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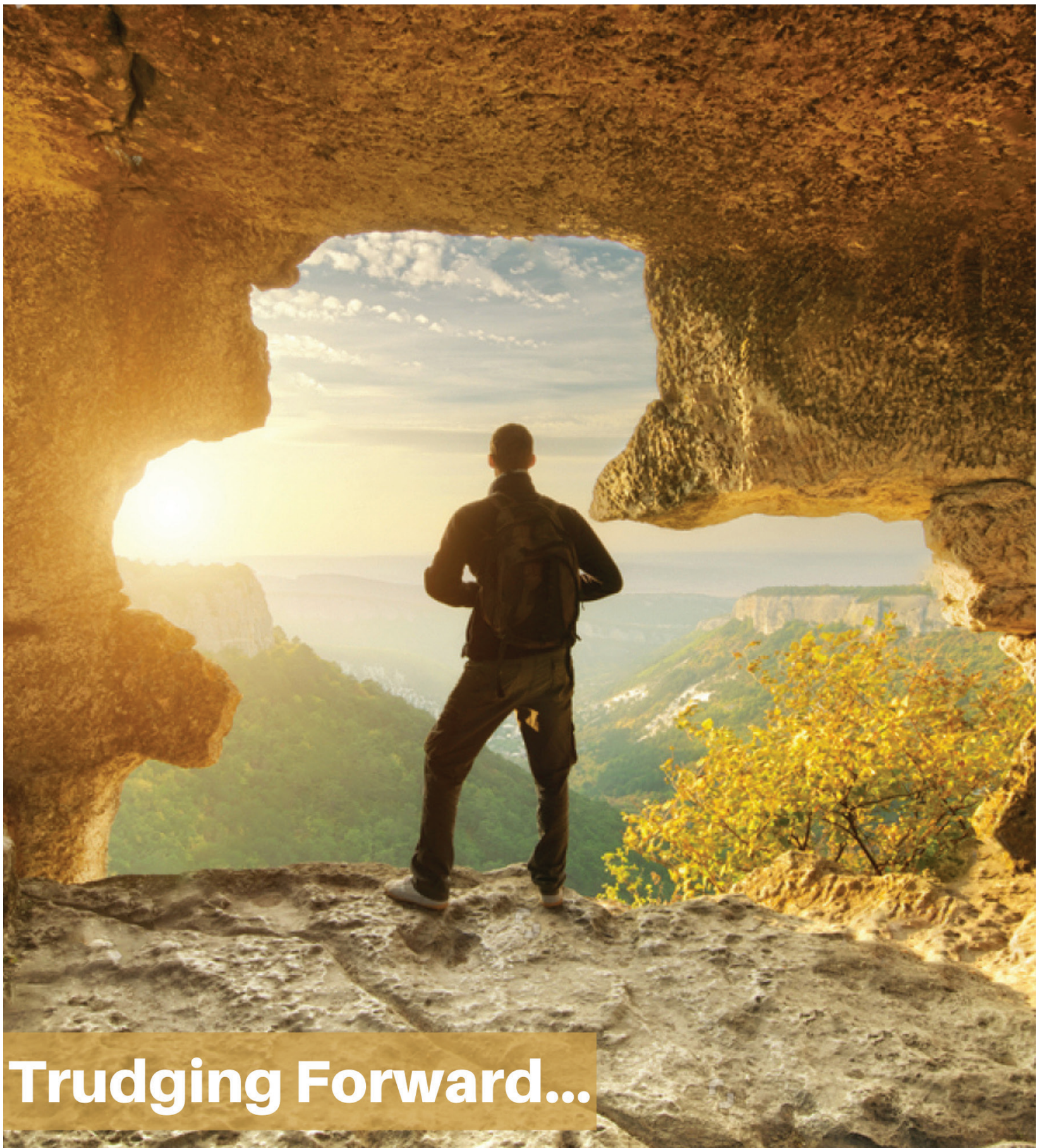
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Dear Friends,

Greetings and compliments for the festive season!

While the gradual recovery is on, the tourism sector is being compounded with stop-start cycles for quite some time thus hampering speedy recovery. This brings more challenges for the sector, but we have also seen businesses digging into opportunities to encourage innovation, drive new business models, explore new niches/markets, and open up new destinations.

Domestic tourism has restarted and is providing a much-needed boost to help sustain many tourism destinations and businesses, and will continue to be a key driver of recovery in the short to medium term.

TTJ November edition is all about how Indian travel and hospitality sectors still remain in survival mode and the industry still showing a strong sense of resilience while trudging forward and rethinking tourism. As you find out in the issue, words like staycation, self-drive, eco-friendly, sustainability, etc, are indeed getting more prominence and more discussed now.

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)
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Lionsgate® Zone at MOTIONGATE™ Dubai expanding with two brand new, world-first rides and record setting thrills

The region's largest immersive Hollywood-inspired theme park, MOTIONGATE™ Dubai, will start 2021 on a high note, and earn the park a multitude of world firsts when it launches two brand new, thrilling rides as part of its expansion of the Lionsgate® Zone.

Thrill-seekers and fans of the major motion picture franchises John Wick and Now You See Me, will be able to experience two record-breaking new rides in early 2021. MOTIONGATE™ Dubai becomes home to the first-ever theme park rollercoaster inspired by the global hit action franchise John Wick, whose first three installments have grossed nearly \$600 million at the worldwide box office. The Lionsgate Zone will also introduce the world's fastest single-car spinning coaster based on the popular twists and turns of heist thriller franchise Now You See Me. The launch of these two, world-first coasters will earn MOTIONGATE™ Dubai the impressive record for the maximum number of rollercoasters in a single theme park in the Middle East.

Denis Pascal, General Manager at MOTIONGATE™ Dubai, commented, "We're starting 2021 with a bang and offering our guests never before experienced attractions! We're continually looking at ways to enhance the MOTIONGATE™ Dubai experience and we cannot wait to break some world records with these two brand new coasters. They will not disappoint even the most daring amongst us."

Set over a 310-meter track, and reaching speeds of up to 64km per hour, John Wick: Open Contract will deliver up to 2.8 G-force from the

4D free spin coaster. Inspired by the events of the recent films, after stepping inside The Continental, guests will embark on a journey that simulates the epic action of the John Wick world as the coaster races down a 4D track that provides both forward and backward, freestyle spins.

Reaching speeds of up to 70 km per hour, riders of Now You See Me: High Roller will feel like they are part of a daring Horsemen escape as they race to expose the antics of a criminal mastermind. Riders won't find a more intense coaster experience anywhere due to its drops, non-inverted loops, and Immelmann turn sections which will see riders make a full 180-degree turn after entering a thrilling half-loop section of the track, followed by a half twist.



India has now established air bubble agreement with 21 countries

During the lockdown, India had initially established travel bubbles with countries such as the United States, Germany, and France to start repatriation drive as early as May to bring back stranded Indians. Soon after, air bubbles were established to further ease the travel to other countries. Since then, India has formed agreements with 21 nations in total the latest being Rwanda in the first week of November 2020.

'Transport Bubbles' or 'Air Travel Arrangements' are temporary arrangements between two countries aimed at restarting commercial passenger services when regular international flights are suspended as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the arrangement, airlines from both countries are allowed to operate, unlike Mission Vande Bharat where only Indian air carriers were allowed to operate flights. They are reciprocal in nature, meaning airlines from both countries enjoy similar benefits.

More passengers travelling to visit their families, for health reasons, for business and some even for a casual visit has resulted in a spike in the number of people taking international flights through the 'air bubble' arrangement.

The 21 countries that India has established an air bubble include Afghanistan, Bhutan, US, UK, Germany, France, Japan, Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Maldives, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Netherlands, Canada, Iraq, Kenya, Oman, and Ukraine.

The government is in discussion with Italy, Kazakhstan, New Zealand, Australia, Israel, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, and Thailand for similar arrangements.

Countries such as Hong Kong and Germany have suspended or have limited flights with India over COVID-19 cases and schedules, respectively. Recently, India and Oman have cut capacity on their travel bubble following passengers testing positive for COVID-19. Under the new agreement, airlines in each country can only fly 5,000 passengers every week, down from 10,000 previously.

Also, unlike Vande Bharat Mission, the Air Bubble Pact allows flyers to travel freely without registering with the government. In Vande Bharat Mission, one has to register their name with the Indian Embassy in order to fly out of a specific country. Mission Vande Bharat is undertaken only in countries where no flight is allowed to fly.

However, the majority of flights are still bringing out stranded Indian citizens, OCI cardholders and diplomats not all countries are allowing visas of all categories. It's only that under the air bubble agreement, you don't have to do additional paperwork such as registering online or with the embassy to fly in and out of the country. The rest of the travelling remains the same as the pre-COVID period, only that international border rules apply. In India, for example, even people holding valid tourist visas are not allowed.

Karnataka revises guidelines for international returnees

International travellers travelling to Karnataka can seek exemption from home quarantine by submitting a negative RT-PCR test report.

Issuing revised guidelines for international returnees to Karnataka, the Health Commissioner Pankaj Kumar Pandey said a self-declaration form on the online portal will be mandatory 72 hours before the scheduled date of travel.

The travellers will have to undergo 14 days home quarantine in view of the coronavirus scare. However, travellers may seek exemption from home quarantine by submitting a negative RT-PCR test report. This test should have been conducted within 72 hours prior to undertaking the journey. The test report should be uploaded on the online portal for consideration and should be produced in hard copy on arrival.

Before boarding all passengers are advised to download Arogya Setu app, Quarantine watch app and Aphyamitra App on their mobile devices. On arrival, all the passengers at the points of entry at airport and seaport will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19.

SpiceJet to start twice-weekly flights on Delhi-Ras Al Khaimah route from 26 Nov

SpiceJet will operate twice-weekly flights between Delhi and Ras Al Khaimah from November 26.

While the flight on the Delhi-Ras Al Khaimah route will be operational on Thursdays and Sundays, the flight on the return leg of Ras Al Khaimah-Delhi will operate on Fridays and Mondays.

Shilpa Bhatia, Chief Commercial Officer, SpiceJet, said, "Ras Al Khaimah is a very special addition for us and a strong hub from where we have actively operated 350 cargo and 195 repatriation charter flights in the last few months. As one of the key and growing centres for trade and commerce, we see tremendous potential in this sector."



Odisha Tourism scales up Eco Retreat event to five locations

Chief Minister Naveen

Patnaik on November 11, 2020, declared Odisha Tourism's flagship three-month glamping festival Eco Retreat, open for booking. Patnaik also unveiled the new logo subtly



depicting the ecological orientation. This year's Eco Retreat is being organised keeping in view the last year's success of its debut with an event at the marine drive in Konark.

Speaking on the occasion, the chief minister said that last year, a benchmark was set in luxury glamping with phenomenal success at the marine drive eco-retreat at Konark. This time, the state has scaled it up to five unique locations Konark, Hirkud, Bhitarkanika, Daringbadi and Satkosia. The Eco retreats will offer tourists an excellent opportunity to discover Odisha's diverse tourism offerings in style.

In a note of assurance to tourists from across the country during the COVID-19 pandemic, the chief minister said that all stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality sector across the state have been provided training on protocols. Consistent with Odisha's stellar management of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Eco Retreats will be in complete compliance with guidelines and standard operating procedures prescribed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India.

The chief minister urged the district administrations to take ownership of the execution of the Eco Retreats.

Raising hope for the pandemic affected tourism and hospitality sector, Patnaik expressed confidence that the Eco Retreats will provide the much-needed fillip to Odisha Tourism and help it revive during this difficult time.

The Eco Retreat model ticks the right boxes in terms of environmental sustainability, technological leverage, teamwork, timeliness in near-perfect compliance with good governance and will be transformative for each location's tourism-oriented future.

The Eco Retreats Odisha is slated to open for tourists from December 8, 2020, and will continue till February 28, 2021. One can book an easy-to-use integrated portal ecoretreat.odishatourism.gov.in is available to tourists from across India.

Hyatt announces plans for Hyatt Place Aurangabad Airport

Hyatt announced plans for the first Hyatt-branded hotel in the historic city of Aurangabad – Hyatt Place Aurangabad Airport. The 157-room hotel represents continued expansion of the Hyatt Place brand in India and is set to be the sixth Hyatt-branded property in the state of Maharashtra. Expected to open in 2023, Hyatt Place Aurangabad Airport will feature the Hyatt Place brand's intuitive design, casual atmosphere and elevated amenities, such as free Wi-Fi and 24-hour food offerings.

Located near the Aurangabad Airport in the Chikalthana industrial area, Hyatt Place Aurangabad Airport will provide guests with an approachable stay experience and the ability to easily access the city center and the Shendra & DMIC industrial area, which is currently being developed. As Aurangabad continues to experience an influx of leisure travelers looking to explore local heritage sites, the hotel's smartly designed social spaces and guestrooms with dedicated work and sleep areas will cater to business and leisure travelers alike. In addition to 157 spacious guestrooms, the hotel will include a restaurant & Bar, grab-and-go meal service, fitness center and swimming pool for guests to relax and unwind.

What Next.

As we come to the end of the year, a few questions get tossed around about the tourism industry.

Rajeev Kohli

First – did any strong trends emerge from the pandemic? I will say no. There has been a great rush of pundits claiming that people will look for more solitude and remoteness in their travels. Staycations will become the norm of the future. People want to prioritise safety over all else. If anything, the trends on the ground are actually showing quite the reverse.

Whichever city or destination has opened, people have thronged back to their old habits. Bars are busy; beaches are teeming with people; amusement parks have lines; shopping malls see increased footfall - human behaviour will not change easily. Yes, there are those that want more 'resorty', secluded places, but that consumer base was always there. It's not new. Also, these spots of isolation tended to be somewhat pricier, to begin with, so its customer base was always different. Did the pandemic create a whole new accommodation category? NO. Did the pandemic create new hotels to fill demand? No. Did the pandemic give travellers more money to spend? Certainly NOT. So, logic dictates that this segment will see a short-term spurt from pent-up demand but will gradually peter-out to their normal pre-pandemic interest levels.

There has been positive news of Pfizer having high success in its vaccine, and that means others will follow soon. (A specialist on CNN stated that this success is an affirmation of the novel genetic approach taken that is a first and that other researchers are following the process as well. So, the base theory has been proven. That is a huge scientific leap). This is excellent news. It will not be long before when preventive measures against COVID will be more accessible, and that will boost interest in travel. I expect people to rush back for the excitement travel gave them - the adrenalin of exploring, of seeing and of touching. The desire to walk on the streets, to sit at cafes, to listen to concerts; all will return. These emotions are at the core of travel. Isolationism which so many are pushing will never prevail.

Second, are there any Silver Linings? Yes, there are, and some of these are ironically not so pleasant for many. The excess of business

First, are there any new trends that have evolved out of the pandemic?

Second, are there any silver linings we can see?

And third, What Next?

decisions in the past has been trimmed to the core. Corporate fat has been shed. Bloated companies across the tourism industry have let people go, not only because of the lack of business but also to take advantage of the lower hue and cry from corrective measures which they could never have gotten away with in better times. We will probably see companies across the spectrum become leaner and hopefully, more efficient. Still to be seen.

Sadly, not everyone will survive the pandemic. We will see bankruptcies and closures of all shapes and sizes. This is 'THE' shake-up of our generation and only the nimble and fittest will survive. This is the Law of Nature. Humans are fragile. We need to adapt to the changes in our external environment. Otherwise, we get cast aside.

One unintended but perhaps most valued part of the pandemic (if I may loosely say so) was that it gave everyone a brief respite from the dog-eat-dog world we live in; an opportunity to detach from the daily grind. People got to spend quality time with their families, learnt a language, took up a hobby or just got in touch with the memories they lost. That is not a bad consequence of being locked up in our homes. Many have changed their outlook on life; others decided that the status quo suits them better. Either way, there is no right or wrong on how you dealt with the past many months. Personally, I got to spend quality time with my love of 32 years, and our relationship has only strengthened. So hey, my silver lining is shiny. Hope for many of you as well.

I also personally believe that even though the virus hurt tourism, it was more our lousy myopic pricing strategies of making tourism a



Rajeev Kohli

low margin business that ultimately did us in. From airlines to hotels to cruise companies to tour operators and so on, everyone found themselves with very little in their banks to be able to withstand the crisis. That's because many were living on thin retention of earnings. Especially true in India. They say every business should have six months of cash on hand to survive a crisis. How many did? We will likely enter 2021 with fewer players in the tourism industry. This may be good for some, bad for many. Will lower competition help the consumer? Who knows. Will the shake-up bring in better pricing behaviour, I certainly hope so. What I do think is that now buyers and consumers will be a lot more careful in vetting whom they give their money to. Credibility and track record will be important. So, a silver lining probably lies for those who followed ethical, moral and good business practices and will be in a better position to recover. The shake-up should lead to some better business practices. Let's see if we learn anything from the crisis.

Third, What's Next?

Damm, I wish I knew. Anyone who professes to predict what will come next is spinning a tale. There have been surveys after surveys and papers after papers released over the past many months. Some say tourism will recover soon, some say in a few years. Anyone who has studied Market Research knows that research is only as good as the questions asked, and I feel the quality of research in India is generally horrible. Numbers can tell us whatever we want them to.

The tragedy in India is that we are probably the ONLY major economy in the world where tourism got ZERO support from the Government and has cruelly been left to die. To make matters worse, a bulk of the industry is still in a FORCED lockdown due to the non-operation of flights and visas. So, we can't generate revenue even if we want to—such a sad state of affairs.

How will we revive? What will happen next in the way we function and operate?

At a very base level, each one of us, without exception, will see our organisations change. This will be inevitable. Our employee base has been decimated beyond repair. I am very heartbroken about that. Our client base has been severely impacted as well. So many old partners have gone out of business. So

many friends have been let go. Airlines have reduced routes, especially in key emerging growth markets that were of interest to India. So, we have to start afresh in many aspects of how we operate, how we sell and how India is to be positioned.

What I do feel strongly about is that we are very behind the curve in creating an industry-wide revival plan. The Government and the Industry associations should have by now gotten the stakeholders together to work on a strategy to implement as soon as we get some timelines on when we can get closer to our pre-pandemic operating rules. Our competition is way ahead of us. This is a race and we are currently in the last place. We cannot afford to be complacent. I hope the private sector would push hard and demand their respective association to wake up. The slumber is deafening.

What can you do as a business operator? If you wait for the Government and trade bodies to act, you can wait a long time. So, take some action on your own. I do not feel technology is a replacement for a lot of what we do, but it will most certainly be an enabler in bringing out efficiencies. So, look at what you can do to simplify and better manage your back-office processes. Are there any software tools out there you can use? Train your staff in new skills or help them improve old ones. That will only help you. Relook at

your marketing material, your brand look and feel and your messaging. How can you improve that? And at a base level, what can you do to improve your own skills as an owner or senior manager? There are tons of online courses on basic things that are cost-effective and easy to digest. Go for it!

If I had a crystal ball, I would be the richest man. Right now, all we can do is guess and my guess is that when our borders open and flights start, India will see travel restart sooner than most believe. Indians want to travel, and foreigners want to visit us. Will it happen overnight, probably not. Will it take years, probably not either. The recovery will be short to mid-term. This is what my heart tells me. We just need to hang on for a few more months.

Doing your best at this moment puts you in the best place for the next moment. Have faith that the best is yet to come.

I want to share something I read recently that I found inspiring.

"The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why." – Mark Twain

Happy to get feedback and thoughts on this issue.
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'Less is more is the travel mantra the next season'

Irrespective of the international border opening being gradual and tentative, Tourism Malaysia stayed connected with their travel trade partners via various online platforms such as webinars for travel agents, internal video conference sessions, and product briefing sessions for travel partners, etc. Mohd Hafiz Hashim, Director, Tourism Malaysia- Mumbai, shares more on their present focus during the pandemic.

Prashant Nayak

While societies and industries are now looking to rebuild and re-emerge from the crisis, the recovery process for the travel industry will be complicated and lengthy. Despite some countries across the globe negotiating travel bubble pacts with their 'safe' counterparts in a move to revive the tourism sector, recovery to pre-pandemic levels may take time even after all restrictions are withdrawn.

Speaking about their current focus for India, Hashim says, "Well currently, we are focusing on staying competitive. The discerning travellers of today's still love exploring unique experiences each destination has to offer and go much beyond staying in the top suite of hotels. Choosing the best dining options or spas to authentic local experiences and developing attractive packages will be our key focus forever and not only in the pandemic. To match up with the millennials' definition of travel, you need to indulge with

the local offerings which are way beyond any packaged holiday or cookie-cutter options. Furthermore, safety and hygiene will be the utmost issue to gain travellers' confidence in our destination."

When asked about communicating and staying in touch with their workforce and key stakeholders, Hashim speaks, "Working from home during COVID is obviously a move directed at minimizing the spread of the virus. Currently, most consumers aren't brand-committed. For example, roughly 70 per cent of leisure travellers haven't decided what airline they will travel with, and 80 percent haven't chosen the accommodation provider when they first start thinking about a trip. Stakeholders in Malaysia are currently constantly updating their products and packages through social media platforms."

2021 for Hashim, is going to be the year of the new normal with small group holidaying for



Mohd Hafiz Hashim

long at homestays run by local communities. Solo travel picks up pace, customised self-driven options take the front seat. In these times of social-distancing, nature is set to triumph. It is the hills, sea resorts, wildlife reserves and isolated locations that will win over the traveller. With easy accessibility to hygiene and a more tailored approach to individual travel demands, glamping and homestays may just become the norm for leisure or business travellers. At the same time, MyCEB through Tourism Malaysia is offering some new incentives to lure business travellers to Malaysia.

Responsible travel is the future of tourism and sustainability will be the name of the game

While speaking to Debjit Dutta, CEO, Impression Tourism Services & Bengal State Chairman, IATO & ADTOI, it was interesting to know that actually, COVID-19 has given the tourism industry an opportunity to focus on sustainable tourism products considering the emerging market demand in the days to come.

Prashant Nayak

As we all understand now that in tourism it is going to be a major challenge for us in the new normal. Now people are desperate to travel but they are not totally confident to travel. Debjit says, "Whatever new trends we have seen and understood in the last couple of months, is because of COVID-19 and there are going to be four major impacts on the tourism business. First is, people will create demand for clinically fit travel which will be mandatory from now on and will persist as a trend even after the pandemic, secondly because of the limitations people are exploring nearby destinations. So, these are the big areas of focus for the travel industry. Third is that, though travel will be expensive, luxury will become kind of pocket-friendly and travellers will be able to afford high-end properties at a lower price, and last but most impactful will be responsible tourism becoming the future of travel because of many factors."

People are actually looking to travel to nearby destinations for short holidays because of the limitations and restrictions due to the pandemic. Now, this is a very big opportunity for the local stakeholder and the host communities as intrastate travelling is increasing and which is very good for the local destinations as nearby cities are emerging as the primary source markets and this is a kind of positive impact of COVID-19.

"Anywhere, close to the metro cities or big towns, travellers are looking for unexplored destinations and small character properties with

mature rooms which offer very clean and sanitised stay and of course, less crowd. So this is a big area of opportunity for the industry and this trend will actually continue in the future because earlier a large number of travellers used to consider weekends and vacations travelling to far off states or out of the country. Since this trend is evolving and continuous it is very good for businesses to explore some underdeveloped regions or areas which have not been explored by the general tourism communities," assures Debjit.

However, Debjit also remarks, "I would say it will not be that good for tour operators because, at this age of internet in tourism, most of the travellers do not tend to take support from a tour operator or an intermediary because of their understanding that the producer is next to your house and you don't need a third-party to get to the producer's courtyard especially when you are talking about the local



Debjit Dutta

products or a nearby destination.

So, most opportunities could be lost and they should thus tread with caution and it should not be their only option."

Presently, intrastate travelling still has limitations because of the confusion in knowing a particular state's travelling rules as they are constantly changing because of the uncertainty of the pandemic. In India, the primary challenge is that we don't have a uniform rule in terms of rules and restrictions and all these things vary from state to state and further restrict the will to travel.

Also, after unlocking, there is no confirmed news about each state's

tourism offerings and this is a big bottleneck to promote domestic tourism pan India. "If we can find a mechanism where we have a uniform 'One India Standard Operating Protocol for Tourism' applicable to all the states then it will be easy for the industry in which tour operators will benefit from domestic travel and that would certainly increase with people getting used to the new normal. Those who are used to getting outside and exploring other cities will continue to travel and explore and tour operators can exploit this potential," says Debjit.

Talking of inbound tourism, Debjit says that it is going to be a big challenge and is not going to be happening very soon until and unless a vaccine is available in the market. Debjit points out two primary reasons for India not being a viable destination during such times. "In India, we have always been promoting faces more than the places. We are selling our people, cultural diversity, our festivals, our bazaars, etc which are generally crowd pullers and have shades of over-tourism and its side effects. Here again, not all foreigners are comfortable with these aspects or may not be on their wish list now. Most of them will be keen to stay away from the crowd and consider some natural destination which can add to their adventure and fun. So ultimately, these are not the right products for global markets in the present scenario and it is very important for India to change its brand positioning statement."

Continuing on the second point, Debjit states, "India is not counted among the top destination in the global chart in terms of cleanliness and hygiene despite having top attractions and diversity in the world (which creates interest for inbound visitations). It looks like we are not that focused on the global market game to be considered as a safe, hygienic and tourism responsible country and this is coming as a bottleneck in terms of inbound tourism."

Debjit is keen that the industry players focus on the concept of 4 R which is Review, Reset, Restructure and Revive and he has been telling people for the last few months to use these aspects in the business. Adding to this, he shares more, "I think it is once in a lifetime opportunity for the industry, I will explain why? What has happened is till date there has been

a change in the industry in last 10-12 years due to digital development the industry is less of selling experiences and more of trading, so quantity has taken over the quality and to ensure quantity, we have all come up with trading tricks. However, such business models do not allow you much scope to keep a sustainable reserve for such unprecedented crises and that is what exactly happened. Now, the industry is certainly realising the mistakes they have done like working with narrow or literally no margins, and how bad it has become for the overall health of tourism in the country. That was a transformation then and now again we are going through a transformation because of the impact of COVID-19 and this is the one time opportunity, in-fact a lifetime opportunity for us to Review, Reset, Restructure and Revive, so we can look forward to a sustainable tourism business post-COVID"

Thus, focusing on being a responsible traveller or a travel operator following Sustainable Tourism practices with Fair Trade Policies can make a positive impact on the destination and help business models to survive and continue in the future. Another outcome of the pandemic is that we all are beginning to get to know that there are many unexplored potential places for tourism but we have never been able to distinguish because of the lack of market awareness or lack of market demand for such places until now.

Debjit mentions his own experience, "We are associated with the community tourism initiative in Sundarbans that has 6 rooms and I'll tell you that I had more clients from abroad or other states than we had from Kolkata. Now, we have the opportunity to sell these to domestic tourists as now people are looking for somewhere to go and they are quite surprised that such a place exists. Even, I have come to know about many destinations which earlier I did not give much thought about. Local market exploration has become big due to pandemic and it will be helpful for a lot of small destinations and the local communities. It has the potential to change the economy and in India, we have plenty of such beautiful destinations close to cities and towns.

On the same lines, Debjit is working on an exclusive section on

their website that gives you details about unique experiences one can enjoy in West Bengal and North East India. He has done a web series for India Tourism Kolkata on different kinds of experiences and the first one was on RANBARIS (Heritage Stays in South Bengal). It is popular with foreign tourists and gives great opportunities for inbound players. Once, he did a show on RANBARIS and the viewership went up more than 10000 and everybody had so many queries about the place as people never knew that such kind of properties still exists for stay and fabulous experiences.

"Similarly, in a second episode, I did on Heritage Tea Trails and have highlighted 6 tea garden properties where people can go and stay for a holiday. There was a lot of appreciation from viewers as once again they did not know that there are so many tea gardens and bungalows in North Bengal for holidays and vacations," informs Debjit.

Presently, for their projects, he has shortlisted 50+ unique destinations in Bengal offering homestays which he is eager to develop and promote with the industry. He says it is quite surprising as earlier he didn't have the opportunity to focus on most of those destinations as the market demand was only for some prominent destinations like Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kolkata, and Sundarbans. Popular destinations in Bengal must be less than 10 but now he has another 50+ to add.

"So from 10+ destinations, we can work out to 60+ which is indeed a phenomenal growth and this could hold true for all the states in India. Thanks to COVID, remote destinations without the crowd and natural stand-alone properties are the new demand of the people and we can develop or en-cash on such properties," adds Debjit.

On a final note, Debjit says, "So I urge tour operators now that it is high time to understand the change and adopt appropriate strategies base on the upcoming market demand. Responsible travel is the future of tourism and sustainability will be the name of the game. So we all have to get ready and work to deliver such products and services and it is certainly going to be a great restart instead of all the limitations and challenges."

RARE India: pioneers in sustainable and earth-friendly conscious luxury

Shoba Mohan is the Founder Partner of RARE India, a company that has been promoting conservation and community-based tourism with sustainability as a keystone value for tourism and hospitality. She sits on board associations such as RTSOI, TTC, IAHRC, etc, and promotes the idea that sustainable travel is future-ready and luxury has to be redefined around parameters that believe in the protection and preservation of the planet.

Prashant Nayak

RARE India is a collection of some of the finest boutique hotels, palace stays, wildlife life lodges, home-stays and retreats of the sub-continent. Here, they believe that 'Meaning is the new luxury' and their community is an inclusive list of experiential hotels and hospitality concepts with a quality and style quotient that appeal to the world traveller, belief in working with the community while being personal and high on service.

RARE India's list comprises a unique collection of hotels spanning four countries – India, Nepal Sri Lanka & Bhutan, 17 states in India alone and over 50 hotel brands. "Our hotels are often set away from the repetitive and regular routes, aspire to tread softly on the land they are set in and preserve the innocence of the destination. In short, you have a 'RARE' collection of hotels and concepts that offer the perfect immersive experience to the evolved traveller," shares Shoba.

Speaking about current booking trends, Shoba mentions, "With the domestic market encouraged by the slacking of COVID regulations of the states and borders, most definitely boutique hotels are in business, especially at easy driving distances. However, I am dismayed to see that the demand has not improved the value proposition of these hotels; instead, there is a huge rush for discounting and that is not a good strategy when the market is waking up to these offbeat owner-run hotels."

Revenge tourism is something the industry is talking about. When asked if Revenge Tourism has the potential to boost the initial rise in travel and tourism post-COVID, Shoba states, "Much that I dislike aggressive words like revenge tourism, yes! there is pent-up demand and hence there are a lot of booking requests for off-beat hotels and known brands in the pandemic times; however, this only addresses one part of the tourism business. The inbound market is still and much of the outbound is in waiting for countries to open up. So, while hotels and services benefit, many travel companies are out of business

and several thousand jobs are at stake."

There have been several new evolving travel trends because of the pandemic and some will be there to stay even post COVID. On this, Shoba shares, "We have taken to technology in a big way and have created networks to help promote our community. We have also sharpened our narratives and are looking at building a portal that will focus on 'conscious luxury travel'. There are several ideas – work from forests, work from the hills, small weddings, etc. The numbers do not add up enough to make it a trend. The biggest trend one is seeing is people and families looking for driving vacations up to 8-9 hours from feeder markets. And of course, the 'deal' and the health and safety protocol is what gets the hotels its numbers."

The RARE community has been a pioneer in the sustainable tourism space. The community has been established on sustainable values of conservation, preservation, low carbon footprints, watershed management, local community engagement and against over-tourism. Some of the RARE sustainability initiatives are aimed at eliminating the use of plastics in all forms, especially single-use plastic, across hotels in the community and enabling them to adopt a no plastic policy in a phased and measured manner.

"I wouldn't call sustainability a pre-occupation, neither is over-tourism. The industry was

beginning to take notice of issues like over-tourism, plastic, garbage and pollution. The pause gave us time to ponder over it and I hope industry leaders will 'explore' solutions to mitigate global issues. This crisis should help us reach us to more people and resort to planet-friendly operations at all levels," opines Shoba.

A key differentiator of every RARE hotel is its commitment to the community and its focus towards being conscious and aware of the impact of any tourism and hospitality activity. RARE India is a member of RTSOI (Responsible Tourism Society of India) and also India chapters of, PATA, TOFT, IATO, and TTC – an international association promoting experiential and transformational travel.



Shoba Mohan

‘Domestic traveller is being tapped aggressively by all the stakeholders of the industry’

H&M Services (Hospitality and Marketing Services) is a privately owned, full-service sales and marketing company. With many business relationships established over the years, they are a preferred partner for several standalone as well as hotel chains and work with a diversity of businesses, including spas and resorts, management companies, ownership groups, destination and vacation rentals. Geeta Maheshwari, Founder & Director, H&M Services, shares that they are determined to overcome the challenge with sustained innovation and their continuously evolving best practices

Prashant Nayak

H&M Services comprises a dynamic and multi-talented team of travel, marketing, business development and client servicing experts. By harnessing their collective experiences and passion for what they do, they have been to achieve far-reaching success for their hospitality clients and partners by helping them increase their bookings and deliver a superior return on investment. Whether a Start-Up or Grown-Up business, H&M Services is ready, willing and uniquely able to provide the perfect solution

While queries are pouring in for the forthcoming season at some of their properties, Geeta says, “Since the international inbound traffic is severely hit it is expected to have a toll on some of our properties in the states of Karnataka and Kerala. However, with the opening up of the domestic market, we are receiving queries from enthusiastic travellers and we are hopeful that this will help our properties rebound to the pre-COVID scale. Furthermore, since the outbound market is exhibiting a downward trend, the travel and tourism industry is hopeful to convert these numbers to domestic travels.”

Recent surveys show that people want to catch up on missed travel opportunities when the crisis subsides. This has led to the hotel and tourism industry hoping for a wave of ‘revenge travel.’ On the mention of revenge travel, Geeta opines, “I honestly feel that this is just a marketing jargon. The hospitality industry is currently touching the bottom. Though people are keen to

travel but are being very selective at this stage. Subsequent to the travel restrictions being eased, the initial travel is more or less in the short distances where a traveller preferred mode is by road. People are still sceptical to travel by air for a holiday. We need not give this travel any name but the underlying factor is that the domestic traveller is being tapped aggressively by all the stakeholders of the industry. Needless to mention, the numbers of domestic travellers are huge and can give the desired boost to the industry.”

On asked about how her organisation is responding to the new emerging travel trends? “Well, the new trends are here to stay, at least for the time being. We at H&M Services are innovating our business model to suit the customer and are helping them to tide over these hiccups. We, at our selected properties, have introduced new packages like staycation, self-drive packages, workation packages and many more. These have been well received in the travel industry domain and are being marketed through social media, networking options, etc,” informs Geeta.

Considering that today a guest not only is looking for a safe and secure environment but is also looking for a pleasant and exciting stay, H&M has revolutionised their service designs at selected units thereby ensuring a memorable guest experience in spite of all COVID challenges. They also hope to see a smile on each and every individual they deal with.

Amidst the COVID pandemic raging throughout the world, the silver lining according to Geeta is that domestic tourism is expected to grow leaps



Geeta Maheshwari

and bounds. “International travellers will surely explore new places within their own country. With the decline in the outbound traffic, the domestic travel market can expect substantial gains. Domestic tourism is likely to scale greater heights in the following years. Society as a whole has accepted this as a new normal. People may now be more inclined to organise weddings and other family functions within our country rather than exploring the destinations abroad,” assures Geeta.

At H&M Services, they have always been extremely cautious with hygiene, sanitation and safety of their guests and travellers and their properties as well. The present challenge has strengthened their resolve to tackle it in an effective manner.

Maharashtra fighting back COVID-19 by opening new doors for the tourism sector

The sector which is still reeling under the stress caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 witnessed a sense of relief in the state of Maharashtra where the government came out with different policies to uplift the tourism sector in the state.

Nandivardhan Jain

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing and largest employment generators in Maharashtra. To continue with the same trend, when the governments across states and the central government are busy tackling the COVID-19 situation, the Maharashtra government went a step ahead and continued to support the other sectors with policies that were long-awaited.

The honourable Cabinet Minister, Aaditya Thackeray in an urge to uplift the urban and rural tourism in the state has come out with different initiatives like Caravan services, Agro-tourism, industry status, and reducing the license requirement for setting up a new establishment.

With all these initiatives the government has aimed to create a balance between urban and rural development. This in turn will help promote the rural economy by promoting entrepreneurship and employment in the rural areas. The reduction in-licenses from 70 to 10 to open a business was aimed towards bringing ease of doing business and reducing the time to set up a new establishment under the tourism sector.

To keep up with the changing trends, MTDC in association with Motohom (Moving hotels on Wheels) has launched the caravan services. The initiative is primarily focused on those who like to spend their holidays outdoor and independently. This will allow people to explore the wilderness that Maharashtra has to offer.

The agro-tourism policy of Maharashtra

will invigorate the rural sector and agricultural practitioners with a steady source of an alternative income and alternative employment through tourism like farm stays, local cuisines, and cultural aspects. Though the agro-tourism policy has been across multiple countries already, Maharashtra has taken a lead in India to implement such a policy.

Individual farmers, agriculture cooperatives societies, agriculture research centres, agriculture universities, or farmer companies can set up agro-tourism centres. The Tourism Department will certify these centres after which they can be eligible for loans and other tax benefits. The requirements to register under the policy include owning an area of two to five acres with residential arrangements and facilities for meal supply.

The much-awaited industry status provided for the tourism sector will ensure a reduction in operational cost which can in turn act as one of the best support provided by the government during these times. In the first phase of developments, the industry status will provide a rebate in the property taxes, electricity charges as well as water charges.

All the establishments classified as hotels by the Union Ministry of Tourism will be eligible for the benefits under the newly awarded status and will be able to reap the benefits from 1st April 2021.

As of today, there are approximately 110 hotels across the one to five-star categories in Maharashtra which are classified by the



Nandivardhan Jain

Ministry of Tourism. As the classification is optional, the majority of hotel owners have not opted for it. So to provide benefits to them as well, the committee is expected to suggest norms that will be finalized by the state later on.

Recently, MTDC also announced it is partnering with Airbnb to promote home-stay and bed & breakfast (B&B) tourism in the state by promoting home-stay tourism, this partnership will encourage travel to lesser-known destinations and will enable inclusive community-led tourism in the state that will further enhance economic prospects. The partnership will also enhance the potential of tourism to create jobs and sustain livelihoods for local communities and will spotlight unique properties as more travellers explore stays near metro cities.

The tourism sector contributes nearly 10 percent to the GSDP of Maharashtra and is one of the biggest employment generators for the state. The move of the state government will ensure the hospitality sector sails out smoothly from the rough patch that it currently is in.

Nandivardhan Jain is the Founder & CEO of Noesis Capital Advisors.



Emirates continues to focus on strengthening business with customer-centric experiences

As a pioneer in the industry, Emirates adapted quickly to meet the needs of the changing environment by ramping up its SkyCargo network, supporting repatriation flights, implementing a comprehensive set of safety measures including the distribution of hygiene kits, and introducing free, global COVID-19 cover for medical expenses -an industry-first. Jabr Al-Azeeby, Vice President India & Nepal, Emirates, shares how they continue to focus on being customer-oriented to provide even more connectivity and value for their patrons.

Prashant Nayak



Jabr Al-Azeeby

Emirates looks forward to resuming passenger services to India as soon as conditions allow. In the meantime, they continue to support repatriation movements to the country by facilitating travel for stranded Indians who wish to return home.

“The COVID-19 global pandemic has hit the travel and aviation industry hard. As international borders gradually re-open, travel restrictions ease and businesses and industries learn to adjust – we are optimistic economies will recover and this will bring stability for travel demand to return. For now, we remain focused on restoring passenger operations, keeping the safety of our customers, our people, and our communities as the top priority. We are proud to lead the way in boosting confidence for international travel, by providing customers with the assurance needed to fly safer and better. We have implemented various measures in the air and on-ground including the

distribution of complimentary hygiene kits containing masks, gloves, hand sanitizer and antibacterial wipes to all customers,” assures Al-Azeeby.

Emirates was also the first airline to introduce free, global cover for COVID-19 related costs, should passengers be diagnosed with COVID-19 during their travels. They also revised their booking policies to offer passengers more flexibility, choice and confidence when planning their travels.

To be successful post-crisis, the airline’s strategy has always been built on being innovative and placing customers at the heart of everything they do. They are confident of their business model and with Dubai as their hub; their proposition is as strong as ever. Dubai was one of the world’s first cities to obtain the ‘Safe Travels’ stamp from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) – which endorses Dubai’s comprehensive and effective measures to ensure guest health and safety.

Al-Azeeby shares more, “Emirates will continue to lead the way in the aviation industry with superior products, service, comfort and network. Customers can currently travel to more than 95 destinations via Dubai within the airline’s growing network. We will continue to innovate and invest in our products and services to provide customers with a safe and unmatched travel experience in the air and on-ground. We also recently introduced Emirates Gateway, available via the recently launched Emirates Portal (a one-stop-shop for travel industry partners to quickly and securely access the full range of information on Emirates’ latest products, services and policies) - offering our trade partners the ability to enhance travellers’ journeys with customized products and services.”

Al-Azeeby feels that the impact of COVID-19 on the aviation industry has been unprecedented and travel has drastically changed since March. However, this has paved opportunities to innovate and create a more resilient industry. Enhanced health and safety initiatives will remain in place post-pandemic and ‘touchless’ interactions will increase. “For us, we will continue to invest in our products and services to provide customers with a safe and unmatched travel experience. We recently introduced fully self-served, check-in and bag drop kiosks in Dubai International Airport, allowing customers to check-in, receive their boarding pass, choose seats on board, and drop off their bags. While the service is currently not available for passengers travelling to India - more self-service and ‘touchless’ facilities are planned to be added in the coming month,” adds Al-Azeeby.

The global pandemic also led Emirates to innovate in the way they operate cargo-only flights on passenger aircraft, in addition to dedicated freighters and belly-hold cargo on passenger flights. They also modified 10 Boeing 777-300ER aircraft to carry more cargo. In India, Emirates SkyCargo operated scheduled freighter services and several chartered flights to nine cities, to ensure an adequate flow of vital commodities such as pharmaceutical products and perishables.

“The COVID-19 pandemic is far from over, but we are all learning to cope with it. However, we remain committed to serving our customers and we hope to resume our full complement of services and destinations as quickly and safely as the situation allows,” concludes Al-Azeeby.

Sheintourism: bringing the change together

In the current business environment, women have made significant inroads into the areas of entrepreneurship and leadership. In the tourism industry, there's been a surge of women taking professional and leadership roles to steer the development and growth of the industry. Yet, despite the advancement, one can witness women still lagging behind men in income, career opportunities, and business ownership.

Prashant Nayak

Sheintourism was founded on the premise that it is critical to have women as powerful agents of change at all levels in the tourism industry to enhance the socio-economic trajectory of women. They hold a strong conviction and belief that diversity and greater representation of women in entrepreneurship and leadership positions in the tourism industry have far-reaching benefits on societies, communities and the quality of lives of women. Through the collaboration of partnerships and ideas, the Sheintourism platform paves the pathways for women in tourism to flourish and realise their potentials.

Conceptualised by four innovative game-changers in their own right, Anna Alaman, Nisha Abu Bakar, Zinal Doshi, and Rashmi Chadha, Sheintourism is driven by a common purpose and passion for the empowerment of women in the tourism industry. Though individually they have their own setups and start-ups, collectively, they bring diversity in their tourism experiences, expertise and cultural orientations to realise their vision to connect, inspire and develop women in the travel and tourism industry. Through the collective power of the women tribe, they strive to steer sustainability, innovation and meaningful changes in the tourism industry.

Sheintourism believes in the unimaginable power and contribution of

women in tourism and with this vision, their mission is to create a platform in the tourism industry for women entrepreneurs, companies, academic institutions and influencers and empowering through their initiatives and contributions, and thus giving women the necessary tools to flourish their business and sharpen their leadership skills.

The offerings and programs are designed to empower women in tourism through professional networking, the development of skills and knowledge and business mentoring. Here is how women in tourism can benefit:

She Learns

Through Sheintourism's specially crafted and designed workshops and development programs, they develop, grow and transform the potentials of women professionals to be high-performing individuals professionally and personally.

She Connects

Sheintourism brings like-minded women professionals in the tourism industry to establish mutually beneficial relationships, grow business as well as build their social capital.

She Grows

Sheintourism provides expertise to help women make strategic decisions, be a sounding board for complex business matters, extend the diverse and fresh lens to look at their businesses, and expand their business networks.

She Informs

Sheintourism provides intelligence research and insights into consumer and market trends in the tourism industry. They assist organisations to use these insights and data to make informed decisions, design innovative and differentiating strategies and translate the intelligence to best practices and successful actions.

She Ideates

Sheintourism assists tourism organisations to develop strategic visions, formulate sustainable development plans and execute through innovative actions. Their focus is on the development of tourism that is inclusive and transformative, through the involvement of local community participation and the mutual sharing of benefits among stakeholders.

She Influences

Sheintourism supports tourism organisations to have a sound understanding of their target audience and tailor a customised influencer program. Through unique campaigns, they commit to developing brand awareness and brand visibility for tourism organisations.

So, it is time for industry women to join this force as all the four founders at Sheintourism believe that when women come together, incredible things happen. They invite women to turn conversations into actions and to recognise their full potential and humanity. And it is like they all say at Sheintourism, "Let your transformative journey begin with us."



Anna Alaman

Nisha

Zinal Doshi

Rashmi Chadha

Constantly working towards increasing knowledge and skill-set for travel partners to create brand recall

Australia is among the few countries that have managed to control the pandemic; effectively flattening the curve, thus allowing for gradual reopening of state borders. Nishant Kashikar,

Country Manager- India & Gulf, Tourism Australia, feels that the subsequent revival of domestic tourism in Australia will demonstrate to the international travellers, their ability to recuperate and recover and since Indians can't travel right now, they can certainly dream and plan for future holidays to destinations in Australia.

Prashant Nayak

The travel and tourism industry, as a collective, has seen a halt in activity for the majority of the year with domestic tourism and staycations only recently regaining popularity. The pandemic has ushered in unfathomable changes and in doing so, reevaluated what we all once considered 'normal'. In line with this, maintaining destination relevancy and interest has remained a pertinent goal, for Tourism Australia, especially during periods of limited travel.

Due to the restrictions on international travel, customers are increasingly looking to satiate their travel needs from the comfort of their abodes. "This had led to considerable growth of virtual tourism, with demand on an all-time high. In line with this, we have introduced several live tours, virtual trips and 8D format content that will help our audiences visit Australia, from the confines of their home. At a time where businesses across the hospitality sector are on their path to recovery, these initiatives will help us create a high recall and resonance for local tourism operators such that when potential tourists are planning their visit to Australia they are well versed with each of their experiences and offerings," explains Nishant.

As part of the wide scope of their initiatives that have been introduced and ramped up in lieu of the COVID-19 pandemic, Tourism Australia continues to support its commercial, distribution and airline partners by keeping requisite information updated and making sure they remain cognizant of the NTO's recovery strategies and plans. In lieu of the upheaval caused by the pandemic, the needs and well-being of the travel industry and related operators remain important to the organisation's functioning.

Across its key markets, including India, Tourism Australia has made poignant efforts to maintain continuous engagement with direct consumer-facing sales representatives by educating and equipping them with the skills and knowledge required to market Australia as a must-visit destination through their Aussie Specialist Program. "We have further emphasised our communication strategy through regular webinars that will keep various industry stakeholders abreast on travel restrictions, travel trade relevant information, policy measures in place, government directives and information pertinent to public health measures. Travellers are also among our key stakeholders and ensuring the wellbeing of our visitors by implementing safety and health protocols is a key component to reviving tourism," mentions Nishant.

According to Nishant, among the upcoming travel trends that are expected to largely govern the future of travel, slow tourism will allow for travellers to partake in experiences over the course of several weeks and will enable them to explore a destination in-depth, while adhering to safety and hygiene protocols. Therefore, at Tourism Australia their 360-degree virtual tours and live events have been curated bearing these trends in mind.

In the interim, they have also introduced a plethora of virtual opportunities for avid travellers to experience the very best of Australia while in the comfort of their homes and until leisure travel resumes. These initiatives include 8D Audio soundscapes that utilise colour



Nishant Kashikar

psychology to create immersive audio and visual experience in addition to the 360-degree virtual tours and the roster of virtual experiences launched as part of their 'Live From Aus' program earlier this year.

The underlying goal for them as marketers in this industry has always been to establish high brand resonance and positive recall with their audience that will eventually translate into visitation to the destination. While customers are confined to their homes now it is essential to build high recall for the product, service, or destination. Through this phase of restricted travel, they have engaged their customers on a continued basis through digitised content formats that remind them that all of Australia awaits them on the other side of this pandemic.

'An Indian tourist should expect a long but rewarding journey in Peru'

Peru is an amazing destination that looks forward to Indians visiting the country post the crisis. Back in 2017 -19, Peru was gaining momentum amongst the Indian travellers who were on the look-out for exclusive experiences. In Peru, one will be surprised at the diversity and its immense tourist offerings, be it in cities or the rustic and rural countryside. Luis Cabello, Trade and Tourism Counsellor of Peru in India, recognises the potential of India as a key partner for trade and tourism opportunities and hopes to improve the Indian tourist numbers in the coming years.

Prashant Nayak

Q Tell us about the present tourism situation in Peru?

The Government has opened international flights coming from countries with a maximum distance of eight hours. Passengers have to show a molecular test upon arrival and do not need to stay in quarantine if test results are negative.

The reopening of the Peruvian tourism icon Machu Picchu marks a milestone in the industry's reactivation of our country, showing the world that given the permanent decline in COVID-19 cases and the implementation of protocols for tourism, we are prepared to receive travellers.

This is the most visible action of many others that the Peruvian government has been doing to reactivate tourism, one of the sectors most affected by the pandemic. The reactivation has also been initiated by launching the second phase of #DreamThenTravel international tourism campaign, which was recently announced. It is a 100 per cent digital campaign and available in eight languages with the purpose of keeping Peru in the mind of the world's avid travellers.

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

During the general lockdown, entries and exits from the country by air, land and sea were suspended, with an exception of special humanitarian cases, in addition to the transportation of certain cargo and merchandise. During this period, we took the opportunity to carry out virtual trainings aimed at the travel trade in strategic markets. We were able to train travel agents and operators across the globe in this endeavor.

Also, with the goal of reducing the negative impact suffered by tourism, a business support fund was created to support this sector and generate more than 30,000 jobs, promoting local economic development focused on micro and small enterprises.

Q What programmes/projects have the tourism board been working on (or your strategies) to be successful post-crisis?

Peru will promote sustainable tourism during the post-COVID-19 era through promotional actions in every market. Peru as a destination is committed towards this cause.

Our plan is to offer specialized options in varied segments such as culture, nature, adventure and gastronomy. Certain internationally-recognized experiences were already promoted, in alliance with prestigious associations like the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) and the Virtuoso Association, among others. Likewise, agreements with organizations that promote sustainability in the country were also established, such as the National Service of Natural Areas Protected by the State (SERNANP). The aim is to develop brand new destination content.

Furthermore, we will begin strategic alliances with global airlines in this period. We will also be further strengthening our presence in a network of more than 10 000 travel agencies around the globe. With these actions, we expect to have a positive impact towards the recovery of incoming tourism.

Q According to you, what will tourists seek after many months of isolation and understanding the threat of the infection? What behavioral changes can you expect from the new tourist?

According to Travel Sentiment Study



Luis Cabello

Wave 20 (September), 67 per cent of people planning to travel in the next six months will change their travel plans due to the coronavirus. Of this group, 50 per cent of travelers reduced travel plans, 34 per cent cancelled trip completely, 33 per cent changed destination to one they can drive to as opposed to fly and 15 per cent changed their travel plans from an international destination to a domestic option. Evidently, Coronavirus is one of the big factors that will impact travel decisions in the coming months.

Also, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) indicated while the recovery of international tourism remains sluggish, demand for domestic tourism is rising in many large markets such as China where air capacity in July rebounded to around 90 per cent the level of 2019. In Russia, the air

capacity has also been underpinned by rising domestic travel.

There is an emerging preference for avoiding public transportation and other high-density transit hubs. Consequently, there is a noted decrease in the demand for on-the-go consumption. People will look for transportations with a lesser number of passengers and time on-board.

Though the domestic sector is the first to revive, and Peru is already taking strong initiatives to promote travel in this sector, we are gearing up towards the reopening of the international sector in due time. We are conscious of the fact that a prolonged period in quarantine has modified people's prioritization of values, giving greater weight to personal well-being and sustainability. This will certainly impact the kind of activities which will gain momentum when they travel in the future. There will be a clear preference for outdoor activities in nature, indulging in adventure activities, in addition to wellness tourism and community tourism. Tourism in the new normal will entail greater planning and research, as it seeks sustainability and responsibility.

Q Have Indian tourist footfalls been recorded in Peru, pre -COVID? Which are the countries from which Peru gets the most tourists?

Indian tourists have increasingly been visiting Peru in the last few years and the numbers have been steadily increasing. Between 2017 and 2019 the average growth rate of Indian travelers visiting Peru grew by 17.2 per cent. According to the data available from the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism of Peru (MINCETUR), more than 9,500 Indians visited Peru till September of that year. Machu Picchu has been the main tourist icon for Indian tourists, but there is a clear trend of visitors spending most number of days in Peru in spite of opting for multi-country itineraries to Latin America.

In terms of tourists choosing to travel to Peru internationally, in 2019, most tourists came from our neighbouring countries (Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia, or Brazil). From Europe, Spain was the country with the highest number of its travelers opting to travel to Peru.

Q Peru is certainly a long-haul destination with more nights to spend! What should an Indian tourist expect in Peru? Like safety measures, climate, food, heritage culture, etc?

An Indian tourist should expect a long but rewarding journey. In Peru, he will find different types of climates- from very warm to very cold- as well as different regions (jungle, highlands and coast). Despite Machu

Picchu being the most popular icon among Indian tourists, Peru offers a wide range of nature reserves, archaeological sites, and gastronomical delights.

We are proud to announce that Peru has recently been awarded the Safe Travel Stamp by the World Trade & Tourism Council (WTTC). It is a non-profit organization with more than 30 years of working in the travel and tourism sector which has laid down the bio-security guidelines for the reopening of destinations to tourism. Peru is the fifth country in Latin America to be awarded this stamp and is following the guidelines when reopening all sectors.

Q Any other information that you would like to share with us?

Peru is committed to highlight the geography and nature that it has to offer to its visitors in the coming years and there is an extensive plan in place which includes the business and the travel sector alike. One of the segments to be strongly promoted would be sports tourism in Peru. The Lima 2019 Pan American Games allowed the country to consolidate the sports infrastructure available in the country and will also aid in further strengthening Peru as a MICE destination with ample options to hold meetings and conventions in the South American Pacific region.

Continuing to build the Israel – India connect

With the teams making changes to their goals for 2020, The Israel Government Tourist Office (IGTO) based in Mumbai, has adjusted their strategy to adapt to the evolving changes in both India and Israel, to achieve their goals. Sammy Yahia, IGTO Director of Tourism, India, and Philippines, converses with TTJ on their plans and work scenario in the current situation, which is filled with the uncertainty of when life and tourism will resume to normal.

Prashant Nayak

With Israel coming out of Lockdown 2.0, Sammy's strategy is to keep the notion of Israel as a holiday destination in the mind of every Indian traveller. To successfully do that, they are constantly in touch with their partners in the industry, including travel agents and tour operators, airline partners, media partners, corporates and consumers (through social media), amongst a few.

The current 'work from home' routine has resulted in many organisations increasing their dependence on online tools to keep in touch with their team members and clients/vendors, which is the same for all of them at the Israel Ministry of Tourism. "While it has presented its challenges to all of us, team members from all over the world have been collaborating more with their counterparts, creating strategies while sharing ideas, which

has boosted productivity.

The Israel Government Tourist Office (IGTO) in Mumbai has been using digital tools, such as webinars, online conferences, video meetings, online presentations, etc. to continue our work in the market. We are also using traditional tools, namely conference calls and phone calls, to keep in touch with the team and our partners as well," informs Sammy.

Israel, presently, is accepting visitors from select countries with requirements for all travellers, and travel partners, strictly adhering to the health and safety guidelines from the Ministry of Health. In an attempt to utilise the pandemic lockdown as successfully as possible, the Israel Ministry of Tourism (IMOT) has been working tirelessly to improve the tourism infrastructure as well as upgrade the tourism products available in Israel. With the



Sammy Yahia

signing of the Abraham Accords in September and the opening of new tourism routes to the UAE and the Kingdom of Bahrain, IMOT is developing the Israeli tourism product to meet the requirements of Emirati tourists.

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

TAT engages in several immersive virtual projects to highlight Thailand's travel potential

At Tourism Authority of Thailand, (TAT) Mumbai, they believe that there is light at the end of every tunnel. Thus, even throughout these challenging past months, their teams have put their best foot forward to continue engaging with their partners and consumers. Cholada Siddhivarn, Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand, and Mumbai feels it is necessary to keep the destination alive and to strengthen their reach and engagement, they have to strategise their activities in groups' vis-à-vis consumers and trade partners.

Prashant Nayak

C OVID-19 and the perils associated with the spread of the virus have caused havoc wrecks to businesses globally and largely, the tourism industry. Since, their course of work involves the exhibition of destinations and experiences to their visitors, the complete seizure in travel movements paralyzed their daily flow of duties.

"The biggest challenge has been to find creative alternate solutions to continue our momentum of work in order to keep Thailand alive as a destination. Every month TAT has worked towards heightening our engagement with our partners and direct consumers through exciting content across emerging digital platforms. Even as we are witnessing the process of unlocking, in the interest of everyone's safety, we are continuing to brainstorm to find lucrative engagement opportunities through new age media," says Cholada.

At present, TAT teams are emphasising on bridging the gap between the travel and trade fraternity in India with the private sector in Thailand. The reason for the same is to ensure the seamlessness in communication between the industries based in two countries. Although the borders for international visitors remain closed in Thailand, domestic tourism is thriving for the past couple of months. Thailand as a country is safe and has been receiving global recognition for the government and authorities' efforts towards controlling the spread of COVID-19. Thus, it is essential to update the partners on the latest development and together prepare a roadmap of restarting the tourism activities in the upcoming months following the announcement of travel relaxation by both the governments.



Cholada Siddhivarn

TAT has been one of the early adapters of the digital technologies facilitating the creation of virtual events that bring together the travel agents, media and direct consumers on a single and immersive platform. India Luxury Virtual Connect (ILVC), held in July 2020 was the first luxury virtual experience in India that bridged the gap between agents in India and the sellers in Thailand. Recently, TAT also participated in India's first luxury wedding fair, The World of Weddings (TWOW) wherein the team used the opportunity to touch base with the industry leaders and even direct consumers to discuss the future of destination weddings and honeymoons. Further, Cholada mentions, "Moreover, the social media team aggressively shares updates and content to educate the travellers about developments in Thailand. These measures have been effective towards increasing communication with the workforce and other stakeholders in addition to regular

calls, one-on-one virtual meetings and press announcements shared with media relevant partners."

Also, with the consumers, they communicate through their social media platforms with their followers through posts, stories and videos. They conduct online activities as well as contests whenever it's suitable. They let the consumers show them what activities are on their bucket lists for their future visits in Thailand.

Additionally, the team reached out to different travel communities, bloggers, media outlets to share situation updates and also throwback posts of travel in Thailand. Moreover, their social media team has been working consistently during the lockdown on every platform they have on a daily basis to share contents including VDOs and E-book which match consumers' interest and to interact with their followers through contest-driven content.

TAT is also busy bridging the communication gap between Indian and Thai partners in order to prepare and be ready for the positive signs of travel resumption from both countries. "Alongside the above measures to strengthen the reach, we also keep exchanging situation updates of India to Thai partners and vice versa. Our SHA or Amazing Thailand Safety and Health Administration plays a pivotal role to ensure safety and health standards while tourists enjoy their times in Thailand; it has been introduced for quite a while now to both trade partners and consumers through educational sessions. All these activities are to showcase TAT's readiness that whenever the borders open, Thailand is the destination that both business and leisure travellers can trust to visit," concludes Cholada.

‘Staycation package is where our focus is and it has helped’

A veteran hotelier driven by passion and creativity, Nicholas Dumbell, General Manager, The St. Regis Mumbai, is a multi-cultural global citizen with 25 years of experience in the hospitality industry. Nicholas commenced his career in London with leading international hospitality chains and became a part of Marriott International’s myriad brands spanning the last two decades. In a conversation with TTJ, he speaks about the different market segments which are likely to drive the performance for his hotel in these unprecedented times.

Prashant Nayak

At The St. Regis Mumbai, Nicholas leads the dynamic luxury team to sustain the hotel’s positioning as one of the most awarded hotels and as the preferred destination for the social elite. He focuses on steering the team to drive revenue and maintain the property’s reputation of having the highest turnover in South Asia while ensuring guest voice scores remain a priority for The St. Regis Mumbai. He uses his creative flair to increase employee engagement, implement standards, drive guest voice scores, build relationships with key stakeholders and grow hotel market share at award-winning levels.

On the current business trends, Nicholas says, “There’s no doubt that at the current moment the staycation business is increasing, so attracting domestic leisure travellers typically from within driving distance will be key. In the short term, residents of Mumbai looking for a nice luxury escapade for two or three days are the next immediate trend. That will continue to grow to include extensive domestic leisure where I do see over the next two or three months, folks visiting from other cities to stay, dine and shop at our luxury mall, which is an added attraction as it is very accessible next door. The other segment that I do see is the social segment - events and weddings which would bring in group business to our hotel. These are the two strong segments that will drive revenue, until the corporate business starts picking up again, probably not before the end of this year or the beginning of next year.”

Regarding the MICE business, Nicholas feels that the going is tough. “However, the good news is that the government is now allowing B2B meetings. As sentiment and confidence improve, I expect to see a slow and steady

build-up of this segment. We are of course speaking to organisations and associations from industries like pharma and medical who are trying to put something together.” tells Nicholas.

The St. Regis Mumbai over the last few months has ramped up their F&B to include putting together great offerings for some of the ongoing MICE events. While corporate are doing online meetings or conferences, they have been successfully delivering luxury food boxes to participant’s homes to enhance the experience of these events where venue with delectable food presentations was an important aspect before these unprecedented times.

Talking about alternative revenue sources the property is engaged in, Nicholas shares, “Obviously, we have already talked about the room side of the staycation business and I continue to see banqueting being driven through social weddings and restaurants becoming bigger and bigger. One of the things that I see here is the Marriott on Wheels which is the delivery and take-away vertical driving in a large part of the F&B business. We also have seen a rise in families and groups of people taking private use of our restaurants. We have the advantage of having a large expanse of space and we recently saw a group of guests booking XXO, our lounge, for an evening. I see a rise in these intimate soirée and we are glad that we are able to offer multiple options to our guests for



Nicholas Dumbell

these gatherings.”

In response to current circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, The St. Regis Mumbai has implemented a variety of new protocols and elevated practices, keeping with their high standards of cleanliness and luxury service. The hotel has embraced Marriott’s Commitment to Clean program to ensure absolute precision in their cleaning and sanitization procedures. The program is led by the Marriott Global Cleanliness Council. The council includes in-house and outside experts in hospitality, epidemiology, sanitation and protective health and hygiene technology.

Thus, now more than ever, they are passionate about delivering an exceptional experience and truly memorable moments throughout their guests’ stay.

Empowered to roll out a safe and memorable holiday for their guests

Heritage Aarah from the Aitken Spence Hotels is their first foray of the Heritage brand out of Sri Lanka. Reopened in September 2020, Maldives' first LEED Gold-certified resort is nestled on an island in the Raa Atoll and houses 150 villas targeting the premium clientele. Upul Gedarakumbura, General Manager, Heritage Aarah, discusses with TTJ how the resort is leading the way in these tough times, the offerings and strategies implemented to entice guests to their property and give them peace of mind during their stay.

Sonika Bohra

Q How has the resort managed to stay afloat in these unprecedented times during the lockdown until the reopening? What has been your biggest challenge in navigating COVID-19 to date?

Our elevated precautionary operational protocols coupled with great optimism and a strong team. As part of the Aitken Spence Hotels, Heritage Aarah is backed by a resource team that had developed a contingency plan, taking into account situations such as we experienced with COVID-19. This was instrumental in us looking ahead with positivity and strength whilst the pandemic unraveled around the world. Our team here at the resort was also unwavering in their assistance to keep things going, even during the lockdown. With over 60 percent of our staff cadre residing at the resort during the lockdown, we looked at varied conducts which could build team morale whilst preparing

for the 'new norm'. Keeping in mind the importance of the balance in work and play, we curated specific sessions for motivation, wellness, sporting events for our associates while also conducting multiple trainings across operational areas with an emphasis on health and safety, based on national and international requirements.

Q Since reopening, what are your extra flexibility offerings to your guests considering the COVID-19 situation?

After analysing the trends and expectations of the global traveller, we have created a campaign that offers attractive rates with limited time offers such as complimentary seaplane transfers and special value additions such as spa inclusions, excursions and destination dining. Our cancellation policy was revised to include flexi cancellation given the travel restrictions and requirement of negative PCR



Upul Gedarakumbura

testing. We also have long-stay offers, island buyout packages for complete privacy; and special packages for family travel. Additionally, we offer the service of PCR testing at our in-house clinic following governmental regulation, so that our guests have the convenience



of getting themselves tested prior to departure.

Q What are the resort's safety measures and initiatives to address heightened health and safety required in these circumstances?

The safety of our guests and the team members are of paramount importance to us. In order to ensure safety, we have introduced a comprehensive safety manual looking at the entire guest journey – from airport pickup to departure, covering all touchpoints. We have put in place an enhanced health and safety protocol policy that looks at all areas of a hotel operation – from guests to associates, to suppliers. These protocols were developed in line with international and national guidelines. In line with the same, our associates maintain heighten hygiene practices and wear appropriate gear. Temperature checks are done twice daily, for guests and associates and records are maintained in an app. All guest luggage is disinfected with HPA approved disinfectant. Social distancing is maintained in all guest areas. All villas are thoroughly cleaned, and high touch points are disinfected every hour by our team members.

seen 27,217 tourists touching down in the Maldives in the first three months since opening, to enjoy the perfect tropical holiday. Heritance Aarah recommenced operations in September and experienced great demand last months. We are grateful for the rising number of guests booking our resort and coming on board to enjoy the plethora of curated services we offer. We have also received high praise from guests who stayed with us in the last two months on our safety precautions and our approach to the 'new norm'.

Q What actions are you taking now to ensure that you are ready to get the leisure travellers back once out of the crisis?

As described before, our offering is unmatched. In the 'new normal' we see that travellers want more relaxation, healthy food options and experiences which Heritance Aarah offers aplenty. Our resort is designed to give blissful seclusion for all our guests along with a range of activities to enjoy an inspired holiday. If it is a complete respite that you require, our spaces are conducive to exactly that. If it is gastronomic elevation, we offer a culinary journey inspired by flavors

from around the world, brought to you by culinary Olympic winners. For wellness seekers, our Medi Spa – the first of its kind in the Maldives – offers a portfolio of treatments. Our location gives access to a truly mesmerising underwater treasure trove. There are adventures and celebrations, and a unique appreciation of the local culture and traditions of the Maldives. Simply put, for our leisure seekers, we are what your dreams are made of!

Q Can you tell us, what new evolving hospitality trends you have been witnessing and if at all there are any silver linings from the COVID crisis for the industry in the post COVID era?

The situation has enticed us to understand, rethink, and reinvent the wheel for the future of the hospitality industry. Digitalised guest experiences including self-check-in at the airports/ QR codes instead of menus at the hotels, learning and training taking place through online platforms – these have all become necessities due to the present crisis. Virtual communications, social media and networks are having a profound impact on customers. This has led to more transparency and overall

to an improved quality of the services provided by the hospitality industry. Travellers are also shifting towards more healthy meal patterns. Vegan-vegetarian options are becoming popular and the experience seekers looking for yoga retreats/ meditation and not just the adrenaline rush. I believe these are all new trends that will shape the future of the industry as well as human lifestyles.



Q The Maldives is a popular global destination and among the very few to open early! So what kind of footfall has your property witnessed since the reopening?

We are encouraged to see the interest of travellers from across the globe. With the Maldives opening its border for travel in July, we have



‘At OYO, we believe in the philosophy that when there is a storm at sea, the fishermen repair their nets’

As one of the first ten YOpreneurs, Harshit Vyas, SVP & COO, India & SA, Franchise Business, OYO Hotels & Homes has demonstrated a clear ability to collaborate with central business leaders and drive outsized outcomes on the ground right from OYO Secure penetration to improvement in guest experiences. During the entire lockdown period, Harshit ensured that all on-ground teams were motivated and meaningfully engaged. In this interview, he speaks about how they are coping in a year full of challenges and about the strategies implemented to recover faster from the COVID-19 crisis and make the company move forward as one team.

Prashant Nayak



Harshit Vyas

Q What has been the biggest challenge for OYO in navigating COVID-19 to date?

Earlier this year, COVID-19 disrupted industries worldwide, with the tourism and hospitality industries being one of the worst affected. The hospitality industry, as we know it, is a high-touch one, full of greetings, gestures, and human connections. And that was the biggest challenge for the industry at large - to provide safe experiences in a high-touch environment and thereby, build trust among our partners and consumers. At OYO, we believe in the philosophy that, when there is a storm at sea, the fishermen repair their nets. And we're doing exactly that.

Q What is OYO most focused on right now?

Our focus is to evolve from a 'resilient OYO' to a 'resurgent OYO' by focussing on enabling our partners, employees, and consumers with the necessary technology and adjustments required to not only overcome the impact of the pandemic but also build a promising future for the years to come. To achieve this, all our efforts are focused on listening to our partners and consumers, understanding their worries and concerns, their aspirations. With insights stemming from our conversations with our stakeholders, we've rolled out tech-enabled improvements across several areas - whether it is in a product, addressing partner and customer needs, OTA

operations, refund systems, research on partner and customer decisions, dashboards, follow-ups, among others.

When it comes to partner-centric initiatives, we are ensuring increased engagement through virtual platforms like regular webinars and training sessions, waivers to ensure the availability of working capital, among others. On the consumer front, we launched several exercises to speak with our consumers, including 'Project Hello', wherein the leadership including myself picked up the phone on our consumers and spoke to them without any agenda. We heard them out and understood that safety is their topmost priority. To ensure consumer, partner as well as employee safety, we implemented several new SOPs and initiatives at the beginning itself, including OYO's Sanitised Stays in partnership with Unilever to ensure a higher standard of safety and hygiene.

On the tech front, we are strengthening our interventions for both partners and customers by launching tools such as YO! Chatbot, OREO, Digital on boarding of assets, digital payments through OYO Secure, among others.

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

As we move forward, with states opening up their borders to welcome tourists once again, we started seeing positive signs of travel coming back across domestic destinations in the past couple of months. This is a testament to India's rising consumer confidence when it comes to moving beyond the pandemic, of course with safety as the biggest priority. To put things in perspective, across India, between April 2020 and September 2020, we've observed an uptick in bookings across Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Kolkata. On the other hand, Jaipur, Kochi, Vishakhapatnam, Agra, and Goa were OYO's most frequented leisure destinations since April 2020. Among leisure cities, we've also observed that some cities such as Shimla, Manali, Munnar, Ooty and Gangtok that didn't enjoy high demand compared to other tourist hotspots during pre-COVID days are now increasingly showing positive signs of rising bookings since September 2020.

Considering that travel is coming back slowly, when we spoke to our consumers at a deeper level, we understood that there was awareness about Sanitised Stays, however, 81 per cent of consumers said they would opt for rooms that have been sanitised before their own eyes as opposed to opting for an unused room that has been sanitised before. This is what will give them peace of mind. And that was it. We rolled out the 'Sanitised Before Your Eyes' initiative with Sonu Sood, who is not just our brand ambassador but has been and still is an OYO hotel owner for some time now. This was a brand trust exercise that walks the talk by disinfecting the room in front of a guest's eyes. It aims to reassure the customer of all the precautionary measures we are taking so that they can enjoy their stay without worrying about anything else. During this period, we leveraged technology to help us offer meaningful solutions to our consumers in the new normal. Therefore, we launched Contactless Check-ins to eliminate processes that could be digitised and Yo!Chatbot, our real-time 24*7 chat assistant in order to nudge the customer to adopt self-serve product features rather than call for queries.

While there's a surge in demand for travel across the country, through our consumer survey, we observed that 80 per cent of users are searching for sanitised stays, while 46 per cent of users were seeking regulation related information while planning their next travel. Keeping this in mind, we launched a one-stop solution for all travel-related assistance on the OYO app in India, including COVID-19 testing with leading ICMR approved pathology labs, visibility to state-wise guidelines, among others. This includes partnerships with Dr. Lal Path Labs, SRL Diagnostics, 1mg, and Indus Health Plus. This helps us become a part of the consumer journey right from the very beginning when they think about travelling.

We also understood that 56 percent of consumers would travel via private vehicles to nearby locations, with family or friends, preferably between the duration of 1-3 days. Understanding this, we rolled out our Road Trippin campaign with Rocky & Mayur in an effort to inspire travellers to travel safely and with precautions.

Q How is OYO dealing with communicating with the workforce and key stakeholders?

We believe in being proactive and communicating authentic and transparent information with our stakeholders, internally and externally. We are constantly in touch with our employees, asset partners and consumers through e-mailers, virtual meetings, calls, among others.

On the partner side, during the COVID period, we have extended all the possible support to them so they can sustain through this pandemic. During this period, we have actively engaged with owners through multiple webinars which were attended by thousands of our asset partners. This has helped us bridge the gap in communication and bring alignment to a number of areas. To support our partners during this period, we also lessened the burden of payments and waived off for the month of March onwards, including value-added service charges, ensured demand generation through various initiatives, weekly payments, and reconciliation settlements, and helped thousands of partners manage working capital requirements, etc.

When it comes to employees, the COVID crisis and the resulting 'new normal' has made it imperative for us to introspect and take steps to ensure healthy work-life integration. We've moved to a 'hybrid workplace model' for the foreseeable future, which is helping the company operate in full capacity across the country, without compromising the health and safety of its employees. To boost employee morale, we are also organising several engagement initiatives for our employees such as virtual family days, rewards, among others.

We have also moved to a 5-day work week and implemented a 'weekend curfew' to ensure work-life balance. To promote upskilling and e-learning, we launched OYOversity, our Learning Management System for employees which include lessons on leadership, how to boost productivity while working remotely among other topics. Last but not the least, to support employee's mental well-being during these challenging times, we have Employee Well-being & Assistance Program (EWAP) that provides consultation services to employees where they can confidentially avail professional support to improve their emotional well being. EWAP benefits include unlimited phone counselling, access to an 8-week online 'Behavioural Therapy' program among others.

Committed to brand values even in challenging times

An industry leader with more than two decades in the business, Aditya Shamsher Malla, General Manager, DoubleTree by Hilton Pune, has been associated with the hotel for over three years and has been actively taking responsibilities for curating strategic initiatives that lead the hotel to continue its guest and people-focused approach towards retaining its leadership position. In a conversation with TTJ, Aditya shares more about the hotels safety and hygiene protocols and how the hotel is assuring its guests of their world class safety measures. Excerpts...

Prashant Nayak

Aditya Shamsher Malla was very recently listed as one of the top 100 Great People Managers of 2020 by Forbes India. This is the largest study of its kind by the Great Manager Institute in partnership with Forbes India assessing over 6344 Managers culminated in the recognition of top 100 managers who show exemplary leadership of their teams.

Commenting on his inclusion in the list, Malla says, "I am honoured by this recognition and credit my Team to build on the vision of the Organisation and the brand, putting people at the core of what we do. Thrive at Hilton provides us direction in our people initiatives. I am proud of my Team who demonstrated an uncompromising commitment to the values even during such challenging times. I am grateful to my employers Panchshil Hotels for providing us with the platform and a supportive environment."

The survey underwent a rigorous process to identify 100 extraordinary leaders of India, who excel in nuances of business as well as team leadership. This year, the study witnessed participation from 1,158 organizations spread across 24 industries and 6,344 managers that focused on assessing the effectiveness of people managers across levels, age bands and experience.

Coming to the pandemic which threw several challenges for the hospitality sector, but DoubleTree by Hilton Pune and its team rose to the occasion by being at the forefront of providing relief to the underprivileged and affected through the lockdown and thereafter, ensuring no livelihoods are lost. Supporting the community and the team through pioneering interventions including the recently concluded mental strength building session and antigen testing initiatives for staff and their families are some of the initiatives that make the Hotel stand tall.



Aditya Shamsher Malla

Malla says, "The pandemic is the greatest challenge we have faced as a civilisation and hopefully there will not be another one to test human resilience and fortitude in this way. Through the crisis, we proactively took measures to deal with the unfolding situation. At DoubleTree by Hilton Pune, we kept the health and safety of our team members at the forefront closing down operations immediately as the lockdown was announced. I am pleased to inform you that all our Team Members are healthy and serving our guests with the warmth and care that they are trained and known for."

The hotel's biggest challenge undoubtedly was in dealing with uncertainty. The initial optimism of a temporary disruption gave way to confusion and anxiety. Dealing with human emotions in such a situation was something they were not really trained for. They used the best of their comprehension, knowledge and camaraderie to turn the sentiment towards hope. Hope for life beyond the pandemic and their purpose through this period.

With guest services interrupted, their team members focused their attention on alleviating the conditions of their community

and COVID warriors. Under the leadership of their Department Heads, they planned and executed a multidimensional relief initiative. In addition to providing succor to the needy through NGOs and the local Rotary chapter, they reached out directly to distribute relief supplies. Their prompt action was one of the first of its kind in the community and was recognised by even their CEO in one of his initial dispatches.

Mentioning of their current focus, "Right now is to take back control of the events and do our bit in 'creating' the new normal. We are actively communicating with our stakeholders, much as we did through the crisis - only the message is evolving. The Hilton Cleanstay Program which was one of the industry's first responses was implemented with complete alignment and training. Protecting the Heart of the House as much as the Front of the House was critical to effectively sanitise spaces and implement the program, so well designed for this purpose. Our effort at this stage is to recover the business by communicating with our guests and reminding them of the beautiful memories at a Hilton hotel. It's important to move from 'subtle assurance of

safety’ rather than ‘glaring caution’ to dispel fear and focus our energy on rebuilding our lives and business. Staying alert of course is of prime concern,” shares Malla.

Communication in such a crisis was very critical. “In our case, communicating with our Team Members dispersed all over the country and our guests across the world were a daunting challenge initially. With the help of technology and a proactive Human Resources Team, we were able to address all concerns and direct the emotions of our stakeholders towards hope. Intervention in the form of Emotional Health sessions by experts organised by our HR helped in focusing our team’s efforts towards the tasks ahead. Communicating the safety of the workplace to families of Team Members through virtual and physical visits helped in generating trust, which went a long way in honest communications to our customers who were already aware of our pioneering Hilton Cleanstay Program,” informed Malla

According to him, it will be important to keep the ears to the ground and adapt to the changing needs, which will presumably be driven by technology. Their communication in the present stage is focusing on the possibility of guests travelling to their

favourite destination with the assurance of the hotel’s detailed safety and cleaning protocols.

Malla feels that it is indeed time for guests and travellers to take a break and treat themselves to the sights and sounds that they have missed for almost a year! However, the past few weeks have seen an easing of restrictions and guests are beginning to return, some for a much-needed break, and others to ensure their business returns back after the imposed break!

“Either way, we have seen the confidence bestowed upon our brand and our Team and I am grateful to our guests for reposing their faith in us. Our Hilton Honours Members were some of the firsts to avail of the enticing deals and savour the hospitality

of their favourite Hilton hotel as soon as it was permissible to travel. The feedback from ensure and business travellers has been encouraging and we are seeing a progressive increase in business, with F&B showing some fascinating trends. After all, the cookie is still warm and awaits our valued guests who have made it a recognisable ambassador of our hospitality,” concludes Malla.



Strategising relaxing domestic initiatives without hindering guest’s safety

Although travel is not yet returning on a global level the hotel occupancies are on the rise in many domestic and drive markets. However, conventional leisure hot spots are being avoided in favour of more rural locations, as outdoor recreation has grown in popularity to allow for social distancing. Thus, ‘Drivecations’ and ‘Staycations’ are playing a pivotal role in uplifting the market slumber observes Atul Upadhyay, Vice President -Operations, Pride Hotels.

Prashant Nayak

Post lockdown people will be cautious about the destinations they will be travelling to. It’s safe to say that the travel and tourism industry might witness some kind of revenge tourism happening in India but not immediately. Destinations that were once the crowd-pullers may not get too many leisure tourists.

“However, we do expect to see a demand in the market for staycations at places which are a short drive away. The domestic market will pick up faster than the international market as the local travellers will be looking for a safe weekend getaway. People are looking for destinations that do not require public transport or air travel. Going away from the city at a drive to destinations is their first choice of a holiday as it’s a safe bet for their health and safety too,” identifies Atul.

Seeing this upcoming trend the Pride Group has already launched several Drivecations and Staycations packages. They have also designed a holiday package - ‘Pride Escape’, for families and kids who are longing for a fun yet safe vacation. And to make sure that their guests are safe during the transit the Pride Hotels will also arrange for the pickup and drop service.

Atul further shares, “Moreover, to help the travel, tourism and hospitality industry to bounce back we have launched a new campaign called ‘India Dekho with Pride’. This is an initiative in the direction of promoting India as a safe and viable destination for tourism and MICE. In India, the domestic travel segment is the largest contributor to the overall tourism sector hence will play a vital role in the recovery process.”



Atul Upadhyay

The general opinion suggests that travellers will avoid mass tourism and opt for slow tourism. Slow tourism will be an opportunity to rediscover the wonders that are hidden a few miles away from home. “The high risk of large gatherings where it is difficult for individuals to remain spaced will keep us all away from the big cities and the most popular destinations. People will spend their holidays in lesser known tourist destinations. This will boost our tourism and economy,” assures Atul.

‘The biggest challenge is to gain a hundred per cent confidence from the guests’

Ravi Rai is the Cluster General Manager for three properties, viz., Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach, Novotel Vijayawada Varun and The Bheemili Resort-managed by Accor Hotels. He is known to be a resourceful professional with proven success in general management in the hospitality industry spanning over 20 years and is recognised for strong guest focus, sales expertise and ability to leverage core strengths to increase the bottom line. Ravi shares the latest developments at the properties.

Prashant Nayak

Travellers unlike before are now religiously factoring the safety precautions and hygiene measures undertaken by a hotel so it has become essentially challenging to rebuild and regain the assurance of the guests.

“To abide by the norms of social distancing at all the three properties – Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach, Novotel Vijayawada Varun and The Bheemili Resort-managed by AccorHotels, we are providing contactless experiences that include contactless payments, menu to name a few,” says Ravi.

Ravi adds, “To ensure that the guests are aware of our services and are up to speed with the brand offerings, we are communicating about our safety and hygiene protocols through online classes highlighting food and wellness. We have also started promoting wellness at-home packages, food deliveries, and take away options. The hotel has received tremendous response in these uncertain times through these efforts.”

Presently, the properties’ primary focus is for their guests and employees’ safety and getting back to normalcy. In addition to this, with people turning increasingly to the internet and digital media, their focus would be to continue communicating more in the digital

space. They are also looking at associating with influencers to create engagement and showcase the hotels’ adaptation and adherence to some of the most stringent hygiene safety protocols being followed.

“Technology is the key that is helping us stay connected with our workforce and stakeholders minus the physical touch. Through the advancement of social media, we are conducting webinars, zoom calls and conference video calls to discuss further lines of communication,” mentions Ravi.

Technology has indeed played a vital role in this pandemic situation. To utilise technology in the business and implement changes as per the guest’s behaviour, it has become imperative to first engage and interact with the guests. The properties started conducting online classes around food and wellness. They have also started promoting wellness at-home packages, food deliveries, and take away. The hotels have received tremendous response in these uncertain times through these efforts.”

To ensure that both leisure and business travellers trust them, they are adhering to the social distancing norms where the guests’ capacity has been redesigned as per the new norms stated by the local government. Disinfection is conducted in all the meetings areas and the frequency of touchpoints cleaning has been increased. At the



Ravi Rai

properties, they are also proactively pushing contactless payment for check-in and check-out.

To continue traditions even in the new normal, Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach, recently celebrated Diwali festival with a Ladoo making ceremony with guests, which was initiated by their culinary team. The joy of mixing boondi’s spread over thirty guests present at the property ensuring that social distancing was maintained and all the required safety precautions were followed.



The Bheemili Resort Managed by AccorHotels



Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach

Earning the confidence of guests by safely delivering luxury experiences

While staycation is an evolving trend in the COVID era, JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu, has come up with an innovative way of staycation by recreating the tropical experiences and signature iconic elements of Phuket and Thailand through the month of November. Rohit Tiwari, Director of Rooms, JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu, shares with TTJ, more on the immersive 'staycay', the challenges, present focus, their commitment to clients on safety and hygiene matters and much more.

Prashant Nayak

The re-alignment of thoughts posed as a bit of a challenge initially, for the team at JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu considering it took everyone some time to adapt to the ways of the new normal. Even now they keep reminding themselves every day of a very famous quote by J. Willard Marriott, "View the problem as an opportunity to grow" and they did exactly that, introducing home delivery of their signature delicacies via their 'Marriott on Wheels' initiative. This is a time for them to work together, seek and create new opportunities, embrace technology and be prepared for change as they adapt to the new normal.

Presently, there is a great demand for domestic travel, remote work options, family staycations, intimate celebrations and the focus for them is to deliver and create personalised experiences for these segments, whilst following stringent safety and hygiene guidelines.

For those who have been dreaming of travelling all these months, The JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu has introduced the 'Drive to Phuket' campaign throughout the month of November. Guests can enjoy the cuisine and culture of Phuket through staycations and pop-up dinners in a month-long carnival including a one-day outdoor flea market at the hotel.

"With Indians comprising one of the top outbound travellers to Phuket, the JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu's focus for the whole month



Rohit Tiwari

of November will be recreating the tropical experiences and signature iconic elements of the JW Marriott Phuket Resort & Spa to encourage domestic travellers. From the moment a guest books a stay to their check-in and check-out experience, JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu will recreate signature experiences and moments reminiscent of Phuket. Also, this unique 'staycation' will have all the elements of the original Thailand experience right from chef's special Phuket-inspired menu or making your 'Thai evening' a bit more special by lighting the traditional floating lamps in the lotus pond," shares Rohit.

At Marriott International, they have also been practicing the 'People First' approach since inception and have realised that they need to do a lot more than ever before.

They are focusing on the wellbeing of their associates via regular counselling sessions, job enhancement exercises and have partnered with New Life Solution, Inc. meQuilibrium for resilience training for employees, health plans, and help

individuals in stress management, enhance productivity, health, and wellbeing.

Regarding communication with team and stakeholders in these difficult times, Rohit says, "Consistent and transparent communication is vital during such unprecedented times. Keeping all our stakeholders like co-workers, managers, teams, and owners informed about what's happening throughout the duration of the pandemic will be the key to creating belongingness in the team. I am blessed to have a very talented team in the hotel who possess high resilience and tenacity. Our associates demonstrate tremendous commitment, flexibility, and courage while we continue to work in an unprecedented and challenging environment."

Our team on site has also been trained throughout the past months to effectively implement the processes of 'Commitment to Clean' - Marriott International's extensive program on safety and hygiene measures. Safety is our priority and our team members have been trained well to ensure all the norms are being followed.

Marriott has put together a Global Cleanliness Council that comprises in-house and external experts in the field of hospitality, epidemiology, sanitation and protective health and hygiene technology. And then of course their approach to this is their program "Commitment to Clean". Their mission is to identify and deploy scientifically supported best practices and innovations for keeping hotel associates and guests safe. A key component of this program is the Cleanliness Champion with very clearly defined responsibilities.

"We also need to collectively earn the trust of our people in the entire travel experience. We need to work towards providing accommodation which is safe and thoroughly disinfected with the usage of hospital grade chemicals and embrace the use of technology across the hotel to ensure a contactless experience. Since the inception of Marriott International, health and safety have been at the heart of Marriott's approach to hospitality. This commitment to our guests and associates continues to anchor us and shapes our decisions as we adapt to the new normal," concludes Rohit.



‘Hygiene and cleanliness will continue to be of prime focus in the new normal’

As the economy starts to perform, confidence and happiness will enable travel. As the peak declines, there will be a lot more domestic travel picking up, which will continue to happen until the skies open up and international destinations have been cleared, and possibly even after that. Rattan Keswani - Deputy Managing Director, Lemon Tree Hotels and Director, Carnation Hotels expects an uptick in domestic leisure travel, and with nearly 80 hotels across the country, they are planning several packages targeted towards staycations and great Indian getaways.

Prashant Nayak

One of the biggest challenges so far Lemon Tree Hotels has been gaining the trust of guests in terms of cleanliness and hygiene standards post the outbreak, to deal with which they have laid down a set of ‘House Rules’ at all their properties as most of their guests enquire about their sanitization and cleanliness measures, social distancing, food safety and other norms before they finalise their reservation with them.

“For this, we have partnered with Diversey for our new hygiene initiative i.e. Rest Assured. As part of this initiative, the company we have a new set of house rules and preventive measures, to be followed by guests, visitors and team members within each property, to maximise safety and hygiene. The new ‘House Rules’ help customers understand what to expect from our hotels as well as what they must do to ensure their safety e.g. masks, maintaining social distancing, washing/sanitising their hands, etc,” says Keswani.

Sanitisation, hygiene and revenue generation are their focus areas at present across all properties in India and abroad. At all their hotels, they are maintaining best-in-class hygiene standards, and their Rest Assured programme creates an environment focused on the health, hygiene, safety and wellbeing of people.

Moreover, they are looking into the revenue-generating opportunities that will help them bounce back in the new normal. Keswani shares, “One area we have tapped into is day-use accommodation and work areas with business facilities, high-speed wi-fi, etc. for the day for transient and short-stay guests, and for those for whom it may not be convenient to work from home – whether due to personal reasons or infrastructure limitations. These days, WFH could mean

work from hotel just as much as work from home.”

Thus, they have assessed the nature of the current demand and have developed offers to suit this new demand including day use rates, Work From Hotel, Lemon Tree vouchers, seclusion packages, road trip routes, etc. their observation is that people are going through fatigue on account of the stress and lack of mobility created by the pandemic, and road trip destinations such as Goa, Manesar, Rishikesh, Jaipur, Corbett, etc. have seen a decent resurgence. Even Udaipur, as a driving destination from Gujarat, has done quite well. Guests are willing to travel to destinations easily reachable by road in the safety of their own vehicles when they know the hotel they are headed to is clean, sanitised and follow processes that keep them safe.

“Apart from this, we are focusing on the new market segments such as quarantine requirements, healthcare facilities on-premises, MSME business travel and small conferences. In the leisure segment, we expect people to take short driving holidays for which we have developed packages for all our hotels at such locations. Lemon Tree Hotels has launched ‘Trippin with Lemon Tree’ where guests can do pre-defined driving routes with family or friends. Our hotels can be booked for transit stays and/or at the final destination,” informs Keswani.

For their restaurants, they have made the ordering and payment process contactless with the QRestro app. This allows guests to scan a QR code and access the entire menu of the coffee shop/ in-room dining and select the items they



Rattan Keswani

want to order. Then the team reconfirms the order with the guest on the phone and delivers it hygienically in the defined time. Once the guest has finished his meal he can pay online with the link sent to their phone. Thus, the guests feel more reassured with this process being made contactless.

While it is imperative to be connected to your workforce and stakeholders amidst the crisis, Keswani says, “Our leadership team has engaged with teams at all hotels on a regular basis both online and offline to motivate them and ensure their physical and mental health is taken care of. Training sessions have been conducted continuously to keep all employees up to date with the revised SOPs and guests’ interaction processes. From an HR perspective, there has been no compromise with the health and safety of our employees i.e. masks, gloves, personal protective equipment, temperature checks, etc.”

Committed to serving guests the 'Karona Safe Rahona Safe' way

Lords Hotels and Resorts, a leading mid-market hotel chain with a presence in 40 cities, 11 states, and 2 countries continues offering their guests true value stays through exhilarating hospitality experiences. Pushpendra Bansal, COO - Lords Hotels and Resorts, in conversation with TTJ, shares how they are creating a confident environment in their hotels for their guests and workforce while going forward with organizing safe, successful meetings and conferences amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prashant Nayak



Pushpendra Bansal

Lords Hotels and Resorts is one of the fastest-growing hospitality chains in the mid-market segment. Since the company's inception in 2008, it has grown to be a chain of hotels spread across 11 states in India and also a presence in adjoining country Nepal.

The hotel group is committed to serving guests in a safe and hygienic environment. Their safe stay initiative 'Karona Safe Rahona Safe' is based on the guidelines of WHO, FSSAI and MHFW. The enhanced protocols include social distancing, thermal screening of each attendee, sanitisation, thermal screening of guests, Disinfectant fogging

machines are placed in indoor convention spaces and touchless sanitizer is placed near the entrance of every venue.

Extra cleaning and sanitising of public or frequent contact spaces like front desk, elevators, entrance door, and handrails, public bathrooms and seating areas are also conducted. In addition to these measures, the hotel group has also designated a COVID warrior at each hotel and a dedicated team available 24X7 for assistance.

Bansal says, "The well-being of our teammates and all who visit our properties is our highest priority, and we remain diligent in our commitment to provide a safe environment. We are closely in touch with public health authorities and are following their guidelines. We are very much focused on heightened safety of our guests and employees through our safe stay initiative Karona Safe Rahona Safe programme. The enhanced protocols include social distancing, contactless check-in, sanitisation, in-room dining, and we are also allotting room to the guest after 48 hours of the previous check-out.

hotel team to monitor the laid down protocol and new protocols. They are also in touch with the local public health authorities to receive the latest updates on rules and regulations. The hotel manager and other team members who are designated as COVID warriors ensure that all systems and procedures are followed at the micro-level.

"We are offering tailor-made staycations and workcations packages, festive sale on our brand website for leisure and business traveller. We are also concentrating on ancillary services like co-working spaces, food delivery, and facility management for offices to generate revenue," shares Bansal,



on their plans to get leisure and business travellers back to their properties.

Very recently the group has expanded its presence in the sugar bowl of Karnataka – Belgaum is officially known as Belagavi. Belgaum lies amidst the picturesque Western Ghats of Karnataka, at the foothills of the Sahyadri range and the hotel aims to promote business and tourism with True Value Hospitality.

This is the third property of Lords in South India after Bengaluru and Kurnool. The new property will be launched under the 'Eco Inn' branding and is expected to commence operations before the end of the year. It will offer forty-three well-appointed rooms, a banquet hall, a multi-cuisine restaurant, and a rooftop bar.



At Lords, they are in touch with their guests through all digital channels and guest connect programmes, as this will provide them the much need confidence to travel, celebrate at the hotels. Also, their corporate leaders regularly conduct online meeting and training with the

Expecting newer trends with major shifts

While travellers are perhaps more cautious and vigilant as they make their journeys, it really remains to be seen how the industry really re-emerges in a post-COVID world. Dinesh Dahiya, Vice President – Sales & Revenue Management, Sayaji Hotels, is positive that we shall see some new trends and changes in the future of the industry as a whole and certainly some adaptations and additional health and safety measures as have already been implemented across the industry worldwide.

Prashant Nayak

There has definitely been a shift in booking trends recently and it continues to evolve and change. Currently, at Sayaji Hotels, they are seeing an increase in bookings through their digital channels and the booking window is much shorter than in previous times for FIT bookings. Guests are making more last-minute decisions one day before arrival and sometimes even on the same day of their proposed check-in. The booking window for groups and social events has also reduced – where people would usually plan events six months or so in advance, they are seeing these bookings coming only one month in advance. These event bookings also come with social distancing set-up requests, which is very top of mind.

“We are also receiving a large number of walk-in guests, both from the immediate area of the hotel they have chosen, or those transient guests who stop on their way to another destination. In general, the pick-up



Dinesh Dahiya

trend is encouragingly healthy although now with a different dynamic in its pattern. The ‘last-minute’ mind-set is now and, I think will be a common pattern for the foreseeable future. Even though there are no cancellation charges, many guests do not want to make commitments until the eleventh hour,” says

Dinesh.

One of the key trends that have evolved is the staycation. Sayaji Hotels has seen quite an increase in the demand for staycations at many of their properties. As this segment is developing, they have created some attractive staycation offers and package inclusions to cater to this rising demand. On this, Dinesh further adds, “We’re also seeing an increase in drive-through holidays – similar to a staycation, but people are willing to drive further distances than their own city staycation, to feel as if they are really escaping for a holiday experience.”

According to Dinesh, sustainability will continue to be an important issue worldwide for the protection of the environment and he doesn’t think that COVID-19 will change that as it remains a key factor in the daily operations of hotels and businesses, but now hygiene will surely play an important role in people’s minds and their daily lives.

Aware and alert to the changing needs of customers

The ongoing battle against the pandemic has triggered several changes in the hospitality industry and has also made it critical for hoteliers to adopt new practices and technology that will instil confidence in guests. Rajneesh Malhotra, Vice President – Operations and Asset Management, Chalet Hotels, feels that the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a sea change in hotel operations, and adopting the new practices will be the way forward.

Prashant Nayak

The pandemic has prompted hoteliers to embrace fresh ideas and inspiration to cater to ever-changing consumer behaviour and perceptions. While safety continues to be of prime importance, the industry is also faced with a gamut of challenges pertaining to developing a more personalised and engaging guest experience with minimum human contact.

“At Chalet Hotels too, we have implemented robust measures with globally accepted safety standards to reinforce our commitment to safety and enhance guest confidence. We have leveraged customer-centric technology to enable contactless communication for a seamless, secure and safe experience. Our hotels are at various stages of implementation of technologies that are aimed at improving the guest experience, saving costs, and facilitating contactless/touchless services. For example, we are in the process of implementing a keyless mobile check-in option (Mobile Key) where guests can directly walk to their allotted room and can open the door by using a keyless mobile check-in app,” says Malhotra.

COVID-19 has disrupted the way the world normally functions and amidst the outbreak and uncertainty, communication has become all the more important. Frequent outreach through regular updates showcasing solidarity and unity with the stakeholders and partners is necessary especially at this point.

On this, Malhotra shares, “We have been organising regular town halls with all our employees to communicate latest on the pandemic front and the steps the company is taking to ensure health and safety of guests and associates. Our hotels too have organised counseling sessions for employees to deal with the stress induced by the current pandemic.”

In a fast-paced and rapidly changing business ecosystem, it is vital for hotels to be more guest-centric than ever before. “Our hotels are branded with leading global brands Marriott and Accor, who have industry-leading hygiene and cleanliness standards that inspire confidence amongst customers. All our hotels are strategically located in business hubs of key metro-cities and we cater



Rajneesh Malhotra

majorly to the corporate and business travelers whose primary concerns are health, hygiene and safety,” informs Malhotra.

Chalet Hotels have come up with very attractive staycation packages which have been well received by the people and they do see some traction in that segment.

Hornbill Festival 2020 to be held virtually

The Nagaland government has decided to celebrate the popular Hornbill festival virtually this year, amid the surge in COVID-19 cases in the country. In a statement issued, the department of tourism said the annual festival would be observed over audio visual media channels and social media platforms this time, and people can enjoy the tribal dance performances sitting at home.

The content for the online programme will be sourced from government archives, it said. Hornbill Festival, held every year from December 1 to 10, showcases the culture, heritage, food and customs of Naga tribes at Kisama village. Sixteen tribes come together to celebrate their traditions with colourful dance performances.



ITDC signs MOU with Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation to set up 'Centre of Excellence'

India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) Ltd, the public sector undertaking under the aegis of Ministry of Tourism (Govt. of India) and Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC), in an attempt to further enhance skilled youth in the hospitality sector, signed an MoU, on November 12, 2020, for setting up a 'Centre of Excellence' in the state.

The MOU was signed digitally by Shri G. Kamala Vardhana Rao, C&MD, ITDC and Dr. Arja Srikanth, IRTS, Special Secretary to Govt. of AP, MD&CEO, APSSDC in the presence of other senior officials from ITDC & APSSDC.

With an aim to bridge the gap in the hospitality industry, ITDC will be responsible for designing and developing courses as well as curriculum for hospitality education and providing training to students registered with APSSDC. ITDC will also provide valuable inputs to APSSDC in teaching/training methodology. As part of the MoU, ITDC will also conduct various short-term hospitality courses and online certificate courses to train the youth in required skill-set to make them industry-ready.

amã Stays & Trails expands footprint to new locations across India



Indian Hotels Company (IHCL) is expanding the presence of its amã Stays & Trails portfolio to new destinations across India. Post the recent opening of a new bungalow at Madh Island followed by one in Lonavala, the brand will soon launch new bungalows in picturesque locations across Trivandrum, Kodaikanal, Goa, Coonoor and Uttarakhand.

amã Stays & Trails is India's first branded homestay product. The premium homestay market in India is witnessing a steady growth as travellers are looking for more exclusive, unique, and immersive experiences. amã Stays & Trails gives families and groups of friends an opportunity to bond together in these beautiful private bungalows and villas in off-beat locations.

Be it the mist-laden hills of Kodaikanal; the abundant beauty of the Nilgiris in Kotagiri; a peek into Goa's lesser discovered secrets like Betul and Saipem; a tryst with the snow-clad peaks of the Himalayas at Ramgarh; or a journey through Trivandrum's architectural history in a bungalow dating back to 1911; the upcoming amã Stays & Trails bungalows will bring alive each location with unique experiences.

Egypt to announce the biggest archaeological discovery in 2020 within the next few days



At a press conference in Saqqara necropolis, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities will announce the biggest archaeological discovery in 2020 within the next few days.

The excavations of the Egyptian archaeological mission working in the Saqqara necropolis succeeded to discover new shafts filled with a huge number of intact, painted and anthropoid coffins buried inside, exceeding the number of coffins that were discovered and announced in early October. The shafts have been closed for more than 2,500 years. A number of gilded artifacts were also found, including wooden statues and coloured and gilded masks.

The Egyptian archaeological mission announced, during the past years, a number of important archaeological discoveries in Saqqara the last of which was the discovery of 59 painted coffins with mummies in good condition for top officials and priests from the 26th dynasty. This was announced in an international press conference early last October.

Enhanced experience for all arriving passengers availing the RT-PCR test facility at CSMIA

Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) has introduced an enhanced experience for passengers who have opted to undergo the RT-PCR test facility at the airport upon arrival. Passengers can avail a holistic offering of the RT-PCR test as well as specially packaged unlimited delicacies and Free Wi-Fi services while waiting for the test report.

Since the test results are provided in approximately 8 hours post the submission of the samples, the introduction of this new feature at CSMIA comes as a boon to travellers. At approximately Rs. 3900 per person, passengers can undergo the test facility upon arrival at the airport as well as unwind in an exclusive comfortable space while waiting on their test results. During this time, passengers can satisfy their hunger pangs with unlimited delicacies chosen from a specially crafted menu; the meals are served fresh during each meal service timing and hot and cold beverages are also available round the clock on request. Furthermore, passengers can also entertain themselves, while waiting, with unlimited browsing.

Vistara starts Delhi-Dehradun flights



Vistara has launched flights on the Delhi-Dehradun route, marking its entry into Uttarakhand. The full-service airline will operate three (Delhi-Dehradun) flights a week on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays.

Vinod Kannan, Chief Commercial Officer, Vistara, said, "We see Dehradun as an important addition to our network, given the nature of air traffic to and from the city which includes corporate and leisure travellers, SME owners, students, members of the civil society."

IHCL announces the opening of The Connaught – A Seleqtions Hotel in New Delhi



The Indian Hotels Company (IHCL) recently announced the opening of the Connaught, New Delhi. The Connaught presents a unique and striking design, combining the art deco charm of Connaught Place and contemporary luxe interiors. Strategically situated in New Delhi's prime area, Lutyens, The Connaught will be a part of the SeleQtions brand – a named collection of hotels and resorts.

Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, IHCL said, "The Connaught is the newest jewel in the crown of the SeleQtions portfolio. With its thoughtfully designed interiors, The Connaught reflects the best of the cultural and social milieu of the city. With the launch of The Connaught, IHCL further strengthens its presence in India's capital."

Exuding character at every corner, the hotel features 104 spaciouly designed rooms conceptualised by the globally renowned Swedish designer, Christian Lundwall, of LWA. Located in the heart of the city, The Connaught is a perfect abode for business and leisure travellers. The hotel's distinctive offerings include an all-day diner, The Hub, which takes guests on a gastronomical journey across global and local cuisines, whilst featuring some of Delhi's legendary favourites. The restaurant opens into an al-fresco dining venue, and also extends into a stylish cocktail bar that promises to be the city's most sought after watering hole. The Connaught has state-of-the-art spaces for business conferences or social gatherings, including a 2000 sq. ft. open-air terrace.

Etihad makes organisational structural changes to address the impact of COVID-19 pandemic

Etihad Airways has announced a new organisational structure that will position the business to deliver on its mandate in the wake of COVID-19 and meet the challenges of the global downturn in aviation head-on. The restructuring sees the airline continuing its transformation into a mid-sized, full-service carrier concentrating on its fleet of widebody aircraft, with a leaner, flatter and scaleable organisational structure that supports organic growth as the world returns to flying. By embedding the new structure, the airline will strengthen its focus on its core offering of safety, security, service; continue developing its industry-leading health and hygiene programme Etihad Wellness, and prioritise innovation and sustainability, which are essential to the future of the airline.

Tony Douglas, Group Chief Executive Officer, Etihad Aviation Group, said, "After our best-ever Q1 performance, none of us could have predicted the challenges that lay ahead in the remainder of this year. I'm extremely proud of the way my leadership team and the whole Etihad family have navigated the COVID-19 crisis so far, and I must express my gratitude to each member of the team



for continually proving our adaptability to the most unexpected of circumstances."

The new operational model will result in a number of changes to the executive leadership team to streamline the organisational structure. The business units within Commercial will be separated and transferred under the leadership of Mohammad Al Bulooki, Chief Operating Officer, Adam Boukadida, Chief Financial Officer, and Terry Daly, who will assume the role of Executive Director Guest Experience, Brand & Marketing.

Pride Hotels ties up with a financial firm for the 'Wedding at Pride' initiative

Pride Hotels has announced its alliance with a financial firm for the 'Wedding at Pride' initiative. When one ties the knot at The Pride Hotel, one can expect impeccable service in stunning settings where the fine craftsmanship and bespoke attention to detail is paid to every moment. The luxury hotel chain will now facilitate financial assistance to make sure dream weddings come alive- Memories will be created with grandeur and care at Pride.

The 3 key elements to a successful life event – accessibility, space and dedicated support – managing all of these within budget is the biggest plus points of Pride Hotel group. To relieve the patrons from financial stress, the Pride Hotel has tied up with a financial firm to ensure finance doesn't stop one from making their dream wedding come true. Whether one prefers idyllic hills or spirited beaches, majestic deserts or the city of love, Pride Hotels has it all covered. It

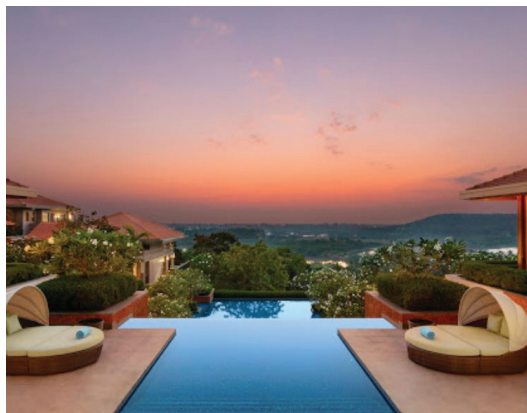


has set the stage for weddings across India by offering its marvellous venue located around the country.

Hilton expands flagship presence in India with the opening of Hilton Goa Resort

Hilton recently

announced the opening of Hilton Goa Resort under the hotel company's flagship brand, Hilton Hotels & Resorts. This opening marks



Hilton's third property in Goa. Located atop the scenic, terraced slopes of Saipem Hills, overlooking the Nerul River, the resort extends Hilton's signature hospitality and tranquil retreat to leisure and business travelers. The chic full-service resort is 34 kilometers from the Goa International Airport and is ideally located 10 minutes away from the popular Candolim and Calangute beaches. The resort is operated by Hilton and owned by Soham Leisure Ventures.

Located at Pilerne Candolim Road, Saipem Hills, Candolim, Goa, the resort offers three unique food and beverage options. Guests can relax at @Saipe, the all-day dining restaurant offering a unique menu with a modern twist and unobstructed views of the pools and river; or treat themselves to assorted artisanal coffees, sweet treats, bakes and brews at Doce, the charming coffee lounge. Alternatively, they can choose to unwind and lounge at Coco, the transformative high-octane bar and restaurant featuring a Mediterranean- inspired menu.

Round-the-clock concierge service is available for guests to customise their own experiential packages to explore the plethora of sights and landmarks of Goa. Guests could also indulge in curated experiences @YourBalcony such as wine tasting, yoga, BBQ, cocktail making and culinary masterclasses. For Guests looking for adventure, the resort offers bicycle trails, underwater escapades and luxury cruises along the backwaters of Goa.

The resort features four outdoor pools with a temperature-controlled whirlpool, a dedicated kids' pool, Fun N Frolic, an aqua-themed kids' club, soon to open full-service spa and salon and 17,600 sq ft of event space. Utmost priority is given to the standard of safety and sanitisation protocols across all areas. Hilton has launched an industry-defining standard of cleanliness and disinfection called Hilton CleanStay, which is now present across all Hilton properties across the world.

Fortune Hotels unveils Fortune Park Dalhousie

Fortune Hotels, a member of ITC's hotel group has announced the opening of its maiden property in the hill town of Dalhousie, Himachal Pradesh.



Primarily the first branded hotel in town, Fortune Park Dalhousie is the latest addition to the chain's hill resorts after Mussoorie, Mashobra, Solan, Mcleodganj and Ooty; it is Fortune Hotels' fourth alliance in the state.

Set in the lap of the mighty Himalayas, this stunning property overlooks the Pir-Panjal range adorned by a dense cover of slender pine trees, verdant greens and enchanting views of the snow-clad valley in the winters. The well-appointed rooms and suites dressed in bright vegan leather with classic wooden ceilings and contemporary décor offer exquisite views of the valley and the majestic mountains, from most rooms. The aesthetic design of the hotel complements the quaint charm of the colonial town and its rich architectural heritage

Featuring an all-day-dining restaurant- Zodiac, a plush bar- Neptune, a breath-taking Solarium- The Oak Lounge, a relaxing spa, a fully equipped gym, an activity zone and an indoor heated swimming pool offering infinite views of the valley, ensure impeccable comfort and relaxation to the discerning travellers. Additionally, the upscale hotel also encompasses a well-equipped meeting room and two state-of-the-art banquet halls embellished with modern chandeliers, ornate teak pillars and elegant décor to help guests celebrate their special occasions in style. With the capacity to host upto 200 guests, the hotel is a perfect destination for weddings, company off-sites, social events, conferences and more.

An ideal destination for family holidays, solo trips, honeymooners and adventure seekers, Dalhousie boasts of numerous activities like rafting, paragliding, trekking, nature walks and more. Just 3 km from Gandhi Chowk, the hotel is in close proximity to all the popular tourist attractions of the district namely Satdhara Falls (4 km), Kalatop Wildlife Reserve (11.6 km), Daikund Peak (13 km), Rock Garden (18 km), Khajjiar (21 km) and the Chamara Lake (28 km). Well connected by air, road and rail, the hotel is just 85 km for Pathankot, its nearest town. Fortune Park Dalhousie can also be reached from Dharamshala Airport (113 km), Jammu Airport (167 km) and Amritsar Airport (209 km) by road.

Kerala CM dedicates India's first solar-powered Miniature Train at Veli Park



Kerala Chief Minister Shri Pinarayi Vijayan inaugurated India's first solar energy-driven Miniature Railway at Veli Tourist Village on November 2, as part of a string of projects totaling Rs 60 crore to elevate the facilities at the panoramic destination to international standards.

The Chief Minister also dedicated the Urban Park and swimming pool at the eco-friendly tourist Village, located on the outskirts of the state capital where the Veli Lake meets the Arabian sea. "The eco-friendly solar-powered 2.5 km miniature railway will enable visitors to enjoy the beauty of nature. The Rs 10-crore project is the first of its kind in the country. Artificial steam spouted by the engine of the train, modeled after the vintage steam locomotive, will stir nostalgic feelings. The station house is also designed in a traditional style. The surplus energy generated by the system will be routed to the KSEB's grid," the Chief Minister said in his address via videoconference.

A tourist facilitation centre, Convention Centre and Art Cafe are also to be opened at Veli soon. The Convention Centre will have an art gallery, a digital display facility to feature major tourism and cultural centres of the state, and an open-air theatre. These world-class facilities will impart a new look to Veli.

The Tourism Minister Shri Surendran noted that the Government had allotted around Rs 120 crores for the tourism sector in one year alone. Of these, administrative sanction has been given to Rs 60-crore worth of projects for Veli itself. This showed the Government's determination to transform Veli into one of the most attractive destinations for domestic tourists. Among the projects for Veli, Rs 20 crores worth of works have been completed, and other schemes are progressing. The Tourist Facilitation Centre will be opened in January.

The Miniature Rail has all the features of a fully-equipped rail system including a tunnel, station and ticket office. The train, a joy for children especially, has three bogies that can accommodate around 45 persons on board at a time.

Sarovar Hotels and Resorts expands its portfolio in Haryana with Geeta Sarovar Portico, Panipat



Sarovar Hotels and Resorts has announced the opening of Geeta Sarovar Portico in Panipat, marking the group's farther foray into Haryana. The hotel was launched in the presence of S.P Bansal, Owner, Geeta Sarovar Portico; Ajay Bakaya, Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels and Resorts.

Spread across 4 acres of land, Geeta Sarovar Portico is an upscale and contemporary hotel offering well-appointed rooms including executive and presidential suites. Savour a delightful meal at the hotel's multi-cuisine restaurant Flavours or go for Rooftop restaurant, Sky Lounge, where guests can enjoy quality dining under the stars. To reinforce that feeling of relaxation, Geeta Sarovar Portico also offers a rooftop swimming pool.

With its resplendent interior, the hotel offers the city's biggest banquet and conferencing facility. The Imperial Banquet hall has an area of 11,000 sq. ft with a capacity of hosting very large gatherings and is perfect for weddings. The Crystal Banquet hall, spread in 3000 sq ft. is ideal for hosting a social gathering and at Regal, one can host corporate and business events. The hotel also houses the biggest parking space of accommodating over 300 vehicles in a go.

Given its strategic location, away from city's hustle and bustle, the hotel is ideal for business as well as highway travellers. Within easy driving from Delhi, it offers the perfect opportunity to explore the unique city with its historic places of interest, traditional jewellery, artifacts, and pottery. The city holds an important place in the international market for its handloom production.

Tourism Authority of Thailand celebrates Loy Krathong Festival in New Delhi

Keeping the festive spirits alive and follow the tradition, the Tourism Authority of Thailand along with the Royal Thai Embassy and Radisson Blu Plaza Airport Hotel, celebrated the Thai festival of Loy Krathong at Radisson Blu Delhi Airport hotel on October 31, 2020. It was a beautiful and most picturesque evening as several floating candles, flowers and krathongs decorated the venue showcasing Thai festivals and traditions.

Around hundred guests including diplomats, corporates, media and members of the travel fraternity were invited to celebrate the magical festival of lights where candle lit krathongs twinkled on the water creating unforgettable experiences. Guests at the event learnt the art of traditional Krathong making and decoration which they floated into the water. The event also included demonstrations of a popular Thai snack and dessert which was greatly enjoyed by the guests.

The evening was inaugurated by Thai cultural performances

followed by the traditional Loy Krathong procession that was led by Nang Noppamas who was carried on a palanquin to the pool and she invited the guests to release the candle and incense lit krathongs into the water thereby paying respect to the water goddess.



Razdan Holidays organises the first-ever 'Atal Tunnel & beyond' self-drive tour

A convoy of Delhi based twelve leading Inbound Tour Operators (DMC's) travelled together to Shingo La, Himachal Pradesh which is 5091 metres above sea level in their 4x4 vehicles to explore the newly opened route that goes all the way from Darcha to Padum via Shingo La. The road further connects to Leh.

Another objective of the self-drive tour was to experience the newly opened engineering marvel, 'Atal Tunnel'. The trip was organised by an adventure travel specialist company, Razdan Holidays and was led by its Director, Sanjay Razdan, who is also a professional car racer and cross country rally driver with over fifty podium wins under his belt.

The five-day itinerary started on October 23, 2020, and culminated on October 26, 2020, from Manali to Sissu via Atal Tunnel and further to Darcha –Shingo La and back via Keylong – Rohtang Pass – Manali

The trip was organised as a self-drive tour keeping in mind the prevailing conditions and the safety norms to be taken along with enjoying the adrenalin rush of driving in the mountains. The idea was also to educate the travel fraternity about new areas and routes which could also help in the promotion of the region.

The participants also met the

President and other office-bearers of HPTAA (Himachal Pradesh Travel Agents Association) and discussed the future of Tourism and also discussed and suggested measures about how to keep the areas in and around Manali clean and litter-free.



TBO Group diversifies into cargo trade

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered air cargo dynamics. The cargo industry has seen a rapid rise in terms of cargo volume and importance, whether in the shadow of passenger airlines or marine logistics.

TBO Group has launched TBO Cargo with its first-ever office in New Delhi, India. The company will act as a facilitator for agents to get the best prices for shipping cargo via airlines. With this amalgamation of the brand, TBO will not only be able to serve the travel agents who

are assisting in transporting cargo but will also act as a new opportunity for travel agents to tap into a new stream of business.

Ankush Nijhawan, Co-Founder of TBO Group and Managing Director, Nijhawan Group said, "With increased consumer demand, logistics and supply chain management is the need of the hour. We have an edge over advantage of being a leader in the travel industry for decades, we do see ourselves gaining a market share soon enough

to cross-sell to our travel partners and gain momentum in the cargo trade."

Acting as a freight forwarder, the company will assist in arranging commercial transportation for the cargo of other firms. At the moment, TBO Cargo will be catering to requests for only airway logistics but will diversify into ocean cargo in the long future. The company also has planned to expand to Mumbai, Ahmedabad and other major cities in India by 2021.

The economic growth of the country and globalisation are the major factors driving the cargo business. Today, the sector retains an indispensable position, with emphasis on developing countries.





10 YEARS OF IMPACT