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Dear Friends,

Greetings of the season and for the New Year.

2020 had indeed been a very tough year for all of us in the industry with businesses coming to a standstill and our spirit of adventure and travel gone for a toss due to the quarantines and border blocks.

Looking into the New Year, there is a positive light in sight and hopefully with the rollout of the vaccines, the pandemic will start fading out soon, so things can get back to Normal.

Our TTJ Jan issue, which also happens to be our 11th Annual issue, is full of hope and anticipation from the New Year 2021. We have tried our best to cover most of the sectors in the industry and, surprisingly, the contributors shared quite a lot of bright and encouraging insights into what the new year could bring.

So while you read on, please stay well, and don't lose hope. We're all in this together and I pray that soon we will be back to our normal lifestyles again.

Happy Reading and all the best for a fantastic 2021.

Warm Regards

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)
Istanbul | Cappadocia | Antalya
- Scandinavia (7 Nights)
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- Mesmerizing Central Europe (8 Nights)
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Negative COVID-19 test required to enter the US from 26th January



All air passengers are required to get a COVID-19 test within three days before their flight to the United States departs, and provide written documentation of their laboratory test result to the airline or provide documentation of having recovered from COVID-19.

On January 12, Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) signed the order requiring a negative coronavirus test that will go into effect on January 26. Airlines must confirm the negative test result for all passengers or documentation of recovery before they board the aircraft. "If a passenger does not provide documentation of a negative test or recovery, or chooses not to take a test, the airline must deny boarding to the passenger," the CDC said.

Radisson Hotel Group South Asia adds eight new hotels across India in 2020



Radisson Hotel Group overcame a tumultuous year by strengthening its domestic portfolio with eight new hotels across four brands in 2020. Located in key gateway cities and emerging destinations, these new hotels will collectively add over 1000 keys to its domestic network in the next three to five years. The Group also added a new brand 'Radisson Individuals' to its portfolio, which gives independent hotels and small chains the opportunity to become part of the global Radisson Hotel Group and benefit from international exposure.

In the beginning of 2020, the Group had announced four hotel signings – Radisson Blu Hotel Jaipur Malviya Nagar, Radisson Hotel Dehradun, Park Inn by Radisson Jabalpur and Park Inn by Radisson Mashobra. These were followed by four additional signings at the end of the year – Radisson Resort Pondicherry Bay, Radisson Resort & Spa Lonavala, The White Hotel Katra, a member of Radisson Individuals and Park Inn by Radisson Prayagraj.

"We remained focused on our long-term expansion goals while leveraging opportunities such as the introduction of Radisson Individuals to tide over the challenges of 2020. In the new year, we are looking forward to several strategic and brand-defining hotel signings and openings which will provide a major uplift to our brand portfolio," commented Zubin Saxena, Managing Director and Vice President, Operations, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group.

Gujarat govt. announces New Tourism Policy 2021-25

Unveiling the policy, Chief Minister Vijay Rupani said that tourism projects, such as hotels and resorts, which would come up in these high priority centres will qualify for subsidies on investment and other incentives. Some of these high priority centres are Kutch, Devbhumi-Dwarka, Gir-Somnath, Junagadh and Dang districts. Some specific talukas of other districts, such as Dhari in Amreli and Dabhoi in Vadodara, are also included in the list of high priority tourism centres. Instead of focussing on the entire state, their aim is to develop tourism infrastructure in these high priority areas. Under the new policy, incentives will be given where it is needed the most.

Under the policy, the government will give a subsidy of 20 per cent on capital investment for setting up a hotel in the designated high priority centres. While the minimum investment required is ₹ 1 crore, there is no cap on maximum investment, which excludes the cost of land, as per the policy document.

For setting up theme parks or amusement parks in these priority centres, the subsidy will be 15 per cent for investment in the range of ₹50 crore to ₹500 crore. To attract large investments in this avenue, the state government will provide land on lease, in addition to the 15 per cent subsidy, for projects of more than ₹500 crore proposed investment, according to the policy.

Other tourism projects which would be eligible for a 15 per cent subsidy on investment are – convention centres with a seating capacity of over 2,500 people, NABH-accredited wellness centres, tourism hospitality and training centres, tents, cottages and container accommodation.

To encourage caravan rental services, the state government has announced to give a 15 per cent subsidy on investment up to ₹10 lakh, for starting such projects in high priority centres. To encourage new investment in the adventure tourism sectors, entrepreneurs will be offered a 15 per cent subsidy, with a limit of ₹15 lakh, for buying various adventure sports equipment, said the policy document.

Under the new policy, foreign tourists will be offered a 5 per cent discount if they stay at a state government registered hotel.

To promote rural tourism, fair organisers will get an assistance of ₹5 lakh per year to organise all-inclusive annual fairs and festivals showcasing indigenous culture, dance, handlooms and handicrafts.

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Resilience amid uncertainty

The way forward for the aviation industry



Airline operations and connectivity are slowly recovering, giving hopes to survive for the aviation industry worldwide. Airlines expect the vaccine to help the industry bounce back quickly. In spite of the deep losses, many airlines are displaying extraordinary resilience and staying strong by innovating and strategising to the needs of the customers' expectations and safety, in this ever-changing fearful COVID-19 scenario. However, while on a long road to complete recovery, the aviation industry is expected to see a significant turn for the better by end of 2021.

Prashant Nayak



Neerja Bhatia
Vice President
Indian Sub-continent, Etihad Airways

‘Adaptability remains key right now as markets gradually re-open’

at the core of air travel journeys today. Due to the pandemic, there has been an accelerated growth in digitizing experiences and ensuring contactless travel for guests, with the safety and wellness of our guests and teams in mind. Etihad has built on its tech-driven approach and introduced various measures to provide maximum support to guests when not only they travel but also when they plan their journeys with interactive travel maps, contactless check-in and risk assessment tools, among others.

Going green: Sustainability is going to play an even bigger role in a post-COVID-19 world. While commercial aviation still only represents around 2 per cent of global human-made CO2 emissions, the airlines and infrastructure that support them and can adapt to meet the needs of a sustainable, carbon-neutral operation are those that will survive and lead the future of flying. Etihad remains at the forefront to pioneer new and effective ways of mitigating aviation’s environmental impact to reduce carbon emissions and create cleaner and more sustainable transportation for future generations.

Etihad has been nimble which has allowed us to pivot and meet the challenges of the current crisis. We will continue to stay agile, which has greatly helped us in managing business operations better. With an increased emphasis on wellness in the coming year, Etihad will continue its initiatives that focus on passenger wellness and safety throughout their journey.

The year 2020 has seen the COVID-19 pandemic affect several industries, including aviation. The industry that usually connects people across the globe was facing minimal movement. However, this industry has evolved during this crisis. What we see today and will continue to see in the coming months is the ‘new normal’ that has gradually emerged. The situation remains dynamic - countries are lifting restrictions, issuing guidelines and opening borders at different times depending on the situation. Adaptability remains key right now as markets gradually re-open.

We have been working closely with the UAE government and global aviation authorities to ensure we gradually grow our network. However severe the impact of the global pandemic might be, it will not deter our commitment towards India, our largest and busiest market, and one where we’ve been operating in over the last sixteen years.

Some interesting trends that were on the rise last year and will continue being a focus include:

Accelerated digitisation: Digitally enabled experiences are



Jabr Al-Azeeby
Vice President India & Nepal,
Emirates

‘For Emirates, we have a lot to look forward to over the next 12 months’

taking the Emirates A380 experience to even greater heights. Our network, which currently serves 100 destinations, will continue to expand to offer customers seamless connectivity across six continents. Emirates SkyCargo will continue playing a pivotal role in the global distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. Our home and hub, Dubai, will reunite the world in October for Expo 2020 and the UAE will be celebrating its Golden Jubilee.

Starting off the year on a high note, Emirates will remain at the forefront of innovation, introducing industry-first initiatives, and offering unmatched travel experiences in the air and on-ground. As soon as the situation allows, we look forward to resuming our commercial flights to India, but for now, we remain committed to supporting repatriation movements and to strengthening our long-standing partnership with the country.

The year 2020 was an unprecedented year for the aviation industry. As we close off one of our most challenging years, we look ahead to 2021 with great confidence, optimism and resilience. The pandemic is far from over - however, with the global roll-out of vaccines, international borders re-opening, and global economies slowly recovering – we anticipate a more promising year ahead.

For Emirates, we have a lot to look forward to over the next 12 months. We recently unveiled our highly-anticipated Premium Economy cabin product onboard our newest A380 aircraft –



Karthik Viswanathan
Regional Manager
Indian Subcontinent, Qatar Airways

‘The airline industry at large will see a significant change in terms of technology and travel’

hygiene standards are in place. The airline industry at large will see a significant change in terms of technology and travel.

As I mentioned, we have learned a lot from the pandemic. The trend that I see taking hold is that the customer journey will mainly revolve on three aspects – safety, hygiene and seamlessness. The wearing of masks and the use of sanitizers may prevail and be ‘must-haves’ for travel going forwards. Secondly, emerging technologies that were once in the background will now play a leading role in drawing more people to travel – such as contactless travel and possibly, digital health passports.

As we begin the New Year with optimism, our aim is to continue enhancing and amplifying our existing offerings while introducing new ones, to cater to the ever-evolving needs of our passengers. 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.

Qatar Airways stringently implemented the most advanced safety and hygiene measures, including the provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for cabin crew and a complimentary protective kit and disposable face shields for passengers. Additionally, among other enhanced hygiene measures, the airline was the first international carrier to deploy Honeywell’s Ultraviolet (UV) Cabin System, operated by Qatar Aviation Services, further advancing its hygiene measures on board.



Alex McEwan
Country Manager- South Asia
Virgin Atlantic

‘The start of vaccine deployment in the UK and across the world is incredibly encouraging’

purchase decisions. At Virgin Atlantic, we operate one of the cleanest, youngest and greenest fleets in the industry. We have simplified our fleet, accelerating the retirements of 747s to ensure we have twin-engine aircraft only, contributing to a further 10 per cent saving in CO2 emissions per passenger, building on 18 per cent improvement we have delivered in the last 10 years.

The start of vaccine deployment in the UK and across the world is incredibly encouraging. Widespread deployment is a momentous global task and will take some time, but we are confident that as this ramps-up across the world, confidence in travel will build and allow restrictions to be safely relaxed throughout the year. We have seen indications that there is significant pent up demand for our flights, with passengers looking forward to travelling again this year with confidence.

Another encouraging trend that we hope to see continue in 2021

As we bid adieu to one of the most challenging years for everyone, we are optimistic for 2021. I am very much hopeful that global commercial travel and the aviation sector will continue to walk towards a gradual recovery.

At Qatar Airways, we never stopped flying throughout the pandemic, fulfilling our mission of taking stranded passengers home on scheduled and charter flights. It goes without saying that people will continue to travel again, meet friends and family, restart specific business travel and experience the world. Additionally, with promising developments around the vaccine rolling out across the world, this gives us greater confidence particularly as we look to the second half of 2021.

We believe that travel will steadily return, limited by entry restrictions rather than customer confidence. As we all are aware, the aviation industry is highly adaptable to potential risks – it has a history of resilience and will continue to manage and mitigate risks.

The pandemic has been a crucial example of the exemplary initiatives implemented across the travel and aviation industry. This year has been a learning experience, and for the aviation industry, it gave us an opportunity to enhance customer experience by adapting newer technologies to ensure the highest safety and

After a bruising 2020, we are confident that 2021 will be a year of recovery for the aviation industry. At Virgin Atlantic, we have taken decisive action to weather the storm and to survive through the pandemic, and are in a position to rebuild this year. We are confident that the reputation for quality we have developed in 20 years in India and our strategy of always putting customers first will make us the airline of choice as passengers return to flying.

With lower global demand for air travel since the onset of the pandemic, we have seen airlines retiring their larger and less fuel-efficient aircraft types. This trend will continue, as sustainability and fuel efficiency become an increasing factor in passengers’

is Cargo. Cargo revenue has been a success story in 2020, with our services from Delhi and Mumbai to London Heathrow offering vital connectivity to ensure that global supply chains are maintained. This will become even more important as vaccines are distributed across the world, with India, in particular, being one of the largest global producers of vaccines.

Like all travel businesses, the pandemic has had a huge impact on our financial position. We are pleased to have completed a

£1.2bn private-only solvent recapitalization of the airline and holiday business. This significant milestone puts Virgin Atlantic in a position to rebuild its balance sheet, restore customer confidence and welcome passengers back to the skies safely, as soon as they are ready to travel. We offer passengers extra peace of mind when travelling with us during the pandemic, with our best-in-class health and safety measures and by offering passengers flexibility when they book, with free date changes and COVID-19 insurance cover as standard.



Vinod Kannan
Chief Commercial Officer
Vistara

‘We expect a significant increase in demand for non-stop flights as customers will try to avoid connecting flights due to concerns of exposure to COVID-19 in transit’

With the streamlining of state restrictions and growing confidence in air travel, the demand for domestic air travel has been steadily growing in the last few months. While it is still far from reaching pre-COVID levels, it may be safe to say that domestic air travel has started showing signs of recovery. Our recently concluded customer survey also indicated that about 63 per cent of our customers would take their next flight by February 2021, and it shows a gradual, upward-moving trend in demand. The news about the coronavirus vaccines has further brought positivity in the sector, however, return to pre-COVID levels and “normalcy” will largely depend on when a vaccine is made widely available.

International air travel, however, is still far from recovery as restrictions continue to evolve in many parts of the world, presenting uncertainties to travellers’. Having said that, some international

routes are still viable for airlines to operate special flights as part of India’s travel bubble agreements with various countries, with a substantial amount of traffic on those routes.

When international travel opens up, we expect a significant increase in demand for non-stop flights as customers will try to avoid connecting flights due to concerns of exposure to COVID-19 in transit. Vistara is very well placed and operationally ready to offer direct connectivity to long-haul destinations, especially with more B787-9 Dreamliner aircraft joining our fleet. In the FY2021-22, we aim to get all six Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft and more Airbus A321neo aircraft from the order we placed in 2018.

At Vistara, we continue to remain committed to our long-term growth strategy and remain optimistic about the possibilities and opportunities in time to come.



V Ravindran
Regional Manager
SriLankan Airlines, India and Bangladesh

‘Airlines have to compromise some aspects of Branding, Image and USP’s in order to strengthen Safety and Health measures by default’

With the completion of the unprecedented year of 2020, in my personal opinion, the aviation industry will have to start its own activities even at its own scales by summer 2021 with relaxed protocols. Countries that are dependent on international tourism will push that to happen otherwise the Industry will itself suffer for another 5-10 years. Many airlines will start with minimum number of frequencies in order to curtail certain fixed costs such as lease and staff costs till the industry recovers which would need

additional investment by then.

Presently, travellers are desperate to commence as they are bored and as soon as the commercial flights are ready to take off, we will see the ball rolling. Airlines have to compromise some aspects of Branding, Image, and USP’s in order to strengthen safety and health measures by default.

At SriLankan, we are ready to commence as we are/were operational to a select few destinations during the last 11 months or so, it is a matter of increasing the scale with viability decisions that would be the main decisive factor.

Indian outbound, ready, geared, and poised to bounce back in 2021

Many signs point to a quick rebound for travel in 2021 and that's because people will be making up for missed travel in 2020. Globally, tourism is picking up with a handful of destinations opening borders and airlines getting a go-ahead from their respective Governments. For the Indian outbound sector, which is still on major pause, there is now a flicker of hope as vaccine roll out across the country has begun. TTJ speaks to some stalwarts in the Indian outbound sector to know what lies ahead after a long hiatus and their plans and strategies when international travel resumes from India.

Prashant Nayak



Rajeev Nangia

Chief Operating Officer
TRAC Representations

'The advantage of Indian outbound market is its potential and diversity of travellers it offers'

2021 is a "Year of Hope", as the industry is facing the most challenging phase and the impact is global. Pandemic has hit all sectors of the Travel &

Tourism. Though the vaccine is a ray of hope, it is imperative that the industry get together and prepares for new normal scenarios and practices. Also, the industry at large needs to start educating clients to adopt and start encouraging clients to travel.

Optimistically, initial signs indicate a positive way forward. We have seen a steady increase in domestic as well as international destinations, which have opened up and have flight access. The industry should gear up and should prepare for gradual recovery to reach the levels of the Year 2019 and each stakeholder should be ready to put in all efforts.

Outbound travel from India has always been a major and one of the fastest-growing components of Indian Travel & Tourism. Indian Industry has been actively involved and has been largely focused upon Outbound Tourism from India. NTO's have seen growth from India and the last two decades highlight the ever-

growing NTO's presence in the market to target their respective travel audiences. The advantage of the Indian outbound market is its potential and the diversity of travellers it offers. The vast array of travel segments are undoubtedly an asset for the NTOs as they can target mass to niche, all at once. Similarly, professionals servicing the Indian market have the bandwidth to cater to a varied clientele.

In the current situation, domestic travel has been the first to resume and followed gradually by outbound. However, the industry cannot survive by catering to only domestic travel it will have to be a mix of Domestic, Outbound and Inbound where outbound brings in a bigger chunk of revenue for the travel trade, servicing the travellers.

It's time when we all, the people servicing travel and people availing travel have to get used to new normal practices. It may initially look stressful but for the safety and security of all and to combat the challenge the new safety precautions have to be adopted and practised. The people have already started adopting the norms of new normal practices, while it may have initially felt a little uncomfortable, but as we move forward, more will imbibe the "New Normal" and start enjoying travel and discovering the world once again.

The year 2021 brings in new hope and makes one feel optimistic and hope that small steps taken towards outbound travel in the last quarter of last year will bring a new vision and a larger number of countries opening borders for tourism in the Year 2021.



Elisa Robles Fraga

Director

Tourism Office of Spain in India (Mumbai)

‘Every crisis brings in a lot of opportunities’

We are hopeful that travel shall resume in 2021 since people have dreamed of travelling this year and they cannot wait to pack their bags and discover a new destination.

proved to be of excellent standards. The Spanish Government is constantly working on keeping the international tourism flows open in accordance with health and protection measures while reviewing additional measures needed to ensure safety such as safe corridors.

In the tourism field, a plan to boost the tourism sector was approved in July, endowed with more than 4,200 million Euros that includes the development of a wide range of measures that range from health security protocols; at an international level to implementation of measures to improve the competitiveness of tourist destination, tourism knowledge and intelligence model and marketing in order to position tourism in Spain as a safe destination.

Initiatives have been launched with the objective to advance and transform our model towards sustainable, digital, accessible, inclusive and safe tourism to improve the competitiveness of the Spanish tourism sector from a comprehensive perspective. Destination Sustainability Plans have been developed with an investment of 58 million, creation of a tourist intelligence platform-DATAESTUR, to reinforce Spain with a new Travel Safe communication tool.

Moreover, work is being done on the development of Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2030, which constitutes the roadmap to maintain the leadership position that Spain has in the tourism field, modernising tourism model based on sustainability and implementation of tourism intelligence and digitisation.

Tourism is gradually opening up all around the world and especially in Spain, we strongly believe and have faith that tourism will recover faster than we thought it would thanks to the recent scientific developments and research that have been a breakthrough in these difficult times.

The positive signs of worldwide vaccination drives, following of hygiene and safety protocols at all kinds of establishments, increased demand of destinations adopting responsible and sustainable tourism measures like the ones in Spain are some of the most motivational signs for outbound travel to resume from India.

The demand for tourism will kick off with an increase in domestic travel in the entire world. Nonetheless, Indian outbound travel scenario to international long-haul destinations will pick up once travellers are reassured that they would be travelling to a safe and secure destination like Spain.

Every crisis brings in a lot of opportunities. Spain has taken this pandemic situation in its stride and ensured that all health and safety protocols are being followed everywhere: supermarkets, bars, restaurants, public tourist places like monuments, museums, tourist attractions, etc. The Spanish Ministry of Health has awarded all the establishments following the safety guidelines and protocols with a ‘Responsible Tourism’ seal.

The whole of the tourism value chain in Spain has exceedingly



Priyanka Nijhawan

Director- Representations

Nijhawan Group

‘Despite the current global scenario, Dubai has emerged as the most popular international destination for Indian tourists, and we hope to spearhead the position in 2021 as well’

There has been an exponential increase in demand for travel due to the lockdown, travellers are looking for a

vacation again. Ever since the air bubble between India and Dubai has been established, there has been an unstoppable growth between the two destinations. With the ease of travel restrictions, travellers are gearing up again for international trips. The Emirate is showing the highest levels of safety and hygiene, which have added to our advantage. Indians were amongst the most travelled before the pandemic struck, and they indeed are the most confident about resuming their international travel endeavours to Dubai.

India has been the number one source market for Dubai even before the global pandemic hit and continues to maintain its position. There has been substantial growth in Q4 of 2020 in regards to outbound tourist travel from India to Dubai, with flight connectivity from almost every major tier 1 and tier 2 cities. Dubai has emerged as the most popular international destination for Indian tourists, despite the current global scenario and we hope to spearhead the position in 2021 as well.

Having flexible packages for visitors is the need of the hour, as they are increasingly looking for unique, secure and self-contained experiences closer to home. As of now, travel may seem different in many ways. People can expect to explore the world with masks, maintaining physical distance and sanitisation.

There is no doubt that these changes will influence almost every aspect of the tourist's travel itinerary. The highlight of the new marketing plans will definitely focus on health and

refinement. Health standards will now be as strict as they can be. We want to promote the resumption of family travel to Dubai especially during the month of Ramadan, expected to begin on April 13, 2021, along with the summer vacations in India. Dubai also has a huge potential market for hosting lavish Indian weddings.

The government of Dubai has demonstrated the highest levels of safety and sanitisation throughout all institutions with efficiency in handling the crisis and working towards a single goal for making the city safe and secure for its residents and visitors. The much-awaited Dubai Shopping Festival is ongoing for its 26th edition. Shopping malls and centres across the city continue to implement stringent procedures such as temperature checks, regular cleaning and sanitation processes, as well as follow strict government-recommended precautions. Dubai is gearing up to host the first-ever World Expo in the Arab world, in what is sure to be a spectacular experience for all visitors.



Neliswa Nkani

Hub Head – MEISEA
South African Tourism

‘We want travellers to come back enriched after an easy, fluid journey’

We are very optimistic about 2021, as there is a pent-up demand for international travel. Our travel trade partners tell us that Indians are raring to travel. We are

already seeing plenty of interest and queries for destination South Africa, especially from Indian business and leisure travellers. At South African Tourism, we expect to see Indian traffic to the destination in the first half of this year, subject to border restrictions and connectivity.

With offers, deals, discounts and flexibility like never before, international travel is becoming increasingly appealing and accessible to the aspirational Indian traveller. With the correct precautionary measures in place, there is no reason for international travel to take a back seat.

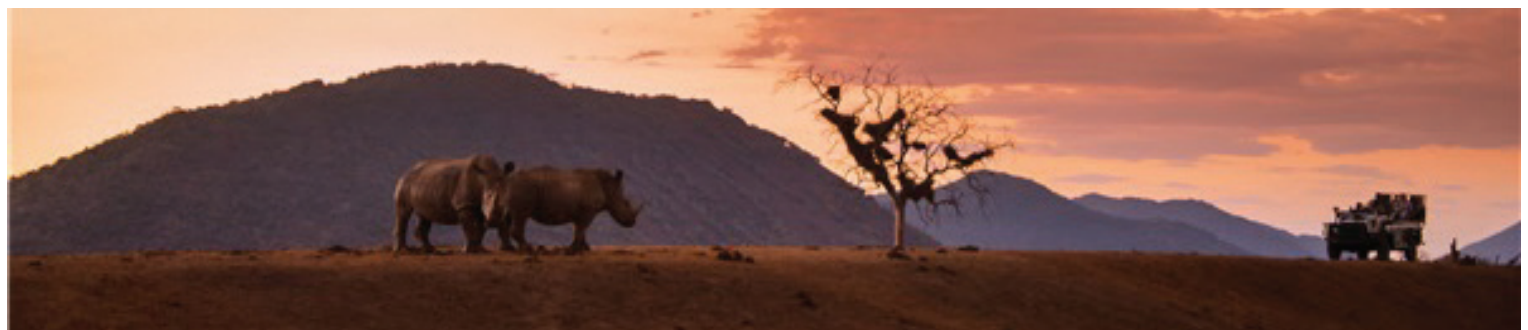
In South Africa, we remain committed to the safety and health of our visitors. Over the last few months, a lot of consultative work and focus has been placed on both, de-risking the sector and putting health & operational protocols in place for the

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

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

We are aware of the effect the pandemic has on the global economy, and have been repackaging accordingly, with the intent to offer consumers excellent deals and discounts. Safety measures are transparent and well-communicated and have been factored into overall packages so that there is no surprise or extra-cost to travellers.

Prior to the pandemic, we announced the rolling out of e-visas for the India market. While pilot runs were ongoing, the pandemic hit us, thus delaying the process. We want to assure Indian travellers that we are focused on issuing e-visas as soon as possible, as we want to make it as easy as possible for Indians to come to South Africa. We want travellers to come back enriched after an easy, fluid journey.





Vasudha Sondhi
Managing Director
OMPL Group

‘Indians love to travel overseas and there is a huge segment that is waiting to discover the world’

Outbound travel has already resumed. If reports are anything to go by, Maldives seems to have attracted a significant number of

The chain hotels and other first-class to deluxe hotels have always been very particular about cleanliness and it is even more so now. I also see a trend of bubble travel for weddings and small events.

Now, definitely throughout the globe, staycations will be a higher number for 2021 and possibly 2022. Having said that, Indians love to travel overseas and there is a huge segment that is waiting to discover the world. Outbound Travel may be pushed back or take a back seat for one or 2 years, but it will definitely be back. A trend that we may see are short-haul trips that will pick up in the near future. Travellers taking short-haul overseas trips will be more ready to take long haul flights gradually.

From personal experience, the way to have stress free travel in today's context is to get tested each time you travel and return. Carry only as much luggage as is required. So travel light. Keep sanitizers and other cleaning agents or wipes in small containers for your hand baggage. Use public utilities and toilets as infrequently as possible, masking and washing hands must become a mantra, maintain physical distance. Travelling again is not to be misunderstood for going back to pre-COVID behaviour. One of the most important aspects for travellers is to understand, it is as important for you to be safe and as for the others who may be serving you in hotels, cafes, etc.

travellers from India and Dubai. The regular, aspirational and business travellers are all raring to up and go. Even though I assume that virtual events and meetings will continue to take priority over physical travel in 2021. Leisure travel will return in phases as destinations open up and as the cases reduce in India. The encouraging signs would be to have the cases going down and flights should open up with a rider on tests prior to departure and on arrival at the destination. This should become the rule to minimise spread. This will certainly help boost international travel.



Vachirachai Sirisumpan
Director
TAT New Delhi

‘We know, the Indian travel market is one of the quickest to rebound post the pandemic’

Hope and positive thinking are important forces for our tourism industry. Recently, there has been good news of vaccine preparations and distribution but at the same

of travel and accessibility between the destination countries and India. Take Thailand as an example, before the pandemic with many flights to Thailand from India, a number of connecting points, visa on arrival exemption fee as well as close proximity plus our strength on a variety of tourism products and services and the warm and welcoming Thai hospitality. With the large potential of avid travellers in India, I do see the rise of both domestic and outbound travel from the Indian market. Currently, tourism boards and domestic travel agencies in India as well as many International destinations are very active in the Indian market. As we know, the Indian travel market is one of the quickest to rebound post the pandemic.

In the future, focus and importance on safety and health will be a top concern and a priority for all tourists while travelling. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) together with the Ministry of Public Health with the cooperation of all Thai travel and tourism associations has launched the “Amazing Thailand Health & Safety Certification Administration” or SHA since May 2020. Tourists, both Thais and International could be assured that all touchpoints and experiences in Thailand will be implemented with all health and safety measures and procedures.

time, there has been a 2nd and 3rd wave of COVID-19 that has occurred in many countries. Therefore, we need to be hopeful and realistic to adjust to the fast-changing situation around the world. I personally hope that the leisure outbound travel will start gradually by the 2nd quarter of this year. We continue to receive regular inquiries from tourists and travel agents asking when Thailand will be open for Indian travellers. This is a very encouraging and positive sign that Thailand is one of the favourite holiday destinations for Indians.

The Indian outbound travel scenario will depend on the facilitation

**GB Srithar**

Regional Director (India, Middle East, South Asia)
Singapore Tourism Board

‘We will continue to embark on initiatives to ensure Singapore remains top-of-mind and the destination of choice among our future visitors’

Tourism recovery will take time, as the COVID-19 situation is constantly evolving and mass international travel is not likely

international travel resumes. We are working alongside partners in India to share relevant destination content and updates in travel experiences.

We will continue to embark on initiatives to ensure Singapore remains top-of-mind and the destination of choice among our future visitors, when the time is right for them to visit. However, given the pent-up demand for international travel, we remain confident that the desire to travel to vibrant destinations like Singapore has not diminished and both leisure and MICE travel will resume when the time is right.

Singapore is fortunate in that we have the capacity and resources to manage the COVID-19 pandemic in a robust manner and we have made good progress. To set high standards of environmental public hygiene and to build confidence in our businesses, we also launched the SG Clean Quality Mark in February 2020. This is a national mark of excellence that is awarded to businesses that meet those standards. Innovation and technology will play an important role in future proofing and readying our industry for 2021.

In addition, STB and our tourism partners have been leveraging technology and the digital medium for consumer outreach in India since the start of the pandemic as it is important to continue engaging with them, entertaining them in such extraordinary times and keep Singapore close to their hearts and minds. In 2021, we will continue to bring engaging content to the audiences in a creative way to showcase Singapore's diverse offerings and our brand identity to our audience.

to return in a significant way any time soon. More so than ever, the ability of a destination and its tourism establishments to provide good health and sanitisation practices will be vital in inspiring confidence and influencing consumers' choice to travel. In addition, consumers will likely be more adept at using digital tools and may choose to consume services and experiences in different ways.

Nevertheless, Singapore is well-positioned to emerge from this crisis and we remain confident in the long-term prospects of Singapore's tourism sectors – both for leisure and MICE & business travel – as the fundamentals that make Singapore an attractive place for unique, high-quality travel and MICE experiences, and a key business hub remains unchanged.

Amid overall tourism recovery, here in India, we continue our trade and consumer engagement initiatives to keep Singapore in the mind space of Indian travellers so that we are ready to welcome them when

**Nishant Kashikar**

Country Manager- India & Gulf
Tourism Australia

‘Australia’s word-class handling of coronavirus will be the drawcard for a new wave of “safety sojourns” when international borders eventually reopen’

With the introduction and subsequent administration of the COVID vaccine taking place globally, we have entered 2021 with an added certainty

is limited to non-existent.

Among those factors that are proving to be the stepping-stone towards the resurgence of outbound travel activity, restitution of aviation capacity, overseas travel to meet your loved ones, enrollment for higher education courses at international institutions and heightened interest in leisure travel are swiftly arising as key motivators to travel again.

In lieu of the lessened travel activity observed in the year gone by, the introduction of travel bubbles and safe travel zone arrangements will help re-stabilise the industry. As such, due to the growing influence of Australia's successful and ongoing management of the virus, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of travellers will continue to be a key priority as international travel restrictions ease and international travel to Australia resumes.

As travel slowly but gradually regains its former pace and tenacity,

and greater reassurance of the future following a year that relied on pre-mediated measures and heightened quarantines and safety protocols. However, the revival of the travel and tourism industry remains contingent on each country's ability to curb and eradicate existing clusters of infections as people will feel more at ease and will be encouraged to visit those countries where the risk of infection

people will naturally gravitate towards domestic and local getaways due to reduced travel time and to avoid quarantine protocols. However, this is an optimistic first step that will eventually translate into an increase in outbound travel as domestic vacations can help build back traveller confidence.

All through the pandemic, Tourism Australia has continued to maintain and amplify Australia's attractiveness as a holiday destination amongst high-value Indian travellers through the delivery

of a variety of virtual and digitised initiatives. Australia has made successful attempts to circumvent the spread of COVID-19 and is buckling down on the importance of safety protocols, prioritising public health and safety above other factors. Australia's world-class handling of coronavirus will be the drawcard for a new wave of "safety sojourns" when international borders eventually reopen. Safety and security is the most important factor when choosing a destination and as a result of COVID-19, Australia is at the top of the global bucket list for international travellers.



Sheetal Munshaw
Director
Atout France -India

'Tourism remains a priority for France and the French government is committed to the sector and its cause'

The last few months of 2020 have seen a gradual re-commencement of outbound travel from India. We've had destinations such as Maldives,

trade and influencers. This fortifies the perception that Indians have missed their holidays abroad. Domestic travel is definitely on the rise but given a choice and depending on the circumstances that prevail, the Indian outbound traveller would certainly like to include an international holiday in his travel planning. There is a pent-up demand for travel as most people have already travelled within India in 2020 once state-wise restrictions were relaxed. I definitely think that once the opportunity arises the demand for outbound will meet and surpass expectations.

France was amongst the first 4 countries with which India established an air bubble. We are hoping that when borders open and when travel resumes in the new normal, the creation of this air bubble may have a direct positive impact on tourism.

Tourism remains a priority for France and the French government is committed to the sector and its cause. The Paris Convention and Visitors Bureau has launched 'Caring Attitude', a charter for Parisian tourism industry professionals which include a series of commitments to welcome visitors around a common set of values and in accordance with the health measures in force.

Sustainable travel has been a very important aspect of our strategy in the last few years and is now gaining more prominence and taking place of pride in our experience. A prime example here is Air France that aims to halve its CO2 emissions per passenger-km by 2030.

Dubai, Kenya to name a few open their doors to tourism. This is indeed a good sign and we are hoping that 2021 is the year when outbound travel may resume albeit in a very gradual, phased manner. We can only be cautiously hopeful as the situation globally continues to undergo rapid changes and many countries are still experiencing a second or even a third wave of the virus not to mention new mutants et al. Outbound travel will also hinge on vaccination protocols adapted by countries and also how successfully they've managed to control the virus, as well as the implications in terms of mobility and criteria for entering various countries, remains to be defined.

International destinations that are now open to tourists have already seen a sizeable number of Indians visiting their shores. We already see these destinations organising familiarisation trips for the



Sammy Yahia
Director of Tourism for India and Philippines
Israel Ministry of Tourism

'With the introduction of the vaccine, I am hoping to see Israel welcome tourists by March or April 21'

Almost one year ago, the travel industry came to a complete halt, stopping domestic and international movement.

Since then, there have been many significant changes including India's 'air bubble' with 23 different countries – giving Indian travellers access to almost 100 countries, as well as the recent positive updates on the vaccine progress from India and other countries. With the introduction of the vaccine, I am hoping to see Israel welcome tourists by March or April 21.

With the new trends in travel over the last few months, I believe that domestic and international travel will both be popular options for Indian travellers. The ease of accessibility to local tourism and

the work-from-home culture, during the pandemic, has created new opportunities for holidaymakers to travel.

The relaxation of domestic travel rules has also encouraged travel to the offbeat Indian treasures. This leads me to believe that the trend in domestic travel will continue to grow with travellers taking shorter but more frequent trips. I am optimistic international travel will grow in the first half of 2021 as well though it will not be as buoyant as 2019.

Israel's Ministries of Health and Tourism, with the support of the local municipal corporations and governing bodies, have created SOPs to ensure measures have been taken to reopen the travel, tourism, and hospitality sectors. Restaurants in Israel are open for limited dining, takeaway and delivery services.

Restaurants and bars have offered business owners the opportunity to expand their seating area to public spaces in order to be able to comply with the social distancing rules, at no additional charges from the Municipalities.

Currently, Israel has restricted entry to Israeli passport holders, resident visa holders, and travellers with specific entry approvals by the Ministry of Interior. All persons planning to enter Israel, with the appropriate approvals, must complete a health declaration before travel, as well as enter a 14-day quarantine upon arrival.

I strongly recommend contacting the embassy prior to planning your trip for the most up to date requirements.



Mohd Hafiz Hashim

Director
Tourism Malaysia, Mumbai

‘An Indian traveller, harbors an immense love for travelling and exploring various destinations across the globe’

We are expecting outbound travel to resume by the 1st quarter of 2021. Many countries are currently going through various relaxations on lockdown

guidelines. Domestic tourism is gradually taking shape post the lockdown and ease of restrictions. OTA's have observed a 20-25 per cent month on month jump in holiday bookings. Resorts have seen 30 to 35 percent occupancies. These are few encouraging signs which make you believe that outbound travel will resume from India. With vaccines beginning to be rolled out in several spots across the globe, a return to travel will also soon be on the horizon.

An Indian traveller, harbors an immense love for travelling and exploring various destinations across the globe. Positive reviewing and updating corporate travel policies and booking processes, re-

defining various destination and their requirements for outbound travellers will help to boost travel. This could be for any, infrequent travellers, frequent travellers or bleisure travel deciding upon who can travel to whichever destinations.

We have noticed that a lot of couples opted for a simple online wedding during the lockdown and now that the restrictions are a little relaxed, wedding planners will devise new ways to make the grand affair and honeymoons intimate yet extravagant.

In Malaysia, around 3 million people work in the tourism and hospitality industries, they have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, now, indoor playgrounds, theme parks and attractions are allowed to reopen with adherence to the SOPs. Domestic tourism has restarted in Malaysia and is helping to mitigate the impact on jobs and businesses in some destinations.

Presently, along with many Online Product Briefing sessions for travel agents across the country, we are also working on various discounts and other freebies with several product partners in Malaysia to attract Indian tourists. In all, currently, there are 23 countries now which India has travel bubble arrangement and Malaysia is also working on the agreement with India.



Thoyyib Mohamed

MD
MMPRC

‘We want to make all our visitors enjoy their visit as safely as possible’

India has always been a key market for the Maldives. Since the reopening of the borders, the arrival statistics have

shown gradual and constant growth. By the end of 2020, India became the number one source market to the Maldives. The strong connectivity in terms of flights due to the travel bubble has enabled this positive growth. With the new start of 2021, we have planned several activities to be conducted within the Indian market in order to recover and regain the arrivals to pre-pandemic level. We expect India to continue to be a top performer to the Maldives.

During this unprecedented time, we had to re-strategise

our marketing activities in order to accommodate the current trends and to gain the maximum out of our market efforts. We have constantly attempted to study the consumer's behaviours accordingly and plan for our efforts for 2021. Our strategy for India will greatly focus on keeping the visibility of Maldives and to showcase the Maldives as a safe haven for holidaymakers through targeted activities directly to consumers and travel trade. Some of the activities include digital campaigns, online and offline fairs and roadshows, virtual events and FAM trips. This year, we will also work on reaching as many regions within the Indian market via these platforms. Maldives has also launched the Border Miles program this January to entice more tourists and encourage multiple visits.

In terms of measures, Maldives has always been constantly monitoring the current situation prior to implementing the next phase of protectionary measures. Starting from resorts and liveaboards, which initially opened for visitors on July 15, 2020. After careful monitoring, on December 14, 2020, all hotels and

guesthouses are now fully open for our tourists to enjoy as well. All products including resorts, guest houses, live-boards and hotels offer unique experiences that the visitors can safely enjoy.

All travellers require a negative PCR test for COVID-19 (96 hours prior to departure) and an online health declaration form should be filled and submitted within 24 hours prior to departure. We want to make all our visitors enjoy their visit as safely as possible. With the Allied Inbound Insurance, this is definitely additional support to enjoy the safe haven. We are also geographically blessed with naturally distanced islands which make for natural social distancing and the one-island-one-resort concept also adds to this. This means that each hotel is situated on one island, far away from one another, and only the staff and tourists are situated on the island. All these measures in place ensure that tourists will get to enjoy a safe and hassle-free vacation.



Rachel Bremer
Global Travel Trade & Destination Development Manager
Utah Office of Tourism and Film

‘We are here to support the industry, and inspire future travellers from India’

We are optimistic and expect to see a small recovery in 2021, with a return to 2019 visitation and spending by 2024. We are encouraged by the vaccine rollouts and the

increased intent to travel in our top source markets, including India.

I believe we will see the rise of ‘revenge’ travel and visitors looking for open spaces and landscapes that Utah has to offer. The product that is Utah will be a welcome respite after months of quarantine. While domestic visitation has been key to our short-term recovery, International visitors will remain a priority, and part of our long-term strategic visitor economy recovery efforts. We have not decreased our representation or marketing during the pandemic in our core source markets globally, and continue to focus on both our domestic and international markets now and in the future.

With strategic co-operative marketing, partnerships, education, and product development, as well as targeted consumer marketing, we will see growth from India. We must inspire consumers to visit Utah while educating them on how to visit, and creating an accessible, bookable product for our travel trade partners. We are fairly new to the market, this will take time, but I am optimistic that with the right messaging, partnerships, and education we can increase visitation and visitor spending from India.

The Utah Office of Tourism is supporting stakeholder education on industry best practices/visitor readiness. This coupled with responsible visitor messaging led by our content team, and on visitutah.com helps our visitors to stay informed, and our industry to safely and effectively welcome International visitors once again.

I encourage travel trade partners and consumers alike to visit our COVID 19 Traveller Resources page, as well as our Responsible Travel page. Travel and the experiences of travelling to new, scenic destinations like Utah will be in high demand, especially for visitors that have already visited the East Coast and West Coast of the USA. We are an excellent road-tripping state, and for wellness tourism, eco-tourism, and longevity retreats. We are here to support the industry, and inspire future travellers from India.



Arches National Park, Utah



Neeti Bhatia

Director

Intrepid Marketing and Communications

‘We are certain that outbound travel will gradually gear up once international borders open to Indians’

We, at Intrepid Marketing & Communications, are already receiving a substantial number of queries around international travel and are hence hopeful that once the restrictions are relaxed, outbound travel shall slowly but steadily gain momentum.

In addition to the positive responses from traveller communities, the revised guidelines introduced by governments and tourism boards to ensure the health and safety of visitors surely has been a notable booster. It communicates their welcoming approach towards visitors from other countries and increases the traveller's trust in the destination. Several countries and leading hotel brands have also announced attractive offers to entice tourists to opt for longer stays.

As of now, domestic travel surely is leading the movements keeping in mind COVID-19 imposed restrictions and safety quotient. However, we are certain that outbound travel will gradually gear up once international borders open to Indians. In the last few months of 2020, the outbound travel industry witnessed a substantial influx as travellers opted to visit short-

haul countries as compared to other domestic destinations. NTOs are directing their efforts towards promoting their destinations and communicating COVID-19 guidelines in order to boost arrivals as early as the first quarter of 2021. Hence, to conclude, if the travel trade fraternity continues to join hands to revive the travel industry alongside government's support, we are affirmative that the outbound travel industry will gather steam in no time.

Intrepid Marketing and Communications is representing Kenya Tourism Board, Bahrain Tourism and Exhibition Authority Office; both the countries are welcoming Indians presently. Kenya, Africa's most coveted destination, is allowing visitors to explore the destination immediately after arrival, sans quarantine period. At present, there are three direct flights from Mumbai to Nairobi and connecting flights once a week from select cities. In order to practice safety, the tourism board requires all passengers to undergo a COVID-19 PCR test 72 hours prior to their travel. The Kenya Tourism Board is eagerly looking forward to welcoming more tourists shortly. For adventure seekers who are willing to explore long-haul options, Kenya undoubtedly is the ideal destination.

Also, Bahrain has emerged as a new short-haul destination for Indian families as direct flights and COVID-19 safety are of utmost importance. Gulf Air has 5 direct flights from 5 cities (Delhi, Mumbai, Kochi, Hyderabad and Chennai) in India and as a protocol PCR test is mandatory; the reports will be updated on the Beware Bahrain app which travellers have to download when in Bahrain. With Bahrain being the Best Wedding Destination in 2020, the tourism board is also reaching out to the wedding segment for upcoming weddings in 2021.



Magical Kenya

Incredible !ndia



Khushboo Gujarat Ki

The sand is exactly as white as shown in this picture.
The ocean of white sand stands out stark and pristine in its
colourlessness, interrupted only by passing herds of camels.
On moonlit nights, the desert reveals another colour.
Something that can hardly be described in words.

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

Amitabh Bachchan

Amitabh Bachchan



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HOPE ON THE HORIZON

for the reeling outbound travel sector

The impact of COVID-19 on tourism is expected to continue and the industry is likely to underperform till the end of this year. Still, there are high hopes from Indian travellers considering their explorative nature and inclination towards travel. In recent years, India's rising middle class and growing population coupled with a strong economy have further fuelled growth in the Indian outbound travel market. Given that, tour operators and specialists handle the bulk of outbound travel from India. Hence, TTJ spoke to some of them to know their hopes and expectation on outbound travel in 2021.

Prashant Nayak



Tejbir Singh Anand

Managing Director
Holiday Moods Adventures Pvt Ltd

‘Outbound travellers are waiting for the destinations to open up and have not taken up domestic travel as an alternate’

Of the three verticals of tourism namely outbound, inbound and domestic travel I feel outbound travel would be number

two climbing up on the ladder after domestic travel. Though we all are still in the midst of the COVID time, yet we can all see a very encouraging response of outbound travel to Maldives and

Dubai, the only two leisure destinations that are practically open for Indians at present. Both these destinations can vouch that their business is growing and the majority of the travellers are from India aiding their travel industry. What is heartening is that slowly but steadily new travel bubbles are being formed with many countries which are soon going to be offered to the Indian traveller as the air connections resume. Queries for South Africa and Kenya have already started and I see the traffic towards South Africa and Kenya growing very soon. The fact that it's taking money and time, to get the COVID-19 negative test done, both while departing from India and coming back, (though no one is happy doing it) is encouraging enough as a positive sentiment for outbound travel from India.

With domestic tourism getting attention, let's analyze what kind of domestic travel is happening in the country. If you talk to any tour operator, you will hear they are still waiting for business to resume. If you talk to your travel agent they will be happy to share that bookings for hotel, air tickets and insurance are keeping them busy, however, the conversion ratio is just 10-15 per cent. At present, domestic travel is all about online hotel bookings and the major beneficiary at present are hotels directly situated in leisure destinations, OTAs, and few robust travel agents. "Work from Hotel" and "Workcations" are new concepts seen around benefitting the homestays and the B&B industry directly but not the agents and operators.

I am sure that soon the outbound travel will give a neck to neck

traction to the domestic travel given the fact that both the client segments are totally different. Outbound travellers are waiting for the destinations to open up and have not taken up domestic travel as an alternate. As outbound travel slowly resumes, I am very optimistic that the graph is only going to go up north.

Our destination's preparedness in 2021 for the Indian outbound traveller is purely dependent upon the air sectors and countries opening up for inbound tourism. We can talk about some sectors as of now and we are very excited about destinations such as South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Egypt, and Jordan linking northeast Africa with the Middle East, promoting Mongolia, Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal in Mountains and plateaus of Asia, Maldives, Philippines, Mauritius as Exotic Islands.



Harjit Singh
Associate Vice President
Signature Tours

'Indian outbound travel has always come back stronger from the periodic disruptions we have had in the last two decades'

2020 has been a historic year for the travel and hospitality industry and despite the challenges the world has faced, travel

a few evacuation flights and with inter-state borders in India opening in July – August, domestic travel was the only option. Domestic and regional travel will have an advantage due to international travel restrictions. In the near term too, domestic travel will have an edge until the bulk of international travel returns possibly starting March in a gradual and phased manner.

Despite the looming shadow of COVID-19 this holiday season, Maldives has recorded over 12,000 arrivals from India within the first 20 days of December. For Dubai, India has been the top source market for arrivals between July-November.

India now has two vaccines approved; an early availability and revival in consumer confidence could even result in 2X growth in outbound travel.

The ability of a destination and its tourism establishments to provide good health and sanitisation practices will be vital in inspiring confidence and influencing Indian traveller's choice. It is likely for them to prioritise quality travel companies that can provide trust.

Destinations, hotels and service providers are responding and putting in place standardised protocols for safety and hygiene giving travellers more comfort. We have global alliances that allow us to access companies around the world which have adopted health and hygiene global standardised protocols – so our guests can experience 'Safe Travels'.

has prevailed. Travel is on top of mind as Indians look at planning their 2021 calendar.

With the development of the vaccine, formation of air travel bubbles and gradual and cautious opening of international borders, the future looks optimistic. Indian outbound travel has always come back stronger from the periodic disruptions we have had in the last two decades.

India has established transport bubbles with twenty-three countries across the world and going forward we will see more countries being added. Indian tourists can travel to Maldives, Dubai, Kenya, Tanzania bearing in mind their health and safety guidelines, without any impediments.

Well, international borders were closed until mid-July except for





Sajan Gupta
Founder
Vayu Seva

‘The issue with outbound travel from India is that there are very few countries or destinations that are open to tourists from India’

I am extremely hopeful of outbound travel resuming in 2021. Some of the early signs have been India's air travel bubble with the Maldives and Dubai. There has been a record-breaking number of travellers to these countries between July and now, which is indicative of the positive outlook towards outbound travel even in such challenging times.

The issue with outbound travel from India is that there are very few countries or destinations that are open to tourists from India. Due to the lack of options, Indians have become more

creative about exploring domestic destinations. However, once borders start reopening and restrictions will start easing out, I am very hopeful of travellers continuing with their holiday plans outside of the country, as has been the trend in the recent past (before COVID-19)

My team and I spearheaded a project to operate a direct chartered flight between Kolkata and the Maldives while observing strict health and safety measures. The direct flight not only made travel from Kolkata to the Maldives convenient but also helped reduce exposure to additional airports, hence reducing exposure to germs. We have been keeping ourselves updated about health and safety protocols to be followed while travelling, and we have been educating our clients about the same. By combining direct flights and hotels that maintain safety standards, we have been able to curate stress-free experiences for our clients.



Rajiv Verma
Director
Lawrence Travels

‘I think even under best of circumstances, we should not expect outbound to regain 25-30 per cent of last year targets before Oct-Nov 2021’

The majority of Indian tourists are no longer afraid of COVID-19 and after being stuck in homes for more than six months they are desperate to go for an international trip which is subject to new air bubbles flights commencing along with tourist visas being worked out.

Indians are already spending ₹20000--25000 per day in domestic resorts such as Ananda Spa, Wild Flower Hall, etc, and if more travel bubbles are not created, such spenders will continue to travel within India as most nearby international destinations have already been visited by them. Please understand that there are more than 100 million domestic

tourists who can afford to spend more than ₹2000 per night per room and if international travel eases out then the same middle-income domestic tourist has the potential to become an outbound traveller and enjoy budget holidays in Thailand.

However, time and again, with international flights being banned like recently in the United Kingdom or news of mutated virus during a vaccine rollout does not help the outbound travel scenario.

I think, even under the best of circumstances, we should not expect outbound to regain 25 per cent to 30 per cent of last year's targets before Oct-Nov 2021. So till things get better it is imperative that outbound tour operators and agents have to do their homework and understand which international destinations are opening and to have the sound knowledge of the SOP's and practises applicable at the destination for tourists to be confident for travel.

True Grit: The fight back for survival and revival continues for the hospitality industry in 2021



Though the hospitality industry is in the middle of one of the toughest crises, it is positive that the industry will bounce back with new ways of connecting with customers. Various confidence-building measures are being taken by the hotels in the country right from reinventing and digitising the customer experience and, in making their stay more experiential, safer, and hygienic. TTJ speaks to some of the industry leaders about their expectations from 2021 and it is also interesting to know the compelling new trends and opportunities emerging within the hospitality sector.

Prashant Nayak



Kerrie Hannaford

Vice President Commercial
Accor India & South Asia

‘People want to step out of their houses to simply relive the joys of travelling and to relax’

Innovation and creativity will continue to have a centre stage in the hospitality industry. We feel that the fraternity will remain dynamic but will now be extra cautious and agile. It will be imperative to drive consistency across the board for delivering guests an experience that continues to keep

their safety and hygiene at the helm.

At Accor, we will every day bring the best versions of ourselves by working smarter, driving performance, and continuously delivering quality service. We believe that in 2021, the industry will emerge stronger and provide seamless hospitality to our guests.

Guests have become more tech-savvy during the lockdown and digital interaction has gained popularity now more than ever before. The hospitality industry has been aggressively embraced technology; starting from booking the room to check-in, check-outs and payment procedures. Consumers also prefer emails, digital posters, and digital menus for all the communication.

There is also a new trend of virtual events and weddings in the MICE segment. At several Accor's hotels, we saw a rise in demand for curated and virtual weddings. We have also launched 'Vivaah at Novotel', which provides our guests an opportunity to connect with all their relatives and friends to join in for the celebrations from different cities virtually.

We have witnessed an ongoing trend of domestic leisure travel as well, especially for weekend getaways, staycations, drivecations, and celebrating special occasions. People want to step out of their house to simply relive the joys of travelling and to relax. The overdue pent-up demand for travel and the festive season have helped the industry in recovery.

We are cautiously optimistic about 2021. In terms of planning, we have pivoted from the usual short and long-term plans to take a more flexible approach by concentrating on our ALLSAFE protocols and messaging. We are staying agile, keeping an eye on changing trends, vigilantly observing behavioral changes in our guests, and swiftly working accordingly with our teams across to deliver the best of our services to guests. We are looking at everything quarter by quarter to stay aligned with changing guest's preferences and restrictions by the government and travel policies.

We will take a renewed approach towards our existing partnerships and campaigns next year. We will continue providing our guests the most memorable experiences curated by our loyalty programme ALL - Accor Live Limitless. 2021 also marks the launch of the first Raffles in India, one of the most luxurious and coveted brands in the world. We will have a memorable launch, as this expands our luxury portfolio in the country and will be the 10th Accor brand available in India and South Asia.



Seema Roy
Area Managing Director
Preferred Hotels & Resorts, South Asia, Middle East & Africa

'As such, the second half of 2021 looks more promising across all business segments'

COVID-19 has been the biggest disruption for our industry in recent memory. Despite this, we are cautiously

optimistic now vaccinations are being rolled out globally. This time has pushed us to stay resilient, think differently, and look at all plausible avenues to grow stalled business and ultimately thrive.

There is a pent-up desire to travel and we have seen demand increase since Q4, especially in the local leisure segment with more people travelling closer to home. There is increased confidence about health and hygiene protocols being followed universally. While corporate travel remains restricted to essential business only, small events are coming back in a hybrid format. As such, the second half of 2021 looks more promising across all business segments.

Local and limited international leisure has picked up, especially over the end of year holidays. Indian leisure locations like Goa and Rajasthan, Dubai, and the Maldives have seen good occupancy numbers in the last few weeks also.

Among new trends we witness is that residential-style lodging was on a strong growth curve even prior to the pandemic, but this segment will become a much more frequent choice in the coming years for leisure and business travel due to space, privacy, and security that stand-alone properties provide to families and groups of friends. Demand for small, boutique, buy-out friendly properties has also increased.

There is a huge focus on personal space being integral to the new luxury guest experience offering.

Another key trend that is emerging is the rise of sustainable travel. There is more understanding of travel's impact on the environment and local communities, therefore, destinations providing unique cultural experiences with a clear commitment to local environments and communities are attracting more business. The current crisis has expedited progress in this area. In line with this philosophy, Preferred recently launched Beyond Green. This new hospitality brand debuted with 24 founding member properties that exemplify leadership in sustainable tourism, including The Brando in Tahiti and Linyanti Wildlife Reserve in Botswana. Beyond Green represents Preferred's commitment to supporting a better future for travel that protects our planet for future generations.

On this long road to recovery, we continue to provide our member hotels with global market intelligence and resources, and continue to drive bookings through the I Prefer Hotel Rewards program, which is the world's largest points-based loyalty program for independent hotels. Over the past few months, we have made a series of updates to extend greater flexibility and value-based offers to more than 3.7 million I Prefer members globally, providing them with greater incentive to stay at our hotels worldwide.

Our role is also to reassure and provide our loyal guests with the best advice for safer hotel stays. We have included each member hotel's approach to safety and sanitation across all of our channels, including the brand website. Last summer we announced a global partnership with Bureau Veritas, which our hotels to have their health and sanitisation programs certified by a respected global authority.



Benita Sharma
Area Manager North Luxury Hotels & General Manager
ITC Maurya

‘Our guests will continue to be drawn towards our hotels that take care of their wellbeing’

The third quarter in this financial year has witnessed a marginal recovery giving way to hope. The main driver behind this partial recovery is the

‘WeAssure’ protocol: ITC Hotels’ commitment to Health, Hygiene, and a Safe Environment. Through this, guests will be reassured by accreditation from the National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH). ITC Hotels has also partnered with DNV GL Business Assurance, a leading certification body, for stringent clinical levels of hygiene and safety. While there is a lot which has been done on the ground to ensure the safety and hygiene of our guests and employees and the focus is not just to be clean but near to clinically clean!

Sustainable business practices that respect the environment and society have always been the DNA of ITC Hotels. Since pioneering the concept of “Responsible Luxury” in 2009, ITC Hotels has commissioned numerous planet positive initiatives, which range from the use of renewable energy which today powers more than 57 per cent of ITC Hotels electrical requirement to an over 50 per cent reduction in water consumption over the last five years to name a few and amongst the first hospitality chains to discontinue use of ‘Single-Use Plastic’ across its operations. ITC Hotels has also been focused on initiatives addressing health and wellbeing and over the years introduced many initiatives like heightened focus on Indoor Air Quality, installation of Radiation harmonizers that mitigate the harmful effects of radiation at all ITC Hotels and the Sleep Program which addresses multiple parameters aimed at enhancing the quality of sleep from interventions on controlling decibel levels in the room to lighting, fragrance and aromas to introduction of a sleep menu designed to promote the biological aspect of sleep quality using select food ingredients from across the world.

domestic leisure travellers. The Outbound Indian luxury traveller will look out for exclusive domestic vacations within the country as uncertainties about international travel continue to loom large. To tap this demand, most domestic hotels have curated special Staycation, ‘work-from-hotel’ and F&B packages, which have sparked some recovery in the sector. Overall, hotel occupancy in India has improved from approximately 10 per cent in April 2020 to almost 32 per cent in December 2020. Going forward post administering the COVID- 19 vaccine, I believe social distancing will become a new norm- the travel industry will witness more traffic – there will be a gush of travel especially for people rushing to meet their loved and dear ones. Visa norms would soon focus on health rather than finances. So we finally have seen a light in the long dark tunnel and have lots to look forward to upon the return of both the domestic and the international business travellers.

Our guests will continue to be drawn towards our hotels that take care of their wellbeing. We are fortunate to have a head-start as the Responsible Luxury initiative which has been our guiding premise for over a decade. As part of this ethos, we welcome guests with the



Rohit Kapoor
Chief Executive Officer
OYO India & South Asia

‘Presently, our travel booking trends suggest that India is ready to travel again’

The year 2020 has been a year of immense learning. The pandemic presented an opportunity for us to build a ‘resilient OYO’. Our ability

to adapt, problem-solve and respond to unexpected challenges has been key to our survival and road to recovery. In 2020, we leveraged technology in a big way by offering meaningful solutions to our consumers, partners and employees in the new normal. We focussed on continuously delivering a high-quality experience to our customers as part of our ‘Sanitised Stays’, ‘Contact-less check-ins’ and ‘Sanitised Before Your Eyes’ initiatives while adding value to the experience of

our asset partners with improved occupancy and revenue. Presently, our travel booking trends suggest that India is ready to travel again. Currently, our occupancy has recovered to 45 per cent of pre-COVID levels with room nights sold increasing 40 per cent + month on month. The demand we are witnessing is fairly distributed and holiday patterns have changed tremendously. With Work From Home and flexible work hours, today, families don’t necessarily have to plan their holidays around school calendars, weekends, or holiday seasons. We believe that leisure markets will see a fair share of pent up demand spurt before witnessing steady occupancy in 2021. We are also expecting more families, groups to travel and opt for our long-term rental vacation homes offering - OYO Home. With travel restrictions opening up gradually and the vaccine trials starting globally we are hopeful that together with our partners and our customers, we will make the best out of whatever 2021 has to offer.

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Satyen Jain
CEO
Pride Hotels

‘If given the ‘Industry status’ it will help give the hospitality sector the boost to thrive in the long run’

We are hopeful that with the 2021 budget the government will extend its support towards our industry and will try to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 from it. The hospitality industry

is one of the hardest-hit industries and business loss due to COVID -19 is unabsorbed. Today, Tourism and Hospitality as an industry accounts for 12.6 per cent direct and indirect jobs in the country. If given the ‘Industry status’ it will help give the hospitality sector the boost to thrive in the long run. Moreover, we are also anticipating that the government reworks on the GST rates for hotel room tariffs of ₹7500 and above 18 per cent and they review the Kamath Committee Recommendations which are very stringent and unfavorable for our industry.

Guests today are taking charge of their safety, health and wellness; hotels are responding with stringent SOP protocols with technological advancement to minimise human contact. Wellness is also taking on primary importance as guests want to know that it is safe to return to large group settings. Reduced density, increased sanitation stations and pre-packaged meals could be the norm going forward.

Secondly, the general opinion suggests that the domestic market is picking up faster than the international market as the local travellers are looking for a safe weekend getaway. Seeing the upcoming trend the Pride Group has already launched several Drivecations and Staycations packages. We have also designed a holiday package - ‘Pride Escape’, for families and kids who are longing for a fun yet safe vacation.

Due to the current scenario of social distancing and for the safety of our staff and guests, we needed new solutions to meet the requirements and yet stay competitive. At Pride Hotels we have rolled out enhanced technological measures like contactless check-in and check-out facility through apps to avoid unnecessary contact; contactless billing facility, and mobile-friendly dining menu. To provide our guests with an enhanced safe and hygienic environment we have deployed technology at every aspect of our services.

We have launched a few initiatives to keep our operation engaged and relevant like Co-Working & Corporate Spaces desks, the alternate office space for working professionals. ‘India Dekho with Pride’ campaign to boost domestic travel, tourism and hospitality industry which has been overall deeply impacted by COVID-19. Wedding at Pride initiative facilitates financial assistance to make sure that our guests’ dream wedding comes alive within the specified budget. We are also offering staycation facilities with financial assistance.



Sarbendra Sarkar
Founder & MD
Cygnett Hotels & Resorts

‘Sustainable practices need to be a part of our brand USP. It needs to be integrated into our day-to-day existence’

This year has been intense, life-changing. The world as we knew it is far-gone! The news of the vaccine is a welcome change.

We anticipate that the government in its upcoming Union budget enables the industry by bringing about some incentives that can boost revenue. We are expecting lowered GST rates on hotel room tariffs, better infrastructure and connectivity to destinations. ‘New age’ travellers will expect simpler, outdoor experiences with their near and dear ones. There will be an expectation for more private, roomy spaces and personal control over health and hygiene. Two encouraging trends you have noticed in the hotel industry are:

“Smart” Rooms are a priority. Along with the insistence for safety, hygiene and cleanliness being the first ask for every traveller, with the world getting digital and with ‘Work from Home’ being the new normal. All basic hotel conveniences in a room are becoming gradually becoming digital. Guests want concierge services, check-in/out, room services made easy with a push of a button (or tap of a finger) allowing for minimum contact catalyst.

Sustainable hospitality is the way-forward. Eco-friendly practices,

products and services are what the guests now prefer. This pandemic has pushed some really intense buttons, and everyone is beginning to realise the need to conserve and not misuse resources before it is too late. Just leaving a card in the room requesting the guest to re-use towels, etc. will not cut it anymore. Sustainable practices need to be a part of our brand USP. It needs to be integrated into our day-to-day existence. For example, Solar panels; recycle used water for the landscape/garden in the property; re-work F&B menus to include healthier, immunity-boosting options.

Our number one priority is the health and safety of our guests, staff and our partners. This pandemic has completely changed the way we do business and pushed us to get more innovative and rethink our strategies. All our improvement/improvements are aimed at ensuring a safe, hassle-free and comfortable holiday for our guests. We have created a comprehensive “Health & Safety Assured” program based on all rules/guidelines set by the World Health Organization and other local/central health agencies. We have implemented this program across all our properties.

We pay special interest to a guest experience post check-out to understand their point of view and constantly better our services. Furthermore, we have upped our communication strategy and are constantly communicating with our target audience. This level of communication and transparency has in fact has proven positive for us as we are now getting a lot of enquiries.



Noshir A Marfatia

Senior Vice President - Sales & Marketing
The Fern Hotels & Resorts, Concept Hospitality

‘Safety and hygiene in hotels have become the key differentiators in this new normal period’

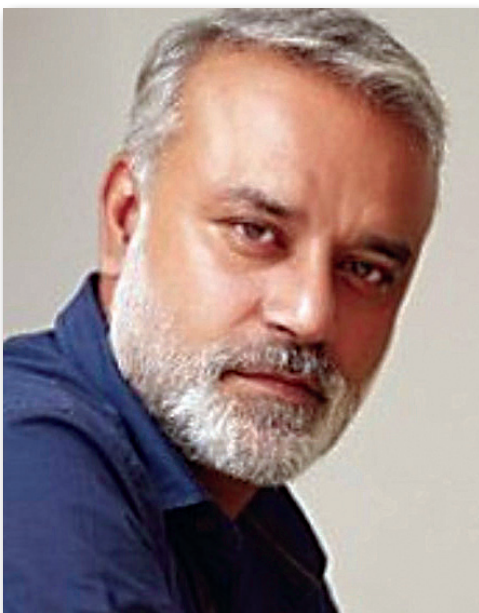
The industry has sunk to its lowest lows in 2020, and the expectations are that 2021 will see some bounce back happening, if not

immediately, then at least by the summer. Leisure travel to close-by resorts has been happening all across India with a vengeance, and this is expected to continue and grow. Corporate travel too is seeing a small start in many business locations, and also conferences, social events and small destination weddings. Some of the more enlightened state governments such as Maharashtra and others have been supportive of the industry, by easing business norms, rationalising licenses and reducing some fees. Hoteliers and other stakeholders have worked closely together this past year and with the government’s support, we are hopeful of a positive turnaround in 2021.

After the initial lockdown months where all hotels across India suffered drastically, some locations have seen a bounce back. All our resorts have done exceedingly well in the October-December

quarter, and in fact, some have done even higher revenues in Q3 than the previous year. Staycations and weekend city breaks are the new buzz words that have given hotels the occupancies and revenues to partially cover their operating costs. Most encouraging for us has been the huge demand we have seen at the resorts we have newly opened during this period - our new hotels in Gangtok, Daman, etc are all off to a flying start, with room bookings exceeding our expectations! And now with airline flights between metro and business cities also seeing high seat loads, we are hopeful that our business locations too will start seeing a return to earlier occupancy levels.

Safety and hygiene in hotels have become the key differentiators in this new normal period. Guests will now be more mindful to stay at hotels where they feel safe and secure. Over the past 6-8 months, we have geared our operations to provide our in-house teams and guests an environment that is clean, hygienic and safe, with proper masking and social distancing being pre-requisites. We will continue all efforts to maintain these norms till required. As all our hotels return to full operations and optimum staffing, we go into the New Year by providing all our guests a higher level of service and facilities.



Jaspreet Singh

Executive Director
Vana Dehradun

‘As an added measure considering current times, Vana has created a safety bubble inside the retreat for smooth and secure operations to follow’

By following and practising sustainable choices, one always has the advantage of achieving

optimisation of resources, which directly impacts the society around us. The pandemic had brought travel to a standstill and shelved many travel plans. As travel restrictions have started to lift, travellers are undertaking short trips, with sustainability and responsibility at the core of their travel. Sustainable choices in travel have led people to introspect about society, ecology, and the environment while travelling which is currently essential.

At Vana, our Vanavasis (our guests) are aware of our sustainable practices and are fully supportive of our practices for seven years now. While we have managed to transform the lives of many, we continue to aim at enhancing wellbeing and be of service to all by collaborating with Domestic trade partners in jointly offering a Wellness Journey

to today’s discerning seekers of wellness. As an added measure considering current times, Vana has created a safety bubble inside the Retreat for smooth and secure operations to follow. This simply means that the team catering to our Vanavasis (guests) are staying in-house. A non-negotiable requirement to be on the premises for both Vanavasis and the Team is to be tested for COVID- 19, prior to their arrival at Vana. We are hopeful of the success of the current immunisation drive and eagerly await for normalcy to return.

While we are hopeful for normalcy to commence post the recent developments on the immunisation drive, Vana stands prepared. We are keen on catering to our discerning clientele as a wellness domestic tourist destination while being focused on its life vision to enhance wellbeing and be of service to all. Effort this year will be to make Vana’s experience closer to that of a sanctuary. A Retreat where stillness, contemplation, selflessness, simplicity and equilibrium can be practised and felt. While we continue to offer Ayurveda, Sowa Rigpa (Tibetan Healing), and Yoga in its true authenticity along with complementary therapies and nourishing cuisine to complete a wellness journey.



Shiv Bose
General Manager
Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa

‘The industry is highly resilient and will bounce back with vigour in the next two years’

The hospitality industry has witnessed many scourges in the past and has come out a winner. We have had our share of dull days with unforeseen circumstances and unpredictable events, but the backbone of the industry has never been broken. The industry is highly resilient and will bounce back with vigour in the next two years.

New dimensions of affordable luxury have opened up with house catering and food delivery opportunities. Staycation offers

and value-based catering proposals are doing the rounds. The opportunities are very customer-centric and are useful in creating a very good ecosystem that is not confined to typical hospitality service. Enhanced hygiene measures as adopted by all hotels and resorts are paramount to creating a very safe environment and instil confidence in travellers.

Our resort is well poised to handle vacation seekers and event groups. We have adopted Marriott guided standards towards serving our guests effectively in keeping with the situation at hand. We are also working with local associations to offer our guests a holistic experience ranging from sporting activities, heritage site visits and buying directly from local artisans.



Davinder Juj
General Manager
Eros Hotel New Delhi Nehru Place

‘Technology has played a crucial role in the pandemic as it has helped in providing solutions to many problems’

While the Year 2020 threw the world into chaos, forcing industries to either overhaul their operations or rethink new strategies to survive; New Year 2021 seems to be bringing along new hopes and opportunities for better gains in occupancies and regular travel. However, it is difficult to predict the actual revival but especially when we don’t have the cure yet, but the real pick up in business, travel and revenues is expected between 3rd and 4th quarter. But, I strongly feel that the use of latest technology will help ensure safety and reduce health risks.

Technology has played a crucial role in the pandemic as it has helped in providing solutions to many problems. If today, we have been able to introduce and provide contactless services to our guests in order to ensure safety and reduce health risks, all this has become possible with the help of innovative technology. Virtual meetings have become a trending chapter of today’s life. Digital platforms have evolved like never before. Contactless payments, contactless check-in and check-out, contactless food ordering, are all fine examples of technological change. In fact, technology has kept us all together and connected through the tough times.

Secondly, in the post lockdown phase, safety and hygiene took priority over everything else and became the key to restore the

confidence of the guests and associates. To ensure that everyone visiting the hotel feels the same warmth and comfort with us while experiencing the sense of safety, we have adopted various measures which include highest levels of cleaning and sanitisation in all areas of the hotel.

At Eros, we emphasise on creating a valuable experience for our guests, rather than just a stay. To enhance this experience, we have introduced #EROS CARE initiative under the name of which we implemented a comprehensive outline of safety measures such as screening of guests and team members at the hotel entrance, the highest level of cleaning and sanitisation practices, touchless soap dispensers, sensor taps and automatic sanitizers to avoid contact, PPE in all relevant areas, self-declaration forms during check-in to assess guest’s medical and travel history, staggered seating in restaurants and guest areas, glass shielding at the reception desk, sanitisation of guest luggage at the entrance, strict protocols for holding events and conferences, markings and queue manager placements to encourage safe distancing, digital/contactless payments, adequate display of various do’s and don’ts in all guest and back areas, dedicated Hygiene and Safety Manager and trainings and mock drills for team members to prepare them for any emergency situations. All these measures are in line with the guidelines issued by the World Health Organization (WHO), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MHFW) and Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

Key holiday trends of 2021



Rishi Verma

Domestic travel with preference for staycations:

For travellers, domestic travel will be the key to discover more avenues and destinations as safety and cleanliness will continue to be top priorities due to COVID-19. As per RCI'S latest travel trends, the preference for nearby places with private spaces has increased. Top trends among RCI members include places that are offbeat and in sync with nature, such as tree houses, cottages, farmhouses among others.

Rise in Experiential Travel:

Experiential travel isn't particularly new. There's been growing demand around culinary travel, cultural exploration, and activity-based travel experiences for a few years now. But the demand for experiential travel shows no signs of slowing down in 2021. Adventurers will continue to

Every year travel trends come and go; however, 2021 is set to be one of tourism's most significant years to date. As the world slowly recovers from COVID-19 and borders gradually start to open, everyone expects travel to look a little different than it did pre-pandemic. It is important to now look ahead and plan for the future, following the rules of the 'new normal'. Rishi Verma, Head of India Subcontinent – RCI, shares with TTJ, the new emerging trip types and trends for 2021.

Team TTJ

hunt for truly local and authentic experiences, whether that's the best food places in Punjab, the hidden beaches of Goa, or textile weaving classes in Rajasthan.

Road trips to be favoured

With state borders opened, travellers have started exploring their own backyard. For people residing in India, there are plenty of adventures waiting to be had. Travellers are choosing road trips over flights as they choose a safer-perceived way to vacation; the phenomenon is expected to last till mid-2021. With states easing restrictions and waiving off COVID-19 test requirements, people have increasingly started taking road trips on weekends, workcation and staycations. One can say that this

between working and travelling in 2021. The work from home notion has created a huge demand in the market for dedicated workstations to simplify the work process without any hindrance from internal factors. At RCI, they anticipate that as the offices remain shut for a long time, work from resort will be the next emerging trend.

Micro Trips:

Let's face it, not everyone in the world has the time, money, or know-how to



trend will only continue to see an upward trajectory in the coming months.

Work from Anywhere:

Remote working from anywhere will continue to blur the lines

plan an extended vacation. That's why 2020 is the year to embrace Micro Trips, short yet experience-dense mini-vacations. Micro Trips are more work/vacation time-friendly, more budget-friendly, and more schedule-friendly, yet they provide the same cultural and mental benefits as longer vacations do. Though one may only be gone for 2-4 days, one will still benefit from stress relief, creative boosts, and cultural expansion as people will be leaving their comfort zones regardless of where they are going.



Sail with Confidence: Besides the vaccine, cruise liners are ensuring that cruising is safer than ever

From early July through mid-December 2020, CLIA said more than 200 sailings took place with multiple layers of enhanced health and safety measures. The success of these initial sailings demonstrates new protocols are working as designed — to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 among passengers, crew, and the destinations the cruise ships visit. TTJ speaks to two cruise professionals who are eager to set sail once more, and again create memorable experiences for their loyal and valued guests in 2021.

Prashant Nayak



Naresh Rawal

Vice President – Sales (India & South Asia)
Genting Cruise Lines

‘We observed that consumers are gaining back their confidence towards cruising as they become more aware and educated of the preventive and safety measures that are readily in place on our cruise ships’

2021 comes as a new dawn and hope for the travel industry,

including the cruise sector. Due to the pandemic, undeniably the travel and cruise industry's landscape had evolved drastically and will never be the same. However, there is a silver lining of hope and learning curve to this and at Genting Cruise Lines over the past year, we had rethink, redesign and enhance our operations to adapt to the new travel environment and trends, especially in safety and preventive measures. We are proud to be the first cruise line in the world to commence and successfully launch safe pilot cruises with Dream Cruises in both Taiwan and Singapore in 2020.

Moving ahead, we remain highly optimistic of the continued and gradual rise in demand for cruises again in 2021, especially with the global roll-out of vaccines for COVID-19. Together with our enhanced preventive and safety steps in place, we have a readily available blueprint that will enable us to continue to explore new opportunities to resume safe cruise operations in different countries in the not too distant future.

Under Genting Cruise Lines, Dream Cruises had successfully commenced safe pilot cruise since July 2020 starting with Taiwan and in November in Singapore. From both markets, demand remains highly encouraging with notable positive trends. We observed that consumers are gaining back their confidence towards cruising as they become more aware and educated of the preventive and safety measures that are readily in place on our cruise ships. For instance, our ships currently being deployed in both countries are equipped with an on board PCR machine and in Singapore, all guests are required to conduct



an ART test prior and post-cruise with the ship operating at 50 per cent reduced capacity.

Another notable trend is that travellers are now highly conscious of their well-being and safety when choosing their choice of vacation. There is a gradual and renewed interest in cruising, especially for domestic markets as we have been working hard to educate consumers on the benefits of cruising and the safety measures that are available in line with both international and local authorities' guidelines. In 2021, we hope the regional and global situation will improve and travel bubbles

will expand with prevailing safety conditions that will enable Fly-Cruise to commence in the future this year.

We are looking forward to forging new and safe opportunities for the New Year in 2021, both within the existing and active markets like Taiwan and Singapore, but also new markets within the region. As such, we are constantly in discussion with the various local authorities to share our experiences in safety and preventive measures based on our current active deployments in order to explore suitable timings to resume safe pilot cruises for our fleet across the region.



Henry Yu
Director
Asia (Uniworld Boutique River Cruises)

‘Since the announcements of vaccines, we have seen a surge in booking enquires and many of our customers who have had to cancel their trips in 2020 are rebooking for 2021 and 2022’

Cruising will remain the most popular and potential travel product in post COVID-19 period. In

particular, river cruising will continue to expand and diversify in 2021 and 2022 because of its incredible appeal. Unlike the ocean liners, river cruise ships only accommodate 130-150 guests a ship which can massively reduce the risk of any emergencies. This also ensures our guests get to enjoy all of the benefits of cruising, but with fewer people and more personalised service.

We expect safety will be the priority concern for all travellers and they will choose to book their holidays with a reliable company that can provide them the peace of mind that deliberate steps have been taken to protect their safety, health, and wellbeing.

Beyond the impact on our business, the COVID-19 pandemic has also unveiled some opportunities. Consumer pricing sensitivities have reduced a lot and there are more customers who are willing to pay more to make travel happen.

Since the announcements of vaccines, we have seen a surge in booking enquiries and many of our customers who have had to cancel their trips in 2020 are rebooking for 2021 and 2022. We also received many thoughtful and sweet messages from our past guests. They asked about our crew's situations and expressed their desire to travel with us again. These messages are a huge motivation for us, and a testament of their trust that Uniworld and our parent company, The Travel Corporation will deliver the best way to get back into the world again once it is safe to do so!

Uniworld spent the extra months without sailings improving on our already

industry-leading services. We not only boosted health and safety standards in response to the COVID-19 crisis, but we also added new ships, transformed others and dreamt up new touring options. Uniworld is also the first river cruise company to employ ACT CleanCoat, an antimicrobial coating across all our ships. This solution is renowned for its ability to render surfaces self-disinfecting after one application and is odourless, non-toxic and most importantly, kills bacteria and viruses including the coronavirus family.

Despite the challenges last year, our team in Asia has continued to keep our trade and customers actively engaged through virtual events. We have also introduced a Uniworld Referral Program to expand our guest database for future business. We have on boarded many new agent partners to our e-learning portal, Uniworld University so they can understand how Uniworld offers a personalized brand experience, and learn about our new itineraries and ships.

We are also tapping on opportunities to cross-sell with our sister brands and are working with Insight Vacations and Trafalgar to promote our family-themed "Christmas in July" cruise holidays and a "Danube Youth Cruise & Land" itinerary with Contiki.



Looking forward to a positive beginning

The recent revision in MDA guidelines for the promotion of domestic tourism, revision in guidelines for recognition of tour operators/tourism service providers, skill development training program, motivational talks, encouraging Supreme Court verdict on air ticket refund, media coverage and regular interaction with the members giving them the desired momentum to their plausible views have been some of IATO's efforts in motivating and encouraging their members. Pronab Sarkar, President, IATO shares more with TTJ.

Rachita Sehgal

Q How hopeful are you about inbound travel resuming in 2021? Any encouraging sign?

We are very hopeful as encouraging signs are coming with vaccines being approved by many countries that will benefit citizens of all those countries. This is giving us positive vibes that we may see an end of the current pandemic soon. The positive results may allow tourists' movement from our source markets, especially from those countries with whom we have air bubble arrangements on a reciprocal basis, to open up tourism activities. We have requested our Government to announce the opening date of e-Visas and normal visas for tourists and start international flights as soon as possible so that tourists from abroad can plan their visit to India. As soon as the borders are open for tourism activities, we are sure that tourism to India shall start and inbound tourism shall bounce back to normal within the next two years. We are looking forward to a positive beginning from October 2021 for the tourism industry.

Q How has your association managed to motivate and encourage the members in these difficult times?

To engage and motivate our members we took the initiative of organising various Skill Development Training Program for the staff and owners. Besides, we also organised bi-monthly members' interactive meetings to discuss various issues and invited expert speakers to update our members on various subjects.

With our sustained efforts with all relevant Ministries i.e. PMO, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Commerce, DGFT, Niti Aayog, SEPC, Ministry of Home Affairs and the State Governments

on the MACRO issues like refunds, opening up of borders, revival of e-Visa, resumption of International flights, besides our appeal for Survival and Revival packages of which our members are being made aware through our weekly communication. The members know that their association is leaving no stone unturned.

Q With the international travel scenario supposed to take a back seat compared to domestic travel, according to you, what factors will help to make the Inbound travellers feel confident and stress-free for a vacation in India?

Indian outbound market is around 27 million as per 2019 figures which at the moment are not able to travel abroad and we expect a portion of these affluent travellers may travel within India and some of them may avail the services of tour operators. Presently most of the Indian domestic tourism movements are by road for nearby destinations and booking hotels through online portals and not availing any services from the domestic tour operators as most of the travellers are small families and friends. Group tourism has not started yet due to pandemic conditions. We are hopeful once the pandemic is over, group movements shall start and numbers of tourists shall also increase, who shall use the



Pronab Sarkar

services of tour operators and we shall get back the lost business.

Adherence to safety and hygiene protocols by the tourism fraternity in India and the public at large, Covid situation rapidly improving in our country, steps by Ministry of Tourism in promoting Incredible India through their Dekho Apna Desh and other platforms, increase in Domestic Tourism - Domestic flights returning to 90 per cent of pre COVID days – all these will help to make the Inbound travellers feel confident and stress-free for a vacation in India. Further countries like Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, welcoming tourists from our country clearly goes to show the hygiene standards in India.

Domestic travel is the key to revival

Global travel was so accessible to Indians that for so long we often overlooked our own backyard. I think we will be seeing what our incredible country has to offer in a completely new light. We will start to embrace travel in a more conscious way, seeking out smaller brands, hotels and experiences that reconnect us with nature and minimise our footprint. Short stays and weekend trips will be huge in 2021. Because international travel will be limited, we will most likely travel locally, more frequently. More road trips for 2021. Packing up the car, with a flexible itinerary is a great way to explore our amazing country. Read on as Jyoti Mayal, President, Travel Agents Association of India shares an insight into the road to recovery and the association's efforts to keep their members' confidence afloat during these testing times.

Rachita Sehgal



Q How hopeful are you about travel and business resuming in 2021? Any encouraging sign?

As the President of TAAI & Vice Chairperson of FAITH, I am very confident that travel will revive in 2021. The numbers may take time to come back to the pre-COVID-19 era but the sentiments and confidence will start coming back especially after the vaccine starts getting disseminated in India and other countries. Human beings will always need to be physically present to build relationships to do business deals, to meet each other. Our lives are enriched by real experiences of being there to hear, taste, feel, and absorb. Visiting Family and Friends (VFR) travel will be very strong as families reunite or endeavour to resume their plans from this disrupted year. The reconnection with loved ones, friends, and family will drive travel patterns. This will be both international and domestic.

Q How has your association managed to motivate and encourage the members in these difficult times?

TAAI has been in the continuous process of motivating its members; the virtual platforms gave us an opportunity to have many more meetings on a regular basis. We conducted various webinars, organised meetings, updated the industry on travel and tourism-related issues, interacted with stakeholders, various educational programs on tourism and statutory compliances

were conducted. We also conducted a motivational webinar with Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. We have been able to help our members in getting refunds, airlines to book through GDS. Educating our members, skilling, upskilling and most important our suggestions to the government were shared and adopted on a regular basis. The government has been considering our various inputs pertaining to preparing policies and implementation. Our connect with MoCA MoT, Ministry of Finance, Health, Skill & Niti Aayog has been well established.

We have been able to restore travel by advocating to the government to open businesses, hotels, convention centres even if it is with limited presence. Only if the country opens will the confidence and demand be generated. TAAI has consistently persisted and got RTPCR testing implemented. We are now working aggressively for free testing at airports and health/medical insurance to be made compulsory by the tourism ministry and on-air tickets for the protection of the agent and consumer. We have also advocated for additional flights for more connectivity, flights beyond 'Air Bubbles' which the Honourable Minister has taken into consideration.

Q Indian outbound travel scenario is supposed to take a back seat compared to domestic travel. According to you, what factors will help make the Indian travellers feel confident and stress-free for outbound travel?

Domestic travel will play a very important role in the revival of the economy and travel business. Inbound and international travel will slowly increase and gradually the confidence will be built up. Consumers will want more information about their end-to-end journey, such as which aircraft, which airport to transit and the hotel's 'COVID' cleanliness processes—as people want to make their careful decisions to minimise their risk and exposures for themselves and their families. Search engines will need to supply more information to enable filtering and selections. When people feel safe, they will travel more—as they now know what it is like to be prevented to go to places, they thought they could go anytime.

While it is difficult to predict exactly what tourism will look like in the future, we can expect that travellers will have a greater desire to seek out less crowded attractions and destinations, as well as nature-based experiences. Fortunately, some of India's key attributes including our wide-open spaces, our relative isolation and our reputation for being a safe destination, will be attractive to draw international travellers when they can travel here again. One of the key areas that we are committed to, is telling our incredible indigenous story and celebrating that rich history of the oldest continuous living culture on Earth. Another key focus for us is tapping into an increased desire for, and awareness of, sustainable tourism products and experiences among travellers.

Unity should prevail

With so many lessons learnt over the years, post COVID-19, it is of utmost importance that the Indian travel and tourism fraternity should unite and work together as one industry for a speedy recovery from the pandemic's impact.

Biji Eapen, National President, IATA Agents Association of India (IAAI) & CMD- Speedwings Aviation Group

It has been an incredibly tough year as the COVID-19 pandemic has affected lives and livelihoods worldwide. The pandemic is still affecting the whole world and has temporarily brought India to a near standstill.

Since the first outbreak of coronavirus disease of 2019, more than 1 million people have lost their lives due to the pandemic. The global economy is expected to contract by a staggering 4.3 per cent in 2020. Millions of jobs have already been lost, millions of livelihoods are at risk, and an estimated additional 130 million people will be living in extreme poverty if the crisis persists.

In the Indian scenario, most travel trade offices remained closed, and some partially opened. Though, not yet fully functional, the travel trade must thank Hon. Supreme Court of India for the remarkable Judgment of making the air ticket refund possible for our valued passengers for flight cancellations. We should also appreciate the proactive steps taken by the Government of India and DGCA for the implementation of the Judgment in its true spirit.

According to media reports, the Ministry of Civil Aviation states that 74.3 per cent of passengers received full reimbursement on their tickets and accordingly, ₹3200 crores dispersed against 55,23,940 PNR cancellations. Simultaneously, as per the passengers' option, airlines are holding 2,06,119 credit shells worth ₹219 crores, permissible to issue/re-issue before 31st March or 31st December 2021, depending on the policy of the carriers.

It was a victory of the travel agents fraternity who stood together to protect their customers' interests and rights in getting refund amount over the cancelled tickets when airlines collectively refused. We at IAAI would like to express our sincere thanks to Advocate Jose Abraham who is the 'Advocate on Record' of the Supreme

Court of India and the President of Pravasi Legal Cell, for making IAAI implead in the case against airlines' arbitrary decisions.

Thus, IAAI became the first travel trade association as a party in the writ petition before the Hon. Supreme Court of India regarding airline ticket refund issue, and afterward other associations followed IAAI. We are also thankful to Advocate Ajith Marath, our Advisory Member of 'IAAI Passenger Rights Forum' for his contributions to this cause. We further express our gratitude to every member agents, passengers, travel journals and other media for their wholehearted support for IAAI's Nationwide Signature Campaign in this regard.

IAAI's Nationwide Signature Campaign's most significant success is that we could make our beloved travelling public understand the value and virtue of travel agencies during difficult times and understand how they legally protected by the provisions of India Government's Passengers Charter of 2019. Again, repeatedly, it reminds us of a lesson that, if there were unity amongst the travel trade fraternity, airlines would not have dared to take such arbitrary decisions unilaterally.

Air travel is slowly picking up again worldwide after a challenging period of almost complete lockdown. That should not be a reason for airlines to slow down the refund payment of 26 per cent pending reimbursement. It is the hard-earned money of the



Biji Eapen

travelling public, and IAAI requests Government authorities to take necessary steps to make the complete reimbursement before 31st March 2021 as directed by the Hon. Supreme Court of India.

There will almost certainly be a travel recovery early next year as our industry faced and survived similar challenges before, like the 9/11 attack, 2008 recession, SARS and NIPAH. Even though nobody can predict what will happen, one thing is sure that we will not be able to travel as freely as before. A new style of travel with masks, sanitizers, and social distancing is expected for the near future.

We at IAAI believe that learning from the experiences of the industry stakeholders will try to understand the value, virtue, and goodwill of unity within the Industry and work together for a speedy recovery of the travel and tourism industry from the present jeopardy in this New Year.

It is time to turn obstacles into opportunities

As travel restrictions implemented around the globe slowly release, the tourism industry finds it triggered in an unprecedented crisis. The impact of the novel coronavirus can be felt throughout the ecosystem. Rebuilding, reopening, and restructuring is the need of the hour.

Ankush Nijhawan, Co-founder, TBO Group & MD at Nijhawan Group

CCOVID-19 has left the future of tourism under great scrutiny globally. I am, often asked the 'Future of Tourism' as someone who runs the largest b2b online travel portal but seldom do we hear the opinions or views of the local communities whose sole living is dependent on tourism activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought travel and tourism to a standstill and has changed the world's perspective on hygiene and sanitisation. When we closed the boundaries, canceled events and self-quarantined at home, the travel industry and other sectors began to nosedive. A joint effort to save lives represented an economic disaster for businesses.

With the increased demand for travel due after almost a yearlong lockdown, travellers are looking for a vacation again. Although the pandemic continues to affect lives, locations around the world have begun to reopen, more travellers are getting on planes and airlines are re-establishing routes. Regardless of the risks involved, countries and states have begun to welcome visitors with all SOPs in place.

Despite the positivity in news, the greater threat still spearheads. One silver lining to the pandemic is that consumers are now conscious and demand sustainable and responsible travel policy. Democratisation of travel is very necessary at this stage.

While the wealthy will still travel, society has faced a major recession. It is time to redress the imbalance and utilise the under-tapped resources on this journey to the recovery of our sector.

Privileges come in many forms and tourism often is synonymous with intentional trips. Quality over quantity is what matters- less often now, only if the world begins to travel similar to

the pre-pandemic times.

Personalisation is the key to rehabilitation. When it comes to booking experiences, there is nobody better than our very well established and industry connected travel agents, DMCs and tour operators with their invaluable knowledge. The year 2020 has made the end customer realise the expertise and financial security of booking via a travel agent. In the coming times, consumers are making a well-informed decision to safeguard their travels, by booking their experiences via travel agents to get a sense of security, flexibility and ease of booking.

Various travel restrictions and the reluctance of many to travel abroad has indirectly helped in the rise of domestic tourism. In a post COVID-19 world, travellers' prime priority is the safety and hygiene measures taken up by the destination/ hotel/ attraction, people are ready to pay extra and travel safely, travelling business class over the economy, preferring to stay at a trusted luxury brand hotel over lesser-known hotel chains, the itinerary is now focusing on more remote locations or niche day tours where people are less likely to come into contact. 'Workcations' are gaining popularity. Travellers are looking out for more control over their itinerary; it is now more than ever that Indians will be booking independent villas, premium homestays and non-hotels. With induced travel restrictions throughout the past year, weekend getaways have increasingly grown in popularity with urban India.



Ankush Nijhawan

Staycations at luxury and premium hotels in the same city are also seeing a rise in local check-ins.

Now that the tourism industry has to subsist only on local tourism for some more months, there has been substantial growth in tourists travelling to the green corridor of Northeastern India. The country is also set to benefit from the growing wildlife and wellness tourism.

While the World is trying to come to terms with 'The New Normal' life with COVID-19, there is no dubiousness that this global pandemic will change the world, we know of.

Creative thinking will lead us to new opportunities- no matter big or small. Whilst the pandemic has created many challenges, it has also inspired us with mindfulness, originality and collaboration.

The Future Of Travel

Truths, Not Trends

2021 has the power to be one of the most meaningful of our lives, for our industry, and for people and places across the globe. We look forward to a year of good health, great success, and the gift to travel restored, richly.

Gavin Tollman, CEO, Trafalgar

The past year has been a remarkable examination of how our world responds to crisis. Each and every one of us, wherever we are in the world, has had to face the unexpected, unprecedented trauma of COVID-19. From the beginning of that year, the pandemic crept across the world, grounding each and every one of us.

It is now a year since we were forced to stand still. What a long, demanding year it has been. COVID-19 has not just pummelled the global economy; it has deeply wounded the global community both emotionally and physically and shaken the travel industry to its core.

As I look back at 2020, I am still astounded by the speed at which the pandemic first started and then subsequently spread. Overnight, borders were closed, skies blocked, fears unlocked. We were all left stranded to where we were in those moments. News coverage of those early days remain indelibly imprinted in my mind: a single lone cyclist on what would have been bustling Geneva roads, a vacuum of humanity in Piazza Umberto in Capri, the timeless image

of absolute emptiness in ever-bustling Times Square in New York City, the lines of Parisian cafes and endless rows of retail stores all shuttered. And indicative of what was ahead, the mass of stockpiled, idle aircrafts parked in airports around the world.

Yet now, we are beginning to see tangible green shoots appearing all around us. The biggest of these is the positive vaccine news. I believe that we are entering the beginning of the end of this difficult period.

reduction of quarantine requirements, significant progress in rapid testing and the trials of a digital 'health passport' underway to aid the reopening of borders will collectively build the confidence of an imminently brighter future. Yes, we will soon escape our cabin fever and begin exploring the world again in 2021.

There is light on the horizon. We can once again begin to look forward. To look forward, however, we frequently need to begin by looking back, to analyse the patterns of the year that



We cannot predict exactly when travel will resume but with the approval and the commencement of administering the Pfizer / BioNTech, vaccine and the pending approvals of both the Oxford/AstraZeneca and Moderna vaccines, certainty is growing that we will be able to boldly step out of our bubbles.

This joined with the emerging

was. From 2020 however, there are no trends. We should not put a value on what trends have been established in 2020, as these are all too often simply a reflection of short-term behaviour. In times of crisis, using these behaviours as a compass for future momentum is to institutionalise damage. Instead, what we want to look at is the truth – fundamental forces of thought that

inspire action and change.

Throughout the interminable last ten months of 2020, we have been given plenty of time for reflection, learning and strategy as regards the future of travel. This pause has offered us the chance to re-evaluate where we go from here, to do a proper reset and define how our industry will change after the pandemic.

It is not just about how travel has changed. It is about how travellers have changed.

If 2020 has taught us one thing, it is that there is no crystal ball. But still, I would like to share with you here my nine personally defined, globally inspired perspectives on the changes we will see in our industry and the new traveller in 2021 and beyond.

WANDERMUST: Our wanderlust is at an all-time high. Our time at home has made us crave the world outside more than ever. The pent-up travel demand grows daily. We are aching to explore again and reconnect with the joy that travel brings. Many would travel today, if only planes were flying and borders not closed. This remains an insurmountable challenge. However, we know that when borders and skies are re-opened, so will the floodgates for travel. I believe once we can go again, we will see an unprecedented surge in demand for travel. Travel is no longer something we lust for – it is instead a fundamental necessity. We must travel again.

WELLBEING: Even with the vaccine, we know the creation of safer travel experiences will now be an essential, a given, and a fundamental to protecting the privilege that is travel. For everyone in our industry, wellbeing will be a reflection of brand trust. How we approach protocols to ensure travellers feel comfortable and well taken care of will become a lever for brand choice. Those that do it well will flourish. Those that don't bother to care about caring, will struggle.

THE JOY IN TRAVEL: Travellers will be looking for assurance that travel brands have the know-how to ensure the magic of travel is not diluted in exchange for new protocols. They need to know that their chosen brands have the seamless ability to pivot to new requirements while still delivering the rich deep experiences they are dreaming of. At TTC, we have taken an industry's first leap and added a specific Wellbeing Director on trip, so that our Travel Directors can remain 100 per cent focused on

customer satisfaction and delivering trips of a lifetime.

A GREATER VALUE PROPOSITION: Price has been the historic driving force far too often in travel. In the year ahead, what we get for our money in terms of safety, enrichment, education, inspiration and protection will become of greater importance than just the price we pay.

THE GREAT OUTDOORS: We are already seeing that 2021's travellers, not surprisingly, want nature, the outdoors – places that deliver on wide-open spaces, fresh air, a chance to get into nature, and a way of avoiding crowds. When borders lift, I am confident we will see a resurgence in destinations such as New Zealand and Switzerland that will shoot to the top of the 'must visit now' lists.

CONSCIOUS AND MEANINGFUL TRAVEL: This year has shown that the issue is not over-tourism. The world needs tourism for all of its social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits. The issue is rather of irresponsible crowding as a result of bad management and bad manners. We will see more companies focus on the integration of both conscious and meaningful travel experiences into their DNA. This is what true 'sustainability' is all about. Here at Trafalgar and as part of TTC, we have always looked to make a difference to people, places and the planet, ensuring the destinations we are so privileged to visit are there for generations to come. I am filled with hope and certainty that when we travel again, we will continue to be a driver of real change. It is through what we do as an industry that we can regenerate and restore our world's natural and cultural treasures through travel itself. I believe that travellers themselves will want to ensure that their travel dollars and decisions directly, responsibly and sustainably impact the communities they visit.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS TRAVEL: After stressful times – 2020 being exactly that – multi-generational travel and family and friends travel as a whole, will see a significant rise. Why? Because the importance of travelling together will be something we will see continue as loved ones recognise and appreciate their value as units – essential 'bubbles'. Respecting this shift in social connection, we have extended our offering and created our own private groups and 'travel bubbles' so as to provide travellers with even more options to suit their

wishes and wants.

TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION: The post-COVID19 world will be far more digital. The reason being, the pandemic has compressed years' worth of transformation into months, accelerating ideation and investment, bringing on the dramatic shake-up in how people research, buy and interact with their travel experiences. Greater use of tech for touchless and low touch experiences have become a basis for infrastructure enhancement. Despite limited travel, in the last year, we have already seen electronic devices become more critical to our safe existence. The use of biometrics will be the new normal. Bravely, TTC has removed paper travel documentation and on trip paper touchpoints from our vacations and switched purely to digital communication. Touchless interactions are both instantaneous and sustainable. The use of less paper is the way of the future.

THE ROLE OF THE BOOKING AGENT: At a time when travellers are innately nervous around the unknown of a destination at health and safety level, the expertise, knowledge and support of a skilled Booking Agent is vital for clients returning to travel. Travellers will be looking to those booking channels that offer the personal touch, and who take the time to reconnect and understand inherently the needs of the customer, and what they can offer them for ultimate reassurance.

Travel in the year ahead will look different, no question about it. And this can and will be a good thing. The richness of our experiences, and the feelings we get from travel, have intensified. The opportunity is now to turn inspiration and aspiration into action.

One must never take for granted the impact and freedom of being able to pack a bag, hit the skies or the open road, and fulfil that dream, be it one of leisure or business. Never again should we cast aside as a 'given' the concept of travel as an expectation and entitlement. It is truly one of the greatest gifts of our lives for so many reasons beyond being simply a vacation.

In the New Year, we must remain strict, patient, diligent, staying the course until the pandemic is over. There is no 'going back to normal' as there is no going back, and no normal, to return to.

SOTC: forging partnership to build customer's confidence and peace of mind

Providing a safe customer travel experience at SOTC has been possible with innovations and support from partners. SOTC has associated with leaders in the travel ecosystem to build customer confidence and momentum in travel and continue to look forward to their support in 2021 as well.

Daniel Dsouza, President and Country Head, Leisure Section at SOTC Travel

As destinations ease restrictions and with positive news of the vaccine, there has been renewed consumer confidence to travel in 2021. With distribution of the vaccine spread by the first quarter, we estimate business pick up in the coming quarters of 2021 with recovery towards the end of 2021 and full recovery by early 2022.

As destinations ease restrictions, there has been renewed consumer confidence for travel this season. Maldives, Dubai, Goa, Andaman, Himachal, Rajasthan & Kerala are seeing good demand. Demand for Egypt is also emerging for the New Year with the introduction of our recent Flash Sale. The Flash Sale coupled with announcements on the vaccine has shown a significant surge in demand and we have witnessed an impressive growth rate of 25-30 percent than in November. The upcoming year has many weekends that can be clubbed with other holidays for long weekends. We are observing a rise in inquiries and bookings for these long weekends. These travellers prefer short trips solo, with friends or family during these holiday weekends.

Along with offering customer benefits such as flexible booking options, early booking advantages, minimal booking amounts, easy payment and EMI options, attractive discounts, affordable pricing, hotel upgrades, complimentary child stay, etc, we have had to implement enhanced health and safety protocols to ensure that our customers feel safe and comfortable when travelling with us.

As leaders, SOTC has put together a holistic three-pronged customer confidence-building program in the form of the "Assured-Insured-Secured" Program that covers every aspect of physical safety as well as mental and financial security to give the customer complete peace of mind.

The Assured Safe Travel Program developed and rolled out in association with Apollo Clinics is the most comprehensive set of travel safety protocols in the new

normal, encompassing not only internal processes, retail outlets, etc., but also every partner and service provider across airlines, local travel service partners, hotels, attractions, etc.

Insured in partnership with ICICI Lombard & Go Digit General Insurance Limited has customers fully covered with possibly the most comprehensive retail travel insurance program that includes COVID-19 related hospitalization up to sum assured.

As part of the Secured aspect, to ensure customer confidence from a money and security point of view, the companies offer flexible date changes, rescheduling, cancellations and even guaranteed, accelerated refunds (subject to certain minimum criteria).

We also launched the country's first Safe Holiday Helpline to offer free Holiday expert consultation to help customers navigate the maze of confusing and changing information about state regulations, International travel guidelines, etc, to instill confidence and make the best and safest choice for their travel.

Our Doctor on Call service in association with Apollo Clinics - a member of the Apollo Hospitals Group, is an extension of our Assured Safe Travel Program and yet another step towards reassuring our customers with dedicated and meticulous health care services

The COVID-19 era has initiated various fast-changing developments. New technologies will benefit and improve overall resilience. Technology has always been a key driver for growth at SOTC. We are focusing on an Omni-channel approach to provide a consistent and seamless experience to customers. We introduced Virtual Outlets leveraging technology to provide contactless and seamless assistance to our customers - via phone, chat, video call and apps. We also introduced a first of its kind Virtual Roadshows - The SOTC Holiday Preview. This unique digital initiative benefits customers with convenient and contactless holiday planning - jointly



Daniel Dsouza

with holiday experts and from the safety/comfort of their homes.

Despite the current environment with rapidly changing consumer needs/trends, our teams at SOTC have gone all out in ensuring relevance - and this initiative allows us to understand and engage with our valued customers while showcasing a range of innovative and exciting products and services. We have been at the forefront of innovation and customer-centric initiatives in this new era of travel. In line with this commitment, we have introduced the SOTC Holiday Card that simplifies the travel experience and offers complete savings and benefits for the aspiring Indian traveller. Safety and savings have become crucial and important for Indian travellers.

The industry will need to rise to the challenge of reviving tourism in 2021. Pro-growth policies, integrated approach and investment towards building and supporting infrastructure and safety can drive tourism forward. Not only will destinations change, but how people travel to a destination and within it will see the transformation with travellers keen on opting for private transport or upgrading so that they can stay safe and avoid crowds.

eZee Technosys: hospitality technology aimed at boosting revenues

eZee Technosys laid its foundation in 2005 with an intent to revolutionise the hospitality industry in India. Their goal was to provide ingenious, sturdy, innovative solutions using the latest technology to streamline solutions within the sector. Aeijaz Sodawala, CEO, eZee Technosys talks about the brands' global representation, providing the clientele with state-of-the-art software solutions that address every requirement of the hospitality industry.

Prashant Nayak

Q Tell us about eZee Technosys and its unique offerings.

eZee is one of the very few hospitality technology providers in the world to develop and offer end-to-end integrated hotel and restaurant management solutions. We have industry expertise of over 14 years and this year we will be celebrating our Crystal Jubilee. Our company has its head office in Surat, India, and regional branches in Goa and Malaysia. Recently acquired by Yanolja - the travel tech unicorn of South Korea, eZee has a stronghold on R&D and is constantly introducing innovations in its solutions.

Our diverse offerings include; eZee Absolute cloud-based hotel PMS, eZee Reservation booking engine, eZee Centrix channel manager, eZee Optimus restaurant POS system, eZee Panorama website builder for hotels and restaurants, Critique review management system, eZee FrontDesk desktop-based hotel software, and eZee BurrP! Desk-top-based restaurant POS. Each of these solutions is the best fit for all segments of the hospitality industry - hotels, hostels, B&Bs, serviced apartments, resorts, vacation rentals, hotel groups and restaurants, cafes, QSRs, bars, clubs. Apart from our cutting-edge technologies, we offer a wide range of services to our customers; such as free 24x7 live support, free product onboarding, implementation, and training as well as a dedicated account manager who guides them from time-to-time on efficient product usage.

Q Can you tell us about some of your revolutionary projects in the pipeline?

Over the years, we have constantly focused to bring in the best and innovative solutions that benefit the industry. In the same vein, currently, together with our parent company, Yanolja, we are working on our most awaited platform Y FLUX, a completely automated hotel management platform. Y FLUX solution will revolutionize the way hotel businesses are conducted, which is perfectly poised and fit for the post COVID-19 era.

In addition, we are revamping our PMS product entirely with the latest technology stack, where we are trying to provide the

next level of user experience and simple workflows with optimum speed. We are also working on our revenue management tool that was a missing piece in our offering. This tool will help hotels drive better revenue with minimal interactions.

With new and enhanced products in the pipeline, we are not only opening the path towards a better customer experience but also making our products feasible for the larger hotel segments.

Q What are the future plans and strategies?

At present, eZee stands as the No. 1 Hotel Technology Provider in India. We are planning specific strategies for expansion in each market across the globe. We are looking at least 5 years ahead, with crystallized strategies for 3 years. While we want to focus on our home market and increase our footprint and resources here, we plan to introduce new products in the upcoming year and accelerate our expansion and growth in key regions such as North America, Europe, and SEA.

Our solutions and services are designed to serve the best to our customers, and we stand second to none in that. We are one of the very few providers in the industry to have a complete suite of hotel technology, which is available at a fully integrated one-stop solution, or on a plug and play concept, depending on the need and desires of our customers.

Today, we are seeing a lot of vacuum in the industry. Hotel businesses are in dire need of good technology. Moreover, we want to help our customers and other hotel partners by leveraging innovative technology and make them more profitable. In 3 years' time, we aim to become the No. 1 hotel tech provider globally. On the other hand, considering the Indian market, eZee plans to become a distinct and dominant player in the hotel segment and widen the gap between the other players and eZee. Furthermore, Yanolja, eZee's parent company, is planning to go public (IPO) by the end of next year; which will result in direct and positive impact and support towards eZee's business.



Aeijaz Sodawala

Q According to you, what are some trends within the hospitality tech sector for 2021?

Over time, customer expectations are changing. They want quicker and better services. In addition, technology becomes the ultimate answer here. As a company, we have always had a pioneer mindset to introduce and walk in line with the newest technologies. However, bearing in mind the current situation, we fully agree that contactless services are the new norm. Other than that, there are several hospitality technologies that will have an upward trend for the year 2021. To mention, below are the major ones that would result in a better guest experience, simplified operations, and higher profits for hoteliers.

1. Smart hotel rooms
2. IoT, blockchain, and AI-enabled solutions
3. Contactless check-ins and guest self-service portals, kiosks
4. Voice search and face recognition
5. Occupancy based sensors
6. Digital payments

We have always been agile to meet customer requirements and introduced innovations to our solutions with the latest technology. We aim to continue with it by spreading awareness of technology in the hospitality industry in line with our future projects.

2021 A Year of Hope and New Expectations

As economies adapt to the new normal, several factors contribute to revolutionise travel.

Guest hygiene and safety will be of utmost priority to the sector operations as safety guidelines become a mandatory factor of traveller choice. Lakmini Raymond, Vice President – PR & Branding, Aitken Spence Hotels, shares more with TTJ.

Rachita Sehgal

The hospitality industry is shown to have doubled over the past ten years, capturing attention as the fastest growing sector in the past decade. Although the global pandemic disrupted this flow of fast growth in 2020, given its formidable presence and resilience, we are positive that the sector will show quick recovery. We remain hopeful as lockdowns and travel restrictions ease and airports reopen; the pent-up international tourism demand will prompt the revival of the sector to emerge stronger than before. Sharing insight on the anticipation and expectation in the hospitality industry, Lakmini shares, "While India's borders remain closed for regular air travel as the country fights against the multifaceted crisis, the travel bubble established with the Maldives in August facilitates a safe corridor for the flow of travel to resume. As the first in South Asia to enter into such an agreement, this proves as an encouraging sign for those who have long-awaited a visit overseas. As a part of the hospitality sector, it is our strong belief that the resilience of the industry and the spirit of travellers will support the quick recovery in 2021."

As economies adapt to the new normal, several factors contribute to revolutionise travel. Guest hygiene and safety will be of utmost priority to the sector operations as safety guidelines become a mandatory factor of traveller choice. The safe travels stamp introduced by the WTTC allows travellers to identify companies across the world that have implemented standardised health and safety procedures in their operations. Apart from this, the 'Safe Travels' list is widely available to reassure them of stepping into a safe destination. "We have faith that the demand for the sector will bounce back, but this demand is likely to be different from that we have seen pre-COVID. The change in behavioral patterns has created an environment where guests prefer exclusivity over crowds, thereby the services offered in accordance with the safety regulations are

adaptable by all travellers alike. As the mass market is advancing towards the trend of responsible tourism, Aitken Spence Hotels aims to strengthen its efforts to accommodate sustainable travel in the new normal by addressing challenges of climate and biodiversity. Furthermore, the role of automation will contribute greatly to social distancing standards as it eliminates unnecessary contact in procedures," adds Lakmini.

While these factors encourage travellers to embark on a stress-free vacation, the industry remains positive of the worldwide efforts, with the roll-out of the vaccination inclining towards success and the easy access to PCR tests anywhere in the world. A variety of challenges comes into play as hotels reopen, from analyzing changed consumer behavior to enforcing alternative business models and revenue streams to support the revival of the sector. COVID-19 has created a novel reality in the hotel industry, permanently and embracing this unanticipated future will become the stronghold of our development.

The efforts enacted by the Company to address heightened health and safety will be reviewed as an ongoing plan to give the guests peace of mind regarding future stays. Whilst the guidelines enforced support the national and international efforts undertaken by the national government and health authorities, the hotel staff are well trained to address any further challenges faced when the country reopens to international tourists. Lakmini quotes, "2021 has been marked as the year for us to launch new campaigns, partnerships and events reflecting the changing consumer behavior, online and offline. All while ensuring our plans do not disappoint our loyal customers whose expectations derive from our ongoing business model and campaigns that have



Lakmini Raymond

succeeded across the years. Our flexible cancellation policy and the ongoing voucher system provides a distinct advantage to our guests to overcome the uncertainty in their holiday plans."

Understanding the significance of data in our day-to-day hotel operations, the Company is making a concise effort to implement data-driven decisions and reviewing customer feedback to provide an efficient, personalized service. They have witnessed a significant improvement in occupancy across, Maldives properties that have been in operation since July 2020 along with the successful enforcement of standardized safety measures that have enabled Aitken Spence to provide an enhanced service experience.

"Our Group's strong business contingency plan will ensure our guests and associates are supported regardless of the challenges that lie ahead. Aitken Spence Hotels is working closely with local authorities in adapting towards this new normal and above all, supporting the recovery of the hospitality sector. As the borders open in various parts of the world, we are eagerly anticipating the arrival of international guests and are well-focused to deliver a safe re-launch," Lakmini concludes.

Kandima Maldives: fun, vibrant, and technology-driven

Recognised as one of the only active lifestyle resorts in the Maldives, Kandima Maldives is distinctly positioned for a very large set of audience including - families, couples, honeymooners, and solo travellers. Mapping their guests' evolving travel expectations through comprehensive research and industry feedback, Neeraj Seth, Director of Marketing Communication & Public Relations, Kandima Maldives shares more with TTJ.

Sonika Bohra

While the prolonged pandemic has widely affected the industry during the past year, it has also led to the emergence of effective recovery strategies as well as adaptive travel trends. Implying on the changing dynamics of the industry Neeraj shares the expectations for the year 2021, "I believe that this will pave the way for a positive outlook for the hospitality industry in 2021 and establish a stronger shift towards the revival of travel. The air bubble arrangement between India and the Maldives encouraged a huge influx of Indian travellers to the destination. Furthermore, India became the top source market for Maldives tourism in 2020. Aspects such as short-distance

to the Maldives. Talking about the growing industry trends Neeraj adds, "Another notable trend is the rising preference and enhanced spends on intimate destination weddings and celebrations at resorts, including longer honeymoon stay by couples choosing to start their life together in the new normal. These trends will continue to take shape well into 2021 and beyond."

Recognised as one of the only active lifestyle resorts in the Maldives, Kandima Maldives is distinctly positioned for a very large set of audience including - families, couples, honeymooners, or solo travellers. We have been carefully mapping our guests' evolving travel expectations through comprehensive research and industry feedback. Neeraj

further quotes, "All this has now reshaped into our uplifting 'Lifestyle Reimagined' marketing campaign to welcome guests back. We are promising a lifestyle that is truly reimagined and well-integrated with meticulously crafted experiences, with something for everyone at



Neeraj Seth

of-the-art technology and internationally acclaimed doctors."

Kandima Maldives takes pride in being fun, vibrant, and technology-driven. Their recently launched, fully immersive virtual platform called D.I.V.E. enables guests to plan their vacation real-time with actual virtual tours, including VR enabling. Their amenities cater to varied guests' interests - be it wellness, romance, adventure, or just relaxation. "We feel customisation is what we are best at; we can create packages and private experiences that are completely based on guest preferences to assure them of a thoughtfully reimagined vacation to remember," concludes Neeraj.



Kandima Honeymoon Aqua Pool Villa

international travel, increasing air connectivity, and an accurate perception about the Maldives and its private island resorts as safe havens will continue to attract more Indian travellers in 2021."

Despite numerous restrictions, we have seen a steady rise in demand, with conscious decisions to travel being made by varied traveller segments from India and around the world. This reaffirms continued confidence in the hotel industry to enable safe travel practices while providing immersive experiences to guests. For example, in the past year, there has been a prominent increase in longer duration holidays and families travelling together to short-haul destinations, especially

our resort. Our specially designed K'OnGuard programme provides an additional layer of safety and closely manages all health, hygiene and service protocols while delivering a differential resort experience to all our guests. Our in-house Medical Clinic has state-



Kandima Aqua Villas

Winning back the trust of hotel guests reassurance and communication is the key

The prolonged pandemic has hit the hospitality sector intensely and after nearly coming to complete a year, the industry is positive that the vaccine announcement will give a sigh of relief. Until then the industry needs to strengthen its preparedness to welcome travellers back safely, seamlessly, and importantly communicating and reassuring guests.

Prashant Nayak

With the threat of COVID waves still in progress, it mostly depends

on the government as to how it will look at lockdowns and the bans on international flights. In such conditions, normalcy and recovery in the hospitality sector like other industries will depend on the timeline of the vaccination being launched. However, some recovery in terms of hotel bookings and weddings is already being witnessed due to domestic movements and social events.

"The announcement of a vaccine will bring in the real 'normalcy' for the hospitality industry. The travellers will be more confident in travelling with the fear of COVID-19 gradually disappearing. It will also give a boost to corporate travel and MICE events where all the pending projects will restart leading to an upsurge in business," opines Ravi Rai, Cluster General Manager, Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach, Novotel Vijayawada Varun, and The Bheemili Resort Managed by Accor.

Ravi continues, "The reassurance will only happen when there is a vaccine in hand otherwise the lifestyle of the guests will continue to be according to the 'New Normal' that is based on safe travel, safe stay with stringent hygiene measures. Positively, people in Andhra Pradesh where our hotel is located are stepping out in good numbers taking



Ravi Rai

the required precautions like wearing a mask, maintaining social distancing and sanitising on intervals."

The hospitality business is already starting to see signs of recovery. Now, most are looking at possible recovery around late Q3 2021 or early Q4 2021. "Announcement of a vaccine is definitely a positive sign for our industry; however, the actual benefit would only be seen once the vaccine reaches the majority of the population. Till then strict measures that have been introduced to curb the impact of COVID-19 must be followed under all circumstances.

Companies should not compromise on passenger safety in lieu of higher revenues. The current focus is to ensure that people are able to travel



Gaurav Sinha

in a safe and secure environment," states Gaurav Sinha, Director of Operations JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru.

For Ravi, technology is the key driver that has somewhere helped the hospitality industry to bounce back strongly during this uncertain pandemic and he feels more investments will be needed in

providing services like a contactless punch in and punch out, temperature check at the entrance and exit for the staff & guests, QR code base declaration forms, contactless elevator access, contactless menu, contactless payments and more.

Regarding the role of technology during the strong presence of COVID-19, Gaurav shares, "Technology has changed the way we operate. Hotels have shifted their focus to ensure a lower level of contact and encourage 'touch-free' methods of operation and products. While companies and the government work to eventually eradicate COVID-19, the virus has left us with a strong focus on hygiene and safety. Technology investments for the industry must not only focus on contactless experiences but also lay importance to safety infrastructure to ensure effective sanitisation and cleaning."

Speaking of technology, RateGain is one of the travel technology company powering every segment of

hygiene on social media, brand site, and online channels, and should be centred around the 'NEW' guest (or the evolved consumer) which would build long term trust and confidence.

"It's hard to know when the pandemic will be over, but it's possible to start pivoting a hotel's operations and outreach to be prepared for that inevitable eventuality. The new guest or the evolved traveller will expect to have consistent and positive service, limited physical interactions and enhanced digital experiences at any hotel," tells Kamesh. According to him, the focuses on three key investments which will help hotels win more bookings from post-pandemic travellers are:

Cognitive revenue management: It is how a digital revenue management tool helps hotels optimise pricing in a dynamic market. One needs to improve competitive intelligence and use booking data to show the guest they know and can anticipate their needs.

Smart distribution: is how brands collaborates with a channel manager to simplify room distribution. Here, one has to improve discovery with OTAs and other new channels.

Targeted social media: is how the brand is listening to customers on Facebook and other online platforms. Hotels need to share safety measures transparently and build brand reputation using customer reviews and other user-generated content.

Thus, by focusing on the digital experience, a hotel can drive revenue and increase brand trust with the first post-pandemic travellers. Further, Kamesh shares, "One has to continue to update safety precautions to promote being responsible even after recovery or during an air bubbles operation or post the markets re-opening, to win long term trust. Hospitality Marketers and Commercial teams need to be open to reshape the marketing strategies and reimagining what the future of travel could look like. While it is the best time to try out new digital, social and online channels, one can also opt for social media marketing agencies and experiment with targeted creative

content on digital or social media. It's equally important to keep the messaging authentic, updated, aligned with the brand ethos and cantered around the 'NEW' guest (or the evolved consumer), to stay more relevant in the Better Tomorrow."

The impact on the travel industry has been tremendous since the outbreak with several organisations struggling to achieve operating profit and hence their sustainability becomes a serious concern. "As an aid in the recovery of the industry, a direct benefit must be passed on to the end-user as well as businesses operating in the industry. Several bodies such as CII & FHRAI have already sought government intervention and requested for zero-rating GST for MICE, reduction in fees of e-visas, etc," indicates Gaurav.

On his part, Ravi shares a few tips that can revive the Travel and the Hospitality Industry going forward- namely:

- Concession in Maximum Demand charges like in electricity.
- Waiver of interest fees during lockdowns.
- To ease out the travel restrictions keeping the safety protocols intact.
- To safeguard the economic livelihood of the Industry –State-backed financial support by lending low-interest loans to the tourism sector.
- Waiving off license fee and property tax.
- State-backed promotional campaign for domestic and international travel.



Kamesh Shukla

the travel and hospitality industry with real-time intelligence, connectivity to the largest demand and supply network as well as targeted digital marketing solutions. Kamesh Shukla, EVP, and Head for APMEA-RateGain observes that with the COVID -19 threat still alive, one has to communicate authentic and updated content around safety and

2021 The year of HOPE

In recent years, Kerala has gone through many disasters of unprecedented scale but the strength, unity, and resilience which the State has displayed are indeed noteworthy. Kerala's prompt crises management has been praised globally and is becoming a case study for many. While COVID-19 has certainly been the most serious crisis which Kerala Tourism is impacted by like others, P. Bala Kiran, IAS, Director, Kerala Tourism shares insights of relief and recovery in a land whose heart is as strong as its culture and traditions.

Sonika Bohra

The biggest challenge for Kerala Tourism is to keep the tourism industry afloat in the midst of this gigantic COVID-19 crisis. They are on the lookout to initiate measures that would reduce joblessness in the industry and also bolster the morale of all the stakeholders after the pandemic-induced restrictions are lifted one after another.

When COVID-19 began spreading its tentacles, the first priority of the government was to repatriate all the stranded tourists in Kerala. The four international airports in the state were used to send them to their homelands

via special flights. Immediately after relocating the tourists, the state started working on a relief and rehabilitation package. Bala says, "The state government announced a ₹465-crore package under the Chief Minister's 'Tourism Loan Assistance Scheme' for the tourism industry. Of which, an amount of ₹100 crores have been earmarked for the 'Employee Loan Assistance Scheme'



P. Bala Kiran

wherein all the employees of the tourism industry in both the organised

and unorganised sectors could get loans up to ₹30,000, which has to be repaid as monthly installments at a nominal interest rate of three per cent while the six per cent interest will be paid by the government."

Also, their ₹355-crore 'Working Capital Assistance Scheme' will allow all the tourism industry units to avail loans ranging from ₹100,000 to ₹2500000. In the first year



Munnar



Vagbhatananda Park situated in the Karakkad village

and a half, interest amount up to a maximum of 4.5 per cent will be borne by the state tourism department. This has brought a lot of relief to the tourism industry. Also, a financial package ranging from ₹80,000 to ₹120,000 has been announced for all the houseboats for their restoration and annual maintenance. In addition, all the guides are given a one-time payment of ₹10,000.

Kerala had announced its New Tourism Policy in 2017, which envisaged a doubling of international tourist arrivals in the next five years while the domestic tourist arrivals were to be increased by 50 per cent. "We have made excellent progress till 2019 when we recorded the highest number of tourist arrivals in the last 24 years. The tourism policy clearly charts out the principles of responsible tourism in all our endeavours. As far as the new National Tourism Policy is concerned, we are following all its directions while keeping the right spirit of our own policy of 2017," mention Bala.

From October 10, 2020, 114 tourism destinations in Kerala started opening in phases and till November 1, all the destinations have been opened. As international flights are yet to kick off in a regular manner, domestic tourism is the way to go. Kerala Tourism also realised this and is making all-out efforts to promote domestic tourism. They have already started a new video campaign, 'Change of Air', to give a fillip to domestic tourism. This advertisement campaign, which seeks to put to an end all the inhibitions of a tourist while in Kerala, has triggered huge interest

among both the industry and the people alike. The campaign seeks to increase domestic tourist footfalls. It's in the first phase.

They will be evaluating the results and do a campaign again in the coming months.

To attract tourists once international travel resumes, Bala tells, "There are two important things. One is the urge to travel which is being addressed through our campaign. But the second important component is the COVID-19 safety protocols which are to be followed by the international tourists once they start trickling in. We have already come up with the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for hotels, transport operators, homestays, ayurvedic centres, and resorts. These are being strictly followed across the state. This is the confidence we want to generate when

international tourists also start to arrive. We hope the international tourists will also start arriving very soon and, hopefully, the tourism sector too will be back on its feet."

According to Bala, there have been some important travel trends which they have noted over the last five years and shall use them to their advantage. Thus, they have been able to consolidate their source markets of Western Europe. At the same time, they also generate enough interest in the emerging tourism markets like West Asia and South East Asia.

Coming to the domestic sector, they have made strong inroads in the metros as the source markets, including Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai. New markets are also emerging from states like Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Telangana.

"2020 has been the worst year ever for tourism. 2021 is the year of hope. Now the only direction to go is up and up. We believe the vaccine will be administered very soon to people across the globe. This will hugely help in relaxing the travel restrictions and making travel a normal activity. We are also aware that the growth will be slow but steady as there is also a lot of urge among the tourists to travel. We believe the tourism industry is also geared up to welcome them. We have reasons to believe that 2021 will be a good year for Kerala considering the tourist arrivals," concludes Bala.



Beautiful sunset over the Chinese fishing nets in Cochin

'2021 will be a year of rediscovering tourism potential and developing new avenues'

Rajasthan has been the first of states to adopt a new tourism policy and the policy also reflects upon learning from the pandemic. While saving life remains the top priority, the Tourism Department of Rajasthan is more focused on ensuring 'Safe Tourism'. Alok Gupta, Principal Secretary, Tourism & Devasthan Department, Govt of Rajasthan, shares with TTJ on the challenges, the revival of tourism in the state, emerging travel trends, and the new tourism policy which lays out short and long term goals for promoting Rajasthan as a leading tourism brand in domestic and international markets.

Prashant Nayak

Q How bad has the tourism industry in Rajasthan been affected due to the pandemic? What has been your biggest challenge in navigating COVID-19 to date?

The pandemic and subsequent lockdown across countries almost halted the tourism industry world over, Rajasthan was no exception either. The previous year over 1.6 million foreign and 52 million domestic tourists visited the state, much of the business has been lost this year. As the second wave prevails in several countries the foreign arrivals are expected to remain limited and the industry is restructuring itself to cater to contemporary demands. It was also a difficult time for thousands of families directly or indirectly dependent on the trade.

The biggest challenge is to help survive the tourism industry during this period of the pandemic. As the number of tourist arrivals has come down drastically, the tourism sector is facing its biggest challenge.

Q To revive tourism in the state, what are some of the measures taken by your department?

The State Government has taken several steps to help the tourism industry. The safety of the visitors and the staff was the foremost priority for the Rajasthan Government. The Department released 'Safety and Hygiene Guidelines for Tourism and Hospitality Sector' to set standard operating procedures for hotels, restaurants, monuments and museums. New guidelines have also been issued for the shooting of videos and films. Social and mass media



Alok Gupta

campaigns were also initiated to raise awareness of social distancing and safe behaviour at public places.

As the pandemic posed an unprecedented crisis the department also had to improvise accordingly. Even during the lockdown, the department maintained its connect with agencies and stakeholders related to tourism. The state government has also extended financial relief to the crisis-hit hotel and tourism sector. The department's initiative such as 'Short Stay, Safe Stay' has also been able to attract a large number of tourists from neighbouring states. A safe environment has been helping build confidence among the tourists and sign of an early revival of the sector.

Q Can you tell us about the highlights and objectives of the New Tourism Policy 2020 rolled out by the state government?

It is an attempt to holistically and comprehensively address various regulatory issues related to the growth of tourism and incentives. Its provisions for creating new experiential tourism venues and identifies 15 such categories including rural tourism, craft and cuisine tourism, etc. The policy also focuses on improving the infrastructure, the availability and quality of services, safety and sustainability. There is also an increased focus on skill development to meet the demand of an expanding sector.

In addition to the incentives for hotels and other tourist units, the new policy also identifies tourism startups. The policy calls for the strengthening of the tourist protection force to ensure the safety of visitors. Drawing marketing strategies and aligning foreign collaboration is also focused upon in the policy.

Q Domestic travel is gradually picking up pace. Do you think it will make a big difference to the state's economy in the short or medium-term?

Yes! More than 95 per cent of total tourist arrivals are domestic. As international tourism is likely to take time, domestic is the only option. The unlock phase registered the emergence of new tourist trends such as 'workation', Rajasthan has been drawing more weekend tourists from neighbouring states. Even as the numbers are still short of the previous year, the confidence is gradually building up, and as foreign travel remains restricted even the high-end domestic tourists would be keen to explore more local destinations.

Q When international travel resumes, what are some of the action plans to ensure that you are ready to get more inbound travellers back?

Even during the lockdown, the department has continued its efforts to connect with foreign visitors and agencies. The rich culture and heritage of the state continues to hold its charm for international travellers, yet, it would be only on the surety of safety that tourists will be picking their travel destinations. Rajasthan has been able to present an example in COVID management and breaking the contamination chain. Thus, when the situation normalises people would prefer the state among other destinations.

We would focus on overseas marketing in key markets i.e. Europe, the US, SE Asia through media campaigns, participation in travel trade shows, social and digital media campaigns, PR activities, FAM tours, etc.

Q Are you working or strategising on sustainable and responsible tourism which is getting more importance now?

The recent pandemic and the new normal has once again emphasised the need for sustainable and responsible development. This is also applicable to the tourism sector. Our new tourism policy has a special focus on sustainable development. Also, the provisions for rural tourism, art and craft tourism, tribal tourism, eco-tourism, etc will also promote responsible tourism by



helping conserve the culture and environment. This will at the same time also ensure the prosperity of local people without destructive exploitation of the natural wealth.

The tourism department is also working closely with the Forest and Environment Department to come out with better solutions to the problem at wildlife parks. We are also preparing an Eco-Tourism certification scheme for hotels, opening up a format for the tourists, identifying new Ecotourism Zones.

Q What have been some of the emerging travel trends that you are witnessing in your state?

Post lockdown, weekend tourism, short trips, trips to more open, remote places, countryside resorts, and heritage hotels have increased.

Wedding tourism has seen a rise with the marriage season. More emphasis is being made on cleanliness, hygiene and safety.

Q What are your expectations from 2021 in terms of tourism even amidst the pandemic?

We hope that 2021 will bring new hopes and prosperity for all people. As for tourism, it will be a year of rediscovering its potential and developing new avenues. Several companies are now claiming progress in developing COVID vaccines and we are optimistically observing their trials. It will help in opening foreign tourist circuits and instill confidence among people to take on long journeys. Meanwhile, the state government will focus on achieving objectives of the new tourism policy, promote investment in the sector and expand infrastructure.



KHIRSU

The hidden gem of Uttarakhand

In winters, Khirsu is a place that offers a spectacular wide panoramic view of the snow-covered Himalayas. The virgin landscape here provides an amicable environment to find solace and to rejuvenate spiritually and physically from the overwhelmed city life.

Team TTJ

The pristine environment ringed with lofty Himalayan peaks and habitat of many flora and fauna species makes the state of Uttarakhand, a true adobe of God. There are many destinations in Uttarakhand which make to the wishlist of every traveller looking for something new to explore. Many destinations are known among the traveller communities but some are unexplored and far from the hustle-bustle of city life, right in the lap of nature. The hill station of Khirsu is one such destination. Situated at an altitude of 1700 m in the Pauri district, it is a perfect getaway for peace seekers. One has to travel around 11 km towards the north of

Pauri town to reach this hidden gem of a place.

On a sunny day, one can see the clear sky above and hear the chirping of birds. Pine, Oak, Deodars and elegant pathways covered with bright green moss and fascinating growth of ferns and enchanting mushrooms make every soul get rid of worries and search for the real meaning of life. The feeling of being lost and then finding the spirit connecting with small things can make one happy and complete and all these are essentially the selling point of this quaint little town.

After travel restrictions were removed by the government in the state, Khirsu has received remarkable responses from the tourists. Like

the authentic cuisines of any state factor and attracts tourists from different places, the Basa Homestay in Khirsu which is being run by the local women offers some of the very delicious food to the visitors as they share local folklores. Some similar projects are also underway namely Basa Homestay 2, Hunter House, and Fishery Homestay at Khirsu.

Amid COVID-19, workcation is also a buzzing new term gaining popularity, especially in Uttarakhand. Khirsu is the right choice for visitors who are searching for a combination of charm and peace which can increase the efficiency of completing office work too.

Places to visit nearby Khirsu

Jwalpa-Devi

Temple: A well-known religious centre on Pauri - Kotdwar road, is a renowned place among tourists. It is believed by the locals that, any wish asked here with a sincere heart gets fulfilled. It is open round the year. Every year, during Navratras, a big religious fair is held where many people come from around the region. Many marriages also perform here at no cost.

Ghandiyal Devta

Temple: The ancient temple of Ghandiyal Devta is also a



renowned site among the local worshipers. Known as Rashak Dev- the Divine protector is believed to be an incarnation of Lord Abhimanyu, a devotee of Lord Shiva. The Ghandiyal fair is the major attraction of this temple. It goes on for nine days and nine nights. Devotees with high religious spirit of nearby areas participate and perform rituals.

Beyond Khirsu

Srinagar: Located on way to N.H. 58 on the bank of river Alaknanda, it was once the capital of Garhwal Kings and vital in the expansion of the rulers of the region. Currently, the centre of Garhwal University is situated here. It is the biggest township in the region.

Deval Garh: Situated at 16 km away from Khirsu towards Srinagar, it is one of the important capitals of the Garhwal kingdom. The testimony of the prosperous kingdom can be seen here. The Raj Rajeshwari and Gauri Devi temples are the two important attractions in the vicinity.

ULKA Garhi: A three km picturesque drive from Khirsu (Chaubattakhal) takes one to Ulkha-Garhi. The place is known for its small Ulkeshwari temple and many significant structures of the Garhwal



kingdoms are also dotted in the region.

Pauri: District Headquarter of Pauri Garhwal and Commissioner's Headquarter of Garhwal region is situated here. It is 20 km from Khirsu and 32 km from Srinagar. The attractive hill station of Pauri has many tourist bungalows built in colonial architecture. One can find a number of private hotels here to stay. The town has a big bazaar for shopaholics to buy local stuff made by local villagers.

Lansdowne: A hill station with the longest history continues to attract tourists from all over the country. With the benefit of well-connected motorable roads, this place is an ideal escape from city life.



Dilip Jawalkar

Dilip Jawalkar
Secretary, Uttarakhand
Tourism

"Uttarakhand is blessed with many beautiful and unexplored places such as Khirsu. Amid COVID, the trend of workcation is booming in the state. We are constantly working to turn this pandemic into an opportunity and offer more such options to the tourists visiting Uttarakhand."



Madhya Pradesh

striking the confidence chord to gain travellers' attention

The Madhya Pradesh government has been keen on adopting a multi-pronged approach to increase the influx of national and international tourists in the state. This includes promoting this state as a premier adventure & heritage tourism destination as well as a top wildlife destination of India. Yuvraj Padole, Dy. Director, (Events and Marketing), Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, admits that the situation was very grim and unprecedented because of the pandemic, but with their present focus on varieties of experiential travel with safe and responsible tourism, things are going to get better in 2021.

Prashant Nayak

It seems that the major challenge that Madhya Pradesh Tourism is facing is to build confidence in tourist's minds about the safety at their tourist destinations. With train and air services are not that regular, it is creating hassles and discomfort in travelling. The only way people find here is to travel by road to shorter distances & prefer to visit nearby tourist destinations. Other than that, Madhya Pradesh is also one of the states where all the stakeholders in the hospitality industry are facing severe surviving challenges.

On this Yuvraj says, "We are in the process to build the confidence and trust amongst the travellers through all social media platforms and handles to assure them that all the norms for safety against COVID-19 i.e. wearing of a mask, social distancing, hand sanitizing, temperature checking and other safety measures are followed in the state. Also, the hotel



Yuvraj Padole



Kandariya Mahadeva Temple Khajuraho

staff everywhere have been trained to handle guests with minimum contact."

With the New Tourism Policy 2020 rolled out by the Government of India, Madhya Pradesh Tourism has also launched its tourism-friendly New Film Policy 2020 last year to simplify the shoot permission, promote private investments, and generate employment and tourism opportunities in the state.

"Presently, given the pandemic situation, MPTB is working strategically towards getting domestic tourists to plan vacations; promote explored (travel

circuits) and offer new experience circuits in different segments to the tourist exploring heritage, culture, adventure and wildlife destinations. Keeping in mind the New Normal, our focus is more on the destinations that fit into the frame of experiential activities, basically Responsible Tourism, Activity Tourism, Wellness, and Mindful Tourism. We are into the promotion of homestays, gramstays and farm stay as a safe and culturally rich stay option for the guests to experience the rich rural culture, food and traditions of the state and to have healthy non-polluted tourism. We have special itineraries created for other markets to promote MP,” informs Yuvraj.

In the process to build confidence and trust amongst the travellers, MP Tourism has launched numerous campaigns during lockdown with the pure intention of keeping in touch with travellers and their partners to ensure them that all the norms for safety against COVID-19 are being followed.

In August 2020, Madhya Pradesh tourism launched a campaign “#IntezaarKhatamHua” to build confidence and trust among the travellers and to keep the audience engaged during the monsoon season by featuring major monsoon tourism attractions such as Amarkantak, Panchmarhi, Mandu, Orchha, Tamia, Bhedaghat and national parks.

While the state witnessed a steep revenue decline in the wake of lockdown, it sees a great potential in domestic



Bandhavgrah

tourism to cover some lost ground. With domestic tourism gaining significance last year, Madhya Pradesh is keen to attract tourists from neighbouring states as it is surrounded by five states and has a good road network connecting major tourist destinations and it is very easy to travel by car from neighbouring states. Presently, they have opened up various tourist destinations pertaining to wildlife, heritage and pilgrimage, owing to the huge potential.

“In 2021, Madhya Pradesh Tourism endeavours to position MP as a preferred tourism destination by integrated marketing strategies and promotional campaigns. The special

elements of promotional efforts undertaken include participation in Fairs and exhibitions, conducting roadshows, organizing events like Jal Mahotsav, and other promotional campaigns like heritage run, heritage walk, cycle safari, Tigress on the trail. In addition to that, advertising in print and electronic media, radio, cinema as well as active promotion on social and digital media handles.” shares Yuvraj.

MP Tourism looks forward to boosting morale and bring back confidence in the tourism sector and make them aware that all tourist destinations of Madhya Pradesh are fully prepared and ready to welcome tourists.



Maheshwar

The booming market during the festive weekends

With lockdowns easing and the travel industry gradually opening up, the hospitality market is seeing small signs of recovery. Demand in leisure destinations began seeing weekend occupancy spikes as the lockdown restrictions were further lifted in August last year. To top it, the festivals in India have helped hoteliers to boost festive weekend bookings. Narendra Prabhu, General Manager, Signature Club Resort, gives more insight on a trend that is aiding recovery and where the hospitality industry can focus for long term success.

Prashant Nayak

With the pandemic taking over the world and restricting people's movement to a large extent, the festivities that have started from November 2020 are expected to bring a much-needed cheer to both the public and hospitality sector alike.

"The next few months will also see festivals and long weekends dominating the calendar resulting in families and friends coming together in big numbers. Festivals are an opportunity for families to get together and celebrate the happiness that promises new beginnings. It also translates to love, generosity and happiness giving everyone an opportunity to make their loved ones feel special. Exchanging gifts and spending time together makes a festival's ambience even more joyous," expresses Narendra.

Due to the pandemic, the hospitality industry has seen a drastic drop in family turnout and one of the major reasons being the restricted guidelines put by the MHA. The hotels and resorts have yet not gotten permission to open a few facilities and amenities like the swimming pool for the guests, which is a significant selling point for any including at Signature Club Resort.

In this context, Narendra says, "At present, the hospitality industry is trying to sustain its business during weekdays as the corporate segment is completely shut down with no queries. Given the situation, the industry is dependent on local leisure guests and in this scenario; it's the only segment that has shown interest with families and social gathering groups forming a big chunk of it. However, this segment has demand only during weekends



Narendra Prabhu

i.e. Fridays and Saturdays, whereas Sundays are met with underwhelming occupancies. "

In order to attract this demand and tap into its potential, it is seen that hotels and resorts are coming up with various marketing initiatives with attractive packages and offers especially during weekends and festive weeks/weekend. However, Narendra is of the opinion that "When there is more supply than demand, the industry is going through a hidden price war, where hotels and resorts are slashing rates and BAR as low as possible. Even though the customers are benefited from this price war, operators should ensure their brand image or standards should not be affected by this change of strategy. We are hoping the long weekends will be the opportunity for all the guests and as well as the industry to embrace good times that is ahead of us.

Not just that, it seems to make the

celebrations bigger and better, there are various room packages that are both pocket friendly, which come loaded with lots of value adds and festive surprises. Guests can opt for these attractive offers through the hotel and resort websites.

Other than the exciting offerings, one more new trend seen is that the resorts are offering festive-staycation packages. "As the work and play concept is fading; professionals are learning creative ways to spend leisure time with family and friends. Staycations have become more popular within the cities soon after the hotels and resorts started opening up. Since everyone needed a change after sitting at home for months. Due to the time-crunch experienced by individuals, spontaneous staycations in their own cities with leisure during weekends is gaining demand and all the more during the festive/new year season," concludes Narendra.



IndiGo plans to open seven new stations to enhance regional connectivity

To further strengthen domestic connectivity, IndiGo plans to initiate flights from seven new stations which include Leh, Darbhanga, Agra, Kurnool, Bareilly, Durgapur and Rajkot, subject to regulatory approvals and slot allocation. The airline plans to open Leh and Darbhanga in February, followed by Kurnool and Agra in March, Bareilly and Durgapur in April and Rajkot in May 2021. IndiGo currently connects 61 domestic stations and the addition of these new cities will take the overall number of domestic destinations in the 6E network to 68.

Ronojoy Dutta, Chief Executive Officer, IndiGo said, "IndiGo is on a continuous mission to build the best airline system in the world. This means customers should be able to travel by air, easily and affordably, between all the cities and towns across the country. Hence, we plan to open seven more stations on our network which include Leh, Darbhanga, Agra, Kurnool, Bareilly, Durgapur and Rajkot. Operating in these stations will boost economic growth in these regions while providing access to our customers to the safest mode of transportation, as Tier-II cities lead growth and recovery for the nation."



ISA Tourism to represent Conrad Maldives Rangali Island in India

ISA Tourism (India Sales Associates, ISA) has been appointed as the India Representative for Conrad Maldives Rangali Island resort in the Maldives. ISA is a boutique sales and marketing representation company for hospitality and tourism. ISA is also the RSO-India for the Far East Hospitality Group from Singapore and India representative for the Small Luxury Hotels of the World.

Conrad Maldives Rangali Island resort is a stunning twin-island resort featuring 151 luxury beach and over water villas. The property is part of Conrad Hotels & Resorts, one of Hilton's global luxury hotel brands.

With this partnership, the ISA team will focus on building CONRAD Maldives awareness within the travel trade and driving reservations from the luxury outbound travel market. Additionally, they will generate leads for corporate meetings and leisure groups including family travel and small special interest groups.

Manas Sinha, Director of ISA said, "We are very proud to be associated with Conrad Maldives Rangali Island and to promote their global attractiveness to the discerning Indian guests. This property enhances the range of luxury products and experiences that we are able to offer to our key travel partners and corporate clients. As we notice the growing number of luxury travellers from across India, Our committed team of ISA professionals will engage relevant luxury travel bookers from many Indian cities, extending the local market support, to garner growth for the resort."

Sharad Puri appointed as Cluster General Manager for Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Center and Aloft Bengaluru Cessna Business Park



Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Center and Aloft Bengaluru Cessna Business Park have appointed Sharad Puri as the new Cluster General Manager. An industry veteran with an exemplary track record, Sharad brings with him an amalgamation of knowledge, experience and learning of over 25 years in the luxury hotels business. In his new role, Sharad 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 both the hotels.

A seasoned hotelier, Sharad holds great expertise across all departments and his leadership skills have time and again proved to be an asset. His

association with leading hotel chains from around the country has seen him perform and achieve business objectives, thus establishing the respective hotels' dominance in the industry. Sharad began his journey with The Oberoi, Mumbai, and the Oberoi Towers, Mumbai during 1995 – 2000 where he held various positions in the Rooms Division. He continued his association with the group joining The Oberoi Grand, Kolkata from 2000 till 2004. Prior to joining JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu as the General Manager in late 2017, Sharad spent his time from 2004 to 2017 with established brands including the Trident Hyderabad, Trident Chennai, and Hilton Towers, Mumbai. His contribution to all these hotels has led to him becoming an all-round professional and an industry thought leader, known for his superior analytical skills and strategic approach.



DIG Investment Founder Martin HP Söderström invests in OYO

OYO and its European business of OYO Vacation Homes (OVH) recently announced that Martin HP Söderström has joined the company's Board in the region as a Non-executive Director. As a mark of his trust and commitment towards the company, Martin will also be buying shares worth an undisclosed amount in the parent company. Belvilla, along with its sister brands, including DanCenter, Danland, Traum Ferienwohnugen, Stugsommar, TUI Ferienhaus which are a part of the OYO family, offers the best choice of vacation homes to customers all across Europe, especially in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Nordic & Southern European countries. OYO's vacation homes business has gone from niche to mainstream within just one year. It is therefore a large and critical part of the company's global business, and OYO is committed to investing and growing it. In recent months, an additional 3,400 homeowners throughout Europe have joined the company adding more than 5,000 homes to the current portfolio of the company.

As a member of the Board, Martin will work closely with the management team of OYO to drive continued and sustainable growth in the company. He will provide guidance on potential M&A opportunities, and would also assist the organization in building deep strategic partnerships with other leading, EU-based companies and lay out its brand positioning strategy as a thought leader in the vacation rental space.



Ankush Nijhawan appointed as Chairperson of the FICCI Outbound Tourism Sub Committee

Ankush Nijhawan, Co-founder, TBO Group and Managing Director, Nijhawan Group has been appointed as the Chairperson of the FICCI Outbound Tourism Sub Committee. As Chairperson, his contribution and perspective will help in outlining the road map for a robust regulatory policy for the promotion of the travel and tourism sector.

The Subcommittee will be under the aegis of the FICCI National Tourism Committee, which is Chaired by Dr. Jyotsna Suri, Past President FICCI & CMD The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group.

On this occasion, Nijhawan said, "I am honoured to be appointed as the Chairperson of this sub committee. With the support of our stakeholders, I am confident that FICCI will be able to achieve greater heights in the tourism industry."

Congratulating on the same Dr. Jyotsna Suri mentioned "We intend to work on a more focused way for each and every sub sectors of Travel, Tourism & Hospitality which will be very crucial for the revival."

Singapore Airlines extends PPS Club and KrisFlyer Elite membership statuses and launches new programme features

Singapore Airlines (SIA) is automatically extending all existing PPS Club and KrisFlyer Elite statuses, for memberships that will expire between March 2021 and February 2022, by another year. This is in appreciation of the loyalty and support that members have shown over the last year, and to allay any concerns that they may have about membership renewal during this time.

For PPS Club members, any Reserve Value that expires between March 2021 and February 2023 will also have its

validity extended to between March 2023 and February 2024. This will provide them with more flexibility in utilising their Reserve Value for subsequent membership renewal.

For KrisFlyer Elite members, any Elite miles earned in the 12 months prior to the latest extension will be automatically credited back into their accounts after the membership is extended between March 2021 and February 2022. KrisFlyer has launched KrisFlyer Milestone Rewards, a new initiative which rewards members for Elite miles earned on SIA, SilkAir and Scoot flights. KrisFlyer members can claim rewards such as KrisPay miles and cabin-class Advance Upgrades on board SIA and SilkAir flights at various milestones of their miles accrual journey, starting from just 5,000 Elite miles earned.

With effect from January 01, 2021, KrisFlyer members will also earn Elite miles on Scoot flights. This will count towards KrisFlyer Elite membership status renewal or upgrade, and redemption for KrisFlyer Milestone Rewards.

PPS Club members will also enjoy additional benefits on Scoot flights from February 2021. These include priority check-in and boarding, an additional allowance of 5kg with any baggage purchase, a one-time complimentary booking change, and complimentary standard seat selection.



Pride Group of Hotels expands its business portfolio with the signing of a new hotel in Surendranagar, Gujarat



Pride Group of Hotels has announced its expansion in the state of Gujarat with the signing of a new hotel in Surendranagar. This new property is branded under Pride Bizotel.

Pride Bizotel, Surendranagar is the latest to the Pride Hotels portfolio in the state of Gujarat. Pride Hotels are already operating hotels in Ahmedabad, Rajkot, Vadodara and Anand. Commenting on the development, Atul Upadhyay- VP Operations, Pride Hotels Ltd., said, "In the last few months, things have accelerated positively for the hospitality market in Gujarat. Surendranagar too is witnessing good economic & industrial growth and our group is proud to be part of this expansion at the right time."

With its presence in around 20 great locations across India, Pride Group of Hotels boasts of 2500+ rooms, 52 restaurants and 73 banquets and conference halls, reinforcing itself as the one-stop destination for MICE.

Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa welcomes Shiv Bose as its new General Manager

Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa has appointed Shiv Bose as the General Manager of the property. He is a passionate and driven professional with almost two decades of illustrious experience in the hospitality industry. In his role, Shiv will be spearheading the team and developing the hotel's



operations to deliver stellar service standards. At Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort and Spa, Shiv will lend his expertise to a holistic stay experience for guests and be the torchbearer of the first Sheraton resort in the country.

Prior to joining Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa, Shiv was the General Manager at Courtyard by Marriott Bengaluru Hebbal. He has been the General Manager at Le Meridien, Nagpur for over two years and was also associated with Starwood Hotels and Resorts and East India Hotels.

Vistara to fly between Delhi and Frankfurt from February 2021

Vistara has announced special, non-stop flights between Delhi and Frankfurt from February 18, 2020. The airline will fly twice a week between the two cities, on Thursdays and Saturdays, as part of the 'transport bubble' formed between India and Germany.

The new route will be served by Vistara's brand-new Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft, offering world-class service and hospitality in Business, Premium Economy and Economy cabins. Frankfurt is Vistara's second destination in Europe after London, United Kingdom. Subject to existing regulations around transit traffic, passengers can also travel via Frankfurt to the rest of Germany and the EU. Bookings for the flights are being progressively opened on all channels, including Vistara's website, mobile app, and through travel agents.

Commenting on the importance of this new route in Vistara's network strategy, Leslie Thng, Chief Executive Officer, Vistara, said, "As a key gateway to Germany and an ever-thriving metropolis that is a global hub of finance, commerce and trade, Frankfurt is another significant addition to our route network that also strengthens our presence in Europe. India and Germany enjoy very strong ties, the impressions of which are visible in many areas including business, science and technology, that

continue to fuel demand for travel between the two countries. Not only this, but Germany is also home to hundreds of thousands of Indians and people of Indian origin. Flyers from both, India and Germany, will now have the choice of flying India's best airline on this route that is trusted by millions of people for its world-class products, service and on-point hygiene and safety protocols."



GMR Hyderabad and Dubai Airports sign MOU to launch COVID-19 Vaccine distribution project

GMR Hyderabad International Airport Limited & GMR Hyderabad Air Cargo (GMR-HYD) and Dubai Airports are coming together to build an exclusive Vaccine Air Freight Corridor Product called 'HYDXB-VAXCOR' ('Hyderabad to Dubai global Vaccine Corridor'), and the MoU for the same was signed by Pradeep Panicker, CEO-GMR Hyderabad International Airport, Saurabh Kumar, CEO-GMR Hyderabad

Air Cargo and Eugene Barry, EVP-Commercial, Dubai Airports Corporation in a virtual ceremony.

As per the MoU, GMR-HYD and Dubai Airports will be according



priority to the temperature-sensitive Vaccine shipments moving between GMR Hyderabad and Dubai Airports for further connections to various Continents as part of the 'HYDXB-VAXCOR' and build this service offering as a key differentiator and value proposition for the Vaccine Customers and Logistics Stakeholders. This agreement will lead to the roll out of customised and simplified processes and infrastructural support to streamline the journey of Covid-19 Vaccine right from the manufacturing unit to the airport and hub logistics to delivery to end-customers.

As part of this joint initiative, Dubai Airports has identified GMR-HYD as a key strategic Air Cargo Partner to leverage its Global Distribution Eco-system, while GMR-HYD will leverage Dubai Airport as a key Strategic Collaborator towards facilitating the Global Vaccine Supply Chain with provision of Value Added Services for Vaccine Exporters and Imported from both the countries. The Partnership also entails Technology Collaboration, under which both the entities will explore and work together on an Integrated IT Solution that will provide End-to-End Visibility including Shipment Temperature and Status Tracking for the Customers while Cargo is in Transit between HYD and DXB and during its onwards journey to various global destinations.

Agartala Airport set to become the third international airport in Northeast

Maharaja Bir Bikram (MBB) Airport in Agartala is set to become the third international airport in the northeastern region. The airport, which was built in 1942 by the erstwhile King Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur, is the second busiest in the Northeast after Guwahati's Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport. Imphal Airport in Manipur was declared as an international airport three-and-a-half years ago. A ₹438 crore project is going on to upgrade the airport which will be completed in March this year.

"Construction work on the new integrated terminal building of MBB Airport has been completed and now the interior work is going on. By March 31, all the work would be completed. He said the Tripura government is keen to begin air connectivity with Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries from the Agartala airport," an AAI official said.

The new terminal has been designed to handle 1,000 domestic and 200 international passengers during peak hours, making it an annual handling capacity of three million passengers. Locally available bamboo is used widely in the state for construction whereas tribal artwork and crafts are included to promote cultural tourism. The art and craftwork is displayed all over the terminal in the form of sculptures, 'jaali' work, furniture and murals. The bamboo architecture is represented in the facade of the terminal building by way of a floral 'jaali' pattern depicting the forests and greenery of the region, placed equidistant from each other.

FAITH India Tourism Mart goes virtual on 18-20th Feb

Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality, 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 is holding its India Tourism Mart – ITM a buyer seller meet in a virtual format from 18th – 20th Feb 2021.

The India Tourism Mart which has been actively supported by the Ministry of Tourism is a highly vibrant marketplace. It has seen active attendance from over 250 buyers from over 65 countries having B2B interactions from hundreds of tourism exhibitors from India including most of the State Governments, hotel companies, tour operators and travel agents and tourist transporters.

The elite international buyers reflect a strategic mix of target countries which are critical, developed and under developing markets for India. The tourism verticals in which B2B interactions take place reflect a mix between leisure, adventure, mice, heritage and niche tourism sectors.

Due to the pandemic, the format this year has gone virtual and online B2B interactions will be held between Indian tourism exhibitors and an elite group of global buyers who will be carefully selected from over 90 countries.

Additionally, the domestic focus will figure too prominently in the

virtual format this year with domestic tourism buyers who too will be invited reflecting a mix of tourism trade, corporate and institutional tourism buyers. This will be in robust alignment to being more vocal for local and a stronger 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' from tourism.

Another landmark showcase this year will be a very engaging virtual knowledge tourism conclave which will look to bringing the best in tourism and policymakers to discuss how Indian tourism is strategic to India's socio-economic goals and critical as the country targets post-pandemic revival. This will attempt to create strong linkages between India's \$ 5 trillion economy and the goals for India @75.

The India Tourism Mart or the ITM 2021 virtual will also hope to showcase and be a curtain-raiser for the actual physical ITM to be held in September 2021 highlighting a tourism-ready India once the vaccine is successfully deployed.



Imphal's Koirengei airfield to be promoted as a war tourism site



The Manipur government said that it will preserve part of the historic oil airfield at Koirengei in Imphal, developing it into a war tourism site. The state government had initiated a number of measures to acquire the Koirengei airfield from the Ministry of Defence.

"Chaired a review meeting on the transfer of land under old airfield at Koirengei, Imphal East, presently occupied by central security forces to the State Government," Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh had tweeted.

"We plan to relocate the units of the 57 Mountain Division of the Indian Army that is deployed in the Koirengei airfield to another suitable site. We want to preserve part of the historic airfield and develop it into a war tourist site. The setting up of shopping malls and government quarters around the site is also being considered," a report quoted N Biren Singh as saying.

The nine airfields built by the British in Manipur have played a major role in World War II. Had it not been for these airfields, the British would not have been able to defeat the Japanese in the unprecedented Battle of Imphal in 1944. Manipur and Nagaland feature in the World War tourism map and a large number of tourists, particularly from Japan visit the Imphal War Cemetery in Manipur and the Kohima War Cemetery in Nagaland every year.

However, a section of people has expressed concern over the state government's efforts to acquire the Koirengei airfield as the historic site may be viewed as just another piece of real estate waiting to be developed.

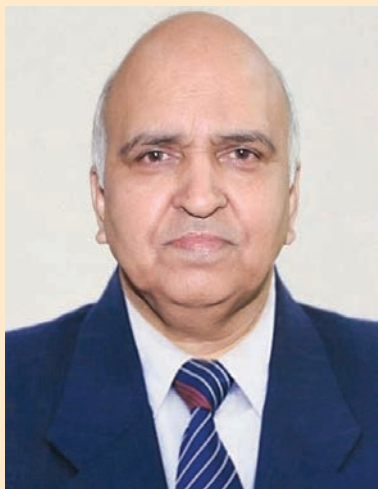
Lemon Tree Hotels launches its second property in Vijayawada with Lemon Tree Premier, Vijayawada



Lemon Tree Hotels Limited, through its management subsidiary Carnation, announced the opening of Lemon Tree Premier, Vijayawada. This is the second property of the brand in the third largest city of Andhra Pradesh. The hotel features 122 well-appointed rooms and suites that feature Kalamkari art and intricate sculptures inspired by the traditional art forms of Vijayawada, with modern amenities and facilities.

Complementing the stay are a vibrant atrium lobby, a multi-cuisine coffee shop – Citrus Café, an award-winning pan-Asian restaurant – Republic of Noodles and a hip recreation bar – Slounge. The hotel also features expansive banquet spaces and conference facilities, including large conference and banquet halls to meet discerning guests' business needs and event requirements. Recreational facilities include a rejuvenating spa – Fresco, a well-equipped fitness center and a refreshing swimming pool and pool deck – Serenity where guests can bask under the sun overlooking the city and refresh themselves with an array of rejuvenating drinks and bites. All this, coupled with a host of premium facilities and amenities, and hospitable service, make the hotel a refreshing option for both business and leisure travellers, as well as city dwellers.

The closest airport is the Vijayawada International Airport, at an approximate distance of 21 kms, and the Vijayawada Junction Railway Station is at a distance of just 2 kms. The hotel's prominent location also offers easy access to Vijayawada's key attractions such as the ornate Kanaka Durga Temple, nestled on the Indrakeeladri Hill, the Undavalli Caves featuring ancient rock-cut temples, formed out of a single granite block, and the Bhavani Island on the Krishna River.



Suneet Sharma is the new Chairman & CEO of Railway Board

Suneet Sharma has been appointed as the new Chairman & Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Railway Board (Ministry of Railways) and ex-officio Principal Secretary to Government of India.

The appointments committee of the Cabinet has approved the appointment of Suneet Sharma as Chairman & CEO of Railway Board. Prior to this, Suneet Sharma worked as General Manager, Eastern Railway.

Suneet Sharma joined the Indian Railways in 1979 as a Special Class Apprentice while he was studying engineering at IIT Kanpur. A graduate in Mechanical and Electrical Engineering he has more than 40 years of experience serving in the Indian Railways in various capacities.



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