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# TTJ Travel Trade Journal

Vol. 11 | Issue 09 | July 2021 | Pages 36 | ₹50

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



Dear Friends,

Greetings from TTJ!

Cut to July first week, the COVID-19 cases in India have started to recede and the vaccination drive is in a full swing. While States are finally opening their doors to the travellers, even far and near countries are thinking about opening their destination to the Indians, albeit fully vaccinated. However, everyone has learnt that a slow and cautious recovery is the best option in such a deadly pandemic.

While this brings confidence to our travel and tourism industry, we at TTJ as usual are keen on keeping our optimism alive. This reflects in our TTJ July 2021 issue, as we share more 'Glimmer of Hopes' through the words and thoughts of tourism stakeholders.

Also, the latest news of the major overhaul in Modi's new Cabinet is refreshing and we look forward to the new and dynamic changes at MoT and MoCA with the appointment of G. Kishan Reddy as the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and Jyotiraditya Scindia as India's new Civil Aviation Minister. Congratulations to both!

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

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

### Friends Travel

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

### Solo Travel

- Splendorous Turkey (6 Nights)  
Istanbul | Cappadocia | Antalya
- Scandinavia (7 Nights)  
Copenhagen | Aarhus | Stavanger | Bergen | Oslo | Stockholm
- Mesmerizing Central Europe (8 Nights)  
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## Belgium recognises Covishield, allows students to travel to country

**B**elgium's government has recognised the Covishield vaccine produced by the Serum Institute of India (SII) and developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University.

Arnaud Lion, Belgium's ambassador to India, said, "India comes under Category III, which means we only allow essential travel from countries under that category. Hence students will be considered under essential travel. Since July 5, 2021, we have delivered over 100 long-stay visas in Delhi and 300 of these visas in Mumbai."

Indians vaccinated with Covishield will still have to undergo an RT-PCR test in Belgium. Only after they test negative, they will be exempted from quarantine.

Recently, the Netherlands also approved Covishield for travellers. These two nations join Switzerland, Iceland, and seven European Union countries that have recognised Covishield. Austria, Germany, Slovenia, Greece, Iceland, Ireland,

Estonia, and Spain have recognised the SII-manufactured vaccine. The Estonian government said that they recognise all the vaccines approved by the Government of India.



## Heritage Aarah & Adaaran Resorts enhance guest safety with 90 per cent of staff fully vaccinated



**H**eritage Aarah and Adaaran Resorts, situated in the luscious paradise atolls in the Maldives, have announced the vaccination of 90 per cent of its ground staff at the resorts with both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. This is in line with the heightened health and safety practices adhered to as part of Aitken Spence Hotels.

The Aitken Spence Group believes that the well-being of its guests and associates is of paramount importance. Collectively, the hospitality brand has taken stringent measures to enact elevated precautionary operational protocols that address heightened health and safety, to give their guests peace of mind regarding future stays. These protocols are based on international and local health and safety guidelines and have been enhanced by in-house experts to provide guests a safe environment.

Susith Jayawickrama, Managing Director, Aitken Spence Hotels Group said, "As we continue to combat the challenges posed by the surprising intruder that has unsettled the world - COVID-19, we are inspired to make our resorts a safe haven for our guests. This optimism is carried through at all our hotels and resorts, as we welcome you back, with open arms and heartfelt smiles."

## MoCA issues quarantine guidelines for travellers visiting Andaman & Nicobar



**T**he Ministry of Civil Aviation has re-issued quarantine guidelines for those travelling to the Andaman and Nicobar islands. The rules have been implemented in order to keep fresh coronavirus infections at bay while encouraging tourism on the Indian island. According to the guidelines, all travellers flying to Andaman and Nicobar islands from the Indian mainland need to carry a negative RT-PCR test report issued from ICMR-approved labs within 48 hrs of departure.

Additionally, all passengers will be tested with a Rapid antigen test on landing at the Port Blair Airport in Andaman and Nicobar islands, and those who test positive will be sent for institutional quarantine free of cost. Such passengers can also opt for quarantine stay at identified hotels on a payment basis.

All passengers need to undergo mandatory 7-day home quarantine even if they tested negative. Meanwhile, passengers proceeding to Swaraj Dweep, Shaheed Dweep, and little Andaman need to undergo 10 days mandatory home quarantine. Failing to follow the guidelines can lead to a fine of up to ₹5,000 for each violation.



## Thailand continues to be a favourite Golf Destination for Indian Golfers: Survey



To keep track of the latest trends and mindset of the golfers, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) & Sports & Leisure Worldwide (SLW) conducted its second survey on 'Golfing in Thailand' with Golfers in India during June 21-July 5, 2021. The surveyed sample group was made up of 1001 golfers from all over India.

The survey resulted in some important facts coming to the fore. Most Golfers, a whopping 97 per cent of those surveyed, rated Thailand as one of the best-golfing destinations. Thai Hospitality, followed by a value for money and affordable luxury, were the top three key factors similar to the previous survey last year which prompts these golfers to travel to Thailand to play golf. Thailand's close proximity to India was another key factor in influencing the Indian golfers' minds in deciding Thailand as the premier destination for golf holidays.

A majority of golfers, almost 68 per cent are vaccinated and 26 per cent have taken their first dose for COVID-19 vaccination and are willing to travel to Thailand.

## Crystal River Cruises announces complete 2021 deployment



Crystal River Cruises, the World's Most Luxurious River Cruise Line, has announced its final deployment for 2021, featuring 35 voyages ranging from seven to 11 nights and exploring the historic cities, cultural treasures and UNESCO World Heritage Sites of the Rhine, Danube and Moselle rivers. Sister ships Crystal Ravel and Crystal Debussy are set to return to Europe's famed waterways on August 29 and August 30, respectively, with a focus on the line's most popular and destination-rich seven-night Rhine and Danube itineraries, as well as voyages showcasing the fairytale beauty of the Mosel Wine Region. Every 2021 river voyage is highlighted by at least two overnight stays, with many voyages offering three overnights, allowing guests to further immerse themselves in the ports' charm and history, or venture to nearby towns for broader experiences.

Plans are well underway to resume river cruising in August thanks to recent positive news from the European Union allowing entry for vaccinated passengers with all countries on Crystal River Cruises' itineraries now open for river cruising.

## Oman suspends flights from India and 23 other countries



Oman has indefinitely suspended passengers flights from 24 countries, including India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, as part of the Gulf nation's efforts to arrest the spread of the coronavirus.

The flights have been suspended until further notice, the Sultanate's official Twitter account for countering COVID-19 announced. The decision was taken as part of the country's measures to contain the coronavirus pandemic, it said.

The other countries on the list include the UK, Tunisia, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Brunei, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Ethiopia, Sudan, Tanzania, South Africa, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Guinea, Colombia, Argentina and Brazil. The ban on arrivals from some of these countries has already been in place since April 24.

## Ultima Collection announces the launch of an ultra-luxe eco estate in Cannes



Ultima Collection has announced the newest addition to its expanding portfolio, Ultima Cannes Le Grand Jardin, opening in 2022. The only private property on the island of Sainte-Marguerite, Ultima Cannes Le Grand Jardin is a historic, walled private estate that was previously home to royals such as Louis XIV and the world's elite. Like Ultima Collection's existing properties across Europe, Le Grand Jardin will feature state-of-the-art décor, facilities and the highest levels of service whilst offering a completely exclusive, secluded and once-in-a-lifetime experience for a group on the Côte d'Azur.

Famed for its unspoilt beauty and at just under two miles long, Sainte-Marguerite is the largest of four islands in the Lérins archipelago, situated about half a mile off the French Mediterranean coast. The island has attracted artists and photographers such as Picasso and Lee Miller, who often sought refuge from the mainland for their 'very own' unspoilt island retreat. The French avant-garde painter, Francis Picabia, was mesmerised by the island's extraordinary flora, fauna and light, and captured its rugged coastline in his painting L'île Sainte-Marguerite.

Exclusively accessible by boat (just 10 minutes from Cannes) or helicopter, with no cars on Sainte-Marguerite, Ultima's guests will feel as they are staying on their very own, secluded private island.



# EXPO 2020 DUBAI UAE

## 182 days of visually striking, intellectually enlightening and emotionally inspired extravaganza



▲ Sumathi Ramanathan

**Q According to you, what are the anticipated factors which can make Expo 2020 a successful one?**

Expo 2020 Dubai is the world in one place – a global experience dedicated to bringing together people, communities and nations to build bridges inspire action and deliver real-life solutions to real-world challenges. A launch pad for broadening horizons and exchanging ideas, Expo 2020 is all about innovation, collaboration and inspiration; this is the key to its ultimate success. Expo 2020 will gather more than 200 participants – including 191 countries, as well as multilateral organisations, businesses and educational establishments – for a visually striking and emotionally inspiring 182 days.

Each and every participant, partner, stakeholder and visitor is fundamental to the success of Expo 2020, as are its range of programmes and initiatives. Through Theme Weeks, participants will explore solutions to fundamental global

challenges such as climate change and biodiversity, equal access to education and healthcare, and bridging the digital divide. Visitors from across the world are invited to join the making of a new world as they explore new frontiers, embrace the opportunities of tomorrow and discover life-changing innovations that can have meaningful, positive impacts on our planet and its people.

**Q Despite restrictions on international travel, and the recent lockdowns in many parts of Europe and Asia, what is the current footfall target set for the Expo? Is it possible to achieve the pre-pandemic target thought of?**

We continue to look forward to welcoming millions of visitors from around the world to visit Expo 2020 Dubai and we have not changed our 25 million visit target. However, we are following the current global situation in relation to COVID-19 closely and will update our modelling accordingly.

Expo 2020 Dubai, the most anticipated mega event is expected to engage 200 participants from over 191 nations (including India) - multilateral organisations, businesses, and educational institutions, as well as millions of visitors making it the largest and most diverse World Expo ever. Sumathi Ramanathan, Vice President, Market Strategy & Sales, Expo 2020 Dubai, leads a team responsible for promoting the first World Expo to be held in the MEASA region, focusing on key visitor markets and leading travel verticals. In this exclusive interview with TTJ, she is happy to answer our queries and touch upon some elements that make Expo 2020 Dubai worth a visit.

**Prashant Nayak**

**Q Special necessary safety measures and protocols will be very necessary for an event of such epic proportions. What are the additional thoughts given to create a safe environment at the Expo?**

The health, safety and well-being of everyone visiting and working at Expo 2020 Dubai is our number one priority and we continue to monitor and adapt to the local and global situation. Robust steps have been implemented in line with the latest guidance from the world's leading medical, science and health experts.

These include the installation of sanitisation stations across the site, mandatory face-mask wearing and strict social-distancing regulations. During the event, Expo 2020's intelligent Smart Queue system will also reduce waiting times, giving visitors more time to explore more of Expo's incredible array of attractions. Building on the UAE's successful vaccination programme, all Expo 2020 staff have been vaccinated



and the Expo 2020 Dubai Steering Committee has encouraged all of Expo's 200+ international participants to join its free vaccination drive. We encourage all staff, participants, and visitors to continue to follow the guidance of medical professionals and the relevant authorities in the UAE.

We will continue to monitor and adjust these measures as necessary as our opening date of 1 October approaches and the situation continues to evolve.

**Q Once the ban on international commercial flights is lifted, Indian travellers will be keen to attend the event and experience Dubai in large numbers. Will there be special thoughts given to such travellers, especially from high-risk countries during the event months?**

We acknowledge the fluidity of the COVID-19 situation, and assure everyone that the health, safety and well-being of all those visiting and working at Expo 2020 Dubai remains our number one priority. We remain optimistic that global efforts to produce and distribute vaccines will be successful, and look forward to welcoming people from all over the world.

**Q Have any changes been made due to the COVID situation, such as the number of participating countries, themes and pavilions thought earlier, ongoing construction work, new ideas or developments?**

Despite the challenges of the past 18 months, our commitment to hosting an exceptional World Expo remains unchanged. Indeed, considering the impact of the global pandemic, Expo 2020's theme 'Connecting Minds, Creating the Future' is even more relevant than ever before. We strongly believe that now, more than ever, humanity needs to come together to remember what unites us, to celebrate our spirit and be inspired by the greatest examples of collaboration, innovation and cooperation from around the world.

**Q What is the current situation at the venue? What impresses you the most as of now?**

Construction on Country Pavilions will be completed this month and we are adding the final, finishing touches to the site so it is pristine and ready to welcome the world on 1 October. Last month, we welcomed 370 delegates from 173 countries who physically attended our International Participants Meeting, where we affirmed Expo's advanced state of readiness and discussed the final

preparations for one of the first events of this scale to take place since the beginning of the pandemic.

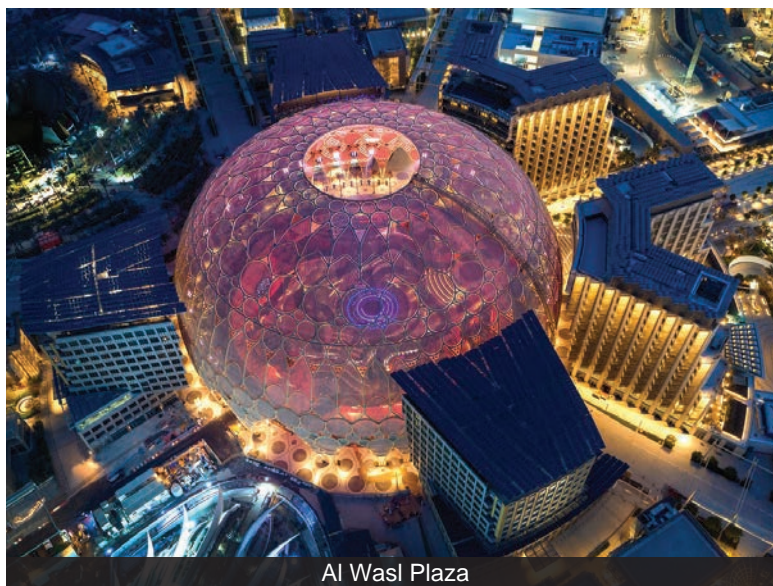
Expo 2020 is one of the world's most technologically connected sites, a city of the future powered by state-of-the-art innovations that will link every aspect of the event to ensure visitors have an unparalleled experience. We also aim to be one of the most sustainable World Expos ever – an example of innovation in action from its cutting-edge sustainable architecture to sensors that monitor energy efficiency.

We can't wait to welcome the world to our dynamic, diverse and ever-changing entertainment programme, with up to 60 live events each day, all day, for 182 days. Expo 2020 is for explorers and adventurers; for foodies and culture enthusiasts; for children and grandparents; for entrepreneurs, thought-leaders, businesses and governments; for the casual tourist, and for the curious who want to experience the future – now. Visitors can tuck in to 50-plus global cuisines from 200 F&B outlets, enjoy delicious culinary tours and explore innovative culinary tech. Expo's inspiring arts and culture programme include a series of substantial public artworks, a showcase of contemporary Emirati design and craft commissions, performances by the Firdaus Orchestra, and Al Wasl, an Emirati opera as well as a host of not-to-be-missed international acts.

**Q If Expo 2020 Dubai becomes successful, tell us about the significant impact it will have on the revival of Dubai's economy which is largely driven by sectors relying on consumer spending like tourism, luxury, and retail?**

The next World Expo is set to become one of Dubai's greatest success stories – a global experience that not only demonstrates the emirate's confidence, safety and openness to all visitors but will further boost Dubai's thriving leisure and business tourism industries.

Beyond that, Expo 2020 Dubai will be a beacon of hope for the global business



Al Wasl Plaza

community by opening new markets and new opportunities to every business visitor. With millions of visitors expected from all over the world and 200-plus international participants, partnerships will be built that will reinvigorate the economy of the UAE, the region and the world.

**Q The six-month mega-event serves as an excellent platform for 191 countries to get together. Other than business and partnerships, are there any thoughts of tackling the COVID situation jointly as every country is grappling with the same challenges?**

Expo 2020 took the decision to postpone Expo 2020 in order to help all of our International Partners and to ensure a better, safer and more seamless outcome for all participants and visitors.

As of June 2021, Expo Live, Expo 2020 Dubai's global innovation and partnership program, has backed 140 grantees from 76 countries with grants of up to US\$D 100,000 in key areas such as healthcare, agriculture, education, fintech and employment. As a part of its response to the ongoing impact of COVID-19, Expo 2020 Dubai launched a USD 1 million Emergency Relief Fund to support Expo Live innovators facing immediate financial hardship during these uncertain times. Together with people from across the world, we are creating meaningful impact through a range of programmes and initiatives.

Harnessing the platform of World Expos to spur the world into action, we will host a range of talks, seminars and workshops – including 10 Thematic Weeks and 18 International Awareness Days – fostering an exchange of ideas between a global community, and thereby unlocking bolder aspirations to shaping a better, healthier, safer, cleaner, and more equitable future.

# With Safety and Wellness assured, travel with greater peace of mind with Etihad

As the world slowly recovers and returns to flying, Etihad Airways' priority is to strengthen their offering of safety, security and service, while they revive the confidence in international travel via initiatives that aim to ease the burden for travellers. The airline is very keen to ensure that passengers have a peaceful journey, one that prioritises their health and wellbeing. Neerja Bhatia, Vice President, Indian Sub-Continent, Etihad Airways in this interaction with TTJ tells that they are focused on what lies ahead and being nimble they are well adapting to the dynamic nature of the industry that they are in.

Prashant Nayak

## Q How is the recovery of your network progressing?

We retain a pragmatic approach to network planning and our strategy remains. The work we have done over the last three years of transformation has positioned the business well. Our network strategies are central to that and as a result, we remained nimble and were able to quickly respond to meet the COVID-19 crisis, as well as fit for business moving forward.

As borders re-open, we are looking at supporting demand by gradually resuming services and expanding our global network, in line with entry and health regulations set by UAE authorities and those at the end destination.

As the national airline of the UAE, we have the advantage of the fact that two-thirds of the world's human footprint is within a six-hour flight of Abu Dhabi. We are currently operating to 60 worldwide destinations across Europe, Middle East & Africa, North America, Asia & Australia, as well as the Indian sub-continent.

## Q In the fight for survival, what are the current issues your airline is putting more emphasis on?

Etihad will continue its transformation into a mid-sized, full-service carrier concentrating on its fleet of wide-body aircraft, with a leaner, flatter and scalable organisational structure that supports organic growth as the world returns to flying.

Last year saw us launch Etihad Wellness, a comprehensive health and hygiene programme, building on the stringent measures already put in place to deal with COVID-19, and which is now a major component of the airline's long-term customer strategy. The launch of the programme was championed by the introduction of specially trained Wellness Ambassadors, a first in the industry,



who provide essential travel health information and care online via webchat, at Abu Dhabi International Airport, and in-flight, so guests can fly with greater peace of mind.

The global response to many aspects of the programme, including the game-changing Wellness Ambassadors and wide-ranging travel health and hygiene protocols, has been overwhelmingly positive. The airline is taking the opportunity to develop Etihad Wellness as a key differentiator for customers when purchasing a premium product that can guarantee them genuine care and effective health and safety measures, and deliver a world-leading service and hospitality offering.

## Q With travellers fearing to fly in the present scenario, what can be done to improve aviation credentials? Do you remain optimistic about aviation's long-term future?

Travelling internationally in a post-pandemic world is a different experience and we fully understand any apprehensions guests may have. The team at Etihad has gone above

and beyond to ensure we prioritise the health and wellness of our guests and employees. In February this year, Etihad became the first airline in the world with 100 per cent of its operating pilots and cabin crew vaccinated.

We launched 'Etihad Wellness' last year, an expanded and comprehensive health and hygiene programme that builds on the stringent measures already put in place by the airline to deal with COVID-19. This was championed by the introduction of specially trained Etihad Wellness Ambassadors, yet another industry-first initiative by us. Present on every flight, on ground at Abu Dhabi International Airport and available 24/7 via live webchat, this specially trained team is here to provide essential travel health information and care so guests can fly with greater peace of mind.

If any guest is diagnosed with COVID-19 during their trip, they won't have to worry about medical expenses or quarantine costs when they fly with Etihad. The insurance is automatically effective from the first flight outside the guest's home country and is valid for 31 days, or upon return to their home



country if earlier. More importantly, Etihad remains the first and only airline in the world that requires 100 per cent of its passengers to show a negative PCR test before departure and on arrival in Abu Dhabi. We want to ensure travellers feel safe knowing every other guest flying with us has tested negative for COVID-19.

All these initiatives have consolidated the airline's position as an industry leader in its response to the pandemic and in keeping its employees and travellers safe. While businesses and industries across the globe have been hard hit by the pandemic, going forward, I believe our ability to remain nimble and adapt to the most unexpected of circumstances will support us in the long run.

**Q Any development at your organisation or onboard your aircrafts that you would like to share?**

Although the past year has been challenging, the impact of this pandemic will not deter our commitment to India, a country that Etihad has been serving for sixteen years now. We are ready to resume operations to key Indian gateways as soon as current travel restrictions are lifted, offering seamless connectivity to and convenient transfers via our home,

Abu Dhabi. We are prepared for when international travel from the country gradually resumes, and our top priority remains the safety and wellness of our guests and employees. To that end, we have introduced several measures for guests to travel with greater peace of mind with Etihad.

## 100 per cent of Etihad's crew onboard has been vaccinated

In February this year, Etihad became the first airline in the world with all its operating pilots and cabin crew vaccinated to help curb the spread of COVID-19 and give passengers' added assurance of safety. This has consolidated the airline's position as an industry leader in its response to the pandemic and in keeping its employees and travellers safe.

## Validity of Etihad's global wellness cover has been extended

If any guest is diagnosed with COVID-19 during their trip, they won't have to worry about medical expenses or quarantine costs when they fly with us. We have introduced a global COVID-19 wellness insurance as part of our health and hygiene programme, Etihad Wellness, which is included with every Etihad ticket up to 31 September 2021.

## Tech and digital-first solutions for a seamless journey

There has been an accelerated growth in digitising experiences and ensuring contactless travel for guests, with their safety and wellness in mind. We have been working with a variety of different companies, some within the industry, and some outside of it, to develop the technology required for a global health certification system. Most recently, Etihad has partnered with the International Air Transport Association to launch the IATA Travel Pass for its guests. This offering, currently under trial, will help passengers easily and securely manage their travel in line with government requirements for COVID-19 tests or vaccines.

## A dedicated Wellness Ambassador on every flight

Etihad has introduced specially trained Wellness Ambassadors, a first in the industry, to provide essential travel health information and care. They are available 24/7 pre-departure, at Abu Dhabi International Airport and on board every flight to offer reassurance by sharing advice on travel wellbeing and details of the health and sanitisation measures being implemented throughout the guest's journey.

## Prince Air, India's first subscription-based airline set to launch soon

Prince Air, a New Delhi-based start-up, is offering a one-of-a-kind subscription-based airline service for unlimited travel on its private jets. With a monthly membership, travellers can fly between major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru at a fraction of usual business class fares.

Team TTJ

Major metros of India have seen a great demand for travel over the past few years and the COVID-19 pandemic made it more evident after the country witnessed an abnormal need for private charters as scheduled commercial airlines were grounded.

Prince Air is designed to offer its services to patrons for a fraction of the usual cost—making its member travel affordable and accessible to everyone. Its service is also faster and more efficient, by cutting down the time spent at airports. That means a round trip flight from Delhi to Mumbai and back would save at least three hours by Prince Air.

Prince Air's Founder, Sanket Raj Singh said, "Passengers subscribing to this new model will be able to enjoy a privileged experience, far different from the regular check-ins we have

to go through at airports. It will be similar to owning your own private jet, an experience that will make you feel special."

Private aviation is still a very immature market in India. That means until now, only HNIs and VIPs could afford the price tag attached to a private jet or business class in India. "Earlier our plans were to introduce Bombardier and Embraer jets. That was then, but now we thought of getting a bigger aircraft like an Airbus A-320 or A-321, comprising complete business class. Instead of having 180 to 220 economy seats per aircraft, we would only have 90-100 Business/First-Class seats—giving our members more space and comfort, all while travelling at a budgeted price," assures Singh.

Unlike other airlines where passengers arrive at the airport about two to three hours before departure, those flying on



Prince Air can arrive only half an hour before departure. Passengers will also have a dedicated boarding gate, and can even arrange a car to exit the airport upon arriving at their destination.

Perhaps the most important question for many out there is how much this service will cost. Prince Air plans on offering a monthly subscription for ₹54,500, giving passenger's unlimited flights across its network. For comparison, a round trip from Delhi to Bengaluru or Mumbai in business will set back travellers anywhere from ₹36,000 to ₹38,000 each.

The Prince Air's experience should be ready for passengers in about six to eight months. It would be interesting to see how it fares among Indian travellers. The company has already started to pre-sell memberships and targets around 10,000-12,000 members in India.



# “We believe that it is the collective responsibility of the airline and its customers to make air travel safer”

Just when the market had entered a phase of recovery from an unusually difficult last year, the impact of the second wave of COVID-19 pushed it back. Nonetheless, at Vistara, they are operating most of their pre-COVID-19 domestic network, with 27 destinations including key big-city routes such as Bengaluru, Delhi, and Mumbai. They are now observing a gradual return of traffic as the situation has started to stabilise.

In this interview, Vinod Kannan, Chief Commercial Officer, Vistara, speaks to TTJ about the airline's recent developments.

**Rachita Sehgal**



◀ Vinod Kannan

Vistara has been fortunate to have been able to expand its international network during the pandemic, albeit with limitations and as part of 'air bubble' agreements. These operations have not only helped them introduce the airline in markets that were already part of their expansion plans, but also helped them to make inroads into new geographies, paving way for a strong foothold for Vistara in global aviation. During this period, they expanded their network to eight international destinations, including London Heathrow, Dhaka, Dubai, Doha, Frankfurt, Sharjah, Malé, and Tokyo.

“The travel and hospitality industry is clearly going through the toughest phase in its history and the second wave of coronavirus has made it even worse. At Vistara, our focus has been on staying nimble in our approach to be able to adapt to the continuously evolving situation. Suspension of operations for two months during the nationwide lockdown, which was followed by a long period of softened demand and the more recent, second wave of COVID-19 has put immense financial stress on the aviation sector. The volatile situation has also led to overall low confidence in air travel,” says Vinod.

In response, the airline continues to work towards achieving and maintaining a lean cost structure while exploring newer avenues to supplement its earnings. To this end, they have also been leveraging opportunities such as commercial cargo and charter flights, and also introduced other ancillary services, such as Gate-to-Gate and book an extra seat, in their effort to generate additional revenue.

Vinod adds, “We have further increased focus on safety and hygiene throughout the customer journey and are actively communicating about it through our campaign #FlyingFeelSafeAgain. We also introduced #FlyerCODE that seeks to appeal to customers to be Careful, Observant, Distanced, and Empathetic, whenever they fly. We believe these small actions will influence positive behavioural changes in travellers and will make them more considerate and disciplined flyers.”

At Vistara, despite the challenges of the pandemic, they have managed to protect jobs of all their employees, setting a good example. Furthermore, they have always taken calculated and well-planned steps while ramping up operations. All these aspects add up to make Vistara the employer of choice for many and has given them the confidence that they will be able to scale up when demand is favourable.

“At Vistara, we have taken various measures to ensure a safe flying experience for customers across all critical touchpoints. In line with COVID-19 travel guidelines and social distancing norms, we incorporated a touchless check-in and arrival experience for all passengers while ensuring row-wise staggered boarding and de-boarding of the aircraft. Vistara kept a sharp focus on leveraging biometric technology for a seamless customer experience. Interactions between cabin crew and passengers have also been minimised to ensure maximum safety and social distancing,” assures Vinod.

“We believe that it is the collective responsibility of the airline and its customers to make air travel safer. Vistara's #FlyingFeelsSafeAgain

campaign focused on communicating safe travel including regularly sanitising the aircraft, following all SOPs at every step of the customers' journey, and deploying touchless processes to reduce physical contact, etc. As a natural next step, we introduced the #FlyerCODE campaign through which we request the customers to be Careful, Observant, Distanced, and Empathetic, whenever they fly,” further shares Vinod.

Recognising the crucial role of vaccination in the battle against COVID-19, the airline took several initiatives and managed to get almost 100 percent of their staff vaccinated with at least the first dose. Vistara was also the first airline in India to operate flights with fully vaccinated cabin crew and pilots. With the authorities focusing on vaccination drives across the country on a war footing they are hopeful that the demand for air travel will return progressively.

Vistara has also been proactive at honing opportunities in the face of adversities while focusing on consistent enhancement of the experience they offer to their customers. “For Club Vistara members, we have digitised many transactions with the objective to reduce manual intervention. Also, since people are unable to travel due to complications around COVID-19, we extended the validity of CV points and tier status for all members. We have also enabled our customers to use a combination of their CV points and cash to make bookings which we have been getting an encouraging response for. We also introduced an innovative feature for CV members which allows them to 'buy CV points' whenever required. concludes Vinod.



# Indigo: finding opportunities, awaiting favourable tailwinds



▲ Willy Boulter

IndiGo has been one of the innovative airlines not just in India but also globally. They always find new approaches to combat difficult situations. Like the COVID-induced lockdown posed a challenge for their business but timely powering cargo operations turned out to be an opportunity for the CarGo arm. Moreover, Willy Boulter, Chief Commercial Officer, IndiGo, is quite optimistic of the revival of the aviation sector very soon and this will be due to the travel demand, fuelled by passenger confidence in air travel.

Prashant Nayak

At IndiGo, they witnessed a strong recovery in February 2021 as they achieved 80 per cent of their pre-COVID levels. They have also seen that air traffic is strongly correlated to the number of COVID cases. February was the best-performing month for IndiGo since the pandemic hit, with passenger numbers rising to as high as 180,000 a day. However, they all are aware that the second wave did impact overall traffic, with a rock bottom in mid-May, and the traffic getting better as COVID cases are reducing. Overall, they believe that they will reach the February levels by end of this year and hopefully a full recovery by next year, contingent on the opening of international borders.

"In the domestic front, we had announced opening 7 regional stations to enhance our domestic connectivity. For now, it's Leh, Agra, Darbhanga, Kurnool, Bareilly, Durgapur and Rajkot. We continuously explore the new markets and opportunities these markets provide for and accordingly decide about adding new destinations and routes," tells Boulter.

However, the pandemic has given them the opportunity to look at new ways of doing business. They always come up with new ways to combat difficult situations. They entered the crisis with no freighters but deployed

around 10 A320/321 passenger aircraft for CarGo operations as their 'CarGo-in-cabin' charters. For the fiscal year 2021, their cargo revenue increased by 9.6 per cent as compared to the previous year. This has really supported them during this pandemic period when their operations have been severely impacted.

Indigo has also initiated a freighter programme and is in the process of sourcing 4 A321XLR aircraft. Boulter shares more, "The A321XLR – Passenger-to-Freighter conversion is the most efficient narrow-bodied freighter available, offering 24 container positions and supporting a payload of up to 27 tonnes. The delivery of our first freighter is expected in the first half of CY2022. Our investment in the Freight Programme will help strengthen our product and services in the segment, and not only accelerate our own business recovery but will also be a strong engine of economic growth for the country."

Additionally, to prepare themselves for the upcoming 3rd wave (if at all it arrives), they are building a war chest through Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP). They have recently got approval to raise ₹3000 crores through the QIP route, to keep their balance sheet stronger, which now they believe is the need of the hour.

While speaking about the aviation industry losing key job skills and its overall appeal to jobseekers, Boulter

says, "It would not be apt to say that the industry would lose its appeal for jobseekers as we are optimistic that once the situation normalises, which definitely will very soon, there will be demand in the industry for varied jobseekers. Aviation as a career has always been fascinating and challenging, which will continue to be the same. Moreover, we are proud of the fact that the aviation industry has been at the forefront when the country needed them, and our employees have worked relentlessly as frontline workers. This makes us optimistic that however challenging the current situation may be, the aviation industry will always be looked upon as one of the ideal careers for many aspirers even in future."

Going on, there has been a positive response from travellers since Indigo restarted their flights. The overall travel demand has shown consistent growth owing to returning customer confidence till the 2nd wave had hit them. "The fact is that air travel is the safest mode of travel in times of pandemic. People are travelling for VFR besides essential travel. However, the encouraging aspect right now is that we have seen demand recovering in the month of June. On the back of increasing customer confidence in air travel and steady growth in passenger numbers, we are bullish that demand will further grow with the increase in capacity across our network," assures Boulter.



# flybig, betting on travel demand from smaller cities to grow its business



▲ Gaurav Rathore

Partnering with Central and State governments to leverage initiatives such as the RCS under the government's UDAN project, India's newest airline, 'flybig' endeavours to be the development platform for the region in which it operates. Excerpts from an interview with Gaurav Rathore, Chief Commercial Officer, flybig.

Manisha Patel

## Q What was the whole idea and purpose behind formulating flybig?

Travel demand from smaller cities has grown in few years, therefore our idea was to establish air connectivity in tier-2 and tier-3 cities to promote local travel via air. Captain Sanjay aspired to develop the best regional network within the regions we operate. With a strategy to keep costs low, optimize the number of staff per aircraft and together with the support from the Government under existing frameworks like UDAN, we have taken to the sky. Regional routes have a lot of potential in terms of tourism, jobs, and business opportunities and we have taken the initiative to provide direct air connectivity to these underserved areas to stimulate development. We started with Central India with our hub at Indore, expanded to northeast India, where we are seeing a positive response from flyers even when the travel is slow due to the pandemic. We will be expanding our operations to other parts of India as things return to normalcy.

## Q Can you give insights on the current operations and aircrafts involved?

flybig has been awarded 20 routes under the Government of India's UDAN4, Regional Connectivity Scheme, out of which 4 are in Central India and 16 in the Northeast. We have operationalised 50 percent of the routes in Northeast India and services on other routes will commence in the next 4-6 months. We are operating our flights through our hubs in Indore and Guwahati. We had direct flights for Ahmedabad, Bhopal, and Raipur from Indore, which have been deferred for a couple of months due to the lockdown. In Northeast, we launched the operations to Rupsi from

Kolkata and Guwahati in May this year; connected Guwahati - Pasighat route along with beginning first direct flights between Agartala and Dibrugarh. Our operations from Indore will re-start soon with new fleet inductions plans.

## Q What are your future plans on extending the operations and aircraft acquisitions?

In the Northeast region, we are looking to operationalize our Aijwal - Tezpur route under the UDAN RCS scheme. Guwahati - Tezu and Shillong - Pasighat will be the next set of our expansion plan that will become operational within 2-3 months. In Central India, we will be expanding the operations in Indore- Gondia and Gondia-Hyderabad route. To keep up with our current commitment, we would need at least 5 aircrafts out of our hubs to accomplish the requirements of the awarded routes with at least a daily frequency. This process will be completed in the coming months with factoring in the existing demand as well.

## Q Your airline has recently started operating in North East India. How viable or potential is this region for your operations?

There are challenges in the Northeast as a region when it comes to connectivity, road connections are tricky due to the terrain and commute via rail takes a much longer time to reach a specific destination. Therefore, air connectivity becomes the ideal connectivity solution for this region. A large network has to be built in a period of time to establish air connectivity in the required cities. We are in consultation with the State Governments and authorities responsible for civil aviation

development in the northeast and with their support our vision to provide air connectivity in all the regional areas will become a reality.

## Q What gives you cause for optimism in these difficult times?

When Rupsi airport welcomed the first flight after 38 years, there was apprehension amongst the travel fraternity whether this will be a sustainable route. flybig had entered the northeast market with Kolkata - Rupsi - Guwahati flight path during the pandemic, so even travel agents were quite sceptical about the commercial viability. To everyone's surprise, we have received an amazing response from flyers in Northeast India and have seen passenger numbers increasing with each passing day. People have travelled for recreation, business and essential requirement. This route has seen a record growth in just two months of its operation. This has been the biggest motivation for us, especially in these challenging times as our entire business revolves around our flyers.

## Q In your honest opinion, what do you anticipate for the future of the aviation industry in India by the end of the year 2022?

Though travel has started to pick up now, it is predicted by analysts that business travel will only reach 2019 levels by 2023. However, travel between tier 2 and 3 cities, leisure, and VFR travel is expected to bounce back faster. Our focus from the beginning has been on establishing air connectivity in underserved areas because connectivity in these regions have become more important than ever, post this pandemic. We are prepared with our growth strategy for all the possible situations that we see in the coming months.





# Phuket by the Beach

**Phuket**, one of Thailand's most loved destinations, located in Southern Thailand, is often referred to as the 'Pearl of the Andaman'. It is Thailand's largest Island located 867 kilometers south of Bangkok. Being a big island, Phuket is surrounded by many magnificent beaches and natural vistas. Some of the must-visit beaches are:

**Patong Beach** is the most famous beach in Phuket with a wide variety of activities and nightlife. The area around this beach hosts the main tourist resorts on the island, and it has plenty of beach activities and vendors.

**Racha Islands** (or Raya Islands) are known as some of the best diving and snorkeling destinations in Thailand. Racha Noi is uninhabited while Racha Yai has several bungalows and resorts.

some excellent hotels with direct beach access. Phuket Fantasea, a Thai Cultural Theme Park, is on this beach.

**Bangtao Beach** is located halfway between Phuket International Airport and the Patong area with a beautiful stretch of sand. This beach has become the home of the famous Laguna Phuket Luxury Resorts.

**Nai Yang Beach** combined with Mai Khao Beach to the north is the longest stretch of sandy beach on the island. There are great swimming and snorkeling spots along the beach with access to Phuket Campground and Sirinat National Park.

**Mai Khao Beach** is part of Sirinat National Park, right where Nai Yang Beach ends. Many excellent five-star resorts are located along this beach.

Some of the other beaches worth mentioning are Layan Beach on the west coast of Phuket, Tri Trang beach near Patong Beach and Rawai Beach which is at the southernmost tip of Phuket.

For those who love nature, along with beaches, viewpoints in Phuket are also amazing. Phromthep Cape is perhaps one of Phuket's most important landmarks and most popular. Karon Viewpoint, Khao Rang, Black Rock. Krating Cape (Laem Krating) are full of magical discoveries.

**Karon Beach** is one of the longest beaches in Phuket. The southern end is close to Kata Beach, where you can enjoy many beach activities like water sports, beach volleyball, etc. It is a more serene and less crowded option to the nearby popular Patong beach.

**Kamala Beach** is a popular destination for families, a beautiful long beach with clear waters during the high season. It features a fair amount of beach restaurants and





## TOP 10

TURESPAÑA



# Reasons for Spain as MICE Destination

Spain isn't just the second most popular tourist destination in the world; it is also a leader in hosting meetings, incentives and events. Spain is ranked fourth in the world for hosting the most international meetings and is the only country with two cities in the Top 5. In Spain, you'll find extraordinary infrastructure, including unique venues with a surprising location, history, environment and gastronomic options. These are some of the reasons for choosing Spain as a MICE destination.



## A leading tourism destination

Travellers to Spain are taken in by the gorgeous vistas, the glorious mountain ranges, the warm Mediterranean waters, the historical cathedrals and of course, the delicious food. There's much to see here, from the scenic coastlines, interesting landscapes to the rich culture, and it's no wonder then that tourists want to come here, again and again.

As a MICE destination, Spain is a country equipped for large-

scale events, with all the attributes of being the world's second favourite tourism brand. Spain has over 16,000 hotels and a network of nearly 100 Paradores: unique accommodation in castles, monasteries and palaces, known for their excellence and their uniqueness as venues for business events.

## Fantastic transport infrastructure

In total, Spain has over 30 international airports, seven major cruise ports and around 3,000 kilometres of high-speed railway. The country has Europe's largest road and motorway network and excellent public transport systems in all its large cities.

## Art is part of our identity

Art can be seen in the monumental cathedrals of Burgos, Seville, León, and in many more locations. The stunning Alhambra palace, the Art Nouveau architecture of Barcelona, the picturesque historic centre of Seville, the futuristic buildings of Valencia and Bilbao are also rich in art. Also, museums like the Prado, is considered by many to be the world's greatest art gallery. The Madrid's Art Walk, the museums and galleries of Málaga, the variety of Barcelona and the list goes on. There are over 1,500 museums to choose from.

## World Heritage culture

Spain is the country with the third largest number of UNESCO World Heritage sites. It boasts 15 World Heritage Cities, with historic city centres and monumental ensembles







worth travelling to see. And our famous fiestas, such as Las Fallas in Valencia or the Courtyards Festival of Cordoba, and traditions like Flamenco, all feature on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

## A place in the sun

Around 3,000 hours of sun a year make Spain a country full of light. The climate is pleasant all year long, and this is a country to enjoy life outdoors, especially in spring and autumn, when the temperature is mild all day. And in the Canary Islands every day is like spring, with average annual temperatures around 23°C.



## A healthy cuisine, full of flavour

Spain is a champion of the Mediterranean diet, recognised by UNESCO as part of the world's Intangible Cultural Heritage, and its cuisine is famous for the ever-popular tapas. A great way to enjoy them is in the traditional markets restored and remodelled as gourmet centres in many cities. And there are famous names in Spanish avant-garde cooking, such as the Roca brothers, Aduriz, Ruscalleda, Arzak and many more: Spain has a total of over 230 Michelin stars and seven restaurants featured in the prestigious 50 Best list.

## A unique lifestyle

Maybe it's because of the good weather, the sunshine or their healthy Mediterranean diet, but Spaniards are famous for their cheerful, relaxed lifestyle. That might be why Spain has one of the highest life expectancy rates in the world (83 years) and is one of the 20 countries with the best quality of life, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

## A wide range of unique locations for meetings

Castles, wineries, palaces, former monasteries, museums and theatres are a few of the most unusual options for holding an event to remember in Spain. There is a very wide range of venues in almost all destinations, as well as over 40 Conference Centres and many meeting rooms, auditoriums and multi-purpose facilities all over Spain.

## Thousands of options for a unique programme

Thanks to its culture, traditions, cuisine and sports events, in Spain you can design a very special social programme to accompany a business trip. From themed, guided or dramatised tours of museums, heritage sites or cities, to hands-on experiences in flamenco studios, cooking classes, boat excursions, or the chance to see Real Madrid or FC Barcelona play football. The options for creating memorable moments are almost endless.

## Extensive MICE professional network

All destinations in Spain have departments specialising in the meetings and events segment, to be found in the Spain Convention Bureau network, and the professionals in the different elements making up the MICE value chain form part of the associations of the MICE Forum. Contacting them is the quickest and most efficient way to organise an event and get the added value of working with experienced local service providers, who organise over 22,000 business events a year for nearly four million participants.

Your Safety is of Paramount Importance, refer to Travel Safe Spain: <https://travelsafe.spain.info/en/>





# “We wish to remain and exist as a **Top of the Mind** destination in the market”



▲ Dr. R. Sigit Witjaksono

Tourism in Indonesia is waiting for the COVID-19 situation to decline and be more conducive for travel. Dr. R. Sigit Witjaksono, Director of Tourism Marketing for East, South and Central Asia Region, Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, Republic of Indonesia, speaks to TTJ, as he assures us that important steps have been taken by the Indonesian government to restore the global trust in Indonesian tourism and it to be the ‘Top of the Mind’ destination the world over.

Prashant Nayak

For Indonesian Tourism, India has long been a very important source market. In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the total number of Indian visitors was 657,300, an increase of 10.35 per cent compared to the previous year. With a large number of visitors from India, they intend to continue to work on the Indian market. But certainly, Indonesia and India must continue the cooperation so that international borders can be opened for both countries. Meanwhile, much like India, Indonesia has also been working very hard to control the pandemic.

Acknowledging the same, Dr. Witjaksono says, “The Minister of

Tourism and Creative Economy/Head of the Tourism and Creative Economy Agency, Sandiaga Salahuddin Uno had also held a meeting with the Indian Ambassador to Indonesia, Manoj Kumar Bharti. During the meeting, the two of them discussed various future program plans, especially opportunities to increase cooperation in the tourism sector and the post-pandemic creative economy. The plan to reopen Bali with direct flights from India was also discussed. This confirms that India is and will still be a very important market for Indonesia.”

With the collaborations and synergy among all related stakeholders, government, business/industry, academic, community, and media,

authorities at Indonesian tourism are quite confident that they can successfully get through this difficult situation because of the pandemic and move forward for the prospective future in the tourism and the creative economy sector. Thus far, the Indonesian government has been focusing on the readiness of the destination and the situation is being closely monitored and is being adjusted and updated accordingly.

“Since 2020, the government and the people of the Republic of Indonesia in many regions/capital cities of all the provinces have been making adequate effort to ensure the readiness of destinations, to welcome visitors, with the implementation of CHSE (cleanliness, health, safety & environmental sustainability). This effort will also be continued, in the ensuing second semester of 2021, in many other cities all around the country covering hotels, restaurants, tourist attractions, souvenir shops, etc., so that it would in turn build and strengthen the confidence of the tourists to visit Indonesia when the condition is again conducive for international travel,” says Dr. Witjaksono.

More importantly, since March 2021, the COVID-19 vaccination implementation program for the tourism industry and the creative economy in Indonesia has already begun. This vaccination step is a part of the government’s realization and initiative to encourage the recovery of the tourism and creative economy sector post the COVID-19 pandemic.

In many places/areas, the government, supported by the stakeholders, have





also prepared the availability of health facilities, including hospitals & PCR / swab laboratories as well as increasing the capacity of testing, tracing and tracking. And to remain present and exist as a 'Top of the Mind' destination in the market, they keep conducting online digital promotions using the hashtag '#InDonesiaCare #IDoCare' and also focusing on online webinar/hybrid activities, amongst others, to update the travellers and the travel industry regarding the readiness of destinations.

Speaking about how Indonesia is working to offer safe travel and environment in both leisure and MICE segments, Dr. Witjaksono, shares, "Travel Corridor Arrangement (TCA) or travel bubble in Bali, Bintan, and Batam (3B) hopefully will be a pilot project of preparing to bring international visitors to Indonesia. Currently, we continue to carry out monitoring and evaluation at 3B, so that it is ready to become a top-of-the-drawer destination visited by international guests when the condition

is conducive again for travel. Everything is being pre-conditioned: safe routes, safe zones, transportation, referral hospitals, and mitigation provisions. Insurance for visitors is also a subject of discussion because this will make visitors safe and comfortable. We have been coordinating and preparing everything from time to time together with related Ministries/Agencies (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Immigration, National Task Force for COVID-19, etc, provincial/local governments and related industries."

For the MICE Segment, in Indonesia, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has made a guidebook/guideline on health protocols (CHSE) for the implementation of MICE activities. The guidebook received appreciation at the international event, Bali Democracy Forum December 2020. When travel resumes, hopefully, international MICE events and activities in Indonesia will be carried out and can be run safely according to health protocols.

"Bali, Bintan, and Batam will be a pilot project of preparing to bring back international visitors to Indonesia. We will continue to promote Bali because Bali remains the main destination for Indian visitors. As many as 40 per cent of Indian visitors come to Bali for MICE, weddings and honeymoons and this is what we will continue to work on, as well as other potential segments for adventure, leisure, etc," says Dr. Witjaksono confidentially.

However, for Indonesian tourism, the important thing is that they have to make tourists feel comfortable and safe. The new normal condition with the implementation of CHSE protocol is a must/mandatory for future trip activities. The authorities would like to ensure that the safety and health of the people travelling to their country is one of their utmost objectives. In this regard, they have made adequate arrangements and implemented their plans and strategies with adaptation, innovation and collaboration to achieve their goal.

## Mauritius: see you in paradise soon

The Mauritian Government along with all stakeholders and the island's population, have joined hands and are taking all possible measures to welcome back visitors to the safe island of Mauritius. Arvind Bundhun, Director–Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, is optimistic of safety measures and COVID-19 protocols in his destination which will enable a prompt and safe restart of the Mauritius tourism industry.

**Sonika Bohra**

Mauritius is ranked as one of the top countries in the world for its response to the COVID-19 pandemic and they have prioritised their tourism staff during their vaccine rollout to keep their visitors as safe as possible.

Bundhun says, "We are opening our island in two phases, starting 15th July, so that we can offer you safe travel and environment from the time you enter Mauritius. We will follow all safety protocols, starting from the airport to transport, hotels, restaurants, attractions, et al, so that your trip to Mauritius remains safe and memorable."

Bundhun continues, "We know that Indians love to travel and they are bound to their homes due to the

pandemic, but they are already yearning to travel as soon as things are back to normal. Hence, there is already a built-up demand for a much-needed break from the current monotony. Mauritius, with its azure lagoons, pristine beaches and many other activities/attractions, would most certainly beckon the Indian travellers to refresh and rejuvenate themselves."

The ongoing rapid inoculation drive in Mauritius and India is expected to ensure that a majority of the population would be vaccinated and protected against COVID-19, which would enable them to travel as soon as the spread of the pandemic is minimised.

"Also, meanwhile, discussing with all our trade partners in India, we found out that a significant section of Indians



▲ Arvind Bundhun

are eager to travel to Mauritius when the restrictions are eased. Hence, we are quite optimistic of the revival of substantial tourist footfalls in Mauritius," assures Bundhun.

Mauritius has long been known as a honeymoon destination. However, they have a lot more to offer — affordable luxury, MICE including weddings, adventure sports, international-level golf courses, filming facilities and more. Thus, MTPA is promoting the island to welcome all segments of tourists.



# Kenya focused on diverse tourism products and selling signature experiences to global visitors



▲ Dr. Betty Radier

Kenya remains optimistic as they continue to ensure the safety of both their citizens and travellers through the vaccine rollout, safeguarding the country through the implementation of health and safety protocols for all to abide by, air bubble agreements as well as border and air space closures as mitigation and containment measures. KTB also continues to monitor travel sentiment to ensure the destination remains suited to emerging travel trends and preferences through product developments and diversifications as well as brand communication enhancements that aim to resonate with the target audience and the present and ever-changing business environment.

Discussing being optimistic in these difficult times Dr. Betty feels that there are many factors to this positivity. "Over the COVID-19 crisis period, Kenya has continued to enhance the visitor experience through enhanced tourism products - 'Magical Kenya Signature Experiences' (MKSE), improved wildlife conservation, enhanced infrastructure, acceleration of vaccination against COVID-19, country's exposure through international events like WRC, MKO, Olympics for destination awareness and enhanced destination equity. The ongoing vaccination of hospitality workers, adherence to health protocols in our tourism facilities continues to reassure us. Kenya is also set to host key international sporting events including IAAF under 20, for the month of August and will attract the participation of over 60 countries from across the globe," says Dr. Betty.

Kenya is blessed with many tourism offerings that excite travellers from across the globe. Dr. Betty Radier, CEO, Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) is hopeful that their vast authentic Kenyan tourism products are capable to offer an outstanding experience to suit today's transformed travellers. Along with this, they are tediously working to keep the destination in mind of the travellers with various initiatives and international events while assuring them that Kenya is safe and ready to welcome them back when travel resumes.

Prashant Nayak

According to Dr. Betty, continuous adherence to COVID-19 protocols in all tourism facilities as guided by the Ministry of health remains key to mitigating against contracting and spread of coronavirus and these measures will offer safe travel and environment in both in leisure and MICE segments when travel resumes.

In terms of emerging trends in India, Dr. Betty shares, "KTB has noted a growing preference for experiential travel, value and health-conscious consumers, the role of Tier I cities remaining crucial drivers of outbound travel with Tier II and III emerging as high potential outbound travel cities. There is also the rise in solo travel in line with the social distancing measures in place."

KTB has continued to work with the private sector to create compelling and experiential packages for potential travellers this is evident in our recently launched 'Magical Kenya Signature Experiences' in February 2021 which introduced an additional twenty-nine (29) interactive and authentic experiences thus

bringing the total number of experiences within the collection to forty-four (44) for visitors to the destination to enjoy and create memorable experiences through.

Kenya has also continued to host international events with restrictive measures such as the Magical Kenya Golf Open and Kenya Savannah Classic in March as well as the World Rally Championship and African Rally Championship in June, thus showcasing the destinations ideal positioning as an events destination. The Government and Private sector have also continued to adhere to the health and safety protocols with the aim of ensuring Kenya remains a safe travel destination.

"We also continue to work closely with the Indian travel trade to ensure they are well versed on the destinations diverse tourism offering, Kenya's tourism sectors strategic direction as well as creating networking and business opportunities with their counterparts in Kenya as we continue to focus on tourism recovery," concludes Dr. Betty.





# Monaco is For You. At last!



▲ Rajeev Nangia

Today, against a general background where things are slowly returning to normal, the Principality of Monaco is taking numerous extra health precautions which have been adopted by all businesses and tourism operators to reassure visitors. Rajeev Nangia, India Director - Monaco Government Tourist Bureau, assures that all precautionary measures are applied and taken to ensure better safety for all. The destination remains vigilant and informed of the development in the international health situation and soon looks forward to Indians visiting Monaco.

Rachita Sehgal

**T**he year 2020 presented an unprecedented challenge, the COVID-19 pandemic struck, and the world faced its biggest global challenge.

Travel and Tourism, across the globe was greatly impacted. After a year of confinement and travel bans, dreams of resuming travel are increasingly on everyone's mind.

"As we have already witnessed the eagerness of people to travel; last year essential travel began and people started travelling, taking road trips to nearby destinations. Post which people started to travel to a few mid & long-haul destinations with all safety procedures in place. We are optimistic about the future as travel will increase gradually and Indian travellers are keenly waiting for the re-opening of international borders. People are aspiring to travel soon. Since after the first wave of COVID-19 in India, travel had begun to various parts of the world, we are very sure that India will

be among the top outbound nations again and the same will be true for the Principality of Monaco," says Rajeev.

Elaborating more on the travel aspect, Rajeev continues, "Travel is an integral instinct in humans. It provides an escape from busy everyday life and an excellent remedy for stress, anxiety, and depression. Keeping in mind, the young and tech-savvy population of India (which nearly accounts for 50 per cent of the population), travel will pick up rapidly as this generation is constantly looking for new experiences. People want to escape from their mundane day-to-day life. Wanting to meet new people, gain new experiences and create memories, people will travel for a much-needed stress-free vacation and we are confident that there will be a pent-up demand of travel in near future and beyond."

Meanwhile, the Government of Monaco is focusing on health confidence to boost the Principality's attractiveness. The Prince's Government has launched the Monaco Safe certification, which is designed to offer customers and visitors the best possible welcome in shops, hotels, restaurants, convention centres, and all other premises that are open to the public, in accordance with the current health regulations to

stop the spread of COVID-19.

The leading hospitality homegrown brand, Monte-Carlo Société des Bains de Mer, is also following the pandemic very closely and is focused on ensuring the health and safety of employees and customers. Monte-Carlo SBM has introduced a number of preventive and protective measures, including Health and Safety protocols in all the establishments, and has also been awarded Monaco Safe label to the Monte-Carlo Cares programme of hygiene measures put in place to combat the spread of COVID-19.

The Monaco Tourist and Convention Authority have re-launched its communication campaign with a slogan which is evolving: "Monaco FOR YOU. At last!" The campaign represents the diversity of what Monaco has to offer tourists, focusing on themes including wellbeing, fine dining, culture, family, romance, sport, responsible tourism, gambling and casinos, weekend escapes, and shopping. With the re-launch of the 'Monaco For You, At Last!' campaign, the Tourist and Convention Authority communicates that it's time for tourism recovery.

"While things were on hold, the Monaco Tourist and Convention Authority nonetheless worked to maintain contact with all those who are passionate about travel, whether loyal clients or tourism industry professionals. The Principality is now planning recovery and demonstrating its resilience by sending a message of invitation which marks both the end of a long wait and the beginning of hope," concludes Rajiv.





# Tourism rebound is well underway in the 'City of Angels'



◀ Seema Kadam

Los Angeles officially reopened for business on June 15, 2021. Optimism runs high for the city's rebound ahead of the summer, as vaccinations increase, and case counts drop. Seema Kadam, Regional Director, India, Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Board, and her team are feeling optimistic about the city's resiliency and ability to protect the health of visitors. With widespread vaccinations and protections like pre-departure testing for international arrivals in place, confidence in travel is reviving, and she is hopeful that Indians will be able to visit L.A very soon.

Manisha Patel

**L**os Angeles is a dynamic, ever-evolving destination – where diversity thrives, in more than 30 culturally rich neighbourhoods, each one offering a distinct vibe. L.A. is home to more than 300 days of warm sunshine, 75 miles of idyllic shoreline, more museums and performing arts venues than any other U.S. city, and an innovative culinary scene led by influential tastemakers. A global creative capital and the epicenter of the sports universe, L.A. presents limitless possibilities for visitors from around the world.

Regarding the current and future travel scenario to Los Angeles from India, Seema says, "Encouraging news on vaccines has boosted hopes for recovery. In Los Angeles, nearly 70 per cent of eligible residents have received at least one dose of the vaccine and the positivity rate remains below 1 per cent. However, challenges remain as travel to the United States from India is currently restricted. At present, no one can travel from India to the United States if they have been in India in the last 14 days. There are exceptions for American citizens, students and those who can prove their travel to the US is of national interest. Real recovery will only be possible when travel restrictions from India are safely lifted. This requires

global co-operation and evidence-based solutions."

In an effort to make vaccines even more accessible, Los Angeles International Airport is also offering free one dose Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccinations on site to all adults over 18.

With the city fully reopened for business, Seema tells, "Our city is committed to being the safest destination for meetings and events and has approached the re-opening with the health of residents as visitors as the top priority. Los Angeles became the first destination in the United States to receive the new health and safety verification badge from 'Forbes Travel Guide and Sharecare' certifying that all hotels with 50 or more rooms have verified health security."

Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board also partnered with CLEAR to more safely welcome group business back to the City of Angels. Beginning this month, meeting planners and event organizers booking business to Los Angeles can receive priority access to Health Pass, creating a seamless and expedited entry to events that prioritizes confidentiality.

"These partnerships allow us to address the most important components of event safety. We want our clients to know the environment they are coming into is safe, and that everyone

has demonstrated the same level of commitment to health and safety. This will allow groups to meet much more freely and comfortably, with fewer restrictions and the enhanced ability to interact," assures Seema.

According to Destination Analysts research, California and Los Angeles are among the top desired domestic destinations that travellers want to visit in 2021. L.A. is a year-round destination filled with iconic experiences that visitors love so much, including their incredible restaurants and bars, museums and performing arts venues, in-person sporting events, shopping centres and retail stores, theme parks and other attractions.

The Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board is inviting possible visitors to start their comeback and experience the seemingly endless new attractions, hotels, restaurants and more that are opening around the City. Being home to some of the world's top creative thinkers, in L.A. innovation is constant. "When visitors from India can safely return, they will find many new offerings including the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures celebrating the best of cinema, SoFi Stadium, home to two NFL football teams and new hotels and restaurants that reflect the distinct tastes and style of Southern California," concludes Seema.



# ‘Our Bula spirit awaits you’



◀ Sunil Menon

The tourism industry in Fiji is awaiting government decisions related to travel and easing of border restrictions. Also, the vaccine is a huge step towards normality for Fiji and its people with hopes that their international borders will open to visitors, restoring the livelihoods of thousands of Fijians, who are dependent on tourism. Sunil Menon, Country Manager, Tourism Fiji India, shares more about Fijian plans to welcome tourists when borders reopen.

**Prashant Nayak**

**F**iji isn't just all sun, sand, and sea, although there is plenty of that too! From hidden waterfalls and lush green tropical rain forests to rugged coastlines and dramatic volcanic mountain peaks, there is so much more to explore.

Fiji has always been intimately linked with India as over 40 per cent of the population being of Indian origin has made this Pacific nation their home for over a century. India has always been a source market for many and Fiji as a country has looked forward to building sustainable and responsible tourism from this region. The multi-hued ties between the countries are sure to get a new sparkle post this pandemic through the various initiatives currently being planned by Tourism Fiji.

Presently, Tourism Fiji has a Matai Specialist programme in place to provide the international travel industry with the knowledge to sell Fiji. Their Matai Happiness Specialists are accredited travel agents from all over the world who have in-depth knowledge and experience of Fiji to help traveller plan and book their holidays. "With the support of our partners who are now empanelled as Matai specialists, we are confident that Fiji with its enhanced and unique experiences will be a sought-after destination," shares Sunil.

Tourism Fiji, along with the private sector stakeholders, is working towards plans to support the sustainable

recovery of tourism while promoting a digital transition to rethink tourism for the future. The tourism sector will be very different in 2021 from what it was in 2019. Though this will bring challenges for the sector, it will also build opportunities to encourage innovation, drive new business models, and explore new niches & markets, open up new experiences and unexplored destinations. They are inclined to move to more sustainable and resilient tourism development models with enhanced protocols. The pent-up demand for travel post vaccinations is sure to act as the major catalyst for holidays to Fiji.

Tourism Fiji is working together with all its source markets to develop collaborative systems across borders to safely resume travel, restore traveller and business confidence, stimulate demand and accelerate tourism recovery. "As of March 2020, the Fijian government has implemented effective measures to mitigate an outbreak in the islands to keep people safe and businesses running. These include the adoption of a contact-tracing application, border and quarantine protocols, and public communications around social distancing and proper sanitation," tells Sunil.

Recent months have also seen the rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations, and these will continue throughout the year until all of Fiji's eligible population is protected. Fiji is in the process of vaccinating our frontline industry partners

and through the Care Fiji Commitment programme wellness ambassadors are being appointed. In support of the Fijian government's COVID-19 initiatives, the Fijian tourism industry has also adopted the Care Fiji Commitment; a WHO-approved standard of best-practice health and safety measures designed to align our industry to safe travel norms in a post-COVID world. In recognition of the Care Fiji Commitment program, the World Travel and Tourism Council recently declared Fiji as a 'Safe Travels' destination.

Regarding the current destination promotion with the Indian partners, Sunil mentions, "Tourism Fiji through its initiatives coupled with its educational programmes have been strengthening partner relationships in India to restore traveller confidence and support tourism businesses to adapt to the new normal. We will soon commence the third phase of our communication while promoting and supporting the safe return of international tourism. This would provide clear information to travellers and businesses of the enhanced health & safety measures adopted by the destination, thus limiting uncertainty and strengthening co-operation within and between partners. With these plans in place, we aim to enhance offerings and together build a more resilient and sustainable tourism environment for Fiji. You can be assured that when borders reopen, we will be ready to welcome you back."



## Thailand hopeful to open borders for Indians soon

While international travel is expected to start slowly and cautiously, Vachirachai Sirisumpan, Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) New Delhi Office, as well as many Thai travel and tourism stakeholders firmly believe that India is and will continue to be an important inbound market for them, when travel resumes. Although the start may be gradual, it is bound to pick up as soon as the situation improves. Till then, Thailand is waiting for you.

**Prashant Nayak**

**B**ased on 2019 figures before the pandemic, Thailand welcomed nearly 2 million Indian tourists to the country, the highest growth among the international markets with an increase of +25 per cent from the previous year.

According to Sirisumpan, every destination knows that the India outbound market can rebound quickly and in large numbers. This can be witnessed by the continuous promotional activities done by numerous tourism boards in India, targeting consumers and travel trade. However, Thailand is a favourite destination for Indians and will continue to be even more with close proximity and easy accessibility to travel, comfort level and variety of experiences to match every Indian traveller's wish list. Be it a family holiday, honeymoon or anniversary trip, wedding and corporate team building, Thailand has it all!

Also, Sirisumpan says, "The most

important factor is the continued support that Thailand and TAT receive from our travel trade partners and friends. On our part, we have been continuously working to maintain and promote Thailand as 'Top of Mind Destination' via consumer and travel trade activities."

As of July 1, 2021, Phuket has opened to welcome fully vaccinated tourists starting with the low and medium COVID-19 affected countries. TAT along with all concerned Thai government agencies and private sectors are working together to set up SOP's, guidelines, and health certifications to receive tourists. "Our safety concern is not only for tourists who come to Thailand but also for local Thai people and expatriates living in Thailand and also for those working in the travel and tourism business," says Sirisumpan.

TAT has been working for many years on their Seven Green Tourism Concept to send clear messages of sustainability. Because



▲ Vachirachai Sirisumpan

of the pandemic, it has made us all look back and appreciate the nature and environment and they are keen to promote this concept evermore. Sirisumpan further mentions, 'Another segment we strongly promote is 'Wellness'. Thailand is well known for its Thai massage, spa, and hospitality, which I believe could attract many Indians to travel to Thailand for holidays to relax and rejuvenate. Thailand has earned a reputation of 'Asia's Spa Capital' and Wellness destination with its unique techniques combining modern and traditional methods and is able to deliver a relaxing atmosphere and warm Thai hospitality."

## Maldives: the wait will be worthwhile

Maldives remains one of the safest destinations to travel to during the pandemic. Being close to India, it has become a desired tourist destination with Indian holidaymakers as it showcases itself being a 'Safe Haven'. Thoyyib Mohamed, MD, MMPRC, believes that the Indian travellers will still arrive in record numbers as soon as the border opens for South Asian travellers once again.

**Sonika Bohra**

**E**arlier this year, India took the position as the top source market to Maldives and steadily maintained that position until the Maldivian government had to stop the issuance of tourist visas for travellers from South Asia due to the surge in COVID-19 cases. Even then, India held the position as the top source market to Maldives. As of 23rd June 2021, a total of 89,599 travellers have arrived from the Indian market.

Mohamed is optimistic about the tourism situation after the second wave of COVID-19 which is slowly subsiding. He says, "The charts indicating a steady decline in the number of COVID-19 cases globally is one of the greatest sources of optimism for myself. I am deeply hopeful to see that the cases are now declining. With careful stringent measures and cautiousness, it is

possible that we are hopefully witnessing the last stages of the pandemic. With that said, another source of optimism for me is the mass vaccination campaigns conducted throughout the world."

Earlier this year 'Visit Maldives' together with the Ministry of Tourism launched the 'I'm Vaccinated' campaign in order to encourage vaccination and the target is to make Maldives the destination with the first fully vaccinated tourism sector in the world. As of June 23, 2021, 96 per cent of tourist workers have received the first dose whereas 70 per cent are fully vaccinated. Fully vaccinated staff ensure travellers that they are vacationing in a safe and secure environment.

MMPRC wants to promote Maldives as one that offers a slice of paradise for all walks of life and they are working tirelessly



▲ Thoyyib Mohamed

to offer everyone this slice of paradise. "We are strongly promoting a comprehensive view of all four products of Maldivian tourism - resorts, guesthouses, live-aboards and hotels. In addition, we are highlighting the variety of unique experiences travellers can have in the Maldives such as indulging in haute cuisines in underwater restaurants, spending the night in a bubble tent with a loved one beneath the equatorial starry night, and rising your adrenaline levels through various exciting water sports such as jet skis, surfing and so on," shares Mohamed.



# Innovate or Perish



Disrupting and getting disrupted is a part of the business cycle. The onus of leading disruption lies on business leaders. History is full of examples of industry leaders who reinvented themselves and lead innovation.

Tirath Shah

Disrupting or getting disrupted is the theme of business nowadays. Though it is difficult to imagine, it took just a decade for motor vehicles to replace centuries old horse-cart transportation. Change is not only constant but can also be that rapid and irreversible. Once humans have discovered a better way of doing a thing, there is no going back. Though it goes unnoticed, smartphones have replaced inventions such as camera, wristwatch, radio, calculator, pager, voice recorder, flashlight and hundreds of similar products that were once disruptors. The crux is simple – disruption happens, and it may happen very rapidly.

It is fairly established that change is constant and leads to efficiency. The real question is how business could lead rather than bleed. Answer to innovation lies with understanding customer's aspiration and applying technology to fulfil aspiration. Technology itself does not disrupt; it is its application that disrupts. When Airbnb disrupted incumbent hotel chains, the driver was customer aspiration for local experiences over standardized hotel services. Consumers are at the centre of disruption and hence are a source of creativity. Therefore, understanding customer persona, their aspirations and customer value chain is essential to innovate.

When RezLive.com was conceptualized offline transactions were the usual way of booking hotels. We dared to imagine an efficient system that was not just exhaustive and fast paced but also transparent. A decade later, online booking tools have

become mainstream. The disruption would not stop here, and we are continuously evolving (disrupting) to lead change. For instance, Rezlive's digital payment ecosystem – a first of its kind in industry – was developed in response to our customer's aspiration to have seamless payment process. We were also the first to offer INR pricing in India and faced a lot of criticism from traditional B2B players initially, however this proved to be a norm which is followed by all now.

In the pre-digital era, travel was limited by information arbitrage and connectivity. Travel was a push product and businesses were able to sell products to consumers as per their convenience. The friction that was generated by the information gap, visa regulations and connectivity has all disappeared by digital revolution. Nowadays, customers know what they want and if a business fails to serve the needs, the switching cost is so low that customers shift to competitors. Travel businesses have metamorphosed from a supplier to consultant to a facilitator.

Over the last decade, travel patterns have evolved and is further disrupted by the pandemic. The seasonality of business, purpose of travel, preferred destinations, and itinerary planning have changed. This is an era of co-creation in which customers create itinerary with the help of facilitators. Business with static products or mindset is gradually losing relevance. Business needs are shifting from delivering services to creating experiences.

In this dynamic environment, businesses need to understand their role and transform to cater the need gap. Transformation is risky but getting disrupted is riskier. Innovation comes with



▲ Tirath Shah

multiple failures but then no one gets it right at first step. It is a constant process of experimenting and adjusting and with this in mind, we launched Rezrewards – An exclusive B2B loyalty program for our travel partners, which proved to be a value addition and is appreciated globally.

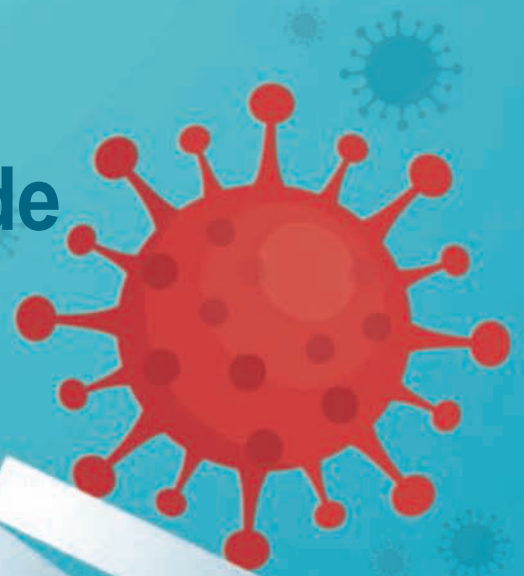
Travel houses must dynamically respond to the unprecedented and evolving business condition the industry is going through. At RezLive.com, we place tremendous emphasis on emerging trends and evolving requirements of our customers to develop products and enable our customers to serve their clients. Agile businesses have not just survived but have grown. Amid digital transformation and personalization lies an opportunity to reinvent our businesses that are more relevant to our customer's aspirations.

Tirath Shah is the Chief Operating Officer of Travel Designer Group.



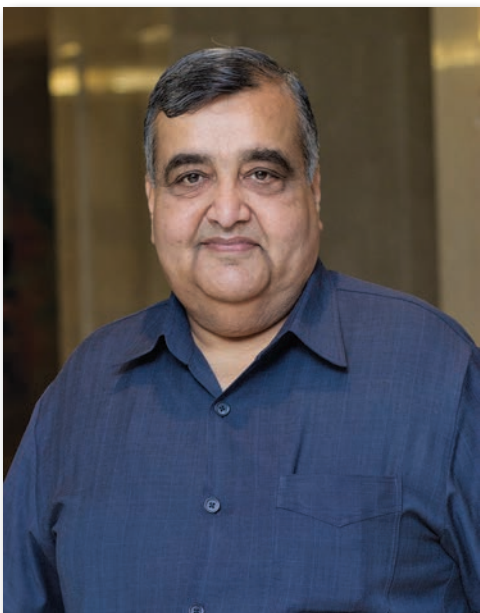
# The fight is on

## Still resilient in survival mode



Since the start of the pandemic, Travel and Tourism Associations in India have been constantly engaging the Govt to take urgent measures on jobs and business protection. Very recently, the Indian Govt has started to understand the importance of the sector and is trying to cushion the blow to the sector, albeit, not much to the expectations. Much more needs to be done in a more coordinated way by governments and the sector. Presently, flexible policies and solutions are needed to enable the tourism economy to live alongside the virus in the short to medium term period. In the next few pages, TTJ interacts with the Presidents of India's leading Tourism Associations to know from them: their current issues, job disruptions, expectations, and the future of the travel and tourism industry in India by 2022.

Ravi Sharma



**Rajiv Mehra**  
President, IATO

Our Hon'ble Finance Minister recently announced 500,000 free visas and a loan guarantee scheme for the travel sector. The Free Visas augurs well for

the future and we see the silver lining in international travel. If everything works towards normalcy, the borders should open by October 2021. By early 2022, we should be on the road to recovery and by end of 2022, we will witness the surge. I do not have a crystal ball, but let us be positive. Also, the entire world is now keeping a watch on the Delta plus variant of the disease and the efficacy of vaccination on this new variant will depend upon how the situation is being handled.

To survive during this stressful situation, some points to be noted are that the Government should consider giving a one-time financial grant to all recognised tour operators which could be 50 per cent of the wages paid by the tour

operators in 2019-20 and a ₹2.5 lakh to each tourist guide recognised by the MoT/State Government as a one-time grant.

We are hopeful for the release of SEIS 2019-20 for tour operators which is pending the government's announcement. The percentage may be considered at minimum 10 per cent of the foreign exchange earnings so that it can give some support to the tour operators for them to survive and revive their business. Also, e-Tourist Visa/International is the key. For us to be ready for the tourism activities, all our front-line tourism workers must be 100 per cent vaccinated.

The E-Tourist Visa/International flight operation should start from October 1, 2021, if the situation remains under control. The announcement in this regard should be made as early as possible so that lead time is given to the foreign agents to prepare themselves to promote India packages. E -Tourist Visa should be opened for all countries on a reciprocal basis.

It is important to open up domestic tourism without any restriction as soon as possible, in places where the number of COVID cases has reduced drastically. This will help build confidence among foreign tourists to visit India.



SOPs, as laid down by the government, have to be put in place and continued by all the stakeholders operating in various segments.

Removing the cascading effect of GST on Tourism Industry by charging GST on Deemed Value should be looked into. Along with that GST on services provided outside India to foreign tourists should be removed. The tourism industry has to be treated as a deemed exporter at par with the IT Industry under Export of Services.

Tourism has impacted more than 10 per cent of India's

employment. This means almost 5 crores jobs. Assuming 75 per cent loss in tourism would imply a proportionate impact on job losses of almost 3.5 crores plus. The industry has lost key skills but the appeal to jobseekers lingers on as the past potential is still present in our memory. The demand will return at a pace and will offer time to garner skilled manpower yet again. Job creation will have its own value and draw once again. IATO is engaged in skill development in anticipation of the demand. The industry is confident in all measures and will be equipped to welcome the much-awaited challenge of demand.



**Jyoti Mayal**  
President, TAAI

As the President of TAAI, I am very confident that once travel starts, it will only boom. 2022 should be a year with huge productivity and revenue

generation. Vaccination, correct safety protocols will need to be kept in consideration, but I am also confident there will be easier accessible proper medication and treatment in due time. Initially, till the time international borders do not open, domestic tourism will see a huge rise in footfalls. We should build on this huge opportunity. To promote confidence in consumers, our states and countries need to work in collaboration and cooperation with each other. As mass vaccination takes place, unilateral policies will be needed both for domestic and international travel to gain momentum.

In these devastating times, where our members needed motivation and connect, we have stood with them as we are all sailing in the same boat and we all collectively need to reach the shore. Once we reach the shore and are safe, we will then surely revive and thrive.

Our biggest issue is that everyone is short on cash and it is becoming difficult for not only us to survive but also to retain our staff and take care of our statutory costs. As the President of TAAI, we are mapping a path for our member colleagues to bring correct procedures and policies by working very closely and effectively with MoT & MoCA. Both these ministries need to work in tandem with each other. We are constantly in dialogue with MOCA to bring effective regulation for the protection of our money from defaulting airlines. Airlines are struggling to survive too, but we as a community cannot survive another's default like of Kingfisher and Jet Airways.

Refunds were a huge challenge at the beginning of the lockdown, and we had to work diligently to push the airlines to pay. We have had huge success though with a small exception and we will continue our endeavour to achieve in totality. We are in no position as agents to finance the airlines or block our funds. There should be

transparent procedures, guidelines and law of the land should prevail as to not let our taxpayer's money be taken out of the country by foreign airlines without fulfilling their obligations to the travel agents. As MOCA is the ministry for aviation, we the IATA agents should be a relevant and important part of their setup. Both airlines and we need to have a task force under the aegis of the Aviation Minister. We need a more efficient and stronger regulator with proper monitoring.

We also need to create opportunities for our members by creating new streams and avenues as revenue generators. For this, we are continuously driving knowledge sessions and connecting them with new products. Skilling and re-skilling is another very important aspect which I have always been driving and which is a very important part of our existence and growth, for both us and our staff. I am also the Chairperson of THSC (Tourism & Hospitality Skill Council) under to aegis of the Ministry of Skill Development and I have been continuously advocating re-skilling because we just cannot afford to become stagnant in gaining knowledge and forget our skills.

As the business world will slowly awaken from the pandemic, there will be a universal understanding and acceptance that things will never be the same again. Tourism is an employment-intensive sector, and it is driven by visitor experience; the people serving in the industry must be well trained. To meet the requirement of the industry and to exploit the demographic dividend, skill development initiatives will be driven by Speed, Scale and Standardisation. Destination-based skilling initiatives to meet the skill gap should be implemented apart from various other initiatives. Training large number of existing workers in soft skills and other tourism-related skills should be a priority area.

The role of Industry associations such as ours (TAAI) has become even more critical in the backdrop of a crisis such as COVID-19. The demographic of a traveller and tourism is changed. Adaption to changes will play a very important role. The most important need would be to develop resilience and agility to deal with the crisis against the constraints imposed by cash preservation. TAAI and THSC are working towards bridging the gap and will be investing more in this for our members and the travel and tourism industry.





**Riaz Munshi**  
President, OTOAI

I think it is safe to assume that by the end of next year, tourism will be well on its way to recovery. We are already seeing momentum for domestic travel and once international borders open up,

we anticipate a surge in bookings of fully vaccinated travellers by end of this year itself. We expect 2022 to be a very robust year given the huge pent-up demand of travellers who haven't been able to travel for a long time. It will be a year of revival for the industry as travellers across all segments will be eager to travel. The 'workation' trend has also propelled people to seize the opportunity to work from wherever they choose, which will continue to drive the growth of long-stay getaways in 2022.

The present times are challenging for everyone in the travel fraternity as people are struggling to stay afloat. Many have also faced personal losses. At OTOAI, we have a deep understanding of these issues and are working on two main approaches – one is focussed on the well-being, both mental and physical of our members and the other strategy is to keep our members updated with regard to new norms of the new normal. We regularly keep them informed about the new international guidelines for international

travel and visas. Taking a step further, we have also waived off the annual membership fee for the financial year 2021-22. The Association had reduced the fees by 50 per cent for the financial year 2020-2021. We understand the plight of our fellow industry colleagues and this gesture was our way of showing our solidarity to them.

The Travel and Tourism sector is one of the largest GDP contributors and the lack of government measures to support the sector has indeed had devastating effects on the workforce. While the recent announcement has sent across some relief to small-scale tour operators and guides, the overall catastrophe has been far too damaging. After years of writing letters and meetings, it was heartening to see the Central Government finally recognising a sector that contributes immensely to employment in the country. However, the scale of relief is small compared to the mountain of the problem we are facing.

The impact of the pandemic on jobs and income has been heavy and our industry is prone to losing skilled personals to other occupations. However, being an optimist, I do not feel that the travel industry will lose its appeal as those who have weathered the storm so far know that with vaccinations in full swing, recovery is around the corner. Demand will soon rise by leaps and bounds and the workforce will be critical in achieving a swifter recovery. I feel that the travel fraternity is a very resilient sector and as and when things will start to improve, the industry will bounce back and fight tooth and nail not just for survival and revival but also to thrive.



**PP Khanna**  
President, ADTOI

Tourism is bread and butter for all of us in the trade and we are just waiting for the happy days to return to this industry when people at large would once again be engaged in the travel, tourism, and

hospitality activities as before or even more. Not only the industry people but even governments, both Centre and State are looking for the revival of domestic, inbound as well as outbound tourism. We, therefore, anticipate great things to happen not only by the end of the year 2022 but even well ahead of it. With the arrival of vaccines, countries are opening up their doors to receive tourists and India will not be left behind. The country will bounce back once we all put up a brave fight against the pandemic.

People must come forward and cooperate in observing the COVID protocols during their outing be it social, business, holidays so that the disease could be contained. It is a must

for economic activities to continue without the imposition of any restrictions by the Government.

Our current issues are seeking Govt. assistance for the revival of the industry and ensuring that the hospitality industry strictly follows the protocols of COVID set by WHO/ICMR/State Governments.

Dissemination of information to our members through webinar programme about new tourism products and States' preparedness to receive the tourists etc are the other work been done. To assist our members financially annual subscription fee has been discounted by 50 per cent of the normal fee. Also, for the benefit of our trade partners on a PAN India basis, we have a special offer to become our members by paying a highly discounted membership fee which is open till the end of the current financial year i.e., March 31, 2022.

Yes! The pandemic has had a devastating effect on jobs and incomes and thus has made many people in the industry make temporary job shifts to manage the current situation. Presently, there is nothing much to worry about the industry losing key skills and its overall appeal to jobseekers. Players in the field have not left the business but are engaged in small-scale activities and work and waiting for the opportunity to bounce back post-COVID.





**Vishwas Makhija**  
President, ATOAI

We expect a revival in sync with the pace of vaccinations and a unified national approach to testing, access rules, tests, and opening up of ETVs at the earliest. The recent announcement of 5

lakh free e-visas is welcome, and we hope States will now adopt an approach in sync with the reality of dropping low mortality rates and widely propagate their mitigation measures to instill

confidence in travellers.

Presently, we are dealing with the lack of in-person interactions with states, government and policymakers; two years of COVID-19 impact needs much action to revive and renew industry efforts; and our primary aim is to reinstate those interactions and lead with efforts to support, align and promote operator interests. We also seek support to hold our annual conventions, which provide great learning, peer interactions and promote industry confidence.

We are lucky to have a very large base of skilled/semi-skilled personnel in the industry. All we need is for our source and destination markets to open, and support the industry, inspire confidence in travellers through a large media campaign. People must know we will be safe no matter where we travel to.



**Biji Eapen**  
President, IAAI

The second wave of pandemic severely smashed travel and tourism and downed the economic growth. Natural recovery needs globally coordinated, risk-based solutions in a phased manner, where inbound and outbound tourism

plays a significant role in the country's financial health.

The economic recovery depends on the steps to build and restore our brand's bad reputation. It is not a deficiency in services or customer dissatisfaction. The catastrophic health situation in India has shaken the image of India. Regaining customer trust and confidence isn't easy. It is a long process, which needs a lot of homework and coordination with all industry stakeholders.

Five lakhs or million free visas will not attract or bring foreign tourists unless most Indians are vaccinated and regain and restore our tarnished image. Restoring confidence for people to begin travelling is the primary task for the government and related organisations. We need travel recovery to start from the ground level - villages, cities, and the metros. It depends on the vaccination drive and immunisation.

We must slowly focus on domestic tourism, building trust with the locals to travel within their states or beyond, non-crowded places with confidence. And for one or two years, people will not have much money to spend on luxury, households, or eatables. For a good start, Government should reduce GSTs and other taxes. Local governments and suppliers should offer special incentives to attract travellers.

The increase in diesel and petrol price bound to impact airlines, trains and automobiles. Rising fuel costs will adversely affect the revival of tourism. It will move commodities like food grains, fruits and vegetables and make hotel tariffs, staying and dining costly. Moreover, with fuel prices hiking daily, planning for vacations and trips will become crucial,

as airfares and other expenses may vary.

In India, travel and tourism are represented through various trade associations based on their nature and scope, like adventure, medical, wellness tourism, etc. While appreciating Central Government's financial assistance as a positive step, we suggest extending the benefit to all IATA Accredited Travel Agencies and Travel and Tour Agencies approved by respective State Governments in India to revive the tourism industry at large.

Survival of IATA ticketing agents and retaining their global accreditations is our priority. Since international flights, curtailed, the financial guarantee becomes a "white elephant". Agents' representatives in APJC-India overlooked the possibility to recommend lower financial security within the ambit of Resolution 812. As a temporary relief to the agents' fraternity, we suggested opting for IATA GoLite accreditations to avoid BSP charges and financial securities. Agents have the flexibility to revert to 'standard accreditation' when the situation is back to normal.

As a re-start to air travel and tourism, we at IAAI and our new initiative 'Air Passengers Right Forum' plan to provide extensive training to our members and travelling public on their rights based on the Air Passenger Charter of 2019. It is a facelift for Agents to enhance knowledge, trustworthiness and accountability and restore customers' confidence and reliability in it.

Travel and tourism are coexisting value chains, or ecosystem encompasses transportation, accommodation, food and beverage, business support services, infrastructure, and several other industries serving and catering to travellers. It highlights the value and importance of workplace and culture, meets the ability to attract skill, employ and retain customers, and innovatively and effectively address their issues.

The pandemic has indeed affected or may affect many skilled and unskilled travel and tourism workforce and many of them have left the industry during these sixteen months for their survival. However, we have confidence in a strong recovery once vaccinations and other measures reduce disease transmission. The industry will come back, and sooner or later, the skilled people will have the better choice to connect with the customers and to meet their satisfaction.



# “This pandemic has taught us to be on our toes within a framework yet without compromising with quality”



▲ Kevin Ashley Martis

Kevin Ashley Martis' association with Concept Hospitality - The Fern Hotels & Resorts, has turned a decade old now. As General Manager - Sales & Marketing (Western India), he oversees all their hotels and Regional Sales Offices in Mumbai, Gujarat, and Goa. His job involves key participation in making the overall budgets of these hotels and then strategising to achieve them. While Kevin shares more about his hotel chain, he also mentions that keeping track of the changing trends is very important, as it has kept him upgraded in today's technology-driven work environments.

Prashant Nayak

**T**he Fern Hotels & Resorts is among the fastest-growing management companies with 84 Hotels in 69 locations and 4900 plus keys under the brands: The Fern, The Fern Residency, The Zinc by The Fern, and Beacon Hotels. During this pandemic, the organisation finalised the 'Fern Hygiene Standards' across all their hotels which they have branded as 'Staygiene', to reassure their employees and customers of their safety and security with them. As India's leading environmentally sensitive hotel chain, the organisation now is putting more emphasis on acting responsibly towards the environment and working on minimising wastages.

When asked about his learning, after the continuous onslaught of the pandemic on the business for more than a year, Kevin says, "We are indeed in the midst of uncertain times; no one ever thought our work methodologies and plans for the future would take such an unprecedented turn. While most of the businesses still figuring out ways to adapt to new work cultures, I feel these times have given us enough reasons to pause and ponder on our fixed mindsets. While we have always heard, "The only certainty is 'nothing is certain'", we barely plan for such uncertainties. The idea involves casting funds aside for such contingencies and prudent allocation of resources. This pandemic has taught us to be on our toes within a framework yet without compromising with quality."

The hotel chain has started directing their efforts towards Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities for

leisure travel as they see a huge potential in these places as people are looking forward to short stays at pilgrimages or planning revenge travel on weekends with their families after a long stay at home. They have also branded affordable deals for travellers looking for unique experiences at different landscapes to provide them desirable experiences while guaranteeing a safe stay with them.

Kevin is hopeful even during these difficult times, as a great deal of self-introspection and preparation has gone into what is working and what's not. Also, the pandemic has served as an opportunity to break free of the conventional thinking rut and experimenting with newer ways of doing things. "We have focused on strengthening our bonds with our existing customers, through strictly following safety and hygiene work protocols and establishing ourselves as a brand they can count upon through our digital marketing channels. Also, this pandemic has gradually built our resilience and forced us to think innovatively within limited resources," expresses Kevin.

"However, we believe travel to vicinity holiday destinations would pick up faster than MICE and corporate travel. Therefore, The Fern Hotels & Resorts have introduced Fern Self-Drive Leisure Holiday packages across 24 of our Hotels and Resorts. While extravagant Indian weddings will take a little longer to string back into shape, we foresee resorts within drivable distance, in demand with the customers both for short breaks as well as for small-capacity destination weddings. Additionally, we have already tied up with many corporates who have resumed

their travel. We are expanding our reach to different corporate sectors and making arrangements for their short business travel stays. Our occupancy rates have already picked up with happy clients' feedback pouring in," continues Kevin.

The major challenge with businesses during this pandemic has been a migration of front-line workers to their native cities for better job prospects. In this situation, Kevin explains, "An organisation's work culture and credibility of its management can be a major retention factor for its employees. During this time, if an organisation pays attention to increasing the employability of their current workforce, the odds are they would stick around and provide added value to the firm. Also, training the workforce into multiple job roles and responsibilities gives them a sense of belonging to the organisation. We have tried to retain our talented workforce with internal transfers amongst our chain of hotels exposing them to multiple job roles."

Kevin believes that the hospitality industry is likely to gain its lost traction by the end of 2022 slowly with customer's behaviours and expectations of the industry gaining shape. Though inbound travel would slowly chart its course, the domestic customers are likely to get more demanding with their preferences clearly laid out. Gradually, the hotel industry would begin to accommodate the increased demands with a more skilled workforce. The shift would clearly not be sudden, rather phased out in stages. However, digitisation in this people-oriented industry is here to stay and over the long run bound to cover up losses.



# Strong growth in demand to fuel for local Travel Agents: **TravClan Survey**

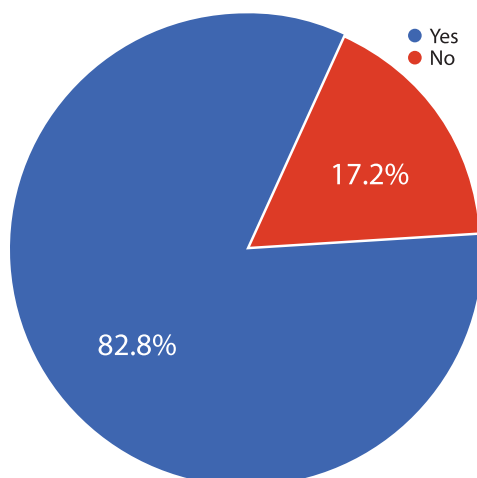
TravClan, a B2B travel platform recently conducted a survey on close to 250 small to mid-range travel agents and consumers across India to identify post-pandemic changes in the travel business ecosystem and the behavior of the Indian traveller. Survey predicts a positive market sentiment with close to 80 per cent of travel agencies catering to first time customers.

Team TTJ

After a difficult 2020 and second wave, now vaccination drive has gathered momentum, and travel business is showing signs of a sustained resumption this time. In such a scenario, the survey throws up certain interesting insights on the future of travel industry.

About 83 per cent of the agents surveyed have catered to first-time customers (those who never used travel agents' services before). This is a key indicator of how an increasing number of travellers are now turning towards travel agents and trip planners. Compared to large OTAs and marketplaces, travel agencies are being preferred as the need for personalisation, and real-time connectivity has increased significantly in the post-pandemic times.

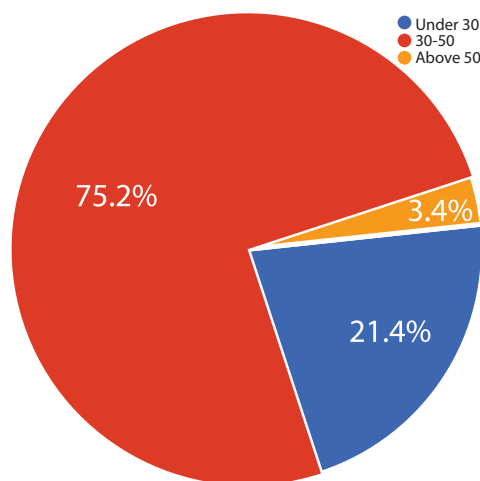
With travel regulation changing every few days across international and domestic sectors, do you feel that more people will prefer to book with travel agent post pandemic rather than themselves?



The survey also revealed the fact that, unlike the perception that the younger people travel more, the travel agents are anticipating over 75 per cent of the holidaymakers in the near future to be in the 30 to 50 years of age group. This indicates more likelihood of couple and family travels' share increasing

in the market. There is also a greater rise in the segment of people willing to spend more to get better services and experiences compared to budget-conscious travellers.

Which age demographic according to you will resume travel after the nationwide vaccination drive is completed?

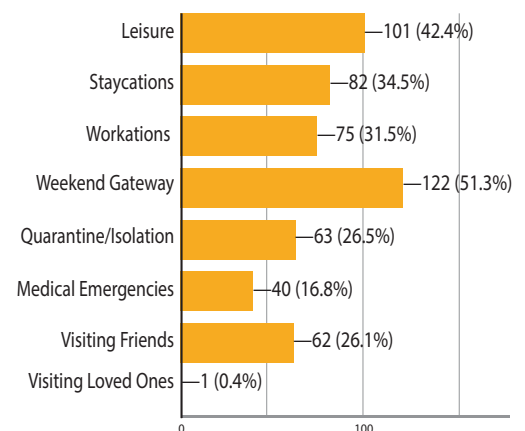


Speaking about this, Arun Bagaria, Co-founder, TravClan said, "The global tourism industry has endured a major existential challenge and is now confidently overcoming this based on knowledge gained during the last one year. The streamlining of processes and progress of vaccination program is likely to result in strong recovery in the market within the next six months or so. We have been able to generate a number of highly impactful insights into the travel industry's operations."

The buoyancy about post-pandemic travel demand is making even those agents re-enter the world of tourism who had earlier shut shop fearing the collapse of global travel business. The survey reveals that most of the travel agents believe that travel operations will resume faster than expected earlier and the international travel is also expected to resume in several major markets by October 2021 with several countries like Maldives, Thailand already announcing phased re-opening.

The survey also brings out the change in the approach towards travel and the reasons behind traveling. Leisure travel and shorter weekend trips have become more popular. Travel agents have also been servicing demand for workcations and staycations that emerged during the pandemic.

What type of travel requirement saw a surge since the pandemic? ( You can select more than 1 )



Adding further, Arun Bagaria, said, "Travel agents are evolving to service the needs of the future travellers by building trust and high-quality service at a time when travel regulations are changing frequently. The travel agents who traditionally functioned offline are also now rapidly adopting the new technologies and becoming travel planners and actively carrying out marketing activities on social media. At TravClan, we have consistently worked towards making the digital transition smooth, affordable and easy for millions of travel companies in India and across the world."

A lot of uncertainty has gripped the travel sector during the pandemic due to the constantly changing operational scenario, restrictions on certain services, destinations and customer concerns. However, travel agents are now evolving into new agent travel entrepreneurs and rediscovering themselves to meet the demands of the traveller!





## Ministry of Tourism, GOI

Union Minister **Gangapuram Kishan Reddy**, elevated to Cabinet rank, took charge of the three departments that are newly assigned to him including Tourism, Culture, and North-East region development. He will be making all efforts to deliver on the responsibilities placed on him by the PM, including completing all the pending projects in the NE region within the stipulated time frame.

## Ministry of Civil Aviation, GOI



**Jyotiraditya Madhavrao Scindia** has assumed charge as Minister of Civil Aviation. He has resolved to discharge his duties with earnestness and continue the good work undertaken by Hardeep S Puri, former Minister of Civil Aviation. He was four times elected to Lok Sabha from Madhya Pradesh, and now it is his first term as a Member of Rajya Sabha.



## Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, GOI

**Sarbananda Sonowal**, the former Chief Minister of Assam who handled the Sports and Youth Affairs ministry in PM Modi's first government, is the new Minister of the Ports, Shipping and Waterways. Sonowal will also handle the AYUSH Ministry. Mansukh Mandaviya had the charge of the Shipping Ministry prior to Sonowal.

## Kerala Tourism



**Dr. Venu V** is back with Kerala Tourism as Additional Chief Secretary –Tourism. He is also the Additional Chief Secretary -Higher Education, Govt of Kerala. An eminent personality in the Tourism sector in India, he was instrumental in making of 'Kerala- God's Own Country' campaign and was also a part of the 'Incredible India' campaign. He is also known for his effective marketing of Kerala Tourism as a global tourism brand and to improve the quality of the Tourism and Hospitality services in Kerala.



## Norwegian Cruise Line

Norwegian Cruise Line is strengthening its Sales strategy with the appointment of **Eamonn Ferrin** as Vice President of International Business. Ferrin will oversee NCL's sales efforts outside of the US and Canada and grow the Company's international footprint by deepening existing travel relationships, reaping new business and further integrating international source markets into the Company's global business plan. In this role, he will report to Todd Hamilton, NCL's Senior Vice President of Sales.

## Hahn Air



Hahn Air announced the appointment of **Christoph Althoff** as Vice President Airline Business. The industry professional joined the Hahn Air team on July 1, 2021, and will be in charge of an international team of experts managing the partnerships with Hahn Air's more than 350 partner airlines worldwide as well as acquiring and implementing new partner carriers.



## Crowne Plaza Kochi

Crowne Plaza Kochi has appointed **Dinesh Rai** as General Manager. In his new role, Dinesh will be responsible for the continued success of the hotel by combining cutting-edge hospitality with innovative experiences for the guests. Apart from devising strategies for strong rooms and social business, his focus will be to leverage Food and Beverage capabilities to curate novel offerings for their house guests and the residents of Kochi.

## OYO



OYO has appointed **Nitin Thakur** as the Head of Communications. A seasoned professional, Nitin will be responsible for driving OYO's reputation forward and delivering the company's mission of empowering entrepreneurs of small and independent hotels and homes by providing full-stack technology that increases earnings and eases operations while bringing affordable and trusted accommodation that guests can book instantly.

## Travelport and Emirates reach agreements on un-surcharged content, NDC distribution and IT service extension



**T**ravelport and Emirates have reached a commercial agreement that allows Travelport-connected travel agencies to avoid the airline's surcharge on bookings via Global Distribution Systems (GDS). Furthermore, the companies announced a new long-term agreement to enable the distribution of Emirates NDC content via Travelport's next-generation platform, Travelport+, and an extension to its longstanding IT agreement.

Travelport's global network of travel agency partners have been automatically upgraded to a dedicated channel that provides access to un-surcharged content. These agencies will also continue to benefit from a graphically rich experience when searching for and booking Emirates branded fares, as well as greater access to its ancillary offers, thanks to a long-term extension of the airline's existing agreement to use Travelport's Rich Content and Branding merchandising tool.

As part of the deal, Travelport-connected agencies will be able to gain simplified access to Emirates' NDC content and services via Travelport Smartpoint and the company's enhanced RESTful / JSON APIs once the agencies sign new NDC specific agreements with both companies. Travelport and Emirates continue to progress the NDC technical solution for travel retailers worldwide and are now in the process of developing enhanced features and functionality that will, when complete, be gradually rolled out.

Travelport will also continue to provide Emirates with its industry-leading pricing, shopping and ticket rebooking technology as part of the agreement, to support the airline in the delivery of advanced shopping and rebooking options within its own internal sales channels, including its NDC channel and [www.emirates.com](http://www.emirates.com).

## WTTC report reveals COVID-19's dramatic impact on Travel & Tourism around the world

**A**sia Pacific was the region hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic according to the new annual Economic Trends Report from the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC). Asia-Pacific was the worst performing region, with the sector's contribution to GDP dropping a damaging 53.7 per cent, compared to the global fall of 49.1 per cent. International visitor spending was particularly hard hit across Asia Pacific, falling by 74.4 per cent, as many countries across the region closed their borders to inbound tourists. Domestic spending witnessed a lower but equally punishing decline of 48.1 per cent. Travel & Tourism employment in the region fell by 18.4 per cent, equating to a shocking 34.1 million jobs. However, despite this decline, Asia-Pacific remained the largest region for the sector's employment in 2020, accounting for 55 per cent (151 million) of all global Travel & Tourism jobs.

The report also revealed the European Travel & Tourism sector suffered the second biggest economic collapse last year, dropping 51.4 per cent (€987 BN). This significant and damaging decline was in part due to continuing mobility restrictions to curb the spread of the virus.

Domestic spending in Europe declined by 48.4 per cent, offset by some intra-regional travel, however international spending fell at an even sharper rate, by 63.8 per cent. Despite this, Europe remained the top global region for international visitor spending. However, Travel & Tourism employment still suffered across the Continent, falling 9.3 per cent, equating to a dramatic loss of 3.6 million jobs.

Travel & Tourism GDP in Africa dropped 49.2 per cent in 2020, in line with the global average. Domestic spending declined by 42.8 per cent, while international spending saw a much steeper contraction at 66.8 per cent. In terms of employment losses, Africa suffered disproportionately more than other regions, falling 29.3 per cent, representing a staggering 7.2 million jobs.

Travel & Tourism's contribution to GDP in the Middle East decreased significantly in 2020, dropping 51.1 per cent. While domestic spending declined 42.8 per cent, international spending saw a much steeper fall of 70.3 per cent, in part driven by severe restrictions. The region, which was highly reliant on international tourism in 2019, saw international spending as a share of total Travel & Tourism spending drop from 62 per cent of the total in 2019 to just 46 per cent in 2020. However, domestic spending grew in share, from 38 per cent of the total in 2019 to 54 per cent in 2020.

Despite a 42.4 per cent decline in Travel & Tourism GDP in 2020, the Americas was the least affected major region globally. As a result, it remained the largest region in terms of its economic importance, accounting for 35 per cent of global direct Travel & Tourism GDP. While domestic spending dropped by 38.9 per cent, international spending saw a significantly sharper decline of 72.1 per cent due to severe travel restrictions on inbound visitors.

The Caribbean, which is as a region highly reliant upon international visitors, was the worst affected 'sub-region' globally. Its Travel & Tourism GDP fell 58 per cent last year, from 14.1 per cent of its total economy in 2019, to just 6.4 per cent in 2020.

## Kerala relaxes COVID-19 norms to boost tourism sector

**T**he Kerala government has come out with some relaxation in the standard operating procedures (SOP) of the COVID-19 protocol to boost the tourism sector.

Tourism activities are allowed in areas where the Test Positivity Rate (TPR) is below 10 per cent. However, the staff working in the sector must have taken at least one dose of vaccination. The guests also must either have proof of at least one dose of COVID vaccination or an RT-PCR negative certificate taken within 72 hours.

In these areas, accommodation units in are allowed to function adhering to the standard operating procedures issued by the Department of Health, Government of

India, and the operational guidelines of the Department of Tourism, Government of India.

Click Hotels by Suba acquires 35 properties including 1589 Hotels, GenX, RNB, and RNB Select

In a major breakthrough for the hospitality segment following the COVID-19 outbreak, Click Hotels by Suba has successfully added 35 new properties to its portfolio across 22 prime destinations in India which marks the milestone of a total of 2000 rooms. Marking one of the biggest acquisitions in the budget hotel segment, the latest expansion drive is a part of Click Hotels' acquisition of 1589 Hotels, GenX, RNB, and RNB Select.

Following its acquisition, Click Hotels

by Suba has marked its transition to an asset-light business model. The hospitality conglomerate has further forayed into the leisure segment building on its 'Bed, Breakfast, and Broadband' and affordable luxury model. The new-age mid-segment hotel chain will now directly manage 50 prime hotel properties across India, UAE, and Nepal.





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Click Hotels by Suba has also successfully expanded its footprint with this acquisition across key tourist destinations including Ranthambore National Park, Jim Corbett National Park, and Dalhousie alongside others.

The brand believes in going the extra mile for each of its guests. Hence, in addition to iPads and BYOD (bring your own device) technologies to name a few for easy check-ins, the brand's online booking system comes equipped with artificial intelligence and other avant-garde technological enhancements. The brand also harnesses the power of data and analytics, which forms the base of its key decision-making. And, these tech-driven hospitality services will continue to be implemented across every new property. A new Loyalty Program, called 'Click Smiles', is now live as well and will further add to the brand's core value proposition.

The journey of the Suba Group of Hotels began with the vision of hospitality by its founder, Abu Baker Mehta, and steady fast efforts of the Group MD, Mansur Mehta from 1996 onwards, have led to a rapid growth trajectory of the hotel chain. Suba Group of Hotels diversified into two brands, namely Suba Hotels (a 3- and 4-star hotel group) and Click Hotels (a new-age budget hotel group), in 2015. To date, both brands have established a strong presence across India and UAE, with 15 hotels and 720 rooms across 11 destinations.



## Domestic passenger air traffic witnesses a 41-42 per cent sequential growth in June 2021: ICRA



For June 2021, domestic passenger traffic is estimated at 29-30 lakh, implying a sequential growth of 41-42 per cent compared to 19.8 lakh in May 2021. The airlines' capacity deployment for June 2021 was around 46 per cent higher than June 2020 (31,700 departures in June 2021, against 21,696 departures in June 2020). On a sequential basis, the number of departures in June 2021 were higher by 14-15 per cent, as Covid-19 infections demonstrated a downward trajectory.

According to Kinjal Shah, Vice President & Co-Group Head, ICRA, "For June 2021, the average daily departures were at 1100, significantly higher than average daily departures of 700 in June 2020, and higher than 900 in May 2021, though remains significantly lower than 2000 in April 2021. The average number of passengers per flight during June 2021 was 94, against an average of 77 passengers per flight in May 2021. Though there is some recovery observed in June 2021, there exists continued stress on demand, driven largely by the second wave of the pandemic, limiting travel to only necessary travel, while both leisure and business travel have been curtailed due to various state-wide restrictions, despite the decline in infections."

## Germany lifts travel ban on travellers from India, and four other countries

Germany's health agency, Robert Koch Institute has lifted its ban on travellers from five countries hit by the Delta strain COVID-19, including India, UK, Russia, Nepal, and Portugal.

Germany reclassified India under the 'high-incidence areas' from 'virus variant countries'. The change means simpler requirements for people visiting those countries. People who have had either both vaccination doses, or who can demonstrate they have recovered from COVID, will not need to isolate on their return or arrival.

Germany had introduced 'virus variant country' travel category to prevent the entry of the Delta coronavirus variant. India was classified as a virus variant area at the end of April.





## Pavilions Hotels & Resorts to accept Cryptocurrency for hotel bookings

The Pavilions Hotels & Resorts has partnered with the leading global Crypto-payment gateway, Coindirect, enabling customers to pay with Bitcoin, Ethereum, and 40 other virtual currencies confidently and securely, 24/7.

Guests can take advantage of paying in the Cryptocurrency of their choice, based on the currency and location they are situated in at the time of booking, offering more freedom and a contemporary, personalised service.

The Pavilions Hotels & Resorts group recently announced new hotels, expanding its portfolio to 14 locations across the globe, most recently The Pavilions Anana Krabi, and The Pavilions El Nido, Palawan Island, which join properties in Phuket, Bali, Himalayas, Mongolia and Niseko in Asia, and Amsterdam, Madrid, Lisbon and Rome in Europe.



## Valley of Flowers in Uttarakhand is now open for tourists



However, keeping the health safety of all stakeholders at the utmost priority, the tourists wishing to visit the valley will have to submit a negative RT-PCR report and abide by all the COVID-19 protocols put in place across the state.

A key attraction point for tourists, the Valley of Flowers is situated at an altitude of 12995 feet above sea level in Chamoli district. Presently more than 50 species of flowers are blooming in the valley. The Valley of Flowers National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is one of the two main areas of the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve. The place offers an ethereal view of exotic flowers like Orchids, Poppies, Primulas, Marigolds, Daisies, and Anemones. It is believed that in the Ramayana period, Hanuman came to this valley in search of the Sanjeevani herb.

The months of July, August, and September are considered the best to visit the Valley of Flowers. Mountain ranges and beautiful glaciers surround the valley and this area remains a center of attraction for its medicinal, flora, and fauna. When the rainy season starts, the valley becomes a picturesque place with flowers and the whole place glows like a colorful palette. This divine place is also home to some rare and endangered creatures. The journey to the Valley of flowers is a zig-zag trail of 16 km, during which the tourist moves ahead while looking at the beauty of nature so that he does not find his journey difficult.

## Sarovar Hotels and Resorts continue to expand its portfolio in Srinagar



Sarovar Hotels and Resorts has announced the signing of another hotel in Srinagar. This will be Sarovar's second hotel in Srinagar.

Sarovar Portico, Srinagar is scheduled to open in early 2022 and will offer well-appointed rooms, modern facilities, restaurant and banquet spaces. The beauty of Srinagar will be well imbibed in the interiors of the hotel while providing all modern facilities, ensuring that your stay is most comfortable. The hotel is located at the Airport Road, Humhama area and is just 4 km away from the airport and 9 km from the bus station and railway station.

Srinagar also known as 'Switzerland of India' is famous for its natural beauty, gardens, waterfronts, and houseboats. It has seen fascinating tourists for centuries with its beautiful picturesque Himalayan backdrop, pristine lakes dotted with houseboats, shikaras, and the majesty of Mughal architecture. Needless to say, the incredibly famous Dal Lake is one of the most favored vacation destinations in Srinagar. Along with this, other must-visit places are Shalimar Bagh, Mughal Garden, Nishat Bagh, and Tulip Garden.

Commenting on the development, Anil Madhok, Executive Chairman, Sarovar Hotels and Resorts said, "We are delighted to be consolidating our presence further in the 'land of lakes and Garden'. It's a significant addition to our rapidly growing footprint in the leisure portfolio and reflects the strong traction the brand is gaining in the region."



## IRCTC to operate special train in September covering 'Char Dham Yatra'

Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) will soon start the services of a special train in September covering several top tourist destinations, including Char Dham-Badrinath, Jagannath Puri, Rameshwaram, and Dwarkadhish.

The decision was taken in view of declining cases of coronavirus across the country. IRCTC has now launched another very popular pilgrimage circuit 'Chardham Yatra' by 'Dekho Apna Desh' Deluxe AC Tourist Train.

The 16 days tour will start from Delhi Safdarjung Railway Station on September 18, 2021, and cover the visit of Badrinath including Mana Village (near China border), Narsingha Temple (Joshimath), Rishikesh, Jagannath Puri including Golden beach of Puri, Konark Sun Temple, Chandrabhaga beach, Rameshwaram including Dhanushkodi, Dwarkadhish including Nageshwar Jyotirlinga, Shivrampur beach, and Bet Dwarka. Guests will be travelling roughly 8500 kilometers on this tour.

The State of Art Deluxe AC Tourist Train has a host of astounding features including two fine dining restaurants, a modern kitchen, shower cubicles in coaches, sensor-based washroom functions, foot massager. The fully air-conditioned train provides two types of accommodation—1st AC and 2nd AC. The train has enhanced security features of CCTV cameras and Security Guards for each coach.

IRCTC has launched this special tourist train in line with the government of India initiative 'Dekho Apna Desh' to promote domestic tourism, at a very competitive price



starting from ₹78,585 per person. The package price covers train journey in AC classes, accommodation in deluxe hotels, all meals, all transfer and sightseeing in AC vehicles except hilly areas, travel insurance and services of IRCTC Tour Managers.

To ensure the safety measures post COVID 19 in this deluxe tourist train, provision has been made and booking is restricted to around 120 tourists against the total capacity of 156 tourists. Also, at least the first dose of COVID-19 Vaccination is mandatory for guests of age group 18 or above. Besides this, IRCTC will also provide a safety kit to all tourists having face masks, hand gloves, and sanitizer.

## Delhi govt frames guidelines for domestic travellers

The graded action plan approved by the Delhi government in anticipation of a third COVID wave has recommended guidelines for people entering the city, including for travellers from states with over five per cent positivity rate and those which have reported mutant strains. For international travellers arriving in Delhi, central government guidelines will be followed, the plan states.

The colour-coded plan was approved during a meeting of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) attended by Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal, and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal among others. The graded action plan has four levels of alerts based on the positivity rate or the number of new cases, oxygen, or bed occupancy.

The first level (L-1) is yellow coded, the second (L-2) is 'Amber', the third level (L-3) is 'Orange' and the highest level (L-4) is 'Red' that denotes over five per cent positivity or the number of new cases reaching 16,000 during a week or 3,000 oxygen-bed occupancy. The plan states that there are three types of situations in which restrictions will be put in place in respect to domestic travel.

The restrictions will come into force when a 'Red Alert' (Level 4) has been enforced in Delhi and people are coming by air into the city (including transit passengers) from other highly infected states and Union Territories where the positivity rate is more than five per cent, the plan states.

The second condition of restrictions will involve people coming into Delhi by air, trains, buses, cars, trucks from other highly infected states or Union Territories where the positivity rate is over 10 per cent, it says. The third condition for the restrictions is when people coming to Delhi



through different modes of transport from other states or Union Territories where a new mutant of virus is detected, it added.

Such restrictions were imposed on travellers from Telangana and Andhra Pradesh where a mutant of coronavirus was found in May this year. People arriving in Delhi during the implementation of the graded action plan will require to produce a certificate of successful vaccination of two doses of COVID-19 vaccine or a negative RT-PCR report, not more than 72 hours old.

Those failing to do so will require to undergo a 14-day mandatory institutional or paid quarantine stay, stated the action plan document. Officials, including district magistrates, deputy commissioners of police, municipal deputy commissioners among others will ensure strict compliance of COVID-appropriate behaviour, it added.





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## **PACHAR GROUP OF HOTELS**

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