employees and added that vaccination teams would travel to bigger resorts in the future. The Ministry added that 10,000 tourism industry workers will be inoculated during this program including resort staff, guesthouse staff, liveaboard workers, airport representatives and local artists.

The initiation of the vaccination drive is bound to bring hope to the local population, as well as ensure the safety of tourists. This gives the message that Maldives is a low-risk destination for travellers, and will hopefully bring about a surge in tourist arrivals.

Jetsave, India's leading visa facilitation company, is now an IATA member



Jetsave, which has been leading the visa market in India for the past 31 years, has now got IATA certification as well. Jetsave has never paused its expansion mode and keeps on adding new offices and an array of services for its clients. Beyond visas and attestation work, Jetsave has been offering tours and packages, travel insurance, group bookings, flight tickets, car rentals, travel guides, etc. With IATA certifications, one can be assured of quality service at the most economical price. Jetsave's team is available round the clock for its services and one can contact Karan Sharma (+91 98999 16699), Kartik Sharma (+91 9810211095) and Aseem Sharma (+91 98117 96968) anytime.

World Travel & Tourism Council to hold its Global Summit in April 2021



The highly-anticipated World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) 20th Global Summit, will now take place in April – one month later than the originally planned date. The Global Summit is being organised in partnership with the Government of Quintana Roo in Mexico and will be held in Cancun, Mexico on 25-27 April.

WTTC, which represents the global Travel & Tourism private sector, has taken the decision to move its Global Summit from March into April to coincide with the expected relaxation of travel restrictions and the beginning of the sector's recovery. The Global Summit will be a fantastic opportunity to showcase what both Mexico and Cancun have to offer as a destination, along with the world-class health and safety protocols that have been implemented to host such an event. The event will take place in a hybrid format, allowing those unable to travel to benefit from the content virtually.

WTTC's annual Global Summit is the most important Travel & Tourism event in the calendar, where the highest-level industry leaders meet with key government leaders to act on the biggest and most important issues across the global agenda.

IndiGo signs agreement with BAPL, to commence operations from Durgapur

Continuing its efforts towards strengthening regional connectivity, IndiGo signed an agreement with Bengal Aerotropolis Projects Limited (BAPL) to start operations from Durgapur – the 66th destination in 6E network. The airline will operate its first direct flights from Delhi, Bengaluru, and a southern city to Durgapur from April 22, 2021.

Being one of the largest industrial hubs in the state of West Bengal, daily direct connections between key metro cities and Durgapur will augment economic growth in the city as well as the region. Durgapur also attracts people for its Damodar river and coalfields of Raniganj and increased access to the safest mode of transportation will further augment domestic tourist traffic.

As part of the agreement, BAPL will also provide local marketing support to IndiGo through their expertise in the



city. Post securing all regulatory approvals and specific flight schedules for Durgapur, IndiGo will soon take the overall number of domestic destinations in the 6E network to 68 by opening Bareilly and Rajkot in the coming months, as part of its plan to expand regional connectivity in the country.

Kunal Shanker joins the InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram as General Manager

InterContinental Hotel Group, South West Asia has appointed Kunal Shanker as the General Manager of InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort. A well-rounded hotelier, Kunal brings with him over 22 years of extensive hospitality experience both in commercial and operational roles. Having worked in different capacities of Director Sales & Marketing, Executive Assistant Manager, General Manager and Cluster General Manager in diverse geographies such as Kathmandu, Cochin, Pune, Mumbai, Amritsar and New Delhi, Kunal is an extremely versatile leader with a proven track record of adapting to diverse cultures and regions and driving performance.

In his new role, Kunal will oversee the complete operations and management of the hotels along with the senior leadership teams, to ensure the highest levels of guest engagement, profitability and continue to build on the positioning and reputation of InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort.





UNION BUDGET 21-22

A big dampener for the travel and tourism industry

The Government has been severely disappointing the travel and tourism fraternity in terms of support ever since COVID crippled the industry and the Union Budget seemed to be a ray of hope which has now been somewhat shattered.

Team TTJ

After being left out of the special economic and comprehensive package, the travel, tourism and hospitality sector were hoping that the government may consider the sector during the Budget 2021-2022.

Also, just a week before the budget, stakeholders and associations in the industry were banking that the Finance Ministry will come out with feasible plans to enhance and boost travel and tourism by ensuring adequate support in ease of doing business. Some associations also had sent suggestions for support and good governance before the budget.

Union Budget 21-22 has proven otherwise, with the budgetary allocation for the ministry of tourism slashed from Rs 2,500 crore in 2020-21 to Rs 206.77 crore this year, which is a blow to the tourism industry which is reeling from huge losses due to the coronavirus crisis. The industry was clearly anticipating and expecting more than this.

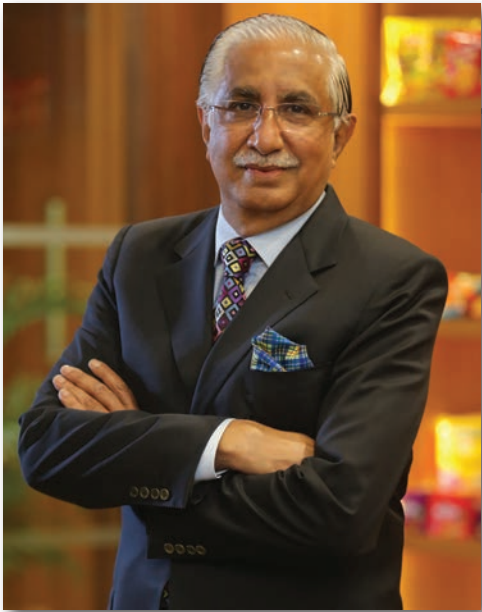
With the coronavirus crisis bringing the tourism sector to its knees, the union budget has allocated Rs 1088.03 crore for the development of tourism infrastructure and has allocated a sum of Rs 63.65 crore for capacity building for service providers and Rs 138.65 crore for training and skill development.

With the coronavirus crisis restricting

not just foreign tourist footfalls into the country but also keeping domestic tourists at bay, the budget has focused on pushing funds for promotion and publicity to help woo tourists back. Out of the Rs 668.72 crore allocated towards promotion and publicity, Rs 524.02 crore is for the overseas market and Rs 144.70 crore has been kept for domestic tourists.

The industry was expecting the government would have understood and studied the efforts of other countries that have put in to ensure their tourism sector survives these tough times. But that has not happened in India and has majorly left the sector disappointed.

Some of the industry views are:



Nakul Anand
Chairman, FAITH

FAITH the policy federation of all the national associations representing the complete tourism, travel and hospitality industry of India (ADTOI, ATOAI, FHRAI, HAI, IATO, ICPB, IHHA, ITTA, TAAI, TAFI) & cause partner AIRDA was looking forward to the Union budget FY 21-22 with great expectations. Lack of

immediate direct support in the budget has disappointed the Indian travel and tourism industry. While infrastructure measures announced as budget announcements may boost tourism over the long term, the opportunity for immediate support has regrettably been missed out.

Jyoti Mayal
President, TAAI

We expected much more than what was announced. However, we believe the Budget 2021 has focused more on spending to enable economic growth through infrastructure roads and financial remedies. However, travel, tourism and hospitality were completely neglected. As we await the fine print, the direct taxes are not clear. Further, disinvestment in Air India is

still on the rocks and is expected to be completed this year. Clarity on the same is eagerly awaited by us, the main stakeholder partner hereto. For Rail packages over the years, this shall be an advantage since the plan is to create a 'future-ready' railway system by 2030. Passenger logistics shall have an advantage in the circuits and infrastructure.



Madhavan Menon
Chairman & Managing Director, Thomas Cook (India)



Against the challenging backdrop of the COVID era, the Union Budget 2021-22 is expansionist: We welcome the much-needed investments in healthcare, focus on capital expenditure, prioritisation of assets, privatisation and no change in taxation—structured around a clear pivot to inspire economic growth. While the six pillars of the Budget presented a diversified approach to fundamentals, across health, capital, infrastructure, inclusive development, human capital and innovation, focus on the Travel and Tourism sector has been noticeably absent.

For an industry that is a crucial contributor to India's GDP and a powerful force multiplier, priority tourism-related announcements – an imperative to revival and sustenance – were clearly missed. We are looking at a long road to recovery, and the Union Budget has

not provided the helping hand that was expected of it. We welcome the focus on transportation infrastructure that forms a crucial base for Inbound & Domestic Tourism – with the announcement of a Rs. 1.18 lakh crore outlay for the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (proposed 3500 km corridor in Tamil Nadu, 1,100 km in Kerala, 675 km in West Bengal and 1300 km in Assam in the coming 3 years); equally the proposal of a future-ready rail system by 2030 and the next phases of metro projects in key cities with the 'Metro Lite' and 'Metro New' concepts for tier 1 and 2 regions. From an aviation perspective, the announcement of airport privatisation in tier 2 and 3 cities/towns will serve as a boon towards access and affordability; the creation of a hub and spoke model will serve to catalyse the government's initiatives around Project UDAN and Regional Connectivity."

Ankur Bhatia

Executive Director, Bird Group



India's vaccination program, which has garnered worldwide positive attention, may help in the economic recovery as the situation of women and children is expected to improve with health programs resuming after vaccination of health workers and more people joining the workforce.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during her Budget 2021 speech on Monday announced that the government will provide Rs 35,400 crore for COVID-19 vaccination in 2021-22. The funding would definitely be a shot in the arm for the ongoing vaccine drive.

The Indian economy is indeed

awaiting a return to normalcy in sectors such as travel and aviation. These sectors which provide jobs to 10 per cent of the population are the ones that are now carrying most of the COVID-19 burden and have yet to start operating at anywhere near pre COVID-19 levels. They are also the sectors responsible for enormous job losses and consumption declines. We expect a full-throttle vaccination programme augmented by the Rs 34000 crore funding will bring the long-awaited cheer to the sector. People will start flying with confidence for leisure, like during pre-COVID times after being significantly emboldened by inoculation against the virus.

Aloke Bajpai

Co-founder & CEO, ixigo

Tier 2 and 3 cities have seen significant growth in demand for air travel and first-time flyers post relaxation of lockdown norms. The monetisation of airports in these areas will help capitalise on this growing demand by accelerating infrastructure development in underserved areas and

strengthening regional air connectivity. While these infrastructure measures will boost tourism in the long run, it's sad to see that no extra spends or tax incentives were announced to provide immediate relief to the severely affected travel and tourism sector.



Rohit Kapoor

Chief Executive Officer, OYO India & South Asia



It is heartening to see a budget entirely focussed on revitalising the economy. On the backbone of the proposed reforms, we believe that a focus on growth-oriented measures, economic reforms and inclusive growth would pave the way for extensive economic recovery. The Government's focus on extending and improving transport (road, railway, metro) infrastructure with nearly 217 projects worth over Rs 1 lakh crore to be completed under National Infrastructure Pipeline will enable travellers to explore hidden gems and therefore bolster the domestic tourism and hospitality industries. Additionally, keeping up with the changing times, an overall focus on technology with interventions like incentivising and promoting digital payments will fast track India's transition into a digitally enabled economy.

We are confident that with the series of interventions announced by the Honorable Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, our country is on the path of stable and quick economic recovery. With the mantra of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' and initiatives reducing compliances for one-person-companies, a boost for MSMEs, the reduction in corporate taxation along with the steps to simplify GST for companies further and ease tax compliance will boost morale across industries. The funds allocated to COVID-19 vaccines will also strengthen confidence among travellers and boost faster recovery in the service sectors. The Government's efforts towards skilling the country's youth and collaborating with other countries will spur entrepreneurship and enable job creation as well. This budget truly has the potential for transforming India.



Lubaina Sheerazi
Co-Founder, BRANDit India

The budget has turned out to be a dampener for the tourism industry. With the sector being most affected during 2020 with the adverse impact of COVID-19, there was much anticipation for direct support from the government to revive the sector. However, there has been no respite in this regard. Tourism is a key driver contributing to the country's economic growth, but with the budget not

having a subduing effect, the pandemic cloud will continue to loom over us. Having said that, I do believe that we are a resilient lot and the tourism sector with its immense potential will slowly rise above its capacity in the months to come. With vaccines rolling out, travellers will feel more confident to explore giving the sector the much-needed impetus to bring us back on track.

Sonica Malhotra Kandhari
Joint Managing Director, MBD Group

Overall, Budget 2021 is a pragmatic and positive budget which is committed to key sectors such as agriculture, healthcare and infrastructure development. Higher allocation of Rs. 64,180 crore on healthcare, which also includes Rs. 35,000 crore for COVID-19 vaccines is committed to ensuring fast rollout of mass vaccination and restoring normalcy. This is also expected to give much impetus to the travel & tourism industry in the coming year.

Moreover, the privatization of airlines, allocation of 1.10 lakh crore outlay for

railways and boost to infrastructure development such as the development of new highway projects is a welcome step that would lead the economy to a new growth trajectory. However, we were looking for some measures related to the travel & hospitality sector such as awarding infrastructure status to the hospitality industry and reducing the GST rate on hospitality which have not been addressed in the budget. These reforms would have helped in the revival of this industry, as it has been severely battered by the pandemic.



Sarbendra Sarkar
Founder & MD, Cygnett Hotels and Resorts



While there is nothing specific for the tourism and hospitality sector in the budget, I feel broader focus on the budget on increasing consumption and infrastructure spend by the government will have a positive impact on the hospitality sector. The government has

done the right thing by not introducing any new tax or COVID cess as some had anticipated. We also believe that the amount allocated for COVID vaccination is a positive for our sector as more people get vaccinated it will encourage people to travel.

Pushpendra Bansal
COO, Lords Hotels and Resorts

The tourism, Travel & Hospitality industry is disappointed with the central Government budget as none of our concerns were addressed. Our industry contributes close to 10 per cent of the GDP and tourism budget is now reduced by 18 per cent. The tourism industry has suffered the most due to pandemic and will be the last one to recover;

there should have been some kind of encouragement for domestic travel, including tax exemptions, to save the industry. The only silver lining is a boost to infrastructure projects, which when implemented would help tourism over the long-term. Otherwise, it is a good budget for the country and we are happy that no new tax or cess is proposed.



UNION BUDGET 2021

A major highlight for the aviation industry: MoCA

The Union Budget announced for the Financial Year 2021-22 comes with several positive measures for the aviation industry in India. These measures range from tax incentives and custom duty reduction for promoting Aatmanirbharta, to asset monetisation and disinvestment to mobilise resources for new infrastructure development. Overall, the budget proposals are aimed at creating opportunities for strengthening the aviation eco-system in the country and developing India as an aviation sector manufacturing hub.

Team TTJ

According to the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), the major highlights of the Union Budget 2021 for the aviation industry are:

Tax incentives for aircraft leasing and financing

The Government is committed to make the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) in GIFT City a global financial hub. In addition to the tax incentives already provided, the current budget proposed more tax incentives which include (i) tax holiday for capital gains incomes of aircraft leasing and financing company, (ii) tax exemptions for aircraft lease rentals or royalty paid to foreign lessor, (iii) tax incentive for relocation of foreign funds in IFSC and (iv) tax exemptions to investment division of the foreign banks located in IFSC.



These tax exemptions are a major boon to lessors operating from IFSC. These would help in establishing a vibrant aircraft leasing and financing environment in India, besides offering better terms to Indian and foreign carriers. These measures come on the back of a series of initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Civil Aviation since 2019 to create an aircraft leasing and financing ecosystem in GIFT (Gujarat International Financial Tech) city of India.

Custom Duty Benefit

In the budget proposal, Customs duty has been reduced from 2.5 per cent to 0 per cent on aviation sector components or parts, including engines, for manufacturing of aircraft by Public Sector Units of the Ministry of Defence. This measure will help grow the aviation industry in the country by reducing the cost of inputs for domestic manufacturing and thus promote Aatmanirbharta.

Asset Monetisation through PPP model

The budget proposed monetisation of the next lot of airports for operations and management concession. Other core infrastructure assets that will be rolled out under the Asset Monetization Programme are AAI Airports in Tier II and III cities. The Airport Authority of India is working on the next round of privatization in which 06-10 airports will be included. Six airports have already been awarded to the successful bidder and the concession agreements have been signed. Proceeds from this step will help the Ministry of Civil Aviation to complete the goal of building 100 new airports by 2024.

Development of health system capacities at airports under the Atma Nirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana

Under a new centrally sponsored scheme, PM Atmanirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana, Union budget 2021-22 proposes the development of health systems capacities in the country which also includes the aviation entry points. Under this program, Public Health Units will be strengthened at 32 airports. This program will facilitate the smooth movement of

pharmaceuticals through air across India as well in other parts of the world.

Disinvestment and Strategic Sale

Through budget 2021, the government has reiterated its commitment to disinvestment of Air India and Pawan Hans in 2021-22. The process of strategic sale of Air India is underway. The 'Expression of Interest' EOI has been received. The Transaction Advisor is scrutinising the EOIs. The PIM for the sale of Pawan Hans has also been issued. Besides, the PIM for Air India Airports Services (ground handling) is under preparation.

Expansion of scope for Krishi Udaan in convergence with Operation Greens

To boost value addition in agriculture and allied products and their exports, the scope of 'Operation Greens Scheme' that is presently applicable to tomatoes, onions, and potatoes, will be enlarged to include 22 perishable products. Krishi Udaan Scheme stands converged with Operation Greens through air freight subsidy of 50 per cent for the agri-perishables of NER States and 4 Himalayan States/UTs. The expansion of product-coverage will boost the Krishi Udaan Scheme and improve air cargo transportation from these States.



Rémi Maillard

Rémi Maillard, Chair, Civil Aviation Committee of FICCI, President and MD, Airbus India & South Asia

I congratulate the Finance Minister for addressing the aspirations of India through an expansive budget – one in which infrastructure development has been identified as one of the six pillars for building an 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

The government has made some forward-leaning announcements for the aviation sector, including tax exemption on aircraft leasing and aircraft rentals made to foreign companies. This measure is significant for multiple reasons.

First, it will provide some relief to Indian carriers which are bleeding cash because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, the proposal

sits well with India's desire to develop a local aircraft leasing and financing industry to accelerate the maturity and 'Atmanirbharta' of the Indian aviation industry. Third, tax support for aircraft leasing and rentals will help grow the fleet size in India as a vast majority of these aircraft will likely be leased.

The budget has also announced an ambitious plan to monetise airports in Tier 2 & 3 cities for operations and management concession. Under its strategic disinvestment proposal, the government will look to complete the process of privatisation of Air India and Pawan Hans in 2021-22. Strategic disinvestment receipts will be vital to meeting the government's infrastructure and social development goals.

While the aviation industry welcomes today's budget announcements, it is not out of the woods yet and continues to hope for financial and policy support from the government. Immediate credit support, lower tax rates on aviation fuel and imported aircraft parts for MRO, flexible use of the airspace and fully liberalized code sharing, among others, can make the Indian aviation industry not only more competitive but also distinctly attractive. Given the symbiotic relationship between aviation and economic growth, continued government support to the sector can only catalyse the country's expansion and accelerate it towards achieving a \$5-trillion economy by 2024.

Virgin Atlantic continues its efforts to emerge as a sustainable and profitable airline

Virgin Atlantic is committed to India in the long term and hopes that market conditions will allow them to expand service further in the future. Alex McEwan, Country Manager- South Asia, Virgin Atlantic, discusses with TTJ, how the airline is operating currently and transforming to increase customer satisfaction while also adapting to the ever changing COVID situation.

Prashant Nayak

Q With the ongoing fight for survival, is business picking up? When are you expecting passenger capacity to return to pre-coronavirus pandemic levels onboard your airlines?

The widespread deployment of the vaccine in the UK and across the world is incredibly encouraging for our industry as a whole. It is a momentous global task and will take some time, but we are confident that as this ramps-up, consumer confidence in travel will grow and also allow travel restrictions to be safely relaxed. We are encouraged by the strong rebound in domestic travel within India, which indicates a growing willingness to travel and are seeing pent-up demand for our flights too. Our ambition is to return to pre-pandemic levels of capacity in India this year and we will increase our level of flying in line with demand recovery, alongside a laser focus on ensuring flights generate a cash contribution.

Q What is your strategy to regain your financial strength in the years ahead? Where will you prioritise investments?

As well as taking measures to protect our short-term cash position and financial stability, we have also made changes that will make us more competitive in the years ahead. We have revamped our loyalty programme 'Flying Club' to increase its relevance. Point redemptions will now contribute towards tier status – an industry first. In addition, we are offering passengers 'evergreen' points – their points will never expire. We have invested in one of the newest, greenest fleets in the sky. This work was underway prior to the pandemic, underpinned by our focus on sustainability, but has been strengthened by us accelerating our retirement of less fuel-efficient four-engine aircraft like the 747. Our average number of seats on each aircraft will also be lower due to this change, making us resilient to changing market dynamics. This year we have achieved record-breaking cargo revenues, which has supported the cash generation of the airline as a whole and allowed us to continue service on many routes despite low passenger demand. We



Alex McEwan

have challenged ourselves to more closely integrate our cargo business into the airline in the years to come, for example in the route selection process, to ensure that we continue to deliver strong performance. 'Best in Partnering' is one of our key strategic pillars and influences every decision we take. This fundamental part of our identity remains as important in the years ahead as it has been for our past. A great example of this is our transatlantic joint venture with Delta. For Indian passengers, this offers seamless connectivity between our flights to London and onward to the USA, with shared frequent flier benefits and a consistent onboard experience throughout the journey.

Q How can airlines build in greater resilience to survive future challenges? How can the government help?

One of the biggest challenges faced by airlines currently is rapidly changing travel restrictions, imposed at short notice by governments and often with complex conditions for passengers. Consulting with airlines and airports before announcing or implementing these travel restrictions will allow smoother implementation with less disruption for passengers. Many governments have recognised the value of

pre-departure testing as a method to safely re-open travel corridors. An international standard for pre-departure testing requirements and a globally consistent portal demonstrating travel eligibility would be hugely helpful.

Q Presently, there have been a lot of changes in the aviation industry. According to you, what will be the changing landscapes in airline operations post COVID?

Given the huge strain the pandemic has placed on the industry, it is inevitable that a period of consolidation will follow. Many airlines will be more cautious with fleet expansion and become more streamlined in their strategy, prioritising the areas of their business where they possess a particular competitive advantage. At Virgin Atlantic, our biggest strength has always been our people, with our crew being an essential part of driving our award-winning service. This has been reinforced during the pandemic, with our customers providing us with overwhelmingly positive feedback about how welcome and safe they have been made to feel onboard.

Q Do you believe the bio-safety measures are temporary, or will they become a regular part of the travel experience?

The extent to which safety measures implemented during the pandemic will remain part of the travel experience depends on several factors. Government regulations will clearly be the biggest influence, but policy will also be influenced by passenger demands, and the measures that they deem appropriate to ensure comfort onboard, even if this goes beyond government guidance as restrictions get relaxed in the years ahead. We track customer satisfaction on every one of our flights to ensure that we are living up to our passenger's expectations and delivering unforgettable service, and will be closely monitoring attitudes to safety measures in the months and years to come so that we can adapt our service accordingly.

HAHN AIR

Leader in simplifying and optimising airline distribution capability

Hahn Air is a German scheduled and executive charter airline, and since 1999 it offers indirect distribution services to other airlines and thus provides ticketing solutions to 100,000 travel agencies in 190 markets. With two decades of experience, the company has established itself as the market leader and today, Hahn Air's partner network encompasses more than 350 partner airlines. Bharat Kapoor, Regional Vice President, Hahn Air India, provides more insight into the company and about their unique business model of introducing airlines and agents to a world of NDC and who do not have to develop their own solution.

Prashant Nayak

Q Hahn Air has a unique business model involving airlines and travel agents. Tell us more about the same?

For more than 20 years, we have been enabling travel agencies to sell tickets of airlines they would normally not have access to. With our solutions, travel agents can, for example, issue tickets for airlines that do not grant ticketing authority in their market or that do not participate in the local BSP. With our products H1-Air and X1-Air, we even give travel agents access to airlines that are not in their GDS at all. Via the H1 and X1 codes, travel agents can book flights of these airlines and issue them on the insolvency-safe HR-169 ticket. More than 350 airlines already trust our solutions.

Q How many new airline partnerships have you forged in 2020 despite the difficulties the industry is facing due to COVID-19?

2020 was a challenging year. Nevertheless, we are very proud to have integrated 14 new partners this year. Of the new partners, Air Century (Y2), Air Liaison (DU), Blue Islands (SI), Corendon Airlines Europe (XR), Divi Divi Air (3R), Eastern Airways (T3), Emetebe Airlines (ET) Jet Fly (JFL) and Tayaran Jet (E8) join our X1-Air network. They are now available in Amadeus, Sabre, and Travelport under the designator X1. Cambodia Airways (KR) and Corendon Airlines (XC) complement our H1-Air network

and can be booked under the code H1 in all major GDSs. And finally, Air Canada (AC), Bamboo Airways (QH), Cambodia Airways (KR), Eastern Airlines (2D) and Thai Smile Airways (WE) have signed an interline agreement with Hahn Air. They are now available for ticketing in markets where they are not participating in the local billing and settlement systems and can be issued on our HR-169 ticket.

Q Hahn Air also has a huge network of travel agency partners across the globe. How do you work with them?

Travel agents appreciate our services, which are free, easy-to-use and secure. They do not have to leave their GDS to use our solutions, they can just use the standard reservation and ticketing processes as usual. All they need to do is select Hahn Air as the validating carrier. It is that simple. We have a dedicated team of global key account managers supporting travel agencies in understanding the many advantages of the Hahn Air products. For any ticketing issues, travel agents can 24/7 contact our reliable Service Desk. In addition, we keep our partners informed via regular newsletters and provide an



Bharat Kapoor

excellent website that offers helpful tools like GDS ticketing instructions and detailed information about our services.

What are the multiple challenges in your line of business where there is always a conflict and misunderstanding between the airline and the travel agents? How do you resolve their issues?

That's the beauty of our service. By acting as an intermediary between travel agents and airlines, we are the single point of contact for both sides. That way, we can make sure that conflicts and misunderstandings

do not even arise. With Hahn Air, everybody wins: the airlines gain more potential customers and can therefore sell more tickets. At the same time, the travel agents have access to more airlines and routes and can therefore offer more choices to their customers.

Q How important is technology for your kind of operations which is based on distribution services? What are your unique products helping in these services?

Technology is of course very important, and we pride ourselves on always using the latest standards that are available. We have our own innovation lab developing new ways for our partners to increase their revenue. In 2019, for example, we introduced our own NDC platform and were the first company to issue an airline ticket enabled by blockchain technology. However, we believe that the key to our success is – and has always been – the personal interaction with our partners. Technology cannot replace a conversation, personal training, or a helpful phone call.

That's why I'd say that a very unique feature of our services is our people. Our Service Desk and our dedicated account managers passionately assist travel agents in understanding how they can make the most of our solutions. That's what makes Hahn Air more than a ticket.

Q How is India positioned in your role of operations, specifically in the Asia-Pacific region?

As for India, it is an important market for us. Back in 2002, we first built our roots in the market through our appointed Service Partner Bird Travels, New Delhi. As we saw the potential that the market held, we decided to establish our own office in New Delhi in 2013. To acknowledge the importance of the market, we also established a dedicated Service Desk for India. The 24/7 Service Desk can be reached by e-mail at serviceindia@hahnair.com or on our toll-free number 1 800 1021169. In addition, I am happy to provide trainings, sales support and answers on how to increase a travel agency's revenue with the Hahn Air solutions.

Q Presently, there have been lots of changes in the aviation industry. According to you, what will be the industry like post COVID?

As a whole, our industry is experiencing a difficult phase. More airlines and travel agencies will rely on government aid to survive. It is much too early to predict how the market will develop, consolidate and shift with lowered customer demand, reduced business travel and inconveniences due to health and safety restrictions. We are just at the beginning of a fundamental change in air travel.

Post-COVID-19, we will continue to see an emphasis on security. When considering buying travel, passengers want to see their personal health, as well as their financial investment protected. Hahn Air's free insolvency protection Securix is automatically included with every HR-169 ticket and caters to this extra need for security and protection. Now more than ever, our insolvency protection serves as a strong argument for travel agents to sell our partners' tickets.

With Singapore Airlines new Kris+ Lifestyle app, customers in India can enjoy more options

Singapore Airlines has rolled out its recently launched lifestyle app Kris+ in India. The app is an innovative platform that brings payment, lifestyle, and rewards services together under one umbrella for its customers. Thus, in India, Kris+ combines the best in dining, retail and entertainment discounts, which will allow KrisFlyer members to get the most out of their membership even without flying.

Team TTJ

Kris+ has partnered with 32 local establishments across more than 1,500 outlets in the country, providing customised deals with privileges, especially curated for their customers. More partners will be progressively added in the coming months.

In addition, customers who travel to Singapore from India can also enjoy special offers and rewards at over 750 merchant outlets. Kris+ is also progressively adding more partners and merchants in Singapore and overseas in selected destinations to the platform.

KrisPay, the world's first blockchain-based airline loyalty digital wallet, is integrated with Kris+, enabling KrisFlyer members to earn and redeem miles instantly at over 750 Kris+ merchants in Singapore,

when they travel to the city-state. It will soon be enhanced with other in-app payment options, allowing users to simultaneously earn more miles with each purchase. Kris+ users can look forward to more features, along with the progressive addition of more merchants and services to the app.

SIA's investment in Kris+ is part of the Company's ongoing strategy to drive non-airline revenue streams in the coming years. The Kris+ ecosystem, which has been built to enhance customer-merchant relationships, will further power growth for the KrisFlyer frequent flyer business and broaden its brand appeal and recognition. This will allow customers to enjoy attractive discounts on their everyday purchases, while merchants can reach out to SIA's highly valued 4.7 million-strong KrisFlyer base.



Chen Sy Yen, General Manager India, Singapore Airlines

We are really proud and excited to launch Kris+ in India as it gives our KrisFlyer members a bouquet of everyday lifestyle privileges, even when they are not flying with us. Our vision is to create a comprehensive and updated lifestyle and payments ecosystem with Kris+, which will offer even more and better options and benefits for our global customer base, and thus bring additional value to our partners around the world.

Air Seychelles, waiting to re-establish network with the gradual re-opening of borders

Even though commercial flights between Seychelles and India are currently suspended, Air Seychelles aims to resume flights from India to Seychelles and Johannesburg, as soon as borders reopen. Presently, the airline is closely working with its company's experienced sales and marketing professionals, well-positioned in most Indian cities, to further develop, strengthen and reinforce their presence in the Indian market. Charles Johnson, Chief Commercial Officer, Air Seychelles shares his thoughts on the past and present situation of the airline and other aviation matters.

Prashant Nayak

As Seychelles is a geographically isolated island, and as all other international carriers withdrew service, Air Seychelles performed over fifty charters, most dedicated to cargo and repatriations. They also chased charter contracts throughout their region, and their international network went from five cities to over thirty destinations as their aircraft flew to West Africa, Europe, and even China.

"All of our international commercial flights ceased in March 2020, and at that time, most people only thought it would be for 1-2 months, but it dragged on until November 2020. We maintained domestic flying during this time, but down from an average of 40 flights per day to 4. So to stay afloat and from an expense viewpoint, we tried to cut costs as much as possible, including working from home, 50 per cent salary cuts for staff, and insourcing work that external contractors used to do, like cleaning the aircraft," says Johnson.

In this ongoing fight for survival and with plenty of ups and downs, Air Seychelles had a great November and December, and with Johannesburg and Tel Aviv coming back online, and the pent up demand was huge. However, since mid-January, the COVID issues in South Africa have meant they had to suspend that route, and in Israel, their own surging COVID numbers and quarantine restrictions have killed that business for the time being.

Johnson is hopeful as he mentions, "Seychelles is one of the fastest countries to vaccinate against COVID though, and we anticipate the Israeli market to return from March, and hopefully India and South Africa from

April. While we expect massive demand in the short term, we do feel that it will take 2-3 years before we return to 2019 levels. As per IATA, Pre COVID level - will return in 2024."

Air Seychelles is looking at cutting costs even more now, but they have done a great job of renegotiating contracts and making the airline as lean as possible. Their focus will be on strengthening the network as much as possible and taking fewer risks in new markets.

In a pandemic like this, it was also difficult for governments to manage and open up the skies. "During COVID, we noticed several governments exercising extreme protectionism over their national carriers. We do indeed think this helps, as an open-sky policy during these difficult times can dramatically affect fragile carriers like ourselves," says Johnson.

In order to further build resilience, Air Seychelles will continue to focus on business improvement, self-service, and partnerships which will also be their goal going forward.

Presently, there have been a lot of changes happening in the aviation industry, and bio-safety measures can be a regular part of the travel experience. Also post COVID, changing landscapes in airline operations are anticipated. "Some sort of global standard in



Charles Johnson

regards to health (i.e. vaccine, PCR, etc) will be required. I think it is here for the foreseeable future. Proof of vaccine will definitely be a requirement for travel, but hopefully, the PCR process, which can be expensive and unpleasant, will disappear after a majority of the world's population is vaccinated," assumes Johnson.

In Seychelles, they have adopted a 'health travel approval' that is now required to be submitted within 72 hours of departure. This allows their health dept to know who is coming into the country, their health history, etc. But Johnson feels a global standard, advanced by IATA, will most likely become the new norm.

'The most important form of resilience is in a strong balance sheet'

Apart from having successfully operated their Passenger Charter and CarGo line of business throughout the pandemic, Indigo Airlines also continuously took measures towards reducing their unit costs further, making their fleet more efficient, ensuring their capacity is right-sized to the market, and experimenting with new network and revenue models. Sanjay Kumar, Chief Strategy & Revenue Officer, Indigo Airlines says that the airlines various initiated cost optimisation measures, work on several revenue opportunities in addition to various measures to maintain the liquidity and finances has helped the airline sustain in these difficult times.

Prashant Nayak

Indigo has been fairly adept as a company in changing from long-term planning to capitalising on quick short-term opportunities. They had to take quick decisions to survive the most unprecedented crisis ever. They converted ten of their passenger aircraft into cargo in-cabin aircraft and have been very successful in CarGo operations over the last 10 months, significantly increasing the revenue from CarGo business. They also rapidly changed their business processes to behave like a charter carrier instead of a scheduled airline and have been very successful with this approach in international as well as domestic markets. All in all, the pandemic has changed the decision-making character of IndiGo from a methodical, analytical approach to quick decision making in a crisis mode.

"In addition to the charter operations (Passenger & CarGo), we initiated various other revenue and product enhancements to meet the changed requirement of the travellers. Some of the initiatives are the Flexi Fares which offer flexibility to change, bundled with seat, meal, and reduced cancellation charges. Secondly, our 6E Double Seat options offer customers to choose a next seat empty option, and our Tough Cookie option was launched to offer the COVID warriors (our Doctors and Nurses) a discount of up to 25 percent. We also enabled WhatsApp as a communication channel for the passengers opting for the same," shares Sanjay.

Domestic demand is picking up fast with people preferring to explore their own country in such times. Sanjay opines, "VFR travel will drive the demand in the long run as well, while we believe that corporate travel may remain tepid for some time as it has majorly been taken over by virtual meetings. Overall,

international operations may still be a challenge, but we expect to make a full recovery by the end of this year. As mentioned, domestic recovery has been strong, while international recovery is still facing challenges such as testing, quarantine with fear of virus as well. We expect some boost in the demand once the governments both central and in some states would relax the current restrictions."

At Indigo, they are consistently working hard to increase capacity, optimise costs and enhance liquidity, and they are also eager to be back on the path of growth. "Going forward, we will continue to operate our Passenger and CarGo charter operations, which helped the aviation industry survive the most unprecedented times. With the commencements of commercial flights effective 25 May 2020, we are seeing a steady growth of the business both in terms of number of flights as well as number of passengers. Currently, we operate above 1200 daily domestic flights, which are close to 80 per cent of the Pre COVID levels. On the international side, we are operating about 25 per cent of the Pre COVID levels through various Bubble flights. We expect with the easing of borders the international flight operations will also see similar growth," assures Sanjay.

Indigo is well-positioned geographically to expand into numerous high growth markets with their single-aisle product. Their four-corner strategy from the four cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata allows them to serve markets all the way from Moscow to Nairobi to Manila to Beijing, within a



Sanjay Kumar

range of six hours.

Speaking of being resilient in these tough times, Sanjay tells, "The most important form of resilience is in a strong balance sheet. Every airline must ensure that they have the ability to survive through the worst of a crisis in order to take advantage of the future recovery which inevitably follows every crisis. The airlines need to work with the various governments to ensure that there is a uniform and consistent response to any future pandemic. This response relates both to the onboard product and the airport processes being followed. Currently, airlines are following a set of processes for their operations and abiding by the set of rules/regulations. Airlines and governments need to work closely in to bring back the confidence of the traveller and the growth of the sector."

Vistara, still investing on expanding its fleet and network

Vistara is focused on improving connectivity within India, expanding and strengthening its presence across continents, and forging strong partnerships with many like-minded global airlines, to benefit their customers. Vinod Kannan, Chief Commercial Officer, Vistara, shares how the airline continues to seek new opportunities in these difficult times while remaining committed to its long-term growth strategy and remains optimistic about the new possibilities in time to come.

Sonika Bohra

The COVID-19 pandemic not only impacted Vistara financially but also affected the pace of their expansion, given the various factors, including restrictions on capacity deployment, continued suspension of scheduled international operations, softened demand, etc.

They also have been nimble in their approach and taken several measures to reduce non-customer facing operating expenditures while making every effort to conserve cash wherever possible. "We renegotiated various contracts with partners, vendors, and lessors to reduce cost. With the intent of protecting all jobs at Vistara, we had to even take the painful decision of reducing some staff costs by implementing salary cuts. We have been actively working towards maintaining a leaner cost structure while exploring newer avenues to supplement our earnings. To this end, we have also been leveraging opportunities such as commercial cargo and charter flights, and also introduced other ancillary services in our effort to generate additional revenue," shares Kannan.

Despite the challenges, Vistara has remained committed to its long-term expansion plans, albeit with temporary modifications. The airline sees great potential for long-haul direct flights from India, hence they have been steadily growing their global network under travel bubble agreements that India has entered with several other nations. They are staying on the course of their long-term vision and growth strategy of densifying their domestic network while expanding globally to become



Vinod Kannan

one of the world's best airlines.

The demand for domestic travel has been steadily picking up since the last quarter of 2020. Kannan tells, "Today, people are more confident of flying than they were earlier, and therefore, it may be safe to say that domestic air travel has entered a phase of recovery. We have been gradually mounting flights in our domestic network, and we are already operating at nearly 75 per cent of our pre-COVID capacity. However, deployment of capacity continues to remain regulated by the government, and for airlines, it also depends on passenger demand. The Indian Ministry of Civil Aviation currently allows airlines to operate at a maximum of 80 per cent of pre-COVID capacity."

However, when it comes to international operations, there is a long road to recovery. The scheduled international flights remain suspended, and travel restrictions continue to evolve in many parts of the world. Although certain international routes

continue to be viable for airlines to operate special flights as part of travel bubble agreements, the opportunities to scale up international operations are still largely limited. However, the news of the development and administration of COVID-19 vaccines from across the globe has brought considerable optimism among the aviation and travel industries. At Vistara, they are hopeful of a gradual return to normalcy across the globe, providing a favourable environment for restarting scheduled international flights.

"We continue to invest in expanding our fleet and network. Our experience during the ongoing pandemic boosts our confidence in our international expansion plans as we see a stronger preference for non-stop flights among customers. Vistara is uniquely positioned in the market with a clear, competitive edge to offer direct connectivity to long-haul destinations to and from India, especially as more wide-body aircraft are expected to join our fleet soon. While we are working out the delivery schedules of aircraft with Airbus and Boeing, we expect to receive the remaining four Boeing 787-9 Dreamliners in the financial year 2022 along with more from the order we placed with Airbus for A321neo and A320neo aircraft. Overall, we aim to have 70 aircraft by 2023," reveals Kannan, while speaking about strategies for the future.

While the COVID-19 crisis has exposed the volatile nature of the business environment across the globe and as an industry, the airline too has gained valuable lessons on being better prepared for future challenges. "I think it is crucial for businesses to be agile to quickly adjust to the

changing dynamics. As a relatively young airline, we have tried to remain nimble in our approach since the very beginning. This has helped us in quickly adapting to the changes in several instances,” opines Kannan.

It is seen that various government and regulatory bodies have supported the aviation industry navigate during such turbulent times. However, Kannan feels that there is scope for improvement in the overall infrastructure like developing more airports to overcome challenges like runway shortage, slot constraints, capacity constraints, etc. However, with the government’s increased focus on infrastructure development, they expect the situation to improve soon. Also, the airline constantly engages with the government authorities, together with other airlines, for cohesive solutions for the industry and is hopeful of favourable outcomes as we move ahead.

This pandemic has made us all put safety and hygiene in a different perspective altogether. In this context, technology has played a very significant role by making several processes touchless, thereby reducing the risk of contracting the virus. Thus, at Vistara they believe, it is a trend that is going to stay. They expect a larger number of such technological interventions to transform the way we travel. IT infrastructures will become more sophisticated with greater use of technologies like AI, AR, VR, Robotics, etc. and the aviation industry will need enhanced processes and systems for passenger data collection in line with data privacy protection rules.

Another notable trend is the growing preference for non-stop, direct flights to avoid the risk of contracting the virus while in transit. Vistara has already witnessed this trend emerge and expect it to only get stronger in the future. Thus, with their plans for

direct flights to major cities across the globe, they believe that they will be in a good position to meet these needs and demands.

For safety and hygiene for all, Vistara has introduced several tech-enabled processes to reduce physical contact between their staff and passengers. This is the need of the hour and is going to be the focus of the entire industry for a long time. They are investing significantly in this direction as well.

Bio-safety measures in effect today are based on the current environment and understanding of COVID-19. “As the situation evolves, these measures may also evolve with it. However, in the larger context, we believe that safety and hygiene will continue to be among the top considerations for customers and bio-safety measures will continue, in some shape or form, in the foreseeable future,” concludes Kannan.

SriLankan focused on reconnecting and consolidating its position in key markets

At SriLankan, they are ready to commence operation on major routes like in the pre COVID days, but it is a matter of increasing the scale with viability decisions which would be the main decisive factor. V Ravindran, Regional Manager, SriLankan Airlines, India and Bangladesh, shares more about the past and the future at the airline.

Prashant Nayak

SriLankan over the past year has taken several initiatives with the industry stakeholders to support and to represent the country and as a national carrier to commence the air transportation to boost tourism and the economy. They also operated cargo flights to a select few destinations in the Middle East, Far East, European Union, and Indian Sub Continent, and had scheduled passenger operations to the Maldives and operated special repatriation flights to India from Australia.

Speaking on whether the business is picking up, V Ravindran says, “It is a tough question. The people who have desperate requirements to travel are opting while complying with the protocols and the guidelines given by the Government authorities. We are optimistic the situation will be in control after the administration of the vaccine, however, in my opinion, passenger

capacity to return to pre-coronavirus pandemic levels by mid-November or later.”

SriLankan wants to prioritise Indian destinations and few new destinations such as Korea and Sydney, which are in the pipeline. They will be putting their efforts to strengthen the current network and will temporarily suspend certain routes until it regains the pre-COVID business level. Certain cost-cutting measures also will be in place in consultation with the stakeholders.

“The pandemic has been a good lesson and every organisation has to have reserves to face this type of challenges and all costs to be critically evaluated while not to be hesitant to tough decisions as well. However, as the government is the main shareholder of SriLankan, they will take all possible measures to keep the airline flying,” implies V Ravindran.



V Ravindran

Presently, there have been a lot of changes in the aviation industry. Safety and hygiene will be the utmost requirement and priority, and both airline and passengers have to critically evaluate spending by every cent in terms of service and relevant features. On this, V Ravindran speaks, “I do believe that bio-safety measures will become a regular part of the travel experience for at least for a foreseeable future, but, I wish it could be temporary.”

Etihad Airways

Adaptable and innovative in the changing aviation dynamics

Etihad Airways has navigated the past year with adaptability, remaining nimble and responding quickly as the scenario evolved. Besides that, the wellness of their guests and employees remains an utmost priority. Neerja Bhatia, Vice President, Indian subcontinent, Etihad Airways explains in detail the initiatives and measures being adopted by one of the most resilient and leading global carriers.

Prashant Nayak

As the COVID situation took over completely in 2020, to stay afloat, Etihad Airways redeployed its fleet as the market changed. They deployed some of its 787-10 aircraft on cargo routes to supplement Etihad Cargo's fleet of Boeing 777 freighters. Etihad operated various special cargo flights from Abu Dhabi to several destinations on its global route network including Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Kochi, and Bengaluru. With a majority of their fleet on the ground for a few weeks, Etihad embarked on the biggest aircraft maintenance programme in its history to ensure that it was in its best shape for when it returned to flying.

In 2020, they launched 'Etihad Wellness', an expanded and more comprehensive health and hygiene programme and customer guide. This builds on the stringent measures already put in place by the airline to deal with COVID-19. Etihad Wellness is championed by specially trained Wellness Ambassadors, an industry-first initiative.

The airline also introduced a COVID-19 global wellness insurance cover – just one of the ways that Etihad promises to keep their guests protected with Etihad Wellness. The cover is included with every Etihad Airways ticket for travel up to March 31, 2021. Lastly, Etihad remains the first and only airline in the world that requires 100 per cent of its passengers to show a negative PCR test before departure and on arrival in Abu Dhabi carried out a maximum of 72 hours before their flight departure time.

"As the situation remains dynamic, we retain a pragmatic approach to network planning, increasingly focusing on routes that make financial sense. No-one has a crystal ball to predict how the air travel landscape will shape up in the coming months as several travel restrictions are still in place and countries are likely to open their borders at different times. We have been working closely with the UAE government and global aviation authorities to ensure we gradually grow our network. Guests can

enjoy a quarantine-free stay in Abu Dhabi when they fly from select countries or transfer to up to 60 destinations across Asia, Australia, Europe, the Middle East, and North America," says Neerja.

Etihad is in the middle of a five-year transformation. This has positioned the business well and they are already benefiting from the process of going back to basics and challenging all costs. It has also given them the agility to better manage operations through the COVID-19 crisis and be prepared for when air travel markets reopened. The restructuring sees the airline continuing its transformation into a mid-sized, full-service carrier concentrating on its fleet of wide-body aircraft. They continue to review all aspects and areas of their business. They have introduced many operational changes and continue to develop and enhance their guest offering with more choices available in all cabins, and more travel solutions through greater system-wide use of innovation and technology.

Like everyone, the global health crisis that hit Etihad in 2020 was unprecedented, but it has been a year of learning. Neerja mentions, "We navigated these times with agility and adaptability. Those that don't adapt won't survive. As a business, we have stayed focused and maintained momentum. The key to survival has also been transforming every challenge and crisis into an opportunity. As highlighted earlier, with a majority of our fleet on the ground for a few weeks last year, Etihad embarked on the biggest aircraft maintenance programme in its history to ensure that it was in its best shape for when it returned to flying. Sustainability is going to play an even bigger role in the post-



Neerja Bhatia

COVID-19 world. Airlines and wider industry organisations that adapt to meet the needs of a carbon-neutral future are those that will lead the future of aviation."

As we step further into the post COVID world, there will likely be an increased focus on health and wellness certification. Etihad has been working with a variety of different companies, some within the industry, and some outside of it, to develop the technology required for a global health certification system. Etihad is one of the first airlines globally to launch the IATA Travel Pass. It is a mobile app to help passengers easily and securely manage their travel in line with government requirements for COVID-19 tests or vaccines. The IATA Travel Pass will enable Etihad's guests to create a 'digital passport' to receive COVID-19 test results and verify they are eligible to undertake their journey. It will initially be offered to Etihad's guests on selected flights from Abu Dhabi in the first quarter of 2021.

"Passenger safety and wellness will always be a top priority for us. Some safety measures and changes introduced last year in light of the pandemic are likely to be extended or adapted in the near future as the situation evolves. As highlighted above, innovative measures with digitisation in air-travel experiences and health/wellness certification will be a focus," concludes Neerja.

‘Our priority is largely on safety, hygiene, and sustainability’

As the largest airline flying consistently throughout the pandemic, Qatar Airways accumulated unrivalled experience in how to carry passengers safely and reliably during these uncertain times. As they take on the New Year with optimism, they aim to continue enhancing and amplifying their existing offerings while introducing new ones, to cater to the ever-evolving needs of their passengers. Karthik Viswanathan, Regional Manager, Indian Subcontinent, Qatar Airways shares that despite the economic impact of COVID-19 on the aviation industry, Qatar Airways continued to invest in its products and services to ensure that its customer experience remains unparalleled and the best in the world.

Rachita Sehgal

Qatar Airways was able to continue flying throughout the pandemic thanks to its varied fleet of modern, fuel-efficient aircraft that allowed it to offer the right passenger and cargo capacity in each market as its operations were not dependent on any specific aircraft type. The airline's fleet of 53 Airbus A350 and 30 Boeing 787 are the ideal choices for the most strategically important long-haul routes to Africa, the Americas, Europe, and Asia-Pacific regions. In the last few months of 2020, Qatar Airways took delivery of four Airbus A350-1000s, reaffirming its position as the largest operator of Airbus A350 aircraft with an average age of 2.7 years. All were fitted with the airline's multi-award-winning Business Class seat, Qsuite.

“Indeed, the pandemic has been challenging but we are optimistic that travel will steadily return, limited by entry restrictions rather than customers' confidence. While the pandemic has tremendously affected the aviation sector with a unique set of challenges resulting from a more restrictive travel environment and subdued demand. But with the promising developments such as the vaccine rolling out across the world, I am very hopeful that global commercial travel will resume soon, and the aviation sector will function the same way as before,” assures Karthik.

On board, the airline has continued to deliver its full dining experience, comfort amenities and award-winning service, with enhanced safety measures. In Business Class, the airline's Dine-on-Demand service is now presented fully covered on a tray with our beverage selection. In Economy Class, Qatar Airways' full dining experience 'Quisine' is available, with food and cutlery served



Karthik Viswanathan

completely sealed as usual on a tray.

Qatar Airways will be the first airline in the Middle East to begin testing the innovative new IATA Travel Pass 'Digital Passport' mobile app, in partnership with IATA, from March 2021. The trial will play an important role in the airline's vision to have a more contactless, secure, and seamless travel experience for its passengers. On this, Kartik says, “With innovation and technology, we not only plan to enhance the customer experience but also ensure optimum safety levels. Qatar Airways currently operates more than 800 weekly flights to over 120 destinations across the globe. By the end of March 2021, Qatar Airways plans to rebuild its network to 130 destinations. Many cities will be served with a strong schedule with daily or more frequencies.”

Qatar Airways currently operates

more than 800 weekly flights to over 120 destinations across the globe. By the end of March 2021, Qatar Airways plans to rebuild its network to 130 destinations. Qatar Airways Cargo is adding additional flights using passenger aircraft to carry freight to meet the global demand for cargo, especially medical supplies. In the past few months, the airline has transported over 250,000 tonnes of medical and aid supplies to impacted regions around the globe.

“Qatar Airways' commitment towards consumers continues to make travel experience better, seamless, and safe. For the same, we have been taking various initiatives to ensure we meet the customer expectations while also keeping the business steady. That said, our priority is largely on safety and hygiene, and sustainability. It makes absolute sense to especially prioritise investments in the field of digital innovations that will aid in the

safety of our passengers both on board and on the ground,” explains Karthik.

The airline has successfully managed to navigate the operations without disruption during challenging times. Qatar Airways has also become the first global airline in the world to achieve the prestigious 5-Star COVID-19 Airline Safety Rating by international air transport rating organisation.

Karthik feels besides implementing strategies to survive, airlines should work closely with governments around the world to resume commercial flights in line with entry restrictions. Also, Governments need to work with international bodies such as IATA and ICAO to establish and formalise regulatory guidelines so that airlines can operate with certainty and stay focused on the business of flying.

Fiji's 'Care Fiji Commitment' program to ensure traveller safety once borders re-open

In anticipation of Fiji's borders re-opening to international travellers, Fiji has introduced the 'Care Fiji Commitment' which is a program dedicated to enhanced safety, health and hygiene protocols to ensure the utmost safety of travellers to Fiji in a post COVID-19 world. The introduction of the program represents a destination-wide assurance that Fiji is ready to welcome travellers safely back to its shores upon re-opening. And with this newly added layer of security, travellers are one step closer to the 'Place Where Happiness Finds You'.

Team TTJ

Since the declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, Fiji has made health and safety its top priority. Due to the country's quick and effective response to COVID-19, Fiji was able to contain the virus from a very early stage and mitigate any risk of the outbreak within the islands. The government's effective containment measures put in place in March 2020 meant Fiji was able to officially declare itself COVID-contained in June 2020. Now, with the introduction of the Care Fiji Commitment, travellers can be assured that Fiji is a safe destination to enjoy on their next vacation to the islands.

"The Care Fiji Commitment is our assurance to travellers that the health and safety of everyone who lives and travels here remains our number one priority," says Tourism Fiji Acting CEO, Robert Thompson. "Now, with this added layer of confidence in place, Fiji is primed to be an ideal post-pandemic destination – one that is and has remained COVID-19 safe, allows natural social distancing, has a wide variety of islands to choose from, offers mostly boutique resorts with under 50 rooms total, and is known for its wide-open beaches and expansive rainforests," adds Thompson.

The Care Fiji Commitment program consists of the following key components:

Globally Recognised Control & Mitigation Measures

The Care Fiji Commitment is an ongoing commitment to maintaining protection measures against COVID-19 in Fiji. This includes having testing and surveillance processes aligned with the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations, local testing available at the Fiji Centre for Disease Control, WHO accredited isolation facilities, clear procedures in place for suspected cases, dedicated drop-in fever clinics for concerned visitors showing symptoms and a

dedicated COVID-19 hotline.

Wellness Ambassadors

A designated Wellness Ambassador at each business will be available to travellers throughout their journey to assist with any COVID-19 related questions or concerns that may arise. The Wellness Ambassadors have undergone extensive training and are dedicated to implementing and upholding all hygiene protocols and COVID-19 safe practices.

CareFiji Contact Tracing App

Travellers will be strongly encouraged to download the careFiji app which is a privacy-preserving, Bluetooth-based mobile app which utilises non-location tracking technology providing Bluetooth is enabled. It gives an added layer of security for visitors that any contact with a COVID-19 case will be quickly and seamlessly identified.

Two-Way Commitment

Travellers will also be asked to commit to the program by postponing any travel if they feel unwell, communicating with the Wellness Ambassadors as needed, downloading the careFiji app and adhering to all social distancing, sanitisation, and face mask regulations, where required.

For added assurance, travellers can book their trip with full confidence through Care Fiji Commitment Partners. To date, nearly 200 of Tourism Fiji's industry partners – including the resorts, restaurants, tour operators, attractions and more - have gone through an extensive training process as their first step in making the Care Fiji Commitment. The process is still ongoing and a full list of approved partners will be available once complete.

To add strength, recently, the Care Fiji Commitment programme has received recognition by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), a global body on Travel and Tourism. The WTTC 'Safe Travels' stamp



CAREFIJI COMMITMENT

allows travellers to recognise destinations and companies adopting health and hygiene protocols that are aligned with WTTC's Global Safe Travels Protocols.

With the 'Safe Travels' stamp added to it, the CFC gives increased confidence to international travellers and will help ensure a seamless travel experience as border restrictions ease. The globally recognised stamp has been adopted by many other destinations across the world and serves as an important signal to travellers, workers and other stakeholders that there is a consistent global approach to health and safety best practices. To be endorsed by WTTC, Tourism Fiji submitted Fiji's best practice protocols defined in the Fijian Government's COVID-19 Safe Guidelines for tourism businesses and the comprehensive process involved for businesses to make the Care Fiji Commitment.

Regarding this development, Thompson said, "The Safe Travels stamp means our programme follows the World Travel & Tourism Council's international protocols. Our team is working hard to ensure that all businesses in the tourism sector are signed up for the Care Fiji Commitment programme. We're encouraging other companies that have not expressed their interest to do so by reaching out to our team."

IATO Elections

BATTLE LINES DRAWN

Battle lines have already been drawn by the two contesting teams for the forthcoming election of one of the largest travel bodies in India. The members of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), the apex body of Inbound Tour Operators in India are waiting for the D-day on March 06, 2021, as the election results will define which team guides the members and the sector out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ravi Sharma

The long-postponed elections of IATO which was supposed to be held in April 2020 will now be held on March 6, 2021, due to COVID-19. Early this month, the association revealed the final list of the contestant for the forthcoming election of Executive Committee Members for the next term to be held in New Delhi.

While Homa Mistry, Chief Executive Officer, Trail Blazer Tours has been appointed as the Returning Officer for the much-talked election, outgoing Vice President of IATO, Rajiv Mehra (Uday Tours & Travels) will take on Lally Mathews (Divine Voyages) for the post of President. Outgoing Sr. Vice President, E.M. Najeeb (Air Travel Enterprises) a big-time player from South India, who is the Senior Vice President in the present team, will be contesting

against Sarab Jit Singh (Travelite India).

For the post of Vice President, Lajpat Rai (Lotus Trans Travel) and Ravi Gosain (Erco Travels) have filed their nominations. Rajesh Mudgill (Planet India Travels) will take on Rajnish Kaistha, (Paradise Holidays India) for Hony. Secretary, while Sunil Mishra (Cosmos Tours & Travels) has filed his nomination against Viney Tyagi (Uni Crystal Holidays) for the post of Hony. Treasurer, Raj Bajaj (Perfect Travels & Tours) and Sanjay Razdan (Razdan Holidays) are contesting against each other for the post of Hony. Joint Secretary. Executive committee members will also contest the election in the active and allied categories.

While IATO has been active on many fronts before and during the pandemic, it is also one of the large associations which failed to get

support from the various ministries in the past one-year despite their several attempts to come out from the COVID situation. This makes it important for travel associations to work together towards getting industry status for the sector. However, now while it looks like the travel industry is gradually recovering, but the unpredictability of the pandemic is keeping the industry and travellers at bay and thus, even this year, the industry is facing the vital question of reviving the travel scene ever more and the horizon still doesn't look very clear.

So with the team divided into two fronts as 'Team Moving Forward' and the second one as 'Team for Change', TTJ had opportunities to talk to a few contestants in each team as to what are their motivation, strength and commitments if elected? Here is what they had to say...

IATO MEMBER - YOUR
RELIABLE PARTNER



INDIAN ASSOCIATION
OF TOUR OPERATORS

IATO MEMBER - YOUR
RELIABLE PARTNER



INDIAN ASSOCIATION
OF TOUR OPERATORS

IATO MEMBER - YOUR
RELIABLE PARTNER



INDIAN ASSOCIATION
OF TOUR OPERATORS

TEAM FOR CHANGE

Working to ensure collectively bring about a positive change in IATO



Lally Mathews
Divine Voyages

My motivation and strength is of the membership which has given me the opportunity of contesting again. We will do our best as a TEAM to convince the Government for some relief. It seems that the Government cannot give any cash subsidy, so we will ask for soft loans at three-four percent with interest and

installments to be deferred to 2022 or 2023. This can give some relief to the membership. Thus, the team will always do best for the membership in every aspect. It has to be noted that there is nothing any association can do against a pandemic of this kind. We have to keep prodding the government for their help.



E.M. Najeel
Air Travel Enterprises

we could not do it even in this term because the present leadership was holding on to it.

Secondly, we have been demanding the waiver for the annual membership fees during the pandemic period because the members have been in real trouble and this has not been accepted at all. Talking about women's participation in the IATO EC, that has also not happened. We wanted IATO to be a full pan India organisation with representation from every place, every segment, every sector, and every nook and corner of the country, but it is mostly perceived as north-centric. The leadership has been doing it intentionally because of their vested interest to keep it as a pocket organization.

This time, we have come under the leadership of Lally Mathews and have found new people, including youths, experienced people, and new faces from different sectors for the team. We want to bring the right combination of bright youngsters and experienced mature persons to fulfil our team's intentions.

I have a lot of experience working in this industry from the last four decades, focusing in Kerala and South India as well as at the national level too. I have been on the national advisory committee of tourism with the UPA Government as well as the NDA Government. I have been functioning in IATO as well as several travel and trade organisations, and hence my expertise can be shared for the benefit of the members. Tourism is my passionate subject, and I would like to support my members who can survive and revive tourism in such extreme conditions and contribute to the economic growth of the country.

Lastly, I would like to say, we have always worked with the government, the state, as well as the central government for the growth of tourism and we want to work with the government in the future too. We want to partner with the government, to make them understand the importance of tourism and convince them to extend more financial support for the tourism sector in the coming days.

What is crucial for IATO at present is a complete change of team required in its helm of affairs, and it is very important for the organisation's existence and future growth. The last time four of us were elected, we tried our level best to influence every major decision for the benefit of the members, but at the same time, a couple of things which we were demanding for the last several years could not be achieved. One example is that of the constitutional amendment which is pending for the last seven to eight years. We have been continuously demanding it, yet



Rajesh Mudgill
Planet India Travels

Well, there was some section of people who wanted to delay the elections. Not fighting its own battle was the biggest mistake of IATO leadership. 2020 was tough for our members and in turn for the association as well. Members had high hopes from the government

and were very disappointed when they found that the government has left them high and dry and the leadership was not ready to stand up for the members as they never wanted to confront the government.

We have learnt a lot from the pandemic. Firstly, we should keep on increasing our membership rather than decreasing it. The government sees numbers and we must add numbers to show our strength. Secondly, the association must build a robust database so that we can prove our point backed by data. Learn to fight our own battle rather than depending on some other organizations, who have their own battle to fight.

Our team is a good mix of experience and young technological minds and well spread across India.

We would take this challenge head-on with the combined strength and vision of our members. We need to develop a culture where only a select group of people are not assigned all the jobs, but we should involve more and more members who can help in turning around the tide.

If elected, I will work for generating revenue streams for the members. Greater opportunities for all our members, bringing about transparency, inclusiveness and work out the short and long-term goals for the association for overall growth. Above all, I would like to stand for my members whenever and wherever they will need me and take their voice to the corridors of government without fear and self-interest.



Lajpat Rai
Lotus Trans Travel

My motivation for contesting is the present tourism scenario and my strength is my past working experience with IATO in various capacities. The pandemic has given a 'New Vision' that we must keep a cushion for rainy days, and the mission is to focus on the domestic tourism market as well as inbound tourism. Also, if possible to create an alternate source of income as well to

keep afloat. The biggest lesson learnt is to be ready for any eventuality and be more supportive to the members in this pandemic situation.

If elected, shall do my best to convince all the stakeholders to work towards better coordination among the members and the various other tourism associations and the Ministry of Tourism to enhance the tourism numbers.



Sanjay Razdan
Razdan Holidays

As a simple member of the association, I would say that the leadership has failed us in more than many ways. This is the main reason that most members are disgruntled and frustrated.

Yes! I agree that the pandemic has been tough and would have been tough for the association as well. However, there is an old saying, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going". At times we need to think out of the box. This pandemic

has mainly taught us that we must stay united. Now the question is, who should have taken the initiative in this direction? In my opinion, it's the prime duty of any association leadership to interact with the members on a regular basis. If there is a problem, where would we go? In any tough time, the leadership must call regular meetings via zoom, etc and talk to members and provide the much-needed solace. I remember the president of ATOAI used to call

zoom meetings regularly area-wise all over India. A small talk or just asking, "How are you?" makes a big difference.

This pandemic has no doubt has left all of us distraught, with no revenues for almost a year now. Most other businesses have re-started except tourism in general and Inbound Tourism in particular. As far as Razdan Holidays is concerned, we have used this free time to create new tours and discovered new areas and itineraries. At the same time, we have taken the initiative to educate our fellow DMC's into areas which they would have never done otherwise. In October 2020, we organised the first educational FAM Trip to Himachal Pradesh, the first-ever four-wheel-drive expedition with 19 DMC's from Delhi NCR to scale 'ShinkuLa' on 4x4 vehicles via the new architectural marvel 'Atal Tunnel'.

Then, in January 2021, Razdan Holidays organised another educational FAM trip – the first-ever 'Desert Trail Expedition' in Rajasthan visiting Churu, Udaipurwati, and Samode. More than 50 percent route was over Desert Sand

Trails, Riverbeds, and unknown villages. The participants also indulged in Dune Bashing under expert guidance. As I am myself an expert off-roader having expertise in driving 4x4 cars, the idea was to impart some special skills to my friends. These trips also opened new areas and new itineraries for promotion and these DMC's can sell in the future to their clients. For me, it was like giving back something to the industry. As far as the readiness is concerned, we are absolutely ready and impatiently waiting for foreign tourists to come back. We will of course welcome them with renewed vigour, energy and love.

With God's grace and support of friends and well-wishers in IATO, if elected, our team under the guidance of Lally Mathews has many plans for the benefit of members. To start with we would want to achieve all the points as mentioned in our manifesto. We want to make IATO member-friendly, easily approachable, and accountable on all fronts. For us, IATO is 'For Members and Of Members'.

TEAM MOVING FORWARD

United in their vision and mission to revive the down and beaten tourism industry



Rajiv Mehra
Uday Tours & Travels

My motivation and strength of the 'Team Moving Forward' is the strong willpower of my team members of working selflessly for IATO and the industry with zeal, leaving aside any personal agenda and gains. This we have shown in the last three years, as most of my team members are present in the existing EC and have extended their full support in all our efforts to deliver our best to the members. We are all ready to work for the revival of the industry and take the challenges for which we would work closely with the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, and would emphasise the following issues which we have also included in our manifesto:

- Request the Ministry of Tourism

to start marketing and promotions by organising roadshows, participation in international travel marts, organise FAM trips for FTOs, etc., as soon as the restriction on e-Visa is removed and international flights start operating

- Get the IATO website linked with the MoT website so that members can receive queries/leads
- Promote the IATO website in different source markets to get leads/queries for our members
- Request the Ministry to provide booths to tour operators in all major international travel marts at a very subsidised cost so that members can participate in maximum marts.

For the betterment of the association and the members, our wish is to continue SEIS for 5 years, to get SEIS released for 2019-20, to get the MDA Guidelines further relaxed, and also to get more relaxation in MoT Guidelines for recognition so that more and more members can avail benefits for which we have recommended the following to our Ministry:-

- Continued follow-up with the Ministry of Finance/Commerce/

DGFT, regarding the release of SEIS Scripts for 2019-20

- Getting SEIS for the tour operators for the next 5 years by getting it included in Foreign Trade Policy 2021-25 with the easy terms and conditions suitable to our members
- Removal of the requirement of minimum Rs. 2 crores turnover of foreign exchange earnings in MDA Guidelines for overseas promotion so that all our members can be benefited
- Relaxation in qualification for MoT Recognition by adding diploma/certificate of Tourism & Hospitality Skill Council

Seeing the present conditions of our members and other colleagues in the travel trade, we have learnt and would advise our members to save funds for such situations, do not do cost-cutting for short-term gains and benefits and keep proper margin in your profit. This would help us to survive in such conditions. Our aim for Moving Forward Team is to think big and not lure our members with small petty benefits. We are going to work for the revival of business for our esteemed members. Therefore, we are seeking votes for the entire team to complete our unfinished agenda.



Sarab Jit Singh
Travelite (India)

The team moving forward consists of motivated and committed individuals with years of experience both as tour operators themselves as well as working for the industry as IATO EC Members in the past.

The pandemic has indeed played havoc with the tourism sector, especially inbound, with no international flights and no visas being granted by the government. The Moving Forward team after elections will draw out a working strategy to engage the Ministry of Tourism (MoT), Ministry of Commerce (MoC) as well as other ministries for a collective strategy that helps tourism to be back on rails at the earliest. We also understand the importance of IATO members who have immense experience in engaging foreign tour operators and convincing them to

start selling India in their regions. For this purpose, in my opinion, the smaller and self-employed tour operators will be most effective and their contribution may prove to be a game-changer.

As Senior Vice President, I will be responsible for the chapters and regions and other sub-committees. We definitely need the most effective chapters and regional committees for this we are going to engage with the members and set up new teams within the first three months. This pandemic was a unique challenge, and we hope that nothing like this happens in the future. However, there are certain lessons to be learned even at the association level which will be discussed and a system will be brought in place so that the industry is more prepared to face such challenges.



Ravi Gosain
Erco Travels

Team Moving Forward consists of highly motivated and dedicated individuals to serve IATO. In the previous tenure, every individual candidate had proved their capabilities to deliver on different

There is also plan-B to work in the direction to be self-sustained and look for avenues to make IATO help members generate business.

As per the IATO constitution, the VP is directly involved in membership development, looks into seminars, conventions and develop marketing activities. If elected, I will dedicatedly work on business-oriented seminars, and overseas marketing activities both online and offline, and it will be high on my agenda. This will ensure members generate business. IATO convention is one of the most anticipated annual events, which not only gives a lot of knowledge but also gives an impressive networking platform. I will look into making the platform more tech-enabled and keep participants engaged for a longer duration, even beyond the convention period.

Secondly, I will also strengthen the IATO membership base on a pan-India basis. Membership base was the major issue in explaining to the government about the number of people employed in tourism, as it is a highly 'unorganised sector'.

Lastly, the pandemic has given us some great lessons in life and the important one which I realised from the association point of view is that we need to be more self-sustained and keep ourselves in a better position to deal with such undue situations and work as a strong entity to support members with ideas and try to upgrade their skills.

subjects. It's a great combination of experience and young minds which is very important to excel in membership benefits. We are passing through the most difficult times in our business life cycle so far, current IATO team led by Pronab Sarkar and Rajiv Mehra worked very hard to get some relief for the tourism industry and left no stone unturned on various government and bureaucratic fronts. Unfortunately, the pandemic largely affected the tourism industry and we are still looking for avenues to survive and revive. We want to continue our efforts in this direction and keep on doing efforts to bring some happiness to the faces of tourism industry professionals.



Rajnish Kaistha
Paradise Holidays India

The Moving Forward team has like-minded professionals with a good mix of old and new. We have taken three EC members from out of Delhi and it shall give IATO a wider representation.

Our profile is of educated and experienced members who are

successfully running their tourism business for many years. The pandemic has given much more resilience to work for the industry to bounce back.

The members of our team have experience and strength to survive the pandemic. Tourism is a peacetime activity so obviously, world order needs to be in place. Challenge is to restart tourism and the much-needed vaccination drive shall be over within this period and international borders shall open up. India needs strategic marketing abroad and synergy by both government and private partnerships and roadshows can play a very vital role here. I have realised that it's not MOT but various other ministries such as Finance, Revenue, Home, etc., that needs to be in sync with IATO and its members to fulfil our needs. I shall definitely work hard to get tourism in

the concurrent list of government to get more benefits for the industry.

The tourism sector does not feature in the Centre, State, or Concurrent lists. We suggest that tourism be included in the Concurrent List of the Constitution of India. For this, we need to work hard for lawmakers to understand our requirements and listen to industry voices. This will enable the Centre and States to effectively regulate the sector and frame policies for growth of this highly direct and indirect employment intensive sector.

We suggest that tourism exports are treated at par with other exports and services, and such transactions may be zero rated for GST without stopping the Inflow of input credits. Tourism services provided to foreign tourists in India on receipt of foreign exchange should be treated as "Deemed Export" and exemption of GST should be made available.

Much awaited Mobile app for seamless communication with members shall be worked immediately within a week of being elected. Also, upgrade the IATO secretariat to be more efficient and member-friendly.

The pandemic came as a bolt from the blue and hit 7 billion earthlings as it had never. Brutal as its effects have been, it gave us much-needed time to introspect. Tourism is the first casualty of any geopolitical happening. So, we need to educate our members accordingly to be always prepared for any eventuality. It's not easy but to get some kind of fund to support members and it can come from something insuring the gratuity for all. At Paradise Holidays, I have supported all my staff during these tough times by insuring the gratuity on an annual basis.



Raj Bajaj
Perfect Travels & Tours

Groomed by my legendary father, Late Badri Bajaj, Past President IATO, it is he who motivated me to renounce my brilliant engineering career of global repute based out of Silicon Valley. Thinking analytically, lateral and logical are strong attributes,

which I continue to apply over the last 38 years of intense passion for tourism, deep-rooted in my DNA, with 100 per cent commitment to serve IATO since its very inception. Over the years, my devotional service to humanity and IATO in various capacities including propagating the Incredible India campaign at many roadshows internationally is known to all. In the upcoming election, I have volunteered for the post of Hony. Joint secretary to serve IATO and the fraternity with similar zeal.

My progressive initiative for 2021-23 includes:

- Envisage increasing the membership from the existing 1700

members to a target of at least 20 per cent and growth to have nice effectiveness in the corridors of Ministries.

- Motivate existing members for greater participation and to encourage members to come forward with their valuable inputs and put to the leadership of IATO for strong government representation to be more members-centric.
- To develop synergy between active and allied members for synchrony of marketing and knowledge sharing of newer, innovative and niche tourism products through regular educative webinars and workshops for the benefit of the entire membership. Endeavour to make business sense for members and to share the best practices.
- In coordination with Industry partners, will persuade the Ministry of Surface and Transport for the adoption of 'One India One tax policy' during the dossier finalisation of the revised Motor Vehicle Act.
- Strengthen IATO secretariat with robust and effective ecosystem analytical approach day-to-day activities including regular and periodic updation of membership data, consistent and faster two-way communication with members.

To conclude, my humble appeal to all is to mandate and elect a stable and sincere team with leadership qualities having a sharp focus on deliverables.



ADTOI's 10th Annual Convention at Kevadia injects confidence and boosts the morale of its members

The 2-day physical event held at the Convention Hall, Tent City 2, was a first of its kind post COVID-19 and was supported by Gujarat Tourism and MoT. The convention was inaugurated on 12th February 2021 with the theme 'Domestic Tourism–Hope for the Revival' and saw around 400 people in attendance reflecting the will of the travel trade fraternity to reopen business.

Prashant Nayak

With required protocols and safety measures in place, there could be no better place than the Statute of Unity, Kevadia, and no better occasion than the annual convention of ADTOI to spread this message. Kevadia is the right example of how tourism can touch the lives of people at every level. Kevadia has transformed into a complete family destination with all amenities. It has direct rail connectivity with major cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Varanasi, Chennai, Rewa, and Ahmedabad to name a few. The Ahmedabad-Kevadia Jan Shatabdi also has the Vistadome Coach, which provides visitors a unique experience.

"Gujarat is a pioneer state looking at tourism seriously and doing all that is possible to showcase the state to the rest of India to experience incredible India. So

we held the ADTOI 10th Annual Convention 2021 at Statue of Unity (SOU), which has become one of the upcoming major destinations in the country for domestic



Chetan Gupta

tourists," said Chetan Gupta, Convention Chairman.

Arvind Singh, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, and Rupinder Brar, Addl. Director-General, Ministry of Tourism were guests at the inaugural ceremony. Singh said that India has a robust domestic market which could soften the impact of COVID-19 as compared with nations that rely largely on international tourists. Post lockdown and as the control over the spread of pandemic is achieved, it is widely agreed that domestic tourism will recover faster than international tourism. He also added that the restrictions on travellers have been eased and interstate travel has started all across the country.

Rupinder Brar opined how Kevadia is an ideal example of how tourism can completely turn around the socio-economic situation of a region, generating employment opportunities for thousands of tribals in and around the region.

The Union Minister of State (IC) for Tourism & Culture, Prahlad Singh Patel also addressed his inaugural speech through a video message. "The slogan of 'Dekho Apna Desh' by Prime Minister has given a boost to domestic tourism. If we work with well intentions and planning, we can achieve great things and this monument (Statue of Unity) is proof of that. You will get to see many such wonderful things in the Karmbhoomi of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," said



Patel. He also emphasised that India should reach the top position from the 34th spot in tourism soon.

The second day started early morning with the 'Ekta Marathon' and many enthusiastic members participated in the run. During the day, business sessions were held with Arvind Singh speaking on the 'Role of Aviation in Promotion of Tourism' at the Convention. Singh, who in January 2021 took the charge of tourism secretary after over a year-long stint as chairman of the Airports Authority of India (AAI) made the session interesting and worthwhile with his knowledge on the subject.

Also, many state tourism boards such as Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, and Kashmir gave their presentation about tourism in their state along with a presentation by MoT. Rupinder Brar moderated a session on 'Technology is the Future-Travel Real from Virtual'. The panel had Debjit Datta, Malvinder Rikhi, Harish Chandra, and Dhananjay Sailankar who gave eye-opening insights on the topic. The session had lots more to discuss as technology is becoming a key driver in many tourism initiatives and the panel wanted every member to get technologically updated.

Mamta Verma (IAS), Secretary Tourism and Civil Aviation, Gujarat Tourism and Jenu Devan (IAS), Managing Director & Commissioner of Tourism, Gujarat Tourism also addressed the session and highlighted many aspects of Gujarat to indeed showcase it as an outstanding tourism destination in India.

'Dekho Apna Desh, Leveraging Domestic Tourism' session with Sudhir Patil, Swadesh Kumar, Vijay Mohan, Abinash Manghani moderated by PP Khanna also had wonderful insights on the subject.

The objective of this convention was to build public confidence to travel for the revival of domestic tourism in the country. The government, which has lost an entire tourism season to COVID-19 is now banking on domestic travellers to revive

tourism and the iconic Statue of Unity, the world's tallest statue, has set an example. More than 50 lakh visitors have come to see the Statue of Unity after it was dedicated to the nation (on October 31, 2018) and it is estimated that it will progressively improve as connectivity improves.

The second half saw participants depart to tour the destination. Now called Kevadia Tourism Sector and the landmarks other than the imposing statue include Valley of Flowers, Butterfly Garden, Ekta Nursery, Jungle Safari, Unity Glow, Arogyavan, Children Nutrition Park, and Cactus Garden. There are also discoveries such as cruising, river rafting, cycling, and night shows. The whole experience needs at least a 2-night stay and nothing better than the accommodation in 2 tent cities with nature to enjoy in an ideal setting beside the riverfront.

To conclude PP Khanna, President, ADTOI had the following to say, "I felt that the tour operators who have come here are very positive and they are very happy that at least ADTOI has opened the doors physically. For the last 11 months, with no business and people just sitting in their houses, there was no tourism in the country. After joining this convention, many tour operators had the opportunity to see Kevadia booming with tourism. If you really consider the SOP's and the guidelines laid down by WHO and ICMR,



PP Khanna

there is no doubt that we can promote any destination, particularly the Kevadia Tourism Hub where they have taken all the care about all the protocols. All the tour operators are very happy and we are very hopeful that when they go back, they will promote Kevadia. The place has now become a unique and theme destination as only last year it was a one-night destination, but today it can be easily extended to 2 or 3 nights. Earlier, only the statue of unity was here, but shortly the government felt the need for other attractions and prompted the opening of jungle safari, cruises, and many theme parks."





Dorjay Namgyal, Kailash Expedition, Leh

After attending this convention, we physically got a chance to meet all the tour operators and also the domestic inbound and outbound agents who are now focusing on the country's tourism potential. I also found many new people who want to promote Ladakh. Earlier, they used to send people to other countries but from this year they are sending people to many beautiful destinations within in our country like the Himalayas or to the south and this certainly will improve the country's economy. Like in the last year, the opening of outbound and inbound tourism looks quite difficult this year too, so that's why we are now focusing on domestic travel and trying to understand the vibrancy of the sector. The ADTOI convention has given us the confidence to leverage our business thoughts towards domestic tourism.



Sunita G, Gagangiri Tours and Travels, Mumbai

This was my first convention and outing post lockdown, and we all are motivated to get ourselves unlocked and prepared for business. In the past 2 years, Kevadia has built up many fantastic tourist attractions, and this place truly feels to be a contender on the world map. I was impressed by the sightseeing and several places within the destination. But I think, first, we all should explore and bring it on India's map like the Taj Mahal, and for that, we need to sell it more and more to our domestic customers. Presently, there are a lot of inquiries for the Statue of Unity from Maharashtra, and now we know it has the potential for a short period outing with 3-4 nights at the best. With a direct train from Mumbai to Kevadia daily, it is indeed cost-effective and convenient. So, Kevadia and the Statue of Unity will soon turn out to be a hot-selling destination for Maharashtra tour operators.

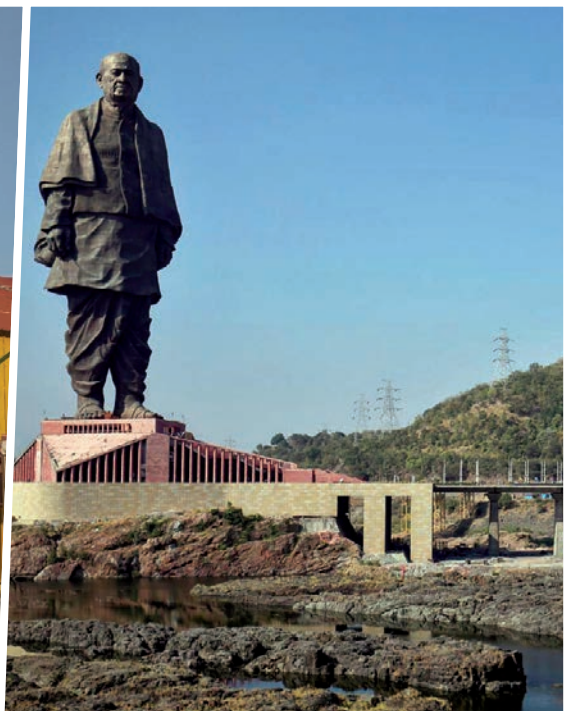


Raja Ramesh Balla, Aakasa Veedhila, Visakhapatnam

Unlike other conventions we attend in so many parts of India, this time it was quite different as the COVID fear was around. But members still attended the convention, which is certainly notable.

It was a kind of new feel and certainly refreshing and the one good thing I noticed is that the convention at the Statue of Unity has made the tour operators confident, with a sense of unity and it has given a strong slogan for the tourism Industry that travel is going to boom shortly. Also, in the past 1-2 months, we have seen an increase in our business with improvement in our package sales and thus definitely business is picking up.

The Tent city at Kevadia has a nice ambience and a fresh feel to it with plenty of relaxation and it is a good place for excursions. Generally, we do not do corporate bookings but now I want to send some of my corporate clients to Kevadia as it is very ideal for corporate bookings on a large scale as well as for family and friends.



ARRA Hotel Group

In a zealous expansion plan, to launch 25 properties across India

ARRA Hotel Group, an upcoming chain of luxury hotels and resorts will be launching soon in the most exotic locations, captivating environs, religious and pilgrimage centres, in the abode of nature. The brand is a promising start-up chain of properties with the best of modern amenities, warm hospitality and unmatched services, and guests couldn't ask for more.

Prashant Nayak

Evoing admiration and fascination in a powerfully irresistible royal manner, Arra Hotels & Resorts has arrived, with products and services that are set to change the dynamics in hospitality operation and services.

The group operates with their flagship brand ARRA which caters to the luxury upscale segment and TWIST which is a young feel budget brand. The deals have been signed and under the leadership of Anshu Malik, a passionate hotelier by choice, guests can expect the best of modern amenities, warm hospitality and unmatched services.

"We have signed 25 properties pan India, under our brand name Arra and Twist which are under various stages of reinvention as per our standards and will be operational by end of the year. We have just signed 2 properties in Bangalore consisting of 284 keys, which will go operational by Feb 20th. You'll be happy to know that we were also signed Asia's largest microbrewery consisting of one lakh fifty thousand square feet area to be opened by March 20, 2021," informs Anshu.

With investments in place, everyone at Arra Hotel Group is very upbeat about the developments. They have also talked to some world-leading banks for more investments, and they are very optimistic about the funds to be delivered to them by April 2021.

Anshu further adds, "By April 2021, we will be opening properties in Jim Corbett, Rishikesh, Nainital Delhi, Gurgaon, Manesar, Dehradun, Nainital and Goa by February 20, 2021. All the



Anshu Malik

properties will go operational. So, we will have 15 properties by February that will be operational under our umbrella and we are on an expansion spree, with almost signing one property daily. Our team is working very hard and our Director Acquisition is a very young dynamic person who is working hard to sign up properties."

ARRA Hotel Group's overall mission and vision is to have 100 properties by 2022 and by getting into international operation next year they intend to be one of the world market leaders in the hospitality industry.

Anshu was groomed under the direct patronage of the Late Capt. Nair, Chairman of Leela Group of Hotels. His hard work led him to be the youngest General Manager in the hospitality

industry, having worked with the top international brands such as The Leela, Starwood, Wyndham, and Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group. At a mere young age of 28, he was the Vice President at D.S Hotel and Resorts and earned the highest accolades in the company, taking the hotel industry by storm because of his aggressive marketing strategies and enterprising personality. His undeterred vision is to become the best hotel company pan-India.

At Arra Hotels & Resorts, they are armed with a cutting edge global insight and a holistic understanding of the hospitality industry catering to complete hospitality products and services pertaining to business and leisure segments, domestic and international. "We are a Hospitality Management and Marketing company, all about dreams and promises and living up to it and our expertise lies in hotels and resorts acquisitions, operations, hotel management and sales /marketing," assures Anshu.

ARRA Hotel Group promises to be the finest and distinguished hospitality company in Pan India—happy to serve, giving their guests a unique and fulfilling service quality and product satisfaction. They are also committed to offering an amicable, safe and ethical environment to their team members to mutually grow and reap the benefit together. The brands are poised to build high-value, meaningful and lucrative opportunities for owners, investors and associates, and also in giving back to the communities.

Organizational cynicism in Indian Hotel Industry

Organizational cynicism is an emerging topic of organizational behaviour studies and rapidly gaining attention in the hotel industry. In this globalized era, where technology is at its zenith point and diversity of workforce at large scale, it is a challenging task for human resource managers to sustain their talented employees in the organization for a longer period. The hotel industry is a labour-intensive industry and is facing the problem of cynicism that leads to the attrition of employees. The main objective of this article is to present the different dimensions of organizational cynicism generally and also to identify the antecedents and consequences of organizational cynicism.

Sumit Banerjee

The hotel industry in India has witnessed a remarkable boom in recent years. It is one of the key elements of the Indian tourism industry and contributing to the Indian economy. The thriving economy and increasing scope of business in India have acted as a boon for the hotel sector. Currently, the Indian hotel industry is facing the problem of cynicism and attrition at a large scale as compared to other sectors. The study shows that in order to identify the role of organizational factors on job outcomes in the Indian hotel industry, organizational cynicism is a crucial factor in measuring the outcomes of the employees working in the hotel industry.

The impact of organizational cynicism is directly connected with organizational commitment, job satisfaction, employee engagement, and turnover. Organizational cynicism decreases the level of commitment, satisfaction, and engagement of employees towards the job; on the contrary, it increases the turnover of the employees. Thus, it can be contended that organizational cynicism carries the organization in a negative direction. Hence, it becomes essential for the organization to focus on the problem of cynicism to achieve better organizational results and retention of potential employees.

Researchers from academia and human resource practitioners have identified mainly three components of organizational cynicism. These elements are beliefs, affect, and behavioral tendencies. All three components vary from positive to negative on an evaluative continuum.

Belief- The very first dimension of organizational cynicism is the belief that the organization lacks in terms of integrity. The employee feels that the practices which are implemented in the organization are lacking in fairness, sincerity, and honesty. The organization policy is based on self-interest and not for the welfare of the employees.



Sumit Banerjee

Such kind of feeling creates inconsistent and unreliable behavior among the employees.

Affect- The affective dimension of organizational cynicism comprises several of these emotions. A cynical employee is having anger toward their organization. They feel shame and hatred while introducing the organization. Thus, it can be said that cynicism is connected with a variety of negative emotions. Therefore, organizational cynicism is not only holding certain beliefs about their organizations but also experiencing a related set of emotions.

Behaviour- The final dimension of organizational cynicism is tendencies toward negative and often disparaging behaviour. A cynical employee feels that the behaviours of colleagues are not supportive. They are selfish and do not care about the other employees working in the organization. They do not provide cooperation and assistance when required. These kinds of behaviours of the colleagues with other colleagues developed negative feelings and this leads to cynicism.

Antecedents of Organizational Cynicism:

There are various factors that influence organizational cynicism in any organization and are common to almost every organization across the globe. Predictors of organizational cynicism are organizational complications, lack of support from top management, insufficient support from colleagues, and low job autonomy. Poor organizational performance and top management salaries are the main antecedents of organizational cynicism. Breaking of the employment contract by the employer and experience of the employee in the organization creates the problem for the new employer. Supervision skill, support from the organization, lack of leadership quality, trust in the organization are the antecedents of cynicism. Employees misbehave and talking arrogantly to others generates cynicism among employees. Lack of involvement of subordinates in the decision-making process and improper support from the management are also considered as predictors of organizational cynicism.

Conclusion:

Organizational cynicism is one of the serious problems which is prevailing in almost every organization. Organizational cynicism has negative consequences for any organization and carries the organization in a negative direction in the form of low job satisfaction, commitment, turnover, intention, absenteeism, and higher attrition rate. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the employers and human resource managers to pay proper attention to such a serious issue that is rapidly eating the root of the organization and to control organizational cynicism for the survival and smooth functioning of the organization.

Sumit Banerjee is an Academic Administrator at the Global Group of Institutions at Haldia, West Bengal.

Energy efficiency, green buildings to define hotels of the future

As most people were confined indoors as a result of the lockdown in wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, demand for energy commodities has dropped by 25 to 30 per cent according to KPMG in India estimates. However, with summer right around the corner, energy consumption is likely to see a spike during the peak months. Keeping in mind the impact that energy consumption has on the environment, hoteliers took this time to re-strategise their operations with enhanced smart technology to build a greener business model.

Rajneesh Malhotra

The hotel sector has increased focus on energy consumption and that has accelerated the evolution of smart building technologies that curb energy wastage/consumption through conscious efforts. Environment sustainability in the hospitality industry has evolved over the last few years with hotel chains taking into cognizance the fact that the industry plays a pivotal role in protecting the earth's resources. Experts are of the opinion that green building technologies can help the world prepare for a future in which pandemics may be more common. In fact, the Singapore Green Building Council (SGBC) President Dr. Ho Nyok Yong made it loud and clear at a webinar in May last year when he said, "Think of green buildings as giant N95 face masks, protecting you from harmful toxins the moment you step inside." In addition to this, consumers today have become more conscious of their habits by choosing sustainable experiences.

Considering the ever-evolving landscape of the hospitality industry, cost of utility and energy consumption while also considering environmental impact, is a matter of concern, making it imperative that Hoteliers today take proactive measures to evaluate energy consumption patterns. At the same time, it is also important to implement a robust set of practices to ensure our hotels are energy efficient without compromising on customer experience. Among the various factors that contribute towards energy consumption the larger share comes from— air-conditioning (45 to 50 per cent) followed by lighting (14 to 18 per cent) and the rest by kitchen equipment, plumbing equipment, refrigeration, and elevators.

To reduce and control energy consumption, let us consider the following essential factors:



Rajneesh Malhotra

Air Conditioning: To optimise the energy used for cooling, hotels need to be equipped with Omni sensors that automatically detect occupancy and recalibrate temperatures in the respective guest rooms. This helps save load and results in lighter electricity bills. Apart from this, hotel premises must also be installed with Pressure Independent Balance Control Valve (PIBCV) for Fan Coil, as well as Air Handling Units to provide initiate further savings.

At Chalet Hotels' properties, our HVAC plant rooms have incorporated additional measures like high-efficiency chillers, inline pumps, and low approach cooling towers with variable frequency drives with plant room optimiser for lower energy consumption. As a result, consumption of HVAC plant rooms reduces by more than 15 to 18 per cent.

Lighting: Hotels need to adapt to efficient lighting systems with LEDs instead of incandescent or CFL lighting. At Chalet Hotels, sensor-based lighting tools enable delivering significant energy savings while also ensuring the quality of service and comfort for the guests. Smart controls in rooms are environment-

friendly tools and save energy by 15-20 per cent.

Kitchen equipment, plumbing equipment, refrigeration, and elevators: With the use of smart technology, energy-saving devices can perform several actions that lead to energy efficiency. For instance, walk-in and deep-freezers use smart technology to read and adjust temperatures according to the food stored in them. This reduces the load on the compressor and leads to lesser power consumption. Furthermore, hotels can implement Preventive Maintenance Schedule for refrigeration systems that are monitored online to avoid any mishaps.

Besides the factors stated above, it has become imperative for hoteliers to invest in modern infrastructure like green roofs and energy-efficient windows. Energy-efficient windows (Double glazed triple windows) reduce noise levels inside the room and solar radiation. Apart from ensuring overall energy efficiency, these help streamline operations, enhance employees' productivity and provide an improved guest experience. There are a number of improving energy efficiency opportunities in hotels today, and IoT (Internet of Things) based solutions have made these simple and affordable. Hence we train and sensitise our staff on the need to conserve energy and the importance of working towards a sustainable future. Finally, we ensure that our guests are made aware of various measures the hotel is taking to minimise its carbon footprint and how they can contribute to the effort.

Adoption of technology and involvement of all stakeholders has helped Chalet Hotels in building a sustainable future while driving profitability, which will result in energy-efficient building models, as has always been the company's motto.

Rajneesh Malhotra is the Chief Operating Officer at Chalet Hotels Ltd.

Desert Trail Expedition by Razdan Holidays vows participants

Razdan Holidays is a leading adventure travel company in India since the year 1957 and had started as an adventure travel organizer in Kashmir and Ladakh, pioneering foreign expeditions in the region. With adventure in their blood, Sanjay Razdan, MD, Razdan Holidays, had recently curated the Desert Trail Expedition track to bring the motorsport and off-road experience to the many tour operators based in Delhi and is hopeful that such unique products can be brought to the general adventure enthusiasts as well. Read on to know more about their experience.

Team TTJ

After a successful self-drive expedition to Shingo La in October 2020 and being recognised among the first tour operators to scale the pass on wheels, Razdan Holidays conducted a self-drive tour in the state of Rajasthan from 15th to

19th January 2021.

Sanjay Razdan, Managing Director of Razdan Holidays, is also a professional motorsport driver and National Rally Champion. The tour led by him was aptly named 'Desert Trail Expedition', as the route went to Rajasthan's authentic and untouched routes and destinations.

Starting from Delhi to Churu on Day one, Udaipurwadi on day three and Samode on day four, this was not a usual self-drive tour as the route chosen was fifty percent off-road going through the desert sand trails, riverbeds, and villages of the region wherein the drivers got the opportunity to challenge their 4x4 vehicles.

For this expedition, Sanjay teamed up with Arvind Balan, who himself organises motorsport activities in Rajasthan. To execute the tour successfully, the duo even did a recce a week before the departure just to ensure that the whole route would be safe for all the participants with an ideal amount of adventure.

Participants got to test their machines for the first time. All vehicles were 4x4 equipped and their drivers finally got to use their off-road capabilities for a change

instead of the routine commute in Delhi. One of the participants exclaimed that he respected his vehicle even more now. All participants agreed that it was an amazing trip full of adrenalin rush experiences.

The entourage consisted of all kinds of 4x4 SUVs such as Mahindra Thar, Volvo XC90, Toyota Fortuner, Ford Endeavour Titanium, Mercedes Benz GLE 350, Chevrolet Captiva, BMW X3, and Maruti Suzuki Gypsy.

The Indian DMC's who participated in the Desert Trail Expedition were Razdan Holidays (Organising company), eBix Cash Travel Group, Namaste Tours, Captivating Experiences, Cosmos Travels,

Katha Tours, Era Tours and Travels, Dominion Travels, Mod Travels, Wanderglobe Inc, and Maxperience Events.

Razdan Holidays is planning to organise more of such authentic off-road experiences in the subsequent months of 2021.



Tourism Authority of Thailand launches #TakeTheThaiventureReload

Tourism Authority of Thailand, India recently announced its new social media campaign targeted towards social media aficionados. The 'TakeTheThaiventureReload' campaign will not only engage the participants to share their idea of an idiosyncratic holiday but also help TAT to position Thailand as a destination for millennials.

#TakeTheThaiventureReload campaign will be active till March 2021 and the two lucky participants with the most quirky and quick response will win a hosted trip to Thailand. Here are the contest rules

Level I – Register and follow TAT's social media pages

Level II – leave a comment describing your idea of a holiday in Thailand

Level III – Scavenger Hunt, wherein the participants are directed to the website in search of the QR codes hidden within the blogs that would redirect them to a question about Thailand



Tourism Authority of Thailand hopes to keep the travellers engaged so that the destination stays top of mind when travel resumes. So, hurry get on to your social media accounts to show-off your quirky side and win a chance to travel to Thailand – The land of smiles.

Insta: @TAT_INDIA; Facebook : @tourismauthorityofthailandindia

Flight ticket prices set to rise as govt increases cap on airfare by up to 30 per cent



To give more pricing flexibility to airlines, the Centre has expanded the airfare cap. Accordingly, the lower fare band has been increased by 10 per cent, while the upper cap has been raised by 30 per cent. Notably, the move comes after a consistent rise in domestic passenger numbers. At present, the applicability time period of fare bands within which the airlines have to operate is till Feb 24, 2021.

Under the fare structure, air routes are divided into seven sections based on travel time. Each section has its minimum and maximum fares. Accordingly, the Delhi-Mumbai ticket price has been fixed at Rs 3,500-Rs 10,000. Currently, the airlines can operate up to 80 per cent of their pre-COVID capacity.

Jehan Numa Wilderness launches Bori Safari Lodge as the first wildlife lodge in Bori Wildlife Sanctuary

Jehan Numa Wilderness, which owns and manages the critically acclaimed Reni Pani Jungle Lodge in Satpura Tiger Reserve and the Jehan Numa Retreat in Bhopal, has launched the Bori Safari Lodge as the first wildlife lodge in the Bori Wildlife Sanctuary area of Madhya Pradesh. Located just 4 km away from the gate of the Sanctuary and 2.5 hours away from the Satpura National Park, the charming lodge is nestled amidst a 7.5-acre farmland estate in the lush and rustic Dhapada Village.

Being the first wildlife lodge near the oldest forest reserve in the country, Bori Safari Lodge is far away from usual tourist attractions and an oasis for nature lovers. It is situated approximately 144 km from Bhopal and offers utmost luxury to its guests, along with an immersive experience of rustic life. With a focus on personalised service and sustainable tourism, Bori Safari Lodge has also joined the RARE India Community of conscious luxury hotels in the Indian subcontinent.

Bori Safari Lodge offers 8 luxury air-conditioned rooms that come with two bedrooms, contemporary en-suite bathrooms and private viewing decks. The interiors feature muted tones and artful décor that complement the village ambience outside. Other facilities include an infinity plunge pool, a spa, indoor and

outdoor, and a library.

Guests staying at the Lodge can enjoy wildlife tours, 4x4 game drives, buffer rides, walking safaris and wildlife safaris with best-in-class naturalist guides in the Bori Wildlife Sanctuary as well as the Satpura National Park. They can enjoy village tours, interact with locals, and go on an anthropological excursion at Dhapada and other nearby villages. Ecotourism activities like learning about farming practices in the area, how they grow crops and rear their livestock can also be experienced.



The Global Rep to promote Tourism & Travel Technology Brands in India, CIS countries & Middle East

The Global Rep works with Travel, Hospitality and Technology companies and is the brainchild of Sandeep Khetarpal, a Tourism and Hospitality veteran of 30 years.

The Global Rep is an integrated firm providing clients with comprehensive representation in Eurasia's most important markets. The Global Rep increases its clients' sales through trade and tour operator contracting, marketing, social, influencers, events, PR, and digital media. With a dedicated and experienced team and offices based in India, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Serbia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, The Global Rep will be able to deliver a comprehensive service with a return on investment in mind.

"What makes The Global Rep Agency different is that we are focused on next-level marketing," says CEO and Founder Sandeep Khetarpal. Incredible opportunities deserve inspired representation. Through long-standing relationships in our network globally, we offer individualised marketing services to each product we represent.

The Global Rep roster of clients now includes Destination Management Companies from Europe and Central Asia and the firm has just signed an agreement for representation appointment for Catabatic Technology for promoting helloGTX Travel CRM and other services in CIS, Middle East, and Eastern European countries.



StreetGooser

creates milestone, partners with 4000 hotels

Not yet two years old and 4,000 strong! Launched in December 2019, StreetGooser, a Cloud-based accommodation management system has enrolled 4,000 hotels eager to use its array of cutting-edge technology products. StreetGooser has even signed up revenue management companies, associations, and hotel aggregators, and many more are queuing up, confident in the knowledge that StreetGooser delivers on its promise.

Essentially, StreetGooser is a one-stop-shop, crafted to make life easier for small to mid-sized accommodation providers. Now more and more hotels, hostels, serviced apartments, vacation rentals, guest houses, villas, bed & breakfast, resorts and villas across the globe are embracing this new technology and arming themselves with the tools to run their businesses smoothly and efficiently.

This innovative start-up is the brainchild of three out-of-the-box thinkers and pioneers, Shakthivelu M, John Varghese and Deenath Sharma who collectively bring to the table over half a century of experience and expertise in travel, tourism, airlines, hospitality, entertainment and IT sectors. StreetGooser is also a child of the pandemic in a sense.

SFO earns 'Voice of the Customer' recognition from Airports Council International

The San Francisco International Airport (SFO) has been recognised by Airports Council International (ACI) World for their 'Voice of the Customer' initiative, which honors airports that continued to prioritise customers and ensure their voice was heard during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the significant challenges posed by this pandemic, SFO has continued to gather feedback from passengers using ACI's Airport Service Quality program.

"SFO has evolved to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, but our commitment remains the same: to deliver an exceptional experience to our customers," said Airport Director Ivar C. Satero. "ACI's Airport Service Quality program has guided our efforts for years, and more than ever now is the time to ensure we meet and exceed travellers' expectations. We are grateful for this honor from ACI World."

"The Voice of the Customer recognition celebrates the commitment of airports that continued listening to passengers and adapting processes and procedures to meet changing expectations of customer experience in response to COVID-19," ACI World Director General Luis Felipe de Oliveira said. "As our industry works towards recovery, airports that listen to – and prioritise the needs and expectations of – customers will be better-placed to respond. ACI's ASQ programme gives airports the tools, objective measurement and benchmarking, for airports to gather information on the needs and expectations of customers and help drive their performance in response."



Pride Hotels announces its partnership with Indian Railways (IRCTC) to deliver a safe stay



The Pride Group of Hotels recently announced its partnership with the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) to deliver a safe and luxurious stay for rail travellers. Under this association rail passengers will now be able to book their accommodation with their train tickets.

On behalf of this partnership, The Pride Group of Hotels will offer a hassle-free platform for Indian Railways passengers to book hotel rooms in any of the desired Pride properties located across the country. Apart from the stay, the Pride Hotel will also provide the guests with five-star amenities, including air-conditioning facilities, Wi-Fi access and 24-hour customer service support.

Further commenting on the association, Amit Sidana, VP Sales & Marketing at Pride Group of Hotels says, "With this association, IRCTC customers will have ready access to the accommodation at the Pride Properties across the country. This initiative will help the travellers in preparing their itinerary through a one-stop window from booking their tickets to accommodation." Keeping the present circumstances in mind and as a part of the 'New Normal', the Pride Group has also launched the 'Pride Safety Assurance' initiative. With travellers being extremely thoughtful about their accommodation, this assurance is designed to cover hygiene guidelines, booking policies as well as precautions to be taken by guests and staff to ensure safety and flexibility.

STB partners with local MICE industry to showcase reimagined experiences and catalyse new business opportunities



The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) has announced the launch of the SingapoReimagine MICE Virtual Show, the first such collaboration between STB and local MICE players. Organised by STB, the two-day event will be held from 3rd to 4th March 2021 and is part of Singapore's efforts to catalyse the MICE industry's recovery and generate business opportunities for our partners. About 700 participants are expected at the show.

The event will feature a locally curated programme that includes live-streamed cultural and leisure tours, culinary master classes by celebrity chefs, and a live panel discussion with industry leaders on organising pilot events in Singapore. It will also facilitate 1-on-1 virtual meetings between participants and up to 40 leading suppliers like hotels, convention centres and tour operators.

Within the virtual 3D environment, participants can navigate the virtual trade show floor easily with their mobile devices and connect with exhibitors, such as Gardens by the Bay, Singapore Airlines and Sentosa Development Corporation. They can also catch up on various event programmes on demand and take part in trivia quizzes to win prizes. The top 5 voted buyers will each win a hosted trip to Singapore on Singapore Airlines, inclusive of a hosted stay and exclusive experiences.

Airbus signs MoU with GMR Group to collaborate on aviation services in India

The MoU was signed at Aero India 2021. Airbus and GMR Group will team up to explore potential synergies in several strategic areas of aviation services, including maintenance, components, training, digital and airport services.

Under this partnership, Airbus and GMR teams will work together and innovate across areas such as maintenance, airport operations and air cargo supply chain among others to realise our shared goals. Airbus and GMR will collaborate to explore a broad scope of aviation services both for commercial and military aircraft to benefit the entire aerospace ecosystem in the country.



WTTC says governments should abandon the concept of 'high-risk countries' and instead focus on 'high-risk travellers'

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) is calling for governments to abandon the concept of 'high-risk countries' and instead focus on how individual 'high-risk travellers' are treated at borders. WTTC, which represents the global travel & tourism private sector, is urging governments around the world to shift their focus from whole countries, towards individual travellers. Instead, WTTC says governments around the world should redefine their whole approach to risk assessment, to revive international business and leisure travel.

Combined with a common international consensus on the metrics used to assess risk and a laser-like focus on a cost-effective, comprehensive, and rapid departure and arrival testing scheme for all travellers, could pave the way forward for the meaningful return of travel. It would also ensure only those affected are forced to isolate, while travellers who test negative can continue to enjoy safe travels through observing hygiene protocols and mask wearing.

Gloria Guevara, WTTC President and CEO, said, "Risk based on entire countries is neither effective nor productive. Redefining risk towards individual travellers instead will be key for unlocking the door to the return of safe international travel. We need to learn from past experiences, and crises such as 9-11. We cannot continue labeling entire countries as 'high-risk' which assumes everyone is infected. The reality is much more complex. Not only does it stigmatise an entire nation, but it also halts travel and mobility when many people who test negative on departure and arrival could safely travel without exporting

the virus. We have to recognise this reality and redefine the risk to focus on 'high-risk' individuals.

"We firmly believe implementing a comprehensive testing regime and the use of technology is the only practical way to restore international travel

securely. Furthermore, a comprehensive testing programme will be less expensive than the economic cost brought on by blanket quarantines and lockdowns. This refocus would avoid exporting the virus and enable the free movement of travellers, while still observing enhanced hygiene protocols such as mask wearing and social distancing. We must learn to live with the virus, as it will take time for the global population to be vaccinated. This is why WTTC has long advocated introducing a comprehensive and cost-effective test on departure and arrival for all international travellers, as a way of preventing those carrying the virus from spreading it."



Maharashtra to host 20 cultural festivals across six regions in Feb-March

The Maharashtra tourism department will organise 20 mini festivals across six regions — Konkan, Pune, Nashik, Aurangabad, Amravati, and Nagpur in February and March to boost the sector. The state tourism department has earmarked Rs 100 lakh for organising these 20 festivals.

After a difficult year of the pandemic, the state government is all set to welcome tourists through 20 mini festivals so that travellers can explore the less-known destinations across Maharashtra. These festivals will be organised through regional offices of the Directorate of Tourism with the help of the local district administration and are aimed to help feature the less explored destinations prominently on the Maharashtra tourism map.

Some landmark festivals to be held in Nashik include Grape Harvesting, Nandur Madhyameshwar, Bhandardara in Ahmednagar and Laling Fort Festival in Dhule. In the Konkan region, popular festivals such as Vengurla (Sagareshwari) in Sindhudurg district, Shrivardhan Festival in Raigad district, Katal Shilpa Festival and Anjarle Festival in Ratnagiri district will be organised. Aurangabad division will witness Ter Festival in Osmanabad district, Kapildhara Festival in Beed district and Hottal Festival in Nanded district, while Sindhkhed Raja Festival in Nagpur district, Narnala Fort Festival in Akola district and Tipeshwar Forest Festival in Yavatmal district are planned under the Amravati region. Nagpur will also organise the illustrious festivals, including Ramtek Festival, Bor Dam and Wildlife Festival, in Vardha and Bodalkasa Bird Festival in Gondia district.

Ceylon Travel Consultancy forays into India market to promote Sri Lanka



CEYLON
TRAVEL CONSULTANCY

Ceylon Travel Consultancy, Sri Lanka's first sales and marketing hotel representation agency, recently tied-up with Singh consultancy and Destination Venture to gauge and facilitate the market in India especially, Mumbai and Delhi.

Ceylon Travel Consultancy offers strategic business solutions for hotels, resorts, and villas located in the iconic destination, Sri Lanka. India being a key market, the association will help bridge the gap between private and big partners present in Sri Lanka and the Indian travellers.

Singh Consultancy and Destination Venture will play a vital role in executing all trade, marketing, and communication activities undertaken by Ceylon Travel Consultancy, commencing February 2021.

Signum Hotels expand footprint in Europe; to open Signum Adrenaline Park Tara in Serbia



Signum Hotels & Resorts continues to strengthen its presence in Europe with another hotel signing. A new-build Signum Adrenaline Park Tara is scheduled to open in Serbia in April 2021 as the latest addition to the company's premium lifestyle collection of exceptional hotels.

Signum Adrenaline Park Tara will be the group's first hotel in Eastern Europe, strengthening the company's brand presence in this region. The 40-room hotel will have a restaurant, meeting space for 100 guests and outdoor parking. Travellers and shoppers will be delighted by the central location since it is just 200 meters from the Tara river, 10 km from the airport and only 200 meters from the railway station. Signum Adrenaline Park Tara is truly one-of-a-kind, distilling the best of its location through interior design, exceptional guest amenities and the expertise of its people.

Announcing the signing, Mehul Sharma, Founder & CEO, Signum Hotels & Resorts said, "We are excited to mark our presence in a new region that holds great potential for tourism. This new hotel signing is in line with our strategy to expand across exceptional destinations globally. We are looking forward to the hotel launch by end-April 2021."

True to the group's 'experiential stay' service philosophy, guests of Signum Adrenaline Park Tara can expect staff who deliver extraordinary attention to detail and exceptional knowledge of the destination. Together with its locally curated art programs, focus on hyperlocal sustainability and helpful recommendations on exploring the best of the city (such as adventure sports), the hotel offers an authentic experience of Belgrade both inside and outside its walls.

Saudi Arabia suspends entry for 20 countries, including India



Saudi Arabia on Feb 2, 2021, suspended entry for 20 countries, ranging from some neighbouring states to the United States, in a bid to curb a jump in coronavirus infections. The ban applies to neighbouring Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, and in the wider region, to Lebanon and Turkey. In Europe, the ban includes Britain, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland. Elsewhere, as well as the US, it applies to Argentina, Brazil, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan and South Africa.

Saudi citizens, as well as diplomats and health workers coming from those countries, will be allowed to enter the kingdom in accordance with the precautionary measures.

Vistara to fly to Malé from 03 March 2021



Vistara has announced special, non-stop flights between the capital of the Republic of Maldives, Malé, and Mumbai, India, starting March 03, 2021. The airline will fly three times a week to Male under India's travel bubble agreement with the Maldives. Vistara will deploy its Airbus A320neo aircraft with three-class cabin configuration on the routes, thus becoming the only airline to offer travellers the choice of Premium Economy in addition to Business and Economy cabins, on flights between India and the Maldives. Bookings for the flights are being progressively opened on all channels, including Vistara's website, mobile app, and through travel agents.

Commenting on the launch of the new routes, Leslie Thng, Chief Executive Officer, Vistara, said, "Our new service to the Maldives will give travellers greater access to one of India's most preferred holiday destinations. We are delighted at the opportunity of taking India's Best Airline to more places and offering the very best of air travel to people flying between India and the Maldives while maintaining the highest standards of safety and hygiene."

Think Strawberries strengthens its team with new appointments

Think Strawberries has announced multiple appointments across departments as momentum amongst existing and new clients begins to see an upswing. These announcements further demonstrate the company's commitment to drive accelerated growth and elevate go-to-market strategies and innovations as the scenario rapidly changes in the wake of the global pandemic.

While Sam Stephan has been appointed in the capacity of GM-Sales for South India, Damini Arora Dheman has joined as Sr. Manager-Client Relationship Management and Tavneet Singh Marwah joins as Sr. Manager Sales.

Munmun Marwah, COO, Think Strawberries commented, "In order to ensure scalability, over the years we have established solid SOPs aimed at achieving efficiency, uniformity of performance and international quality output. We are constantly developing

this holistic approach by putting more robust systems in place. In line with that goal, we are proud to have professionals of such distinction, caliber and perspective joining us. Through 2021, we will continue to develop Think Strawberries into an advanced strategic practice to cater to our large and diverse international clientele."



Tavneet Singh Marwah



Damini Arora Dheman



Sam Stephan

Kerala Tourism Minister inaugurates 18 projects worth Rs 40.46 cr

The projects inaugurated by Kerala Tourism Minister Shri Kadakampally Surendran, through videoconferencing, included destination development of Kovalam Phase 1 -Samudra Beach park area and Grove Beach area, Kovalam- at Rs 9.9 crore and beautification and interlocking of Mulavilakam Footpath at Kovalam at Rs 52 lakh.

In his address, the Minister said the domino effect of COVID-19 has reflected in the tourism sector also and it is expected to continue for some more time. But the government did not allow the pandemic to hamper the implementation of the tourism sector projects.

"The state government has initiated a lot of special projects for the revival of the sector where around 15 lakh people are directly and indirectly employed. Last year, we got Rs 45,000 crore overall income from the tourism sector, which was an all-time record," he said.

"With the inauguration of these 18 tourism projects in seven districts, the government has completed more than 100 projects in the last six months. Among the 300 tourism projects that had been given administrative sanction since the government took power, 80 percent has been completed. No other government in the history of Kerala has implemented so many projects in the tourism sector," Shri Surendran added.

Important among the dedicated projects are the construction of additional block for Government Guest House, Kozhikode- Phase II at Rs 9.5 crore, Children's Park at Marine Drive, Ernakulam (Rs 4 crore), Construction of Yathri Nivas at Idukki – balance work, Idukki (Rs 3.82 crore), Tourism development works at Payamkuttimala, Kuttiadi, Kozhikode (Rs 2.15 crore), Chavakkad beach area tourism project (Rs 2.5 crore), and Muziris Heritage Project (MHP)- repair and maintenance of Paliam Oottupura, North Paravur (Rs 2.03 crore).

Other projects in the list are Renovation and upgradation of Manakkachira Tourism project, Changanassery; augmentation and enhancement of the STP at Kumarakom; renovation of Prakrithi Gramam at Ezhattumukham -Phase I -Angamaly; repair and maintenance of Paliam Interpretation (MHP), North Paravur; renovation of Paravur Market (MHP); Bengalakadavu, Mathilakom, Kodungallur (MHP); construction of Children's Park, Kottapuram, Kodungallur (MHP); Mala Cemetery compound wall construction, Kodungallur (MHP); renovation of Mala Synagogue, Kodungallur (MHP); and Stadium Square, Kasaragod.

Pride Group of Hotels signs Pride Biznotel City Center in Rajkot



"Gujarat state hosts ample potential across industries, and a hospitality partner is surely needed to ensure these industrial expansions are supported suitably alongside satisfied employees. We're glad to further expand our presence in Gujarat with the Pride Biznotel City Center, Rajkot. It's indeed a proud moment to be part of the growing state and economy in whatever little way possible. Guest safety will be assured by our efficient team at Pride Group of Hotels," said Atul Upadhyay- VP Operations, Pride Group of Hotels.

Pride Biznotel City Center, Rajkot is the 3rd property added to the hotel portfolio in Gujarat after the recent signing of Pride Hotel, Bharuch (2021). Pride Group of Hotels are already operating hotels in Ahmedabad, Rajkot, Vadodara, Anand and (2021) Surendranagar.



YEARS OF IMPACT