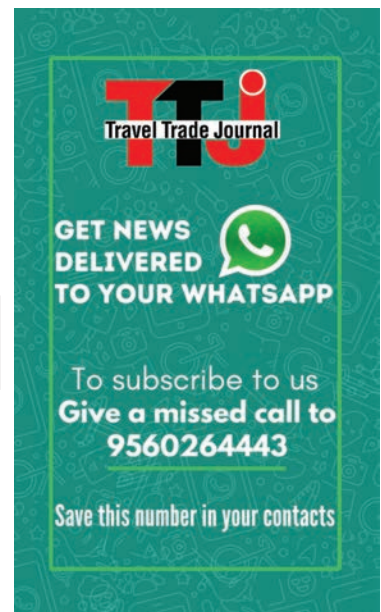




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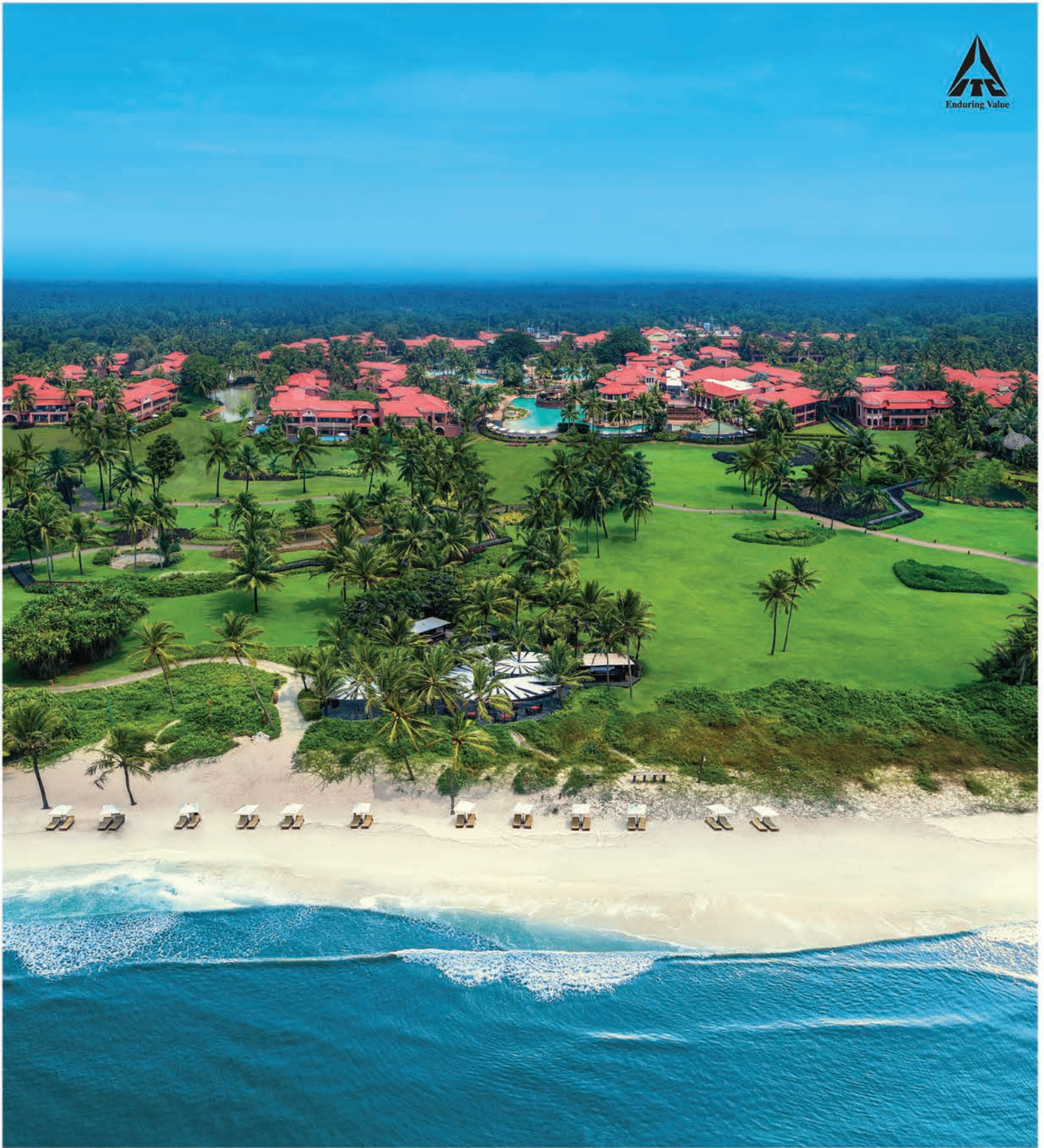


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Dear Friends,

The tourism industry that was just finding its footing after nearly two years of devastation wrought by the pandemic is once again rattled as countries throw up new barriers to travel in an effort to contain the new COVID-19 variant, Omicron. However, there was a quick response by several nations, which demonstrated that they would rather risk overreacting to a new threat rather than underreacting.

India too has delayed operation of scheduled international commercial passenger services till January 31, 2022, which will keep inbound travellers away for a bit longer. However, the findings are, every time there has been a variant, and as soon as it clears up a little, leisure travel snaps back very quickly and domestic travel booms. Inbound and business travel is a little more uncertain, but I presume it won't be for long.

Since the show must go on, we at TTJ are excited about the 36th IATO Annual Convention being held in Gandhinagar from 16th - 19th December 2021. It's the most anticipated travel convention for inbound tourism and TTJ has always been an integral part of this. This issue is a pre-blast on the convention and has several pages dedicated to the association leaders, stalwarts, members and also on the apt convention theme, in the present circumstances, "Brand India: The Road to Recovery."

The issue also features outbound travel interviews, which reflects that the stakeholders are still trying to stay relevant, and ready to accept Indian travellers when borders reopen.

Happy Reading!



Ravi Sharma

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GANDHINAGAR

For that breath of fresh air and refreshing new experiences

Gandhinagar, the capital city of Gujarat, settled on the banks of Sabarmati river, is one of the must-visit places in India. A beautiful contrast to Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar is a scenic and peaceful city and gets tourist attention with its interesting sights, places to explore, and a plethora of exciting experiences.

Team TTJ

Due to the division of the old Maharashtra and Gujarat, the new State of Gujarat was formed in May 1960. After the formation of the state of Gujarat, the capital of the state was kept at Ahmedabad. Then, to reduce the population density of Ahmedabad city, Gandhinagar, the new capital of Gujarat, was established. The government had found this large land scarcely habituated, so they utilised it to make it the capital of the state. The city was established in 1965. The new capital was named Gandhinagar to maintain a lasting memory of the Father of the Nation- Mahatma Gandhi.

The planning of the entire city of Gandhinagar has been done by two planners from India, namely H.K. Mewada and Prakash M Apte, who had apprenticed with Le Corbusier in Chandigarh. To establish and maintain a separate identity for the new city, the surrounding area of about thirty-nine villages was brought under a Periphery Control Act (as in Chandigarh) that permitted the new development of farmhouses only.

Gandhinagar lies at a distance of 32 kilometres towards the northeast of

Ahmedabad. An expressway connects Gandhinagar with Ahmedabad. Soon, the state government offices were transferred to Gandhinagar in 1970, and the city subsequently became an administrative centre in Gujarat. Gandhinagar also serves as the cultural and commercial centre of Gujarat.

The capital complex and government offices, including the Assembly called the Vidhan Sabha, the Secretariat called Sachivalaya and government office buildings like Udhog Bhavan, which houses the offices of the industries departments, are located in the centre. The main source of employment in the private sector is provided by two industrial estates dedicated to engineering, electronics, and non-polluting light industries. There is also a software technology park called Infocity.

Gandhinagar has been divided into thirty sectors that stretch across the central complex of the government of Gujarat. Every sector in Gandhinagar has its community centre, health centre, shopping

centre, primary school, private housing and government housing as well. All the sectors also have the provision of extensive planting, recreational areas and parks beside River Sabarmati that offers the city an atmosphere of green cover.

With 32 lakh trees, the green and clean city, Gandhinagar is also considered as the “greenest” town in the world. The city has been planned with gardens, broad avenues dotted with trees, beautiful buildings, temples, markets, and many other facilities.

In recent years, Gandhinagar has grown into an educational hub with prestigious institutions such as the Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar, the



National Institute of Design (Gandhinagar campus), Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology, National Institute of Fashion Technology, Gujarat National Law. Mahatma Mandir is a convention and exhibition centre and a memorial located at sector 13 is inspired by the life and philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. It is one of the biggest convention centres of India, spread over 34 acres.

Gandhinagar has a plethora of good and decent places to eat, the ice-cream parlours are a hit with a variety of melt-in-the-mouth treats. The city otherwise has a majority of staunch vegetarians, but now even non-vegetarians can find decent options. Also, since there are so many offices based here, a lot of people have homes here and hence a lot of eateries have mushroomed. Gandhinagar presents a wide range of grade hotels and accommodation for the visitors.

Gandhinagar represents the splendid cultural legacy of Gujarat through its significant artwork, craftsmanship and arts, including wood carvings. Fine examples of wood carvings can be found in temples and monuments. The craftwork of artisans on daily-use utensils and objects. The native tribes in Gandhinagar specialise in making exclusive ethnic jewellery and terracotta work.

Being the capital city, it attracts a large number of tourists every year. The tourist places include Akshardham Temple, Hanuman Temple, Swaminarayan Temple, Adalaj Step Well, Science City, Sabarmati Ashram, Indroda Dinosaur and Fossil Park, Sarita Udyan, Deer Park and Craftsmen Village Trimandir, Dandi Kutir and various multiplexes.

Dandi Kutir

This is India's largest and only museum built on the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. It represents Mahatma Gandhi's powerful idea of people across lines of class, gender, age and community asserting their common right to salt itself: a symbol to inspire a pluralistic society



to march towards independence: Purna Swaraj. A glimpse of Mahatma Gandhi's early life is beautifully portrayed along with traces of his marriage to Kasturba and his experiments with youth. This is the only museum depicting the biography of Father of the Nation, using sophisticated technology.

Akshardham Temple



Gandhinagar's Akshardham Temple is the largest and most important temple in Gujarat. The complex is very popular among tourists visiting Gujarat. As a main attraction of the city, the temple complex combines devotions, art, architecture, education, exhibitions and research in one place, which is spread in an area of 23 acres. The monument enshrining the seven-foot-high, gold-leafed Murti of Lord Swaminarayan is the focal point of the complex. The majestic, intricately carved stone structure stands amid sprawling gardens. Six thousand tonnes of pink sandstone were used in building the monument, which is regarded as an architectural masterpiece. The temple came to international attention when two heavily armed terrorists attacked it in September 2002.

Indroda Dinosaur and Fossil Park

Indroda Dinosaur and Fossil Park is a precious treasure spread over an area of about 400 hectares on either bank of Sabarmati River in Gandhinagar, the capital of Gujarat. It is considered to be the second-largest hatchery of dinosaur eggs in the world. Regarded as India's Jurassic



Park, it is run by the Gujarat Ecological Education and Research Foundation (GEER), and is the only dinosaur museum in the country. The park consists of a zoo, massive skeletons of sea mammals like the blue whale, as well as a vast botanical garden, amphitheatre, interpretation centre and camping facilities. It also has a Wilderness Park which is home to innumerable species of birds, reptiles, hundreds of nilgais, langurs and peafowls in its vast forest.

Sarita Udyan

Sarita Udyan is another popular spot along the Sabarmati River and an ideal destination for a delightful picnic. There are a number of recreational facilities available here for the entertainment of the visitors. Sarita Udyan is popular among the locals, and this is located adjacent to a deer park, which is another must-see location. It never fails to enthrall both kids and adults.

Adalaj ni Vav

Adalaj ni Vav is a popular tourist attraction of the city and is situated 18 km south of Gandhinagar. The well was built in 1499 A.D. by Queen Rudabai. The stepwell or Vav, as it is called in Gujarati, is intricately carved and is several stories in depth. The designs on its walls and pillars include leaves, flowers, birds, fish and other breathtaking ornamental designs. In the past, these step wells were frequented by travellers and caravans as stopovers along trade routes. There is an opening in the ceilings above the landing, which allows the light and air to enter the octagonal well. However, direct sunlight does not touch the flight of steps or landings except for a brief period at noon. Hence, some researchers say that the atmosphere inside the well is six degrees cooler than the outside. Another remarkable feature of this stepwell is that out of the many stepwells in Gujarat, it is the only one with three entrance stairs.



Gujarat committed to the future of Tourism

The state of Gujarat is at the forefront of tourism recovery and has been initiating and inviting major travel associations in India to hold their conventions in the state. Further taking up the cause of travel recovery, IATO has fixed its 36th Annual Convention in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

At a pre-convention IATO member meeting organised at New Delhi, Hareet Shukla, IAS, Secretary - Tourism, Devasthanam Management, Civil Aviation & Pilgrimage, Government of Gujarat, welcomed all members and trade partners to Gujarat for IATO's Annual Convention and shared the State's commitment to the future of Tourism.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja



▲ Hareet Shukla

IATO held its pre-Convention meet at The Park Hotel New Delhi on November 18, 2021, and updated its progress for the Convention. Hareet Shukla was the Chief Guest for the event. Speaking at the occasion Shukla, said that virtual meetings and conferences were clearly not a substitute for the warmth and bonhomie created during one-on-one meetings. The travel industry has experienced almost 18 months of restrictions, quarantine, and distancing norms and is now once again gearing up to the real world of meeting, greeting, and networking. The IATO 36th convention will be one such great opportunity for the industry to meet. He extended a warm welcome to all IATO members and industry partners to Gandhinagar for the convention.

Sharing the tourism roadmap for Gujarat's future, Shukla said, "Gujarat has always been a progressive, people-driven, industry-driven, and policy-driven state. It lays a lot of stress on green energy and solar energy, being the first state to implement a Solar policy under the leadership of then, Chief Minister, Narendra Modi."

Gujarat has a very progressive tourism policy in place. This policy is now further being revised to be in tune with the current times. In addition, the state also has formulated policies in place for Heritage Tourism, Adventure Sports Tourism, Homestays, and Cinematic Tourism. Gujarat today receives an almost 40-50 per cent share of the total investment coming into the country, primarily due to its clear policies and ease of doing business. The state's track record speaks for itself and the delegates visiting Gandhinagar and taking post-convention Familiarisation trips will be able to witness this development first hand.

Reminiscing his earlier days when he was posted in Kutch in 2003-06, post the great earthquake that devastated the region, Shukla talked about the transformation he was a part of in the region. Having witnessed a stupendous transformation of the Rann Utsav since 2005, where they were reaching out and inviting guests, to 2021, where people are now lining up in droves to see the White Rann.

Tourism has been a transformer and game-changer for the people and economy of the region, welcoming almost five lakh visitors now. The Bhuj Airport is well connected from Delhi, Mumbai and Ahmedabad and

very soon, flights from Surat will also be introduced.

Kevadia is the next game-changer destination in Gujarat to have caught national attention and now very prominently features on the domestic tourism circuit, Indians are attracted to the 'Statue of Unity'; in great numbers and are mesmerised and extremely proud of what they witness at Kevadia. The endeavour is now to put this destination on the global tourism map.

Besides the 'Rann Utsav', Gujarat is also promoting the 'Navratri Utsav'; and the 'International Kite Festival'. The Beach at Shivrajpur has been awarded the prestigious Blue Flag Beach rating and is now on the radar for sustained development and promotion. Gujarat is also blessed with four world heritage sites and sustained efforts are underway to holistically develop them to attract more visitors.

Further elaborating, he also talked about an additional aspect that Gujarat was now developing, 'Border Tourism', taking inspiration from the daily display of national pride at Wagah, near Amritsar, Gujarat is now developing its own 'Seema - Darshan', with infrastructure and displays to surpass the one at Wagah, at its own border post with Pakistan at Nadabet.

Shukla assured all the office bearers and members of IATO present at the meeting that the government of Gujarat stood firm on its commitment to tourism and will leave no stone unturned or effort wanting from its end to ensure the grand success of the 36th IATO Annual Convention, 16-19th December 2021 at Gandhinagar- Gujarat.



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Exclusive interview with Dr. Subhash Goyal, the recipient of the highest honour of the Tourism Industry, IATO's Hall of Fame



▲ Subhash Goyal

IATO's Hall of Fame Awardee Dr. Subhash Goyal PHD, M.B.A, B.Com. (Hons Gold Medalist from Sri Ram College of Commerce), Past President - Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), Member- National Tourism Advisory Council, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India is the founder Chairman of STIC Travel & Air Charter Group, one of India's biggest B2B travel Group with branches in all the major cities of India. Representing some of the world's best brands like United Airlines, Ethiopian Airlines, Air China, SriLankan Airlines, Ukraine International Airlines, Myanmar Airways International, Royal Brunei Airlines, Croatia Airlines, Cambodia Airways, Royal Jordanian, Nordwind Airlines, Holland America Cruise Line, A-Rosa – European River Cruise, Pacific High, Windstar, Alamo Rent-a-Car, etc.

He has not only emerged as a capable business leader but has expanded his area of operation to work for the entire travel industry. Today, he is counted among the travel fraternity's foremost spokespersons.

Over the past years, he has served the industry in various capacities and at present also holds many important positions in government and industry associations. In this exclusive roundup with TTJ, Goyal shares many interesting thoughts and pointers related to IATO and the current travel and tourism scenario, which is worth making a note.

Ravi Sharma

“I am convinced that Tourism is the only industry in the world which can eradicate poverty not only from India but all over the world”



The then Union Home Minister, Shri Rajnath Singh and the then Minister of State for Tourism & Culture (Independent Charge) Dr. Mahesh Sharma along with Dr. Subhash Goyal and other IATO members at the launch of the "Tourist Visa on Arrival enabled by Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA)", in New Delhi on November 27, 2014.

How do you feel that you have been nominated unanimously by the Executive Committee of IATO to receive the highest honour of the Tourism Industry "The Hall of Fame" Award?

I am really humbled because I recall when I was serving as IATO President, how diligently the committee would discuss who to select for the highest honour of the industry. For me, this award allows me a moment to reflect upon my life's work in promoting India, which, as I have said before, is the greatest show on planet Earth. Given the labour-intensive nature of the tourism industry, it can eradicate poverty and I shall continue to advocate the benefits of tourism development.

What were your achievements as IATO President? Give us a brief on the progress IATO made during your tenure?

When I took over IATO as the President, the total membership of IATO was only about 300 and by the time I left as President, it was over 1500. Today, I am proud to say that we have a good surplus balance and IATO owns two prestigious offices in a good commercial complex.

In 1995, after becoming the IATO President, I was able to get, for the first time in the history of IATO, the then Prime Minister of India, P.V. Narasimha Rao, to inaugurate the IATO convention. The presence of Prime Minister at a travel convention is not just about photo opportunity or optics but it serves as an endorsement of how seriously the government is taking that industry, allows stakeholders to directly express their grievance to the leader of the nation and in my experience has had a tremendous impact on short- and long-term policy. In that convention, we requested the Government to promote Domestic Tourism and the need for upgrading the hotels, roads, airports, railways stations

and other infrastructure in the country.

Some of the work done during my tenure are:

At the IATO Convention in Lucknow, in 1996, requested the government to form a National Tourism Policy, National Tourism Board and appealed for uniformity of taxes, an open sky policy for civil aviation.

In 1997, at the 7th IATO Convention, recommended the formation of tourism boards in every state, headed by the Chief Secretary or the Chief Minister, and creation of a Tourism Development Fund.

IATO also asked to start pre-paid and Meter Taxi service at the Airports and to encourage the development of more convention centres.

At the IATO Convention in 1998, requested for better coordination between Centre and States and between the Ministries of Tourism, Civil Aviation and Culture, to focus on promoting Rural Tourism and IATO demanded an Export Status for the Tourism Industry.

Back in 1998, we had also organised a huge demonstration for the abolition of Service Tax. The Government had agreed to our demand of suspending Service Tax for two years till 2000.

In 1998, further initiatives such as requesting the government to promote Buddhist Tourism and allocate a separate fund for it. IATO requested the government that Adventure Tour Operators should be allowed to import all their equipment's, free from import duties, which are needed for Adventure Tourism. We also appealed for restricted areas in the mountains to be opened.

Appealed to the government to approve Budget Hotels and Guest Houses by starting a Home Stay programme. We reiterated our demand for uninterrupted movement of coaches and tourist cars through different states and a single-point collection and rationalization of

taxation policy.

Regarding the Comprehensive Aviation Policy, IATO demanded government should allow all International Airlines who want to fly to India without insisting for royalty and reciprocity so that tourism can be promoted.

At the IATO Convention in Jaipur-1999, we again asked for reduction of Taxes. Also, the Tour Operators to be given the same benefits which were given to exporters on foreign exchange. We again requested for an open sky policy by the Government. We asked Jaipur to be recognized as an international airport. We requested the government to create a Tourism Management crisis fund, as established in Sri Lanka.

We asked for the establishment of a permanent PR mechanism in the Ministry of Tourism to professionalise marketing and PR activities.

Request for prior information to be given to the industry before implementing any new taxes.

We requested the government that Taj Mahal should be kept open at night during full moon days.

At the IATO Convention in 2000, we again stressed on the same requests, i.e., better coordination between Centre and States and open sky policy. Abolition of Service Tax. Tourism to be put under the concurrent list. Sustainable Tourism to be promoted. New Tourist circuits and new destinations to be promoted and Coastal Tourism and River Tourism to be encouraged.

What do you think was your contribution to the development of tourism in the country?

I think, apart from making people realize that tourism is an instrument for job creation, poverty eradication and economic development, my biggest achievement as IATO President was to get the E-Tourist Visa policy announced and implemented. I had the honour of

doing it at an IATO function along with the then Home Minister, Rajnath Singh and the then Tourism Minister, Mahesh Sharma.

You have addressed a lot of seminars and meetings. Which ones do you remember the most?

I have had the good fortune of addressing many international seminars and conferences whether it was a PATA regional conference in Malacca-Malaysia, the Routes conference in Chicago, the Routes Conference in Mauritius and the World Youth Tourism conferences in Vancouver-Canada, Manila- Philippines, Cancun in Mexico, Italy and many other countries. Even during Covid times, I was invited to address virtually the BRICS conference in Saint Petersburg in 2020 and again in 2021. But the most satisfying experience was when I addressed the Commonwealth Directors' meeting in London. I was invited to address the Commonwealth Country Director's meeting held at the Marlborough House in London, UK, where Directors of Commonwealth from 53 countries were present. Even though my presentation was only for about one hour starting from 9:30 am but the interaction carried on till 4:30 pm with only half an hour lunch break for a working lunch. By the end of the day, I could convince the Commonwealth Directors from all over the world about the importance of tourism for poverty eradication in the world.

As IATO President, you supported the formation of FAITH. What was the reason?

Being in the industry, I gradually realized that the Tourism Industry was divided, the tour operators have their separate associations like Domestic Tour Operators have their separate association, Adventure Tour Operators have their separate association, Hotel industry has two different associations, MICE agents have their separate association and the Transporters have their separate association; so it was very important to bring all of them under one roof. We tried very hard and

finally with other industry leaders like Pronab Sarkar, Subhash Verma, Sarabjit Singh, Nakul Anand, S.M. Shervani, Rakesh Mathur, Rajji Rai, Rajeev Kohli, Rakesh Lamba, Ajay Prakash, P.R.S. Oberoi, Vivek Nair, Vinay Lal and a lot of other members, we all started an organization called FAITH i.e. 'Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality' in 2012. At that time, I was IATO president and even though, in principle, IATO had agreed to join FAITH but the executive committee



Dr. Subhash Goyal presenting a STIC Travel Brochure to Hon'ble Narendra Modi ji the then Chief Minister of Gujarat.

had not ratified, so I proposed the name of Nakul Anand as Chairman which was unanimously supported by everyone and later on when IATO became a member, I was nominated by IATO to represent it in the FAITH Board, where I remained a Board Member. When the term of S.M. Shervani and Subhash Verma was over, I was unanimously elected as the Honorary Secretary of FAITH and Chairman of the India Tourism Mart (ITM).

What were your achievements as Honorary Secretary of FAITH and Chairman of ITM?

To enable small and medium Tour Operators, who were not able to afford to participate in International events like FITUR-in Spain, ITB-in Berlin and WTM-in London; we decided to organize a Buyer/Seller Meet so that all Indian Tour Operators, Hoteliers and State Government could promote their products to International Buyers from all over the world.

We hosted the first ITM free of cost for the delegates who came from 69 countries and in the second ITM 74 countries showed their interest and 67 countries were hosted by us free of cost. The Ministry of Tourism had provided air tickets for all the international delegates and the rest of the hosting was done through sponsorships by different State Governments. FHRAI and leading hotels had given free and discounted rooms. IATO, Adventure and Domestic Tour Operators had provided free and discounted Post Conference Tours and Transport out of the sponsorships that we had collected. Despite making enormous expenses in Hotels and Exhibition infrastructure.

FAITH played a very important role to put up a united voice of the Indian

Tourism industry and as Secretary of FAITH, we highlighted the plight of the Indian Tourism Industry right from the Prime Minister of India to all the members of Parliament and highlighted the need to help the Tourism industry in both print and electronic media very aggressively.

What do you feel about the IATO's 36th Annual Convention this year?

The IATO Convention is taking place after nearly two years and all the members are excited to meet each other, face to face and explore the possibilities of working together for the mutual advantage of our industry.

The gradual kick-start of domestic tourism may have brought some relief to your association members, what is the feedback you are getting from your members?

In 2019, about 11 million tourists visited India and most of them were managed by the members of IATO and the country earned approximately 30 billion dollars in foreign exchange. So, Domestic Tourism can never substitute the importance of inbound tourism, not only for India but also for all the other countries of the world. It is rightly said, "Something is better than nothing", so Domestic Tourism has given us some oxygen in the pandemic. However, for inbound tourism to survive and thrive, we need international tourists and they will not visit India on very expensive fares, so we need to start scheduled international flights as soon as possible. Domestic Tourism has a lot of potential but it can be a survival strategy for us. Only aggressive inbound tourism can be a game-changer for India.

According to you, what will be the impact or benefit of the Govt's

initiative of five lakh free visas by March 2022?

This can only be a good publicity strategy, however, more important than free visas are cheaper and affordable airfares to India. In order to save 25–50 dollars on the visa, no tourist will spend 500 to 1000 dollars extra on airfares to visit India.

By when do you think the Inbound tourism arrivals will match the 2019-20 figures?

In 2019, we had an air services agreement with 105 countries and most of these country's airlines were operating to India. Unfortunately, right now we have air-bubble agreements with only 28 countries and their capacities have been reduced by less than half. So how will the tourists come, unless and until the air services are increased to pre- COVID levels? Only If we open the skies in 2022, then we will be able to reach the 2019-20 figures perhaps by 2023. Otherwise, it is very logical that tourism will not revive without the starting of incoming international flights.

Please list the top five factors that will benefit Inbound tourism

1. Open Sky Policy for international flights.
2. Extension of e-Tourist Visas to all our source markets like UK, Canada, America, etc.
3. After the starting of international flights, a very aggressive digital marketing and social media campaign about India's safety standards for fully vaccinated passengers must be showcased.
4. Foreign exchange earnings from tourism should be incentivised by giving the same kind of incentives as given to physical exports.
5. The government, with the help of the tourism industry and the Indian Embassies abroad, should identify the big tour operators in our source markets and start a Tourism Ambassador programme. Tourism ambassadors with proper orientation should be appointed in at least 100 countries. IATO can help in training these ambassadors.

How can the Ministry of Tourism support IATO members during 2022-23?

➤ Marketing Development Assistance (MDA) for tourism marketing and promotion should be doubled and reimbursement of the expenses of the tour operators should be made within 15 days after submitting the report. This should be done online so that the process is more transparent and efficient.

➤ The government along with the tourism industry, ministry of commerce and other ministries, jointly try to get the maximum number of international conferences, exhibitions and events to take place in India, as is being done by countries like Germany, Singapore and China.

What are the benefits for members joining IATO?

There are many benefits of joining IATO and some of them are given below:

- Members can network with all the other members of the association.
 - Members get credibility as a recognised and trusted tour operator by joining IATO
 - Members can promote their products and programmes with each other.
 - Members can participate at discounted rates in buyer/seller meets in India and abroad.
 - As an industry member and a recognised association, the Government is sensitive to the problems of the Association and thus the advantage.
- Members can take advantage of the various skill development programmes which are organised by IATO and also other trade associations.
- Members can get leads from the Ministry of Tourism website.
 - Members can participate in various meetings, conventions and roadshows within India and all over the world which are organised by IATO, jointly with the Ministry of Tourism.
 - Members can write articles and share their views in the IATO newsletter.
 - In most of the states, the IATO has local chapters. By actively getting involved with the local chapters, members can take up their local issues and get them resolved at the State level through the Association's Chapter Chairmen's and the Executive Committee.

What is your view on the India Tourism International offices plus the idea of all Indian missions abroad to promote tourism?

I had suggested in my book "Poverty Eradication and Economic Development through Tourism" about 15 years back that all the Indian Embassies should be used, particularly the reception area, to promote tourism to India.

When I was President of IATO, I have always suggested that the Tourist offices should be staffed by young, local sales and marketing people of Indian origin, living in those countries. Such recruits will be more cost-effective and knowing the local language will be an added



Addressing a Press Conference on behalf of ASSOCHAM-The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry

advantage. They should be given targets and should be regularly monitored. The Indian Embassies should support the local tourist offices and they both should work in coordination with each other. Also, they should work alongside the Indian carriers, offices, or representatives in that country.

The biggest snag in the Indian missions abroad is about security reasons as they are not accessible to a common man, whereas even a small downtown tourist office can be accessible. What we should do is to try to understand and improve the existing tourist offices by making them target-driven and accountable. The Indian missions abroad can supplement their efforts by helping with tourism promotions, such as inviting the big tour operators to the missions during major Indian festivals and events that are celebrated at the Embassy.

After serving as IATO President for 14 years, I continued contributing in my capacity as 'Immediate Past President' for 9 years. During these 23 years, I have left no stone unturned in fighting for the cause of Indian Tourism and helping every member to the best of my ability. When I took over, as I said earlier, tourism was considered as an elitist activity, which led me to my work in communicating the advantages of following a tourism friendly policy via letters, public speeches, newspaper interviews and articles, and my book titled "Poverty Eradication and Economic Development through Tourism". My goal was to change the thought process of not only the Government of India, but the public at large. I believe I have been successful in causing a mindset shift that has led to positive developments.

IRCTC

Innovative and Resilient

No industry across the globe has been spared the COVID-19 fallout. The impact of restrictions on the travel, tourism and hospitality industry, compounded with fear among the masses to travel, has been tremendous. IRCTC's tourism and catering business also bore the brunt in these unprecedented challenging times, with its catering and tourism revenues seeing a drastic downturn in FY 2020-21. TTI spoke to IRCTC's Rajni Hasija, Director (Tourism and Marketing) about these turbulent times, challenges, innovations, and the roadmap for the future.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

IRCTC, in its more than twenty-year existence of serving as a government corporate entity in the areas of rail catering, tourism, hospitality and passenger amenities, has come a long way. IRCTC established itself as a leader in the areas of hospitality services, Travel and Tourism, packaged drinking water, and internet ticketing by providing value-added products and services for passengers, tourists and other customers, targeting IR and Non-IR related services alike, building a resilient business portfolio that is scalable and based on core competence.

Speaking on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hasija said, "I do not think any industry across the globe has been spared by COVID-19, now the responsibility of gaining back guest and traveller confidence lies to a great extent with the travel and tour operations organisations. I feel rather than doing a lot of new things, we need to rethink and redesign our existing products to gain back passenger and traveller confidence. Vaccinating staff, training them, partnering with hotels and transport operators, and sensitising stakeholders who are willing to take up the fight against COVID-19 responsibly and seriously is key to reviving the tourism business."

Innovation led IRCTC to start domestic tours on the Deluxe Tourist Trains, an exercise that proved to be quite successful. IRCTC'S endeavour to connect the Northeastern states by train by operating the first North East Tourist Circuit Train, which covers various destinations in the Northeast such as Guwahati, Itanagar, Kohima, Dimapur drew tremendous response from domestic tourists.

Hasija, further added, "The Buddhist Circuit had got a new train in 2018 with additional features such as dining cars, restaurants, bathing facilities and

sitting area in 2AC coaches. Due to the ongoing pandemic with restrictions on international arrivals, the arrivals from Buddhist countries dried down. So, it was decided to operate this train in the domestic market and the response was way beyond our expectations. New train circuits were introduced, including Ramayana, Northeast, Char Dham, Dev Darshan. These circuits have been very well received by the domestic market. While one aspect could be the pent-up domestic tourism demand, the other aspect is that the travellers are seeking newer experiences. With Indian roots in spirituality and divinity, tourist circuits to religious destinations are a safe bet for us. our air packages to Leh and Ladakh also drew a tremendous response."

While the ongoing pandemic and recently discovered variant of the virus has caused a psychological impact, the rapid pace of vaccination taking place in the entire country, with more than 79 crore people administered with the first dose and 46 crore people administered with the second dose till date, travel confidence has grown up among the masses. Recent surveys conducted by leading research companies have revealed that 72 per cent of Indians have indicated their desire to travel next year, of which around 50 per cent of the participants have plans to undertake foreign travel.

Talking about IRCTC's future marketing efforts, Hasija said, "IRCTC has been a customer-centric organisation with constant improvisation in marketing strategies which has helped it sustain its business over the last two decades. The major strength of the company is 'Common Man Tourism' on which the company has been focusing and targeting its bouquet of tourism products."

IRCTC has a humongous database of millions of customers who are its rail ticketing website users. Through innovative data mining, data analytics,



▲ Rajni Hasija

and other innovative marketing strategies, the company is focusing on targeted marketing to offer a specific range of tourism products and services according to the profile of tourists. IRCTC has recently ventured into the field of Affiliate Marketing to ensure its reach across the country through its affiliates who are social media influencers, YouTubers, travel bloggers, and who are in a position to promote the tourism products and services of the company among a sizeable proportion of the population.

It is important to understand that tourism is a very sensitive business and is dependent to a large extent on the external environment over which companies have limited or no control. IRCTC, like most of the other tourism companies, faces similar challenges. Instilling confidence in the minds of customers to travel again by ensuring proper health and safety protocols during operations is of utmost importance. International travel restrictions are still not relaxed in most of the countries, especially now with the emergence of the new variant of the virus, the situation has once again become cautious.



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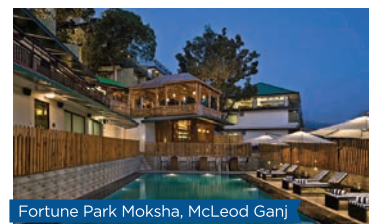
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36th IATO Annual Convention

Setting the stage for recovery of INBOUND TRAVEL

IATO's 36th Annual Convention comes at an opportune time for the members. Currently, when the travel industry is going through a very rough patch with mixed indications of revival, it is an exciting time to be at the convention to brainstorm and network with peers. Many sessions at the Convention are focused on deliberations as to how the industry can revive tourism and bring it back to the pre-COVID level. More than 900 delegates are expected at the three-day Convention and show support for the unified cause of tourism recovery. The leadership team of IATO shares with TTJ, the various aspects of the convention, right from the reason on deciding to hold it, members' participation, its highlights and the expectations from one of the most eagerly awaited events by all in the Indian travel trade.

Ravi Sharma



Rajiv Mehra
President- IATO

for starting a business, for the trade as well as for the government. Consequently, it is imperative that we put our minds together and chalk out a plausible road map that shall steer India to the path of recovery. This triggered the theme for our convention, "BRAND INDIA - The Road to Recovery"

Going ahead, the meaningful inaugural, the well-appointed strategic and structured business sessions, crafty state presentations, motivational talk, with networking luncheons and dinners acting as an informal forum to talk business on the side are the major highlights of the convention. The IATO run, award ceremony, spouse tours, the post-convention tours will add that zest and momentum and, of course, the onsite marketing of the tourist sites of Gujarat. These compelling features are a huge draw for our members.

I firmly believe the 36th IATO convention this year will have greater participation and will definitely create a major impact as the time is opportune to network for business. With the government coming out with suitable policies and an industry hungry for business, this convention packs in a punch and a penchant for recovery. Members have shown their keen interest to attend the convention and we expect large numbers of members and non-members to join the convention, including the state governments.

Moreover, the industry issues have been constantly highlighted with the Government and various ministries for the past 18 months and that is why we see reasonable success with the policies rolled out by the government.

There are many reasons which prompted our decision to hold the convention this year and show to the world and domestic travellers that India is ready to welcome them. Vaccination programme in India is world largest with over 116 Crore people vaccinated, borders opening up from 15th

November, pro-activeness of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and the Central Government, states ready to welcome tourists, airline bookings picking up at fast pace, people travelling to destinations of their choice and above all our valued members are ready to embark on business with all SOPs in place.

Further, with India opening up, the policy formulations are getting conducive to business, the mindset is all



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Also, this convention will reiterate the major issues, but more importantly, the effort will be to chalk out a viable recovery path in consultation with the government and the stakeholders.

Given the ever-changing COVID scenario, it is difficult to say at the moment when the Inbound tourism arrivals will match the 2019-20 figures, but if all augurs well, then 2022-23 may witness a near 19-20 mark but we are not sure. Also, unless the scheduled flight connectivity is operational with the target countries in the source and emerging markets, the five-lakh free visa scheme too will not have the desired impact. IATO has requested the Government that the five-lakh free visa validity may be extended to March 2023 or, in case there is a tsunami of tourists post the borders effectively opening up, the five-lakh figure can be increased suitably.

So, I feel it is important for the media to project the image of India that it is ready to embrace tourism with all the new normal and conducive policies concerning COVID precautions. The government and the stakeholders are well-prepared catering effectively with all the elements of the marketing mix to offer tourists a memorable experience of Incredible India.

When it comes to Domestic Tourism, I would like to say that it has shown the world that with Indians travelling locally, India is safe and ready to welcome tourists from across the world. The airlines, the tourists' cars and coaches, the hotels and the sightseeing places are equipped with the new normal to cater to the tourists. This is the feedback that we want the world to get and embark on their travel to India. Domestic Tourism can create a favourable image of India that the global media can lap up and can lead to a faster recovery of Indian Tourism.



E. M. Najeeb
Senior Vice President
IATO and Chairman- IATO Convention

Opportune time is the trigger, so with the borders opening up, policies slated to be conducive, the trade hungry for business, the industry is upbeat. All these factors prompted us to hold the IATO convention this year. Let us be positive, with over 116 crore vaccination doses, it is time to march ahead with cautious optimism.

Also, India is gearing up, and it is ready to welcome tourists with all SOPs in place, the government is supporting the industry with its policies, the states are looking at seamless travel, the stakeholders are keen on networking and discussing issues with the policymakers – the case is thus ripe and a perfect fit to choose “BRAND INDIA - The Road to Recovery”, as our theme for the convention.

The key highlights of the Convention will be: the well-appointed inaugural, quality speakers at the strategic business sessions, meaningful State Presentations, a motivational talk, informal networking at the hosted Luncheon and Dinners which address relevant thoughts. Post Tours add the opportunity for onsite marketing of destinations in Gujarat. The IATO Run for the fitness enthusiast and the evening entertainments, all will add up to make the entire package a memorable one.

As all conventions have their own USPs, this Convention will have a major impact as we are ready to capitalise on the borders opening up and hence timely networking, adapting to strategic ideas emanating from the sessions and presentations will leave our members to view the

road map to rejuvenate their business.

Addressing key issues to the government, be it Centre or State, regular follow-ups and one-to-one meetings to fructify our requests are a part and parcel of our regular daily IATO activity. The Convention is to bring our valued members on a strategic platform, listen and discuss with policymakers and chalk out a road map that shall synergies business. It is the cherry on the cake.

Speaking about the Govt's initiative of five lakh free visas by March 2022, the benefits will accrue only when the scheduled flights open up with the target and emerging markets. With the new variants of COVID-19, challenges are still there. IATO has already requested the government to extend the visa facility till March 2023. However, a lot depends on how the COVID Situation pans out and how the industry, the world, responds to our borders opening up with cautious optimism. However, if all goes reasonably well, we see a major fightback in 2022-23.

Presently, with inbound tourism on halt, I think, Domestic Tourism paves the way to tell the world that if Indians can travel within India safely, then why not the global tourist traffic. It has opened up new destinations, given us a new mindset of a discerning traveller and has reinforced that all SOPs are in place with respect to air travel, surface transport, hotels and sightseeing. The policymakers have viewed these and have given the needed momentum to tourism. What better scope can one ask for?

Domestic tourism does have the potential to be a game-changer in the faster recovery of Indian tourism and it will pave the way for MICE, Inbound, Wedding and Adventure tourism. The destinations, the stakeholders, both private and government, will be energised and the latter will then be prompted to address conducive policy measures that shall catalyse tourism.

On the last note, I request to the media to carry the true positive news that is emanating from all corners with respect to vaccinations, borders opening up, facilitation by states, industry ready to welcome tourists with all SOPs in place so that we embark on a factual positive image building of Incredible India.



Ravi Gusain
Vice President- IATO

We need the motivation to move ahead to seek possibilities for running our businesses. COVID-19 is still hovering around, but this is the

enhance their knowledge base.

Fortunately, after opening up Indian borders for tourists, our members rejoice with enquiries which will be a morale booster for them. FTOs were happy with the announcement of 5 Lakh free tourists visas as it gave a positive signal in the market. We still have to go through lots of hurdles and checks for operating tourists, but we are hopeful to cross over all of them one by one.

It will probably take a year or two to come back to pre-COVID levels in terms of foreign tourist arrivals in India. Although with a proactive approach from the government of India and stakeholders, it can be achieved earlier provided people come out of pandemic syndrome. IATO has been in regular touch with the MoT and various other ministries to be able to survive as an industry in the past 20 months and we are somehow glad that a few of our requests and demands were considered positively by the government.

We understand saving life was a priority for the government, but now when things are improving; we are expecting intense support from them to rebuild tourism businesses. We are having regular meetings with MOT officials for resumption of overseas promotions, both digital as well physical and satisfied so far with their planning. However, we will be able to quantify the progress after it begins. So, at the IATO convention, our focus will be to brainstorm all these possibilities with the government officials along with stakeholders.

time we all should adopt a cautious approach for new beginnings.

So, after much deliberations within the executive committee, our members and the Gujarat government we decided to organise IATO's 36th convention in Gandhinagar. Our convention theme is based on the present scenario of how we can bring up Brand India after this devastating 20 months. We want our members to join in numbers because this will be a different convention as compared to previous years; we are the lucky ones to be alive today, but our years of hard work in building our businesses got a huge dent due to the pandemic. We require more hand-holding, encouragement and sharing ideas for future strategies, and the IATO convention will be an ideal platform to restart. We are inviting some prominent speakers to our business sessions, which will help delegates to



Rajnish Kaistha
Hony. Secretary
IATO and Co-Chairman- IATO Convention

Life has to move on. With nearly 1.2 billion vaccines administered, it's time to show the world that India is safe to travel, thus we have

convention in big numbers. People in tourism have moved and suffered a lot in their profession since March 2020, so it is an excellent time and place for networking and rebuilding relationships.

Not to forget that lobbying with the Government is very important and after the IATO's Kolkata Convention in 2019, it shall be a big platform for the same. The Gujarat CM, Tourism Minister with a team of top officials, state governments, airlines, hotels and other suppliers shall be attending and we all shall be discussing the way forward for mutual benefits.

Domestic tourism is the base of the pyramid and it has already taken off in a big way. More and more Indians are discovering off-beat routes, smaller, lesser-known places and more so, their own country. It has given confidence to the Govt, to us, the private players and also to our partners and tourists abroad that India is now safe to travel to. I am happy to share that with the soft opening of e-Tourist visas, some of our members have started receiving foreign tourists, though in small numbers. The ball has started rolling and it shall gain momentum soon.

The Government has taken time for the opening cautiously and has started digital marketing of tourism abroad to promote Brand India. The five lacs free tourist visas are also a big step in the right direction. It's showing the country's willingness to attract tourists. We at IATO

decided to hold the IATO's 36th Annual Convention in Gandhinagar. We are moving forward on a cautious but positive note. The E-registration form of IATO strictly asks for two vaccines.

As Domestic Tourism has already started in a big way, after nearly two years of lull, we are now prepared for international tourists with the soft opening of E -Tourist visas. So, it's about time, the theme of the convention, "Brand India- Road to Recovery" is showcased.

We all know life is not the same in the pandemic. Our convention in 2020 was postponed for reasons beyond control. It's almost after 20 months that the Tourism and Hospitality Industry and its stakeholders shall be under one platform. We are getting lots of responses and the interest being shown by our members to join the

are consistently in dialogues with the Govt to extend this offer till March 31, 2022. Tourism to come back to the pre-COVID levels will take time, but we are highly optimistic about the 2022/23 season. So, extending free tourist visas

shall go a long way to help the beleaguered industry. Also, because of the way things are at this point in time because of the pandemic, we expect tourist arrivals to reach pre-COVID levels by 2023!



Sunil Mishra
Hony. Treasurer- IATO

The highlight of the Convention is the theme, "Brand India- The Road to Recovery" which is apt for the revival of business

and will add to the efforts of promotional endeavors of the stakeholders that are ably supported by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India for marketing Incredible India.

India is gearing up, it is ready to welcome tourists with all SOPs in place, the government is supporting the industry with its policies, the states are looking at seamless travel, the stakeholders are keen on networking and discussing issues with the policymakers. Also, the recent covid variant challenge has churned our thoughts. Consequently, it is imperative that we put our minds together and chalk out a plausible road map that shall steer India to the path of recovery. The

case is thus ripe and a perfect fit for the convention that will see a meaningful inaugural, crafted business sessions, informative state presentations punctuated with networking luncheons, dinners, entertaining evenings, motivational talks, the IATO Run, and the final valedictory session. The Post Tours will cater to the onsite marketing of Gujarat as a leading tourism destination.

The Convention is indeed a strong lobbying platform to highlight industry issues with the Government and various ministries and also a platform for effective networking. Participation for the Convention is under progress in these challenging times. I feel the impact of the Convention will be significant as the timing is very suitable and the business-hungry industry is now hungrier to revive its business.

Presently, Domestic Tourism is a game-changer to the point that it can send a strong positive image of India globally. However, for faster recovery, we need to address Inbound and MICE as well. It is difficult to say at the moment when inbound tourism will restart and gain momentum as one has to wait and watch how things pan out concerning COVID, not only in India but also with respect to its major markets. I am optimistic about 2022-23 if the situation improves.



Sanjay Razdan
Hony. Joint Secretary- IATO

The 36th IATO Convention's main highlight is in its theme, "BRAND INDIA – The road to Recovery". We are all waiting to revive

tourism and what we are looking at is the recovery now.

I feel the participation in this convention will be higher than seen in the past conventions. There are two main reasons. First is everyone is looking to meet friends in the trade after almost 20 months. Secondly, the past 20 months have been quite difficult for all of us and we would love to hear from experts in the industry how to proceed and what would be the new norm of doing business post the pandemic.

As known, most IATO members are into Inbound Tourism, but I agree that with Inbound Tourism coming to a standstill since March 2020, many of us tried to

work in the Domestic Tourism segment. However, some succeeded, some failed. However, Domestic Tourism is already a game-changer. The size of a country, the spending power of a common Indian, the kind of population and the variety of tourism destinations within India, there is a huge market for tourism within the country and it's growing by the day. I believe Inbound and Domestic are different branches of tourism and need separate expertise.

I do believe the convention will bring out some important issues and as we have some important dignitaries and officials from the Ministry of Tourism Government of India and Government of Gujarat. We have some important sessions lined up during the course of the convention, and it's a great platform to request different ministries for help.

As I conclude, regarding inbound travel, praying that all goes well, and in my opinion, we should have good business coming in from October 2022. Also, when we speak about the Government's initiative of five lakh free visas by March 2022, though, it's a very small offering but will surely help attract tourists. Hoping the Government of India comes forward with more help to the much ailing Tourism Industry.

As India celebrates the 75th Independence Day,
Let's revisit the
incredible stories
of courage
and valour.

On the 75th anniversary of our independence, let's set out and explore those historic sites that stood witness to our freedom struggle and remember the countless sacrifices done by those who dedicated their lives and resources for the country.



**Sabarmati Ashram,
Gujarat**

Home to Mahatma Gandhi and the ideology that set India free - non-violence.

**Jallianwala Bagh
Memorial, Punjab**

This sacred pilgrimage site honours the fallen victims of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre.

**Cellular Jail National
Memorial, Andaman**

A former British prison, the Cellular Jail now serves as a shrine to the political dissidents it once imprisoned.

**Red Fort,
Delhi**

On August 15, 1947, India's first Prime Minister hoisted the national flag at the Lahori Gate here.

**INA Memorial,
Imphal**

Dedicated to the soldiers of the Indian National Army, it pays tribute to the soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the nation.

**Jhansi Fort,
Uttar Pradesh**

The Fort stands as a tribute to the warrior queen Rani Lakshmbai who fought against the British.

36th IATO Annual Convention

Harbinger of growth for domestic travel

The 36th IATO Annual Convention promises a great future for travel groups from the Eastern region to highlight the vast tourism potential.

Swaati Chaudhury

At a time when the demand for domestic travel has peaked in the country, it comes as really good news to hear that the 36th IATO Annual Convention will be in Gandhinagar, this month.

Undoubtedly, IATO Annual Convention is one of the biggest and significant travel events in the calendar of the Indian tourism industry.

Debjit Dutta, Chairman, West Bengal Chapter, IATO, informed, "The last IATO Annual Convention that was held in Kolkata in September 2019 was the biggest travel carnival in Bengal. It provided new opportunities for the travel industry of Bengal. In this day and age, when domestic tourism is back on track since the advent of the festive season, the convention will help to bring investments into the tourism sector. The pandemic had a huge impact on the tourism industry and a plethora of changes have occurred in the post-pandemic era. We are looking ahead to discuss the travel trends that have set in, learn and understand the transformations that have taken place and revive the relationships within the industry. The upcoming convention will be a landmark event in the annals of the tourism history of India."

In today's world, travel destinations are opening doors to vaxxed travellers and new-age travellers intend to explore authentic experiences. Dutta further said, "The need of the hour is to gear up in order to become post-Covid ready. We are looking forward to the return of investments in the realm of tourism. Every opportunity needs to be utilized and this kind of event is not-to-be-missed. Travellers are trying to explore new destinations in the domestic sector. Since global tourism is on hold, domestic travel will be a major topic of our discussion at the convention. The flow of tourist traffic in Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas has been terrific during the festive season this year. This kind of tourist flow has not been recorded over the past five years. Travellers are keen



▲ Debjit Dutta

to explore the Northeast destinations. We have to collaborate for sustainable tourism development since travellers are stressing more on hygiene and safety these days."

Some IATO members feel that it would be difficult to predict the kind of impact the convention will have on the domestic travel industry of the country. Sushil Kumar Singh, Chairman, Bihar and Jharkhand Chapter, IATO said, "The guidelines on which travel groups operate to entice domestic travellers need to be changed. The pandemic has crippled the tourism industry of our country and we need to appeal to the Central government for the travel industry to sustain in the long run. There are plans to open the Buddhist tourist circuit in Bihar sometime in February, next year. With proper highlighting of tourist getaways in Bihar and Jharkhand at the convention, chances are there for domestic pilgrims to head to the Buddhist tourist circuit of Bihar comprising Bodh Gaya, Rajgir, Nalanda, Vaishali, Kesariya and Lauriya Nandangarh." Singh also averred that the convention is likely to bring a 25 per cent surge in tourist arrivals in Bihar and Jharkhand.

As the tourism industry has been hard by the pandemic, the forthcoming convention will provide an opportunity that



▲ J K Mohanty

the domestic tourism world wouldn't want to miss. J K Mohanty, Chairman, IATO, Eastern Region commented, "The 36th IATO Annual Convention will provide a perfect platform to offer a major boost to Odisha Tourism by interacting with travel groups and tour operators and thereby showcasing the immense potential of Odisha and the Eastern states of India. The East will get a big opportunity to highlight its tremendous tourism potential, the first-of-its-kind non-virtual travel convention ever since the pandemic has hit the world. We need to come ahead to exhibit the tourism products of the eastern states that are replete with diverse potential starting from beaches to mountains and mangrove tourism to eco-tourism, tribal tourism, lakes, wildlife and culture as compared to other regions of India."

The convention will mark the presence of nearly 900 travel agents and tour operators. Mohanty said, "With the relaxing of Covid curbs and vaccination going on in full swing across the length and breadth of India, domestic travel will play a prominent role in the country. It will be of immense benefit to flaunt the wide array of MICE venues of every state that will bring a surge in domestic tourist footfall. The convention will form a platform to exchange business opportunities among travel companies."

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A Pragmatic view

"The Road Ahead"

The 36th IATO Annual Convention has emerged as the perfect platform to announce that the Indian tour operators are back in business, bringing back the self-confidence in the industry and instilling confidence in clients to re-believe in brand India. Speaking to the IATO-Executive Committee members, Regional and State Chapter leaders from North and Central India, what clearly emerged was the complete consensus on the timing to begin getting ready, to engage, collaborate and send out a positive message to the world that India is 'Tourism Ready'.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

The last two years can be considered the lowest ebb ever experienced by the Travel, Tourism & Hospitality Industry. Every segment of the industry was hit below the belt. However, now our better understanding about the virus, combined with major steps towards vaccinating the global population and safety norms, gives us optimism to take the next baby steps towards business normalisation. We are still not out of the woods and the new Omicron variants have again got the entire world on tenterhooks. The feeling, however, is not one of panic, but one to learn to live and evolve within this new 'Biosphere'. The 36th IATO Annual Convention provides a perfect platform to deliberate on impending issues, addressing concerns, fears and probably emerging with a working roadmap for the future.

Deepak Bhatnagar, Executive Committee Member, IATO, said, "We



had the last convention in Kolkata in 2019 and the last physical meeting on IATO members was held on 14th March 2020 just before the first lockdown, during this long gap though IATO regularly remained in touch with members and industry. In the last two to three months

situation of COVID specially in India has been static and indication from the Government is encouraging that Inbound tourism would be fully opened soon, effective November 15, 2021, tourist visas are opened keeping all these developments, we felt it was the right time to have convention which will allow members to meet all Industry colleagues at one platform and also through various business sessions provide them an opportunity to gain knowledge and information which will help restart business."

"Now, after the successful vaccination drive crossing 120 million, we all need to live alongside COVID for a long time and continue our social and economic activities with all possible precautions. The tourism industry has been the biggest sufferer for the last twenty months hence it is



time for all stakeholders to meet, share their learnings and deliberate on the way forward," tells **Sunil C. Gupta, Chairman, IATO Northern Region**.

Sharing similar thoughts, **Tony Marwah, Executive Committee Member, IATO**, says, "Fact of the matter is, that we have to learn to live with COVID. It was high time that the industry sent a positive message to the world that India is ready. What better platform



than the annual IATO convention? The convention is widely recognised and a much-awaited event."

Ashok Dhoot, Executive Committee Member, IATO, also believes in the same when he says, "This convention



is special and extremely important to show the world that Indian tourism trade is strong enough to overcome any crisis and ever-ready to welcome guests from all over the world. All members are really looking forward to be there to make the statement."

'BRAND INDIA - The Road to Recovery' as the theme and ethos of the convention struck the right chords

and everyone expects to contribute and learn and hope to walk back home with some kind of roadmap for the future. **Prateek Hira, Chairman, IATO Uttar Pradesh Chapter**, shares his thoughts,



"This is the most apt topic in the present times. Two years have been really bad and so bad that the brand India has almost diluted. I personally feel that the term 'Incredible India' has become passé in the travel world in the past two years even more. Not only that India as a brand has to rebuild and reaffirm its image, but also each one of us in the tour business has to rebuild from scratch. I have always advocated to my industry brethren, to think like a startup, taking baby steps, realigning and reengineering businesses to re-establish them in the changed environment."

"If there has been a setback because of COVID-19, the positive side is that every country has to restart from zero. Whichever countries are able to market first and maintain all Covid protocols and safety measures successfully will get the benefit, and be able to capture good tourism business. Under the same endeavor and to build up the campaign, 'BRAND INDIA - The Road to Recovery' theme was chosen as the theme for IATO Convention," states **Manmeet Singh, Chairman, IATO Punjab Chapter**.



Tsering Namgyal, Chairman, IATO Ladakh Chapter, reminds, "COVID almost killed tourism, millions lost their



job and thousands of hotels, guesthouses, homestays, tourist transports, tour operators, ticketing agencies, guides lost their business, their livelihoods or had to shut down. Thus, recovery of India as a favourable tourist destination was badly needed. Therefore, the most important objective for our country is how we should do the 'recovery'? What marketing strategies should we adopt? How should we recover trust amongst international travellers to choose India? Hence, the suitable theme was "road to recovery."

Talking about the potential of domestic tourism in the country coming to the rescue and being a game changer for the future during these times of international travel restrictions, the general feeling was not that of exuberance, and we received mixed feedback. While some pockets like Leh-Ladakh, Kashmir, Goa and hill stations in the north did show spikes but the majority of business generated was not booked through agents but directly with the hotels or through OTAs. Lifeblood of IATO agents was the inbound business, which was not happening in these times. Many members may have dabbled in some domestic business, when opportunities emerged to stay afloat, or some may have started or may be contemplating new verticals to underwrite their future risks, but all will only be well when global restrictions are lifted and inbound tourists start coming in.

On this subject, Tsering Namgyal shares, "The way new COVID variants are being found in many countries it seems it will take some time say two or three years for international travel to come to a normal level therefore domestic tourism could prove to be a game changer."

Speaking about the same, Sunil C. Gupta says, "As we all know and agree that domestic tourism definitely has a huge contribution to tourism at all times and is a big economic spinner in the Indian economy. But we need to remain relevant

in the international markets and all sectors like aviation, hotels, tour operators and handicraft industry draw huge sustenance from the Inbound market. While some members do deal with domestic tourism also but majority are Inbound operators and they continue to be severely affected."

"Some of our members have started with the domestic segment, and it will help them. More importantly, it will carry positive vibes to FTOs to start business in India. Today, many locations are sold out, no rooms are available. Campaigns like



Dekho Apna Desh have played a key role in domestic tourism," shared **Zia Siddiqui, Executive Committee Member, IATO**.

Tony Marwah also points out, "Quite a few of our members are involved in domestic tourism as well as outbound, but their core business is still inbound. Domestic tourism has increased thanks to the revenge tourism factor, but the benefits to our members are not significant. Most travellers prefer to take vacations to destinations that are accessible by road, book directly with the hotels, leaving a very insignificant or no role for the tour operator. Hotels are openly advertising and encouraging travellers to book directly with them on their website and offering discounts. Domestic tourism has the potential to be a game changer, but in the context of inbound tour operators, it has little bearing on us. We have to create an environment that will encourage foreign tourists to visit India."

Adding more on this aspect, Prateek Hira shared his view, "We seldom thought of distributing our business in different segments and having different verticals before we saw the potential of domestic tourism, which recovered first and with a great surge. The shift from the outbound to domestic travel, even though forced, during the international restrictions was an eye opener for our industry. Most of us did venture into this domain and learnt to cater to this vertical as an alternate source. In my opinion domestic travel will not only help the industry to recover faster but will also make India readier to better its position in inbound tourism."

Discussing the impact of the government's decision to extend five lakh free visas by March 2022, Deepak Bhatnagar, said, "Offering the free Visa for tourism at the time of reopening was one of the key recommendations by IATO along with other points and we are very happy that the government has extended five lakh free visa which would be great marketing initiative, we have also requested Government to remove the time limit for these free visas, which is currently valid till March 31, 2022."

"It is definitely welcome as it adds to advertising or creating positive vibes. However, any tourist coming to India spending a few hundred dollars on flights, hotels and internal travel with sightseeing etc. is not impacted by the minor saving on Visa fee," opines Sunil Gupta.

Talking about inbound tourist arrivals into the country, it appears that 2019-20 has suddenly become a benchmark year against which to measure revival. Businesses will take no less than three years to revive from 2022 onwards. Knee jerk implementation of guidelines and restrictions are and will be detrimental to all current and future business.

Manoj Kumar Matta, Executive Committee Member, IATO, warns, "If there are no more mutants, we can

expect pre-COVID tourist figures by 2024. However, emergence of new variants is a big concern and threat to our industry. We don't only need to look at India, but our source markets



as well. Many of FTOs have closed their shutters and millions of potential tourists have lost their lives. Airfares are currently skyrocketing. Furthermore, why would someone come to India where every state and every district has its own SOPs and that too these rules change overnight."

On the last note, speaking of his

expectations from the convention, **P. Vijayasathy, Executive Committee Member, IATO**, said, "IATO convention is a platform to bring large number of participants from the tourism fraternity across the country,



the media members, the heads from the Government Ministry, members from different tourism associations who will have an opportunity to attend interesting interactive sessions, where both get to know and understand each other's, issues and work closely for the growth of the tourism industry."

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Keen and excited to be a part of travel recovery

Around the buzz of the upcoming 36th IATO Convention, TTJ interacted with a few Chapter Chairmen from the Western and the Southern region to get their feedback on the Convention from their respective regions. From the interactions, the common factors were that everyone is optimistic about the Convention and everybody wants the scheduled international flights to be back so that the normal inflow of foreign tourists starts as early as possible.

Prashant Nayak

The IATO Convention is the most anticipated and enriching annual business and networking event that the association and trade members look forward to every year. While it was not possible last year due to the COVID-19, the organisers believe that at present it is the right time to organise the Convention as COVID-19 cases are very low, as well as it was time to show the world that India is getting back to normal.

Randhirsingh Vaghela, Chapter Chairman, IATO Gujarat & Diu Chapter says, "The government has already taken the steps in

to the world and to show to the tourists that India is on a path to recovery and normalisation. Also, to note, IATO is an apex body that represents the interest and concerns of the trade fraternity and has always taken up issues of its members with the government. I believe this Convention will lead to some new suggestions for the government to consider that shall help the industry."

Surely, after the members have been in a state of null for the last 19 months, they are certainly looking forward to meeting fellow trade members and there is supposed to be more participation and enthusiasm among the members. "The highlights for the 36th IATO Convention will be the networking factor once again, which is after a gap of two years. More important is that the members will be taking back with them, the learnings shared and discussed in the sessions which will focus on adapting and equipping oneself to the new business changes and the opportunities ahead," assures Vaghela.

Though IATO is an inbound travel association, the kick-start of domestic tourism has brought relief for some of the association members. Due to the pandemic, there have been many inbound tour operators diversifying into domestic tourism and its promotion. "Domestic tourism has shown signs of huge potential in the last one year, especially with international scheduled commercial flights not yet being operational. Thus, tourists have opted to explore various destinations in India. This has also led to a huge jump in demand for certain tourist destinations across the country," observes Vaghela.

Many tour operators and travel

agents feel that the Government's initiative of five lakh free visas by March 2022 is a positive step and shall have a positive impact on inbound tourism. Vaghela says, "It would be helpful if the government can plan a similar initiative for the period 2022-2023 to bring back the much-needed jump for inbound tourism. I feel 2022-2023 shall be the rebound year for inbound tourism. While there are already queries for the early part of 2022, the major thrust shall be seen in 2022-2023, if the pandemic cases are negligible."

Sejoe Jose, Chapter Chairman, IATO Southern Region, shares his views about the Convention, "The IATO Convention will once again



▲ Randhirsingh Vaghela

direction by agreeing to issue five lac free visas, so now it is time for the association members to build confidence and get back on the road to recovery. Also, the theme for the Convention, "BRAND INDIA - The Road to Recovery" is apt because it is time to showcase Brand India



▲ Sejoe Jose

give a positive signal to the inbound players across the world that India is safe to travel. The tourism body getting together at the Convention from different parts of India proves that travel has become normal and all safety precautions are taken care of, even if the conference will

be attended by around 900- 1000 people. IATO Convention is a great platform to bind members together and with discussions get answers to the questions and doubts raised on various issues faced by the industry since the pandemic.”

Reflecting on the rise of domestic tourism during the course of the pandemic, Sejoie explains, “I agree that domestic travel has been a very important part of tourism for a very long time. To quote by example, the total number of domestic tourism figures is 60 per cent more when compared to inbound tourism. But I think it does not carry the glamour of inbound tourism. The pandemic has made a big difference in the context of domestic tourism, as scheduled international flights have not started and hence those who would have otherwise travelled abroad are still travelling in India. This is really helping and improving domestic business in India manifold.”

Sejoie too is positive about the free visa scheme of the government. He says, “The biggest benefit of giving five lakh free visas comes as good publicity to capture the world’s attention. This is also a message that India is very serious about tourism and ready to accept tourists to India. It also makes a statement that India is a safe place to travel. However, the Indian government should look at opening scheduled flights so that it is affordable for inbound tourists to travel to India. The Indian government should ensure a uniform policy in all states when tourists enter the country. Also, in countries like the UK, the embassy is not giving appointments for tourists to apply for visas to India. All such glitches have to be sorted out.”

Regarding the resumption of inbound tourism, Sejoie was of the opinion that the numbers will be again seen from winter 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, but now it all depends on the course of the pandemic with the new variant in the news.

Fortunately, compared to other developed countries, India has been recovering faster from COVID. Hats off to the efforts of the government in its vaccination drive that has gone a long way in helping in this recovery process. Pandian Kumaravel, Chapter Chairman, IATO Tamil Nadu, says, “We the IATO members are also positive that our industry

will recover soon and the IATO convention would become a good starting point for inbound tourism to flow in India and revive strongly as never before.”

According to Pandian, the IATO platform is a real, genuine forum wherein members’ interest is always



▲ Pandian K.

put first and industry issues are dealt with much precision and care at appropriate levels. Members have found many solutions at the right time through IATO’s intervention, being the apex body for tour operators in India. “IATO Conventions have always been an eye-opener from the time I became a member. The conventions over time have taught me many valuable lessons pertaining to the industry, where we discuss and find relevant solutions to the ongoing issues. The conventions keep us updated with the latest trends, solutions, challenges and ways to tackle them, etc. So, at every convention there is bound to be new insights, and this year as well, I look forward earnestly to the valuable insights as take away messages,” shares Pandian.

Adding on, Pandian further shares, “We all industry colleagues are going to meet each other after around 18 months and will be sharing good things as well as the challenges we faced in the last year due to the pandemic. We will share knowledge and best practises as well. There are a lot of subjects that we need to discuss with each other regarding post-pandemic challenges and how we need to tackle them. IATO always makes an excellent representation for its

members with the Government bodies, guides us and supports its members with its valuable suggestions and representations. I am sure this Convention will have full participation from its members.”

Pandian too feels that real travel recovery is possible only when inbound tourism resumes. For the same, the government needs to support the resumption of international tourism by providing clear information to travellers around the world with added safety measures, removing uncertainty in the minds of tourists, and strengthening cooperation between various countries for a smooth flow of tourists.

Jitendra Kejriwal, Chapter Chairman, IATO Maharashtra and Dadra Nagar & Daman, said, “A month ago, even our first physical



▲ Jitendra Kejriwal

meet of IATO in Mumbai after the lockdown was well attended and much appreciated by the members. The event concluded with some interesting insights. I was also glad to see many hoteliers attending the meeting. Around fifteen members confirmed for the IATO Convention at the venue and more have joined now. We expect members in large numbers to attend the 36th IATO Convention. Presently, many members are concentrating on domestic tourism but I am sure that the 36th IATO Convention at Gandhinagar will be a great platform and opportunity for members to bond after nearly two years and find out ways and solutions to work towards enhancing inbound travel.”



▲ Pronab Sarkar

"Every member is proud to be a part of IATO"

Pronab Sarkar has been associated with IATO for the last twenty years and has served in various capacities. He was the President of IATO for five years from 2016 to 2021 and is very well known in the travel fraternity. To know more about the much awaited 36th IATO Annual Convention, in an exclusive interaction, Pronab Sarkar, Immediate Past President of IATO, shares his views on the Convention, the Association's progress during his tenure and other key and relevant issues concerning inbound travel.

Ravi Sharma

The entire tourism industry is looking charged up and waiting to open inbound tourism to India. The time is opportune as the stakeholders and the policymakers ideate on telling the world that India is ready to receive tourists. Pronab says, "I can say that this year's Convention is of particular relevance, taking a cue from the recent announcements by the government on opening of borders. IATO Convention is a looked forward to every member of the Association. It's one event that unites the members, makes them network and bond with one another. It's all about collective learning and finding solutions at the convention."

Meanwhile, human nature is to move and longs to travel. Hence, it is seen that domestic tourism has sent a positive signal across the world that, if Indians feel safe to travel within the country, so can the world. "The many facets of tourism such as the airlines, the surface transport, the hotels, the monuments, the sightseeing places are all addressing the concerns and safety protocols in this 'new normal' to the domestic tourists and this aspect will pave the way for confidence building among the inbound segment. This is the feedback I am getting," informs Pronab.

Asked about the impact or benefit of the government's initiative of five lakh free visas by March 2022, Pronab shares, "I feel the announcement made with the closing date of March 31, 2022, is not right as we yet don't have the commencing date to reopen inbound travel. We don't have any idea about when the actual arrivals will start. International flights are not yet open and we already have a closing date. We can gauge the impact only when the scheduled airline movement starts with the major and emerging markets. Also, the quarantine regulations are eased for seamless travel within India and even when the tourists return to their country. IATO has appealed to the authorities to extend the validity until March 2023 or extend the date of closure until five lakh visas are not consumed. In-case, the response is positive, the government can consider increasing the free visas by a few lakhs more."

Pronab is optimistic about the year 2022-2023. He assures that it will gradually improve year by year and may take two to three years. Presently regarding Inbound tourism for arrivals matching the 2019-2020 figures, one has to wait and watch how things pan out with respect to COVID-19, not only in India but also with respect to its major markets.

According to Pronab, five key

issues need to be addressed which will benefit inbound tourism. Most of which have been brought to the notice of MoT.

➤ IATO has taken up with the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) to request the Ministry of Home Affairs that e-tourist visa should be of double entry and valid for 60 days' as inbound tourists wanted to travel to Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan along with India. With their recent meeting with the authorities, they are quite hopeful that it would happen soon.

➤ IATO took it up with the Ministry to resume E-tourist visas from countries excluded from major source markets such as Canada, United Kingdom, Indonesia, Malaysia, Macau, and Hong Kong. Mainland China and other remaining countries to be considered once conditions were favourable.

➤ Resumption of scheduled international flights operation as per bilateral agreement should be in force before March 2021 due to high air fare presently charged on air bubble flights.

➤ Tourism industry to be treated as deemed exporter on par with IT Industry under export of service.

➤ Rational GST on Tourism Services which is in line with neighbouring countries should boost international tourism.

Pronab further briefs that IATO being an apex national body, by the way of IATO leadership, the members' voice on macro issues like SEIS, MDA, etc, is heard in the corridors of ministries, airlines, state governments and hotels.

IATO is a recognised body by the Ministry of Tourism and Government of India and also a renowned body among all the related ministries. At any given time, any challenge in operation of tourism services, IATO is ever ready to help its members. IATO assists a member in becoming a recognised tour operator by the

MoT. Once an IATO member, the credibility factor with the ministries gets magnified and also with the recognition by MoT will enhance a member's business prospects. IATO is also the knowledge partner for educating the latest technology and marketing norms.

"IATO is a very active body and helpful to its members. IATO disseminates all important information to its membership by sending bi-weekly reports through social media and regular circulars. IATO is a very positive thinking strong association and all members

of the Executive Committee are very responsible in their capacity and always been helpful to all the members, 24x7. What IATO is giving back to its membership is remarkable and IATO is proud to be considered the best association in the travel trade. Basically, every member is proud to be a part of IATO. The USP lies in how a member integrates with the association to become a collective and formidable buying power with stakeholders and honing selling acumen to promote Incredible India across the world with grace and efficacy," concludes Pronab.

Progress IATO made during Pronab Sarkar's tenure

- Reduction in double entry e-Visa fee and relaxing e-Visa rules. Getting medical visa, business visa under one umbrella and allowing simple norms for conference visa.
- Revised GST for hotel accommodation.
- Worked on special extra baggage rates for the IATO members by Indigo Airlines.
- Participation in World Travel Mart (WTM) 4th – 6th November 2019. IATO took up the matter with the MoT to reduce the booth cost to ensure maximum participation from IATO members and especially to encourage small tour operators. The Ministry agreed to the request and reduced the cost of the booth.
- Exemption of tourist vehicles from election duty for the members of IATO and ITTA.
- IATO redesigned its newsletter to give a completely new look.
- Introducing the new IATO website.
- During the transport drivers' strike, IATO immediately intervened and got it settled. Later, IATO signed an agreement with ITTA on transport tariff. The rates agreed were indicative and members were free to negotiate rates with the transporters.
- Positive handling of the Tiger Safari strike at Ranthambore.
- Aiding air connectivity and introduction of new/additional flights by Air India, Indigo and Vistara. connecting smaller tourist spots by UDAN.
- IATO has handled over fifty MoT sponsored FAM Tours. Each FAM Tour was handled by IATO members professionally. IATO was especially given the responsibility of handling all MoT sponsored guests, including tour operators, media members, TV teams and the decision makers from overseas.
- IATO increased its visibility in the national print media and electronic media.

While IATO follows up with various ministries, the Association also makes various representations to the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Finance, GST Council, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Railways and the state governments, expressing their concerns on various issues as mentioned earlier. They were able to resolve some of these issues, but some are still pending and IATO is following up on those. There were over 100 meetings during the year which were attended by the President or the Office Bearers/ EC members giving their inputs, which was useful in many aspects. IATO members also contributed and joined for the inspection of tour operators, hotels, bed & breakfast establishments, wherever they were asked by the IATO Secretariat.

The IATO membership drive continued during Pronab's tenure and there was a substantial increase in the membership. As of date, they have a total of 1674 members with 352 active and 1322 Allied, Associate and International members.

Key issues that IATO have requested MOT, GOI

- To remove the Rs 2 crore minimum cap from the MDA Scheme for Inbound and announce the revised MDA scheme for Inbound on the line of previous norms.
- As and when the situation further improves, International Road Shows need to be organised in target sources and emerging markets across the globe.
- FAM Trip for leading Foreign Tour Operators (FTO) from across the world in the near future so that India showcases to the world that India is ready for tourism.
- Dekho Apna Desh to be translated to major foreign languages and screened at tourist offices/ embassies abroad and hotels in India
- Linking of MoT Website with that of IATO.
- To appoint a nodal officer from the Ministry to help the foreign tourists in case of any exigency.
- Extension to the validity of MoT recognition for the tour operators, till March 31, 2022, in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Champion Sector Scheme should be applicable to Indian Inbound Tour Operators approved by the MoT, GoI, so that the tour operators can add value or give discounts on their package cost to their FTOs. This will encourage FTOs to utilise the services of ITO. In return, this will encourage more Indian Tour Operators to take the MoT recognition and join the mainstream. This will also help fight the competition from the neighbouring countries and bring in more tourists to India.

Pandemic induced revenge travel makes domestic tourism soar

With relaxed Covid restrictions, revenge tourism has become the flavour of the season, leading to a boom in domestic travel. The industry is also gearing up for 'revenge travel', as more and more Indians are hitting the road and flocking to popular destinations. TTJ interacts with the travel trade industry in West Bengal to know the reasons behind the soar in domestic travel, the current trends that are ruling the industry and the future that lies ahead.

Swaati Chaudhury

After a long dull period because of the pandemic and lockdowns, travel curbs have been relaxed. Domestic tourists once again began heading to popular tourist retreats across the country. The dawn of the festive season marked a tidal wave of visitors to the Himalayan destinations in West Bengal and Sikkim.

Explained Sandeepan Ghosh, Chief Executive Officer, Siliguri's Eastern Meadows Tours, "With the vaccination process in order, the steady flow of tourists to Darjeeling and Sikkim Himalayas began sometime in September-end, this year. Most hotels in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong, Siliguri, Pelling, and Gangtok recorded around 60 per cent occupancy. While the influx of tourists gained momentum at the onset of Durga puja and Diwali, leading to 90 per cent occupancy in hotels. In today's times, the need of the hour is to achieve a sustained flow of tourists. Both Central and state governments have taken up strides for a complete vaccination drive. Our travel group took up several vaccination programmes and around 2,000 stakeholders in Siliguri and Darjeeling Hills came forward to create confidence in the minds of travellers. The pandemic should not resurface and, in current times, COVID-19 is moving towards the endemic stage. Keeping with COVID-safety measures, the disease would be sporadic in times to come."

Ghosh is also associated with Eastern Himalaya Travel and Tour Operators Association (EHTTO) that is making strides to keep the Himalayan destinations pollution-free and has proposed to come up with a promotional



▲ Sandeepan Ghosh

video for West Bengal Tourism.

The coming summer holidays will be crucial for the domestic tourism sector. Ghosh said, "If things go according to the plan, the next summer holidays will pull in a large chunk of domestic travellers that will help the travel industry to churn out around 80 per cent business. At the same time, it is essential to gain confidence in the minds of travellers. Since people want to indulge in newer experiences, they are focusing on offbeat, serene and pollution-free destinations like Tinchulay, Takdah, Rishikhola and Dwaipani in the district of Darjeeling. Homestay facilities will take over in the post-pandemic world. With the resumption of airlines, the travel industry will boom and experience a golden period in the next two years."

The domestic tourism industry in India is performing better in the pandemic break. Popular tourist destinations along with luxury and heritage hospitality groups are witnessing a steady flow of travellers. On this, Manoj Saraf,



▲ Manoj Saraf

Managing Director, Gainwell Travel and Leisure commented, "Thousands of tourists are descending on Goa's beaches to beat the pandemic boredom. All major Goa-bound flights from Indian metros are choc-a-bloc and Goa has emerged as the leisure domestic tourism capital of India. The premium hospitality groups have tripled their prices while the high-end, five-star properties in Goa are occupied till March, next year. MICE groups are flying off to Goa. Hence, domestic tourism in the country is at an all-time high since high-end travellers are unable to visit overseas and are heading to luxury getaways in the country. All luxury, heritage and premium properties in Rajasthan have doubled their charges. The boom period for domestic tourism is here to stay for the time being, since global tourism is passing through a period of uncertainty. There will be a greater number of group departures and advance bookings but domestic travel will gradually slow down."



Must-visit UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Gujarat

A UNESCO World Heritage Site symbolises the evolution of humanity and represents the connection between our shared past and future. Gujarat now has four World Heritage Sites – Dholavira in Kutch, Champaner in Pavagadh, Rani ki Vav in Patan, and the historic city of Ahmedabad, each of which represents a distinct cultural moment and unique historical landscape.

Ahmedabad World Heritage City

India's first World Heritage City is a role model of unity in diversity Gujarat. The city of Ahmedabad is endowed with a rich architectural heritage that is vital to the local identity and continuity of the place. Along with the foremost heritage Indo-Islamic monuments of the 15th to 17th centuries, there are potential heritage precincts in the form of the Pols, the traditional residential clusters of the medieval period, which make Ahmedabad exceptional. Combining these all, the historic walled city of Ahmedabad has it all to be the first city in India to be inscribed in UNESCO's World Heritage City list of 2017. The city is known for its association with Mahatma Gandhi and, in addition to a complex maze of neighbourhoods called pols, hosts some of the country's finest medieval Islamic architecture.

Rani ki Vav, Patan



Rani ki Vav is an ancient step-well located on the banks of the river Saraswati in the town of Patan in Gujarat. Added to the list of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites in 2014, Rani ki Vav was built as a memorial during the Chaulukya dynasty. Built in the complex Maru-Gurjara architectural style, Rani ki Vav has a very intricate and elaborate design. One of the most sumptuous structures of its type, it has an inverted temple, seven levels of stairs, and more than 500 principal sculptures. Stepwells have been a unique form of water management system in the Indian subcontinent.

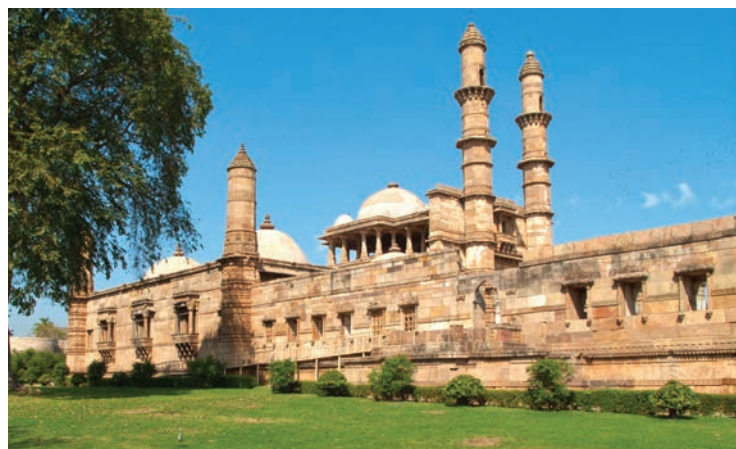
Dholavira Archaeological Site, Kutch



Dholavira archaeological site is located at Khadirbet in Bhachau Taluka of Kutch district in the state of Gujarat. The site, named after Dholavira village for its closeness to the village, includes ruins of the ancient Indus Valley Civilization/Harappan city. Dholavira Site is the most prominent archaeological site in India belonging to the Indus Valley Civilization. The site was discovered in 1967-1968. It is the fifth-largest of eight major Harappan sites across the subcontinent. Inhabited until 2100 BC, Dholavira is one of the oldest inhabited areas of India. It is also counted among the oldest archaeological sites in the country.

Champaner & Pavagadh Archaeological Park, Panchmahal

A UNESCO Heritage site, Champaner and Pavagadh are often clubbed together as one of the most engaging historical attractions of Gujarat. Pavagadh stands on top of the hill that looks over the sprawl of monuments at the base in Champaner. The duo makes a rich heritage site dotted with forts, mosques, monuments, tombs, arches, temples, step-wells and fortresses from 8th to 14th century. Champaner is the only unchanged Islamic-Mughal city over the centuries, offering an authentic flavour of the architecture of the era. Juxtaposed to this is the Kalika Mata Temple on Pavagadh Hill, where thousands congregate during Navratris.



Rann Utsav:

changing landscape, changing lives



The Rann Utsav celebrated in the Great Rann of Kutch region of Gujarat kick-started on November 01, 2021, and will end on February 20, 2022. The wholesome package of nature's splendor, fun, entertainment, adventure, leisure, sightseeing, and the cultural connect is waiting to be explored. Most important to mention is this scintillating festival has provided a platform to the local artisans, craftsmen, and vendors to come together to sell their products, setting an example of inclusive growth and social upliftment.

Team TTJ

As the Chief Minister of Gujarat, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi decided to prioritise the development of backward regions, he chose to promote tourism in Rann of Kutch not just by marketing the most unique feature of Rann - its salt desert which come alive with diamond-like brightness on moonlit nights but also its exquisite arts, crafts, music, dance and unique architecture and culture. The Gujarat government had three prime objectives such as creating economic opportunity, promoting the natural and cultural beauty of Kutch and lastly, to induce social development in the region that had hardly any infrastructure and population.

The Rann Utsav of Kutch, which started as a two-day event, now has transformed itself into a full-fledged flagship event of the Western state that spans four months

from October to February every year. The Rann Utsav has brought with it spurring economic and employment opportunities to the region. The story of Rann of Kutch and Dhordo village, where the festival takes place, encapsulates the story of Gujarat's bottom-up development model. Good road connectivity 24x7 power supply, internet facilities, etc. have opened up numerous new business opportunities for the local people. Today, the village has Wi-Fi connectivity and all those with educated children have computers and internet at home. Almost everyone in the village has a dish TV and clean water is supplied to the remotest village of the desert land. Dhordo and other villages such as Hodka are today's world-acclaimed tourist destinations.

During this winter festival, Gujarat Tourism puts up hundreds of luxury tents to create a whole tent city that comes alive with a whole array of cultural festivities- local dances, music, mimes, and what

have you. The nearby accommodations and tents are packed to capacity during that time. The demand far outstrips supply; that is why villagers have been encouraged to provide homestay facilities that give the tourists first-hand experience of traditional lifestyle and culture.

Soon the desert plains of Rann of Kutch transform into an oasis for domestic and foreign tourists. The festival of Rann comes alive in the evening with desert music and colorful dances. The Utsav, a carnival of music, dance and folklore, offers an excellent opportunity for tourists to indulge in leisure, pleasure, and merriment. Villagers also set up stalls to sell their crafts and other local products. Tourists come to see the unique architectural style of their homes too and also enjoy a meal or two.

Rann Utsav has plenty of good eating joints, so homestay hosts offer only morning tea and breakfast. This works out much cheaper for tourists as well.





During the full moon night in the winters, amid the awe-inspiring and contrasting landscape, the three to four-day final festive extravaganza brims with hospitality, vigour, and traditional flavour of the area. This carnival organized at the various locales within Kutch takes one around the natural grandiose while introducing the visitor to the indigenous cultural and ethnic flavour of the people. The shimmering night landscape because of the moon gives the enchanting moments of this fest, which feels like 'Heaven on Earth' during these days.

Not just the Rann, but the entire Kutch region has benefitted from this festival because when tourists come, they land at Bhuj, which has also developed plenty of tourist sites. Then they go to Mandvi for a day and then move on to Khawda and Dhordo, etc. Even the small street vendors have a stable source of income. The craftsmen sell their goods faster than they can produce because people come here in droves during the festival period. In Dhordo itself, over 25,000 people come to see the village every day, apart from those who stay over for the night.



The event has also enabled farmers to explore a wider market for their milk and farm products. The villagers of the Kutch district have also reaped rewards from the flourishing festival in their region. The literacy rate in the region has increased to an unprecedented high of ninety per cent, while expanding banking services has made their life easier to live. The winter escapade had created lakhs of employment opportunities for the local youth as well as the old.


The region is a paradise for handicrafts, handed down by the generations is keeping the traditions and prosperity alive. The artifact of Kutch has made its place in the global market. The main handicrafts are embroidery of ethnic style, patchwork, terracotta, pen knives and nutcrackers. Wood carving, mud-wall painting, silverwork, iron bell with a copper coating, seashell toys are the most famous handicrafts of Kutch. Kutch is world-renowned for its mirrored embroideries. Most of these were traditionally stitched by village women, for themselves and their families, to create festivity, deities, generate wealth. Embroideries contributed to the substantial economic exchange required for marriage and fulfilled other social obligations which required gifts. Be it thread work or leather, every village has a different and unique style of making embroidery. Thus, the unique, exquisite embroidery, bandhani sarees, traditional ornaments and mirror work are some of the specialties of Kutch. Inherited by the bequest of craft, the Kutch people weave their dreams in different forms of embroidery.

Largely unexplored, infinitely exotic and full of unique experiences, the Little Rann of Kutch is a one-of-its-kind habitat in the world. After the monsoon, the whole place transforms into a spectacular coastal wetland. The only haven of the Asiatic wild ass and the favoured breeding ground of many rare bird species, the Little Rann, offers innumerable sights and

unforgettable experiences. Through the chilling winter months, various locations in Kutch are visited by unique species of birds. For birding enthusiasts, nature lovers and tourists, Kutch is a haven that offers the experience of bird watching in all its glory. Alongside the animals and birds that make the region home, live the Agariya tribes' people who harvest salt for a livelihood. 'Agar' in the local language means salt and the unique salt-pans are natural production units of salt. Visiting the Little Rann thus also provides an opportunity to see the salt harvesting process by the Agariyas. All these tourist experiences offer more sources of income for the local villagers who are into specialised occupations such as eco tourism, birdwatching trips and safari drives.

Thus, driving employment opportunities and business opportunities for local artists and artisans and common villagers, the Rann Utsav phenomenon is still paving in more opportunities for the Kutch economy and making it more kaleidoscopic.





There is no end to fun and discoveries in Pondicherry

Pondicherry, also known as Puducherry or just Pondy, is situated around 150 km south of Chennai on the eastern coast of India. Pondicherry takes one on an amazing walk back in time. This is a city of bon vivants, where heritage, peace, delicious food and memories are in store just for you. Pondicherry will never disappoint the explorer in you!

Team TTJ

Pondicherry, now officially named Puducherry, is a union territory of India situated in the Southern Peninsula. The Union Territory was formed out of four exclaves of former French India. The enclaves are situated in three different states. Pondicherry and Karaikal are in Tamil Nadu, Mahe is in Kerala, and Yanam is an enclave in Andhra Pradesh. All of these enclaves were under French occupation before they were handed over to India. Each enclave shares a mixed cultural heritage, combining its South Indian roots with a French colonial past. After the French left it, Pondicherry has managed to retain its French influence with tree-lined avenues and Mediterranean-style houses that lend it a curious non-Indian touch.

Historical significance is found everywhere in Pondicherry. From being an important trade destination for the Romans to being under the control of the Pallavas, Cholas and Pandya. Later, the reigning hands shifted to the Sultanate of Madurai, followed by the Vijayanagar Empire. Then came the colonisers from Europe whose influences are ever present in the still-standing monuments, especially in a part of the city called the White Town, the French Quarter of Pondicherry.

All the streets of White Town are characterised by beautiful mustard colonial buildings with bougainvillea burdened walls. These are sprinkled with cozy cafes and chic boutiques that provide delicious French cuisine and beverages. Walking down these streets can give the tourist an entrance into the fairy-tale beauty of Pondicherry. With well-defined seating,

amazing sea views, and beautiful cafes such as the Le Cafe, the White Town Promenade is one of the most visited places in Pondicherry.

The township of Pondicherry is planned on a grid system, which is to say that the roads meet each other at right angles. On the seaward side is the long Petit-Canal, which divides the town so that the French township is on the side facing the sea and the predominantly Indian and Tamil on the other. However, this former French colony may be a perfect amalgamation of the standard Indian sensibilities and French architecture, making it a dreamy escape that gives the simplest of both worlds.

The sea is the soul of Pondicherry. It is not possible to leave Pondicherry without being allured by the beaches and the sea. Spotless beaches and elegantly decorated promenades around this coastal city, which are simply ideal for viewing a magical sunrise or sunset. Watching the sunrise over the deep blue area of the Bay of Bengal is an adventure that everybody should have while in Pondicherry. The place offers different water sporting facilities for the sun and beach lovers. Scuba diving, kayaking and surfing courses are available in Pondicherry and this attracts numerous tourists to the area. Over the recent years, Serenity Beach has come up as one of the most important surfing destinations in the region.

Pondicherry offers a variety of cuisines. From South Indian delicacies to fresh, from continental cuisine to Creole, authentic French to Italian; Puducherry will spoil you with its food options. Creole food in Pondicherry is not only a potpourri

of French and Tamil cuisine, it is also influenced by Portuguese and Dutch.

With the slow pace of life in Pondicherry, it makes an ideal destination for a relaxing holiday. Being a beach town, Pondicherry has a considerable number of resorts that offer the best in luxury accommodation and panoramic views of the ocean. The city's glamour is not just limited to its expansive beaches, its heritage landscapes and facades also entail beauty along and the lush gardens set a meditative ambiance and with natural forests nearby.

Pondicherry is a yearlong destination, but summers can be warm, so bring your sunscreen and glasses along. During rains, you can easily get around the city because there is never any flooding incident. The months of October to March are the best time to visit Pondicherry as the temperatures stay at a pleasant 20 to 25 degrees Celsius.

The best way to see Pondicherry and its surrounding areas is by renting out a bicycle or a motorcycle from the several outlets on Mission Street and MG Road. For the wandering travellers, the spiritual seekers, the historians, or the nature lovers; the French Riviera of the East should be a must-visit on everyone's list.

A visit to Pondicherry is an experience that no seasoned vacationer would want to miss. Besides the White Town and Heritage explorations, there are plenty of places to visit in Pondicherry in one day. However, a retreat to the idyllic town for two or three days is an even better choice, especially, if you wish to explore the variety of attractions that it has to offer.

Promenade Beach



This is one of the most visited places in this beautiful coastal city. The beach stretches almost 1.5 km and has important landmarks that tell tales of bygone times. The statue of Joan of Arc, Dupleix's statue, the old heritage hall, the statue of Mahatma Gandhi, and the old lighthouse greet visitors at the beach. A visit to the Promenade Beach in Pondicherry is best undertaken in the early morning and late evening as the vehicular traffic is stopped and children can roam around freely on the street. Don't forget to bring your camera to capture the awe-inspiring scenery at the beach.

Auroville

Auroville, a popular spiritual and religious site in Pondicherry state, is very near to Chennai. Auroville was set up by people who believe in the teachings of Guru Aurobindo, as well as a new way of life separate from caste, creed and nationality. It is often mistaken to be a hippie hangout, but nothing could be further from the truth. People from all over the world who believe in a united spirit of kinship and harmony have built this place and named it the 'City of Dawn'. The entire place exudes peace and unity and houses the famous Matrimandir Meditation Centre, the Main Road Market selling locally made



soaps, perfumes, trinkets and clothing, delicious organic food at the Auroville Bakery. This is a must-visit tourist place in Pondicherry with the family.

Botanical Garden



Gorgeous fountains, Japanese rocks, a large aquarium with beautiful fishes, a stunning children's train and a dancing fountain, the Botanical Garden in Pondicherry is indeed a blissful place for travellers of all ages, especially for kids. Founded by C.S. Perrottet in the year 1826, this oval-shaped Botanical Garden is spread over 11 hectares of land and is reckoned to be one of the most frequented tourist destinations in Pondicherry, mainly because of the exquisite floral species that compel tourists from far and wide. There are other compelling sights of rich greenery.

Chunnambar Boat House



One of the best ways to experience Pondicherry's pristine natural beauty is to take the ferry from Chunnambar Boat House, located near the mouth of the Chunnambar Creek, which operates boating and other leisure services. While the Chunnambar Boat House is best known as the sole access point to Paradise Beach, it also has options for several activities, such as backwater boating.



Chhattisgarh Tourism hosts Slow Brunch at Bikaner House

Bringing the colours, dances, folklore, crafts, tastes and flavours of Chhattisgarh to New Delhi

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

The Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh Shri Bhupesh Baghel, played a gracious host on Dec 3, 2021, at Bikaner House, New Delhi as it came alive to the beating of drums and ringing of bells of Bison Horn adorned folk dancers from Chhattisgarh. Adding further folk essence to the event was powerful soul stirring Pandawani singing by Prabha Yadav and her mandali. A special menu was curated by renowned Chefs and delicious Chhattisgarh's

delicacies were served to showcase the diverse options of food and flavours that the state offers. Mahua based Cocktails curated by Nitin Tiwari introduced the Delhi glitterati to the earthy and flowery flavours of this tribal tippie from the heartlands of India. The brunch was well-attended by well-known artists, film and theatre personalities, bureaucrats, photographers, writers and bloggers. It was a memorable winter afternoon for all present.



Skål International Kolkata 127 and British Deputy High Commission Kolkata holds Millennium Post COVID Warriors Awards 2021

The Millennium Post Covid Warriors Awards 2021 were conferred to those who worked relentlessly during the pandemic to keep lives moving.

Team TTJ

The Millennium Post COVID Warriors Awards 2021 event was held at JW Marriott Hotel in Kolkata on December 5, 2021, in partnership with the British Deputy High Commission Kolkata and Skål International Kolkata 127.

Firhad Hakim, the Minister of Transport and Housing, Government of West Bengal; Yemi Odanye, the Deputy Head of Mission, British Deputy High Commission Kolkata; Sagnik Chowdhury, Regional Director, India Tourism; Roshni Sen, Principal Secretary, Department of Mass Education Extension and Library Services, Government of West Bengal and Sanjeev

Mehra, President, Skål International Kolkata 127 were the guests of honour for the programme. The Editor-in-chief of Millennium Post Durbar Ganguly was also present on the occasion as the host of the programme.

On the occasion of 75 years of India's independence, 75 awards were given in various categories, including Kolkata Municipal Corporation Workers, Hospitals, Hospitality and Service Industry, Vaccination Drive Organisers, Entrepreneurs, Entertainers who became mass awareness ambassadors, and various NGOs.

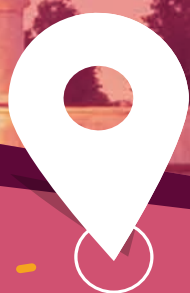




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In his role as a brand custodian of Tourism Australia for over a decade, Nishant Kashikar, Country Manager- India & Gulf, Tourism Australia, has been responsible for driving visitation and tourist spend by raising Australia's awareness and appeal in India. Under his leadership, arrivals from India to Australia have more than tripled in the last decade to reach 400,000 and he has been instrumental in strengthening the people-to-people links between the two countries. TTJ interacts with Nishant to know more about the current travel scenario in Australia.

Prashant Nayak

Australia is one of the world's leading tourist destinations. Can you tell us the importance of the tourism sector in its contribution to the Australian economy?

Tourism is a sector that has long been a significant contributor to the Australian economy and gross domestic product (GDP), serving as a revenue generator and driver of employment and job growth pre COVID-19. During the year 2019, both domestic and international tourists recorded spend of more than A\$122 billion and contributed A\$61 billion to Australia's GDP. Australia also recorded 9.3 million international visitor arrivals at an increase of 3 per cent compared to the previous year. In total, tourism supported around one million jobs in 2019. This is equivalent to one out of every 12 jobs in Australia.

Interestingly, while Australia ranks 42nd in terms of total tourist arrivals, it is 10th globally, in terms of total tourism receipts and ranks at the top of the list for daily spend per visitor. As such, Australia is a high-yield destination, which records one of the highest per tourist spend in the world, with the average international

tourist spend being a little over AU\$ 5,200 per person.

According to you, what are the important parameters being considered by the Australian Govt for reopening its tourism to other countries?

The reopening of Australian borders for international tourism will be monitored through the introduction of a four-phase National Plan.

Earlier in July 2021, the Australian Government released a four-phase National Plan as a systematic means to safely transition Australia's National COVID-19 Response, with each new phase triggered once certain vaccination thresholds are achieved nationally. In response to the plan, Australia is on track to becoming a highly vaccinated nation that will not only support the ability to address and curb instances of infection but will also pave the way for travel to resume.

Australia has now fully vaccinated around 80 per cent of the population and while large parts of the country have started moving from Phase B to Phase C,



▲ Nishant Kashikar

under which international travel is poised to open to vaccinated Australian citizens, permanent residents and their parents.

As of November, the government has relaxed border restrictions for parents of adult Australian citizens and permanent residents. Fully vaccinated citizens from New Zealand and Singapore are also permitted to enter certain states within the country, without the need to quarantine.

Australia is popular with Indians. What is the current scenario which makes you hopeful about the resumption of tourism from India to Australia?

The India market has always been and remains one of Australia's most important and promising markets. The below key developments and recent announcements have been well-received by the Indian travel industry, who are confident that the latent demand will translate into actual visitation once we reach the freedom of movement stage for Indian tourists.

*Parents of Australian citizens and permanent residents from India can now travel to Australia, after seeking an exemption and obtaining a visa from Home Affairs

*The recognition of India manufactured vaccines, Covishield and more recently, Covaxin by the Australian government

*The announcement around the commencement of Qantas flights from Delhi to Sydney wef 6 December 2021 and the resumption of Air India flights on the same route from 15 November 2021

*Visa Application Charge (VAC) Free Applications: If Indian travellers held a Visitor visa that expired, or will expire, between 20 March 2020 and 31 December 2021, they are eligible for a future Visitor visa at no cost under VAC waiver provisions

Furthermore, we believe and are hopeful that the gradual reopening of borders for New Zealand and Singaporean citizens will provide a framework for a further easing of travel restrictions for fully vaccinated travellers from across the world as soon as it is safe to do so.

What kind of tourist target are you looking at from India to Australia in the new year 2022?

Since India is expected to be among the fastest growing economies in the world, with a rising and aspirational middle-class population and through the gradual strengthening of the Australia-India bilateral relationship, India could potentially be a market in the league of 1 million visitor arrivals for Australia, over the next decade.

Which are the segments of tourism you would be banking on now and targeting from the India market?

Given the huge pent-up demand for travel, we believe that all major segments will contribute to the recovery of the tourism

sector. With 750,000 people of Indian origin currently residing in Australia, the visiting friends and family segment will be among the most active segment to travel to Australia, to meet their loved ones. Furthermore, since Australia will host the ICC T20 Men's World Cup in 2022, we will see a resurgence of the Business Events (MICE) segment.

With over 10 million weddings taking place every year in India and pandemic induced travel restrictions, newly married couples have had to defer their honeymoons and as Australia has always been a preferred honeymoon destination, we believe that those couples who will embark on their first trip when the borders reopen will definitely have Australia in their consideration set. Given the rise and increase of disposable income, we also believe that the young explorers or millennials will contribute greatly and travel when the borders reopen.

Tourism Australia has recently relaunched the Aussie Specialist Program. How has the response been so far from the Indian travel partners?

To connect and engage with our Indian trade partners, Tourism Australia introduced virtual editions of the Aussie Specialist Program, Australia 365 On-Demand and the inaugural Australia Global Summit.

The Aussie Specialist Program has received an overwhelming response during the pandemic and we have received over 1,400 new registrations since March 2020. Our most recent figures are indicative that we have registered over 26,000 qualified Aussie Specialists across the world, and over 3,600 of them are qualified Aussie Specialists from India.

The Program has been a vital tool and means of connection for over three decades, allowing us to upskill and provide personalized first-hand training to our agents and thus, equipping them with the knowledge and material needed to help elevate Australia as a top-tier destination to mainstream and niche markets. We have also introduced a new offering alongside the re-launch of the Aussie Specialist Program, Australia 365 On-Demand, a global and virtual trade hub that allows registered buyers to connect with over 20,000 suppliers. This platform also provides Aussie Specialists with the means to train, connect and stay updated all year round.

What is new in Australia, attractions and destination wise? Recommend us an itinerary for a 3-week vacation in Australia?

What makes Australia a truly unique destination is the variety and quality of experiences and local culture, there is something for everyone, every age group and every interest. An ideal 3-week vacation itinerary should include star attractions across all states and territories, namely:

New South Wales: Start your day with a city tour of Sydney and its quaint suburbs. You can then enjoy the sun setting over the city by booking a climb on the iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge. You may spend a day at the famous Bondi or Manly Beach or take a tour to visit the vineyards at Hunter Valley.

Queensland: No trip to Queensland is complete without visiting the Great Barrier Reef and the oldest rainforest in the world, the Daintree Rainforest. If you are looking for an adrenalin rush and a fun family day, visit the adventure capital of Australia. Cairns for a day of white-water rafting, horseback riding, skydiving or even bungee jumping.

Victoria: Experience Melbourne's renowned coffee culture as you stroll down the city's famously colorful AC/DC Lane or Hosier Lane, home of Australia's best street art. And if you are a cricket enthusiast, the revered Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) is a must visit. You can also take a day trip to the scenic Phillip Island for a front-row seat to witness the incredible Penguin Parade.

South Australia: Book a tour of the picturesque Adelaide Oval and complete your experience with a stay at the stadium's state-of-the-art Oval Hotel, where you can watch a match from the comfort of your room. Pencil in a trip to Kangaroo Island for an opportunity to interact with Australia's famed wilderness and unique wildlife.

Northern Territory: Journey to the spiritual capital of Australia for an immersive cultural experience at the largest sandstone monolith in the world, Uluru, which is also home to an abundance of ancient and scenic walking tracks. At sunset, enjoy the breath-taking views of the critically acclaimed 'Field of Light' installation by celebrated artist, Bruce Munro.

Tasmania: When on the island of Tasmania, make your way to the pristine Wineglass Bay beach located on the Freycinet Peninsula, which is also home to Saffire Freycinet, a luxury coastal sanctuary in the Luxury Lodges of Australia portfolio. Reserve a suite that looks over the magnificent Hazards Mountains as you enjoy multi-course degustation menus with local wines.

Australian Capital Territory: Watch the Australian government in action at the historic Parliament House in Canberra and while in the capital, book a stay at the Jamala Wildlife Lodge where you can live amongst lions, tigers, cheetahs as well as friendly giraffes and deer in a private glass enclosure.

Western Australia: When in Perth, visit the city's crowning jewels, the WACA and Optus Stadium for a behind-the-scenes tour, a bucket-list experience for every cricket fan. Meet the happiest animal in the world and click a selfie with the adorable quokka on Rottnest Island, just offshore from Perth.

SANTA MONICA

A perfect and unique blend of beach town charm and urban energy

Santa Monica in California, a destination that is both chic and with laid-back luxury, comes alive with all the unique experiences the city has on offer. This ocean-front destination averages 280 days of sunshine a year and offers some of the best sunsets on the West Coast of the USA. TTJ gets to know more about the chic beach community from Todd Mitsuhata, Global Business Development Director, Santa Monica Travel & Tourism (SMTT) and it does sound like an appealing destination for travellers of all ages. Read on to know what Todd has to say about this amazing year-round vacation destination, which has much more than its famous beach and pier.

Prashant Nayak

How does Santa Monica stand out from other destinations in California?

Known as Los Angeles' beach city, Santa Monica is California's quintessential playground. Set along a 5.6-kilometer stretch of coastline, Santa Monica is home to sandy beaches, friendly locals, an extraordinary hotel collection, and a wellness culture all of its own. At just 21 square kilometres, Santa Monica is also easy to explore by foot or bike, which makes it different from most other California destinations. Its proximity to LAX, Beverly Hills and Hollywood also makes it the perfect base of stay to explore the greater Los Angeles region.

Tell us why SM makes an exciting destination and the reasons travellers need to visit and explore the place when in California?

Santa Monica manages the ideal balance of seaside charm and coastal sophistication. It's also home to eight diverse neighbourhoods – each infused with character. Once you spend time here, you'll quickly discover just how much Santa Monica packs into its compact

area. Along the oceanfront, you'll find a unique selection of hotels ranging from beachfront luxe to vintage gems, celebrated restaurants, world-class shopping, and famous attractions like the Santa Monica Pier. Serving as an artistic centre for generations, Santa Monica boasts more than 150 galleries, public art installations, theatres, and museums. Culture is at your fingertips wherever you are throughout the city.

Home to four weekly farmers' markets, frequented by health-conscious Angelenos and local chefs, Santa Monica is a leader in the local food movement. The city's dining scene features restaurants helmed by celebrity chefs and rising culinary stars alike.

Moving around car-free in Santa Monica is simple with the advents of light rail, shuttle and bus services, ample bike rentals, and more. Santa Monica's gorgeous topography, temperate weather and over 100 miles of bikeways make it one of the most bike-friendly cities in the U.S.

With its intersection of near-perfect weather, outdoor activities, abundant

locally grown food, and walkability, it's no wonder Santa Monica is a hub of healthy living. You can bike for hours, learn to surf, or simply take time to rejuvenate your body and mind.

Which are the nearest hub cities for easy connectivity to SM? Tell us about the hotels and accommodations in SM?

Beverly Hills and West Hollywood are just a short 30–40-minute drive from Santa Monica while Venice Beach is just a 10-minute bike ride from our beach city. Downtown LA is easily accessible (in 45 minutes) via the new Metro E Rail Line. Hollywood and Universal Studios can be accessed by the Metro E and B Line in just over an hour.

In terms of accommodations, we have 41 hotels in Santa Monica, all of which are within four miles to the ocean, and most of which are adjacent to or within walking distance of the beach. The Santa Monica hotel collection has a wide variety of accommodations, from luxury to budget to beach cottages and offers a central location to greater Los Angeles.



▲ Todd Mitsuhata

If travellers need to plan a 3/4 days' vacation in Santa Monica, what will be your ideal itinerary and suggestion to them?

DAY 1

Start your morning the way locals do – with a refreshing dip in the Pacific Ocean. Learn to catch a wave with a surf lesson at Aqua Surf School. Afterwards, it's time to be pampered for lunch with Beach Butler Service at Perry's Café. A private butler will prepare your beach chairs, tables and umbrellas while delivering beverages, food and ocean equipment to meet your seaside desires.

In the afternoon, take a short stroll to the historic Santa Monica Pier, the end of Route 66 and home to Pacific Park, Los Angeles' only admission-free amusement park. Take a ride on the iconic solar-powered Pacific Wheel, known for its panoramic views of the Southern California coastline. Afterwards, explore the world-famous Third Street Promenade, an alfresco shopping experience with top name-brand stores.

As the magic hour approaches in the evening, head for cocktails with a view at Elephante Beach House. The open-air rooftop bar and restaurant aims to transport guests from Los Angeles to the Southern Mediterranean all whilst staying in the heart of Downtown Santa Monica.

DAY 2

In the morning, the beautiful coastline and temperate weather make Santa Monica an ideal destination for a two-wheeled adventure. Rent a bike from Santa Monica Bike Centre and cruise along The Strand, a 35-km long, paved trail that starts in Santa Monica and connects the city with neighbouring Venice Beach. As you pedal along, soak up Southern California's beach culture – famous for its surfers, body builders, street performers and spectacular ocean views.

For the afternoon, there's no better place for a leisurely stroll than Montana Avenue, a tree-lined boulevard that's home to numerous restaurants and retailers. From unique home boutiques to high-end cosmetic stores, the area that stretches from 7th to 17th Street is a hotspot for the latest beauty trends, fashion and healthy eateries.

In the evening, enjoy a street-side, alfresco dinner at Father's Office, the popular American gastropub on Montana Avenue that serves the much celebrated 'Office Burger', along with 36 craft beers on tap. For one last cocktail, head to The Bungalow, great for outdoor music and a fun atmosphere that lasts well into the night.

DAY 3

Get an early start to your day by listening to the sounds of the ocean with a private or group yoga lesson from Beach Yoga SoCal. Afterwards, head to one of Santa Monica's four weekly Farmers Markets. The Wednesday Downtown Santa Monica Farmers Market is the largest organic market

on the West Coast, where top chefs from across Los Angeles shop for the freshest ingredients.

In the afternoon, it's time to hit the shops at Santa Monica Place, a sophisticated, open-air shopping centre with three levels of retail and dining. From Nordstrom to an array of the city's best shops - Louis Vuitton, Tiffany & Co., Nike, The Disney Store, Hugo Boss, Uniqlo, Michael Kors and more - Santa Monica Place is the epicenter of relaxed, celebrity-inspired style.

Afterwards, cook up a scrumptious lunch of your own with a private cooking class at the Gourmandise School of Sweets & Savouries. This beloved institution offers hands-on cooking classes for beginners to professionals.

Come evening and head to Santa Monica's Mid-City neighbourhood for an alfresco dinner at Birdie G's, the latest concept from the locally owned and operated Rustic Canyon Family of Restaurants. With a diverse menu designed by Michelin-starred Chef Jeremy Fox, dishes pay homage to midwestern comfort food – with a Southern California twist.

DAY 4

Begin your day exploring one of Santa Monica's quirkiest neighbourhoods, Pico Boulevard, home to a collection of below-the-radar shopping finds and unique art galleries. While you're here, be sure to follow Santa Monica's Street Art Mural Guide because this eclectic street contains a multitude of popular murals. Afterwards, enjoy a breakfast of lemon ricotta pancakes on the outdoor patio at Lunetta All Day, an all-day eatery from local chef and former professional surfer Raphael Lunetta.

Santa Monica's central location in Los Angeles County makes it an ideal base to explore the wider region. On your final afternoon, head 15 minutes up Pacific Coast Highway for a visit to the Getty Villa. Situated on a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the Getty Villa is an educational center and museum dedicated to the study of the arts and cultures of ancient Greece, Rome and Etruria.

Once darkness has taken hold, it's time to grab dinner. With four weekly Farmers Markets, fresh ingredients abound in Santa Monica. Head to Wally's Wine & Spirits in Downtown Santa Monica for an alfresco dinner and a delightful pairing of locally sourced produce and meats with the world's finest wines.

Santa Monica is famous for weddings. What are the factors which have given rise to this event segment?

Santa Monica's beachfront setting, along



with its extraordinary hotels, most located within walking distance of the beach, make it the ideal place for weddings and honeymoons. Many of our event venues, such as the Annenberg Beach House and The Victorian, as well as our restaurants, including Elephante, make full use of our year-round temperate weather and offer ample outdoor and open-air spaces.

Is tourism the only pillar of SM's economy?

Santa Monica's enviable position as a highly desirable tourist destination supports a robust hospitality-driven economy. Pre-pandemic, tourism brought nearly \$2 billion annually to the Santa Monica economy and supported more than 12,500 tourism-related jobs. Santa Monica is also on the leading edge of the creative economy, as home to some of the U.S.'s key creative businesses. Major brands Activision, the Grammy Foundation, Jerry Bruckheimer Films, Lionsgate Entertainment, Red Bull North America and Universal Music Publishing Group are each located in Santa Monica, bringing world-class creative services and innovations that support the local economy.

How are you promoting your destination in the India market? What is your expectation or Indian tourist target in 2022?

Santa Monica is an ideal destination for Indian FIT travellers – both families and honeymooners, looking for a beach vacation while experiencing the Southern Californian understated luxury vibe. We have been creating awareness about the range of experiences that Santa Monica offers among the travel trade and media through focused product update programs like the Sundowner with Santa Monica and Revive the Santa Monica Soul. We aim to build momentum and destination awareness through dedicated promotion and trade engagement programs, all aimed at generating incremental room nights for the city.

Prior to the pandemic in 2019, our beach city welcomed 4.3 million international visitors. Indian travellers consisted of a small but growing segment of these travellers, and we look forward to growing these numbers with the recent re-opening of the U.S. borders.



FURAVERI MALDIVES

A picture-perfect palm island with unmatched levels of mind-blowing luxury.

Tanya Sehr Godinho

Tuning in to the simple beauty of nature, Furaveri Maldives is a five-star deluxe property, where the open ocean meets the lagoon. An island rich with life and intriguing history, it witnesses the warm sunsets of memorable evenings by the beach, that lulls you to sleep in a haven of trees. The property is well connected to the airport and you can reach here via seaplane or domestic flight and speedboat.

Furaveri caters to all age groups and lifestyles with elegantly designed, generously spacious, private villas.

They have a range of options, starting from the beach and garden villas to water bungalows and Dhoni pool villas, to make your vacation as memorable as you could possibly imagine. The two-bedroom reef and beach residences with a pool are pure luxury!

With access to international services in Maldivian settings, I found myself effortlessly at ease in the blissful aura of the island. Between daytime walks and nighttime views, I came across people from different corners of the world and we had interesting conversations on how we came about being in the same place at the same time!



Main pool overlooking the beachfront



Water Sports



Signature Beach Pool Villa

For their yearly getaway, a family of eight were looking for spacious, accommodative rooms by the ocean and cultural activities to keep their children engaged. The Kids Club at Furaveri hosts origami workshops, pizza making classes, among other fun activities.

A couple with close friends were there for a luxurious vow renewal ceremony by the beach. I witnessed the staff recreate the most magical evening under a sky full of stars as they participated in an intimate ceremony among loved ones.

Furaveri seemed like the perfect home base for a thrill-seeking solo trip, for there were many individuals here for work and leisure. A week-long trip feels short, as there's a lot to explore on the calm, peaceful and serene island in addition to the 24-hour bar, Udhares. The villas have large work desks overlooking the water-side that make for a perfect break in between. The Wi-Fi is strong and can always be upgraded, if required.

Furaveri is blessed with a beautiful house reef and surrounded by many magnificent dive sites that are secluded and teeming with life. The marine ecosystem here is an unforgettable experience waiting to be explored! At the end of the day, whether you would like to unwind with a drink or experience a culinary journey, they have you covered. Jaafaiy is the main restaurant of Furaveri Maldives, serving themed buffets for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Udhares Bar is spacious and family-friendly with an adjacent pool and sunbathing area where you can relax and enjoy the stunning view.



Dining at Jaafaiy

The island has something for everyone, and Indian food is no exception. Inspired by nature and infused with culture, they offer signature dining experiences at their Asian-fusion Raiyvilla and Mexican-special Amigos. Lounging in a cozy setting, Furaveri is popular for keeping you entertained while you indulge in a great variety of delicacies, beverages, games and live shows.

Snorkelling with the giant mantas is yet another experience that will create everlasting memories. Hanifaru Bay, in Baa Atoll, is the biggest manta feeding hotspot in the world! The site is a protected marine park and the entire bay has been declared a UNESCO biosphere reserve. This remote Atoll is known for having some of the richest coral reef systems in the world.

The best time to plan a holiday here is between December and February, although the weather is bright and cool all year round. The Wellness Village offers signature experiences that are unique and authentic. Every treatment is considered a powerful healing tool in ancient China, Japan, Indonesia, India and Maldives. It's a must try! The Village runs on the philosophy of creating a balance for your mind, body and spirit to be able to achieve the highest point of wellbeing. Based on these three elements, the Wellness Village is derived from sport, yoga, meditation and fitness. They combine your wellness experience with a selection of holistic Asian and Maldivian traditional treatments, along with healing practices of Ayurveda and a healthy cuisine. The Wellness Village teaches you how to bring this into your everyday life with new habits and homecare programs.



Raiyvilla- Specialty Restaurant

The beach, the reef and the jungles make the island an appealing destination for those seeking disconnection from the world. Listening to the inherent beauty of nature and culture, I found inspiration. Making the best of what you have, with nature as your guide, it's easy to tune in to the simple beauty of surroundings and follow your heart. Furaveri Maldives offers a heady mix of Indian lifestyle, Maldivian tradition and natural beauty that should be experienced at least once in a lifetime!

Photo Spots

- 1. Hammock at the Water Villa entrance
- 2. The swings opposite Jaafaiy
- 3. The Wellness Village entrance
- 4. Sunrise at the main pool beachfront
- 5. Sunset at the Raiyvilla restaurant beachfront

DGCA extends ban on scheduled international passenger flights till January 31



The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has extended the ban on commercial international passenger flights till January 31, 2022.

The regulator issued a circular on December 9th, saying “The competent authority has decided to extend the suspension of scheduled international commercial passenger services to and from India till 2359 hours of January 31, 2022.”

Scheduled international passenger services have been suspended in India since March 23, 2020, due to the coronavirus pandemic. But special international flights have been operating under the Vande Bharat Mission since May 2020 and under bilateral “air bubble” arrangements with selected countries since July 2020.

India has formed air bubble pacts with around 33 countries, including the US, the UK, the UAE, Australia, Kenya, Bhutan, Finland, and France. Under an air bubble pact between two countries, special international flights can be operated by their airlines between their territories.

India establishes travel bubble with Australia



India has established special air travel arrangements with Australia to let the Indian and Australian carriers carry the passengers on their flights between India and Australia. According to DGCA, for Outbound flights from India, airlines can carry nationals/residents of Australia, and foreign nationals with a valid visa who are eligible to enter Australia/ New Zealand. Similarly, any Indian/Nepal or Bhutan national destined for Australia/ New Zealand and holding a valid visa of the destination country will be allowed.

It would be for the airlines concerned to ensure that there is no travel restriction for Indian/Nepalese/Bhutanese nationals to enter the destination country before the issue of ticket/boarding pass to the Indian/Nepalese/Bhutanese passenger. Seamen of foreign nationalities and Seamen holding Indian passports would be allowed subject to clearance from the Ministry of Shipping.

Regarding inbound flights into India, Indian/ Nepal/ Bhutan nationals in Australia and New Zealand, all Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders and PIO cardholders holding passports of any country; and all foreign nationals holding a valid Indian visa as per extant guidelines will be allowed.

KTO organises its first Hybrid MICE Roadshow, MICE Experience Day 2021

Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) hosted a one-day experiential event, “Korea MICE Experience Day 2021” on December 10, 2021, targeting the Indian travel trade to update on its latest MICE destination offerings. The event was intended to prepare the travel agents for the re-opening of the destination in the near future.

The event was organised in association with OTOAI for its active members and close travel trade and media partners of KTO. The event began with the virtual address by Sangho Moon, Director from the MICE Marketing Team at KTO head office followed by opening remarks by Y.G. Choi, Director at KTO New Delhi. The special addresses to the event were given by Chan Kim, General Manager at Korean Air and Guldeep Singh Sahni, former President of OTOAI and supporter of KTO.

A live virtual tour of Gyeongbuk Palace (an iconic landmark in Seoul, South Korea) was arranged for attendees followed by three exciting engagement activities – Hanbok (Korean traditional dress) wearing experience, Korea MICE (X O) Quiz and Dalgona Cookie Challenge (From the K-Drama fame –The Squid Game).

South Korea was presented in a new light for MICE travel. The latest support program and unique experiences for MICE events were introduced to the trade partners. To make the event meaningful for business purposes, hybrid B2B meetings were

set up with 11 DMCs, three of which were present physically, while others connected virtually with the travel agents.

KTO is looking forward to signing an MOU with companies who confirm their interest in sending MICE groups to South Korea by 2023. Commenting on the event, Y.G. Choi, Director KTO New Delhi said, “We wanted to show a New South Korea to our trade partners especially for MICE groups, so we planned this as our final event of the year for the travel industry, to show how optimistic we are for the coming year.”



Andhra Pradesh planning to upgrade tourism infrastructures

In a bid to improve the tourism infrastructure, the Andhra Pradesh government is going to construct a ropeway at Gandikota village with an estimated cost of Rs 4.50 crore, informed State Tourism Minister Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao on December 10, 2021.

Speaking to media persons, the minister said, "The social infrastructure will also be developed at Borra Caves with an expenditure of Rs 2.70 crore and cottages to be constructed at Maredumilli with Rs 1.15 crore. Apart from these, water and adventure sports are to be developed at various places in the state."

The government also proposed to construct temporary toilets and restaurants at Lambasingi in the Visakha forest region, where at least 20,000 tourists are visiting per day, Rao said.

Though the government was trying to construct permanent structures there, they were stopped due to various reasons, but

now, these constructions would be completed with an estimated amount of Rs 3 crore, he added.



108 countries recognise India's COVID vaccination certificates for travel purpose: Government

A total of 108 countries recognise the Indian COVID-19 vaccination certificate for travel purpose, Minister of State for Health Bharati Pravin Pawar informed Lok Sabha on December 10, 2021, sharing data available as on December 6.

The World Health Organization's Emergency Use Listing (EUL) assists interested UN procurement agencies, member states and countries in determining the acceptability of using specific vaccines, based on an essential set of available data on quality, safety, efficacy and performance, Pawar said in a written reply.

The aim is to expedite the availability of these products to people affected by a public health emergency, and it allows countries to

expedite their own regulatory approval to import and administer COVID-19 vaccines, she said.

Persons inoculated with such vaccines, which are listed under the WHO- EUL, are deemed to be protected by authorities of many countries and allowed to travel internationally, Pawar said.

"However, not all countries require COVID-19 vaccination for travel. India also does not, at present, require COVID-19 vaccination for travel. Among the countries which do have such requirements, as on 6th December 2021, a total of 108 countries recognise the Indian vaccination certificate for travel purpose," she said in the written reply.

Visit Utah organises Thanksgiving lunch for its key travel partners and associates



On the occasion of Thanksgiving, Visit Utah organised an exclusive sit-down lunch for its key tour partners and media associates at the Pondicherry Café, Sofitel BKC, Mumbai. The event was a full house, and the venue was an ideal place for great bonding and networking.

While Zach Fyne, Global Market Specialist, Utah Office of Tourism in USA virtually wished everyone on the occasion, the delegates were also showcased 'Destination Utah', where they were amazed by the vast number of attractions and also the fact that some major Hollywood films were shot in Utah.

The highlight of the day was a six-course meal specially curated by Chef Neeraj Rawat, who promptly used to update about the delicacies in each course. The six-course meal planned and prepared by the Chef and his team was clearly innovative with that American feel and touch factors in the dishes.

With the scrumptious meal, a round of a fun quiz game on Destination Utah also kept the delegates enthralled and captivated. Interestingly, by the end of the game, most could memorise the destinations and attractions (some known and some unknown) in Utah, like the Zion National Park, Bryce National Park, Arches National Park, Heber Valley, Bonneville Salt flats, Ogden, Kanab, etc.

In India, AVIAREPS India represents Visit Utah. The very well-executed luncheon by hosts Ellona Pereira and Mansi Oza turned out to be a memorable networking session.

WelcomHeritage unveils WelcomHeritage Elysium Resort & Spa, Shimla

WelcomHeritage has announced the opening of its 36th property in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh- WelcomHeritage Elysium Resort & Spa. This is the 6th property of the brand in Himachal Pradesh.



Nestled in the quiet, white blanket of snow and serenity, this resort is surrounded by Fir, Oak, Deodar, and tall Blue Pines, and offers luxury across every touchpoint of the guest experience.

Amidst the picturesque beauty of white enveloped green trees and the breath-taking beauty of colonial structures brought out by a modern flair, stands the charm of WelcomHeritage Elysium Resorts & Spa in Shimla. It is an amalgam of old-world charm and contemporary comforts.

The design of the hotel is inspired by the traditional Himalayan architecture with modern civility around. The crowning glory of the property is the panoramic view of the entire Shimla from its greenhouse-styled rooftop dining area – a mesmerising treat. The hotel offers 42 exquisitely designed guest rooms with three separate colour themes, featuring a stunning blend of modern design and timeless beauty. Guests can enjoy innovative culinary experiences and locally-inspired delicacies. Other facilities include a meeting space, banquet hall, fitness centre, spa and kids' play area. Whether alone or with family or with fellow travellers, you can have your 'me time' after a bustling day of sightseeing in here, in the quiet, at top, and soak in the 360° view of entire Shimla from here.

Fortune Hotels inks operating agreements in Katra and Amritsar

Fortune Hotels recently announced the signing of two individual operating agreements for hotels in Katra (Jammu & Kashmir) and Amritsar (Punjab), thereby strengthening its growth strategy in key pilgrim locations and adding over 100 new rooms to its existing inventory.

Fortune Park The Atrium, Katra set in the heart of Katra city home to the Holy shrine of Maa Vaishno Devi. This 58-room spacious hotel with a glass pyramid-shaped atrium roof, is poised to open in the summer of 2022 with refreshed contemporary interiors, modern facilities and impeccable services that promise to offer homelike comfort to leisure traveller looking to explore this popular tourist destination. The

aesthetic property is owned by M/s Swastik Resort.

Fortune Inn Heritage Walk, Amritsar, is a 50-room boutique hotel conveniently located in close proximity to Jallianwala Bagh, just off Heritage Street and a 5-mins walk from the sacred Golden Temple. This gratifying property is undergoing a refurbishment programme and is anticipated to open towards the mid of 2022.

Strategically located in their respective destinations both hotels enjoy a distinct positioning and address the growing accommodation demand for branded hotels in these high potential markets by offering quality stay options at an attractive value.



Rohit Shorey appointed as the MICE Tourism Ambassador for Kazakhstan in India

The Ministry of Culture & Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Kazakh Tourism Board have appointed Rohit Shorey as their MICE Tourism Ambassador for Kazakhstan in India.

Kairat Sadvakasov, Deputy Chairman, Kazakh Tourism Board acknowledged that Rohit Shorey, Founder, Kazin DMC has made a significant contribution to the overall development of tourism to the country from India, especially in the MICE segment. At a reception held at the Marriott hotel in Nur-Sultan on November 27, 2021, the board presented Shorey with a Certificate of Ambassadorship. The reception was attended by Vishal Jain, Director, Kazin International, who signed the MOU and collected the award.

Rohit and Vishal remain very bullish on Kazakhstan, as the destination has vast potential in the field of tourism. The destination has a wide diversity of offerings in all verticals of tourism. They feel that India and the Middle East will become a major source market for tourism to Kazakhstan and this is one of the reasons why Kazin DMC has maintained a 100 per cent focus on Kazakhstan since 2016.



EKTTA holds AGM, resolves to bridge the gap between tourism stakeholders



EKTTA (Enterprising Knot of Travel & Tourism Associates) held its AGM at Swosti Premium Hotel, Bhubaneswar on November 12, 2021. The Association, since its inception, has kept its focus on empowering and enabling the industry with effective workshops and knowledge sharing, catalysing organic and inorganic growth with tie-ups and networking, etc. In the AGM, they resolved to rejuvenate their focus on these subjects again.

An exclusive interaction with Chairman HRAO and Swosti Group Jitendra Kumar Mohanty was organised on the theme 'Vocal for Local'. This was to create a synergy among the local travel agents, tour operators and the hoteliers in Odisha with the sole aim of bridging the gap between them, for the overall growth of tourism in the state.

The event concluded with a captivating presentation by the supporting partner, Dubai Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM). The presentation educated the members with new products and opportunities and informed them about the latest SOPs in Dubai.

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