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

Email: info@sampanmedia.com

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

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Dear Friends,

As I have started meeting up with trade colleagues and associates, they are constantly asking me what's next for the tourism industry as we shortly enter into the second month of the last quarter of 2021. What's clear is this ride is still underway. It might still take some more time before complete normalcy returns. The tourism industry is on its way to revival and has also started taking strides in that direction.

Consumers are adjusting and settling into a new normal, as they learn to live with the reality of COVID-19. As more countries reopen their borders, consumers will have more options and preferences to take that required break. Most importantly, their will to travel is still alive and it will be more so due to the pandemic.

Meanwhile, our TTJ November 2021 issue will be a delight to read as we bring you a few pages which show recovery is on and more travel is on the cards.

Happy Reading!

Ravi Sharma

Ravi Sharma
ravisharma@sampanmedia.com

Editor's Desk

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Cambodia to end quarantine for vaccinated travellers



Cambodia is lifting all quarantine requirements for vaccinated inbound travellers entering Cambodia by air, waterway, or land border checkpoints.

Travellers will be required to take a rapid antigen test on arrival rather than waiting for the results of the lengthier polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test.

Prime Minister Hun Sen confirmed the waiver of all quarantine requirements. “You just need to wait 15-20 minutes for the rapid test results and then you can continue your journey to any place across the entire country with no limitations, however you wish,” he said.

“Cambodia is almost fully vaccinated with nearly 88 per cent of the total population of around 16 million covered. So, there is no quarantine requirement any longer – except for those who have not been vaccinated who still need to do the 14-day quarantine like before,” he said.

Before departing for Cambodia, passengers need to be sure to have proof of vaccination and a health certificate indicating that they tested negative for Covid-19 in the 72 hours prior to their flight.

Saudi recognises Covishield as approved vaccine for travel



As Saudi continues to open up to the world, the Saudi Arabian government has recognised Covishield as an approved Covid-19 vaccine. Following this announcement, Covishield, produced by the Serum Institute of India, joins the list of eight other approved vaccines including Pfizer BioNTech, Comirnaty, Oxford AstraZeneca, SK Bioscience, Vaxzevria, Moderna, Spikevax and Johnson & Johnson.

Travellers who are fully vaccinated with Saudi-approved vaccines are able to enter the country without having to undergo institutional quarantine. While entry into Saudi is still temporarily suspended for travellers coming or passing through India in the 14 days prior to their arrival into Saudi, the approval of Covishield is a positive development as Saudi prepares to open its borders to Indian tourists.

Indian travellers who have spent 14 days in a country that is not on the list of countries where entry is temporarily suspended immediately before entering Saudi are also permitted as long as they are fully immunised. A negative PCR test conducted no more than 72 hours before departure is a mandatory requirement in all cases.

Seychelles lifts ban on Indian travellers with immediate effect

The Ministry of Health Seychelles has announced the entry of visitors from all countries, including India, irrespective of COVID-19 vaccination status.

All travellers will be required to present a negative PCR test taken within 72 hours of departure. Additionally, visitors will need to submit a duly filled application for Health Travel Authorisation on <https://seychelles.govtas.com/> which is subject to verification and approval of the Public Health Authority. A valid travel and health insurance policy to cover COVID-19 related quarantine, isolation or treatment. There will be no quarantine requirement, minimum stay nor restriction on movement upon entry into Seychelles. Conditions for stay for children up to age 17, regardless of their vaccination status, will be as for the parent/guardian they are accompanying.



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New Delhi Marriott Marquis and The St. Regis Aerocity, New Delhi set to debut in 2025

Marriott International recently signed an agreement with Prestige Group and DB Realty to introduce the New Delhi Marriott Marquis and The St. Regis Aerocity, New Delhi. Slated to open in 2025, the agreement is expected to add 779 rooms to the Marriott International portfolio.

New Delhi Marriott Marquis is anticipated to feature 590 thoughtfully designed rooms. The hotel is slated to offer a variety of local and international gourmet delicacies at its three dining outlets, including an all-day dining restaurant, a specialty restaurant and a diner. The hotel will feature the Marriott Hotels Greatroom lobby – a stylish hub of the hotel that serves as a great social gathering place for both day and night. Along with the Greatroom, plans call for the brand's signature M Club Lounge, where Marriott Bonvoy Elite members can enjoy a range of complimentary food and beverage options throughout the day.

The St. Regis Aerocity, New Delhi, is anticipated to feature 189 luxurious rooms and suites. The hotel is slated to feature an all-day dining restaurant, a specialty restaurant and a New York Deli, a tribute to the brand's flagship hotel, The St. Regis New York, located at 55th and Fifth Avenue. Guests can also look forward to The Drawing Room and the signature St. Regis

Bar. Guests will also enjoy the brand's renowned Butler Service, offering highly bespoke services customised to each guest.

Guests at both hotels can expect modern, multi-purpose events and meeting spaces suited to host weddings, socials, meetings and conventions, paired with sophistication and impeccable service. With an expected 85,000 sq feet of meeting space in total, the two hotels are poised to create the ultimate destination within the Aerocity landscape.



Skyhelix Sentosa to open ahead of schedule on 15 December



Mount Faber Leisure Group's highly anticipated new attraction, SkyHelix Sentosa, will open ahead of schedule on December 15, 2021, in time for the school holidays and year-end celebrations. It is Singapore's highest open-air panoramic ride and will be the first carbon-neutral attraction on Sentosa.

Located within the collection of attractions at Imbiah Lookout, SkyHelix Sentosa is an unforgettable gondola ride that reveals breathtaking views as it gently rotates 35 metres above ground along a vertical helix-like structure. Guests will enjoy unparalleled 360° sights of Sentosa and the developing Greater Southern Waterfront while dangling their feet in the air with a cool drink in hand. The ride's apex is 79 metres above sea level, making it one of the highest vantage points on Sentosa.

SkyHelix Sentosa is a new landmark within Singapore's evolving tourism landscape. Through the launch of this attraction, Mount Faber Leisure Group seeks to contribute to Singapore's vision of becoming a top sustainable urban destination by developing unique, engaging and sustainable leisure experiences around Singapore's stunning views and beautiful nature.

Lakshadweep revises COVID curbs in view of improved situation



In view of the improvement in the coronavirus situation and almost 100 per cent vaccination coverage in the Union Territory, the Lakshadweep administration has issued an order indicating the revised restrictions and norms like non-requirement of a coronavirus test to travel there from the mainland or for moving from one island to another for those who have taken both doses of vaccine 14 days prior to the trip.

Those fully vaccinated 14 days prior to their travel would not be quarantined either on arrival at the island from the mainland or the other islands of the archipelago, the notification read.

Non-vaccinated or partially vaccinated persons, however, need to have a negative Covid-19 (RT-PCR) test result not older than 48 hours from date of travel and they would also have to undergo three days mandatory quarantine on arrival, it said.

The other norms are that shore leave would be granted only to those ship crew who have been fully vaccinated and that thermal-scanning of passengers has to be carried out at Kochi and all ports of arrival.

Deputy Collectors or Block Development Officers have been directed to ensure strict enforcement of COVID-19 appropriate behaviour in all islands at all time, the order said.

No COVID testing for children below five on international arrivals: Health Ministry



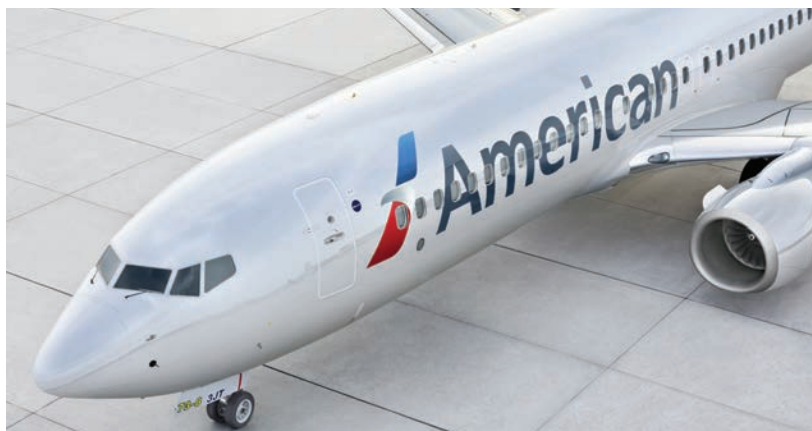
Children below five years are exempted from both pre- and post-arrival testing for COVID-19, according to the revised guidelines for international arrivals released on November 11, 2021, by the Health Ministry.

The guidelines, however, state that in case they are found symptomatic for coronavirus infections on arrival or during the home quarantine period, they shall undergo testing and be treated according to protocol. This standard operating procedure (SOP) shall be valid till further orders, the Ministry stated.

The Health Ministry said that the guidelines for international arrivals in India have been reviewed in view of increasing vaccination coverage across the globe and the changing nature of the pandemic.

In its guidelines, the Ministry said that the global trajectory of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to decline, with certain regional variations, but added that there is a need to monitor the continuously changing nature of the virus and the evolution of SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern (VOC), which must still remain in focus.

American Airlines inaugurates New York-New Delhi direct flight



American Airlines' inaugural New York-New Delhi flight landed at the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) on November 13, marking the resumption of the American carrier's flights to the country. The flight operated by a Boeing 777-300ER aircraft will be run daily throughout the year.

American Airlines flight 292 took off New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport at 7.27 pm local time on November 12 and landed at IGIA on Saturday night.

The carrier was supposed to start operations in October, but it was deferred by a couple of weeks as the US announced the reopening of international travel on November 8. American Airlines' Bengaluru-Seattle, that was supposed to start from January 4, 2022, stands deferred to March-end as corporate travel is yet to pick up and expected to revive till then. The Airline suspended its India flights in 2012 when it terminated its Chicago-New Delhi flight, which it started in 2007.

American Airlines MD (sales) Tom Lattig told TOI, "There is a tremendous demand for travel between US and India thanks to a large diaspora and growing business ties between the two countries. People now want to fly direct instead of one-stop flights, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic. We are looking at Mumbai closely. We will look at the two routes announced and then take a further call."

The American has deputed its 304-seater Boeing 777 on the Delhi route with four cabins, 52 in business and 8 in first. The airline recently entered into a code-sharing agreement with IndiGo for nationwide connectivity.

US to give spouses of H-1B visa holders automatic work permits

Benefit lakhs of Indian-Americans, the United States has agreed to provide automatic work authorisation permits to the spouses of H-1B visa holders.

This is a huge respite for thousands of spouses of non-immigrant visa holders, such as H-1B, who will be provided automatic work authorisation permits, a step that would also benefit thousands of Indian-American women. Dependents, including the spouses of H-1B visa holders, are given H-4 visas. Earlier H-4 visa holders always met the regulatory test for automatic extension of EADs (employment authorisation documents). A significant beneficiary of the H-1B visas in the US are Indian IT professionals. The move will make the employment extension process simpler for the spouses of H-1B holders, thereby directly benefiting Indians.

The decision, however, has not come voluntarily from the Joe Biden administration. The American Immigration Lawyers' Association (AILA), on behalf of immigrant spouses, had filed an action-class lawsuit in March. On November 11, the US District Court for the Western District of Washington directed the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) - the immigration arm of Department of Homeland Security - to allow spouses of

H-1B visa holders automatic extension of their work permit.

"This (H-4 visa holders) is a group that always met the regulatory test for an automatic extension of EADs (employment authorisation documents), but the agency previously prohibited them from that benefit and forced them to wait for reauthorisation," AILA's Jonathan Wasden was quoted as saying in a report by news agency PTI.

This may be applicable to L2 visa holders as well. AILA said the agreement between the parties is a "giant achievement" and will result in a landmark policy shift for USCIS, which has now recognised that L-2 spouses enjoy automatic work authorisation status. L-2 visas are given to the spouses of L-1 visa holders.





Seven Mile Beach in Negril



▲ Donovan White

Jamaica is currently experiencing one of the fastest travel and tourism recoveries in the world. As per Amadeus, the searches and demand for the destination were running 50 per cent ahead of the global average and travel agents led bookings and searches doubling the global average. With Jamaica recently lifted the ban on travellers from India, Donovan White, Director of Tourism, Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB), shares the latest travel and tourism scenario in the exotic destination. The country is keen and working to open new routes to facilitate travel between India and Jamaica, to make the destination more accessible and seamless for Indian tourists.

Prashant Nayak

Working towards making Jamaica the most favoured destination in India

Please tell us about the tourism recovery in Jamaica?

The recovery has been very positive. We are enjoying a V-shaped recovery. Presently, the earnings are around about 1.4 billion US Dollars. We anticipate that by the end of this year, we'd probably be around about 1.6 million and about 2 billion in terms of earnings. This puts Jamaica in a good position with all the teams we need to be in full recovery.

Currently, from which countries does Jamaica accept tourists and what are the requirements and protocols to visit the island nation?

Jamaica was among the first destinations to reopen to travellers last year and remains one of the most accessible and enticing places for Americans in 2021. Jamaica is accepting tourists from South America, Canada, and the UK. Jamaica recently lifted the ban on

travellers from India.

Requirements and protocols to visit Jamaica are: a negative COVID test taken no more than 72 hours before arrival in Jamaica. You must complete the travel authorisation form and get approval for the entry. And all the other time protocols apply like wearing masks in public places, maintaining social distancing, etc.

Jamaica had also established a pair of "resilient corridors" to protect visitors and citizens from COVID-19, last year. The corridors incorporate more than 80 percent of Jamaica's tourism areas and only one percent of the country's resident population. They also meet the strict COVID-19 protocols approved by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTTC).

On the tourism front, any new developments in Jamaica? How is cruise

tourism picking up in the country?

Jamaica has had a long experience as a tourist destination, being a favoured retreat for travellers from across the globe. The destination has been one of the best-known resort vacation destinations in the world and currently boasts one of the most diverse visitor accommodation sectors in the Caribbean, including world-famous all-inclusive resorts, upscale hotels and villas, and a range of distinctive tourist accommodations and attractions.

Vision 2030 Jamaica – National Development Plan is Jamaica's first long-term strategic development plan. The Tourism Sector plan also will have implications for other areas of national development, including transport, urban and regional planning, housing, services, agriculture and manufacturing.

Almost 20,000 players in the tourism industry had the opportunity to benefit from the recent return of cruises to Jamaica. The Carnival Sunrise, the first cruise ship to dock in Jamaica following a 17-month hiatus caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, arrived in Ocho Rios, St. Ann, on August 16 with approximately 3,000 passengers and crew. Jamaica is constantly trying to get more opportunities to bring back & further expand cruise tourism.

Tell us about the tourism scenario from the India market before the pandemic?

Prior to the pandemic, Jamaica was making good strides in terms of building the destination as the most favoured destination in India. But it was rudely interrupted by the pandemic. And so, we've had to restart all over again. We expect that it will take some time to regain the pre-pandemic numbers and traffic to Jamaica, but we are



Music Band in Kingston

working towards achieving those numbers gradually. Presently in the UAE, we are not only promoting Jamaica but also looking to develop new routes to Jamaica, as well as initiate new opportunities to make the travel to Jamaica from India even more seamless.

Post COVID, what kind of visitor mix are you looking for from India to Jamaica by the end of 2022? Any particular segment that you are targeting from India?

We see there's a great opportunity with the wedding market because people who like to or prefer to travel and do destination weddings tend to have fewer inhibitions for cost and distance. Post-COVID, the demographic of travellers has changed. They've gotten younger, they've got more adventurous, they've gotten more sensitized to wanting to travel and travel long distances and spend more time. And with Jamaica, a destination that offers so much variety, so much culture, which also resembles some aspects of Indian culture; we believe that we can make a very good push to get more Indian travellers.

From an Indian point of view, what would you recommend visitors to see and experience on a week-long trip to Jamaica?

Jamaica is the island of melodic days, upbeat nights, and unforgettable experiences. Get back to nature in the magic of the whispering rainforests, hike the gently rustling Blue Mountains and look at the world through new eyes. Meet the friendly people, try Jamaican food, and watch the sunset over the Caribbean Sea to the sound of reggae grooves and good times. The island has something for every kind of traveller.

Visit Negril, a small town in Jamaica, is a beautiful vacation spot. The beaches are sublime and the sunsets are like nothing else on earth. It is the epitome of relaxation. Head to Montego Bay is a marvellous melting pot of cultures, buzzing with locals, visitors, and

expats who've made Jamaica their home. Montego Bay is the main tourist hub for Jamaica and also its second-largest city. You can also visit Ocho Rios—a town with stunning scenery, renowned attractions, world-class resorts, and vast shopping options, Ocho Rios is one of the major tourist regions in Jamaica. And definitely visit Kingston is the capital and largest city of Jamaica, and is the cultural mecca of the island. The place to be if you want to experience the mesmerizing music and heady nightlife as you vibrate to the beat of the drums.

Are you doing any special promotions in Expo 2020 Dubai to entice Indian tourists and other tourists from this side of the continent?

Jamaica by participating in the World Expo 2020 aims to draw a broader picture of what Jamaica brings for tourists. The zones of the Jamaica pavilion, such as business and investment zone, music zone, heritage and culture zone, gastronomy zone and the experiential zone, a special effort is being made towards promoting Jamaica in India.

How do you see the global tourism industry evolve in a post-COVID world?

We see a changing of the travel marketplace happening already. The demographics of travel are beginning to shift themselves. There is an increased level of millennial travellers that are more adventurous, they're more opportunistic. We also see that there is a tremendous transfer of different segments to the millennials. The age groups are getting easier and the demand for high-end services as in a destination is also getting greater. So, we feel that the travel market spaces are going to be demanding more services. And we are gearing our own destination to be able to fit into that demand cycle while maintaining the quality, and then our mix, all the products that would have attracted all types of travellers from across the globe.



Fleet Street Music in Jamaica

The wait is over, to visit the 'Land of Smiles'

Thailand is now welcoming fully vaccinated foreign visitors, together with returning Thais and foreign residents, from more than 60 approved countries and territories to enter the Kingdom by air with no quarantine requirements, which started from November 1, 2021. As India has been included in the list, TTJ interacts with Cholada Siddhivarn, Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand, Mumbai office, to get more clarity and insights on the current tourism matters prevailing in the country.

Prashant Nayak

With India recently included in Thailand's quarantine-free entry for vaccinated travellers, how hopeful you are in bringing numbers from India as tourism resumes?

Indians have always been fond of Thailand. While international travel was restricted, we received a lot of queries for Thailand. Now that travellers from India face no quarantine restrictions on entry into Thailand as long as they can provide evidence of having been vaccinated against COVID-19 under WHO guidelines. As a result, we expect even more Indians to travel to Thailand and consider Thailand as their primary destination of choice.

What do you have to say about the air connectivity issue? Will it hamper your forecast and targets set for the year 2022 since India still has an international flight ban in place?

Yes, I agree international flights travel ban is a concern but, we at TAT India are putting in all our efforts to woo Indians to the land of smiles. We have had communications in the past with our partners and consumers, and we understand that despite the restrictions, the growth and demand for Thailand is still very encouraging. People want to holiday, and with borders opening, I am sure there will be a slow but steady inflow of tourists from India.

Besides sandbox programs, Thailand has other schemes such as the 'Test and Go' exemption for vaccinated travellers and or the 'Happy Quarantine' program for partially or unvaccinated travellers. What has led your Government to ease out the earlier strict COVID curbs?

As we work towards mitigating risks around outbound travel and to enhance the quality of our travel health programmes,



▲ Cholada Siddhivarn

we will continue to ease up on existing COVID requirements like the Safety & Health Administration (SHA) which has been recognised by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), RT-PCR tests, etc. We aim to keep these measures progressive and in accordance with best practices that meet both global standards and our travel needs.

Has the sandbox programme been successful after Thailand strategised it? Do you have the numbers for international travellers visiting Thailand since inception?

According to the Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health, there were a total of 30,538 visitor arrivals to Thailand at all international airports during November 1-10, 2021. The top 10 countries were: USA – 3,864 arrivals, Germany – 3,274 arrivals, UK – 1,785 arrivals, Japan – 1,713 arrivals, South



Korea – 1,296 arrivals, Russia – 1,140 arrivals, Switzerland – 1,116 arrivals, Sweden – 1,041 arrivals, France – 923 arrivals and UAE – 810 arrivals.

The 30,538 arrivals included 19,949 visitors under the Exemption from Quarantine (TEST & GO) entry scheme, 9,072 under the Living in the Blue Zone (17 Sandbox destinations) programme, and 1,517 under the Happy Quarantine requirement (comprising 453 arrivals with a seven-day quarantine and 1,064 arrivals with a 10-day quarantine).

According to you, which factors should the Indian traveller keep in mind before making travel plans to Thailand?

Before making plans to Thailand, you should take care of the following factors for a comfortable journey:

- Apply for your Visa beforehand and have

approved the 'Thailand Pass' QR code handy.

- A Certificate of Vaccination (fully vaccinated) with an approved vaccine at least 14 days before travelling.
- Those previously infected within 3 months must have received 1 dose of an approved vaccine at least 14 days before travelling.
- Travellers under 12 years of age, travelling with parents or guardians, are exempt from the vaccination requirement.
- A Medical Certificate with an RT-PCR lab result indicating that COVID-19 is not detected issued no more than 72 hours before travelling (all travellers).
- A confirmed payment for stay at SHA+, AQ, OQ, or AHQ accommodation, and 1 RT-PCR test. (1 N for Test & GO/7N for Sandbox/10N for Happy Quarantine)

- An insurance policy with coverage no less than US\$50,000.
- Download the 'MOR CHANA' App when in Thailand.

What can the traveller expect now in Thailand after almost two years of travel lull and break?

Thailand has geared up with all safety protocols and necessary restrictions to ensure safe travel. However, restaurants, parks, and other such touristic places will have new rules and procedures that one may need to follow.

Which segments of tourism you are banking on now and targeting from the Indian market?

At this moment we feel Weddings, Golf, Luxury, DINK segments will be the pillars to drive in traffic.

What will be your current initiatives and strategies with travel partners in India, now that Thailand has reopened for them to get back into action?

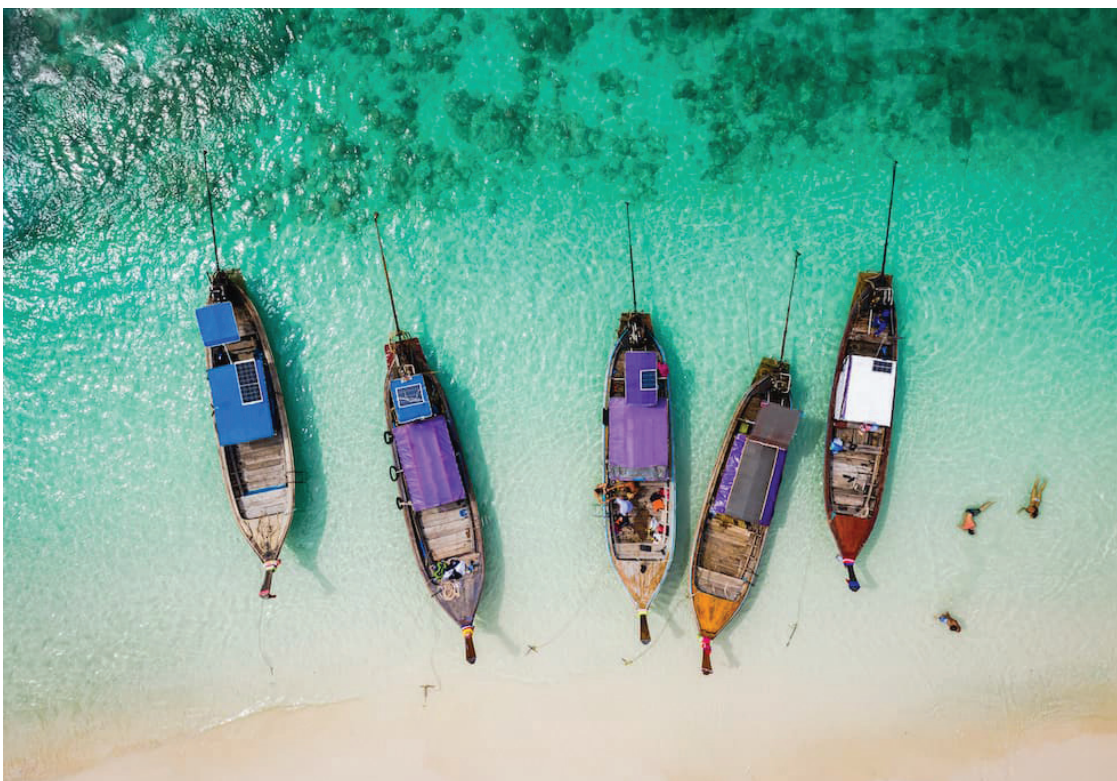
TAT has announced the 'Visit Thailand Year 2022' which will offer 3 'Amazing New Chapters' in which the world's travellers are welcome to experience in Thailand.

Chapter 1, or The First Chapter, will see TAT highlight tourism products and services that will awaken travellers' five senses; such as delicious Thai cuisine and the picturesque natural scenery that can be discovered all throughout the kingdom.

In Chapter 2, titled The One You Love, TAT will focus on specific segments like families, couples, and friends and invite them to create wonderful memories together in Thailand. Bangkok, Phuket, and Chiang Mai in particular will be promoted

as popular destinations for weddings and honeymooners, with their beautiful beaches, mountain resorts, and vibrant city appeals.

Chapter 3, The Earth We Care, will highlight how nature's chance to revitalise due to the COVID-19 situation has increased ecotourism awareness among the world's travellers and how their behaviour has impacted the environment. The emergence of travel segments like Wilderness tourism (Escapers) and Cult-Vacation (Conscious) will also show that travellers' behaviour has changed towards spending more time in nature and being increasingly conscious of their impact on natural resources.



MOT and IRCTC deliberate the way forward for the promotion of Buddhist Tourism in India

In its efforts to revive tourism, the MoT (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India) together with IRCTC, organised a train familiarisation trip combined with a series of conferences on the Buddhist Circuit. The aim was to bring to light the potential of this popular destination in the religious tourism segment. Buddhist Tourism is one of the prime focused tourism products that India has to offer from its cart of diverse tourism products both in the domestic and overseas markets. Post witnessing a vast improvement in the Covid situation in India, MoT has initiated promoting this aspect of religious tourism looking forward to keen participation from the industry stakeholders.

Ravi Sharma

To jumpstart the revival of the Buddhist Circuit, a Train FAM Tour and series of Conferences were organised from October 4 to October 8, 2021, by the Ministry of Tourism Government of India. The idea was to showcase some of the prominent Buddhist sites to the invited inbound and domestic tour operators and a few selected media houses. Along with the FAM tour, a series of conferences at Bodh Gaya and Varanasi

were also organised. The Bodhgaya event was attended by nearly 100 plus delegates. The prominent speakers were G.K.V. Rao, DDG Tourism, MoT & DM of Bodh Gaya. Presentations were given by BSTDC and Dr. Achyut Singh, Joint General Manager, IRCTC. Rahul Chakraborty, COO, IATO also gave a presentation. The focus of the presentations was how to improve the visitors to the circuit.

After the conference on October 5, the delegates were taken by luxury

coaches to Bodh Gaya for the Darshan, followed by a dinner that was hosted at Mahabodhi Hotel, Gaya. On the early morning of October 6, delegates packed their respective luggage and left for the site visit to Rajgir and Nalanda. En route to Rajgir, a short break was devoted to visiting the statue of Dashrath Manjhi, popularly known as the Parvat Purush. The story of Dashrath Manjhi was so inspiring that it came out as a movie and was released in Indian cinemas some years ago, titled Manjhi-The Mountain



Man, which was indeed a well-directed reflection of his life. Delegates boarded the special train and reached Varanasi later in the night.

The conference at Varanasi held at the Taj on October 7 turned out to be ground-breaking. Over 150 tourism professionals attended the conference. Speakers like Arvind Kumar, Secretary Tourism, MOT, GOI and Neelkanth Tiwari, MOT, Uttar Pradesh, were the main speakers. They elaborated on the key issues with regard to the development and promotion of tourism in the circuit. The Honourable Tourism Minister of Uttar Pradesh stole the show with his remarkable speech. He emphasised on the overall development of UP tourism products, particularly with the development of Ram Mandir at Ayodhya. The event was indeed a grand success!

Under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme, the Tourism Ministry has sanctioned five projects of ₹325.53 crore for Buddhist circuit development in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh.



Dr. Achyut Singh
Joint General Manager
(Tourism & Marketing)
IRCTC

Singh said, "With a view to heighten our offerings, in the financial year 2018-19, a brand new state-of-the-art 'Buddhist Circuit Tourist Train' was envisioned. This AC Deluxe Tourist Train has a host of astounding features, including two fine dining restaurants, a modern kitchen, shower cubicles in coaches, sensor-based washroom functions, and foot massagers. This fully air-conditioned train provides two types of accommodation viz. first and second AC. On this train, IRCTC has deployed



private Security Guards and CCTV cameras for enhanced security."

Singh further added, "This Buddhist Circuit Tourist Train is one of the key tourism products for both IRCTC and the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. In order to showcase such a valuable tourism product, MoT in association with IRCTC has organised this FAM tour for Inbound and domestic agents especially in association with IATO and ADTOI. Interested agents can enter into an agreement with IRCTC for sales, promotion, and booking of the 'Buddhist Circuit Tourist Train'. Two types of agent agreements are done: PSA (Preferred Sales Agent) and TA (Travel Associate). All agents who have signed the agreement with IRCTC can book the 'Buddhist Circuit Tourist Train' packages and avail a commission."

The Buddhist Circuit Tourist Train will be operational from the month of October to March. The total capacity of the train is 156 guests, with four First AC coaches that accommodate 96 guests and two Second AC coaches that accommodate 60 guests.

Singh further added, "This Buddhist Circuit Tourist Train is one of the key tourism products for both IRCTC and the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. In order to showcase such a valuable tourism product, MoT in association with IRCTC, has organised this FAM tour for Inbound and domestic agents, especially in association with IATO and ADTOI. Interested agents can enter into an agreement with IRCTC for sales, promotion, and booking of the 'Buddhist Circuit Tourist Train'. Two types of agent agreements are done: PSA (Preferred Sales Agent) and TA

(Travel Associate). All agents who have signed the agreement with IRCTC can book the 'Buddhist Circuit Tourist Train' packages and avail a commission."



Sunil Mishra
Director, Cosmos Tours
& Travels

The overall experience was rejuvenating. It was a drive to promote the Buddhist Circuit as a team that comprised the Government and the stakeholders. The ideation was well crafted and we expect a positive outcome. The food on the train was a gourmet delight and the entire environment made the appeal go miles. Kudos to the chef and the service team for delivering such an amazing experience.

A suggestion was put forward that 'Hot Water Dispensers' can be put in each compartment along with tea/ coffee,

sugar sachets so that self-service can be availed any time. It will be especially useful for foreign tourists who are used to such facilitation.

My view on the conferences in Gaya and Varanasi is that they were extremely meaningful. The facilitation offered by DM Gaya, the address by DG Tourism and IRCTC appealed to the stakeholders and opened emerging vistas. At Varanasi, the Hon'ble Tourism Minister of Uttar Pradesh gave us spiritual insight in a befitting manner. The Secretary Tourism, Government of India, spoke from the operational point of view. Other points that emerged from the authorities on the dais were very informative and carried a strong message.

The scope for this market is immense for the agent community. The two lakh tourists per year in 2019 can go up to four lakhs in 2022, once we open up new routes and places as deliberated. Mid-way facilities like Bodhgaya–Rajgir or Lucknow–Varanasi, is a point that needs to be addressed by the authorities at the earliest.

Some focus points to market the Buddhist Circuit packages could be tying up with tourism associations such as IATO with a special offer so that the awareness can reach a vast number of trade members. This indeed is the right time as borders are opening up and the trade demands and welcomes new opportunities.

Secondly, transport or connection to places such as Aurangabad or Vaishali should be provided so that tourist traffic keeps generating both before and after the pilgrim season. This will increase the duration, price tags and overall

investment but is certainly worth a thought as it will reap major benefits in the long run.

The third addition can be to arrange familiarisation trips, inviting leading foreign tour operators from the major source markets. Also, this segment of tourism needs increased participation in international and domestic travel marts.

Last but not the least, we need to have increased involvement from the interested agents. They should be made an integral part of the Buddhist Tourism Conclaves, which in turn, may help to promote the circuit.



Manoj Kumar Matta Director, Oriental Vacations and Journeys

It was probably after 24 years when I got the opportunity of an overnight

train journey and that too a luxury train! It was a 'Red Carpet' welcome at the Safdarjung Railway Station with all COVID protocols being followed. The welcome 'tika', welcome drink, classical instrumental music, etc, were quite memorable gestures. As there were a few changes that took place a day before, the same was not conveyed by the IRCTC team while allocating the coach and berth numbers, and thus better coordination is required for a smooth check-in process.

The train was comfortable with four berths and two berths coupe, though most of my friends found that apt for group travel, it's better to be in a second AC which gives you the feeling of traveling together as there is enough open space and seating area. Locker with each berth was unique and necessary for such travel. Two bogies in the train have been converted into restaurant/dining space, having sixty-four covers each, and one bogie was converted into the kitchen. The food served was freshly prepared and had ample variety, be it Indian, Chinese, or Continental. However, yogurt served on one of the days was not worth eating and the same was brought to the knowledge of staff who changed the same immediately.

There were two showers and toilets each in each compartment, however, these should be increased as queues were seen in the morning hours. On our return journey, one of the showers and toilets had no water, the same should have been checked



and refilled on the way, but the staff didn't pay much heed to it despite informing them on this.

Hotels offered both in Bodhgaya and Varanasi were good and comfortable. Ideally, mini buses / Innova would have been used in Bodhgaya instead of a large coach, considering the huge traffic in town. While preparing the itinerary, it appeared, the authorities didn't realise that on the day of the Rajgir and Nalanda excursion, it was an auspicious day when thousands of devotees come to Bodhgaya and roads are hence blocked or crowded. This is poor planning which caused the unnecessary delay thus we didn't have sufficient time to visit the places, the purpose defeated!

One should understand the value of time and be punctual as the timings were not adhered to during both the conferences. Moreover, the speakers should know who their audience is and thus only the information related to us (tour operators) should have been shared instead of letting the delegates know whatever they knew or had compiled!

Having said this, there were several lacunas and we need to improve the same because this special train has also been offered to our Japanese or a few European guests. They might have sued by now as they are very much punctual. We shall have to bring punctuality into our blood and shall have to ensure that the itinerary goes as promised. The fairs, festivals, important events, etc. must be considered before announcing any departure. IRCTC must ensure enough supply of water in toilets and showers and, as and when possible, should also have another set of toilets and showers ready. The train and the sector covered have enough potential, not only in Buddhist pilgrims, but even otherwise. IRCTC should also include a Heritage Walk in Bodhgaya and Varanasi within the itinerary. As the Buddhist population is primarily concentrated in Asian Region, we must focus on this market. Renowned monks must be involved in this train journey to make it a complete spiritual sojourn. In fact, monks are the ones who can generate enough business on their own for this train. To optimise the usage of the train during night halts, IRCTC can use it for hosting lunch or dinner for the groups staying at the train halt destinations. It can even be promoted for certain pre-wedding

functions, as it will act as a catalyst and few potential guests will get first-hand experience by way of just dining on the train.

If possible, IRCTC can explore the option of liquor on demand during the journey (the stuff can be removed before entering Bihar and can be stocked again from there on the return leg), this will ensure additional revenue for IRCTC as well beside facilities onboard for guests. Overall, it was an unforgettable journey and I wish I was given the option to explore the entire 8 days itinerary!



Anil K Rajput
Managing Director,
Promark Travel Services

The trip covered Bodhgaya, Nalanda, Rajgir, Varanasi, and Sarnath, which in my view is an enriching Buddhist circuit experience. The hotels and transport used are good, however, the guide and tour escorts need to be trained. My main aim was to have experience of luxury of train travel in first class and second class, however, the entire train is air-conditioned. The kitchen serving hot, freshly prepared meals served in two dining cars was excellent enough. There are hygienic toilets, showers, foot massagers and a small library for tourists to use. Bed and afternoon tea are also served in cabins.

The train is exclusively reserved for tourists and no one is allowed to board on the way as there are security guards onboard which is quite comforting. The train originally was conceived keeping in mind the foreign tourists and, with Delhi, the start and endpoint. However, if this train is to be used for domestic

tourists, then it should start from the nearest point where we have more of a Buddhist population. Examples are two-three cities or towns in the North East which will not only cater to Sikkim and Arunachal but also pilgrims from Bhutan and Myanmar may be able to join. Jammu/Delhi is viable for tourists from Ladakh and Himachal and also ideal for tourists from Western/Eastern countries coming down to the capital. Mumbai is a good place for Maharashtra-based Buddhist pilgrims and to connect with pilgrims from Western / Eastern countries while Chennai is a good base for pilgrims coming in from Sri Lanka. Also, keeping in mind the Indian tourist point of view, the cost has to be reduced.



Lajpat Rai
CMD, Lotus Trans Travel

The efforts put in by IRCTC and the Ministry of Tourism are commendable. They did their best to make our journey most comfortable and memorable and took special care. In my opinion, the 'On Board' services were really remarkable, be it cleanliness, hygiene, food quality and the service. However, the 'Off Board' service and planning of the itinerary to showcase the pilgrimage sites/monuments and the developments taking place in this sector were not up to the mark.

I feel the train has tremendous scope. My suggestion is that The IRCTC should think about the 'Dynamic Pricing' for this train to attract the price-conscious pilgrimage tourists starting by announcing the lowest possible pricing.



Uttar Pradesh Tourism hosts grand familiarisation tour for Indian tour operators and travel media

The Department of Tourism & Culture, Government of Uttar Pradesh, hosted a grand familiarisation tour for the Indian tour operators and travel media from Nov 1-4, 2021, on the sidelines of the much-awaited Deepotsav festival in Ayodhya.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

A pan-India group of Indian tour operators and travel media were invited to witness the fifth edition of 'Deepotsav' (festival of lamps) in Ayodhya, which was organised by the Department of Tourism & Culture Government of Uttar Pradesh in tandem with FICCI. Attended by 60 tour operators, IATO and Travel media members, the tour was a grand initiative with an aim to showcase the hidden wonders that Ayodhya holds within, the idea was also to share with the visiting

delegates the road map for Ayodhya's future development. The perks of VIP treatment provided to the group only added to the ease and fun, the group was given access to the special passes and clearances along with a proper pilot escort, making the experience smooth and unforgettable, even amidst the peak of festivity and heavy footfall in the ancient city of Ayodhya.

All delegates visited the Ram Lalla temple site where the foundation stone was earlier laid by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The new temple is also under construction. The delegates also



visited the famous Hanuman Garhi temple, 'Bal Hanuman sitting on Lap of Maa Anjani', the deity enshrined in this temple. Hanuman ji is considered the guardian deity of the city of Ayodhya. The group was then accorded a grandiose welcome at Kanak Bhawan, greeted by Sanskrit Shloka chanting by the students of the 'Vashisth Gurukul', and witnessing the Aarti ceremony. The entire 'Ayodhya Walk' experience was well-curated by Prateek Hira and his team from Tornos, who ensured that everyone had the perfect 'Darshan' experience. The boat ride on the Holy Saryu river along the ghats was another indelible experience. The whole delegation was also hosted and welcomed with a cocktail and dinner on November 1, at the Renaissance Marriott Lucknow, co-organised by Tornos, Renaissance Marriott Lucknow and Marriott Fairfield Lucknow.



On November 3, 2021, Ayodhya was abuzz with dignitaries that included Yogi Aditya Nath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Shri G. Kishan Reddy, Union Tourism Minister, H.E. Pham Sanh Chau, Ambassador of Vietnam, H.E. Willy K. Bett, High Commissioner of Kenya and H.E. Dr. Roger Gopaul, High Commissioner of Trinidad & Tobago.



A symposium 'Rediscovering Ayodhya as a preferred Tourism Destination' was organised at Ayodhya on November 2, 2021, under the stewardship of Dr. Neelkanth Tiwari, State Minister, Independent Charge, Tourism, Culture & Religious Affairs. Speaking on the occasion, Shri Mukesh Kumar Meshram, I.A.S. Principal Secretary, Department of Tourism and Culture Government of Uttar Pradesh, further shared his vision of New Ayodhya and various developments that were underway. The High commissioner of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Roger Gopaul, was the guest of Honour and he expressed his quest for searching his Indian roots back to the region and how the Ramayana was the sole binding source of spiritual solace for all indentured labourers that were transported to lands far away by the British regime more than a 150 years ago.

The Deepotsav 2021 festivities unfurled on a grandiose scale with great fervour and excitement as a sea of humanity stood by to witness the Ritual worship of Shri Ram, Sita, Laxman and Hanuman ji, and also the lighting of almost a million oil-filled earthen diya lamps to mark the Deepotsav 2021.

Breaking the previous year's Guinness World Record of 6,06,569 lit earthen diya lamps, the fifth edition of Deepotsav created a new Guinness World Record of more than nine lakh lit earthen diya lamps. The audience was spellbound with the sound and light show on Ramayana projected on the ghats of Ram-ki-Paidi, followed by an astounding laser and fireworks display.

What a monumental welcome it was for Sri Ram to his own city, Ayodhya!



Prateek Hira

President & CEO, Tornos

"Tornos was delighted to curate this familiarisation tour of Ayodhya for the Government of Uttar Pradesh on the occasion of Deepotsav and run it quite closely on the lines of what it offers to its guests in Ayodhya including the welcome chats by children of gurukul and privileged access to the temples. Having our industry colleagues over and being able to serve them on this tour was a blessing of sorts in itself and what better way to send out a message that we are in Ayodhya too and in a big way".



Ayodhya on the fast track to development as a religious tourism destination



▲ Mukesh Kumar Meshram

Ayodhya, the city of Lord Ram, is currently undergoing a metamorphosis. Located on the banks of the holy Saryu river, Ayodhya has always been an integral part of Hindu religious belief and culture. With the construction of the 'Ram Janam-Bhoomi Temple' now in full swing and the sharper focus of both the central and state governments on the development of religious tourism circuits within the country, the rejuvenation of Ayodhya is underway.

Ensuring that the 'Vision' of the Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Aditya Nath crystallises, the ground efforts are being spearheaded by Mukesh Kumar Meshram (I.A.S.), the Principal Secretary, Department of Tourism and Culture, Government of Uttar Pradesh.

Enlightening more on Ayodhya, Meshram elaborated, "Ayodhya is the city of Ram, Sita, and Laxman and not a myth or mythological city as a few historians, archaeologists, architects, or people tend to suggest at times. The story of Ram as enshrined in the Ram-Charitra-Manas and the Valmiki Ramayana teaches us a lot. The whole endeavour of this redevelopment is to ensure the transfer of values, virtues, morals, and ethics for the generations to come."

Meshram further shared, "The vision of new Ayodhya is to recreate and interweave

On the sidelines of the 'Deepotsav 2021' held at Ayodhya, TTJ interacted with Mukesh Kumar Meshram (I.A.S.), the Principal Secretary, Department of Tourism and Culture, Government of Uttar Pradesh, to know more about the current developments in Ayodhya, which is emerging as a significant religious tourism hub.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

the various facets of Ramayana, carefully blending religious tourism with learning and making it an inclusive destination for all. Towards this endeavour not only basics like city beautification and cleaning, creating more parking spaces, widening of roads, solid waste management, and sewage treatment will be looked at, but also Ramayana-based theme parks for children, digital museums and sound and light shows will be set up. Better accommodation will be created both in the star rated and budget categories."

Twelve hundred acres of land have been acquired and will be offered to both foreign countries and Indian states to set up their cultural centres, guest houses and emporiums. Land parcels would also be allocated to various Hindu sects and sub-sects at Ayodhya to establish their matth's and ashrams enhancing Ayodhya's stature as a centre of Vedic learning. The streets and avenues of Ayodhya will be planted with trees and shrubs as described in the Ramayana. The Ayodhya Research Institute established a few years ago is actively involved in research and has tie-ups with various universities worldwide. It actively offers Ph.D. scholarships and fellowships to enhance research and understanding of Ramayana.

Speaking about the plans for ensuring better access to Ayodhya, Meshram shares, "Ayodhya is already a railhead, and the city is also well connected with Lucknow via a four-lane highway and will be very soon connected through the Purvanchal

Expressway with Varanasi. Also, plans are underway to create an international airport at Ayodhya within the next two years.

"The 5 Kosi, 14 Kosi and 84 Kosi Parikrama circuits around Ayodhya are being revived with better amenities, refreshment areas and rest houses to facilitate a smooth experience for the pilgrims."

To benefit the hoteliers investing in Ayodhya, the government is waiving the stamp duty at the time of registration. Also, land-use change is being allowed without any land-use conversion charges. The state government will also offer up to a 20 per cent subsidy on projects. To encourage all-inclusive growth and create employment in hotels for the local population, the state government will bear 50 per cent of the EPF contribution. In the case of women and people with disabilities, the state government will cover 100 EPF contributions. The government has created a positive investment environment and simplified the process and already many hoteliers are queuing up with their projects.

"The goal is to put Ayodhya on the international tourist map with world-class infrastructure and promote it as a centre for Vedic and Ramayana learning without disturbing the essence of Ayodhya as the city of Sri Ram," concludes Meshram.



'Conference of Tourism and Culture Ministers of Southern Region' successfully concludes in Bengaluru



After a successful two-day conference of 'Tourism and Culture Ministers of North-Eastern States' in September 2021 in Guhawati, the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) organised a 'Tourism & Culture Ministers Conference of the Southern Region' event from October 28-29, 2021 in Bengaluru, with the aim to highlight and apprise the industry stakeholders about the Heritage & Cultural Tourism initiatives, Skill Development, the potential of Cruise Tourism of the Southern States and UTs.

Ravi Sharma

G. Kishan Reddy, Hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and DoNER, inaugurated the two days' conference of Tourism and Culture Ministers of the Southern Region at Taj Westend in Bengaluru, Karnataka. Minister of State, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying and MoS in Ministry of Information & Broadcasting Dr. L. Murugan; Minister of State, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Bhagwanth Khuba, and Minister of State for Tourism, GoI, Ajay Bhatt were other dignitaries present at this event. Secretary Culture, GOI, Govind Mohan and senior officials from various Central Ministries, State Governments, Union Territory Administrations (UTs), media, and industry stakeholders were also present.

The inaugural session was also attended by Tourism Ministers of all Southern states

and senior tourism officials of these states. Speaking on the occasion, G. Kishan Reddy said that under the Prime Minister's guidance and leadership, it took us only 281 days to administer 100 crore COVID vaccine doses. There can be no bigger confidence booster for the revival of tourism other than vaccination. "Tourism & Culture Ministers Conference of the South Indian Region's main objective was to discuss and deliberate on the tourism development strategy for the region in line with the Prime Minister's idea of Cooperative Federalism - where the Government of India and the state governments come together to find solutions for a better India," Reddy added.

Reddy said that he truly believes that the Southern Region is unique in its offerings and Ministry has laid special emphasis on developing infrastructure, on-ground capacity and skills. Reddy also informed that under

the Swadesh Darshan Scheme, which focuses on integrated development of theme-based tourist circuits; the Ministry has sanctioned 15 projects in the Southern States worth ₹1088 crores. "Under the PRASHAD scheme (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive), the Ministry has sanctioned 6 projects in the region that

amounts to 15 per cent of the entire scheme budget," he added.

Reddy further informed that recently, the Ministry of External Affairs at the request of the Ministry of Tourism has appointed dedicated twenty Tourism Officers in Indian Missions abroad. This will enable them to widely promote Indian tourism in countries such as Australia, Canada, the USA, France, Germany, and Gulf countries. "India's civilisation heritage goes back to many thousands of years and this Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav is also an opportunity to pay a tribute to all those people that fought for the preservation of our heritage," he added.

Dr. L. Murugan highlighted the importance of Religious and Spiritual Tourism in the development of the tourism sector. Murugan said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has shown keen interest in the tourism sector. His vision of developing India as a multi-modal tourist destination is now being executed. "Each state of India has a unique potential of contributing to this vision of PM Narendra Modi," he added.

Murugan also stated, "As we are celebrating 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', it is our duty to encourage the younger generations to visit the memorial of these freedom fighters and devote themselves to the service to the nation."

Minister of State for Tourism and Defence, Ajay Bhatt said, "Culture and tourism complement each other in today's changing world. If culture is the soul of any society, tourism is the medium of understanding and knowing that society. If our culture is rich, then tourism is the means of demonstrating



this prosperity. That is why it is necessary to see culture and tourism as two sides of the same coin. The people of South India have understood this very well, and that is why there has often been a very good development in the field of tourism here.” Bhatt also highlighted the impact of 100 crore vaccination on the tourism sector.

During the first day, Rupinder Brar, ADG, Ministry of Tourism, also gave a presentation on the various projects/initiatives/programmes being under-taken for the creation of tourism infrastructure, marketing and promotion, and skill development programmes in the Southern Region. After that Director General, Archaeological Survey of India, and Ministry of Tourism, V. Vidyavathi gave a presentation on heritage projects, monuments, and other cultural initiatives in the Southern Region. Potential of Cruise Tourism and Rail Tourism in the Southern Region and opportunity in Southern Region State-wise/UT-wise presentations were also given.

The Ministry of Tourism promotes India as a holistic destination on various platforms in digital, print and social media. Since April 2020, under the ‘Dekho Apna Desh’ campaign, the Ministry of Tourism is conducting webinars on various tourism products, including dedicated webinars on States and UTs of the Southern Region. The connectivity by air, rail and road to various destinations in the region is excellent and sought-after destinations by many.

The Ministry of Tourism has concentrated on the issues of skill development in the tourism sector, creating a pool of well-trained and professional ‘Tourist Facilitators’ is essential for providing world-class services to the tourists, promotion and marketing for creating awareness about the destination in the domestic and international markets.

During the sessions, speakers spoke about the various challenges faced by the sector in each region of southern states. Most of the Tourism Ministers spoke about their unique products, infrastructure development, skill development and sought budgets from the

union minister for the specific projects. They also discussed the challenges and measures to boost tourism while maintaining the culture of the region. Presentations were also made by the Secretaries and Directors of the southern states.

As domestic tourism is showing a great surge in the last few months and as the borders will be open for international tourists soon, building the confidence and trust of the tourists is extremely important. In this connection, the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Tourism have already notified COVID-19 Safety and Hygiene protocols. The Ministry has put in place a System for Assessment, Awareness and Training in Hospitality Industry (SAATHI) to ensure compliance with COVID-19 safety and hygiene guidelines and to ensure safety and health of employees/customers. The SAATHI initiative aims to assist in the preparedness of hotels to continue operations safely and also restore the confidence of guests and enhance the image of the hotel as a responsible hotel. As of date, more than 10,000 accommodation units have registered under SAATHI. The hotel units from States and UTs of the Southern region have shown a good response in registering their units on the portal to follow the necessary protocols.

Ministry of Tourism undertakes development of infrastructure at tourist destinations across the country under its infrastructure development schemes viz. Swadesh Darshan (SD) and PRASHAD (National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive). In Swadesh Darshan Scheme 76 projects have been sanctioned across India which also includes projects from the Southern Region States



and UTs. Under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme, projects have been sanctioned in different themes such as Coastal Circuit, Buddhist Circuit, Eco Circuit, Spiritual Circuit, etc. Under PRASHAD Scheme, 37 projects have been sanctioned in India which also includes projects from the Southern States. These efforts are expected to culminate in a major fillip to the tourism sector in the region.

G. K. V. Rao, DG Tourism, GOI, proposed the vote of thanks. Later, a gala dinner was hosted by the Honourable Minister of Karnataka at Taj Westend. A number of travel trade delegates from Bengaluru were seen and most of the tourism ministers were not only present but also seen interacting with media and delegates during the evening. Many cultural performances were organised and the event's highlight were the folk dances.

On the second day, the media was taken to Mysore by KSTD Volvo coaches. All the accommodations were provided by KSTD and Jungle Lodges. On the way to Mysore, the famous Tipu Sultan's summer house was shown at Srirangapatna. Prominent places worth visiting in Mysore were the Mysore Fort and Chamundeshwari temple. A shopping round was also organised at ‘Cauvery’, the States’ Silk and Handicraft Emporium and also the delegates were taken to some toy shops at Chanapatna.

While this trip was experiential, I personally felt, the media delegates should have been given some more time to see the world-renowned Mysore Palace, which certainly was magnificent. The time allocated for the trip was insufficient and the itinerary turned out to be very hectic. However, reminiscing on the two days, the delegates seemed to be impressed by the conference. The bonding showcased and established between the delegates, members, PIB and MoT officials in this conference is well appreciated. Such bondings give an opportunity to support and understand businesses and ideas, which is certainly needed for Indian tourism in the post COVID world.



Rediscovering the ancient Char Dham walking route for new tourism opportunities

Uttarakhand tourism, in association with Trek the Himalayas, has embarked on a historical mission of rediscovering the ancient Char Dham trail that was walked on foot by pilgrims ages ago. In the past, the Yatra was primarily done by wandering ascetics and other religious aspirants who would take up the challenge of walking these long and arduous trails, sometimes ascending to elevations of 4000 metres.

Team TTJ

A distinguished Recce team of 25 has left for a quest to retrace the old Char Dham route. Anticipated to take approximately 50 days to complete the entire circuit of 1200+ km on foot, the journey will be documented through visual and written mediums. Upon completion, the project will be developed into a remarkable documentary. The Yatra began after a Flag off ceremony at Uttarakhand's Chief Minister's residence in Dehradun on October 25, 2021.

The central team includes trek researchers, guides, exploration leader, SDRF officials, Forest officials, the operations team, the Documentation crew and the production team. They are supported by a group of cooks, helpers and porters looking after the team's well-being and daily activities.

The Char Dham circuit consists of four ancient pilgrimage sites in the state of Uttarakhand viz. Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath. The exclusive Recce program was divided into five stages. Stage 1 covers Rishikesh to Yamnoutri, stage 2- Yamnoutri to Gangotri, stage 3 - Gangotri to Kedarnath, stage 4- Kedarnath to Badrinath and stage 5 would bring the team back from Badrinath to Rishikesh. During the recce, the team would also re-explore

different 'Chattis' (established by the Baba Kali Kamli group) used in the old Yatra as a structured system of providing free ration and Dharamshala to make this quest more comfortable for the travellers.

Along with the movement of rediscovering the ancient route, the Yatra also focuses on sustainability and modernization. Under the state Government's Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya Grah Awaas Yojna, the Yatra focuses on promoting local homestays by making them their accommodation points and including them in the itinerary further. Moreover, the Yatra also aims at encouraging and promoting local food, handicrafts and the rich cultural heritage of all the destinations.

As on 11th November, completing a staggering distance of 350+ km in 16 days, and exploring 25+ chattis till now, the journey is progressing even better than anticipated.

Every day the team has carried the same spirit, exploring different flora and fauna, pausing to record information from the locals, taking notes as to what needs to be repaired along the way, the trekkers have done a wonderful job. In addition, they've also been investigating different tourism and adventure



opportunities, new trails, and treks that can be developed after completion.

November 6 was a big day for the team as they took part in the closing ceremony of Yamnoutri Dham, completing one of four Dhams in the Yatra. They reached Uttarkashi on the 9th day for rest. The team then had planned ahead on reaching Gangotri Dham within the next 3-4 days, which will result in the conclusion of two out of four Dhams on the Yatra. The trail is expected to move with similar enthusiasm and efficiency throughout the rest of the journey.



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USA calling!

Prepare for new travel guidelines and discoveries

The USA is now open for vaccinated travellers. Apart from highlighting the travel requirements to enter the United States which have recently changed, TTJ also explores some of the new experiences that are offered for the Indian traveller from coast to coast.

Team TTJ



The United States flung its doors open to vaccinated international travellers recently welcoming many visitors who've been shut out of the country for nearly 20 months. Starting November 8, 2021, travel requirements to enter the United States have changed.

When arriving at a U.S. land port of entry or ferry terminal for non-essential travel, international visitors should be prepared to:

- Present proof of COVID-19 vaccination as outlined on the CDC website; and,
- Verbally attest to their non-essential travel and COVID-19 vaccination status.

Prior to boarding a flight to the United States, international visitors should prepare for:

Proof of Vaccination Requirement

International visitors to the United States must provide proof of full vaccination prior to boarding their flight to the United

States. Accepted vaccines include those that are FDA approved or authorized, as well as vaccines with an emergency use listing (EUL) from the World Health Organization (WHO). Individuals can be considered fully vaccinated at least two weeks after the last dose of an accepted single-dose series or any combination of two doses of an accepted two-dose series. Children under the age of 18 are exempt from the vaccine requirement, and other limited exceptions apply.

Testing Requirement

International travellers aged two and older are required to show proof of a negative COVID-19 viral test result taken no more than three days before travel. Both nucleic acid amplification tests, such as a PCR test, and antigen tests qualify. In a very limited number of cases, there are additional testing requirements for those who are exempt from the proof of vaccination requirement and documentation needs for travellers who can demonstrate recent recovery

from COVID-19 in place of a negative viral test.

Contact Tracing Requirement

All air passengers to the United States are required to provide contact information to airlines before boarding flights to the United States for the purposes of contact tracing. This process is critical to detect and respond to variants of COVID-19, helping protect the public and international visitors.

Federal Mask Mandates

All travellers are required to wear a mask over their nose and mouth while in airplanes, airports, and other indoor areas of public transportation while traveling to, within, or out of the United States. More information about the mask requirement is available from the CDC.

State and Local Requirements

Once international visitors arrive at their destination, individual state and local governments, as well as some businesses, may have their own health

and safety guidelines regarding masks, social distancing, vaccination status, and more.

More information on all the above and documents can be found in the CDC website (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/noncitizens-US-air-travel.html) and the U.S. Department of State's Frequently Asked Questions.

What's new in these US regions

With the USA re-opening, there is so much more to explore in the country. And it is a difficult choice from the myriad of experiences that are offered for the Indian traveller from coast to coast.

Philadelphia

There have been a range of new hotel openings in Philadelphia between 2020 and 2021. In 2021, the city saw the debut of the Live! Casino & Hotel in the South Philadelphia sports



complex and in Center City, the new Element Philadelphia and luxurious W Philadelphia are now open, sharing a building and 45,000-square-feet of meeting and event space along Chestnut Street, just steps from popular downtown attractions.

There is also a range of new attractions to entice visitors to this dynamic city. After two decades of planning, design and construction, the Philadelphia Museum of Art has unveiled 90,000 square feet of new and reimagined public and exhibition space as part of the Frank Gehry-led Core Project. Adding to Philadelphia's vast collection of art museums and innovative public art, the Neon Museum of Philadelphia offers permanent exhibits of historical and cultural information as told through this eclectic art form.

Virginia

This year brings some significant news to celebrate for the state of Virginia. A new property - ARCHER Hotel Tysons opened late in September, only the seventh property for the



Pantheon at Busch Gardens® Williamsburg, Virginia

award-winning boutique brand that places major emphasis on local discoveries. For adrenalin-rush lovers, Busch Gardens Williamsburg has announced that Pantheon, the world's fastest multi-launch roller coaster, will open in March 2022. The exciting new roller coaster will feature two inversions, four launches, five air-time hills, a 95-degree drop, a height of 55 meters, and a record-breaking top speed of nearly 120 km per hour.

San Francisco

From San Francisco Ballet's Nutcracker to The Art of Banksy, even the Grinch will find something to celebrate in San Francisco. The San Francisco Fire Engine Tours are already ready with the



San Francisco Holiday Skyline

holiday sights and sounds from a vintage, open-air Mack Fire Engine with San Francisco Fire Engine Tours. It is an interesting way to celebrate the season with Christmas Carols and fun facts as you tour downtown San Francisco, the Embarcadero, and Union Square. The Art of Banksy, the largest touring exhibition of authentic Banksy artworks sourced from private collectors around the world—announced the San Francisco exhibition will be held at San Francisco's iconic Palace of Fine Arts.

Santa Monica

Santa Monica, also known as Los Angeles' beachside city, is not just renowned for the most spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean or over a century old Pier. Downtown Santa Monica is just 13 km from Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), a quick 20-minute cab ride away. The understated luxury that defines the city is also well evident with the new experience that the city has on offer- the Santa Monica Picnic Company which sets up a picnic in the sand, complete with blankets, a low picnic table, and string lights. They also put together a charcuterie board made up of items from local Santa Monica businesses and clients seeking some adventure can also add on a surf lesson. In addition to that, Santa Monica also has the new Hilton Santa Monica Hotel & Suites located in the heart of the city.



Santa Monica Picnic Co

The iconic 'Atatürk Cultural Center' reopens to enliven Istanbul's art and tourism offerings

Anticipated to be a major attraction for the city's residents and thousands of tourists visiting from around the world, Istanbul's Atatürk Cultural Center reopened its doors to art lovers on October 29, 2021, the 98th anniversary of Turkish Republic Day. Known as Atatürk Kültür Merkezi (or AKM in short) by the locals, the newly built contemporary structure is one of the most important investments of the Beyoğlu Culture Route project, established by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism as Turkey's one of the largest arts and culture project to date.

Team TTJ



President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Minister of Culture and Tourism, Mehmet Nuri Ersoy, inaugurated the Istanbul Atatürk Cultural Center in an opening ceremony attended by prominent figures from the business, arts and academic spheres, as well as representatives from non-governmental organisations, and local and foreign media outlets.

Completely reconstructed in 2.5 years by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism at a cost of TL 2 billion, the AKM welcomes visitors throughout the year to a 49,000-square-metre, 2040-seat Opera House equipped with state-of-art technology. The Centre also features a 16,300-square metre, 802-seat Theatre Hall, the 410-square-metre AKM Gallery, an AKM Multipurpose Hall and a pathway called "Culture Street".

In addition to the aforementioned halls, the AKM offers an indoor area of approximately 100,000 square metres, consisting of a Gallery, a Multipurpose Hall, a Children's Art

Centre, a music platform, a music recording studio, and a library designed as an information centre for specialized topics such as music, art, architecture and design. The renewed complex also includes the AKM Yeşilçam Cinema and spaces such as the Design Shop, along with rehearsal areas, soloist and orchestra study rooms, restaurants, a cafeteria, book cafes, workshops, and administrative and technical units.

On the occasion of the opening of the AKM, the world premiere of the Sinan Opera was held. Composed at the request of President Erdoğan, and staged by the Istanbul State Opera and Ballet, the opera, an original work by a Turkish composer, was brought to the stage by the renowned Italian director Vincenzo Grisostomi Travaglini. The Center also welcomed the London Philharmonic Orchestra during its opening week, which is considered one of the finest symphony orchestras in the world and featuring almost 100 musicians.

The New AKM will be Istanbul's cultural heartbeat which plays a vital role in Istanbul's goal of becoming a globally leading arts centre, will continue its mission of cultivating, supporting and presenting art, drawing visitors from all walks of life to experience rich content. The new AKM will serve as an example for similar structures in Turkey.

Resident institutions in the

new Atatürk Cultural Center include the Presidential Classical Turkish Music Choir, the Istanbul State Opera and Ballet, the Istanbul State Theatre, the Istanbul Symphony Orchestra and the Istanbul State Turkish Music Ensemble affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

The AKM Gallery is on the facade facing Taksim Square, next to the main building housing the iconic sphere. Featuring a soaring, prismatic design at the entrance to the Culture Street, The Gallery also fulfils the need for an exemplary exhibition hall in Istanbul. The space will host exhibits by selected contemporary artists.

The Beyoğlu Culture Route Project highlights Istanbul's international value, and its historical, architectural, economic, and touristic assets. The Beyoğlu Culture Route which features the newly-rebuilt Atatürk Cultural Center, also has the Galata Tower, Atlas Cinema, Galata Mevlevi Lodge, the Mehmet Akif Memorial House, and the Tarık Zafer Tunaya Culture Theatre, along with numerous other historical, cultural and architectural assets restored by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

The Atatürk Cultural Centre thus marks the start of the culture avenue, and its reopening also featured the International Beyoğlu Culture Route Festival, which took place from October 30 to November 14, 2021, featuring the participation of more than one thousand artists across 60 locations. Developed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey, the festival will be held annually to ensure that this project, designed to contribute to the brand value of Istanbul, is showcased on an international level.



Exploring the legacy of Colonial era



The Lalit Great Eastern Kolkata takes enormous pride in occupying the position of being the oldest luxury, five-star hospitality set-up in India and Asia.

Swaati Chaudhury

For heritage and art-buffs interested to have a glimpse of a palatial, luxury, heritage property that dates back to the Raj era, look no further beyond and head straight to The Lalit Great Eastern Kolkata. Sprawling over 3 acres of land on Old Court House Street in Dalhousie Square, the five-star property is a bucket-list experience for heritage lovers in today's era. Taking a Heritage Walk to explore the property will surely make you travel back in time.

It was way back in 1830 when a British baker named David Wilson had set up a bakery that formed a favourite hang-out for the officers of East India Company. Spurred on by the success of the bakery, David Wilson embarked upon a venture to come up with a luxury hotel. The hotel was set up in 1840 and was renamed Auckland Hotel after the then Governor-General of India. Better known as Wilson's Hotel, it was in the form of 'C' shape that emerged as an iconic luxury hospitality landmark during the Raj era. This is incidentally the premier hospitality property in the country to get illuminated back in 1883. Also known as Great Eastern Hotel in contemporary times, the legendary property was acquired by The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group sometime in 2005. It was a tough challenge for the new owners to renovate the property and after seven long years of painstaking renovation, it was reopened as The Lalit Great Eastern sometime on

November 19, 2013.

The heritage property has three prominent blocks – the Victorian Block, the Edwardian Block and the Contemporary Block, of which the Victorian and Edwardian Towers are the heritage wings. To begin with, the Heritage Walk kicks off in the Main Lobby in the Contemporary Block that has the symbol of 'Fish' considered auspicious in West Bengal. There is a grand piano at one corner of the Main Lobby manufactured by M F Rachal & Sons, Hamburg (Germany). The piano was once the pride of Maxim's Bar in the bygone Auckland Hotel. One can come across the age-old vats where the dough was kneaded in the bakery, and in today's times, these vats serve as planters at the entrance of the hotel.

The Contemporary Block has dining options including Tea Lounge, Legacy Grill and Alfresco, the all-day dining outlet. Besides, the Great Ballroom and Rejuve-the Spa are in the new block. One can gape at the innumerable artefacts in the Victorian Block that comprise Venetian mirror and blue potteries that were all made in Bengal. There are artsy interiors and shola works that are eco-friendly traditional artworks of Bengal.

The Edwardian Block is supported with huge iron beams and there is antique stuff comprising terracotta artworks, century-old charcoal irons, bread moulds, and a three-legged table on display. The legacy rooms are sprawling ones. Each Edwardian

room is replete with a bay window. The 8-feet gigantic cup standing on the balcony that was received by A L Bilimoria, the former Chairman of the hotel by Queen Elizabeth II will make heads turn.

There is the old-world riveting iron staircase that brings you down to the Bakery nestled in the Edwardian Block. The USP of the Bakery is the presence of a century-old, grand old oven made from the house of Baker Perkins Limited of England. The oven is no longer functional but is well-preserved and adorns the Bakery. A portion of the wall of the Bakery remains untouched to pay tribute to the old Bakery. Adjacent to the Bakery is Wilson's The Pub.

Those interested in the Heritage Walk will have to shell out ₹1,000 that comes with high tea and ₹1,500 with high tea and wine. For more information and bookings, call 033 44447777.



Spiral Staircase at The Bakery

Stressing on hygiene and safety tops the priority list for hotels

The concept of staycation has emerged quite popular in these unprecedented times. A high degree of hygiene and cleanliness are the new luxury mantras. Subhash Sinha, General Manager, The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat, highlights the current trends in the luxury hospitality industry.

Swaati Chaudhury

Astravel opens up again, business in the hospitality sector is gradually getting back on track. Today's travellers want to indulge in newer experiences. Let's take a peek into the kind of plans drawn up by The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat to lure global and domestic travellers into its property.

Subhash Sinha shared, "The pandemic has been a great learning experience for our hospitality industry. In fact, we have learnt to innovate and improvise in order to tide over the unprecedented crisis. While it's true that travel has taken a dip during terrible times but we are armed with a high level of hygiene and safety protocols that is sure to boost the confidence of our guests. In today's times, providing a safe environment for our guests has emerged as our topmost priority. Staycations have become quite popular in the new age. Travellers are more confident to travel and an increasing number of our visitors

prefer safe staycations. With tourism opening up, we are receiving a number of group bookings, wedding visitors and free individual travellers along with staycation guests."

The current pandemic had a huge impact on every industry. The pertinent question is, what is the way forward for the luxury hospitality sector? Sinha said, "The only possible way the hospitality groups can mitigate the uncertainty in demand is by securing a base occupancy and then adopting a dynamic approach with pricing based on the demand. It is significant to focus on certain segments like airlines and relocating movement in order to bring healthy occupancy and subsequently drive the average daily rate (ADR)." Having said this, ADR forms one of the key performance indicators in the hospitality sector. "It is highly essential to remain abreast of our surrounding environment in order to monitor upcoming developments and react prior to the



▲ Subhash Sinha

competition that would keep the impact of uncertainty at bay," further said, Sinha.

With Covid curbs, travel restrictions and containment measures, there has been a considerable rise in travel. Sinha added, "With new health protocols in vogue and restoration of tourism supply chains, business will be back in a restricted capacity. The month of September witnessed a rapid spurt in domestic travel with the easing of travel restrictions. We look forward to a gradual rise in travel next year. Owing to a number of health protocols and travel curbs, tourists are looking for new alternatives. Once the pandemic is over, the preference for living in hotels will be on the rise. Visitors would prefer safety and would be eager to invest in luxury brands."

Corporate movement to play significant role in recovery of Kolkata hospitality industry

Corporate movement forms the calling card of hospitality. Rodney Kaypee, General Manager, Hotel Hindusthan International Kolkata throws light on the future of hospitality in the city.

Swaati Chaudhury

The hospitality sector was hit hard by the pandemic and it's time for the industry to gradually get back on track. The heralding of the festive season in 'The City of Joy' brought cheers in the food and beverage industry with city restaurants clocking record footfall.

The hospitality sector in Kolkata is preparing to welcome global and domestic visitors in the coming period. Rodney Kaypee commented, "Our hospitality group has always been preferred by mid-segment, global and domestic travellers. With the virus on a gradual decline across the length and breadth of the country, we are making a sincere effort to reach the pre-Covid level in terms of room occupancy. The food and beverage vertical has recorded

a rise in footfall and the rooms division is getting better. The leading global markets comprising Bangladesh, South-East Asia and Europe are likely to become normal by mid-next year. Bangladesh forms our substantial market. We are upgrading our products and designing attractive packages to entice our visitors."

The festive season has ushered in new hope in the city, Kaypee said, "The period of October and November witnessed a significant rise in footfalls, better occupancies and has instilled fresh confidence in the hospitality industry to perform well in the last quarter of the current fiscal and in the next fiscal. Our major ambition is to attain a pre-Covid level in terms of revenue. We are hoping for a spurt in domestic arrivals. The current



▲ Rodney Kaypee

occupancy in our property is around 45 per cent to 55 per cent and we expect this to rise by 25 per cent in the next quarter. We are receiving a number of online queries and bookings from our visitors. Once the world gets back to normalcy and things fall in place, corporate movement will gain momentum. As of now, there has been no such uniform recovery in the corporate world."

The pandemic has crippled us in many ways. Regarding the future of hospitality in the city, Kaypee further said, "The hospitality scene is trudging on the path of revival. The concept of cloud kitchen and work from home has made an adverse impact on the luxury hospitality scene. The future of hospitality industry depends on corporate movement."

Resort Suite Units

New age investing model

In recent times, we have observed an upheaval of sorts with the introduction of the sharing economy system, effectively disrupting traditional sectors like the tourism and hospitality sectors, compelling conventional businesses to rethink their business models. These disruptions, in turn, give rise to rapidly evolving ecosystems and investment opportunities, such as the trending business model.

Vaibhav Jatia

To truly cherish the beauty of this system, let us take a deep dive into the workings, application, and benefits of owning such a property.

What is the Concept?

A relatively new and path-breaking concept, it is essentially a cross between a condo and a hotel, combining the experience of hotel accommodation with the outright ownership of a property. Aimed to transform the leisure hospitality and real estate industries simultaneously, this business model offers investors a high-value product in the form of an individual resort suite unit, generating sustained real estate rentals while also being a convenient vacation destination.

Typically located at popular vacation destinations, such as hill stations and beaches, the luxury property usually would be a component of a conglomeration of condominium buildings that are operated exactly like a hotel property, accommodating guests who pay for the rooms for a duration of their choice. Being the unit owner, you are within your rights to avail the property for a specific duration. During the time when you are not utilizing the unit, it would be accessible to the general public as a rental space.

Identifying the Benefits of such an Investment:

Regular Income & Earnings: Certain investments offer annual rentals, while other assets need liquidation to provide value. But by investing in the ownership of a resort unit, you will be entitled to bank on a monthly stream of revenue that not only increases your cash flow but also affords significant liquidity and flexibility to your portfolio. The investment could especially be a boon for individuals

who own multiple high-value properties yet consistently feel financially insecure.

Minimal Maintenance:

Traditional property investments often tend to be a burden on your resources, whether it be time or profits in the form of maintenance and repair expenditures.

Maximum Flexibility:

Unlike owning a conventional property, unit owners are entitled to leverage their assets in various ways, be it as a private vacation home, a luxury rental condo, or even as a secluded workspace. Flexibility is one of the asset's strongest suits, attracting entrepreneurs from all across the country who envision setting up a productive business in the hospitality and real estate space at the same time.

Easy Acquisition: A valuable addition to your portfolio that is also easy to acquire. Resort units don't require buyers to liquidate their assets to facilitate a purchase. These highly-desirable investments can be secured through financing, provided that you approach dealings with adequate discipline, working alongside credible lenders and financial advisors.

World-Class Amenities: Efficient housekeeping, friendly concierge services, rejuvenating spas, gourmet restaurants, and pristine pools are some of the amenities found at highly-expensive hotels. However, by being a unit owner, you can enjoy these benefits without spending a penny on luxury



▲ Vaibhav Jatia

accommodation throughout the duration of your ownership.

Enhanced Security: Due to the increasing demand for such luxury properties, the need for ample protection is paramount for unit owners. To address such a vital element in the operation, the complex owner or the hospitality company usually employs a team of well-drilled security personnel to guard the premises against various safety hazards.

Final Thoughts:

A novel and revolutionary concept that has had to endure its fair share of adversities like the lack of awareness amongst buyers and the unprecedented pandemic, its popularity and acceptance have recently steadily increased due to its well-documented sustained returns and priceless lifestyle enrichment.

About the author: Vaibhav Jatia has immense experience in investment banking and real estate private equity, having worked with some of the most institutions in the industries, such as Morgan Stanley, Lehman Brothers, and Westbrook Partners. Presently, he functions as the Managing Director of Rhythm Hospitality, pioneering the ResiTel concept in India. Additionally, he is recognized within the industry as one of the dynamic game changers for the sector, leveraging his expertise in project conceptualisation, capital raising, project planning, and marketing, sales and HR.

IIHM Global Centre for Tourism and Hospitality Research

Taking responsibility to conduct research in areas that matter to the tourism industry

The International Institute of Hotel Management (IIHM) has launched the IIHM Global Centre for Tourism and Hospitality Research. Students from IIHM as well as from other institutions across the world will be welcome to join the research groups at the Centre. Suborno Bose, CEO & Chairman, IIHM Hotel School, shares more about this enterprising project, much needed for the tourism and hospitality industry.

Prashant Nayak

The IIHM Global Centre for Tourism and Hospitality Research, which will be affiliated with the International Hospitality Council (IHC) London, will be located in three cities – Kolkata, Delhi, and Goa. The research centre in Goa will be a residential facility where researchers from all over the world can conduct research on a long-term basis. Research at the Centre will be conducted in various focus areas of the industry, such as how the industry will move on after the pandemic in terms of business, new ideas, strategies, the food cycle, extensive use of plastic, etc.

The most important highlight of the Centre was that it was officially inaugurated by the UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili on the occasion of World Tourism Day 2021. On this, Bose expressed, "IIHM is deeply honoured and humbled by the recognition and affirmation of our role by the UNWTO. This will only strengthen our resolve and that of our partners to champion the cause of hospitality and tourism across the world. We would like to function as the Kolkata chapter of the UNWTO, spreading their message on tourism and hospitality across India and the world."

The International Institute of Hotel Management (IIHM) is a chain of premier hotel management training institutions with 10 campuses spread across India and the world, namely, Kolkata, Delhi, Pune, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Goa and Bangkok, and Samarkhand. This leading hospitality and culinary arts training college in India has been preparing bright and industry-ready hospitality professionals for almost three decades through its advanced training in hospitality and culinary arts, upgrading itself to adapt to changes and up gradation in the industry and making students industry-ready.

IIHM's modern and advanced infrastructure is at par with any leading hospitality institution in the world. IIHM

follows an international curriculum that includes masterclasses with international chefs and hospitality professionals. This enables to give students world-class exposure to hospitality and culinary trends. IIHM believes in practical training along with classroom teaching. The institution has two hotels attached to it in its Kolkata and Goa campuses for the practical training of students.

On asked about the thoughts put behind launching the IIHM Research Centre, Bose says, "The post-COVID era will be different in many ways as the focus for every industry has changed. Tourism and hospitality, too, will experience a transformation as it will be intertwined with various other industries. As an experienced educationist associated with the hospitality industry for almost three decades, I understood the need and relevance of research in the Tourism and Hospitality sector more than ever. Keeping this in mind, I decided to start the IIHM Global Centre for Tourism and Hospitality Research."

The IIHM Global Centre for Tourism and Hospitality plans to provide the infrastructure to help in research in various areas to help increase tourists in the future. India is a favourite tourist destination across the world. It is known for its art, culture and unparalleled hospitality. Tourism in India generates several small and large job opportunities, creating self-employment opportunities and generating enormous taxes. The Indian tourism industry can be divided into three segments – inbound tourism, domestic tourism and outbound tourism. In order to study the various opportunities and avenues in all three segments, IIHM Global Centre for Tourism and Hospitality Research will provide the necessary infrastructure and support to conduct research in this field. Interested people can visit the centre for important references and information regarding tourism and hospitality.

"Research is essential in any industry and in the present circumstances, in the



▲ Dr. Suborno Bose

tourism and hospitality fields, research is required now more than ever. In the post-pandemic era, it is necessary to understand the characteristics, preferences, attitudes and opinions of visitors and the travel trade. The market research also enables to identify new areas of diversification and further, understand the performance of the tourism sector in our country," shares Bose highlighting the importance of research in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Bose also feels that it is important now to upgrade and upskill our skills, talent, and personal development. "In the Next Normal world, the way people work and function has undergone a sea change. People have made huge lifestyle changes as a way of adjusting to the pandemic situation. Career-wise, too, young people are looking for other lucrative options and are choosing different professions and developing new skills. For example, there is a huge surge in students wishing to become entrepreneurs. Many have started their own start-up ideas in the pandemic and are running them successfully," concludes Bose.

Amaya Kuda Rah Maldives hosts FAM trip for Indian agents

While the pandemic had devastated our travel plans for almost two years, the one desired element that has come out of the pandemic is to seek out safe and secluded destinations. When we think of such a destination, Maldives wins over every other destination.

Sonika Bohra

Amaya Kuda Rah Maldives, in association with Maldivian Airlines and Yorker Holidays, hosted a familiarisation trip for elite tour operators and select media from India, from 5th-9th November 2021. During their stay at Amaya Kuda Rah, the guests experienced natural bliss and delight in

the lap of luxury. The list of their favourite moments of the trip was definitely long, but the highlight, without a doubt, was their open theatre movie night. Numen Hospitality, India Sales Office of Amaya



Kuda Rah Maldives, was also part of the important delegation.

"When I first started selling Maldives, Indians were in the top ten

countries, but during the last six years, the trend has changed drastically and Indians are now number one visitors to Maldives, and this will only increase from here on. This shows that the Maldives is one of the most preferred international destinations by Indians," said Aditya Raj Singh, Head of Sales, Amaya Kuda Rah.

Surrounded by turquoise waters and surreal tranquillity, Amaya Kuda Rah Maldives, is a stunning 5-star resort on the Indian Ocean. The resort also hosted Arbaaz Khan recently on his Maldives visit.



'A celebration of Ladakh' at The Claridges New Delhi

The Claridges New Delhi showcases 'The Mighty Maryul Festival' to celebrate Ladakh's rich and fascinating culture from 10th-18th November 2021.

Team TTJ

The Delhi winters have set in, and The Claridges, New Delhi, got the ball rolling by hosting a Ladakh Cultural Festival in the heart of the capital. The nine-day event will feature Ladakh's cultural heritage, with a focus on its enchanting cuisine, fashion and music. The festival kicked off on November 10, 2021, at The Claridges Garden, with a cultural pop-up by renowned Ladakhi fashion designers Jigmat Norbu and Jigmet Wangmo. The duo's designs reflect their passion for reviving, preserving, promoting the textile art, crafts, and traditional way of life of Ladakhis. The guests were enthralled by an exhilarating live musical performance by noted Ladakhi folk singer and instrumentalist Tsewang Phuntsog.

Authentic Ladakhi cuisine is a major theme throughout the festival. The Claridges has invited noted chefs Pankaj Sharma (opening and closing night) and Nilza Wangmo (from Nov

11-17), who will serve sumptuous traditional and contemporary flavours of Ladakh every night. The wide-ranging menu includes traditional delicacies prepared with a deliciously contemporary twist.

The festival is also hosting a series of daily talks by noted experts on various aspects of Ladakhi life. These include fascinating topics such as Ladakhi Pashmina by Stanzin Minglak and Sonam Angmo From Lena Ladakh Pashmina, Heritage Conservation in Ladakh

by Noor Jahan, Kargil – Crossroads of Culture and History by Muzammil Hussain, Ladakhi fashion by Jigmat Norbu, authentic Ladakhi cuisine by Chef Nilza Wangmo and Textiles from the Ladakh Himalayas Ladakh by Dr. Monisha Ahmed and a 10-year quest for the elusive snow leopard by Vikram Singh.



Skal International Bombay annual Diwali bash, a power-packed event

The energy-filled event held recently was sponsored by PayU and Bird Group, along with exciting gifts from partners, Emirates, and VisitBritain. Overall, it was a wonderful way to reflect on the two years gone by and cement their strong relationships into 2022.

Team TTJ

Skål President Sk. Sunil VA welcomed the members and guests and wished them all on the occasion of Diwali and for a successful year ahead. This was also accompanied by the induction and the pinning ceremony of the new members. On this occasion, nine new members joined the club, which increased the membership of the Skal Club of Bombay to 159. All the new members were sworn in with the Skal Oath and they expect many more new members to join the movement going forward. The event had a fantastic turnout of close to 90 members, along with their spouses and guests, that finally closed at a headcount of 112.

The party continued with special gifts sponsored by their partners. For the Best dressed male and female skalleagues, prizes were given by Emirates and VisitBritain. The bumper prize in the Lucky Draw was a couple ticket to Colombo sponsored by Sri Lankan Airlines along with two nights' accommodation sponsored by Shangri-La, Hambantota. It was won by Sk Arvind Tandon and the prize was distributed by Ruwan Wijekoon, Area Manager Western India for Sri Lankan



Airlines and Sk. Vivek Braganza who heads Shangri-La in the region.

The Photo Booth erected for the occasion was a draw, with everyone ensuring their pictures were captured for posterity. The members enjoyed the energy in the room, which was intense. The party then continued with some foot-tapping music being belted out by the DJ, leading many onto the dance floor.

PayU is working on a platform for revenue generation, which would be an added value to members of the Club.

BirdGroup is a business conglomerate having business interests in travel, aviation, hospitality, distribution, airport handling, and automobiles across the globe and has been a great supporter of the Skal movement. The Club also took the opportunity to invite Sk. Carl Vaz, National President, Skål International India, to be present at the function.

As the party gathered momentum, many Skalleagues were seen celebrating and enjoying the evening to the fullest.

The networking dinner had a good spread of starters and the main course. The surprise gift was a giant Boondi Laddoo curated by Skalleague Jay Shah. Special hand-crafted soap and cream by the talented Sk. Kajal Somaiya were gifted to all leaving the party which was appreciated by all. Once again Skal led by example, taking in the motto of 'Doing Business' amongst Friends seriously.



Yorker Holidays ushers in Diwali Festivities

Yorker Holiday's Pre-Diwali Cocktail & Dinner was well attended by their travel partners, with some coming from as far as Agra and Dehradun to attend the festivities and usher in better times for the travel industry. A peek into the networking night.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

Yorker Holiday's grand celebration took place at the Station Bar, Connaught Place, New Delhi on October 29, 2021, and was supported by well-known travel brands such as Norwegian Cruise Line, Revier-Dubai, Dubai Parks, Ain Dubai, Ski Dubai, and Lemon Tree Hotels.

The evening lucky draws kept everyone enthralled on this pulsating evening and many hotel stays and

attraction tickets were raffled off. The grand prize of the evening was two return air tickets to Maldives, courtesy of Maldivian Airlines. The event will be well remembered by those who attended.

Yorker Holidays is a B2B operator specialising in domestic and international tour packages, beach holidays and cruises. The company's tagline "Dil Toh Ghumakkad Hai!" very aptly summarises their love and commitment to the world of Travel.



'Enjoy with Destinations' relaunches with the spirit of Diwali



A select gathering of special invitees was attended by senior industry and trade association leaders, hoteliers, travel partners, and friends of EWD.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

Jaishree Viridi and Malkit Singh Viridi, announced the post Covid comeback of their company, Enjoy with Destinations (EWD), with their 9th Anniversary celebrations at the Ayu Hotel, Sunder Nagar, New Delhi on October 29, 2021. This select gathering of Special invitees was attended by senior industry and trade association leaders, hoteliers, travel partners, and friends of EWD.

Lucky draws for the evening were sponsored by Tree of Life Resorts, Ayu Hotels, Spree Hotels Rishikesh Inn, and OSR Resorts & Hospitality.

EWD, primarily a domestic player, has now announced its plans to venture into the outbound tourism space and also lay a greater emphasis on curating pet-friendly, vacation experiences.



Delhi NCR indicates strong travel demand

A recent travel trend study conducted by Thomas Cook India in Delhi NCR is witnessing 60 per cent month-on-on growth with approximately 290 per cent surge in domestic holidays and 55 per cent in outbound. This is based on a data comparison of September 2021 vs September 2019.

Team TTJ

A surge in demand due to the Festival and upcoming Winter Season, Expo 2020 Dubai, and Honeymoon travel due to the marriage season in the North are some of the key factors powering travel growth from Delhi.

Romil Pant, Senior Vice President, Leisure Travel, Thomas Cook (India) Limited said, "Delhi continues to be one of our best-performing markets and contributes significantly to our holidays business: international and domestic. Lockdown fatigue and pent-up demand is resulting in strong travel desire. This year we have seen high demand for travel within India, Delhites preferring outdoor adventure and mountain locations like Himachal Pradesh, Leh-Ladakh, Uttarakhand, and North East; our bike trips are doing exceptionally well.

The demand is back to 65 per cent of pre-pandemic levels overall."

Pant further added, "While Maldives has been Delhi's top destination, we are seeing a strong surge for Switzerland, France, Russia, Spain, Egypt, and Turkey, along with the Expo 2020 Dubai across families and business/trade associations."

Delhi is also witnessing a strong demand for overseas education travel and Thomas Cook India has delivered well on student travel to USA and Canada with quarantine packages. Thomas Cook India's recent survey has revealed insightful consumer behaviour and travel trends for Delhi.

Based on multiple-choice options provided to customers, the below data is not equal to 100 per cent:

- 62 per cent prefer international destinations;



▲ Romil Pant

favourites include Maldives, Dubai, Switzerland, France

- 78 per cent prefer domestic holidays; Kashmir, Leh-Ladakh, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand; with North East and Andamans now seeing strong demand

Key segments driving demand were families, millennials/young professionals, honeymooners, business and leisure, students, and spiritual tourism. While 60 per cent customers from Delhi enjoy travelling with family or multi-generational family, 10 per cent as a group of friends/colleagues, 25 per cent couples, and 5 per cent solo travellers.

Malaysia to reopen its borders to international visitors by January 1

Malaysia will reopen its borders to international visitors by January 1 at the latest, a government advisory council said on November 11, as the country seeks to revive its ailing tourism sector.

The Southeast Asian country has gradually reopened its economy in recent weeks as coronavirus infection rates have slowed amid a ramped-up vaccination program. More than three-quarters of Malaysia's 32 million population are vaccinated, government statistics show.

Former Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, who chairs a council tasked with spearheading Malaysia's economic recovery program, told reporters the tourism industry was recovering too slowly without foreigners and noted that operators needed time to resume businesses.

Muhyiddin, however, said infection control measures such as Covid-19 tests will remain in place, with authorities to determine entry based on the Covid-19 situation in originating countries, and other factors. He did not state when a firm date for

reopening will be announced, but said the decision was still being detailed by health and security agencies.



Vida Beach Resort Marassi Al Bahrain to open its doors this December

Vida Beach Resort Marassi Al Bahrain is set to open its doors in December, bringing with it a cool new hospitality concept like no other to the Kingdom.



The sixth Vida property and its second beach resort will offer chic meeting rooms, funky dining outlets and comfortably designed contemporary rooms for the young and on the move, making Vida Bahrain the go-to destination this season. A metropolitan space for those who are tech savvy, enjoy modern art or those who simply want to kick back and relax, whatever your needs Vida Bahrain will take care of them.

Situated on the southern island shores of Marassi, with immediate beach access, and in proximity to the soon to be open Marassi Galleria Shopping Mall, the 157-room and 141-serviced residences resort will be home to your next best escape.

Foodies will love the dining concepts, which include Origins, a quirky easy-going restaurant for guests to work from, spend the day relaxing and much more. For al fresco lovers, there is a trendy sea-facing pool bar with a temperature-controlled rooftop infinity pool with Instagramable views of the sea. The Bistro by Origins will offer a more upscale dining experience with amazing sea views and unique gastronomic offerings that will sure-fire leave you impressed. As the property is perfectly positioned adjacent to the waterfront, most rooms, gym and dining outlets have a contemporary aesthetic appeal with a beachside atmosphere.

Switzerland now open to all fully vaccinated Indians

With the World Health Organisation's (WHO) emergency use listing of India's indigenously made Covaxin vaccine,



Switzerland has opened its doors for all Indian travellers who have been fully vaccinated with either the Covishield or Covaxin doses.

Switzerland opened its borders for tourists vaccinated with two doses of Covishield starting June 23, 2021. However, post the WHO nod for Covaxin, all fully vaccinated adults need to only fill in an entry form and present their COVID certificate to authorities on arrival in Switzerland and are exempted from taking the test. Travellers who have recovered from COVID-19 within the last six months are also exempted from tests and quarantine upon entering the country.

Children and adolescents need to fill in the entry form, which can be included in the entry form of the adult travelling with them. Children under the age of 16 are not required to provide proof of a negative coronavirus test on entering Switzerland. They are exempted from the test requirement on entry and the test requirement within 4-7 days of arrival.

The Embassy of Switzerland Visa Section in Delhi and VFS Global have started accepting applications for all types of Schengen Swiss visas, including Type C (entry and a stay of up to 90 days within a period of 180 days). Vaccinated people can file for their visa applications in VFS Global centres in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Chennai, Cochin and Hyderabad.

MakeMyTrip partners with IndiGo to offer exclusive charter services to Phuket

MakeMyTrip, in partnership with IndiGo, has launched exclusive charter services to Phuket. As the pandemic eases and countries begin welcoming back Indian travellers, MakeMyTrip together with IndiGo, is making travelling to the island easy while Phuket continues to remain closed for direct flyers from India. This industry-first and one-of-a-kind package has been packaged with various travel benefits, value adds and unmissable offers.

These charter holiday packages have been designed and packaged to offer unique leisure and stay experiences in Phuket. As part of the package, the company will offer end-to-end travel services including airport transfers, Certificate of Entry (CoE) assistance, early check-in, and check-out at one of the premium properties, travel insurance, return RT-PCR assistance among others. With packages starting at only ₹39,999, travellers will be able to make a booking at a special price of INR 1000 only. Package inclusions are detailed

city tour, visit to Coral and Racha Island by speedboat, a day trip to Dolphins Bay, to name a few.



Outrigger Mauritius Beach Resort appoints Global Destinations as its Marketing Partner in India

Outrigger Mauritius Beach Resort has appointed Global Destinations as its sales and marketing arm in India.

Outrigger Mauritius Beach Resort, managed by Hawaii-based Outrigger Hospitality Group, offers guests 181 spacious ocean-facing rooms beside a white sand lagoon in the south of the island, adjacent to the scenic nature reserve of Bel Ombre. The resort combines local culture with world-class hospitality. It is known for its serene setting, premier amenities, locally inspired entertainment and diverse dining options, including Mauritian Creole flavours.

Pranav Kapadia, Founder of Global Destinations, said, "With Mauritius opening its borders, there couldn't be a better time to announce our new partnership with Outrigger Mauritius Beach Resort. Our objective as Global Destinations is to generate business for Outrigger Mauritius Beach Resort from multiple segments such as FITs, couples, honeymooners, weddings, families and more."

Snorkelling, kite surfing, mountain biking, e-biking, forest hiking, waterfall discoveries and educational flora and fauna tours in the adjacent UNESCO biosphere reserve are all popular with resort guests.

The lagoon fronting the property is home to more than 70 species of tropical fishes and abundant coral – preserved, in part, by Outrigger's ZONE (OZONE) global conservation initiative.

In the resort, children can delight in fun activities at the complimentary Coral Kids Club while adults find tranquility at the renowned Navasana Spa.



▲ Pranav Kapadia
Founder, Global Destinations

Visit Portugal signs VFS Global as its Trade and Marketing Agency for India

VFS Global has been nominated the new Trade and Marketing Agency for Turismo de Portugal, the official Tourism Board for Portugal, responsible for building destination awareness in the market, attracting more visitor footfall from India, and positioning Portugal as the leading destination for travellers across segments.



▲ Claudia Matias
Director – India,
Turismo de Portugal

In its role, VFS Global will help establish a bigger media outreach for Turismo de Portugal, providing them the latest updates about the destination, and keeping the travel trade up to date on the most recent and relevant information on places, products, and experiences. Additionally, there will be a focus on building corporate and airline partnerships to establish Portugal as a preferred destination in the India market.

"Since the opening of our Turismo de Portugal office in 2020, based in New Delhi, our aim is to work with the entire Indian market. This is a very strong commitment, and we have selected VFS Global as our local Travel Trade and PR Agency to help us with this thrilling and huge task, with two major objectives. First one is to increase awareness about Portugal as a tourist destination and the second one, of course, is to increase partnerships with different tour operators and travel agencies to increase their knowledge and expertise on Portugal and to create the best conditions for these potential partners to bring more business here from India," said Claudia Matias, Director – India, Turismo de Portugal.

Fortune Hotels opens Fortune Resort Benaulim Goa



Fortune Hotels recently announced the opening of its upscale resort in the serene backdrop of Benaulim, South Goa. Branded Fortune Resort Benaulim Goa, the resort offers 96 gracefully appointed rooms including plush suites and chalets, a relaxing spa, a stunning swimming pool, multiple F&B offerings and unique experiences. This picturesque property is an idyllic spot to discover the serenity of Goa and have a relaxed holiday like no other. It is a perfect getaway for family holidays, solo trips, honeymooners and adventure seekers.

Additionally, the premium resort with its pristine tropical setting and a mix of vantage venues, open spaces and a lawn, can also convert into a perfect spot for dreamy weddings. Be it a heavenly wedding on the beach, a shack-styled nuptial or a luxe wedding alcoved in the verdant garden, it can host it all. The resort specialises in hosting impressive destination weddings and boasts of a party deck and an open air dance floor. Along with the state-of-the-art facilities, a dedicated team, delightful gourmet options and tailor-made services, your event is sure to be a success. With a capacity to host up to 500 guests, the stunning landscape of the resort also provides a beautiful natural backdrop for unforgettable events making it an ideal place for company off-sites, social events, conferences and more.

Well connected by air, road and rail, the resort is about 40 mins drive from Dabolim Goa Airport, and just 10 mins from Madgoan Railway Station.

Kenya Tourism Board releases new courses in the Magical Kenya Travel Specialist Program

Kenya's tourism marketer, Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) has released exciting new courses in the Magical Kenya Travel Specialist Program. The program which was launched earlier this year in March is designed to deliver and maintain effective online training targeted at travel agents around the world.



The eLearning platform will equip the travel agents with the relevant knowledge on Kenya's unique and diverse offerings for the discerning traveller. Upon completion of the Magical Kenya Travel Specialist Program, agents will qualify as Certified Kenya Travel Specialists and can confidently offer their newfound expertise to their clients and grow their business through increased sales.

The new courses added into the Program which includes sustainable travel in Kenya, the Magical Kenya Signature Experiences, Demand Segments, and a deep dive into the uniquely diverse Kenya Territories will enable agents to effectively design their itineraries to deliver memorable experiences that last a lifetime. Upon completion, the agents will be recognised as Gold Certified Kenya Travel Specialist. Besides the recognition, the agents also have the opportunity to gain additional benefits such as inclusion in familiarisation trips, peer-to-peer advice, with travel agents around the world and in-market programs among other incentives.

Agents can log in onto www.magicalkenyatravelspecialist.com to begin their journey of becoming Kenya Certified Travel Specialist.

Vistara inaugurates non-stop flights between Delhi and Paris

Vistara operated its first non-stop flight to Paris CDG (Charles de Gaulle) airport on November 7, 2021. Under the air bubble agreement between India and Europe, Vistara will fly twice a week between the two cities – on Wednesdays and Sundays. Bookings for the flights are open on all channels, including Vistara's website, mobile app, and through travel agents.

The Delhi-Paris route is being served by Vistara's Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner, that provides travellers a world-class flying experience. Vistara will accept all eligible customers that meet visa/entry requirements in both countries, as specified by the respective government bodies.



Maldivian commences non-stop direct flight between Delhi and Malé

Maldivian, the national airline of Maldives, operated its first flight from Delhi to Malé on November 5, 2021. The flight offers in-flight meals, standard baggage facilities and operates in Economy Class and Business Class configuration. Maldivian, the national carrier of the Maldives, will be operating this service three times a week with an Airbus A320 aircraft. DEL- MLE: 0925 – 1255 on Wednesday, Friday, Sunday. MLE -DEL: 1455 – 1925 on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday.

For Business Class travellers, the airline also offers access to lounges at the airport, an exclusive check-in counter and generous seats with comfortable recline and seat-pitch.



Sandeep Basu is the new Corporate General Manager - Preopening & Operations of Cygnett Hotels & Resorts

Cygnett Hotels & Resorts has announced the promotion and appointment of Sandeep Basu as their Corporate General Manager – Pre Opening & Operations. He will play a key role in meeting Cygnett's aggressive growth goals. His first assignment in his new role will be the opening and launch of Cygnett Park BL, Jaipur.

Sandeep brings with him an incredible track record of over two decades of experience in the hospitality sector, having essayed roles in various renowned companies like Park Hotels, ITC Hotels, Hyatt and Sheraton. An articulate and passionate hotel professional with strong business acumen. His expertise lies in the Pre-Opening of hotels, which he garnered along his decades-long experience across various roles, locations and hotel segments.

'Rotary Hero Award of Excellence' for Jitendra Kejriwal

'Rotary Hero Award of Excellence' was presented to Jitendra Kejriwal, Director Arika Travels Mumbai for his contribution in Covid Relief, Covid Vaccination, Paediatric Heart Surgeries, and other health initiatives by Rotary District 3141. Arika Tour and Travels was established in 1994 is now a well-established and respected player in the travel and events industry.





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