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AS MOTHER EARTH REJUVENATES



TILL BARREN ROADS AND NEW HORIZONS OPEN



LET'S PAVE THIS BUMPY PATH WITH ALL THINGS POSITIVE

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Dear Friends,

The Covid-19 pandemic has deeply affected the travel and hospitality industry as a whole, with each sector displaying its own specific dismay.

We all face a complicated year ahead and it might, take up to a year for each of the sectors to return to its normal levels.

Meanwhile, with the Covid-19 lockdown in place in several countries across the globe, we are also at a stage where many countries are just starting to introduce more stringent physical distancing measures as COVID-19 crosses their borders. Nevertheless, there are some countries that think they are passing the peak phase of infections and are already planning how to remove some restrictions.

With the same, there are many countries strategising and doing situation assessment, impact assessment and road mapping, to help get the tourism industry back on its feet. Though sequential recovery may be slightly slow and quite different but it will happen with a vengeance.

On the societal front, the consequences of Social Distancing is not going away in a hurry, and is also not going to make it easier for the industry. However, this too shall pass and the human spirit will fly higher than ever.

TTJ May-June 2020 issue focuses on the survival and recovery of the travel and hospitality industry and it was quite overwhelming to know that many stakeholders were keen to write and contribute to the stories. This only signifies that everyone is with high hopes and individually and collectively, we, from the travel and tourism industry, need to tread and tide over the critical times with caution and innovation.

Happy Reading!

Ravi Sharma

Ravi Sharma

ravisharma@sampanmedia.com

Editor's Desk

Honeymoon Travel

Beautiful Greece (8 Nights)
Greece | Athens | Mykonos | Santorini

Exquisite Italy (9 Nights)
Rome | Naples | Amalfi Coast | Florence | Paris | Venice

Idyllic Maldives (4 Nights)
Maldives

Family Travel

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

Friends Travel

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

Solo Travel

- Splendorous Turkey (6 Nights)
Istanbul | Cappadocia | Antalya
- Scandinavia (7 Nights)
Copenhagen | Aarhus | Stavanger | Bergen | Oslo | Stockholm
- Mesmerizing Central Europe (8 Nights)
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Expo 2020 will now welcome the world on October 1, 2021



Expo 2020 Dubai is gearing up to help shape a post-pandemic world and create a better future for all after a two-thirds majority of Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) Member States voted in favour of postponing the next World Expo by one year. The global mega event will now run from October 01, 2021 to March 31, 2022, a delay that allows all participants to safely navigate the impact of COVID-19, and allows the World Expo to focus on a collective desire for new thinking to identify solutions to some of the greatest challenges of our time.

Wealthy tourists, the charm of the 1960s to inspire Goa's re-invention of tourism

Goa will have to re-invent its tourism profile and go back to the pristine 1960s, to get the industry back on its feet, Tourism Minister Manohar Ajaonkar said on May 07. He stated, "We do not want tourists who consume drugs, cook



on our roads or who create nuisance on beaches. We want good tourists who are wealthy and who can appreciate Goa and its culture."

UNWTO predicts a decline in international tourists between 60 to 80 per cent in 2020

The coronavirus pandemic caused a 22 per cent decline in international tourist arrivals in the first quarter of 2020, according to the latest data from UNWTO. The crisis could lead to an annual decline of between 60 and 80 per cent compared to 2019.

It noted that arrivals in March fell sharply by 57 per cent after the start of a lockdown in many countries, as well as the widespread implementation of travel restrictions and the closure of airports and national borders. This translates into a loss of 67 million international arrivals and around \$80 billion in revenues.



Emirates Group records 32nd consecutive year of profit

Emirates reported a profit of US\$ 288 million, 21 per cent up from the previous year. Revenue decreased by 6 per cent to US\$ 25.1 billion, influenced by the expected 45-day closure of the DXB runway and the temporary suspension of passenger flights in March. Airline capacity reduced to 59 billion ATKM with aircraft fleet size unchanged

dnata reported a profit of US\$ 168 million, which includes US\$ 59 million one-time gain from sale of stake in an IT company, Accelya. Revenue increases by 2 per cent to US\$ 4.0 billion, reflecting business growth with international business accounting for 72 per cent of revenue.

Colombia's Avianca airline files for bankruptcy

Avianca Holdings SA, Latin America's second-largest airline, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, as a bond payment deadline loomed and after unsuccessfully pursuing emergency aid from Colombia's government to survive the coronavirus crisis. Avianca's



scheduled passenger operations have been grounded since mid-March, reducing its consolidated revenue by over 80 per cent and placing significant pressure on its cash reserves.

IATA rejects call for 'middle seat empty'; supports face covering for passengers & crew

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) does not support mandating social distancing measures that would leave 'middle seats' empty. In fact, the aviation body believes that wearing face coverings for passengers and masks for crew while on board aircraft as a critical part of a layered approach to biosecurity to be implemented temporarily when people return to travelling by air. IATA says that evidence suggests that the risk of transmission on board aircraft is low. Mask-wearing by passengers and crew will reduce the already low risk, while avoiding the dramatic cost increases to air travel that onboard social distancing measures would bring.

Qatar Airways to give away 100,000 complimentary tickets to frontline healthcare professionals



Qatar Airways gives away 100,000 free tickets to frontline healthcare professionals to say thank you for their heroic work looking after people during the current COVID-19 pandemic. The giveaway opened at 00.01am on 12 May, International Nurses Day to say a massive thank you to these heroes and will close at 23:59 on 18 May (Doha time). Healthcare professionals can register for this exclusive offer at 'qatarairways.com/ThankYouHeroes' by submitting a form to receive a unique promotion code, offered on a first come, first served basis. The complimentary economy class return tickets on Qatar Airways operated flights will be fully flexible for destinations and dates.

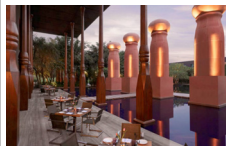
Sri Lanka to target high-spending tourists to revive tourism

Sri Lanka will target high-spending tourists to revive the tourism sector, said President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. He proposed that Sri Lanka should take steps to issue visas with a recognised health certificate when tourists begin to return to the island country, according to the Colombo Gazette. He also proposed that Sri Lanka's tourism target countries where coronavirus has been contained. The President stressed the need to focus on promoting medical tourism by highlighting the 'successful efforts taken by Sri Lanka to contain the spread of the coronavirus'.

ITC hotels launch 'WeAssure'

ITC Hotels recently launched its path breaking 'WeAssure' initiative. In a first for the hospitality industry, the discerning guests of ITC Hotels will be reassured by an accreditation by National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers (NABH)- the leading standards organisation for sanitation, hygiene, safety and infection control practices. ITC Hotels is also partnering with DNV GL Business Assurance, one of the world's leading certification bodies, to ensure stringent clinical levels of hygiene and safety. These assurance certifications will stand testimony to the rigorous hygiene protocol being put in place to ensure the safety of guests and associates at ITC Hotels, across India.

Roseate Hotels & Resorts introduces 'Care by Roseate' – Touchless Hospitality



In a bid to minimise physical contact with guests at their hotels, Roseate Hotels and Resorts has launched 'Care by Roseate'; believably a novel approach towards instilling confidence among its customers about their safety while staying and dining at restaurants across their six properties in India and UK. The Coronavirus Pandemic is far from over and 'Touchless Hospitality' is the new future which is here to stay with us. Roseate Hotels & Resorts have completely remodelled their standard operating procedures towards providing greater care and ensuring a safe environment for their cherished guests.

Tanzania launches Digital Tourism



Foreign tourists planning for wildlife safari in Tanzania and East Africa, can now view the Great Wildebeest Migration through live-stream digital media outlets across the world. Tanzania Tourist Board has partnered with key tourist players including wildlife conservation authorities to launch a digital media platform on wildebeest migration. TTB is also collaborating with Tanzania National Parks and Ngorongoro Conservation Area Authority who also have partnered with the Serengeti Show Live team to bring the highly visual wildlife show to the world to entertain and educate the viewers. The Serengeti Show Live team in conjunction with TTB has set out on a mission to bring positive news, beautiful views, natural spaces and the wildlife of Africa to screens across the world.

Hurtigruten extends suspension of operations, eyes June 16 start date



Hurtigruten cruise line plans for a gradual restart of operations on the scheduled Bergen - Kirkenes – Bergen voyages along the Norwegian coast, starting from mid-June.

Operations will be suspended until June 15, 2020. The first scheduled round trip departure from Bergen will be on June 16 with MS Finnmarken. Following June 16, the cruise line will make decisions for each voyage individually.

Airbnb launches talent directory to help laid-off staff find new jobs

To support former 1900 employees who suffered at the hands of cost-cutting measures, Airbnb will launch a talent directory to help find new jobs. The talent directory gives ex-teammates the opportunity to upload profiles, resumes and work samples for any potential employers to see. Airbnb is also offering four months of career services through RiseSmart that specialises in career transition and job placement services. And the Employee Offered Alumni Support systems encourage all remaining employees to opt-in to a program to assist departing colleagues find their next job.

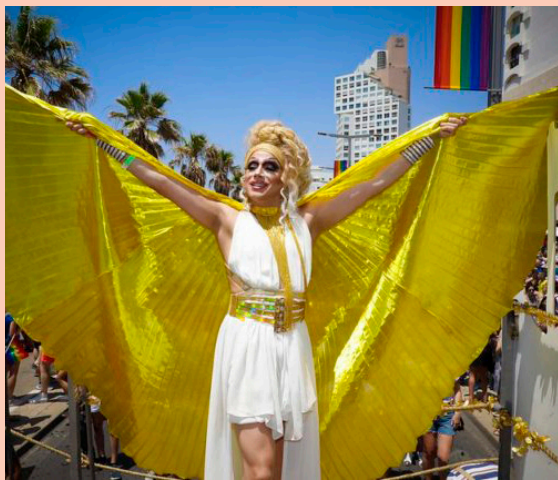
UNWTO releases a covid-19 Technical Assistance Package

UNWTO has released a Tourism Recovery Technical Assistance Package to offer guidance to Member States in response to COVID-19. The package is structured around three main pillars: economic recovery, marketing and promotion and institutional strengthening and resilience building. The COVID-19 Tourism Recovery Technical Assistance Package is designed to support governments, the private sector and donor agencies face this unprecedented socio-economic emergency.

Turkey launches 'Healthy Tourism Certification' Programme

Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Republic of Turkey has initiated Healthy Tourism Certification programme, which shall be applicable as of summer season of 2020. The certificates, to hotels, restaurants, transport firms, and other facilities will be granted by international certification institutions to mark a high level of health and hygiene requirements. This certification program shall ensure that guests in Turkey are going to make their holidays safely and hygienically and feel comfortable during their visit. The programme covers preventive and protective steps including air, marine and land transportation, arrival ports, all facilities providing a holiday experience, health condition of employees in the industry, and tourists themselves.

Tel Aviv Pride Parade 2020 postponed



In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the four largest Israeli pride parades – Haifa, Jerusalem, Be'er Sheva and Tel Aviv-Yafo – have jointly decided to postpone their parades, hoping to take place later this summer. Tel Aviv Pride is celebrated with a surge of gay-friendly events that take place across the city. The city has decided to continue with Pride Month celebrations with the world in June 2020 through virtual events.

Mathieu Montmessin to head Hahn Air's new R&D department



To give testimony to its commitment to innovation, Hahn Air has introduced a new executive department, Research & Development (R&D). The team will be led by long-standing Hahn Air executive Mathieu Montmessin. It analyses new technologies, fosters innovation and broadens Hahn Air's product portfolio by generating new revenue streams and sales channels. Hahn Air is confident that their partner airlines and travel agency partners will benefit from the team's innovative solutions and new distribution opportunities, especially in light of the current corona crises and the adjoining phase of recovery.

NCL, well-positioned to withstand over 18 months of voyage suspensions

A week after stock drop due to stories that NCL needed to raise money to pay its financial obligations, the company has recovered with enough liquidity to last 18 months without sailing again. NCL Holdings successfully raised \$2.4 billion gross simultaneous quad-tranche capital. The company posted a net loss of \$1.88 billion, or \$8.80 per share, for the three months ended March 31, compared with a profit of \$118.2 million, or 54 cents per share, a year earlier.



ITDC proposes to offer quarantine facility to support Mission Vande Bharat

India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) has offered to support Mission Vande Bharat, the massive repatriation operation by the Indian government to bring back stranded Indians from different parts of the world in the wake of the coronavirus crisis. To support the government address mass quarantine issue for the evacuees, Hotel Samrat, Chanakyapuri, operational under ITDC has proposed to offer 50 rooms at a special rate for those coming from abroad who have to undergo a mandatory self-quarantine. The hotel is taking all required measures to sanitise the facility as per the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

CSMIA upholds 'Atithi Devo Bhava' tag wins Best Airport Staff in India & Central Asia 2020 by Skytrax

GVK-MIAL managing Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) has been recognized under the Best Airport Staff in India & Central Asia 2020 by Skytrax. For the last 15 years, CSMIA endorses its motto of 'Atithi Devo Bhava,' to cater to the delight of its passengers, and still standing true to its vision. The Indian hospitality culture resides in the DNA of the airport staff which has been recognised for their combined high-quality of service delivered across front-line positions at the airport including employees working for Customer help/Info counters, Immigration and Security as well as the food & beverage outlets and others. The airport also ranked amongst the top 10 best airports worldwide under the 40-50 million passenger's category.

Domestic aviation industry will need up to ₹35,000 Crore additional funding in FY21-23



According to rating agency Icra, the domestic aviation industry affected by the coronavirus pandemic and subsequent lockdown would need additional funding worth ₹32,500 to 35,000 crore during FY21-23. It also said industry-level debt would grow to ₹465 billion (around ₹46,500 crore) over FY 2021-22. At the same time, the industry is projected to record 44 percent de-growth revenue and 26 percent negative CAGR (compound annual growth rate) in 2021-2023, Icra VP Kinjal Shah said during a webinar.

Lufthansa Group significantly expands service with June flight schedule



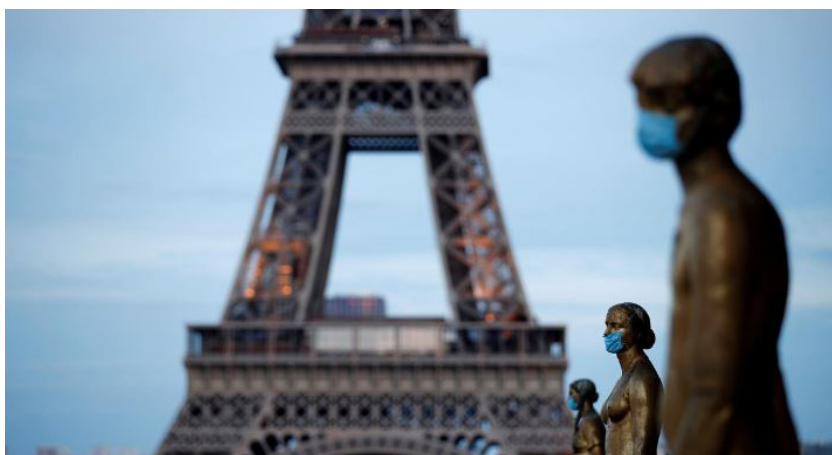
Lufthansa, SWISS and Eurowings are again adding numerous leisure and summer destinations to their flight schedules in June, as well as more long-haul destinations.

With over 106 destinations in Germany and Europe and more than 20 intercontinental destinations, the range of flights on offer for all travellers will be greatly expanded by the end of June. The first batch of flights will be available for reservation in the booking systems today, 14 May. By the end of June, the Lufthansa Group airlines plan to offer around 1,800 weekly roundtrips to more than 130 destinations worldwide.

Russia announces 23.4 billion rubles in 'COVID-19 compensation' for airlines

To compensate for Russian airlines' losses incurred as a result of COVID-19 pandemic, the government announces allocation of 23.4 billion rubles (about \$320 million). The subsidies can be spent on wages for air industry personnel (no less than 60 per cent from the overall amount of the installment), leasing payments (not more than 30 per cent from the overall amount), payments for aircraft parking (not more than 10 per cent of the overall amount), as well as operating activities and property maintenance.

France unveils 'massive' 18 billion euro plan for hard-hit tourism sector



France announces measures worth 18 billion Euros to support its tourism sector, which has been battered by the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in closure of beaches, leisure attractions and hotels. Measures outlined by Prime Minister, Edouard Philippe to rescue the sector, which he said totalled a 'massive and unprecedented' 18 billion Euros, included a 1.3 billion Euros investment plan for direct cash injections into businesses by state banks. Businesses with up to 20 employees and 2 million euros in annual revenue in the tourism, hotel and restaurant sector will also be able to tap a solidarity fund until the end of the year, to receive grants of up to 10,000 Euros.

Test setup has begun on the world's longest rollercoaster at sea



Last October, Dream Cruises and Maurer Rides announced the world's longest roller coaster at sea on board the new Global Class cruise ship, Global Dream. The 'Spike®-Coaster' type roller coaster – called Space Cruiser by Dream Cruises – will be the highlight of the 'Dream Park at the Pier', the very first theme park at sea. What was previously only possible with animations and graphics is now becoming reality as one of the most exciting cruise ship attractions to date is already being set up on land in advance for testing purposes. In order to keep the assembly and commissioning time for the 2500-cabin cruise ship as short as possible, the roller coaster is currently being built for testing in the immediate vicinity of the MV Werften shipyards in Germany.

Accor and AXA launch a strategic partnership to offer unique medical assistance

Accor and AXA, a global leader in insurance, announce an innovative strategic partnership to provide medical support to guests across the 5,000 Accor hotels worldwide.

Accor guests will benefit from AXA's most recent advances in telemedicine through free access to medical teleconsultations. Guests will also get access to AXA's extensive medical networks with tens of thousands of vetted medical professionals. This will allow hotels to make the most relevant referrals (e.g. language, specialty, etc.) to their guests in the 110 destinations where Accor is present. This unique medical service complements its overall global recovery plan and is included in the enhanced health and prevention protocols that Accor has put in place notably through its ALLSAFE Cleanliness label in anticipation of the progressive reopening of its hotels across the different regions.



Serbia pins hopes of post-Covid tourism revival on Chinese

Serbia is pinning its hopes for a revival of tourism on Chinese tourists as it emerges from its coronavirus lockdown. According to tourism officials, the number of international tourists visiting Serbia was close to zero in April and the first half of May. Rasim Ljajic, Serbia's Tourism and Trade minister expects a total drop of around 1 billion Euros in revenues from foreign tourists this year. Ljajic is looking for help from a link between the Serbian Tourist Organization and Fliggy, an online travel agency owned by the Chinese e-commerce company Alibaba, which will promote travel to Serbia in China.

FAITH appeals Chief Ministers of all the states for specific support package

In a recent development, FAITH, the policy federation of all national associations representing the complete tourism, travel and hospitality industry of India requested the Chief Ministers of each state, for coming up with a state specific package.

Team TTJ

With 28 Indian States set to lose tourism as an industry and foreign and domestic tourism in each state hit severely for 2020 – 2021. COVID-19 Pandemic has jeopardized all top performing foreign source markets for tourism like USA, Canada, UK, Germany, China, Japan, Singapore, Russia, Italy, and Spain. FAITH has appealed to the Chief Ministers of each state for coming up with a state specific package.

A complete waiver of all fixed electricity, other utility charges and all excise duties for FY 2020-21 without any penalties. A renewal of all licenses, permits, permissions which were expiring in FY 2020-21, without any financial charges or penalties. A refund of the FY 2019-20 of SGST collected from all travel agents, tourist transporters, hotels, tour operators, restaurants and any other tourism, travel and hospitality enterprises in the state which will help

manage their working capital crisis. This can be paid back in subsequent year's interest free and without any penalties. Also, complete waiver of any other taxes, fees, cesses or levies such as the property taxes or interstate tourist transport taxes levied at the level of the state, municipal, district or panchayat on the tourism, travel & hospitality industry.

Additionally, FAITH has also requested the Chief Ministers for their support with the following requests:

To the Finance Minister, of Govt of India for a complete waiver of income taxes, GST, PF and ESI and any other statutory taxes, fees, cesses or levies on the tourism, travel and hospitality industry for FY 2020-21.

To Governor RBI for increasing the moratorium period on loans from three months to full financial year of 2020-21 without any penal or accumulated interest.

To Finance Minister, Govt of India and

Governor RBI for setting up a Tourism COVID 19 fund for 10-year interest free loan for enabling

tourism, travel and hospitality industry to meet salary costs. This could be for a minimum fund size of Rs. 50,000 crores which is almost equal to the gross banking credit to Indian tourism, travel & hospitality industry. This will help retain jobs, ensure that tourism business don't go bankrupt and also will protect the principal amount of loan and overall banking exposure.

FAITH has thus appealed for urgent support to prevent mass bankruptcies and unemployment in tourism, travel and hospitality industry in each state.



States will have to work in tandem with centre once Indians are brought back from abroad

In an exclusive interview with Hardeep Singh Puri, Civil Aviation Minister, he talked about the challenges the government faces in undertaking probably the largest evacuation during peace time, the working balance between the states and the Centre, and the plan ahead to help the aviation industry bounce back once the nationwide lockdown comes to an end. Here are excerpts from the interview.

Marya Shakil



Hardeep Singh Puri

The total number might seem like a conservative estimate, but it all depends on how the pandemic pattern unfolds across the world. The airports and all the logistics are in place. But there have been instances when some had registered earlier with us, wanting to come back, withdrew later on because of factors such as situation improvement or the idea of a mandatory quarantine once they are brought back. There have been some other challenges like with some countries; they have refused to take back anyone other than those of their nationality.

How involved are the states with the plan and how do they wish to go forward with this?

We can only help to bring the people stranded and once we do, the states also will have to work in tandem with us so that they have the facilities ready to safeguard the citizens according to the guidelines. We will facilitate their arrival here and once we start doing it, after a couple days, the situation will be reviewed. We are in touch with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), the authorised representatives from the states to ensure a smooth process.

Until now, only Air India has been involved in repatriation operations of citizens. Are there any plans to use the services of other private airlines soon?

We are starting with Air India and as I said, we will be open to the idea of private airlines helping out with evacuation as the situation evolves.

The implication of the coronavirus lockdown has affected all sectors.

What is the government doing to help the aviation sector?

We are aware of the tremendous strain on the civil aviation sector. An estimated 2, 50,000 people are directly or indirectly employed by civil aviation industry. The issue of fares, taxation and turbine fuel charges are also involved. The government will be a good sounding board for it and will extend help as much as possible. We have reached out to the finance ministry and have been talking to the airline companies, and will try and help them so that there's minimum damage.

As the country comes out of the lockdown, how will we see the airline operations resumed?

We were one of the first countries to bring in lockdown and have been very strict with it too. We will have to re start operations sooner than later. Domestic flights will have to be re started in a calibrated and gradual manner. It's the same problem for every transportation ministry, be it metro, local trains or Indian Railways. But we will probably start with 25 per cent of flights after careful consideration of the zones they are marked under, and then observe the situation before restarting some more flights in other regions.

Once the lockdown ends, we might see airlines increasing the fares. Is the government looking at capping them?

We have always been a very customer friendly country. But, having said that, we have to ensure that, once, the restrictions ends, the airlines maintain the fare structure for passengers. We will look into all those aspects once the situation improves.

Marya Shakil is the Political Editor of CNN-News18

As India gears up to evacuate lakhs of stranded citizens in various countries by employing aircraft, military planes and naval warships, beginning Thursday, the central government has said that those in distress and in dire need of evacuation on emergency grounds will be given priority over others. The first two flights from the UAE to India will be from Abu Dhabi to Kochi and from Dubai to Kozhikode, considering the diaspora from Kerala witnessed a high number of applicants.

Has the government chalked out a timeline for the evacuation process for those who have registered to be brought back?

We had a working hypothesis of about 1.9 million people initially who wanted to be brought back. We have a plan to bring back 14,800 people during the first week.

Madhya Pradesh, keen to map more potential in domestic tourism

After normalcy returns, Domestic Tourism is the first segment of the tourism sector to slowly begin, and Madhya Pradesh Tourism sees great potential in the sector due to the versatility of state-owned tourism products such as wildlife, heritage, pilgrimage, leisure and adventure. TTI speaks to Yuvraj Padole, Deputy Director, Events and Marketing, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, who notes that being primarily involved in inbound tourism promotion, they are also very strong with their domestic tourism products, where wildlife tourism is their strength and there would be many tourists who would love to experience nature and other offerings.

-Prashant Nayak



Yuvraj Padole

the choicest tourism destination having a huge variety of tourism products to offer to all tourists."

The state already has various travel circuits in the state with short to long itinerary with the view to offer them different tourism products. Madhya Pradesh has a wide road network connecting all cities and remote tourist destinations. Further, after the COVID situation, the state being centrally located is also well connected by railway networks with over 425 trains crossing the state every day. The state government is also trying to enhance air connectivity with the help of Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India.

On the strategy of planning, the road ahead in these difficult times, Yuvraj is

positive, as he says, "Yes, we are already working on the same. We have held meetings with various stakeholders to discuss the challenges they are facing, invited their inputs and suggestions on the revival. A second meeting was held with hoteliers, wildlife resort owners, and city hotel owners where we gathered their inputs on how to plan an effective strategy to promote the state after the normal situation returns. MP Tourism will have handholding with all its stakeholders and will provide all financial/non-financial assistance. The government is very serious about providing all kinds of assistance to promote and to revive tourism activities in the state.

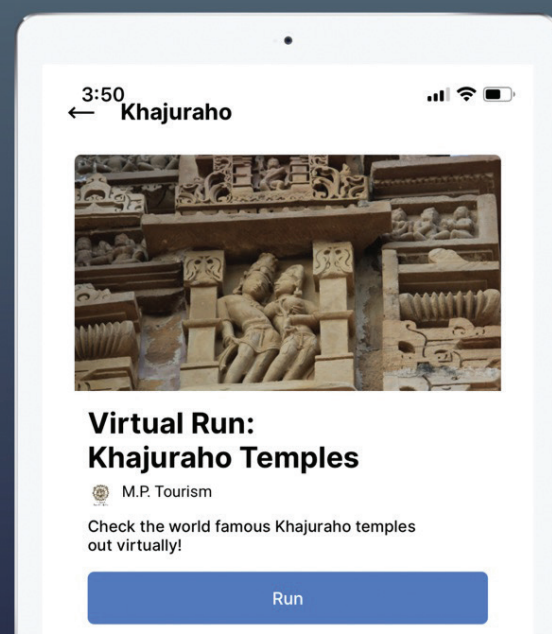
Also, the tourism board has an app called 'RunCation' which is an exciting app to design your entire travel lifecycle in Madhya Pradesh. The MP RunCation app encourages exploration of Madhya Pradesh's fantastic destinations by helping travellers through their journey. These immersive experiences help the travellers to virtually explore destinations that inspire them to travel and finally make on-ground exploration more exciting.

With this app, users can see beautiful and incredible sights from across Madhya Pradesh that too, high resolution and 360 degrees through this app. Featured are forts, palaces, temples, rivers, forests, and more, that too in various new perspectives. Travelling to newer and smaller destinations can sometimes get a bit of hair raising for some tourists. There is either too much information and sometimes too little. For this, the Madhya Pradesh RunCation app should make your journey smooth and stress-free.

Madhya Pradesh is an incredible tourist destination, centrally located and with a wide variety of destinations that satisfy every type of traveller. The state has ample mountains, rivers, forests, and national parks including some of the best tiger reserves, religious and heritage sites that a traveller can explore.

Yuvraj says, "The first segment of the travellers we are looking to attract are people from neighbouring states coming to visit our wildlife, heritage, religious and adventure tourism products because we are surrounded by five states and it is very easy to travel by car from neighbouring states to Madhya Pradesh. In addition, we also have very good road network in the whole state which connects them to our major tourist destinations, at the beginning people will start coming out with small/weekend tours with 3/4 nights itinerary for that MP will be

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Chalking out the 'The Road to Recovery' from Covid-19

The more time one devotes to understand a problem, the easier and clearer the solution appears. So taking that cue, I would like to approach the issue from the demand side (consumer) rather than pondering over what the tourism entities (supply side) should be doing post lockdown.

-Kingshuk Biswas

The Covid-19 onslaught has affected all sectors and verticals of tourism and the global tourism industry has its back to the wall. However, the industry is an eternal optimist so ask anyone in the industry, and he/she will vouch that the industry will bounce back certainly. Such is the resilience of this industry. But even as the industry is taking painful steps to cut costs, manpower; etc it is time to look ahead. Given the current situation, it is more or less a certainty that we will have to live with the virus at least in the short term/medium term. The big question is HOW?

During this Covid-19 period and beyond, the most important factors that will trouble the end customer or travellers will come from transport, airlines, hotels, tour packages and corporate travel and the key questions that will remain in their minds are outlined below. It is merely a

suggestive list and not an exhaustive list, simply because no one knows your customer better than you.

Local Transport

- How safe am I (and my family) from the infection when travelling?
- Will the taxi be sanitized and what about the driver?
- Will they have online payment options such as UPI, Google Pay, Paytm, etc?

Airlines and hotels

- Are the airlines and hotels following the standard public safety norms laid down by the government?
- Can I see if the safety guidelines or do airlines and hotels have some certification, confirming the same?
- What documents will they ask from me, prior to boarding/ check in? Do I need to produce a health certificate or corona free certificate or undergo some spot tests?

- I would like to carry lesser luggage, because I don't know what will be the luggage allowance by the airlines/hotels. Will the airlines/hotels handle my luggage?
- Is it safe for me to order food and water in a flight and or during a stay in hotels or should I carry my own food and water?
- Will I get an isolated or a social distancing seat in the airline?
- I would rather print the boarding pass from home, than be given at the counter. I would not like to sign or touch any hotel documents/papers during check-in or otherwise.

Further on, hotels will have more apprehensions like:

- What kind of room key will I be offered?
- Is it safe for me to touch objects like door, TV, remote control, kettle, mini-bar, switches, etc in my hotel room? What about the usage and safety of public hotel spaces such as lifts, conference rooms' business centre, etc?

- Are swimming pool, sauna, gym, salon, etc safe for me to use?
- What options are available for the morning buffet?
- The frequency of room service staff to enter my room for service purposes?

Tour Packages

- Is the site/ destination/ activity that I am witnessing going to be crowded? What kind of assurance or guarantee is there?



Kingshuk Biswas

- Tour should not be very exhaustive and cover many touch points, as I want minimum public or crowded exposure.
- I wish to travel with my family or friends preferably, so what are the options for private tours?
- If there is a group tour, what will be the group size?
- Can I carry my own food and water on the tour?
- What public convenience facilities are available on the tour?
- Is the local tour guide certified/verified?

Corporate Sector

- Business travel is one big chunk of consumers for the majority of the tourism entities. Here is what Corporates must be contemplating.
- Is air travel/train travel/hotel accommodation really necessary or can't the meetings/ discussions be done through remote means (video conferencing, etc)?
- Why spend on airlines, hotels, etc when already we are facing a cash crunch?
- Will the booking office/agent provide the list of authenticated/certified/verified airlines, hotels, and transport services?
- In addition, in an attempt to read between the lines of the above possible demands, the industry will have to work on the following areas:

Shrinking Tourism Market

To date there is no silver bullet for the crisis, and hence till then restrictions like social distancing, public health concerns will limit the overall size of the global tourism market. Consumers will re-evaluate and limit their annual holiday plans. Business travel will try to keep their prized employees safe from the crisis and also try to reduce travel costs, hence that too will be restricted. Employment is a function of economic activity, so if economic activity (read tourism activity) is curtailed, automatically there will be pressure on employment status too. Hence in the reduced market, the innovators and first movers will be the winners.

Public Health safety

Tourism entities now not only have to be updated about the latest public health guidelines related to Covid-19, prescribed by the government authorities, or conceptualised by the industry but also have to walk the talk when it comes to implementing the public safety guidelines. Hotels and airlines already have headway in this direction, because as such hygiene has

always been a core area of concern for them. The tour operators who have been practicing sustainable tourism practices will be better equipped to face this challenge. The OTAs can seriously think about categorising hotels, airlines, tours, etc in terms of corona-free status or certification.

Packaging Social Distancing

Isolation or social distancing has to be the core principle, around which the tourism entities will have to formulate their products. It is not only the product which the tourism entities will be floating but how they will be packaging it in terms of pricing and how would they be promoting it. It is a no-brainer that online and mobile platform is here to stay for both distribution and promotion of the packages. One can see for themselves that during the lockdown, many local businesses around us have immediately gone online, which one could never imagine in the pre-Covid-19 era.

Human Capital

Tourism is a people-to-people industry and in the service sector, the most precious resource is human capital. The industry will have to explore opportunities for remote working (work from home) of their existing manpower which seems feasible in OTAs and tour operators (digital marketing). Remote working can turn out to be a cost-cutting exercise too. Invest in digital transformation in the organizations which is mandatory to deal with a crisis. Investing in skill up-gradation of existing manpower will become a necessity simply because of new challenges like (1) usage of online platforms (2) new product conceptualization (3) new safety procedures to be adopted.

Plan B

The Covid-19 has taught the industry for having a Plan B in place. Plan for 'things going wrong' mantra should be adopted by the industry. How to survive, if something of similar nature axes the operations completely in the future? Already the industry must have sat with their accountants to relook into their liquidity ratios from the balance sheet. It is time to relook at the cost structures, the current operations cycle, etc and the possibility of cost-saving strategies. What disruptions and innovations can be adopted to withstand future economic tsunamis?

Credibility

The post Covid-19 economy is going to be an era of credibility for the tourism industry. It is not only how the tourism

industry is quickly and efficiently putting up public safety solutions before the consumers, but also how in the past have the tourism entities served its customers. The consumers will tend to flock towards those airlines/ hotels/ operators/ etc with whom they had a greater satisfaction in the past. So the past may be the present and the future too for the industry.

Certification

I foresee certification to be the key differentiator in the tourism industry in the new normal. Because of the new normal, consumers would be quite keen on what systems/procedures/quality controls related to public health/social distancing the tourism entity is bringing to the table. When it comes to sustainability, there are three 'pillars' to consider: (1) environmental, (2) economic, and (3) socio-cultural. If one relooks at the three pillars, one will be easily able to link some of the outcomes of Covid-19 to the needs of sustainable tourism. Whether standards/certifications will evolve from the industry or the government or both entities needs to be seen.

Focus on Analytics

Shrinking markets, pressure on jobs, movement restrictions, health issues, etc all are the vicious tentacles of the new beast- Covid-19. Survival of the fittest will be new normal. However, the silver lining for the services industry is that most of the tourism entities- airlines, hotels, tour operators, OTAs etc have a solid customer base. I do not intend to freak out anyone by talking about business analytics, big data, etc but the simple point is that those companies who have yet not looked deep into their customer database treasure, it is time to do so. Analytics need not exactly mean investing in expensive software, consultants, etc. It only means discovering and communicating the meaningful patterns which can be found in data.

So, on the last note, one has to understand that, businesses are quick to adapt to the political, economical, social changes in the society and Covid-19 crisis is also going to be no different. So my final take is that you need not require consultants/experts to tell you how to run your business. Just delve deep into your customer base and therein lies the answer.

Kingshuk Biswas is the Manager Marketing & Investment at Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Ltd.

Virtual Reality: The New High-end Destination Brochure

As the unpredictable Covid-19 pandemic unfolds, there has been an exponential increase in screen time. People continue to consume OTT content, connect with loved ones, take educational courses, seek medical help, and pursue old or develop new hobbies – all through virtual portals. In keeping with the times, brands have had to evolve to enhance their now redundant marketing strategies and come up with innovative solutions and relevant campaigns that target their consumer base.

Neliswa Nkani



Neliswa Nkani

In India, we have been aggressively promoting virtual tourism experiences in consumer media spaces. At South African Tourism, we believe that virtual reality can be used as an effective destination brochure. It allows consumers a look and feel of the product, and aids in building aspiration. We realized the importance of virtual reality early on, and partnered with Google Street View in 2016 to bring the destination alive to give potential travellers and explorers a taste of the South African Mzansi Experience. Mzansi, the word originates from umzantsi, which is Xhosa for low or south.

In 2017, team of nature-loving South Africans in partnership with Google Street View also released a large collection of 360-degree imagery of the country's wildest areas. The trails extended Street View imagery of South Africa's wilderness areas to include all 19 national parks, 17 previously 'un-trekking' nature reserves and many sites of natural, cultural and historical significance in all nine provinces of South Africa.

Given the lockdown, Kruger National Park, Ulusaba Private Game Reserve and several other national parks are offering virtual LIVE safaris to viewers from across the world. These virtual shows enable you to interact with an expert game ranger in real-time! Safari vehicles, guides on foot, drones, balloons, rovers and remote cams all roam the terrains of the South Africa, to bring the best possible safari viewing experience to homes.

For virtual tours, the possibilities are endless! From Cape Town to Robben Island to Johannesburg's Art Gallery, travellers can now sample the rich South African history, culture, cityscapes and even local cuisine through their screens.

However, travel has been and always will be about people and experiences. While virtual reality is the future of destination marketing, it will not replace the actual, exhilarating travel experience.

We saw a shift in traveller behavior even before the pandemic; travellers ceased seeking just scenic views and sightseeing centered itineraries. Accordingly, the industry moulded itself to cater to a new and fast emerging class of travellers – those looking for immersive experiences. Whether it was taking local culinary lessons, visiting artisans and craftsmen, undertaking high adrenaline adventure or slow travelling to live like a local, travelling is now even more so about the experience.

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

That being said – virtual reality will

play a huge part in not only marketing the destination as a whole, but will also be increasingly used by niche or luxury accommodation and product owners. Giving potential travellers a look around, albeit through a screen, builds trust and provides an estimate value for money proposition, hence leading to bookings and conversions once the destination is open for travel.

For South Africa, we are looking at phased approach to reopen and restore travel. The shift will be gradual, with emphasis laid on hyperlocal travel once restrictions lift, extending to domestic travel, and then on to regional and international travel.

The government is currently working with airlines and ancillary services, hotels, and other partners down the supply chain to identify effective standard protocols to put in place once South Africa is open for travel again. In the meanwhile, we have put in place various sustenance measures, to help our local tourism businesses stay afloat, with a special focus on small and medium business. To this effect, the Department of Tourism has made an additional R200 million available to assist SMMEs in the tourism and hospitality sector who are under particular stress due to the new travel restrictions.

As a sector, we will need to be fluid and adaptable as we progress through the pandemic - there is no standard template. However, the need to travel and explore is innate, and we remain fully confident of emerging more resilient than ever, on the other side of the pandemic.

Neliswa Nkani is the Hub Head – MEISEA, South African Tourism

STB, leveraging technology for consumer outreach

Over the last couple of years, Singapore Tourism Board (STB) has promoted the destination brand 'Passion Made Possible' vigorously and presented Singapore's diverse offerings to audiences across India - families, early and established careers, cruise travellers, meetings and incentive groups and travellers from key metro and secondary cities. GB Srithar, Regional Director, India, Middle East and South Asia – Singapore Tourism Board feels that although travel restrictions are still in place, this is an important time for travel authorities to drive higher consumer engagement than ever before.

Prashant Nayak



GB Srithar

inspire viewers to explore and develop their passions.”

In 2019, STB had partnered with Zomato for Zomaland Season 2, a multicity food and entertainment carnival across ten cities in two formats – Zomaland's larger than life grand food carnival in Pune, Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Mumbai; and Zomaland food festival in Jaipur, Chandigarh, Kolkata, Chennai and Ahmedabad. While the last event in Mumbai was halted due to the COVID-19, outbreak, it gave us an opportunity to innovate and embark on a digital association with Zomato for 'Zomaland@Home'. This association would feature a number of Singaporean artistes showcasing their talents and passions, while sharing about their common love for Singapore's diverse food culture.

One of Singapore's key tourism players, Sentosa Development Corporation (SDC), has launched an initiative which recreates the popular Sentosa island within the Nintendo Switch game 'Animal Crossing: New Horizons'. SDC has invited people to visit #VirtualSentosa and explore a recreation of Sentosa – from beach bars to nature trails and even a spot for some yoga by the beach. This is part of a series of free online leisure offerings for a stayhomecation, as people around the world stay home in the fight against COVID-19.

Other offerings includes, Sentosa Beats Party, a series of curated beats by DJs who have graced the decks of Rumours Beach Club and Tanjong Beach Club, to bring the Sentosa beach club experience to guests at home. Sunset Therapy, a daily dose of golden-hour-calm hosted on Sentosa's Instagram page. Guests who are looking to liven up

their video conferencing parties can tune in to the Sentosa Cocktail Club, a tutorial series on Sentosa's Instagram page featuring expert tips on how to recreate some of the cocktails offered on Sentosa and Virtual Yoga by the Beach, hosted on Sentosa's Facebook page every Saturday at 4pm until May 30.

On recovery and normalcy after the pandemic Srithar said, "It is too early to say when recovery will take place, as this depends on how the COVID-19 situation evolves in each country, including Singapore and destinations in the Southeast Asian region. One thing is for sure - people will continue to take vacations as the health and safety situation improves - holidaying domestically first and then on international travel. Overseas holidays will pick up gradually, with a return to normalcy in tourism taking some time."

"Overall, the tourism industry will take some time to resume and once it does, there will be factors like safety, proximity, air connectivity that will drive destination choices. New travel trends and patterns may also emerge, with some visitors opting for more intimate group travel sizes, and perhaps, even more immersive experiences," adds Srithar.

To reassure the public that their local businesses maintain high standards of cleanliness and sanitation, STB has worked closely with the National Environment Agency (NEA) and other government agencies to roll out the 'SG Clean' campaign. This is a certification programme where businesses commit and adhere to sanitation and hygiene checklists, covering areas such as management oversight, cleaning methodology and general public hygiene. These premises are also audited.

VR technology is a powerful marketing tool especially for tourism. Virtual tourism is a great way to showcase a destination, experience or product, whilst connecting with consumers responsibly. It gives them the experience and joy of "travelling" from the comfort of the home, and can help to increase their affinity towards a destination.

Srithar says, "We have launched an online edutainment series 'Try this at home, Tips from Singapore' which features Singaporean personalities such as sneaker artist Mark Ong; cook, food writer and television host Sarah Huang Benjamin; artist Tan Zi Xi; and Peranakan kebaya makers, brothers Raymond and Edmond Wong. The six-part series released on STB's YouTube, Facebook and Instagram have these personalities completing various tasks assigned to them in a fun and insightful way. Through these videos, we hope to

‘Feel at ease’ for now and ‘travel with confidence’ later

Taiwan, through their digital campaigns for now is focussed once again on the Holiday for Healing – campaign where they are encouraging people to travel to Taiwan for that healing process, to be one with nature, with their families and truly move on from the global pandemic that has affected us all. Dr Trust HJ Lin, Director of India, Asia Pacific and Middle East, Taiwan Tourism Bureau, (TTB) shares his thoughts about recovering and regaining normalcy in their region, the role of virtual tourism and how they are developing programmes, which will play important role in the Covid situation.

Prashant Nayak



Dr Trust HJ Lin

TB has confidence that international tourism will recover. Also, the effectiveness of Taiwan's epidemic prevention has attracted attention of other countries which are expected to attract international tourists to Taiwan. Therefore, the National Tourism Administration is currently doing a warm-up of domestic tourism in the country, to prepare for the overseas tourism boom after lifting the ban at the national borders.

On recovery of tourism and normalcy in his country, Dr Trust shares, "The pandemic situation in Taiwan has slowed down, with zero local cases for nearly a month. The masses are raring to head outdoors with domestic tourism projected to recover earlier than international. In the next phase of post recovery, Taiwan is planning for a number of anti-epidemic measures to make tourists 'feel at ease'

and 'travel with confidence' by lending strength of 300,000 employees in the tourism industry to become the first line of travelling group at various destination hotspots. Connecting at local eateries, accommodations, attractions, shops etc, to be fully prepared to open up to foreign tourists."

On tourism programmes to keep up with their potential audience, Dr Trust tells us, "We will be initiating digital workshops with our B2B partners and interested travellers, but only when we begin to have clarity on the exact situation of outbound tourism from India, and inbound to Taiwan. We are developing several programs but at this point, our focus is on working with countries under the 'Taiwan can Help' program

which is closer to dealing with the current situation and helping other nations with masks, technology and situational cases."

"VR technologies aids in passing on information and market a destination, it is

rising in popularity as we speak. TTB India has been including VR as a component to showcase snippets of nightlife, downtown and ecology in some travel exhibitions. It certainly provides an edge on how we highlight and introduce destinations to customers," shares Dr Trust about virtual tourism, which is on the rise to stay relevant during this pandemic.

On the measures Taiwan is taking for safe travel in the coming days, Dr Trust says, "After a long period of lockdown and quarantine, the effectiveness of tourist destinations in epidemic control will be reviewed. Some suggested that government certification of COVID-19 FREE for tourist attractions or hotel signs should be made, but we will not implement it because a total control of COVID-19 FREE within the country is a prerequisite for safe travel. Tourism services and anti-epidemic measures for hotels are the most basic of services. In addition, one of the new travel habits is to avoid transits as much as possible. Taiwan's successful epidemic prevention performance has led many countries list Taiwan as the first wave of destinations to travel to after lifting their border control. However, till then, stay home, stay safe, Taiwan will wait for you."



Taiping Suspension Bridge

Virtual Victoria from your home

Hugging the tip of Australia's east coast, Victoria is Australia's second-smallest state and has a handy list of virtual experiences offered by Victoria's top attractions including Melbourne. Celia Ho, Regional Manager, South & South East Asia - Visit Victoria assures that while there are so much to see and do in Melbourne and beyond but since you're staying put for the time being, there are so many ways to keep in touch, stay involved and be virtually out there.

Prashant Nayak



Celia Ho

concept of 'virtual tourism' is being promoted and tested on a global scale. Thus, looking to the future, there would surely be a demand for exceptionally produced and technically advanced storytelling formats like the AR or VR.

At Victoria, there are lot of destinations which have opened up virtually and are worth a try for everyone. They range from amazing art galleries, museums, wildlife sanctuaries, heritage sites and scenic locations. One can bookmark these virtual experiences for later and visit in real life or simply fill up your spare moments with one of these great virtual experiences.

One can explore the National Gallery of Victoria's galleries online. These free curator-led tours offer solace and inspiration through digital connection. Other interesting thing is to explore street artist, Rone's virtual reality installation at the historic Burnham Beeches mansion. Tyrone Wright (Rone) is known for his art works found in and around the urban streets of Melbourne's inner-north, and in abandoned houses and venues – as well as his works on the Silo Art Trail. The artworks depict haunting, stylised portraits of women's face and are aimed at finding the friction between beauty and decay.

Also, there is no better way to learn than museums. Whether for young children, adults or the elderly, Museums Victoria is bringing the learning to homes. Discover various home projects to take on, explore the museums or dive into their digital channels to see what else is in store. Museums Victoria has the perfect platform for curious minds. Otherwise, learn something new with Scienceworks, which promises a

whole lot of science! With a curated online content to be enjoyed from the couch, find out interesting facts such as determining when a creature is extinct, the trials and triumphs of a trailblazing scientist, things that shouldn't be put in a microwave to spending an evening with NASA on their journey to Pluto or simply explore exhibitions through virtual tours. Knowledge is the one thing that is constant at Scienceworks, so happy exploring!

Surely, everyone is curious how animals and zoos are coping from their safe enclosures. At Animal House @ The Zoo, watch the live stream cameras from Melbourne Zoo, Werribee Open Range Zoo and Healesville Sanctuary to enjoy the zoo from anywhere. See these animals during their designated feeding time, set to brighten one's day through their quirks. There are more than just zoos and sanctuaries in Melbourne, Victoria. On Underwater reef cam: Port Phillip Bay, watch the Port Phillip Bay's fish, seals and even dolphins go about their daily business via an exciting underwater live-feed. Reef Cam was established to create awareness of the value of Australia's southern, temperate marine life and to provide picturesque seascapes!

On behavioural changes from the new kind of tourist after the pandemic, Celia opines, "Surely, there will be a shift in travel preferences and the world is likely to witness major changes in tourists. Once people get to travel again, there may be uncertainty. Hence, we will observe a shift in travel preferences, they will opt for a more familiar routes/destinations rather than trying out something new. A very noteworthy change in tourists would be a look-out-for-yourself attitude, where each will mind his own business. However, if we take a look on the bright side, young tourists will become more responsive to authority and will opt for thorough guidance before travelling."

The use of VR technology has peaked during this time as the digital world enables people to have real-time transmissions. The promise to bring the travel experience home may seem a little exaggerated, but they have one thing in common- through Virtual tourism the audience desire to travel increases as they view picturesque destinations and as they long to travel once again. Virtual travelling is a good temporary alternative, but it can never be as fulfilling as being physically present. So, for now, it's a good way to provide the necessary content and information to lift people's spirits during these demanding times."

Celia says, "As the world is waiting for this global pandemic to end, people are currently glued to their screens, and are searching for different ways to explore the physical world. Many countries are opting for Virtual tourism as this medium allows people to get a taste to travel right from the comfort of their homes! Currently, the

Thailand, acceding the new world of Virtual Reality

A shift in consumer behaviour will be the first among many changes that the travel and tourism will undergo in the new world post COVID-19. The focus and dependence of this new world will be on the digital spaces and more advanced technology. As we explore more of the virtual reality world, TTJ spoke with Vachirachai Sirisumpan, Director, Thailand Tourism Authority (TAT) New Delhi to understand the tourism boards' plans and strategies to promote one of the most desired tourism destinations virtually.

Prashant Nayak



Vachirachai Sirisumpan

The state of affairs of Thailand post COVID-19 seems to have improved for the better, under sufficient vigilance, the government has allowed the disease containment restrictions to be relaxed for 10 clusters of businesses and locations. Domestic flights have gradually begun to operate starting May 3, 2020 but with strict guidelines on health and safety and social distancing practices. In addition to this, Thailand's largest market, the Chatuchak Weekend Market reopened on May 9. Sharing his views on the changing dynamics and optimistic Vachirachai says, "It is still uncertain when this pandemic will end, and according to many news sources, we may have to wait a year or more than 18 months before the vaccine is available. As things stand at a global level, we are witnessing a flattening and declining incidence of Covid-19 infections in many countries in East Asia and South East Asia, but in other parts of the world cases are still on the rise. I am keeping my fingers crossed and, I hope we can see the start of the arrival of international visitors in Thailand by the 3rd and 4th quarters of this year."

TAT is making efforts to communicate with all international tourists and travel trade to maintain and enhance Thailand as the 'Top of Mind Destination' through various online marketing and promotions. Virtual tours have become more popular in bringing the destination closer to the tourists. TAT has also launched a 'Virtual Tours to 10 Places in 9 Provinces in Thailand' programme. In fact, TAT has been working and promoting destinations through virtual tours for many years, but we are now focusing more on it as a marketing tool. Even many hotels and resorts, as well as attractions in Thailand, are making virtual tours to give a glimpse of real experience when visiting the place, implementing on the importance and future of virtual tour/reality in the travel and tourism industry Vachirachai further adds, "Virtual tours will become more popular and will be widely used in the travel and tourism industry with advanced, easy-to-access and affordable technology. The current situation and impact of Covid-19 will act as a catalyst for online marketing and promotional tools. I strongly believe that virtual tourism or VR technology will inspire people to get out and experience

the real place. It is a great marketing tool that can help raise awareness and educate people about destinations and tourism products. Travel agents can use it to give their clients a clear picture and help them make it easier to decide where to go or to choose a hotel."

Thailand is known for its unique hospitality and TAT is ensuring that the country is safe for travel. TAT is also keen to let potential visitors know, that safety is their principal concern. TAT is working with the Ministry of Health and in collaboration with the public and private sectors to prepare the Amazing Thailand Safety and Health Administration (SHA) certification aimed at raising the standards of the country's tourism industry and developing confidence among international and domestic tourists. "From now on, safety and hygiene will be at the top of the checklist when a tourist chooses a destination to travel, accommodation to stay and activities to engage in. It is therefore up to us to provide information to these tourists as well as to work with travel trade and the media to disseminate information and advice on travel to Thailand," shares Vachirachai.



Vachirachai Sirisumpan

With so much change and uncertainty, the industry and operators have remained top of mind for us

Australia, like any other country, has been impacted because of the international travel ban and border restrictions imposed universally. Nishant Kashikar, Country Manager (India & Gulf), Tourism Australia, feels that the ban is necessary and for the greater good and during this time it is vital that we all remind ourselves that tourism will recover eventually. And while people can't travel right now, they can certainly dream and plan for future holidays to destinations in Australia.

Prashant Nayak



Nishant Kashikar

customers by sharing content that continues to inspire them to visit Australia when consumer confidence returns. We recently released our new 'With Love from Aus' video across our social media channels, which we hope will do just that by inspiring people by sharing with them places that they'll be able to explore in the future. There will be a special 'Live from AUS' program on Facebook on the 16th and 17th May where we will be streaming on the hour, every hour, the country's unparalleled offerings ranging from its unique culture, and stunning natural beauty to world-class food and drink and exceptional wildlife."

Tourism Australia is also staying close to and supporting its commercial, distribution and airline partners - in Australia and in the market - to ensure that they are a key part of the recovery plans. They are also continuing to engage with and educate front-line sales staff in their key markets via the Aussie Specialist Program. Throughout the crisis, which has brought so much change and uncertainty, the industry and operators have remained top of mind for them.

"We have also stepped up our communications, including launching a weekly webinar series, to keep industry informed and updated on public health measures, travel restrictions as well as the various Government support packages being made available. The webinars, in particular, have been well received and we've hosted Australia's Tourism Minister, the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, the Mental Health Commissioner and even the Prime Minister of Australia. Once the coronavirus pandemic is under control,

travel demand will return and as soon as it does, we will be ready to ramp up our marketing activities quickly. We know the recovery can be as fast as the decline, and we plan to be ready to go back and go back at scale when the time is right," announces Nishant.

From using 360-degree panoramic views and 3D imagery to holding online sessions and live video streaming, virtual travel has been helping travellers enjoy beautiful locations digitally and experience the joy of travelling amidst the global lockdown. In line with this, at Tourism Australia they too have developed a series of videos, interactive social media content, pictorial stories and more that take audiences through our most coveted culinary, wildlife, art and cultural experiences at the click of a button! From watching sunsets over the Sydney Harbour bridge and going snorkeling in the Great Barrier Reef to indulging in some of their finest winery experiences and viewing the quokkas in their natural habitat and while virtual reality will never replace traditional travel, it still offers intriguing possibilities.

"The pandemic has definitely ushered in a new normal as part of which we will see a shift in the preferences of travellers towards destinations that have emerged stronger through phases of recovery. Tourists will be hyperaware and reluctant to compromise on hygiene protocols and standards, which will have a definite influence on their choices of not just destinations but also micro aspects like airlines and accommodations basis the protocols enforced by these service providers. Factors like trust, safety and security will be paramount in the decision-making process. Tourism providers that adapt to these changes will ultimately come out on top in the minds of travellers," concludes Nishant.

So far, Australia has been highly successful in 'flattening the curve'. The number of new COVID-19 cases in Australia each day is very low. The Australian federal government is confidently and cautiously taking the first steps to lifting restrictions and has launched an elaborate three-step recovery plan to ensure a COVID SAFE Australia. Once the restrictions lift, travellers will prefer destinations that emerge stronger through phases of recovery. Hence, it is their priority to adopt and implement all necessary health, safety and well-being measures across the nation, to ensure the safety of both travellers and Aussies alike.

In order to keep potential travellers aware of their destination, Nishant mentions, "Although most of the world is in lock down or isolation, there are still opportunities to engage our target

Turismo de Portugal: strategising and planning ahead is an exigency

Tourism office of Portugal is known for its to the fore measures and actions, implementing the same during these harsh times, Turismo de Portugal is focused on a four-step strategy and have transformed their website into 'Portugal Tourism Response', aggregating all the information about the pandemic, restrictions and safety measures. Claudia Matias, Director, India, Turismo de Portugal shares more with TTJ. Excerpts...

Rachita Sehgal



Claudia Matias

Portugal has begun to relax the restrictions implemented to control the pandemic, with the objective of reopening the economy and social activity within the country. This reopening will be gradual, social distancing and extraordinary hygiene procedures will remain of supreme importance. While in the first stage of reducing containment measures, the government of Portugal is gearing up for the first initial movements when people will be eased out of their lockdown protocols. While the country will definitely get a first movers advantage, Turismo de Portugal is leaving no stone unturned to ensure safety and well being of their tourists who will eventually want to travel the country. Stating her enthusiasm to welcome the tourists soon, Claudia says, "We have taken strong containment steps earlier than other countries, and hopefully that will make it possible for us to restart sooner and allow the economic recovery and return of people to activities. Recognising that the destination must inspire the confidence of the tourist for those who visit, Turismo de Portugal created the seal, 'Clean & Safe' to distinguish companies in the sector that comply with the hygiene and

cleaning requirements (established by the responsible authorities) for the prevention and control of this virus. This will make it easier for tourism companies, tourist entertainment companies and travel agencies to have a tool that certifies them as safe companies, ensuring that tourists have confidence in Portugal. So far, over 3500 businesses requested this seal."

Currently, the tourism office of Portugal is actively and closely working with the travel trade of India and is conducting webinars, providing product destination trainings, the training sessions and webinars were attended by more than 2,000 travel agents and tour operators in April. The tourism office will continue to assist and empower their partners in the best way possible, enabling more collaborations, building new product offerings, and developing new digital capabilities to collaborate more efficiently and understand business needs better. Sharing her thoughts on the importance of VR technology in critical times like these, Claudia suggests, "Virtual information has become the need of the hour, and it is of extreme importance for destinations to explore this new medium of communication. Virtual reality can help influence a traveller's interest in a particular destination, agents should definitely look at this as a new opportunity to promote and attract their clients. So, VR can work as a tool to inspire, demonstrate and relay information. Virtual travel experiences are seeing a massive increase due to containment and travel restrictions. But I firmly believe that, as an avid traveller and a well-established professional in the tourism industry, virtual travel will not replace a classic travel experience."

As we enter the new world post COVID-19, we will see a major change in the consumer demands and behaviour, sharing her thoughts about these changing norms Claudia adds, "After the lockdown is over and the world returns to normalcy, the new consumer will look for less crowded destinations with more peace of mind, offering proximity

to nature and well-being for sure, and here, Portugal has an enormous potential and products to offer. Tourists will try to avoid large cities and travelling in groups. There is no doubt that safety with regard to destination, accommodation and other tourist infrastructures will be the deciding factor, not the price."

Turismo de Portugal's four-step strategy:

Being useful – the website visitportugal.com has been transformed to 'Portugal Tourism Response', aggregating all the info about the pandemic, restrictions and safety measures.

Being insightful – in a time of pandemic and confinement, the need to take a break, to dream of the great days to come, TdP launched the #CantSkipHope movement that organically reached to over 1.8 million people in over 90 countries. It is also translated in more than 12 languages; most of the translations were done by the users that wanted to share this inspirational message with the world.

Being helpful – as an organization, TdP has helped launch a campaign in Portugal to acquire volunteers for nursing homes, to help out the elders during this time of need. TdP mobilized over 4000 people in 10 days throughout the country.

Being inspirational – while we all remain confined to our houses, our imagination has no bounds and to keep people inspired and hopeful in the future TdP launched #ReadPortugal campaign. This multi-market campaign challenges people to travel through Portugal in their imagination, using Portuguese writer's books as a means of travelling.

Dubai sailing virtually through this unprecedented time

Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DCTCM) has come up with multiple virtual tourism programmes and experiences in place. An early adopter of disruptive innovation and an exponential mindset, Dubai is set to capitalize on delivering an integrated multi-touch point online visitor experience for future tourists.

Sonika Bhandari

The recovery for Dubai will take a phased approach with the immediate focus ensuring that the strong relief programme put in place by the Federal and Dubai government to support travel, tourism and all related sectors is swiftly executed. The priority is safeguarding the wellbeing of the guests and the people and also working with Emirates, flydubai, airline partners and relevant authorities to support the planned reopening of routes. Emirates, in fact, have started taking bookings from July 1.

In connection with the virtual tourism programmes, the Festival Teams have further developed a Dubai Calendar, the city's go-to entertainment and events guide, now bringing entertainment straight to the living rooms of the city's residents with its curated 'Live from Dubai' event series. Streamed each week from Wednesday to Saturday, 'Live from Dubai' offers

an innovative programme of entertainment, activities and engaging sessions for all the family hosted by some of the biggest and brightest stars in the UAE. In addition, Dubai's leading museums including the Dubai Museum are offering virtual tours of their exhibition spaces so regional culture can be enjoyed from a distance.

Dubai's College of Tourism is also offering a series of online courses that they have created for travel trade. 'Dubai Way' is one of the world's most innovative platforms of its type designed for tourism stakeholders that is accessible online and on all smartphone devices; it comprises practical video training modules covering topics including cultural awareness, professional and social etiquette and customer service. In response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, Dubai College of Tourism is currently developing a range of initiatives to educate and support

employees working in the tourism industry.

Moreover, DCTCM is currently seeing 300 percent higher VR/virtual tour content consumption on platforms such as YouTube due to the travel restrictions and in response to lock down, Dubai Culture and Dubai Film provided access to all Dubai museums via Dubai360.com. Dubai's investment in VR and commitment to technological innovation has prepared the city to deal with unprecedented challenges and will enable Dubai to be hyper agile in its recovery post COVID-19.

DCTCM expects to see an increase in the FIT market seeking out exciting and innovative experiences but in a safe environment. Dubai Tourism is committed to working with hotels and all stakeholders to collectively address the changes post COVID-19 – prudently and cautiously but with confidence, allowing a 'new normal' to be executed and exceptional customer experiences to be delivered.



Malaysia hopes for rapid recovery of tourism



Mohd Hafiz Hashim

The biggest challenge for any country will be to restore the trust of domestic and foreign tourists. Tourism Malaysia's 'Clean and Safe Malaysia' campaign is one of the ways in which this is to be achieved. While the country is striving to recover from the impact of the pandemic, Mohd Hafiz Hashim, Director, Tourism Malaysia, Mumbai shares some of their strategies to rebuild tourism in their popular destination of South East Asia.

Prashant Nayak

days. It helps to connect to maximum number of travel agents across the country and at the same time, it also helps to exchange views of the travel agents, their challenges and also clear all their doubts directly.

Mohd Hafiz says, "Tourism Malaysia believes in the saying 'Seeing is Believing'. Hence, through our Product Briefing Seminar via VR technology, we will also plan Travel Agents FAM & Media FAM post COVID-19. The focus right now will be on building domestic tourism by intensifying the Virtual promotion of Cuti-Cuti Malaysia and Malaysia Truly Asia campaigns.

It seems, domestic tourism will play an important role in the industry's recovery. Therefore, in its social media posts, the Malaysian Tourist Board encourages locals, under the hashtag #TravelLater, to travel in their own country after the crisis in order to boost the local economy."

The tourism board is expecting major changes in terms of the attitude of tourists. The tourists are more likely to restrict their movements within safe zones in compliance with the social distancing measure as advised by health authorities. They are more likely to be inclined towards eco-tourism and prefer secluded spots or 'off the beaten tracks' to avoid crowds, such as Taman Negara, islands and beaches, eco-adventure destinations as well as rural areas.

On recovering and regaining normalcy in Malaysia, Mohd Hafiz shares, "It is very difficult to predict the recovery of the economy from the effects of this outbreak. However, it is our duty to heightened safety measures in-order to boost confidence in domestic tourism. For example, the Malaysian Association of Hotels is planning to introduce hotel certification endorsed by relevant authorities via 'Clean & Safe Malaysia' campaign."

The Malaysia Tourism Team is actively organising virtual tourism programs such as Product Briefing Seminars through webinars for their travel partners across the country. They are taking complete advantage of this opportunity to communicate about their new products and other upcoming products to be launched once tourism re-opens. This will help them gear up and prepare different types of itineraries with attractive incentives.

Virtual tourism is indeed a good platform to promote tourism product during the lockdown

Brand USA: Connecting with Indian trade and inspiring future Indian visitors virtually

Brand USA's proprietary research shows travellers' desire to visit the United States remains high, and they are committed to welcoming back visitors from India and across the globe as soon as it is appropriate to do so. Jackie Ennis, Vice President, Global Trade Development, Brand USA shares more on their current marketing strategy which is more of the virtual kind.

Prashant Nayak



Jackie Ennis

In the near future, interactive technologies, like virtual or augmented reality, will play an important role in destination marketing. Through such technologies, potential travellers can experience some of the sights and sounds of a destination without ever leaving home. Of course, the adventure of actually visiting a destination cannot be replaced by a virtual reality tour alone.

Jackie informs, "We are continuing to inspire future Indian visitors with the rich content available on GoUSA TV, our travel entertainment streaming network. GoUSA TV provides a unique opportunity to immerse global audiences in everything the USA has on offer: the great outdoors, urban adventure, road trips – all told from the diverse perspectives of real people. The channel is updated weekly and is free to download with no logins or subscriptions required. Our social media channels are also a source for inspiration. We just completed a month-long virtual road trip across the USA. We utilized polls, quizzes, and posed questions to our

followers to help determine our next location"

Brand USA is also conducting webinars and online trainings for travel professionals across India to enhance their product knowledge and to also assist them get acquainted with 'USA Discovery Program', Brand USA's online agent training tool. Additionally, a number of U.S. destinations and attractions are hosting virtual events, to keep wanderlust alive during quarantine. These include virtual tours and live streams of real experiences that are unique to the USA. For example, armchair travellers can explore the great outdoors in the USA, by virtually visiting our incredible National Parks.

Furthermore, 'Explore Fairbanks' has made available a set of 360-degree views and tours of some of its biggest attractions, including dog sledding, Northern Lights, and the Midnight Sun, among others. Discover Puerto Rico is sharing the uplifting spirit of the island's vibrant culture by offering virtual salsa classes, cooking demos, and recipes of local dishes online. 'Discover Los Angeles' is live streaming the sunset, or the 'magic hour', from Venice Beach every day on its website and social media channels. They have also curated special magic hour playlists, virtual backgrounds, and puzzles to keep viewers entertained at home. The examples are nearly as

limitless as the real travel experiences to be had throughout the United States.

"In the short term, there will be some changes in how we begin to travel - there will likely be a greater demand for places that are less crowded. However, over time, travellers will get back to doing what they love and crave as individuals. The United States is fortunate to have an abundance of travel opportunities. From wide-open spaces to culture-packed cities, there is a vacation here for everyone. However, conditions on the ground and relevant authorities will determine when travel resumes. Local government and health officials, as well as businesses throughout the entire travel ecosystem, are taking informed and deliberate steps in response to the COVID-19 pandemic," assures Jackie.

Brand USA, is the destination marketing organization for the United States, was established by the Travel Promotion Act as the nation's first public-private partnership to promote the United States as a premier travel destination and to communicate U.S. travel policies and procedures to worldwide travellers. The organization's mission is to increase international visitation to the USA in order to fuel the U.S. economy and enhance the image of the United States worldwide.



Grand Canyon National Park

Azerbaijan launches e-learning platform to boost tourism opportunities



Florian Sengstschnid

Azerbaijan Tourism Board (ATB) has announced the launch of Azerbaijan 101, an e-learning platform designed to aid the training and development of travel agents and representatives across the global tourism industry. The collection of online training and engagement tools has been introduced for those seeking to gain in-

The Azerbaijan Tourism Board (ATB) launches its first e-learning platform which will provide online information about the country's new tourism opportunities to foreign companies.

Team TTJ

depth knowledge about Azerbaijan's offerings. Consisting of six modules, the course will cover products across health and wellness, gastronomy, wine tours, cultural heritage and more.

"While we use this downtime to find innovative solutions and explore new paths to revive our industry, we invite industry colleagues from around the world to join in and keep Azerbaijan's flame ablaze. The new e-learning platform will help to raise awareness about Azerbaijan's product base in an engaging and more effective way," said Florian Sengstschnid, CEO of Azerbaijan Tourism Board.

The platform is open for registration on elearning.tourismboard.az. Courses are currently available in English with a Russian option to be added soon.

Upon completion, participants will be certified as an 'Azerbaijan Travel Expert' and awarded a digital certificate by the Tourism Board.

ATB has undertaken several initiatives to support the local tourism and hospitality industries, with an aim to continue to deliver a world-class tourism destination in the post-pandemic world. In addition to digital webinars, virtual meet-ups, and virtual tours via salambaku.travel, ATB also launched a nationwide campaign called SAHMAN this week. This programme is set to elevate Azerbaijan's existing health, safety and hygiene standards, with public and private stakeholders encouraged to adopt even better practices in their businesses, in the interest of safeguarding public health and supporting the regrowth of the industry.

A virtual Destination Wedding in Jamaica

Jamaica is home to some of the world's best accommodations, attractions and service providers that have won several awards throughout the years. Jamaica is set to stage and host a one-of-a-kind virtual destination wedding to give couples a little something to look forward to in these trying times. Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) is here to spread some virtual sunshine and celebrate love – all together.

Team TTJ

As the world is undergoing a sea of change during the coronavirus pandemic, most weddings have been cancelled or postponed around the world. While one minute the couples were finalising their vows and ordering confetti - the next, all that seemed to belong to an entirely vanished world.

To uplift couples' spirit, Jamaica is coming up with something special to conquer love amidst lockdown. To spread positivity and celebrate love in the time of Corona, Jamaica will host a virtual symbolic celebration for 126 couples who have had to cancel or postpone either their domestic or international wedding as a result of Covid-19 pandemic. This will give the couples an opportunity to experience a destination wedding, albeit virtual, at a time when they are unable to hold their ceremony.

Donnie Dawson, Deputy Director of Tourism, Sales, Jamaica Tourist Board, said, "Jamaica specialises in turning big dreams into romantic realities. This event is a new twist on this promise, and we are excited to be hosting this symbolic virtual wedding and look forward to welcoming these couples when they visit us for their bona fide celebrations, when the time is right".

The virtual celebration will take place on Sunday, May 17th with the beautiful shores of Jamaica as the backdrop. Couples will be able to join the celebration from

the comfort and safety of their homes using Zoom. The people signing up for this exclusive experience can be a couple plus any loved ones of their choosing. Here a symbolic, virtual ceremony will be held where one can exchange vows and celebrate love with the beach as the backdrop.



Experience Qatar's national treasures virtually

Qatar Museums offers a myriad digital resources that allow visitors from around the world to experience its renowned collections and institutions online. While its individual museums are closed to the public at present Qatar Museums maintains the following digital offerings in order to continue to fulfil their critical mission, virtually, of providing spaces for respite, education and inspiration.

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Mathaf, Arab Museum of Islamic Art: can be explored through the Google Arts & Culture platform, offering a uniquely comprehensive overview of modern and contemporary Arab art.

Mathaf Encyclopedia of Modern Art and the Arab World: provides free in-depth, peer-reviewed essays and biographies on modern and contemporary artists from North Africa, Asia and Middle East.

Museum of Islamic Art (MIA): Take a 360° tour of the Museum which is an architectural masterpiece designed by the late Chinese American architect I. M. Pei. Global audiences are also welcome to explore the collections of the Museum of Islamic Art, spanning some 1,400 years, via Google Arts & Culture and on the MIA website. The museum also offers learning and engagement activities for children, families and adults on its social media platforms and website including MIA Storytime, games, puzzles, instructional

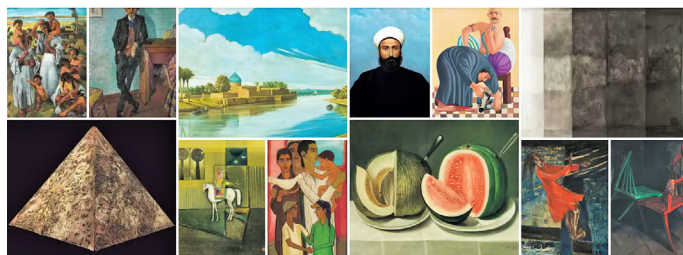
art, video tours and colourful do-it-yourself art projects.

M7: Qatar Museums' new hub for fashion, design and technology start-ups. M7 is offering a biweekly series of online coaching sessions by leaders in the fields of fashion and design, intended to guide and encourage aspiring Qatari designers. Although the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed the full inauguration of M7, these exclusive online coaching sessions — live each Thursday and Saturday on the M7 Instagram account, @M7.qatar, at 6pm local time — will provide ongoing inspiration and support.

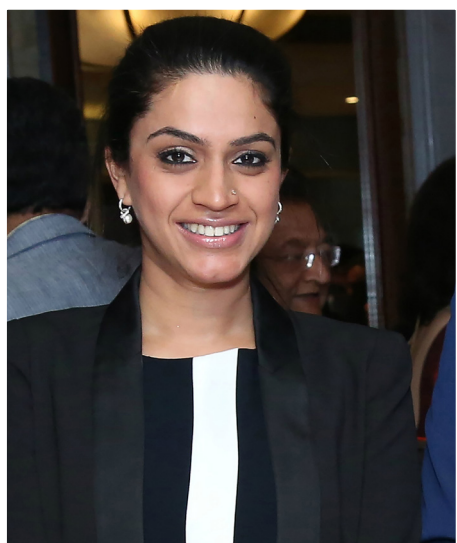
National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ): Through Google Arts & Culture, explore the collections of the Jean Nouvel-designed NMoQ. These include an array of archaeological and heritage objects, such

as the renowned Pearl Carpet of Baroda, embroidered with more than 1.5 million of the highest quality Gulf pearls and adorned with emeralds, diamonds, and sapphires.

Qatar Children's Museum (QCM): currently under development by Qatar Museums, is hosting daily workshops in English and Arabic on its Instagram account that families can participate in using everyday materials found in their home. The sessions invite families to incorporate playing and learning into their daily weekday routine and engage with the museum's staff who will be present to facilitate the sessions live.



Virtual Tourism, 'A new reality for the travel industry'



Komal Seth

As the world battles COVID-19, every industry segment has introduced innovative ideas to keep things running and going. Similarly, the travel industry has introduced the concept of virtual tourism, thus providing an engaging opportunity for the travellers to virtually walk through the destination they seek, virtual reality technology has been very quick to

Make the best of this time for this is the time when you can learn and explore newer destinations via virtual tourism. The industry will be back on track soon and I am sure it will be stronger and better this time. Komal Seth, Founder & Director Linkin Reps, shares more with TTJ.

Rachita Sehgal

adopt especially in the travel industry and for good reason. Komal states, "Travellers usually needs lots of information before they book a restaurant to eat or a place to stay in. VR helps them to view images, look at the videos, and then seek opinions through different social media platforms. It gives a chance to taste the beauty of their expectations or where they are going to spend their holiday in. However, there is a lot of difference between virtual reality and reality. But yes, more or less it will be in trend now for sure."

Sharing plans to promote Turkey through virtual reality and online training programmes, Komal shares, "We have been doing a lot of training programmes these days and educating our potential travel

agents. The results and response received has been impeccable and we have hosted more than 60-70 participants in our training sessions till date. People are interested in knowing Turkey as a destination for all potential groups and are inquiring about different itineraries and visa processes. I think this is the best time to do strengthen your product and do more and more online product trainings for your potential market. People have ample amount of time to listen and study your product.

Virtual Tourism can create a huge impact but as I always say the best stories are written on your passport. So, travelling physically and building memories is something which cannot be enjoyed by just seeing some interesting online videos," concludes Komal.

Navigating uncertain times with adaptability

These surely are unprecedented times and unprecedented decisions are being made world over. At Etihad Airways, the national airline of the UAE, the safety and well-being of our customers and employees will continue to remain an absolute priority. The impact of the global pandemic will not deter our commitment towards India, a country we've operated in for over fifteen years now and one that is Etihad Airways' largest market outside the home market.

- Neerja Bhatia



One cannot deny that the global pandemic has surely affected several industries globally, including aviation. This industry that usually connects people and nations across the world is now witnessing minimal movement. Etihad Airways is following all the guidelines laid down by the UAE and international governments, and will continue abiding by regulatory authority directives. We are doing everything possible to limit the spread of the COVID-19 and protect citizens, residents, international travellers as well as all our employees.

With restrictions on international flight operations and travel at an all-time low, we are navigating through these times by being adaptable and responding quickly. We have ensured that we are prepared to weather the impact of this ongoing situation. Etihad Airways' transformation over the last three years has positioned the business well; it has given the business the agility to better manage its operation, even through the unexpected coronavirus crisis, and to position it for when air travel markets reopen.

As the world continues to change due to the pandemic, we are beginning to adapt in more ways than one, redeploying the fleet and right-sizing as the market changes. Etihad Airways has deployed some of its 787-10 aircraft on cargo routes to supplement Etihad Cargo's fleet of Boeing 777 freighters. Etihad has been operating special cargo flights from Abu Dhabi to several destinations on its global route network including Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Kochi and Bangalore. Working closely with the UAE government and global aviation authorities, our aim is to gradually return to a fuller schedule as soon as circumstances allow. Etihad Airways is utilising this time to ensure that the airline is in its best shape for when it returns to flying.

Let's have a look at some of the other measures that Etihad Airways has currently undertaken.

Uncompromised assistance with travel planning

We understand how hard the past few weeks have been and we have been touched by the support received from our customers and partners. Our teams have been working around the clock to assist our guests and trade partners, and to make sure they are the first to know about our new policies, procedures and travel news. Our priority at Etihad Airways will remain providing continued support to guests and we have introduced a range

of travel waivers, solutions and benefits to help ease the burden. Customers can also change the date of their trip for free or pick a different destination within the same region.

Most extensive aircraft maintenance programme

Etihad has embarked on the biggest aircraft maintenance programme in its history. We are refreshing the interiors and exteriors of our aircraft, from laundering and replacing seat covers and backrests, to replacement of carpets as well as bringing forward scheduled engine changes. To date, this work has seen almost 19,000 seat covers laundered, and over 40 rolls of new carpets and 367 metres of leather used.

Aircraft and cabin deep cleaning

Etihad undertakes detailed cleaning of its aircraft on arrival at each destination, a practice which was already in place prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. On flights deemed low-risk, a general clean and disinfection is conducted in Abu Dhabi when ground time exceeds two hours. On any aircraft arriving from a territory deemed medium or high risk by the relevant international health authorities or if a suspected case has travelled on the aircraft, Etihad is deep-cleaning and disinfecting all cabin areas, cargo holds and crew rest areas.

Cabin air filtration cleaning

Many guests have raised concerns about the risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus while travelling on flights. To minimise risk, significant measures have been implemented prior to departure, in flight and after arrival. In flight, modern aircraft including the entire Etihad Airways fleet are equipped with cabin air filtration systems of similar quality to those used in hospital operating theatres. In any confined area, there is a risk of contracting illnesses from other people. However, the risk is considered lower on aircraft because of the use of high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters, which are effective in capturing more than 99 per cent of airborne microbes in filtered air. As well, cabin air flow is continuous, and delivered at a rate equivalent to up to 30 changes per hour.

Testing contactless airport technology

Etihad Airways is the first airline to trial an innovative airport technology that will help identify medically at-risk travellers and this has been undertaken

with an Australian company, Elenium Automation. These contactless devices will monitor the temperature, heart rate and respiratory rate of any person using an airport touchpoint such as a check-in or information kiosk, a bag drop facility, a security point or immigration gate. This innovative technology, which is currently being tested at the Abu Dhabi airport, would screen every individual, including multiple people on the same booking.

Special flights across the globe

Etihad Airways is continuing to increase the number of special flights that are being operated from Abu Dhabi to several key destinations around the world, as it prepares for an eventual return to scheduled flights, subject to the lifting of current travel restrictions. We have deployed some of our 787-10 aircraft on cargo routes to supplement Etihad Cargo's fleet of Boeing 777 freighters. These services not only give foreign nationals in the UAE the opportunity to travel out of the country, but also allow Etihad to carry essential belly-hold cargo such as perishables, pharmaceuticals, and medical supplies.

Providing meals to communities

Etihad Airport Services Catering (EAS Catering) has prepared and delivered over 15,000 meals a day to people self-isolating or under quarantine, frontline medical staff, humanitarian drives and for various businesses across the capital. EAS Catering, which due to its stringent food handling procedures has been selected to support initiatives, has increased microbiological swabbing of surfaces and hands to validate disinfection and hand washing efforts, which are direct indicators of virus viability. We have also partnered with Zomato to launch the Etihad Ramadan Box initiative to bring Iftar meals to homes across the UAE, including hospitals, essential workers, volunteers and communities in need.

Etihad Airways will continue to assess and adapt its procedures as the situation develops and will apply changes as and when it begins to resume a normal schedule of flights across its global network. We want to reassure our guests and trade partners that when this pandemic is over, Etihad will still be standing, our aircraft will still be in the skies and we look forward to, once again, bringing the world closer together.

Neerja Bhatia is the Vice President Indian Sub-continent at Etihad Airways

Hoping to survive and thrive for a better tomorrow

Of all the major economic sectors in the country, travel tourism and hospitality bore the maximum brunt of COVID-19. Not only were these the first ones to get affected but they could be amongst the last ones to recover. The journey is long but the determination of a better tomorrow is strong, as we pave through these tough times TTJ spoke with some of the industry stakeholders to get a know-how on this painful journey and their predictions of the new world or as many call it 'the new normal'.

Prashant Nayak



Prithviraj Singh

Prithviraj Singh **Co-Founder & Director,** **Eastbound Group**

Domestic sector will be the first to revive in the next few months followed by outbound and inbound. People would prefer to travel to areas that are either declared as green zones such as Tripura, Goa, Arunachal Pradesh, and Manipur or are less affected by COVID-19. Hill stations where population is low and scattered will also see a surge in tourism. Staycations will be preferred and properties around cities that are accessible by roads will be popular.

Fortunately, Eastbound Group has built itself a strong foundation over the years. We have traversed many storms like the economic slowdown of 2008, 9/11 and Mumbai attacks which have directly impacted our industry but our bedrock remained solid. While the COVID crisis

has served us a solid blow and we will surely take some time to regain balance, we will certainly not collapse because of it. We are in the midst of outlining post-COVID plans and new marketing strategies. Since domestic tourism will be the first to revive, all our energies are directed towards this segment to ensure we are fully prepared and equipped for a post-COVID environment.

Health and hygiene will play a major role for clients in choosing a travel partner post-COVID. We at Eastbound Group are putting strict measures in place to ensure that we are well equipped to conduct all future touring responsibly. The buzz words for us are sanitisation, customisation and partner clearances. We shall keep strict controls on all three counts from end to end. Negligence on any of the three factors shall be strictly monitored and will be non-negotiable. In this regard, a comprehensive crisis management manual has been developed by Eastbound Group that shall be strictly adhered to in-house and all our local partners shall be asked to comply. It includes a code of conduct for tour operators, all involved tour guides, drivers, local experience providers, hotel partners and even guests. Masks, use of sanitizers and social distancing will continue to be the norm and travel partners will be chosen on their ability and commitment to mitigate the risk of the virus.

Promotion of domestic tourism and taking one step at a time is our short-term strategy. We will remain agile and improvise along the way as the need evolves. Right now, focus should move to single travellers and millennials with high disposable incomes over older demographic who will be apprehensive to travel or visit crowded places in the coming days. Tier-I cities which are stronger business-driven markets can be given more importance to while corporates can be persuaded to conduct

conferences and events domestically. Also, airlines and hotels can come up with lucrative offers to lure clients whereas new experiential formats of tourism must be highlighted.

Humans are genetically predisposed to travel and explore. COVID-19 has presented itself as an economic challenge much larger than anything tackled by the tourism industry in the past. However, history states that no matter how significant the crisis has been tourism has always bounced back bigger and stronger. And the MICE business is no different. In the coming days, corporates would either choose to hold an event domestically or in a country that is comparatively less affected by coronavirus, but the segment will be back and rolling.

At Eastbound Group, we try to keep internal communications as transparent and honest as possible. Our employees are well aware of the situation and the leaders have been given the most important responsibility of maintaining positivity and motivation among team members in these trying times. Our different departments have been given short and long term goals to achieve in the coming months. We are working on realigning our marketing strategies and introducing new and home-grown products. These are difficult times not only for the travel and tourism industry, but for everyone. All that is required from us right now is to be empathetic and responsible. As history is a witness, this too shall pass.

Philanthropy and altruism is built into the DNA of Eastbound Group and is an integral part of our brand culture. When the pandemic was at its peak, employees of Eastbound Group aligned themselves to extend support to seniors and women living alone by delivering food, groceries and medicines. Staff at our eco-tourism property in Pushkar- Orchard Resort

donated food to the needy and our kitchen was fully functional for this purpose till lockdown was enforced. At individual levels too many staff members have donated to the PM relief fund. It is truly an honour to work with such a compassionate and selfless team.



E. M. Najeeb

E. M. Najeeb **Chairman & Managing Director,** **Airtravel Enterprises**

Looking at the current state of play, it would be impractical to expect tourism inflow to the country in the coming season this year, beginning in September-October. After this season, and by the time the acuteness of the pandemic lowers, we could engage in meaningful promotions and strategic selling of customer oriented packages. That would possibly yield results by the winter season in the coming year, 2021. So, practically, we are talking of almost a year and more to get back to active tourism business. Even, after that, it will be a 'new normal' in the travel business. It may take time to build confidence in the travellers' minds to travel. In this, new normal individuals will be ever concerned about their health. Travel protocols could change. Instead of groups, more of 'just family' in small numbers might travel on short vacations to places that ensure perfect safety.

However, travel phenomenon has great resilience and it can and might revive faster as we have seen in the past. As the interest in travel emerges, when the aviation sector revives their flights, embargos and restrictions are lifted off at countries and borders, and surface transport gets smoother and hassle-free and when the hotels, resorts and

hospitality centres look safe, people will start moving to places. That will gradually catch up as a new normal. Before this, the tourism and travel industry ought to do a lot of homework to evolve a new model and pattern for the business. If we are lucky enough, a good vaccine could come up, which could alleviate all the fears to a great extent and revive travel again.

As the travel business came to a standstill globally, our business also was definitely on a low during the lockdown period. We made sure that we followed all precautionary government norms first. The employees in the organisation are together preparing themselves to address the various challenges we might face until things brighten up. People who were on WFH arrangements were discussing matters on a daily basis on video conferencing and so we never felt we were away from work. Many of our staff have been taking online trainings to upgrade themselves to be ready to face new challenges. The management and staff have been maintaining excellent communication and are holding the hands together. Necessary corrections are being made in managing the business and a new crisp model is being evolved for the future. Smooth but relevant cost cuts are being implemented for future agility. New roles and responsibilities are being worked out for the professional staff.

We realise well that the old pattern and model of business is changing, and we got to adapt to it to sustain us well. We are also relooking at our product line and are working on them to make it more appealing to the buying travellers. We are also looking at making products easily available to buyers and focusing on efficient technology platforms.

In India, we expect domestic tourism to revive first and there are favourable reasons for the same. We have markets within our own national borders, as well as beautiful destinations. New specialised products have to be developed for domestic travellers. Almost 65 per cent of the Indian population is in the youth segment and they are earning people. The products should be appealing to them; Indian travellers are also quality conscious.

The tourism and travel industry is anticipating excellent support from the government as they contribute greatly to the GDP, and also to the foreign exchange earning of the country. It is the biggest employment sector, directly and indirectly. The tourism industry is perpetually in contact with the government at all levels, for supportive

packages to sustain. We understand that the government is working out special packages for the tourism and travel industry, among other sectors in need.

The government has already announced a moratorium on the repayments of loans and interests for the entrepreneurs in the tourism and hospitality industry. We are waiting for the implementation of the same and for more supportive financial packages. A step by step, well thought over relaxation plan should be extended to the airline operations, interstate movements, with all due health precautions and protocols.

Economic activities of the country should slowly revive in stages, and that would trigger off all activities including travel. Every vertical of the economy is one way or the other interdependent, and one of them would support the other. As the world is eagerly awaiting, the tourism sector is also hoping for a medical cure with a good vaccine that can bring back a smile to everyone's face.



Ravi Gosain

Ravi Gosain **MD, Erco Travels**

Tourism is one of the most sensitive businesses and first to be affected in any adverse global scenario. The current Covid-19 pandemic, one of the most extreme in the last few decades, will have a long-term effect on the tourism industry, and things will no longer be normal. Personally, I don't see any improvement in leisure tourism for another 12-15 months. Even if after this period we get some business, it will come with new health and safety norms which may restrict the travel of many who have not been able to cope with this transition.

As we all know, business post

Covid-19 will no longer be the same, because of a lot of travel restrictions, both business and leisure travellers will be more vigilant before they make any trips. This will have a serious impact on overall business volumes. However, that doesn't mean that people won't travel at all, but travel circumstances will remain unpredictable for almost two years from now. Following that, we can hope for normality and regular tourist traffic.

The biggest challenge for all of us would be to deal with visitors who have anxiety and a bit of depression due to long isolation, lockdown, joblessness, etc. We have to deal and be ready to handle these behavioural changes of tourists. We are in discussion with our clients and suppliers in order to prepare a roadmap for future business under these limitations.

Our company is no different from those in the tourism business; we're going to have a tough time for sure. At the moment we are going forward with short-term plans for every quarter, we engaged our staff in training, skill development and improving our management software, so we are equipped for the future. Unfortunately, business owners like me don't have many activities for our employees, so we have planned to send them on unpaid leaves for a few days in a month. This will balance our overhead expenses and limited work. Honestly at this point, the future is quite uncertain and the picture will be clear only in the next 2-3 months.

Handling manpower during this crucial period will be a big challenge for all tourism organisations because everyone is dealing with the shortage of resources without any business activities. This will become more serious as we step into the 3rd quarter of 2020. Most of us have paid salaries to our staff for March and April from our capital or borrowed money. Unfortunately this won't last for long because none of the tourism companies, big or small have any surplus capital to survive more than 2-3 months without any income. It's a painful reality; we will see layoffs or longer unpaid leaves in the coming months. We need the skilled manpower that we've trained over the years, when business comes to normalcy but sadly it will be a long road to recovery, and it will be difficult to hold them without any income. So far, we are paying all our staff and haven't asked anyone to leave. We have a lot of employees who earn below ₹25000 a month and we haven't made any pay cuts for them. Personally, I made a donation to PM Cares fund to enable the government to fight this pandemic.



Anish Kumar P.K

Anish Kumar P.K CEO, The Travel Planners

The tourism stakeholders in Kerala are facing the biggest setback as we earlier had during the Nipah virus, and two floods which disrupted the whole industry for two years and COVID-19 has caused another hit when we were expecting a comeback. Considering the nature of our business, it is very difficult for the industry to survive without business for more than two months.

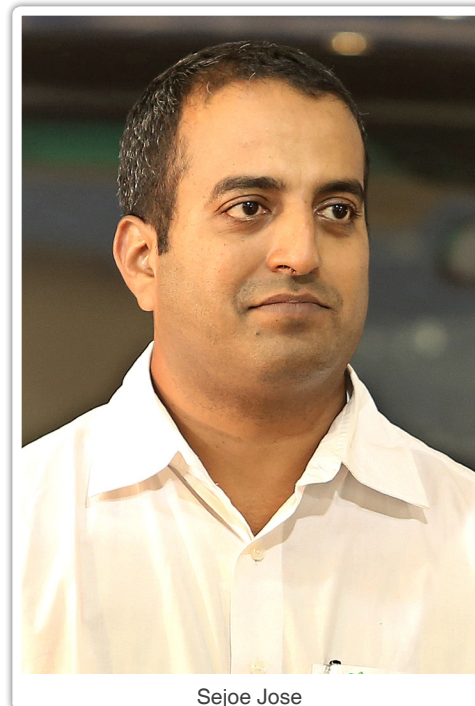
As we move forward, if the situation continues to remain the same I foresee an irreparable disruption of small and medium-sized tourism enterprises and it's saddening to say the number will increase on a monthly basis. Majority of hotels and tour operators are already struggling to upkeep and survive by holding onto their manpower and paying a subsistence allowance.

What is keeping the industry going in this current situation is the hope of a better future, the hope that as people step out post the lockdown they will seek to travel and I'm optimistic that the industry is ready and willing to grab this opportunity on the first go.

From what I perceive, The future of travel may be focused on leisure + healthcare tours and India being a country of diversified offerings has a great potential to become the hub of this new trend as it is the home to two of the most effective well-being facets, yoga and Ayurveda.

In Kerala, the tour operators and hoteliers are working together to encourage regional travel. We have launched a website www.malayaliyatra.com to encourage localities to travel

within the state. I think that every state needs to encourage road trips and then interstate travel to states that are corona free.



Sejo Jose

Sejo Jose, Director Marvel Tours

Every day is a new day because we face different situations every day. The secret to survival is to minimise costs and have enough capital, so that when the business begins, we have enough resources to spend and tap into the market. The only option now is to create tours for locals, friends and relatives who can ride in their own car within the safe area. In my opinion, tourism will begin as soon as the vaccine is produced. Until then, travellers should seek to ensure that they travel locally within the safe zone.

The essentials of travel such as masks, hand sanitizers, and social distancing, are now the new normal. For now, only those who have to travel for essentials will only travel, and many will think twice before stepping out of their safe zone. The fear of seeing strangers will increase which is not ideal for travel.

The most important 'Life Support system' is support the local partners. We are all in this together and therefore we must support our local partners. It could be a tour operator supporting local hotels, local taxi companies, local tour guides and vice-versa. One must realise that only local business partners care about you and will support you at the time of need. Considering oneself to be above the rest will only result in one becoming lonely and finally falling apart.

Use this time to learn new skills

Our travel industry is made up of fragmented smaller agencies all of who don't have great cash flows. So it will definitely have a negative impact leading to closures. My suggestion will be for owners of smaller companies to think about branching out to domestic tourism if not already doing, to offer clients virtual trips just to keep engaged. Vasudha Sondhi, Managing Director, Outbound Marketing & Connect Worldwide India, shares more with TTJ.

Rachita Sehgal



Vasudha Sondhi

Outbound Marketing and OM Tourism are in the business of handling outsourced sales and marketing for hotels, national tourism boards and attractions. Most of our international hotels are closed and therefore we are also waiting for them to open. There is no business and very few leads are being picked up for the future. Adding further, Vasudha shares, "For our tourism offices we are

conducting trainings, webinars etc. For our hotels we are focussed on social and digital media. We are also working with a few domestic hotels and wellness resorts. We have started our work for them as we expect that business to these hotels will pick up. We also have a boutique resort in Uttarakhand and we are already getting queries, we were planning to open our retreat in Ramgarh this summer. That will be delayed to last quarter of 2020."

Recent reports from China showed that domestic travel in the weekend of May within China was around 85 million trips. Similarly in India there will be a segment of domestic travellers who will start travelling from June observing safety norms. The world will adapt a new normal and I don't think life will ever go back to what it was. Sharing her thoughts on the new travel regulations Vasudha adds, "Travel for business will also commence probably in the third quarter of this year. We will not see MICE for at least 12 to 24 months. Smaller boutique hotels, good quality homestays, self rental villas will all do well in 2020 and going forward. Chain hotels will be able to get the word out on their SOP for cleanliness, safety and hygiene. That will help in their ability to get clients back."

Wellness, we can see that people are really interested in health and wellness. It's almost like they want to build strong bodies and immunity overnight. So hopefully this feeling should remain as India has the highest numbers of people having non communicable diseases which is primarily lifestyle driven. A costly lesson but it will be a lesson well learnt if we can adopt a healthy lifestyle. From the queries we are receiving for Uttarakhand, we have guests who want to stay for two weeks to months and some also are keen to move from key cities."

How can the industry generate revenue without government support? Our travel industry is made up of fragmented smaller agencies all of who don't have great cash flows. So it will definitely have a negative impact leading to closures. Vasudha further suggests, "Owners of smaller companies should think about branching out to domestic tourism if not already doing, the industry should offer clients' virtual trips just to keep them engaged. One should use this time to learn new skills; there is a lot of free courses taking place. This time can also be used to research well which hotels, resorts etc are following good safety practices so that clients can be offered the products that will be good for them to experience. This should also be communicated to the clients so they feel reassured and this will be a good way to keep your clients as we."

"We have furloughed some of our team and hope for all to be back to full strength starting June to September. We are following working from home and this will continue till September. We are participating in 'feeding the poor' very actively. We have contributed to NRAI and Seva Bharati and continue to do so. We are also helping all our lower wage staff like guards, peons, farm labour and as well our dhobis and other people who are in contact with us," concludes Vasudha.



 **NAAD**
For a sound you

Sharing an insight on the changing behavioural patterns of the travellers, Vasudha says, "Definitely, tourists will be careful about being in crowded places. From the queries we are receiving for Naad

Cruise with Confidence with heightened precautionary measures onboard Genting Cruise Lines

As the health and safety of Genting Cruise Lines' guests and crew remain its top priority, various precautionary measures with stringent health screening processes in accordance with regional government policies had been implemented from the onset of the pandemic. Genting has recently announced its Enhanced Preventive Measures, to safeguard the health and well-being of all guests and crew and thus is setting new standards for the fleet and the cruise industry.

Team TTJ



Kent Zhu

COVID-19 outbreak regionally and globally, many guests as well as crew have developed higher awareness and expectations with regards to the safety and preventive measures of cruise ships," said Kent Zhu, President of Genting Cruise Lines.

Zhu added, "As a responsible cruise company, it is our duty to adopt a pro-active approach to meet and also strive to exceed the growing expectations and concerns of the public. As such, we have carefully reviewed our prevention and response plan with the Covid-19 pandemic in mind to devise and provide enhanced and comprehensive measures across our fleet. We have taken the positive opportunity during this hiatus period to also implement comprehensive crew training to reinforce effective cleaning procedures, health and hygiene protocols, and efficient guest interaction, which we will adopt as the new safety norm for our fleet and we hope for the industry too."

Explaining further Zhu told, "The public will be pleased to know for instance, that all of Genting Cruise Lines' ships allow for 100 per cent external fresh air to be filtered and supplied to each passenger cabin as well as on board public areas ensuring a constant and healthy flow of fresh air throughout the vessels. Besides that, isolated wards are available in the medical centre and cabins can be converted into quarantine rooms if required. To boost confidence in future reservations for guests, Genting Cruise Lines has also launched its 'Cruise As You Wish' program in which all new and existing Dream Cruises and Star Cruises bookings prior to or on 30 October 2020 will have the flexibility to cancel up to 48 hours before sailing and receive 100 per cent future cruise credit to be redeemed of any Dream Cruises or Star Cruises sailing embarking on or before March 31, 2021.

"With these detailed preventative measures outlined and shared to the public along with our 'Cruise As You Wish' program, it is our hope that future cruise guests will be well-equipped with accurate information and also have a comprehensive understanding of the safety and health protocols and flexible booking options in place across the Dream Cruises and Star Cruises fleet – providing assurance and peace of mind for our future guests," continued Kent Zhu.

In addition to these enhanced safety and preventive measures, Genting Cruise Lines will further collaborate with the China Cruise & Yacht Industry Association (CCYIA) to contribute to the publishing of a white paper for the cruise industry's prevention and response plan against COVID-19, providing a comprehensive and unified standard for the cruise industry to ensure the safety and well-being of all cruising guests and crew members.

A further vote of confidence was provided by the Asia Cruise Terminal Association (ACTA). In endorsing the measures, Chairman of ACTA, Singapore Cruise Centre said, "ACTA and all its members endorse Genting Cruise Lines' initiative and pledge to support these procedures throughout its member ports located across the region including in China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan.

Genting Cruise Lines reiterates that the health and safety of all its guests and crew across its fleet is of utmost importance. With these new standards and practices in place, Genting Cruise Lines is optimistic that the cruise industry will rebound from this temporary setback and regain the confidence of all cruise passengers when operations resume.

Genting Cruise Lines' introduction of enhanced preventive measures for its Dream Cruises and Star Cruises fleet with an increase in safety levels for the cruise industry due to the continuing COVID-19 situation globally is indeed a welcome initiative. As a result, to date, there have been no reported cases of COVID-19 among guests or crew while on board or transmitted via any of Genting Cruise Lines' ships.

In order to further provide peace of mind and a better understanding of the implemented precautionary measures for future cruising guests, Genting Cruise Lines has outlined detailed preventive steps for the recommencement of its Dream Cruises and Star Cruises ships in the near future, which is set to become the new norm for preventive standards for the fleet. These include stringent health screening processes and protocols prior to embarkation and disembarkation, as well as thorough sanitization and disinfection and enhanced hygiene practices for guest cabins, various on board public areas and recreational activities, food and beverage safety and also the health of its crew members.

"At Genting Cruise Lines, the safety and health of our guests and crew are of paramount importance to us. With the impact of the



Highlights of the preventive measures at GCL

Embarkation and Disembarkation

- Mandatory temperature screening and pre-boarding health declarations for all guests
- Infrared fever screening system at the ship gangway
- Higher frequency with increased levels of sanitization and disinfection at the ship gangway and passenger walkways
- Stringent checks for all embarking individuals including crew travel documents; guests aged 70 years and above to provide a doctor's certificate of fitness for travel
- Online check-in for guests to receive designated arrival time at the cruise terminal to minimize crowd congestion
- Additional waiting areas for cruise boarding and disembarkation (with staggered times)
- Compliance with all local port and health authorities' regulations.

Guest accommodations

- Higher frequency with increased levels of sanitization and disinfection in guest cabins with hospital grade disinfectants
- Clean and disinfect guest bathrooms with heavy-duty alkaline bathroom cleaner and disinfectant
- Timely removal of food items from cabins to prevent spoilage and cultivation of microorganisms and bacteria
- Timely housekeeping cabin turnover; bed sheets and linens professionally cleaned and disinfected at high temperatures
- Injection of diluted cleaning solution into drains to avoid clogged pipes and to prevent bacterial growth
- In case of sickness, thorough cleaning and disinfection with hospital grade disinfectant and fogging the cabin after.

Common Public Areas

- All public areas on board will undergo a two-tier sanitization process with thorough cleansing, fogging and wiping using hospital grade disinfectant
- Common public areas will be sanitized from once daily to 2 - 4 times daily and frequent touchpoints such as handrails, lift buttons, table-tops, door handles etc. will be sterilized every hour or less during peak hours (Embarkation and disembarkation time, returning from shore excursions, meal periods)
- Frequent usage of heavy-duty neutral PH floor-cleaning agent to disinfect all floor areas of the ship
- Sanitizer dispensers available at various public areas and crew members stationed at key on board venues to provide hand sanitation.

Food Hygiene Practices & Standards

- F&B restaurants/bar areas, including galleys, will be cleaned and sanitized 3 times daily, during and after service
- Guests are encouraged to wash hands before entry and use sanitizer dispensers available at F&B outlet entrances and exits
- Guest seating will ensure ample spacing; disposable cutlery will be provided, upon request
- Self-service at F&B buffet restaurants will be suspended. All F&B will be served to guests by crew members wearing face masks and disposable gloves
- Culinary use of wild animals and related products are strictly prohibited.
- Stringent procurement guidelines will be enforced and product sourcing from highly affected regions will be strictly prohibited.

Entertainment and Recreational Activities

- Theatres will be sanitized before and after each show; 3D glasses disinfected before and after guest usage (if applicable)
- Cleaning and disinfection of all toys, games and Kids' Club facilities twice daily and/or after every use
- All duty-free shops and entertainment venues will be disinfected twice daily before and after service
- All recreational equipment will be disinfected every 2 hours before guest usage
- Guests capacity will be limited to half the venue capacity to provide ample space between guests
- Sanitizer dispensers will be readily available at various venues including entertainment venue entrances and exits
- Tour coaches will be limited to half capacity and sanitized frequently; training for tour operators based on guidance from the WHO

Spa and Gym facilities will be sanitized prior to and after usage by guests.

Fresh Air Ventilation Systems

- 100 per cent external fresh air is filtered and supplied to passenger cabins and on board public areas
- Air filters and cooling coils thoroughly checked, cleaned and replaced to ensure healthy air quality

Medical Centre

- Isolated wards available in the Medical Centre
- Contaminated items and medical waste will be properly sealed and disposed according to health and safety guidelines
- Used face masks and protective equipment disposed at designated central collection points
- Medical equipment and waste bins cleaned, disinfected and washed twice daily with hospital grade disinfectant.

Crew Members Practices & Standards

- Twice daily temperature checks.
- All Frontline crew are required to wear face masks
- Housekeeping and F&B crew required to wear disposable gloves.
- Designated crew may also wear protective garments and eye protection if required.
- All crew to use anti-bacterial hand soap for at least 20 sec to sanitize hands.
- Medical Centre Isolation Area staff related to suspected cases are required to:
 - wear adequate personal protection (face mask, eye protection, disposable gloves & disposal outer garment)
 - follow proper hand washing practices before and after work duty
 - update of personal health information daily.
- Provide Training Workshops and pertinent information on health and safety preventive measures
- Reduction of crew movement

‘Welcoming, protecting and taking care of others is at the very heart of what we do and who we are’

At Accor, we believe that from a social point of view, it is important to reinstate confidence amongst people to step out and encourage them to travel, dine and stay at our properties once it is safe to do so. We know that the industry will rebound, as it always does after any crisis, but we will need government intervention to ensure that travellers feel safe. Jean-Michel Cassé, Chief Operating Officer (COO) – India & South Asia, Accor shares more with TTJ.

Rachita Sehgal



The tourism and hospitality industry will continue to feel the heat as the restrictions imposed on travel will ease only gradually and apprehension to travel will persist for many more months. So, by when do you expect the travel and hospitality industry recovering and regaining normalcy?

The travel and tourism sector across the globe is undoubtedly the biggest casualty of the Covid-19 pandemic with demand hitting an all-time low. The country has been under a lockdown for the last seven weeks, which has majorly hammered the summer season. Having said that, there is always light at the end of the tunnel and after seeing a recovering trend from the domestic market in China, we are confident that the hospitality industry in our region will bounce back soon. On the upside a gradual recovery in the business prospects may be anticipated ahead of July-August. To experience the return of normalcy, it is imperative that state border restrictions are eased in order to instil the confidence to step out in the sunshine amongst people.

Do you have a survival plan for your hotels in store to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 till things brighten up a bit? What has been your immediate survival plan and strategies in these crucial times?

As a road to recovery, Accor has derived a strategy to ensure all precautionary measures across our properties to enhance the customer experience which is likely to transform manifolds. The safety and wellbeing of our guests and staff is of utmost priority to us, therefore, the company has consciously rethought all physical spaces to embed health & hygiene-enhancing measures into all areas each guests' passes through, making a stay or visit a seamless experience. Remote working is likely to become the new norm, going forward. Across our brands, the new normal would be a mindful room allocation to place all guests apart. Additionally, tables at our restaurants will be placed at a distance in line with social distancing standards. While staying at a hotel, in-room dining may become the preferred way of having a meal at a hotel in order to restrict the use of elevator and avoid human encounters as much as possible. Contactless credit cards will gain popularity and become important as we will consciously limit all cash handlings. We have also developed an extensive procedure

for our operational staff internally on iAuditor- a self-assessment platform, which enlists the brands standards and per touch point. iAuditor will assist hotels teams and management to focus on enhancing hygiene and cleanliness, temperature checks at the entrance, thereby safeguarding the well-being of guests and employees alike. Considering the current scenario currently, facilities like gym, spa and swimming pool are still being pondered upon and to tackle the realities we will need to look for ways that are in the best interest of our guests. We have also been working closely with our sanitation partners Diversey with local medical and government authorities to ensure even more regular cleaning protocols to protect the safety and well-being of our guests and staff.

What according to you presently can work as 'Life support systems' for the survival of the travel, tourism and hospitality industry until businesses recover slowly in the future?

The ongoing spread of COVID-19 has taken the world by storm, however, on the upside a gradual recovery in the travel business prospects may be anticipated ahead of July-August. India has a strong domestic base, and like the entire Indian hospitality sector we at Accor also believe that it would continue to be the key growth stimulator in this sector. In times to come, demand would be driven by domestic leisure travellers, who might still be cautious in taking flights and instead drive for short breaks over weekends. This would be a huge opportunity for all our fellow players in the travel and hospitality sector. We will also witness hotels, airlines, travel agents and experience providers collaborating to deliver unique and bespoke experiences to promote domestic travel. Additionally, with online campaigns and initiatives by the Ministry of Tourism like 'Dekho Apna Desh' going live, government's focus has already been set to accelerate growth in domestic tourism. Having said that, the top priority should only concern the safety and wellbeing of guests. As a plan of action for revival, the hotels should curate safety guidelines to make their stay or visit a seamless experience. This will ensure efficiency, consistency, and measurement of our industry-leading hygiene measures.



After the Covid-19 impact what are your thoughts on leisure business and MICE business?

The world will continue to practice social distancing until the pandemic is controlled to a great extent and this will directly restrict large gatherings. Both MICE and leisure segments will take a step back. Weddings will be a lean and a close family affair. For large conferences and meetings, only senior management will get together and use digital platforms. We also believe that in the long-term large-scale weddings and meetings will return once there is a vaccine as people will always have a human need to connect with others and to celebrate in large gatherings. This is especially true in Indian culture. People will prefer staycations and would invest in pocket-friendly experiences. While MICE and leisure travel will witness a short-term downfall, we are hopeful to see new trends making their way. In our opinion, demand would be driven by domestic travellers, who might still be cautious in taking longer flights and instead drive for short breaks over weekends.

How is your hotel group maintaining the staff crisis at present and what are the plans for them when things are back to normal?

For our colleagues working from home, we are providing free online learning opportunities to them. Accor Academy has partnered with multiple learning partners like eCornell, LinkedIn Learning and get Abstract to offer select courses for access to all its Heartists. The courses will help in improving the skill set and leadership qualities of our employees. The Accor Academy In House training team have also designed short learning podcast series titled 'Antidote', and conduct daily virtual sessions on soft skills and behavioural topics to enhance continuous learning.

Banyan Tree, all set to embrace the new normal

As we brace up to adapt to the new normal, we at TTJ spoke with Alpha Eldiansyah, General Manager, Laguna Bintan (Banyan Tree Bintan, Angsana Bintan, and Cassia Bintan) to know the brand's strategy to withstand the changing times and norms. Excerpts...

Rachita Sehgal



Alpha Eldiansyah

The tourism and hospitality industry will continue to feel the heat as the restrictions imposed on travel will ease only gradually and apprehension to travel will persist for many more months. Sharing his views on the road to recovery Alpha states, "I don't think anyone can say with absolute certainty when this pandemic will come to an end. Beyond that, it will take some time for the industry to regain confidence in travelling again. However, we are a resilient industry and I remain optimistic that we can expect some degree of recovery by the end of this year."

Even though the pace at which the industry will recover depends entirely on the governments of the countries and their policies. Domestic travel will play a key role this year for hotels that receive a large percentage of guests from within the domestic market. "MICE business is built on the basis of human connection between exhibitors, planners and delegates. With the economy downturn, travel restrictions and social distancing measures in place, I anticipate that regaining MICE business will be much slower than leisure business. From small networking events to big travel conventions, I believe that most of it will be done virtually for a foreseeable

duration. We may see more hybrid events, where digital tools such as Zoom are leveraged on to stream meetings 'live' to international attendees," adds Alpha. The resorts at Bintan Laguna are starting to see interest in MICE business in the latter half of the year. The resorts in Bintan offer natural and safe environments with the luxury of space within and beyond the rooms and villas. I think this will pique the interest of MICE planners looking for such destinations. Further stating his views on the leisure business Alpha says, "As for leisure business, I am optimistic that we will see a slow but sure rebound as tour operators and travel agencies benefit from the eventual increase in demand."

The world post COVID-19 will be new and the industry will witness a major shift in the traveller behaviour and patterns, the aftermath of a long isolation period and threat of infection will bring out certain changes. Sharing his views on the same Alpha adds, "Tourists would have developed a renewed pent-up appetite for travel after the lockdown period. However, heightened hygiene and safety protocols will become a part of this new normal for the travel industry. We would see tourists choosing destinations that are closer to home as domestic travel will be preferred over international travel. These tourists may also gravitate

less towards crowded cities, and more towards wide, open spaces like destination resorts and beaches where social distancing measures can continue to be implemented. Health measures, like the wearing of masks, washing of hands and temperature taking will still be conducted as added precautions."

The travel industry has received a major setback and is one of the worst affected industries by this new virus. While companies mark up and strategise their survival plans what remains a major concern, is the loss of talent and revenues, stating his concerns and further suggesting measures to overcome these harsh times Alpha says, "We endeavour to tide through the difficult time together with our employees and their wellbeing is our priority. For business continuity, we have implemented stringent cost management programmes and ceased non-critical expenditure. We also reviewed and implemented essential cost-saving measures, such as the reduction of operating hours and utilities, across our hotels in Bintan. Across the Group, we are rolling out a comprehensive suite of protocols under our SafeSanctuary Programme which includes protective gear and personal equipment, enhanced sanitisation and disinfecting protocols, appropriate distancing and also, crucially, education of all our associates. We are not thinking of what 'normal' is but instead preparing for this next normal that will become a reality soon."

"Our customers and guests have always been at the forefront and top priority of our business. In times like these, it is important to connect with them to express our care and appreciation. Our flexible cancellation policy for postponement of travel dates with special discounts and benefits for future stays reassure our guests and goes a long way in building their confidence. Besides flexibility and showing empathy at every stage of the journey for both associates and guests, partnerships will become increasingly important such that businesses can lean on one another," concludes Alpha.

Marina Bay Sands shows solidarity and support for the nation's ongoing #SGUnited efforts

COVID-19 has significantly changed the hospitality industry, from both the operational and guest experience perspective. The pandemic is expected to have some major impact on the hospitality industry, with recovery likely to take place in phases. It is important for hospitality players and MICE venue operators to be nimble, continue to rethink their strategies and plan in phases to respond to changing consumption patterns and customer experience. Mike Lee, Vice President of Sales, Marina Bay Sands, shares more with TTJ.

Rachita Sehgal



Mike Lee

SERVING THE SOCIETY:

When the Singapore government implemented what it refers to as the 'Circuit Breaker' (closing of most businesses in Singapore, except for essential services) in early April, Marina Bay Sands suspended operations across the entire integrated resort for the whole period. The day before the property closed, Marina Bay Sands rallied our restaurants to donate nearly 15,000 kg of perishables and 3,600 eggs to The Food Bank Singapore. The Food Bank Singapore is a local food charity that collects and redistributes surplus food supplies to the local beneficiaries and communities in need. Prior to this, Marina Bay Sands also launched two other food donation events – one that saw Team Members donate 5,000 food items to local food charities; another where the integrated resort procured, packed and donated 2,000 food bundles to communities in need.

During this Circuit Breaker period, Marina Bay Sands continues to show solidarity and support for the nation's ongoing #SGUnited efforts. Every night we light up the facades of our buildings - the three hotel towers with the shape 'SG ♥', the underbelly of the Sands

SkyPark as well as the façade of ArtScience Museum.

Even though the integrated resort remains closed temporarily, our staff has continued to be paid in full and are staying connected with their colleagues as we prepare for our re-opening. As we strategise ways to boost our business resiliency after the pandemic, we have set up some 40 task forces to explore how to improve operations, from reimagining our MICE venue set-up to designing masks and goggles that seek to protect both staff and guests.

Marina Bay Sands is also certified SG Clean by the Singapore Government. The SG Clean Quality mark recognises our commitment towards ensuring the highest levels of sanitization and hygiene to safeguard the well-being of our communities.

Even though the integrated resort is temporarily closed, we continue to engage our customers by sharing interesting content with them through our social channels with the #MBSatHome series. The series includes cooking demonstrations and recipes from our chefs, online museum tours, curated Spotify playlists and other fun instructional DIY videos.

IMPACT ON LEISURE AND MICE BUSINESS:

COVID-19 has significantly changed the hospitality industry, from both the operational and guest experience perspective. The pandemic is expected to have some major impact on the hospitality industry, with recovery likely

to take place in phases. It is important for hospitality players and MICE venue operators to be nimble, continue to rethink their strategies and plan in phases to respond to changing consumption patterns and customer experience.

Regaining the confidence of our guests and clients is a key priority for Marina Bay Sands. We will be relaunching with enhanced precautionary measures – ranging from hygiene and sanitisation protocols to redesigned experience and touch-points - to give greater confidence to guests when they next visit us.

From the MICE perspective, our team has been conceptualising and working with clients to re-design their event experience and set-up to ensure safe distancing measures are met. Modifications need to be made to how F&B will be served at these events without compromising the experience while new floor plans need to be redrawn to ensure safe distancing. More clients may need to live stream their events to reach out to their delegates, who are either not physically present due to travel restrictions or due to event capacity limitations. Hence we need to ensure that our technical capabilities are able to handle all these requests. The permutations are many and there will not be a one-size-fits-all solution as this is an evolving global phenomenon.



The Leela launches 'Suraksha', where safety and caution will be the new normal

The hospitality industry has been struck largely with the impact of Covid-19 and to tide over these tough times, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts has launched 'Suraksha', a comprehensive programme redefining hygiene and cleaning protocols, in partnership with Bureau Veritas (BV), a testing, inspection and certification company. The programme is a holistic approach that aims at prioritising safety and well-being of the hotels associates and the guests.

Prashant Nayak



Anuraag Bhatnagar

standard operating procedures to provide relentless amount of care and safe environment for the guests. Anuraag Bhatnagar, Chief Operating Officer, The Leela says, "These are indeed unprecedented times and we recognise that the current situation requires all of us to be more thoughtful in the way we approach our daily activities. Your safety and well-being is our primary concern, and we would like to assure you that we are doing everything in our power to provide an uncompromising level of service

with true graciousness of Indian hospitality, while gaining your trust and confidence."

"To reiterate our commitment, we are redefining our hygiene and cleaning protocols with the launch of a comprehensive program designed in coherence with our partners. This is a holistic approach we are taking to elevate our health, safety and hygiene protocols with stringent measures that ensure a safe environment while you continue to enjoy our opulent and indulgent services. We continue to closely monitor the situation and adapt, and enhance these measures, thereby prioritizing the safety and well-being of our guests and our associates," assures Anuraag.

The group has partnered with leading certification company Bureau Veritas to revamp the hygiene protocol of all its hotels. Hygiene managers, e-menus and contactless check-in and check-out are some of the features of the Suraksha project in every hotel to ensure that safety measures are strictly followed at all Leela properties.

The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, a well known global recognised hospitality brand is adapting wide-range of preventive measures across three major classifications (a) ensuring safety at every stage (b) maintaining highest standards of food hygiene and (c) leveraging technology for a safe stay. The group has revamped its standard operating procedures with 'Suraksha' where they will continue to monitor the COVID situation and where safety, hygiene and caution will be the new normal.

With the introduction of 'Suraksha', the hospitality brand has set new



SURAKSHA AT THE LEELA HOTELS AND RESORTS

Ensuring safety at every stage

- Protective gear including masks, gloves and PPE kits for all its associates to provide a safe environment for guests.
- Regular temperature checks of all associates and partners upon entering the hotel premises.
- Alarms for all the associates as a reminder to sanitize themselves.
- Use of hospital-grade, EPA approved chemicals that target a broad spectrum of viruses and bacteria.
- Frequent cleaning and sanitisation of all surfaces across public areas at regular intervals.
- Rigorous deep cleaning and application of disinfectants in guest rooms, fitness centres and restaurants.
- Cleaning of all high-touch points like door handles, elevator buttons, counter tops, table tops and railings with disinfectant at regular intervals.
- Use of hotel cars for transferring guests to ensure maximum safety.
- Sanitisation and inspection of all cars by the concierge team before and after every transfer.
- Deployment of task force under the guidance of its partners and a dedicated hygiene manager, to ensure that all protocols/measures are strictly followed across all hotels.

While maintaining highest standards of food hygiene

- Restaurant seating to ensure social distancing.
- Introduction of an e-menu that can be viewed by guests on their respective phones.
- Use of hand sanitizers in restaurants.
- Introduction of natural immunity-boosting beverages, which will help our guests stay healthy.
- Mandatory use of PPE kits for the kitchen team to prevent cross contamination.
- Washing and sanitisation of vegetables, fruits and groceries.
- Preparation of food in small quantities to ensure fresh food is served to the guests.
- Washing of all dishes at 80 degrees Celsius.
- Hygiene training for all the teams.

While leveraging technology for a safe stay

- Contactless check-in and check-out facility provided with the privilege of paying through phone at check out.
- Use of high bar pressure dry steam cleaners for housekeeping.
- Electrostatic sprayers, a hospital-grade disinfectant.
- Full access to digital news and e-papers instead of print newspapers.
- Adherence to international certifications and standards while considering the guidance and information shared by experts from the partner team.



Acting in the best interest of customers' safety is the need of the hour

Today, RCI remains the leader in vacation exchange, offering the world's largest vacation exchange network and providing unrivalled products and services to enhance the vacation ownership experience. As an organisation, RCI has a forward and positive thinking, even though they have faced challenges in this quarter as most of their members have postponed their travel plans to Q4 for safety reasons. Jonathan Mills - Managing Director, RCI APAC & DAE Global assures that we all as an industry should be positive and know that there will soon be signs of pent-up demand in Q4 2020 and Q1 2021.

Prashant Nayak



Jonathan Mills

face any issues while re-scheduling or cancelling, because they will eventually come back depending on the service they were provided.

Jonathan says, "As a responsible company, we have a customer-first policy. Acting in the best interest of customers and choosing safety is the need of the hour. Keeping the survival of travel and hospitality in mind, we decided to launch the RCI Livestream. In a time, such as this, it is an excellent tool to strengthen the customer relationships we have and wish to sustain- all within the comfort of homes. Our members and affiliate partners are also happy with this outcome and it definitely helps in filling the gap for now. This will also help us greatly once travel is back to

normal."

"Also, we are using this time wisely to figure the changes about to be seen in the way people travel. Along with monitoring social media and our call centre, we have done an internal COVID-19 survey and the findings of that are very interesting. We believe, as of this moment, traveller's confidence has been damaged and will not return until this phase passes. Additionally, there's some indication that travel will be closer to home initially and that people will do more driving tourism. Sanitization will be the new security; local members will opt for local destinations. There will be a boost in domestic travel eventually, as that will

be the first thing that will pick up once things are better. The focus will mostly be on domestic locations and offbeat destinations once the clouds have cleared," continues Jonathan.

The industry is hit hard by the COVID-19, no one can deny that. While it will take a long time for tourism and travel demand to come back to its normal levels; a conservative estimate is that it could take anywhere from six to nine months to recover fully, once the outbreak is effectively contained. On leisure and MICE business Jonathan speaks, "We don't think that Coronavirus will affect leisure or business travel, but it will change them significantly. RCI does not focus on MICE Travel but for Leisure travel, Health and safety will become an ever-present factor. We predict that consumers will expect low prices, and low prices will stimulate traffic. Most importantly, closer to home will define leisure travel for the near term."

Jonathan is of the opinion that during these tough times, everyone should do their bit. At, RCI, employees' safety and wellness – physical, psychological and emotional – is a priority even as the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted life and businesses. People are their biggest assets, and that becomes more important in such times. They have set aside a fund for their support staff and have been helping them out with hygiene equipments such as medicines, groceries, essential goods and tickets to go back to their home towns. RCI believes that the hospitality sector can move the needle during this crisis by supporting their employees in these tough times.

RCI works closely with its affiliate partners; the brand does not have properties of their own. They have formed a designated call centre which is helping member's basis Resort closure and filing their reports and future confirmations. Currently, they are closely monitoring social media and their call centre to identify new patterns and ideas that can be incorporated into their day to day services. The immediate strategy in these crucial times for them is that they are putting their members first. RCI is making sure that they keep providing the best services and connectivity, so their members and that they don't

Navigating through the pandemic with sheer optimism

With Coronavirus outbreak casting a gloomy shadow over the hospitality industry, the impact of the pandemic on travel and hospitality has been palpable and is a legitimate health concern for everyone worldwide right now. For those working in the hospitality industry, the unfolding pandemic not only threatens their physical well-being but their livelihoods are also at risk.

Chander Baljee, Chairman & Managing Director, Royal Orchid & Regenta Hotels shares more insights with TTJ as he reflects some positive thoughts to stay buoyant and resilient during these trying times.

Prashant Nayak



Chander Baljee

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 outbreak has heavily shaken the travel and hospitality industry more than any other industry. The lockdown to contain the spread of the virus in the country has had severe impact on every tourism verticals, especially for the hotels, where it has been disastrous. However, as the outbreak spread, its humanitarian impact has grown but industries that help provide for essential needs, such as getting food and required supplies safely to consumers, are increasingly affected.

Royal Orchid & Regenta Hotels is one of India's fastest growing hospitality brand, managing a portfolio of 60+ hotels across India which have a soul and a reflection of distinctly warm, Indian Hospitality is also facing the brunt of the coronavirus outbreak. However,

Chander, on a positive note, says, "This is also an opportunity for us to control costs, optimise efficiencies and improve profitability in the long-term. Our immediate focus is to work in tandem with our hotel owners and reduce costs. We're working closely with our partners to cap human resources as well as operating costs including salaries, power, and purchases. As occupancy in most of our hotels has been impacted, we have had to dispense contractual and probationary staff. Once the economy bounces back, we will look at onboarding these people again."

Outlining further strategies to cope up with the pandemic and importance of educating

the team, Chander shares, "This is the first time we wish to introduce a 'Zero Budget' business plan and will be looking at costs and revenues at a micro-level. Once the economy resumes, people start travelling and the business is back on track, people are going to expect a new atmosphere which is why it is essential to train them and hence we are using this time to conduct online trainings and certifications."

Royal Orchid & Regenta Hotels has two effective programmes which can come handy during such a crisis. These two modules: Management Development Programme and Multi-Skilling are being conducted by their own 'Presidency College of Hotel Management', where they are training their HODs to take on bigger roles and perhaps grow to take on the responsibilities of General Managers. They also training staff to be multi-

skilled, and there are a lot of FOH and BOH responsibilities that can be taken up by the same staff; making them more relevant to the post-COVID hospitality environment and thereby helping hotels save costs.

"From a business perspective, our portfolio of hotels is well distributed. In larger cities, we have hotels that cater to business as well as transition/leisure guests. Business in these cities is expected to bounce back first as essential business travel will have to be done. It is only very large companies that can depend entirely on video conferencing, most mid-market businesses are 'people businesses' that depend on 'local customer networks' and hence travel will have to be undertaken. Perhaps it will happen with a lot more caution, but rest assured that it will happen with WHO health and safety guidelines to give guests and staff the comfort they will require," tells Chander.

The focus for their leisure properties is to become 'destination hotels' which offer distinct Indian hospitality and local experiences'. They have hotels in wildlife reserves, heritage, and religious destinations.

"With outbound travel taking a massive hit, post COVID we potentially will have 25 million Indians looking to travel within India. This is a fantastic opportunity for us to position not just our hotels but also the whole Indian travel ecosystem in large - to attract more tourists and flourish. In the medium to long term, it is a massive opportunity of growth for Indian hospitality companies and there is so much to be discovered within India. We have yoga, ayurveda, wildlife, UNESCO heritage sites, beautiful mountains, and pristine beaches and this is the opportune time for Indian travel destinations to truly take center-stage," concludes Chander.

Planning ahead is the key to survival for hospitality industry

The fundamental tectonic shift that will emerge for hotels out of this crisis will be around three pillars: efficiency, automation, and technology.

Siddharth Goenka



Siddharth Goenka

C OVID crisis has hit the hospitality and tourism industry the hardest and it will take a long time for the dust to settle. Leisure hotels will take the hardest beating as fear and panic will infect the itineraries of modern travellers. Business hotels may show some intermittent signs of recovery, but things will probably never be the same. Most companies (large and small) have tasted blood with video conferencing and universal acceptance of work from home model. The world seems to be preparing itself for the worst economic recession accompanied by unemployment levels not seen since the great depression. This will be further worsened by de-globalisation and change in geopolitical equations with countries turning more inwards and hostile, thereby further reducing demand for travel.

How do hotel owners react to this impending tsunami? We can either choose to accept the doomsday scenario and surrender to the invisible enemy, or we can throw down the gauntlet and take the bull by the horns. If we do choose to fight, we must first

need to find the courage and self-belief to reinvent ourselves and think outside the box. We may have to accept fundamental shifts and structural changes to the industry and question assumptions that defy conventional wisdom.

With every calamity comes a moment of opportunity, and those who swim against the tide can reach the shores safe. While I do not claim to be able to predict the future or provide a fool-proof playbook on how to get out of this crisis, but I will try to share some ideas on how hotel owners can weather the storm and try to keep their heads above water.

The fundamental tectonic shift that will emerge for hotels out of this crisis will be around three pillars: efficiency, automation, and technology. One way to think of hotels is to compare them to large mega-factories with machines and workers- working tirelessly in shifts to produce output. Just like how concepts like 'lean manufacturing' and 'just in time production' fundamentally changed the manufacturing industry, hotels may soon have our own 'Toyota' moment. Hotels will need to adopt

similar concepts that focus on revenue and cost efficiencies because profit can no longer be taken for granted. Fixed costs will need to be converted to variable costs to shed our extra flab thereby reducing spare inventory and wastages. We will need to use an ideal mix of machines, manpower, technology, and automation to maximize our output while minimizing input, without compromising on guest satisfaction. We will need to take hard decisions about which business units to continue and which ones to pull back from.

Hotels will carefully need to plan their manpower strategy keeping in mind automation possibilities in every department. Staff to room ratios will see a downward trend and there will be an emphasis on achieving 'more' with 'less'. Reservations and back-office teams that perform repetitive clerical tasks can be minimized by introducing automated reservation systems and chatbots that are linked to integrated PMS and marketing platforms. The large clunky IT departments can be replaced by centralized cloud-based PMS and CRS systems with a 2-way integration with marketing and distribution systems reducing the need for periodic backup and maintenance. Core functions like pricing, revenue management, and online distribution can be centralized and automated using modern sophisticated systems, which will lead to an increase in productivity and yields, while the reduction in manual efforts. Large sales & marketing teams that service corporates and travel agents can be trimmed down by introducing B2B booking platforms where suppliers and customers can transact directly.

Many hotels may need to reevaluate ancillary business units like restaurants, bars, spa, and gym which have a high operating cost and fail the profitability litmus test. It may be prudent to either outsource these areas or completely remove them from the product portfolio. Guest enhancement functions like room service, concierge

services, travel desk, and check-in and check-out can be automated using smartphones, tablets, and AI-based technology to increase efficiency. Energy costs like electricity and water can be minimized using IOT devices and energy-saving instruments that run on 'use as you need' basis instead of large centralized units with high fixed costs. Hotels will need to differentiate from their competition by incentivizing their staff to maximize reviews and ratings on online platforms, by using modern tools of reviews and reputation management.

The increase in online business will continue to be beneficial for hotels because it will replace fixed acquisition costs (large sales teams) with variable costs like digital marketing. Even though OTAs will continue to command a lion's share of the business, hotels should focus their efforts on direct booking channels including own websites and booking engine to reduce their distribution costs. Incessant discounting schemes

introduced by some OTAs to grab market share may reduce because short term valuation boost will no longer be considered a metric for success. This may bring about some maturity and fair distribution of market share across online channels. The new emerging funded aggregators who have recently shot to limelight will have to make a hard choice to either grow sustainably by reducing unnecessary expenses (large teams and minimum guarantees) or be relegated to obscurity because of lack of funding options that keep them afloat.

Banks, PE and VC funds may chase projects that are more sustainable, scalable, and profitable rather than outlandish bets that follow a herd mentality of super-natural growth. Asset light models like revenue share and management contracts will be more popular for new projects than outright purchase or lease models. Due to the reduction of profitability in the industry, supply will not flood the

market as new projects will either be shelved or be converted to other less risky asset classes. Hotels that are able to survive the crisis may come out as winners because they will be the last men standing when the crisis is over and demand returns.

Covid-19 will be a watershed moment for the hospitality industry. Instead of writing our own obituaries, we should use this opportunity to regroup, rethink, and reset. There are always winners that emerge out of every crisis, and it is our time to 'cross the rubicon' and script our own futures. Our spirit, thoughts, and actions will determine whether the darkest hour is behind us and whether we can emerge out of this crisis fully shattered or just bruised, ready to pick up the arms again.

Siddharth Goenka is the MD of Octave Hotels & Founder of Aiosell Technologies

Working on key strategies to tackle the repercussion of COVID-19



Sarbendra Sarkar

Given that many industries have come to a standstill, economists now expect a global recession and the main question hospitality industry professionals are asking, is how long it will take for the hospitality industry and the economy as a whole to recover?

Giving an overview of the ongoing situation and the impact it will have on the hotel industry Sarbendra says, "While it is difficult to assess the full impact of the pandemic, its related restriction and net impact on the economy or hotel values, an examination of value trends in prior cycles can provide some useful guidance. Those historical patterns, together with

While hotel owners, operators, lenders and investors are all facing greater challenges and Management companies and franchisors are working to identify ways to support their hotels while maintaining a coherent business strategy, Sarbendra Sarkar, Managing Director & Founder, Cygnett Hotels and Resorts talks to TTJ on their strategies and measures taken to combat the effect of the pandemic in these uncertain times.

Sonika Bhandari

an understanding of the market's current expectations for the ultimate recovery of the industry and its performance, provide guidance for the probable trajectory of decline and recovery for hotel values. It all depends until the global pandemic graph is flattened and understanding from the present situations, it is definitely going to take the next two quarters."

Outlining the strategies to overcome this situation and provide a safe atmosphere to the guests after post lockdown, Sarbendra shares, "As Cygnett is a strong tech-savvy company, we are exploring technological solutions both in terms of hardware and software to act as a catalyst to promote a virus-free environment and will be emphasizing on effective client communication achieved by reassessing our digital strategy. The team is in the process of chalking out various business strategies for diverse scenarios and will set course on a transformation journey to combat

the aftermaths of this pandemic. Our strategy key points include retrenchment and adherence to the guidelines of healthcare authorities and outlining a prevention plan to tackle the situation at various levels with utmost hygiene and sanitisation standards as compared to an experiential property."

"We have asked all our human resources to utilise unpaid leaves as we are not in favor of employee retrenchment and post lifting of the lockdown, the hotels will be opened in a phased manner with two shifts, working alternative days. All the staff will be provided with essential protective gear and equipment for their health and safety," further adds Sarbendra.

Cygnett has opened the doors of one of their hotels to the doctors and medical staff working selflessly to combat COVID 19 and have also contributed to food and necessary supply funds for the people in need.

‘The Fern New Normal’

Reassuring the safety of their guests, The Fern Hotels and Resorts have taken multiple sanitisation and hygiene measures. The health and wellbeing of their guests’ remain of paramount importance for the brand. Noshir A Marfatia, Senior Vice President, Sales & Marketing, The Fern Hotels & Resorts, speaks with TTJ about their safety protocols and the brand’s plans to overcome this slump period. Read on...

Prashant Nayak



Noshir A Marfatia

Travel and hospitality are one of the worst-hit sectors by the pandemic, what remains of concern is that even after the lockdown lifts up there will still be some restrictions in regards to travel and hospitality industry. While the movement will be allowed, it will majorly be confined within the local or surrounding communities. The industry will have to depend on domestic tourism for a long time. Sharing his thoughts on the unrepairable damage, a hopeful Noshir says, “Realistically, quarter one (April-June) is a dead loss, if things start opening up by June-July, then we are hopeful that by quarter two (July-September) hotels will strive to at least break even, and we can only expect that from quarter three (October-December) occupancies will start climbing to at least 50 per cent and above levels. Domestic leisure will be the first to kick-off, for hotels in close proximity, followed by business hotels.

MICE conferencing will start only once people are confident of travelling and socialising in large conference rooms, which I am hopeful will be from Q3 or Q4, similarly for destination weddings but in smaller gatherings. As for International inbound leisure business we should not expect things to start before next year.”

Fern currently operates 80 hotels and resorts all across the country, of which five were all set to launch when the lockdown was imposed. Talking about the impact of COVID 19 on the brand level, Noshir shares, “We initially plan to reopen our leisure and business hotels that can get in business through local road travel. Once, Mumbai and Pune open up, they can reopen our Mumbai hotels, along with Lonavala and Dapoli resorts and our four Goa hotels. Similarly, so on for our different city hotels. Like our counterparts we too have been severely affected by this pandemic but the team at Fern hotels and resorts is very optimistic

and hopeful of the future.”

What is to be believed in this new world, the hotels will now need to provide hygiene of a hospital with luxury and comfort of a hotel. The hospitality industry has already announced new SOP’s and regulations regarding the health, hygiene and safety of their guests and employees. “We have ensured sanitisation and disinfection of all our hotels and their respective operational areas, we have also introduced new SOPs of operations to ensure social distancing and safety for guests. Apart from maintaining high-class hygiene standards we have also introduced a range of package options at different price-points, tight controls on all costs and expenses. At Fern we are all geared up to welcome the new world and take charge,” shares Noshir.

While the industry suffers a major loss, what remains at the crux of all concerns is the loss of job and manpower. Sharing his views on the same, Noshir adds, “As things currently stand, all our hotels have some team members staying in/around their hotels, to keep them maintained. All other teams are working from home and deriving online trainings on new hotel SOP’s, in guest contact, etc. We have not laid off any of our associates and do not want to, but ultimately it will all depend on how long it takes for each hotel to reopen and get the cash flows going. We look forward to welcoming all our teams back as soon as the hotels reopen. We are in regular touch with all our associates, and everyone is upbeat with high spirits and, are waiting to get back to work and start welcoming back our guests.”

Most of the brand hotel teams have been active in their local communities and are reaching out to the underprivileged, homeless, and people who are in dire need of help. The teams take care of their food and clothing needs. At hotels that are currently operating through the lockdown, some have taken in stranded guests, some are providing accommodations for the valiant doctors and nurses serving their communities, and others have been given to the local authorities as quarantine centres.

Get ready to see the ‘Pearl of Africa’

Koncept Africa, a vertical of Pearl Tourism & Leisure Group, is aiming to connect African tourism vendors to the Indian outbound market. As part of the launch process, MD, Jayesh Ashar interviewed Lilly Ajarova, CEO of the Uganda Tourism Board, via video conferencing, where media and few African tour specialists got a wonderful insight into Uganda, ‘Pearl of Africa.’

Prashant Nayak

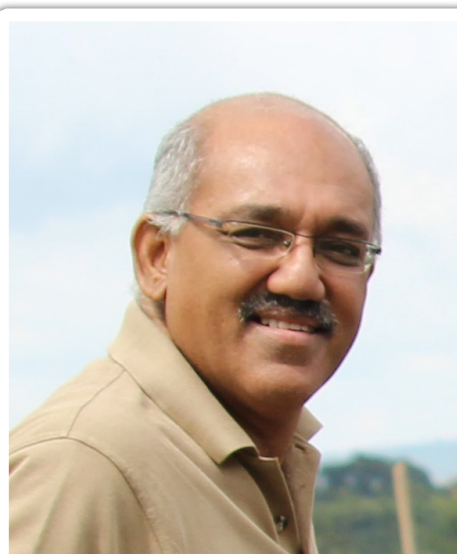
Taking advantage of their 28 plus years of experience in the tourism industry, especially of India and Africa, we aim to connect Indian buyers with African vendors in both b2b and b2c categories. “Post COVID-19, the era of Africa and India will begin. We will assist you to connect with the world’s largest tourism markets. A few more ‘Meet the Host’ themed interviews are planned in the coming weeks featuring key players from the African tourism sector,” said Jayesh to TTJ.

According to Uganda’s Tourism Master Plan, India market features as one of the key source markets. And in a bid to realise the plan, Uganda Tourism Board (UTB) could assign a local representative in the country. This could see the Ugandan flag rise high in the Indian skies.

In the Q&A session, Lilly Ajarova, said, “After North America, India is the number two source market for Uganda and the present profile of visitors is largely businessmen. Since, we are a relatively new entrant in the tourism space; the plan is to appoint a local representative in India to expand the reach in the market.”

Jayesh and Lilly discussed several tourism initiatives and possibilities, including investment in Uganda. “Right now, the majority of those who visit are for business. Those who come for leisure mainly prefer wildlife safaris primate tracking and trekking,” said Lilly.

In the last two decades, Uganda has seen considerable investments in the hospitality sector with domestic, regional and international hospitality chains setting up shops in the country. Over 95 per cent of the hotels are owned by the private sector. Of this, 75 per cent are owned by domestic private players while 13 per cent by investors from other African countries. Only around 7 per cent is owned by international players.



Jayesh Ashar



Lilly Ajarova

Also addressed at the conference were the precautionary measures, revival and bounce back once restrictions are lifted. The growth of Uganda’s tourism was also discussed at great length. As per the statistics, in July 2017 to June 2018, Uganda recorded 7.4 per cent growth in FTAs. Around 15,06,669 international tourists visited Uganda in 2017-2018 while the figure stood at 14,02,409 during the 2016-17 period. Over the last few years, their average growth rate has been 7 per cent. Uganda’s national parks had the potential for a 100 per cent growth in terms of the number of visitors per year.

The best thing about Uganda’s wildlife is that along with the ‘Big Five’ which is found across Africa, the Gorillas and the Chimpanzee tracking and trekking is unique to Uganda and can only be claimed by two other nations, namely Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The Silverbacks or the Mountain Gorillas are best experienced in Bwindi, Uganda, and it’s a trek and tracking to remember for a lifetime. There are 19 species of primates in Uganda, of which the Mountain Gorillas account for 53.9 per cent of the world’s remaining population living in Uganda.

Uganda is the source of the Nile

and kayaking and dream tubing are two lovely activities on the river. The Savannah is rich in wildlife and birds and thus the game viewing and drives in the 10 national parks of various sizes are all fulfilling and thrilling experiences. The snow-clad peaks of Rwenzori (UNESCO® World Heritage Site) are breathtaking in an African setting.

The mighty Lake Victoria, believed for a long time to be the source of the Nile, is shared by three countries: Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya, and is also a stunning sight from the Ugandan side. Murchison Falls National Park is a truly all-in-one wildlife experience featuring water-based wildlife, birds, the Big 4 and chimpanzee tracking and trekking.

Compared to its neighbours, Uganda is only 25 per cent of Tanzania’s land area; 2.4 times smaller than Kenya, and 9.7 times smaller than DRC, but they possess 39 per cent of Africa’s Mammal population. Uganda has substantial natural resources for tourism with a variety of landscapes and ecosystems, climates and cultures. Some of its features are outstanding by international standards while others are very unique. Ugandan experience has novelty and rarity values not easily found elsewhere in Africa.



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Abu Dhabi launches 'Specialist Programme' for industry partners



HE Saood Al Hosani

The launch of the 'Abu Dhabi Specialist Programme', an e-learning platform intends to educate travel trade industry professionals with all destination-related information about the emirate through a series of online courses and will be rolled out in three phases in several languages across 17 markets, including the United Kingdom, USA, Canada, India, Australia, New Zealand, China, South Korea, Germany, France, Italy, Ireland and Russia, as well as GCC countries. The first phase has been launched on May 4,

The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) launches 'Abu Dhabi Specialist Programme' This Specialist Programme aims to engage the wider community of travel professionals, to give them the tools to be knowledgeable in all things Abu Dhabi, through education, training, and certification.

Team TTJ

in the USA, UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and India.

Designed specifically for industry partners such as tour operators, travel agents and wholesalers, the Abu Dhabi Specialist Programme will equip travel trade professionals with accurate and relevant information about Abu Dhabi, supporting and encouraging them to promote the destination to consumers within their markets. The new training and education programme aims to reach a wider audience of travel trade agents worldwide. DCT Abu Dhabi has already conducted a series of virtual workshops and meetings since the coronavirus situation unfolded.

"The Abu Dhabi Specialist Programme is a significant step forward and through it we will be able to reach a larger number of travel trade agents across the globe, including previously untapped markets like Canada and New Zealand. This training and education

platform ensures that all participating industry partners have easy and quick access to the latest content on Abu Dhabi, thus making the destination promotion aspect of their job much easier," says HE Saood Al Hosani, Acting Undersecretary at DCT Abu Dhabi.

The courses encompassed in the programme cover information related to key attractions in Abu Dhabi, local events, accommodation options and much more. Moreover, it includes a rewards section featuring incentive programmes, exclusively available for 'Abu Dhabi Specialists' – travel trade agents who graduate from the main programme. For the Indian Travel Industry, upon successful completion of two modules, the travel trade agents can win an Amazon gift voucher of Rs 10,000 and upon successful completion of the Specialist programme, four lucky winners can win latest smartphones and five lucky winners can win a trip to Abu Dhabi (T&C apply).

Israel's gradual, responsible, and positive return to normalcy



Sammy Yahia

As the world begins the process of returning to a new state of normal, the Israel Government Tourist Office in India headed by Sammy Yahia Director, Israel Ministry of Tourism - India and Philippines has shared some of the steps Israel has implemented in order to outlay strategies in controlling Covid-19 pandemic while returning back to normalcy.

Team TTJ

Israel offers a plethora of things

to do and see to cater to the discerning travellers. Tourism to Israel has steadily grown with 2019 seeing a record of 4.5 million international tourists. But in the past two months, Israel is also among the countries that has been facing the COVID-19 crisis, together with the rest of the world.

Fortunately, due to the substantial decrease in the number of active coronavirus cases in Israel in the past weeks, a press conference held on May 4, 2020 led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Ministers where the government presented the Israeli exit strategy from the Covid-19 crisis. The strategy includes a gradual and responsible return to normality while

controlling the pandemic.

These days, Israel is gradually reducing restrictions and preparing for a new 'Corona routine'. The government has published a 4-step plan to be executed from May through mid-June, subject to the continuous improvement in active case rates. These are the main factors:

Domestic Tourism: In a special meeting convened to discuss the return of the tourism industry to activity, it was agreed that on Sunday, May 3, 2020, bed and breakfast accommodations (especially in the rural tourism areas) will return to operate, provided they follow the recommended 'Purple Guidelines' agreed upon by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Tourism.

Work: All public sector and private sector employees may return to work, subject to the guidelines.

Education: The education system in Israel is gradually returning to activity, starting with elementary schools (grades 1-3rd, limited number of children in each classroom) and high school (grades 11-12th, studying for their final exams in small groups). By the end of May it is planned that all students in Israel will return to full educational activity including schools, universities, libraries etc.

Leisure and Sport: While parks, nature reserves, gyms and shopping malls are open, Museums will open on May 17. Swimming pools and amusement parks will open by the end of May and theatres, cinema, restaurants and competitive sports will return to activity by mid-June. Meanwhile, outdoor sports are allowed for individuals and couples and stores of all sectors and sizes can open for business. However, all openings are subject to relevant guidelines.

Bring-in the change with the birth of the 'new consumer'

Covid-19 is now nudging the destination managers, marketing managers and brand managers to re-position, re-brand, re-market, re-promote and re-communicates its array of tourism products. So, while the world awaits innovations from the Tourism Marketers, Kingshuk Biswas, Manager, Marketing and Investment, Tourism Corporation of Gujarat attempts to address essentially the Decision Makers and Top Managers in Tourism Boards, DMOs and the trade fraternity whose main role is to promote and market the bouquet of tourism products available in the country with a different perspective.

Team TTJ



Kingshuk Biswas

According to Kingshuk, post the Covid-19 lockdown, tourism marketers are in for worst-case scenarios where any industry or sector which by its very nature does not support 'social distancing' will bear the full brunt of Covid-19. Tourism by its very nature does not support 'social distancing', like a visit to famous destinations, family or group tour packages, adventure or activity sites, fairs and festivals, exhibitions, conferences, etc. Thus, the majority of the tourism products would fall in this category. To add to its woes, tourism is also not part of the 'essentials' sector and hence whether we like it or not, it will always take a back seat in times of such crisis.

On the other front, the world economy spiralling down towards depression means, curtailed 'purchasing power' which is the real worst-case scenario for the leisure industry. Besides, all the economic effects linked with the forced 'unemployment' are also starring in the face of the tourism sector.

Also, post Covid-19 lockdown, marketers will be facing a new entity in the form of a much-evolved customer and it is certainly going to be a challenging one. This challenge will be in form in the birth of a 'new consumer'. The new consumer in many economies will be a financially scarred one. Depending on which part of the world the consumer is, he/she would have lost around 5 months of gainful income or employment. Most probably, the consumer would be more concerned about limping back to his/her full employability status.

Post Covid-19 lockdown, many of the working population would have lost their jobs already or adjusting with major pay cuts. In short, marketers have to be ready for 'low

purchasing power' in the economy.

International mobility will be severely limited, as national borders are closed and even if they are to open post lockdown, there would bound to be several health-related apprehensions, restrictions, and checks. Expect business travel to be curtailed, to begin with, with Domestic markets prevail in the short term, at least. Covid-19 has transformed many industries from offline to online, so the new consumer will be more digitally inclined.

Being at home for more than a quarter of a year, it is natural that all of us are yearning to rush outdoors. Freedom from lockdown seems most desirous now. So for marketers there is an opportunity 'to offer outdoor activities' but they have to strictly adhere to 'social distancing' and it being firmly in place.

"It's time to review our existing marketing, branding plans and also an appropriate time to get back to the basics, because a new chapter is going to open post lockdown. So talking about basics, let us relook upon the famous 4Ps of marketing, which have been Product, Pricing, Promotion and Place," says Kingshuk, while he elaborates the re-branding do's for tourism post Covid-19.

Product: This is the most important P amongst the 4Ps. Maximum time and energy should be used to get it right. Tourism Marketers know their products and also their consumers better than anyone else.

Anything popular and crowd-sourcing (activity) will have to take a backseat till the scientific community gives us a green signal in the form of a vaccine or a drug. Also, earlier, it was to offer a product with great value, but now the product has to be coupled with greater health safety assurance. It is going to be back to the drawing boards with your marketing heads/creative/branding agency and rebrand in terms of: health, nature, oxygen, discovery, rejuvenation, peace, solace, hidden skills, etc.

So, it is time to tweak the product portfolio. Think of tourism products that support social distancing. In case, we don't have such products, it is time for us to create them. Some examples of such products (solo by nature is the key) are yoga, trekking, cycling, cuisine, water sports, parasailing, kayaking, adventure sports, etc. Niche tourism areas like bird watching (create circuits), golfing, fishing, etc also can be thought about. In short, any tourism activity which is solo by nature is a good bet. This will also go a long way in broadening our basket of tourism products. So, think of circuits which offer tourists the chance to be lock downed on an island, nature park, wildlife sanctuary, etc, anywhere away from the crowd?

Presently, restricted international mobility means the scope for domestic tourism for many

economies. Short-haul journeys or itineraries or circuits can be evolved. The confidence interval for tourism economies is going to be shorter and tourism marketers will now have to develop data mining skills as it will have to delve deep into its vast databases to churn out products taking into consideration the value proposition for domestic travellers.

Price

It is a no-brainer that in the post Covid-19 economy, competitive pricing will be the new norm at least in the short and the medium run. Maybe, tourism marketers need to take cues from the telecom industry and conceptualise a variety of pricing offers on the lines being offered to the various categories of mobile users. As many of the products will be outdoor, pricing packages like monthly, quarterly, half-yearly, etc needs to be explored.

Promotion

Promotion will be predominantly online – email marketing, social media marketing, SEO, video marketing, mobile marketing, etc. Post Covid-19, hypermarkets, food markets, etc selling day to day essentials, groceries, etc will be the first set of marketers to be in the public domain, and hence herein lies an opportunity for tourism marketers to tie-up for joint or cross-promotions through these outlets. As it is unclear when the international borders will open, domestic tourism is going to be the immediate low-lying fruit, which the tourism marketers can latch upon. So, mediums like FM radio, cable TV, etc will also be useful mediums, apart from the online medium.

Place

The internet is going to be the place to put your products for distribution. Remember with the shadow of 'social distancing' looming, the consumer is going to think twice before stepping inside the office of a tourism board or a tour operator.

Summary for Tourism re-branding post Covid-19 lockdown:

Evolve tourism products which promote social distancing.

Domestic tourism will be the first of the racing block.

Time to adopt data analytics as innovative products is the need of the hour in a reduced market.

Work towards competitive pricing in the short and medium-term.

Promotions is predominantly going to be online and on mobile platforms.

Some re-branding themes can be on the lines of – health, nature, oxygen, discovery, rejuvenation, peace, hidden skills, etc.

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