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Dear Friends,

Travel restrictions aimed at curbing the spread of the omicron variant are hammering the already beleaguered travel and tourism industry, after adding gloom in the crucial winter holiday season. Travellers are rescheduling or cancelling trips because of the tightening rules and the threat perception of Omicron infection.

The year 2022 has us all rewrite our travel and business expectations. It is a wait-and-watch situation once again for the industry. Yet, as to travel is human, we expect travellers to be keen to venture out soon, plan in advance, take all precautions, remain flexible and get insurance cover. Similarly, it is time for us as an industry to stay together and keep our resilience intact and look ahead. Good days should be around the corner.

Our start of the year "Annual Issue" promises to be immersive and optimistic. We bring to you stories, expectations and reviews by tourism professionals from travel and hospitality verticals. We salute their spirit and confidence to think positively about the future, despite the hard and testing times.

Before you read on, we take this opportunity to wish you a Happy and Prosperous 2022 and hope all your travel and business dreams come true. It is finally time to "Look Ahead and Not Away"!

Happy Reading!



Ravi Sharma

Ravi Sharma

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Editor's Desk

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Nijhawan Group appointed as the India Representative for Swiss-Belhotel International



Nijhawan Group has been appointed the India Sales, Marketing & Public Relations representation office for Swiss-Belhotel International. The hotel chain is ranked amongst the world's top 125 international hotel management companies. Swiss-Belhotel International, with a growing portfolio of more than 125 hotels, resorts and projects, manages properties across 19 countries.

On this occasion, Priyanka Nijhawan, Managing Director-Representations, Nijhawan Group said, "We take pride in announcing that Swiss-Belhotel International is the newest addition to our brand portfolio. We are prepared to magnify and pave the path for one of the top hotel companies in the world."

"India has always been a very important market for us and we want to continue working closely with our partners and clients there. Given the business uncertainty due to Covid, we are happy that Nijhawan Group will represent us, with their vast tourism experience and through their large network of offices in the country," said Matthew Faull, Senior Vice President, Sales, E-commerce and IT at Swiss-Belhotel International.

Arabian Travel Market changes 2022 dates to accommodate new UAE working week



Reed Exhibitions (RX) the organiser of Arabian Travel Market (ATM) has announced that this year's four-day event will now open on Monday, May 9, 2022, and close on Thursday, May 12, 2022, to fall in line with the UAE's new Monday-to-Friday working week.

Now in its 29th year and working in collaboration with the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) and Dubai's Department of Tourism and Economy (DTE), ATM 2022 will feature a broad selection of show highlights.

After joining remotely for ATM 2021, this year will see both the ARIVALDubai@ATM forum and the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) participate live in Dubai for the first time ever.

ATM will play an integral role in the Arabian Travel Week (9-19 May), a festival of events dedicated to enabling travel professionals from all over the world to collaborate and shape the recovery of the Middle East travel industry through exhibitions, conferences, breakfast briefings, awards, product launches and networking events.

7-day mandatory home quarantine for all international arrivals in India

Amid Omicron spread, the Centre has revised its travel guidelines for international passengers making 7-day home quarantine must. On the eighth day, if they test negative, they will have to further self-monitor their health for next 7 days. However, if found positive, they shall be managed at an isolation facility as per protocol and their samples will be sent for genomic surveillance.

The Centre also updated its list of 'at-risk' countries. It includes countries in Europe including UK, South Africa, Brazil, Botswana, China, Ghana, Mauritius, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Hong Kong, Israel, Congo, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Nigeria, Tunisia and Zambia. All travellers from these countries have to undergo mandatory RT-PCR tests on arrival. They must wait for the results at the airport before leaving or taking a connecting flight.

For other countries, about 2 per cent of the total passengers on a flight undergo random tests on arrival at the airport, while all are required to self-monitor their health for 14 days post-arrival. Now, under the new guidelines, the RT-PCR test is mandatory for all of them on their eighth day of arrival.

All travellers shall also be required to upload results of RT-PCR test for Covid-19 done on 8th day on Air Suvidha portal. All passengers must upload a negative Covid-report before boarding their flights.



Awe-inspiring **ABU DHABI**

The capital of the UAE is the hub of all things amazing

Abu Dhabi is ready to welcome local and international tourists to the emirate for the 2022 tourism season. With year-round sunshine, an exhilarating events calendar and endless iconic entertainment and cultural attractions, Abu Dhabi remains at the top of the list of desirable global destinations. Following the international entry guidelines, Abu Dhabi is open to fully vaccinated travellers (and unvaccinated travellers from Green List countries) to visit the destination free of quarantine measures. Abu Dhabi is calling on travellers from around the world to visit the emirate to connect with friends and family, fulfil their love of travel and create new memories in a destination where every possibility awaits them.

Abu Dhabi abounds with a fascinating range of landscapes, offering experiences for every kind of traveller, whether they seek nature, adventure, sun and sea, or arts and culture. In Abu Dhabi, visitors will find a destination where respect for the past informs the present and shapes the future.

It is a diverse emirate with desert landscapes, oases, mountain heights, pristine beaches, warm, clear waters, desert islands, an ancient heritage city and a modern cosmopolitan capital city. Lose yourself in historic buildings, thrilling headline attractions, engaging tours and a packed calendar of headline events covering the arts, culture, sports, concerts and trade shows.

Be awed by the culture at the majestic Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, explore breath-taking natural landscapes at Jubail Mangrove Park, delve into the history at the city's oldest standing structure Qasr Al Hosn. That's not all! Indulge, relax and spoil yourself in Abu Dhabi's landmark hotel Emirates Palace and soak up the sun at Soul Beach, an idyllic stretch of natural white sand beach overlooking the turquoise waters of the Arabian Gulf.

Abu Dhabi is highly regarded as a safe destination and has been titled as the safest city in the world for five consecutive years by crowd-sourced global database Numbeo. In addition, the UAE was ranked the safest country in the world for women by a global Georgetown University study this year.

Abu Dhabi has a long and rich cultural history and is a thriving tourism destination that attracted 11.35 million visitors in 2019, with this anticipated to increase to over 23 million by 2030.

Abu Dhabi has invested more than \$8 billion in the cultural and creative industries. It is home to world-leading cultural offerings such as Louvre Abu Dhabi and Abrahamic House (due to open in February 2022) and Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, which is due to open in 2025. It has also been the backdrop to many movies including Hollywood blockbusters such as Star Wars and Dune.

Some interesting facts about Abu Dhabi:

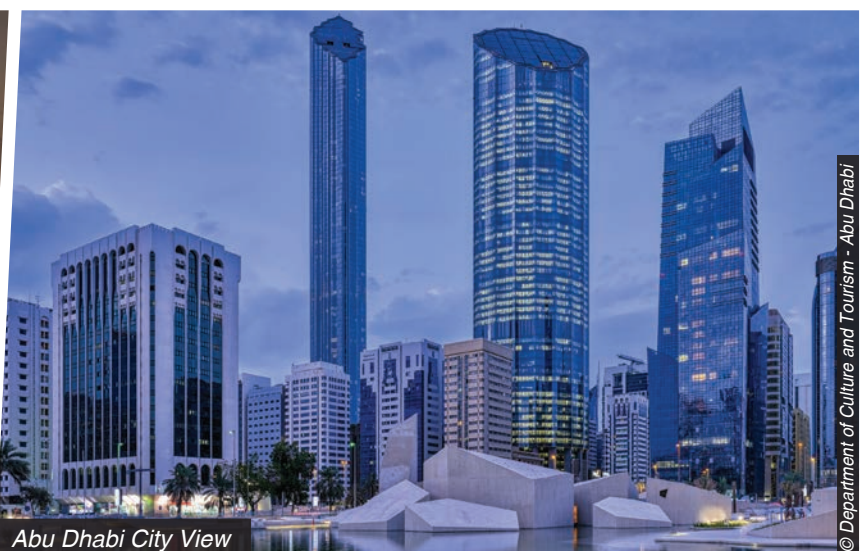
- Abu Dhabi is home to people from over 200 countries.
- Abu Dhabi is a fascinating archipelago made up of over 200 islands.
- Abu Dhabi is home to 14 adventure, amusement and theme parks, including Ferrari World Abu Dhabi, Warner Bros. World Abu Dhabi and Yas Waterworld Abu Dhabi.
- The world's fastest roller coaster is at Ferrari World Abu Dhabi with a maximum speed of 240 km per hour.
- Abu Dhabi is home to The National Aquarium, the largest and the most awe-inspiring aquarium in the Middle East. Located at Al Qana, it spans across 9,000 sqm with more than 200 sharks and rays, representing 25 different species.
- Abu Dhabi is home to Etihad Arena, the largest state-of-the-art indoor entertainment venue in the Middle East.
- The iconic Louvre Abu Dhabi features a dome that weighs around 7,500 tons which is about the same as the Eiffel Tower in Paris.
- The luxurious Emirates Palace hotel features 114 domes, 1,002 chandeliers and 7,000 doors.
- The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque is one the world's largest mosques and has the world's largest hand-knotted carpet spanning 5,700 square meters.
- An 8,000-year-old and the world's oldest natural pearl was discovered at Abu Dhabi's Marawah Island, further proving the significance of pearling in the region's economic and cultural history.
- Over 24,000 events took place in 2019, including Abu Dhabi HSBC Golf Championship, Abu Dhabi Classics, Abu Dhabi Culinary Season, Abu Dhabi Art and a whole host of festivals and concerts attracting international talent from across the globe.

So, whether you're looking for a blissful escape by the sea or are seeking the comfort of home in another country, there is something for everyone in Abu Dhabi.

visitabudhabi.ae



Louvre Abu Dhabi



Abu Dhabi City View

Time to propel tourism to the next orbit together

As individuals, organisations, and the tourism, travel and hospitality industry, we have had to be resilient and adapt quickly to survive over the past 22 months. The global travel scenario has changed forever, and if we can adapt quickly, we have the potential to emerge as a global leader in this field. Indian Tourism must resurrect itself post-COVID to project India as an emerging world power.

Ajeet Bajaj

Travel and Tourism constitute nine per cent of the Indian GDP. Our national dream of being a five trillion-dollar economy by 2024 can be realised if, along with 'Make in India', we focus on and leverage our immense service sector potential, especially in the travel and tourism industry. I have tried to highlight a few points below that require all tourism stakeholders' focus. Before that, I would like to quote:

"It is not the most intellectual of the species that survives; not the strongest; but the one that is able to adapt to and to adjust best to the changing environment," Charles Darwin, Origin of Species (1859).

National Tourism Policy

India's ranking in the World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index 2019 is 34 out of 140 countries listed. Indian Tourism must endeavour to be in the first ten by 2025. The National Tourism Policy must focus on the 14 pillars of the World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index. These must be implemented across India with tremendous emphasis on health, safety, security, and sustainability in the policy. India has to be a 'hassle-free travel experience.' The online visa process needs an urgent review, entry, and exit from India, post COVID-19 protocols, safety, and security of our travellers, road, rail, and air travel infrastructure, health, and hygiene, have to add up to make "Incredible India" a seamless travel experience. Sustainable Tourism must be an integral part of the National Tourism Policy. Issues such as 'over tourism' and carrying capacity need to be addressed through this policy. The UNWTO Global sustainable tourism criteria must be adopted in letter and spirit as part of the policy.

State/Central Governments

It is time to make the Ministry of Tourism more robust with a larger budget, additional resources, and senior officers both at the central and state level. A state tourism and destination audit by a credible international organisation would go a long way in the sustainable development of the tourism sector. Central funding for the states should be based on a minimum rating in the audit process. The synergy between state government departments is of paramount importance, and state governments must be encouraged to set up inter-ministerial teams to harness their tourism potential. While many state governments are proactive, the lackadaisical approach of many states has led to unstructured and non-sustainable tourism development in many parts of the country.

Enhancing the Tourism Product/ Visitor Experience

As per Indian travel industry estimates, we have approximately two hundred products which give us 80 per cent of our business. We need to focus on these products and make them safe, clean, hassle-free, and transformational experiences. India's 'visitor experience' has to be taken to



▲ Ajeet Bajaj

the next level. The travel infrastructure, health and hygiene, road, rail, and air connectivity, have to be on par with international standards, showcasing India as a premium tourism destination. For example, the road to Kumarakom from Cochin in Kerala- one of the jewels in Indian Tourism - the backwaters- is terrible with more potholes and fewer roads! It is suggested that the government make cross-functional teams with high-level representation from the Ministry of Tourism, state government, ASI, civil aviation, railways, town planning for integrated and sustainable development of these products. Central and state government funds must be allocated for this purpose.

Popular tourism towns/cities must also be a part of this plan to enhance the visitor experience. After 'Swachh Bharat', 'Surakshit Bharat' is the need

of the hour. India has to endeavour to become the safest country for travellers, especially women. Media campaigns, sensitising the local population and administration, having tourism in the school curriculum, and tourism police assisting tourists would go a long way in sending the right message to potential tourists worldwide. As a country, we must leverage our rich natural, cultural and historical heritage, identify 100 new products, and develop them to international standards in a sustainable manner while being mindful of the carrying capacity.

Ease of doing travel, tourism and hospitality business in India

While India's ranking in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index has improved to 63 out of the 190 countries surveyed, it has to be a national priority to improve our rating in the ease of doing travel, tourism and hospitality business in India. Presently, it is tough to be part of the Indian travel and tourism industry. We have to simplify procedures, move away from the license raj, have national systems and procedures across all states, online time-bound permissions, incentivise entrepreneurs, and rationalise taxes.

Leveraging our immense Natural Heritage

In India, we have every conceivable geographical terrain, are a global biodiversity hotspot, have 73 per cent of a culturally diverse Himalayan range in India, rich fauna, flora, and avifauna. Indian natural heritage and adventure tourism hold immense potential for economic development and job creation in the remote, far-flung regions of the country. We must gauge carrying capacity, improve infrastructure and accessibility, including road and rail connectivity, and invite entrepreneurs to invest with incentives. Opening and promoting areas like Kargil, Nubra, Pithoragarh, Spiti, Pasighat, and areas like the inner sanctuary of the Nanda Devi sanctuary, which was closed in 1983, in a limited, responsible manner, will put India in the global spotlight and help boost tourism to remote regions of the country.

Adventure Tourism

Adventure Travel is a US 683-billion-dollar industry globally, showing a 21 per cent Compound Annual Growth rate since 2012. Given our huge potential vis-a-vis adventure and sustainable tourism, we can easily

double our inbound figures, presently at 10 million tourists (UNWTO) post-pandemic through Adventure Tourism alone. According to a Neilson report for the Ministry of Tourism and industry estimates, Adventure tourism in India was a 2000 crore industry in 2016 and is ranked 96 out of 163 countries in the 2019 Adventure Travel Development Index of the Adventure Travel Trade Association, USA and George Washington University. The 10 Pillars of Adventure Tourism Market Competitiveness include Government Policies, Supporting Sustainable Development, Safety, Natural Resources, Health, Adventure Resources, Entrepreneurship, Humanitarian, Infrastructure, Cultural Resources, Adventure Image/Brand.

India needs a National Adventure Tourism policy with clear guidelines, online processes, and an enabling environment for investors. This policy must be adopted and implemented by all state governments. The National Adventure Tourism Task Force must be revived to work on the ten pillars of the Adventure Tourism Development Index, involving all stakeholders and state governments. Safety Guidelines of the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India must be urgently implemented by all stakeholders and adopted by all state governments.

It must be mandatory for all adventure tour companies in India to be registered by the state or central government. Presently, only 1200 adventure tour operators out of approximately 15,000 are registered in the country. Soft loans and GST waivers for registered adventure tour operators for five years would go a long way in bringing all operators into the mainstream and streamlining adventure tourism.

The 3 Gs for risk management of adventure tourism are critical to realising this dream, i.e., Guidelines, Guides, and Gear.

Guidelines: Indian Adventure Tourism Guidelines of the Adventure Tour Operators Association must be adopted and strictly implemented across the country, in letter and spirit.

Guides: Skill development with courses in adventure tourism and courses for adventure and nature guides by Govt-run IITs and private institutions will help with the sector's overall development. Training modules to train and upskill all adventure guides in the country in adventure tourism and related skills such as First Aid and CPR, communication skills, F&B, guest handling, soft skills, Search and

Rescue will go a long way in improving our image as a prime adventure tourism destination.

Gear: Until India can produce its gear at par with international standards, tax incentives and duty-free equipment import will help operators ensure that the best equipment is used for adventure.

A senior government officer of the rank of JS should be in charge of adventure and nature tourism at the Centre. State governments must be encouraged to have senior officers support the development of adventure and nature tourism in the states systematically and sustainably. At the state level, the synergy between Tourism and Forest Department is necessary for growth in the adventure tourism sector. Search and rescue and insurance for adventure travel need to be addressed urgently.

GST Holiday

Post pandemic, one of the ways to grow this sector in rural/remote parts of India and channel local employment is to incentivise investor interest by providing a GST tax holiday to Adventure Tour Operators. Extending tax advantages will also align with the development objective of most of these regions, which are either in hill states, border areas, coastal regions, or other areas which need economic development and alignment with the rest of India.

Air Connectivity, Accessibility, and Infrastructure Development to Adventure Hubs in India

Opening airstrips in the Himalayan region will make India a year-round destination. Improving/ launching air connectivity to the Nubra valley, Kargil, Pithoragarh, Chilyanisaur, Gauchar (in Uttarakhand), Spiti, and Arunachal Pradesh and developing highways and introducing fast trains to reduce travel time to popular adventure hubs of the country will give a much-needed boost to adventure tourism in the country. The government must consider viability gap funding in the first phase of launching these flights.

National Trekking and Cycling Trails

It is suggested that at least three national trekking and cycling trails be built to give a major boost to adventure tourism in the country. These National Trails should be walking and cycling trails (paved and unpaved) that are signposted, with lodges, tented camps, and homestays at a distance of 10/12 km.

The involvement of local communities, good communication networks, and medical and rescue infrastructure could make this an international attraction.

- a) Indian Trans Himalayan Trails: A Western Indian Himalayan Trail from Kashmir across Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh to Uttarakhand, and an Eastern Indian Himalayan Trail from Darjeeling to Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.
- b). The Ganga Trail: from Gaumukh to Ganga Sagar (2525 kms)
- c). Coastal Trails: Western and Eastern Coastal Trails.

Ski Destinations

Presently, only Gulmarg in J&K is considered a world-class ski destination in India. Given that India has 73 per cent of the Himalayan range in the country, it is suggested that at least three different international level ski resorts be planned in the next five years. Global tenders can be floated to identify and build this infrastructure.

Island Tourism

Andaman and Lakshadweep Islands must be developed as world-class sustainable tourism destinations. Lakshadweep will never be a Maldives (many more islands in Maldives, 4-decade head start on high-end tourism), and Andaman will never be a Phuket (location adjacent to mainland South East Asia allows far more ancillary development). If we try to copy these destinations, we will be poor imitations and will not attract discerning visitors who would always choose to go for the real thing. Both Andaman and Lakshadweep should follow genuinely sustainable, nature, and adventure-oriented tourism models for their development. Lakshadweep should be a rustic, real experience and a more sustainable alternative to the Maldives. Andaman should position itself as one of the last bastions of pristine island rainforest, mangrove, and uncluttered beaches in Asia, a sustainable alternative to South East Asia's overdeveloped beaches and islands. Andaman's USP, with 86 per cent of the landmass protected under Reserve Forest, Sanctuary, or National Park, is its protected areas that should remain intact.

1. Relax regulations to allow water and other adventure sports on the

islands. Non-motorised water sports activities (kayaking, windsurfing, etc.) should operate freely following basic and easy registration with the local Tourism Department.

2. Allow day visit permits to National Park, Sanctuary, and Reserve Forest Areas on these islands through an easy permit regime. Adventure Sports such as diving, snorkelling, kayaking, and even short treks will capitalise on these relaxations and give character to island tourism and drive inbound footfalls.

3. Easy change of Land Use and enable locals to enter in JVs with 3rd parties: Currently, it isn't easy to commercialise land in Andaman or Lakshadweep for tourism purposes. Allowing change of land use in the Andaman Islands, within masterplan norms, will allow participation in tourism opportunities with a local flavour and character, enabling the use of privately held lands in Lakshadweep to be developed personally or through JVs.

4. Solve external connectivity issues: International air connectivity to South East Asia (for Andaman) and better connectivity to Kochi/Thiruvananthapuram (Lakshadweep) will boost tourism and development opportunities.

5. Solve internal connectivity issues: Encourage Sea Plane connectivity for inter-island movement and facilitate private investment in marine transport by relaxing vessel registration norms as already mentioned in both Andaman and Lakshadweep

6. Relax regulations to allow smaller boats to ply for adventure tourism (can be achieved by allowing vessels registered as Sport Fishing Vessels with Dept of Fisheries to also ply for Scuba Diving, Snorkelling, inter-island cruises, and transfers)

National Adventure Training Institutions

Presently, there are only a handful of credible government-run adventure institutes in the country such as Nehru Institute of Mountaineering Uttarkashi, Himalayan Mountaineering Institute Darjeeling, Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Mountaineering and Allied Sports Manali, National Institute of Mountaineering and Allied Sports, Dirang and Indian Institute of Skiing and Mountaineering, Gulmarg. It is recommended that each state and UT,

depending on its geographical location, have at least one national-level adventure training institute focusing on different adventure sports such as scuba diving, aero sports such as paragliding, Alpine and cross-country skiing, mountaineering and rock climbing, river rafting, white water, and sea kayaking.

Atithi Devo Bhava

In October 2019, the entire country was shocked to hear that an Indian tourist had been detained in Bhutan for desecrating a 'Chorten', a holy Buddhist religious structure. Photos of the Indian motorcyclist standing atop the Chorten near Dorchu La in Bhutan went viral, causing immense national heartburn and shame.

For years 'Atithi Devo Bhava,' 'Guest is God' ethos has been ingrained into the psyche of the Indian community through media campaigns by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. Sadly, while the typical Indian tourist is good-hearted and well-meaning, it is imperative to educate them to conduct themselves with dignity, grace and be the epitome of responsible tourism. It would be prudent to halt any overseas promotional spend on 'Incredible India' till a few months after the pandemic and instead launch a social media campaign sensitising Indian tourists through storytelling and positive examples focusing on three vital aspects: a) Cleanliness and hygiene b) Cultural sensitivity c) Personal conduct and manners. The idea should be to sensitise Indian tourists, while in India or traveling overseas, to be worthy of the respect and exalted status is given to a guest in Indian culture.

In India, "Atithi Devo Bhava" is ingrained in our very ethos. Sadly, the figures have a different story to tell. If China can get its act together and attract 63 million tourists per year (UNWTO 2019), India, given our potential, with only 10 million, can do much better! As the tourism and travel industry, we must have big, audacious dreams and plan accordingly. Our vision must target 60 million inbound travellers annually to India by 2030.

We need to have the national and political will to drive this. Post pandemic, the Indian Tourism and Travel industry must change with fresh, out-of-the-box thinking and propel Indian Tourism to the next orbit.

Ajeet Bajaj is the Founder and Managing Director of Snow Leopard Adventures, three times National Tourism Award winning organisation. Ajeet was conferred the Padma Shri by the President of India in 2012. He has been felicitated with the 'Hall of Fame' award both by the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India and the 'Indian Association of Tour Operators'.



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Inspiring travellers to Dream

Travelling and dreaming go hand in glove. When a destination tickles your imagination, you start to dream, visualising yourself there, and the many experiences for you to look forward to, this dreaming finally fructifies into travel. 2020 and 2021 saw the traveller more or less confined to their homes or cities, due to a barrage of protocols and restrictions, travel was at its lowest ebb, but nothing stopped the traveller from dreaming. This task to keep the traveller dreaming and excited to travel once the opportunity arose was perfectly cut out for the National Tourist Offices (NTOs) worldwide and in India. Rising to the occasion to keep their destination relevant with the traveller and travel partners, the NTOs innovated, though digitally. So came along webinars, regular interactive sessions, immersive 360° videos and a range of imaginative virtual campaigns on websites and social media to keep all engaged, excited and dreaming. So, as we step into 2022, we at TTJ wanted to know whether their efforts and pro-activeness for their destinations brought in the expected results. Moreover, with the latest Omicron threat, we further wanted to understand their immediate focus, plans, and strategies in the new year.

Their feedback looks as if it has been worthwhile, and the show must go on.

Prashant Nayak



Arvind Bundhun

Director, Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority

The MTPA team has been very active on digital media platforms since the outbreak of COVID-19. In the last few months, we observed increased optimism and confidence amongst Indian trade partners towards the destination. With Air Mauritius reinstating flights to Mauritius, under the air bubble agreement, the trade is reporting

an increased urge amongst Indian travellers to visit our country. Hence, MTPA and all stakeholders are confident that our endeavours and pro-activeness for the last two years will bring a better tomorrow.

Mauritius has been open fully for vaccinated tourists since October 2021, with proper health and safety protocols in place. To increase engagement, MTPA plans to organise virtual roadshows and workshops until such time when face-to-face interactions are again safely possible. As things improve, we also have plans for familiarisation trips for media, tour operators, MICE agents, wedding planners, golfers, film and television production houses. An advertising plan was also in place, which had to be put on hold due to the pandemic. MTPA will continue disseminating clear and consistent messages to consumers and trade partners through digital platforms. Our website www.mauritiusnow.com is updated regularly, as it is the most useful tool for sharing the latest information and inspiring consumers to choose Mauritius over other destinations.



HE Khalid Jasim Al Midfa

Chairman, Sharjah Tourism and Commerce Development Authority

We are very confident that our efforts to keep Sharjah in the tourism spotlight are bearing fruit. Our trade partners in India show a high level of curiosity and interest in the emirate's new and varied offerings to sell the destination to their customers. The Sharjah Light Festival is a case in point - we have received very positive feedback about the annual event,

with trade operators enthusiastic about promoting the next edition, which takes place in February 2022.

The statistics confirm the continued popularity of our offerings. For example, our Sharjah Collection bookings that blend luxurious accommodation with Arabian culture, traditional hospitality, adventure, and nature interactions have increased year on year as we emerge from the pandemic. Sharjah's hospitality establishments, which comprise boutique hotels and eco-retreats located in key locations throughout Sharjah, have experienced a rise in the number of tourists for every month last year, with April 2021 recording a whopping 156 per cent increase in bookings when compared to April 2020.

We are acutely aware that our trade partners are the lynchpin for our industry and are integral to ensuring the success of Sharjah's

growing tourism sector. We will be continuing to work hand-in-hand with them to ensure that potential visitors are fully informed of the array of wonderful attractions, hospitality options, and cultural activities that our emirate has to offer every category of traveller, whether single, group, independent, or all-inclusive.

Due to the new COVID variant threat, visitors' health, safety, and security to Sharjah are of paramount importance. We are adhering to all the stipulations issued by the federal and local authorities in this respect. We are ensuring that we effectively communicate the regularly updated travel guidelines to our trade partners and are issuing travel alerts to the tourism sector as necessary. In the face of the new variant, we have returned to the 2-meter social distancing, and public venues and offices in the UAE have adopted the Al Hosn app Green Pass for entry, thereby enforcing continuous COVID-19 testing as a safety requirement.

The UAE has acted swiftly and decisively to deal with the pandemic. Its highly effective vaccination campaign and other steps taken mean that lockdowns have been avoided, unlike the situation with many other major cities around the world. With this in mind, we are confident that the measures being taken by the authorities will ensure the safety of all travellers to Sharjah, both this year and in the years to come. We believe that the UAE's track record underlines our reputation as a safe destination for travellers, even during the worst of the pandemic. Visitors can rest assured when making plans to visit Sharjah.



Luis Cabello

Trade and Tourism Counsellor, PROMPERU India

The current global scenario required us to adapt to survive, and much like the rest of the world, we accepted the challenge head-on. Within Peru, we worked hard to introduce requisite biosecurity protocols and made progress at a steady rate. In India, my office continued to engage with the industry's B2B and B2C

segments – albeit in a modified format. Despite the 'new normal', we shifted our efforts to the digital space and learned to carry out 'one-on-one' sessions with the Indian Travel Trade. The year 2021 proved to be an important year for destination Peru in India, considering we launched the first-ever travel agent certification program here. The feedback we received was more than encouraging!

We organised two webinars in the last few weeks of the year to keep the dialogue open, and we were overwhelmed with the response we received regarding the number of agents who participated in these sessions. We are happy to say that we have begun the New Year positively, with many agents emailing us their Peru Agent certification and congratulating the destination for concise yet informative training modules. Travel too was on the rebound as we began registering entries of Indian travellers to Peru in the second half of the year.

Peru as a destination has also expanded its travel portfolio by

adding new experiences and destinations from the northern part of the country and the traditional tourist circuit in the south of Peru. Travel is now synonymous with the pristine natural wonders, and a peek into authentic cultures, and the north offers just that! One such example is the department of Amazonas, geographically situated near the Amazonian rainforest and home to the archaeological site of Kuelap, known to be a legacy of the Chachapoyas people who were also called the cloud warriors in their times, and other awe-inspiring natural wonders like the Gocta waterfall.

We realise that the pandemic is not yet over and that the industry must continue to work hard to overcome new challenges. Nevertheless, we are certain that the world will collectively make progress soon enough. Whenever the time is right, we are confident that the Indian Travel Trade, together with the Indian traveller, will place Peru at the very top of their travel plans.

Due to the current context of the new COVID variant and taking into account the importance of reactivating the tourism sector, PROMPERU thought it appropriate that its principal strategy be focussed on the promotion of domestic tourism while simultaneously working on various source markets, including India, where we continue to train the travel trade, which allows us to continue receiving prestigious accolades at the international stage, such as the recently announced edition of World Travel Awards South America edition 2021. These international accolades recognise Peru as a dream destination and keep Peru relevant to the plans and priorities in the new year.



Nishant Kashikar

Country Manager (India and Gulf), Tourism Australia

Before the onset of the pandemic, India was the fastest-growing market for Tourism Australia for three consecutive years, i.e., between 2017 to 2019, achieved double-digit growth in arrivals for six consecutive years

and delivered over 400,000 arrivals for the year ended Feb 2020. We remain confident that India will continue to be among Australia's most promising markets for the years to come.

Recent research findings from the Consumer Demand Project (CDP) conducted by Tourism Australia indicate that Australia holds a dominant number one spot across the key factors important to High-Value Travellers (HVTs) and remains consistently number one for

consideration awareness and intention to visit. The CDP report also reveals that from an estimated 2.2 Mn HVTs in India, 82 per cent (1.8 Mn) intend to visit Australia in the next two years.

Tourism Australia's Consumer Travel Sentiment Tracker has consistently revealed that Indian consumers have the highest confidence index, travel and booking intent, and Australia's perceptions of safety remained very high. Other encouraging developments to influence travel to Australia include the announcement of Visa Application Charge (VAC) waiver for Indian tourists whose visas have expired between 20 March 2020 and 30 June 2022 and the resumption of direct flights by Qantas and Air India between India and Australia.



Thoyyib Mohamed
CEO and MD, Maldives Marketing & PR Corporation

The efforts and proactiveness in promoting the Maldives as a destination have brought excellent results. As of 23 December 2021, India is the top source market to the Maldives, with an impressive arrival figure of 286,434 travellers and a market share of 22.5 per cent. This is a 78 per cent growth compared to 2019, our

most successful year in tourism so far. With these figures, we can

As we learn to co-exist with the virus and its variants, we will continue our current plan of action for topical and on-trend marketing and trade activities. We will also introduce new experiences to reinforce destination appeal through exciting advocacy and influencer-led initiatives and experiential content, as we expect India to be amongst the fastest-growing markets for Australia post-COVID.

In recognising the potential of the Indian market, the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade launched the India Economic Strategy to transform Australia's economic partnership with India. The report predicts that, by 2035, arrivals from India could potentially reach up to 1.2 Mn, and these tourists would spend up to A\$ 9bn on their Australian trips.

confidently say that the Indian market has made a full recovery. Since we have already observed such positive growth, we are confident that the upward trend will continue in the future.

The health, safety, and wellbeing of our travellers and the local population will continue to remain our top priority. We will remain vigilant to quickly detect, respond and control outbreaks so that the Maldives will remain safe for travellers. Our dedication to health and safety is the key reason why the Maldives persevered and prospered amidst the pandemic. Our naturally social-distanced islands and stringent measures make the Maldives a safe haven for all travellers whether they stay in a luxury resort, guesthouse, liveaboard, or hotel.



Rajeev Nangia
India Director, Monaco Government Tourist Bureau

2020 was the year in which international tourism came to a complete standstill. 2021 has seen improvements in the tourism sector as the vaccination and booster shots created a higher level of consumer confidence and inspired people to travel again. With the re-launch of the "For You At Last" Campaign, Monaco Tourist and

Convention Authority communicate that it's time for tourism recovery representing the diversity of what Monaco has to offer to tourists.

The Monaco Convention Bureau, the catalyst for the Principality's MICE offering, has launched a new communication campaign with the slogan #REEVENT, which is a rallying cry and an invitation to industry

professionals to come back and organise events in the Principality of Monaco. Since sustainability, environment conservation, and hygiene measures are also in demand, the Monaco Government Tourist and Convention Authority have launched a White Paper on Sustainable Tourism in Monaco. The Destination and its partners adopt solutions to ensure that resources are managed in the most efficient way possible.

With the newly launched campaigns and special initiatives regarding sustainability introduced in the Principality of Monaco, we expect these factors will bring good results for the destination. Due to the new COVID variant threat, our immediate focus is to emphasise the various preventative health measures such as the Monaco Health Pass, Monaco Safe Label, and other precautions like wearing a mask in public places and practicing social distancing, etc. Our efforts will enhance the visitor's arrivals figure into Monaco as soon as possible from India.



Simeron Ghei
India Representative, Jamaica Tourist Board

Travel is bound to recover from its 2020-21 downturn, with vaccinations and booster shots creating a higher level of confidence in people and inspiring significant intent to plan for future travel. The last two years have been a roller-coaster for most people worldwide. With vaccines and digital health passports now making the

rounds, we can finally look forward to new adventures. Living and traveling within the parameters of the protocol is the new normal.

With over 192 countries participating in the World Expo 2020 in

Dubai, the first mega-event since the pandemic broke out has made a global impact and is helping to overcome international reluctance to travel. People visiting the Expo show a positive response regarding travel and tourism. Jamaica has already been opened for international travellers from June 2020 and has recently lifted the travel ban from India. Jamaica's participation will bring in excellent results from this side of the world.

Due to the new COVID variant threat, our immediate focus will be to highlight the safety and preventative health measures introduced and followed by the Government of Jamaica. To keep the destination more relevant in 2022, Jamaica is keen to open a new route between India and Jamaica, making the destination more accessible for Indian travellers.



Brent Hill
CEO, Tourism Fiji

Ever since Fiji opened borders to fully vaccinated visitors from Travel Partner countries for quarantine-free travel on 1st December 2021, it's been an exciting time for us. We're happy to see so many people travelling and extending the average stay to over a week. We expect some 75,000 inbound tourists to visit Fiji over the next few months.

Though India currently does not feature under our 'Travel Partner' countries, we are positive and hopeful to be soon able to welcome Indian travellers back to our shores.

All along the way, last year, we focused on the positives – our vaccination rollout, local tourism re-opening, December re-opening for international visitors, renovations being completed, and campaigns being planned. We had a lot to talk about, and we kept communicating about Fiji. Our priorities were to keep our markets abreast with the latest destination developments from a leisure perspective and COVID-19 safe measures that were being worked on.

As we enter the new year, we will continue encouraging discussions during our regular trade meetings, collate feedback and assess the

trade needs to complement and support them. We are confident both our trade and consumer initiatives will play an enhanced role, as they will help support the travel decision-making process in favour of Fiji and simultaneously raise the profile of Fiji as a visitor destination from India.

Investing in public safety protocols to keep all visitors as protected as possible through the Care Fiji Commitment has been the most critical element and will continue to be for us. Last year, tourism Fiji launched the Care Fiji Commitment Programme as an operational COVID-safe framework for all tourism operators and service providers. Over 1000 businesses are registered under the Care Fiji Commitment Programme, which ensures these properties, operations, and services uphold COVID-safety practices approved by the World Health Organization and recognised by the World Travel and Tourism Council.

With the successful re-opening of borders for our 'Travel Partner' countries, we succeeded in generating a positive image of Fiji – that we are safe, ready, focussed, and a destination that could handle tourists, ensure they had fun and relaxed while keeping them as safe as possible. The buzz around Fiji has been positive and incredible. Our immediate goal is to keep communicating with the trade and consumer to maintain destination confidence and, alongside this work, to aspire affluent travellers who seek premium and personalised experiences to visit Fiji soon.



Berthold Trenkel
Chief Operating Officer, Qatar Tourism

The past year has been all sorts of challenges; however, that has never deterred us from thrusting ahead. We used our time optimally in formulating plans in line with Qatar's National Vision 2030 to become a leading destination as we expanded our tourism proposition.

As part of the 'Qatar Tourism Strategy 2030', we have added a variety of exciting experiences, including a wave of new luxury hotels, theme parks, malls, and major leisure projects, that have recently opened or are set to open in the lead up to the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™. Additionally, we have a host of exciting new initiatives to announce in the coming year, which will include our biggest promotional marketing campaign, "Experience a World Beyond" launched in October 2021 in key markets across the globe and will see its introduction in India within the first two quarters of 2022.

We are now less than a year until the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™, so now is the perfect time to visit Qatar. Qatar is an accessible introduction to the Middle East, blending cosmopolitan modernity and beautiful landscapes with Arabic traditions, cuisines, and cultures. We have a rich cultural heritage, luxury five-star hotels and resorts, great outdoor activities, beaches and museums, and cultural landmarks waiting to be discovered.

While the Indian market situations are dynamic and evolving, our priority is to focus on market recovery and readiness at this given point. With strategic trade partnerships, incentive programmes, target campaigns, and a strong outreach by our partners on the ground, we are positive that the market will see a quick turnaround in good time. And don't forget – Indian nationals are part of the 95 countries welcome to Qatar under the 'visa on arrival' scheme – making us the best destination to visit and discover.

India remains one of the top markets for Qatar, and we continue to engage with the travel trade regularly through our agency partner, who promotes Qatar as a major travel destination, both as a hub and as a final destination, and to drive travel trade engagement. Currently, our plan of action includes joint promotion campaigns, sales calls, TAWASH certifications (our travel expert training program), and activities such as EPEX, MILT among others which help raise awareness for the destination and the extensive developments that are underway. We are witnessing a steady movement in the MICE and Corporate travel segment. India's MICE market has significant potential and is a key driver for Qatar.

Business events are also a rapidly developing subsector of tourism in Qatar. Before the pandemic, it was growing rapidly and had a strong pipeline in the future, with major international conferences, sporting, and business events due to be held in Qatar. Over the next few years, the country will host large-scale events, including FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™, Qatar Grand Prix, Qatar Geneva International Motor Show, to name a few.



Ibu Nia Niscaya
Deputy Marketing, Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy / Tourism and Creative Economy Agency, Republic of Indonesia

The Indonesian government, particularly the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (MoTCE), has initiated protocols for tourism industries, namely Cleanliness, Health, Safety, and Environmental Sustainability (CHSE) protocols through the

InDOnesia CARE Campaign was launched in July 2021.

MoTCE has been working with related ministries and institutions to keep implementing CHSE protocols in whole tourist destinations in Indonesia. It aims to build trust and gain confidence for tourists that all protocols have been implemented in every tourism sector over the nations.

To recover tourism against the COVID-19, MoTCE keeps on the utmost efforts to accelerate tourism recovery by accelerating three main programs:

1. Accelerating vaccination for tourism and creative workers and society in destination: As of December 30, 2021, the number of citizens who already received the first dose of vaccine has reached 160,01 Million (76,83 per cent), and citizens who already received the second dose of vaccine has reached 113,00 Million (54,26 per cent). Specifically, the Indonesian government keeps running the Acceleration of Vaccination in Bali, as it is the main tourist destination in Indonesia.

2. Accelerating CHSE Certification End to End through InDOnesia CARE campaign: Regarding increasing the CHSE certification value, MoTCE has partnered with the Indonesian National Standard (Badan Standar Nasional/ BSN) to create the CHSE standardisation for the tourism industry. As of December 30, 2022, the number of tourist industries that have been already certified has reached 11,986 in 34 provinces and 403 cities/regencies.

3. Destination Readiness and integration with the "Peduli Lindungi (PL)" application: MoTCE encourages all tourists and industries to use PL applications as tourists' tracing and tracking systems. We strongly ensure the end-to-end travel starts from the arrival at the airport, hotel, accommodation, tourist attraction, and so on and up to returning to the airport. We want to show that Indonesia is ready to welcome back international tourists and keep improving the destination experiences.

We need to remain resilient and optimistic against this new reality of COVID variants. Indonesia, especially Bali, has opened international flights and welcomed international tourists starting October 14, 2021. The opening will be done gradually while improving the destination's readiness to welcome tourists. Besides, MoTCE is working hand in hand to develop tourism pillars end to end, starting from the destination, infrastructure, industry, investment, marketing, and event or MICE as well.

The MoTCE will keep implementing 3 (three) strategies to increase and develop tourism sectors for the year ahead, namely: 1. Adaptation 2. Innovation and 3. Collaboration.

Specifically for the India market, MoTCE is initiating various strategies to increase Indian tourists since it is one of our biggest international markets. MoTCE is working hand in hand with the government, wholesalers, travel agents, and other related industries to inspire Indian tourists through campaign #InDOnesiaCare, #itstimeforBali, and #WonderfulJourney by being present online and offline.

In terms of connectivity, MoTCE cooperates with the Ministry of Health Republic of Indonesia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Indonesia, and the Ministry of Transportation Republic of Indonesia to ease direct connectivity such as chartered flights.



Romit Theophilus

Director for India, The German National Tourist Office

Based on feedback received from industry stakeholders, the latent need to travel cannot remain bottled up for long and the cork will pop soon. It is expected that starting March 2022, tourism will start witnessing some signs of recovery. The gradual opening of tourist and cultural businesses in the German states and the relaxation of entry regulations

have inspired potential Indian travellers for their next visit to Germany. As an evolution due to the pandemic, nature and recreational activities gained importance. Outdoor activities are in greater demand, and interest in health, wellness and sustainable vacations are on the rise. Basis the findings of a travel survey, it was found that 'not being overcrowded' was the most important factor to decide on a holiday destination amongst Indians. Peace, quiet, and safety were the next most important aspects. Further, based on feedback received during our interactions with tour operators and travellers, we have noticed a

high demand for Germany this year, especially in the leisure sector. We anticipate Germany being recognised as a go-to travel destination ahead of the summer travel season this year.

The relaunch of tourism in 2022 is in full swing. It was inevitable that the travel bug would prove stronger than the virus. But it is also clear that the places where safety can be guaranteed and not overcrowded will be the first to experience a post-pandemic travel boom. And that is the case within Germany.

Our ongoing mission is to maintain the strong image our customers have of Germany as a travel destination and provide the expertise, up-to-date market analysis, and effective marketing activities that will enable our partners in Germany's tourism industry to make a fresh start. In terms of our strategy jointly with our headquarters, the German National Tourist Board, we are currently working hard to put our marketing on the right track in response to the crisis and looking further ahead. In light of the current trends, we are also strengthening our collaborations with tour operators/travel agents. The experiences gathered during the virtual meetings and events are helping us here. The content of our campaigns for 2022 'German.Local.Culture', 'Embrace Nature', and Feel Good are geared towards the new challenges.



Vachirachai Sirisumpan

Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) New Delhi Office

The last two years have been very challenging for us and everyone in the tourism industry. One of the most important tasks for us, TAT India team, has been to constantly send out positive energy to all our partners in the Indian travel trade. In return, we have received a lot of support from them. We try to stay connected and constantly

communicate with the travel trade and travellers in India, keeping current sentiments and the developing situations in mind.

Thailand has been and will be one of the favourite destinations for Indian travellers but that does not afford us to sit back and relax or put things on hold even when the situation does not permit or facilitate travel to Thailand. We are sure that the India market will rebound fast, as people are looking forward to their next holiday when the time is right.

I am very confident that once the pandemic situation improves and travel restrictions are relaxed by both countries with flights connections, we will see a good number of Indian travellers travel to Thailand once again. This was evident from the fact that some charters which were supported by us and operated in the months of December and January to Phuket drew a good response.

Our strategy is to maintain Thailand as a "Top of Mind" destination by giving a new perspective about the destination in line with the current marketing campaign "Amazing New Chapter", and focus more on sustainable and responsible tourism. We remain a very safe destination to visit, considering the strict safety standards maintained by Thailand. We will also maintain constant and regular communication with our travel trade partners in India and Thailand.

The other strategy is to move fast and be flexible in the market. At the first stage we are focussing and preparing to push travellers whom we have identified as our "First Movers" these are the people who want and are ready to travel to Thailand, based on segments such as Millennial Group, Golf, Wedding and Incentive groups.



A FUN-FILLED FAMILY VACATION IN MONACO

Monaco is an ultimate holiday destination for those who want the finer things in life, laden with luxury, glitz and glamour. However, Monaco also makes for a great family destination, offering a perfect vacation for all in the family. Whether children, teens, adults or old, the Principality never fails to make an impression. The mild climate, seaside locations and an impressive density of sights, attractions and experiences are loved by all age groups. Along with safe and quality environment, adults and children alike will find their happy place in Monaco.

For the past 150 years, Monaco has been the prime destination for the most selective travellers. Through the decades, the Principality has continuously developed a broad offering of services catering to the most exclusive of experiences, combining both innovative concepts and internationally renowned historic establishments, perpetuating excellence. So, whether you are traveling to Monaco by yourself, as a couple, with family or friends: Monaco is FOR YOU!

To mention, Monaco is also a picture-perfect family destination. For families visiting Monaco, there are activities, parks, green spaces and beaches, all which feature on the menu of their highlights, underpinned by unparalleled security. There is something for all desires and all passions. From toddlers to adults, each family will live unique experiences in this ideal place.

Also, the whole year here is studded with events and festivities that are open to all, such as the winter ice-rink that transforms into a swimming pool. The Principality has cultural events of all kinds, including some starry events like the Monte-Carlo Jazz Festival, Ballets de Monte-Carlo, Monte-Carlo Spring Arts Festival, Monte-Carlo Sporting Summer Festival and many more.

In Monaco, there is something for all ages and cultures, with all families treated to the facilities they need to spend their own quality time in an exceptional setting. Thus, get together with your family and share unforgettable moments in Monaco!

From the fascinating world of the Oceanographic Museum in Monaco-Ville to the prehistoric displays at the Museum of Anthropology, the temporary exhibitions at the New National Museum of Monaco (NMNM), or the daily Change of the Guard at the Prince's Palace - there is something to satisfy all tastes and all passions. Everyone will be able to marvel while strolling through the many traditional and exotic gardens of the Principality or travel through time with the collection of cars of HSH the Prince of Monaco. Where the heart of the city beats there is also shopping for all, where adults and children alike will find what they are looking for. Families will surely enjoy the

various activities and events offered there throughout the year in a safe and high-quality environment.

If your family would like to discover Monaco in the wink of an eye, what could be more appropriate than a ride on the little train (Monaco Tours) or a Hop-on Hop-off bus (Monaco Le Grand Tour). You can also ride a bike, don a helmet and explore Monaco's streets and alleys.

Later, recall all the wonderful moments of a day well spent with your family in the beautiful Principality around a convivial table in the Michelin-starred restaurants of Monaco like Le Louis XV by Chef Alain Ducasse and Le Grill at Hotel de Paris; Blue Bay by Chef Marcel Ravin at Monte-Carlo Bay Hotel and Resort; or enjoy the Japanese cuisine at Yoshi in the Hotel Metropole Monte-Carlo. Enjoy farm to table cuisine at Elsa, a 100% organic Michelin-starred restaurant. Chef at Yannick Alleno at l'Hotel Hermitage Monte-Carlo showcases Mediterranean cuisine. With a kitchen that opens onto the dining room, Le Restaurant Du Metropole Monte-Carlo places great emphasis on inventive and flavorful cuisine. Or just choose to go to Antonio Salvatore's table at the newly-starred Rampoldi restaurant.

For more local experiences, head to the Halle Gourmande at La Condamine market, Stars'n'Bars at the Port and Mozza in Le Larvotto district.

Be in Monaco to take advantage of the wide range of activities and events available year-round in an environment as safe as it is enchanting.

Monaco is not just a destination; it is the experience of a lifetime!



Cruising into 2022

From being a cynosure of the leisure travel industry to being right in the eye of the storm during the last two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the cruise industry has been subjected to major scepticism and baptism by fire by both the cruiser and the authorities. Cruising was eyed with unwarranted suspicion, not applying to it the same yardstick as other travel verticals like airlines, trains, and hotels. While domestic airline operations resumed to near-normal levels in countries and international air route bubbles were established, cruise liners had to find their middle ground operating short cruises to nowhere, catering only to the local populace as inter-country port visits were not allowed. Since mid-2021, cruise line operating statistics showed positivity in consumer confidence and safety. The omicron variant appears to be sending ripples as things were looking up. TTJ speaks to the leading lights of the Indian cruise industry to find out about the technology, safety upgrades, confidence-building measures, expansion plans, and what perhaps 2022 holds in store for the industry.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja



It's no secret that no cruise liner was spared in the COVID-19 pandemic, and the last two years have been catastrophic for the industry, but learnings have emerged, and now cruise lines are much better prepared to handle any future situations. Explaining the situation, **Nishith Saxena, Founder & Director, Cruise Professionals** (India GSA for six global cruise brands), elaborates, "One of the greatest learnings for the entire industry and stakeholders is that COVID-19 virus did not originate on a cruise ship. Secondly, with each of the cruise lines carrying thousands of passengers each week since July 2021, there have been minuscule cases of COVID-19 onboard and the need for cancellation of cruise has been extremely limited. Therefore, establishing that hygiene protocols on cruise ships are better than the best in the travel industry. Most important – cruising has emerged to be the safest mode of luxury vacation where 95-100 per cent passengers and 100 per cent of the crew is vaccinated."

Adding further to this, **Naresh Rawal, Vice President, Sales India & South Asia, Genting Cruise Lines**, said, "In these last two years, Genting Cruise Lines was at the forefront rethinking, redesigning and enhancing our operations to adapt to these new travel environments and trends, especially in safety and preventive measures. We were the first international cruise line in the world to resume cruises since July 2020 with Dream Cruises. To date, all three ships under the Dream Cruises fleet are currently operating safe cruises in Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as for Star Cruises in Penang, Malaysia."

Everyone agrees to the need to be vigilant and sensitive about the new twists and turns the pandemic takes and ensure measures are in place and updated following both international guidelines and domestic requirements. **Sanjay Kapoor, VP, Sales Support & Marketing, STIC Travel Group, GSA for Holland America Line, Windstar Cruises and A-Rosa River Cruises**, explains, "Holland America Line, has enhanced the air-handling systems onboard all ships using a combination of increased circulation of fresh air together with upgraded air filtration. Windstar Cruises has implemented 'Beyond Ordinary Care' program on all of its luxury and semi-luxury yachts. This is a multi-layered strategy with key hospital-grade elements: HEPA (high-efficiency particulate) filters and UV-C, ultraviolet germicidal irradiation to filter and disinfect the air, plus electrostatic sprayers to sanitise all surfaces throughout the yachts. Similarly, at A-ROSA river cruises in Europe, the health, safety and well-being of all guests and crew members has always been their top priority. For this reason, the



▲ Nishith Saxena

A-ROSA Care Team has developed 'Safety First' concept, a comprehensive health and hygiene concept based on the official directives and recommendations of the Robert Koch Institute, Germany's federal government agency and the research institute responsible for disease control and prevention, which meets national and international health standards."

Today, every cruise ship has a team of experienced doctors and nurses trained to manage various medical conditions, including COVID-19. Saxena also points out, "The Return-To-Service" for most cruise lines was delayed due to unprecedented scrutiny and overcautious approach from the global regulatory authorities over the last twenty months. Having said that, it is important to note, all decisions by cruise lines have been taken based on science and in collaboration with relevant authorities ensuring that health safety of the crew, passengers and communities we visit on our voyages, is never compromised."

Despite the Omicron variant, the mood is upbeat for 2022, Rawal explains, "At Genting Cruise Lines, we remain optimistic of the cruise industry in 2022. Over the past year, we observed an increase in consumer confidence in cruising as we had successfully demonstrated safe cruises in these recent years, resulting in emerging new domestic markets with consumers also making bookings within a longer lead time in advance. We have to adopt a realistic approach in our operations as the pandemic will continue to evolve. As such, it's crucial for cruise lines to work closely with international bodies and local authorities to monitor the situation closely, so preventive and safety measures can be effectively adapted and implemented to safeguard all on board."

The need now is for the governments worldwide to realistically and pragmatically evaluate the current situation and open their



▲ Naresh Rawal

borders and ports to regular air and cruise traffic to all fully vaccinated and screened travellers. This will encourage a transition to normalcy and do away with knee-jerk reflexes and backtracking of decisions which are detrimental not only to the travel and cruise industry, but to the global economy as a whole.

Kapoor, however, points out that the uncertainty surrounding omicron has affected their future bookings, "Usually this is the season for promoting and selling Alaska and Europe cruises, but with the recent travel restrictions and quarantine requirements, people are hesitant to book right now and mostly postponing their plans. Most of our agents have also put on hold their group allocation requirements. Additionally, non-issuance or delay in visas is also making travel difficult."

Discussing the impact of the very recent caution to avoid cruises issued by CDC, Saxena, emphasised, "CLIA- Cruise Line International Association which is the voice of the cruise industry has reacted sharply by stating that the decision by the CDC to raise the travel level for the cruise is particularly perplexing considering the cases identified on cruise ships consistently make up a very slim minority of the total population onboard—far fewer than on land—and the majority of those cases are asymptomatic or mild in nature, posing little to no burden on medical resources onboard or onshore." He further added, "There has been no dip in cruise queries or bookings after the CDC warning, which also means that even passengers and travel advisors understand the safe environment provided onboard the cruises. We assess, in all likelihood, this CDC alert would be revised before the end of this month unless something dramatic unfolds."

Many new ships were under construction and scheduled for deliveries at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some deliveries were



▲ Sanjay Kapoor

postponed but not cancelled due to constant fleet renewal and the latest technology and ship design upgrades. According to **Rashmi Ahuja, Divisional Head, MSC Cruises India**, “MSC launched two new ships in 2021, MSC Seashore and MSC Virtuosa. In 2022, MSC World Europa will be launched - the first ship in the trailblazing MSC World-Class fleet. LNG powered with one of the world’s cleanest marine fuels and featuring breakthrough green technologies, MSC World Europa symbolises the beginning of a new era of cruising.”



▲ Rashmi Ahuja

Rawal also states, “The pandemic situation has affected the delivery schedule for our ships under construction. However, we are looking forward to welcoming our Global Class ship under Dream Cruises this year as we introduce the next generation of cruising.” Kapoor too is upbeat about additions to his portfolio, “Ms Rotterdam, the newest Pinnacle-class ship of Holland America Line sailed on its maiden voyage in September 2021. Windstar, on the other hand, undertook a USD 250 million Star Plus initiative to completely transform their three

all-suite luxury Star Plus Class ships—Star Breeze, Star Legend, and Star Pride—end-to-end to offer guests more comfort in-suite, more delight on deck, etc. A new A-Rosa cruise ship, A-Rosa Sena is currently under construction, scheduled to depart on its inaugural voyage from Cologne on May 21, 2022.”

Saxena summarises, “The new year will see 32 new cruise ships debut, made up of 25 new ships on the cruise ship order book for 2022, plus an additional seven vessels that were built in 2021 and are expected to enter revenue service this year. The new ship line up of 2022 will contribute 44,659 new berths to the market, plus an additional 23,366 berths from ships from 2021 that will debut this year, meaning 68,025 new berths are set to enter the cruise industry in 2022.”

Clear indications are that the cruise business is set to grow at a very fast pace in the year 2022–2023, catering to the pent-up demand of first-time cruisers who are searching for a very safe and exciting vacation option. In their advertisements and regular communication to their past and potential consumers, the cruise lines have been very upfront about the consumer-friendly booking terms and value additions, motivating passengers to choose a cruise and book early.

“All Ahoy...Bon Voyage”

Norwegian Viva to begin sailing Mediterranean itineraries in June 2023

Launching June 2023, Norwegian Viva will be sailing on a series of Mediterranean itineraries, homeporting in Lisbon, Portugal; Venice (Trieste) and Rome (Civitavecchia), Italy; and Athens (Piraeus), Greece.

Team TTJ

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) on January 13, 2022, unveiled Norwegian Viva, the next ship in its brand-new Prima Class.

Providing guests with elevated experiences including more wide-open spaces, thoughtful and stunning design and exceptional service, Norwegian Viva will begin sailing remarkable Mediterranean itineraries in June 2023, homeporting in key Southern European port cities including Lisbon, Portugal; Venice (Trieste) and Rome (Civitavecchia), Italy; and Athens (Piraeus), Greece. She will then sail the Southern Caribbean for her 2023-2024 Winter Season offering warm-weather getaways from San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Mirroring the upscale design and structure of her record-breaking sister ship Norwegian Prima, Norwegian Viva,

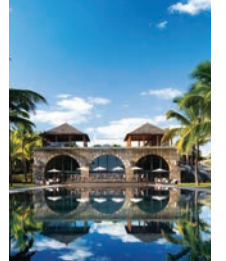
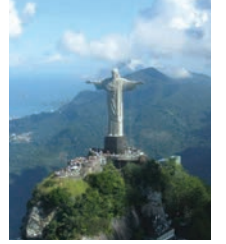
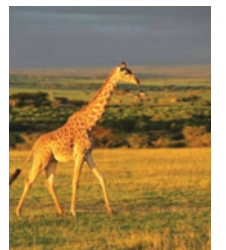
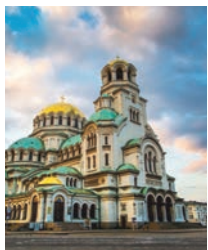
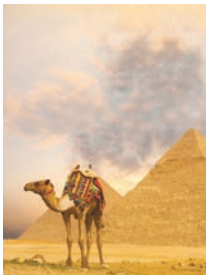
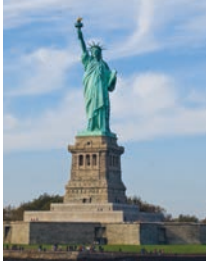
also built by renowned Italian shipbuilder Fincantieri in Marghera, Italy, will debut at 965 feet long, 142,500 gross tons and accommodate 3,219 guests at double occupancy. Travellers will live up every second of their journey in the most spacious accommodations including the brands’ largest inside, ocean view and balcony category staterooms.

The world-class vessel will not only offer the highest staffing levels and space ratio of any new cruise ship in the contemporary and premium cruise categories and largest variety of suite categories available at sea but will also boast a redefined The Haven by Norwegian, NCL’s ultra-premium keycard only access ship-within-a-ship concept. The Haven’s public areas and 107 suites designed by Piero Lissoni, one of Italy’s most renowned designers, will feature an

expansive sundeck, a stunning infinity pool overlooking the ship’s wake and an outdoor spa with a glass-walled sauna and cold room.

The Prima Class’ variety of recreational activities also make their elevated comeback on Norwegian Viva with only-available-on-Prima-Class experiences including the fastest freetail drop dry slides at sea with The Rush and The Drop and the largest three-level racetrack at sea with the Viva Speedway.

Norwegian Viva will feature Ocean Boulevard, the 44,000 square foot outdoor walkway which wraps around the entire ship; Indulge Food Hall featuring 11 varieties of eateries; The Concourse boasting an outdoor sculpture garden; expansive pool decks and infinity style pools at Infinity Beach and Oceanwalk, showcasing glass bridges above water.



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Madhya Pradesh's naturally beautiful Kanha and Jabalpur

Kanha

Walk through the forest habitat and experience the scenic beauty of White Marble in the moonlight.

Kanha Tiger Reserve Madhya Pradesh's largest national park is home to barasinghas - Madhya Pradesh's state animal and a deer species that was brought back from the brink of extinction in addition to tigers and other wildlife. The southern swamp deer (barasingha), which is found only in Kanha Tiger Reserve, has seen its population increase slowly since the 1980s and now is on the road to recovery. The reserve sees two rivers flow through it - the perennial Halon and the seasonal Banjar - which give the wildlife places to congregate during hot summers and leave you with great spots at which to see the animals bison, nilgai, gaur, chital, hyena, jackal and wild hare can all be found in the park, alongside



Kanha Tiger Reserve

peafowl and owl, cobras, saw-scaled vipers and Indian pythons are what you have to look out for on the forest floor, in addition to 18 rare species of plants that can be found in the reserve.

BEST TIME TO VISIT: October to June is the best time to visit the park. During the monsoon rains, the park

remains shut.

GETTING THERE:

Jabalpur is the closest airport, with a four to five-hour car ride after landing to get to the national park.

Jabalpur (Bhedaghat)

Did you know the city of Jabalpur is where the game now known as snooker, originated? This is but one of the several interesting things about this cultural capital of Madhya Pradesh. One of Jabalpur's most famous sights is the marble rock formation at Bhedaghat (26 km away), which changes form as the River Narmada sculpts it with her flowing waters. You might fall in love with the view of the 100ft- high mountains here, but the real star here is the Chausath Yogini Temple, which counts among the most ancient heritage sites in the country.

Speaking of amour, the Dhuandhar Falls (30 km away) will have you on your knees. Its ferocious roar, coupled with its gentle beauty, makes it one of the crown jewels of Jabalpur.

The city's imperial history is romanced by the nature that surrounds it. The massive Dumna Nature Reserve Park (10 km away) is utterly beautiful, and a great picnic and fishing spot for families. Jabalpur also has one of the tallest sitting statues of Lord Shiva in India, standing at a whopping 76ft. Soak up the history of the city by visiting the Madan Mahal Fort (12 km away) and Hanumantal Jain Mandir.

You can also visit



Marble Rocks at Bhedaghat

Tilwara Ghat, where Mahatma Gandhi's ashes were immersed. An interesting illusion created by nature, the famous Balancing Rock is a great place to visit and makes for interesting photographs. And do not miss the ancient inscriptions of the Edicts of Ashoka at Rupnath (84 km; www.asibhopal.nic.in).

But, if the way to your heart is through good food instead, make sure to bite into the famous gakkad-bharta and khoyaki jalebi unique to Jabalpur. We won't judge you if you find yourself trying to smuggle jalebi into your luggage on your way home.

BEST TIME TO VISIT: October to June is the best time to visit.

GETTING THERE: Jabalpur has its own airport and railway station.



Madan Mahal Fort



MAHARAJA CHHATRASAL

CONVENTION CENTRE - KHAJURAHO



The UNESCO World Heritage site Khajuraho attracts tourists for its mesmerising temples. Adding on more to its features is a convention center with brilliant facilities. Named as Maharaja Chhatrasal Convention Center , this venue will cater to all your business needs. Replete with all modern amenities and infrastructure, this convention center offers a secure space to host corporate banquets for teams, both large and small, amidst a soothing decor and ambience.

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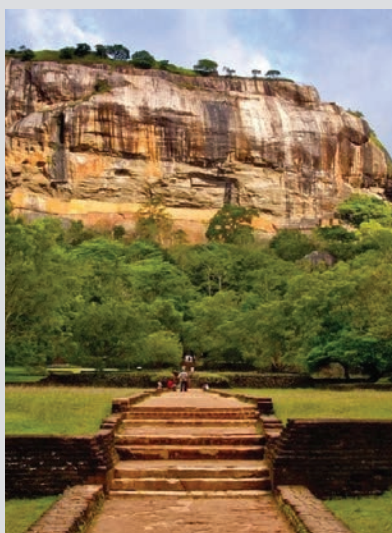
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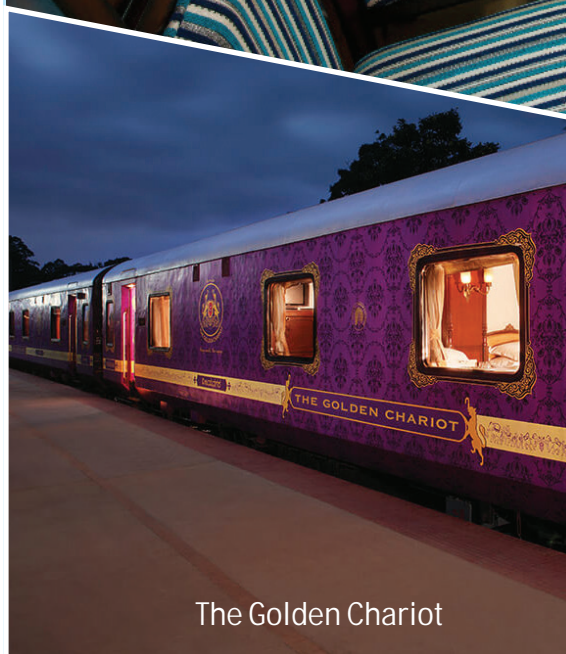
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IndiGo ✈️ Focusing on domestic expansion until resumption of international scheduled flights

At IndiGo, current efforts are on strengthening the balance sheet and return to profitability. While sharing developments at the airline, Sanjay Kumar, Chief Strategy & Revenue Officer, IndiGo, also explains that their primary focus is to keep costs low and grow rapidly in domestic and international markets with a sharp eye on the health and safety of their customers and employees. They also look forward to a decent demand and healthy growth of the aviation industry in 2022.

Prashant Nayak

IndiGo, after resuming operations, has always looked for new opportunities, such as charter flights and cargo business. They were determined to use this opportunity to get better at everything they did. Thus, they set aggressive goals for improving their product delivery, customer service, brand value, employee engagement, cost reduction, liquidity, and revenue generation.

The years 2020 and 2021 have indeed been very challenging for the aviation and travel industry and the global economy, and it is the economy that drives demand for the aviation business. Sanjay says, "We do remain very bullish on the future of Indian aviation - all the underlying elements for rapid growth continue, and I think we have barely scratched the surface in terms of what is possible for the future. Undoubtedly, we are making constant progress. The difficulties of the last years allowed us to explore uncharted territories and emerge stronger with more result-driven strategies in place."

The aviation industry had seen more changes in the last year than ever before, with the pandemic that completely changed how we work and live. It was critical to explore new avenues of revenue generation. IndiGo operated on-demand domestic and international CarGo operations, charter flights, repatriation operations. After witnessing the potential in cargo operations, they launched all CarGo flights as a stand-alone revenue stream. Cargo has indeed been a great contributor towards revenue generation for the aviation sector.

"Additionally, we started 6E Wedding Charter service for our passengers in collaboration with Accor Hotels to offer an exclusive family and friends only IndiGo charter, a hotel deal and safe

travel during pandemic times. We also recently tied up with MakeMyTrip, India's leading online travel company, to launch exclusive charter services between Mumbai and Phuket," informs Sanjay.

Presently, IndiGo is also well-positioned geographically to expand into numerous high-growth markets with their single-aisle product. Sanjay shares, "Our four-corner strategy from our four cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata allows us to serve markets all the way from Moscow to Nairobi to Manila to Beijing, within a range of six hours. We are looking forward to restarting our rapid international growth as soon as the pandemic recedes and international borders open up."

Omicron is, of course, a major uncertainty for the travel industry. While the impact of Omicron has been modest so far, the airline's future bookings are experiencing a slowdown, and they cannot predict with certainty when the trend will reverse again. They anticipate that around 20 per cent of their current scheduled operations will be withdrawn from service.

Elaborating on business travel, Sanjay said, "From what we are seeing currently, business travel may take a backseat for some time until the virus subsides to a greater extent. However, we realised that business meetings can still happen virtually. People have stably moved to technology for their business needs, which will hold strong until the pandemic has receded significantly. We are, however, seeing certain segments of the corporate segments getting back to flying in a phased manner. In addition, SME sector, along with other segments such as visiting friends and family, leisure travel has eventually picked up and people will continue to visit their close ones. People are also exploring their own country for leisure purposes and will



▲ Sanjay Kumar

continue to do so until international travel restrictions get lifted."

IndiGo has witnessed good demand in tier-1 and tier-2 cities, driven by SME and VFR traffic. Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) and leisure travel will drive business for airlines, emphasising domestic traffic, especially between metros and tier 2/3 cities. The airline enhanced domestic connectivity in the regional stations, including Leh, Agra, Darbhanga, Kurnool, Bareilly, Durgapur, Jabalpur, Gwalior, and Rajkot in 2021. "Observing the current situation, we can very much say that yes, regional routes will remain at the centre stage and will propel the overall growth for some time," points out Sanjay.

Running a fleet of more than 275 aircraft, IndiGo is currently in the process of replacing its A320ceo aircraft with more fuel-efficient A320neo aircraft. So, the fleet size will remain around 275 until this process is completed by the end of 2022. However, in the absence of the scheduled commercial international flights, they are still expanding their network domestically to cater to consumer demand.

Committed to build customised travel and tourism services for clients across the globe

Dex Group is one of the most prominent travel groups in India, with offices in all major cities across the country. With a diverse portfolio of travel products, the Group has ensured that a comprehensive portfolio of service offerings has been created to add value to an extensive client base and new potential customers. Ramesh Marwah, Director, Dex Group, in this interaction with TTJ, among other information, shares that while their major endeavour is to achieve the goals of their existing principals, they are constantly working towards strategising the best sales and marketing techniques to bring out the best for the airline and tourism brands they represent.

Prashant Nayak

Dex Group has diversified interests in the travel and tourism industry in India. Tell us about the travel verticals that your Group represents?

Dex Group has been in the industry for over 56 years. We have represented major airlines as GSA, including Thai Airways, Qatar Airways, KLM, Air France, and British Airways. We represent key airlines like LOT Polish Airlines, Alitalia, and Air Austral. We also represent Expedia-TAAP (Travel Agents Affiliate Programme) and Hotels.com in India apart from Cargo & Freight Forwarding, Inbound Tourism, Hospitality & Restaurant business.

With over five decades into business in India, is aviation still a major focus area of Dex Group's operations? Can you tell us about the Group's business model in the aviation business?

While Aviation is still one of the major focus areas for Dex Group, diversifying our business in the hospitality and tourism sector continues to be equally important for us. As GSA, we assist and support the airline in every possible manner to achieve their goals and meet their expectations as their partner in India.

Do you think there is still a huge untapped potential in India's aviation market?

As per a report in the Times of India, December 12, 2021, based on CMIE, Bureau of Transportation, India's International traffic grew to an estimated 27 million departures and 18 million arrivals in 2019 compared to 160 million departures and arrivals each of the USA and China. There is a lot to catch up on for our country! Still, with the forecasted growth of 9.5 per cent in the Indian economy in FY 21-22, travel is bound to grow beyond pre-COVID levels. Add to this the huge pent-up demand and stimulation of travel and tourism thanks to

the Government's plans for new airports, and our country will require enhanced frequencies and additional gateways for existing airlines operating from/to India as also opening of Indian skies to more and more airlines to meet our growing traveller's demand.

As the travel industry makes a slow restart with its highs and lows due to the pandemic, how is your Group ensuring sustainable growth, forging new partnerships, increasing revenues, and reducing your clients' costs?

As we wait for the borders to be opened to airlines operating regular scheduled flights to help revive and recover the industry, survival, and retention of key resources have been of utmost importance during these most difficult times. We are quite optimistic about the industry to bounce back, scale newer heights in Q1 and Q2 of 2022 and help in the implementation of our plans to not only pick up a major share of revenues for our clients but work towards the reduction of their costs. Our ongoing efforts are to use our experience and expertise to assist and establish new companies keen to set sail in India and offer solutions to existing companies with unmet expectations and an inadequate share of the India market.

As a representation company for many international aviation and tourism brands, how are you connecting and reaching out to existing B2B travel partners and new travel agents in India to get their attention?

Since the beginning of 2020 and to date, mail-shots, updates on social media, apart from conducting webinars, have helped us reach out to Trade Partners and share changes in the product and services offered by our clients.

According to you, how important is innovation and technology in your



▲ Ramesh Marwah

line of business?

Thanks to COVID-19, webinars, and social media have emerged as major sources to 'reach, connect and communicate' in the shortest possible time for our line of business.

Despite the pandemic, we see many hotels being launched in India. Can you throw light on this trend in the hospitality scenario of India?

Restricted operation of international airlines and continuation of stricter trans-border travel protocols due to new COVID variants; there has been a huge surge in Domestic Tourism that has not only helped the revival of the Hospitality Industry but has also highlighted the potential that exists in our country for much-required growth in the Hospitality segment.

Post COVID-19, what is the new vision and mission of Dex Group?

To partner, guide, and assist our clients in achieving their goals and make up for the missed opportunities and lost revenues during the pandemic in every possible manner.

In pursuit of a perfect destination during COVID times

With the emergence of the new COVID variant Omicron, travel plans for 2022 have been disrupted yet again. Many countries are now entering a new phase in fighting the virus while at the same time managing the re-opening of the tourism economy. However, the pandemic has led to travellers rethinking how they experience the world, and now they look forward to visiting unknown or overlooked destinations and locations. They are now really interested in visiting nearby places, offering ease of restriction, providing decent travel packages, and which are picture-perfect with a sustainable environment. We asked some DMCs their point of view on such destinations and whether they had new attractions in their portfolio. While some mentioned new places, some are strategising and planning some unique destinations for their trade partners to be aware of. Read on to know more...

Prashant Nayak



Nisha Shrivastva

India Head, DMC Reps; Director Sales, Sunrise Representations

COVID has indeed led to a lot of rethinking in the traveller's mind, and the planners are looking at new avenues and even methods of travel. The places which are overlooked by people who love to meander to different locations are the safest in times of such a pandemic. Maldives is an apt example of a destination that was only

considered a luxury destination and has proved itself to be the top performer during COVID due to its proximity to India and easy COVID norms. Similarly, Sri Lanka, our neighbouring country, did well in Christmas and New Year due to its easy COVID guidelines and since it is a complete destination attracting beach lovers, wildlife enthusiasts, and pilgrim tourists alike. Formula 1 Bahrain Grand Prix is to take place in March, and the country is inviting travellers to experience the destination. Saudi Arabia, for instance, has new hotel expansion plans as it is gearing up for tourism arrivals. These countries have not been popular even though they have the infrastructure and the facilities that an Indian traveller looks for in a destination. Thus, we plan to promote these to the travel trade partners.

Apart from the already mentioned ones, Kenya, Tanzania,

Namibia, Morocco, Madagascar, Scotland, Russia, Georgia, Malta, Armenia, Argentina, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Vietnam, and Cambodia are destinations to vie for. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have been working hard to maintain a relationship with travel agents by organising webinars in promoting the destinations, visibility on digital platforms and social media to stay connected with our target group and sustain the urge to learn about newer destinations. In the days to come, we continue to organise webinars since we represent almost forty DMCs, participate in roadshows, trade shows, organise agent training programmes, and educational FAM trips to educate the travel trade partners with as much information as possible. These initiatives will provide travel agents insight into the unique and unexplored destinations to showcase to their travellers.

DMC Reps specialises in promoting a unique selection of Destination Management Companies to outbound markets around the globe. With its professional teams in Germany, the UK, Russia, China, India, South East Asia, and Australia, DMC Reps offers a unique proposition – to grow their client's DMC business in the world's biggest outbound travel markets, all at the same time, with one trusted partner. DMC Reps offers services that have been fine-tuned to assist their DMC partners with strategic positioning, strengthening current relationships, and creating new partnerships with potential tour operators and travel agencies.



Sandeep Khetarpal

CEO, The Global Rep

With the ease of restrictions last year, Indian travellers turned towards exploring lesser-known or hidden travel gems that offered tranquillity and divinity. Once the fear of Omicron subsides, a similar trend will continue in 2022. The lesser-known destinations will surely benefit from the emerging travel patterns as below for 2022.

Travellers will be interested in exploring the unexplored hidden destinations in 2022 and will prefer to visit lesser-known spots.

The demand for destinations with abundant natural habitats is expected to increase as people have been craving outdoors. People

have been seeking more experiential and meaningful travel lately, meaning they want to truly connect to destinations.

Travellers will be keen on short-haul holidays which are closer, easy visas, hence, instant getaways.

Serbia, a beautiful South European country, offers visa free travel for Indians. Ukraine, an East European country with UNESCO Heritage sights, nightlife, and casinos, along with other countries such as Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan also offer e-visas for Indians. These destinations will get popular among Indian travellers in 2022.

The Global Rep is a representation company that works with the world's most professional and alluring travel brands and experiences. The company represents a curated collection of unique, exclusive, and truly unforgettable travel providers from around the globe, ranging from DMCs, luxury yachts, hotels, to tourism boards.



Puneet Arora
Co-Founder, Holidays Carnival Europe

The tourism sector could not remain indifferent to the sustainability challenge of these times. Today, most governments, international development agencies, trade associations, academic institutions, and non-government organisations acknowledge that there cannot be development that

generates benefits without sustainability.

Tourism can provide a growing source of opportunities for

enterprise development and employment creation and stimulate investment and support for local services, even in quite remote communities. We have learned in our experience that lesser-known destinations have always been attracting tourism before pandemics too. This pandemic has exposed humankind to the viruses that may come and go in the future; hence, travellers are and will be keen to look for lesser crowded destinations with all facilities, safety and hygiene will be a priority. So, as per our outlook, it seems such destinations will be beneficial to invest in, so that they help not only tourism but also local communities.

Holidays Carnival Group is a DMC for the UK, Europe since 2016 and for Russia and CIS countries under the brand, The Travel Carnival since Feb 2021.



Rajiv Verma
Sales Director, India & Asia, Best Value Tourism (Dubai)

There are no second thoughts that now the travellers are rethinking about destinations and exploring new destinations around the world, preferring short haul international destinations or within their own country. Currently, with few island destinations opening up and catering to the high-end

traveller, it is too early to comment that a new era of sustainable and high-value tourism is dawning. Whether during the pre- or post-COVID period, customers are only looking for the best value for their money with economical packages and prefer to spend reasonably. The demand for popular destinations remains unchanged as there are still lots of first-time travellers, thus increasing the numbers for these destinations year on year. Internationally the Maldives, and Goa, in domestic markets remain the favourite amongst honeymooners and couples. Dubai

with Abu Dhabi and Ras Al-Khaimah are also hot-selling leisure destinations for Indian travellers.

As a destination promotion representative with interests in the UAE, I would certainly prefer to promote and stress more on Ras Al-Khaimah. The place is swarmed by tourists of diverse interests throughout the year. Direct air services have recently resumed from different Indian gateways to Ras Al-Khaimah, and this will certainly bring a boost to its tourism serving as a new direct tourist destination for international travellers. With our continued practice of selling UAE packages to our Indian partners and in line with our promotions, different travel packages are being designed for different segments. Soon discussions with Ras Al-Khaimah Tourism will certainly be on our plan to market and promote it as a new and direct destination of UAE to the Indians.

Best Value Tourism is one of the leading DMCs in the United Arab Emirates that provides high-quality travel-related experiences and efficient customer service, thus contributing to UAE's growing tourism industry. The company is fully equipped to assist travel partners in planning and organising cultural, historical, adventure, desert safari, city, and various sports tours in the UAE.



Vineet Srivastava
Managing Director, Yorker Holidays Services

With the varied and multiple travel restrictions during these COVID times combined with expensive airfares due to limited flight connectivity, the consumer was looking for convenience, cost, and safety. These factors instilled the immediate demand to look at self-drive destinations around your city of residence

or exotic destinations within the country. The other options were short-haul international destinations that instilled confidence and safety and did not burn a hole in your pocket. So, we saw a rush for these destinations, and this also highlights the fact that domestic tourism offers enough scope, and there is an immediate need to develop and upgrade infrastructure in these destinations as they will prove to be sound investments both for now and the future, sustaining domestic demand and encouraging development.

During COVID, we did good business within India; Goa, Kashmir and Leh Ladakh generated high demand. Internationally, Maldives and Dubai kept us busy. So, unless the lurking shadow of COVID passes over completely, airfares become more affordable, and travel restrictions are eased, the traveller will continue to be cautious. There will definitely be leisure travel happening, but domestic and short-haul international destinations will call the shots. Due to proximity with Delhi and easy access via superhighways, Uttar Pradesh holds promise, and we are soon launching a Ramayana Circuit based on UP destinations very soon.

Yorker Holidays Services is a B2B-focused wholesale travel organisation with a specialisation in sales representation for exclusive travel products. Offering a bouquet of international and domestic travel-related products and services, such as cruises, hotels, sightseeing, transfers, coach tours, international rail ticketing, visas, and travel insurance, they bring huge value to the agent's business. Their outbound destinations include Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Dubai, and the Maldives.

THE FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL CONTINUES

Associations keep the momentum going

While the pandemic has been very harsh on the travel sector, it has also reaffirmed the importance of the tourism industry with the center and state governments. The added advantage is that they have started recognising and acknowledging the potential of travel associations. That is because many associations in 2020 and 2021 have been consistently representing the travel sector and chasing the governments to bring relief to the sector. Even today, many are still fighting against the odds and vehemently chasing their plans for 2022 in their own respective ways. We at TTJ asked the Presidents of Pan India travel associations for their top agendas for 2022, systems and policies to promote solidarity within the travel industry, and how their associations are targeting, engaging, and creating confidence with potential new business segments such as Revenge travel. Read on to know their views.

Ravi Sharma



Rajiv Mehra
President – IATO

The topmost plan of IATO is to see the situation at hand and then appeal to the Government to start the scheduled flights when the time is opportune. Let me put it this way that the plan on the anvil is the Extension of Service Exports from India

Scheme (SEIS) for the tourism industry for the next five years in the upcoming Foreign Trade Policy, 2021-25. Since the current Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20 is likely to be replaced by new Foreign Trade Policy 2021-25, the Association has recommended that:

- the benefit of the SEIS scheme may be continued for the tour operators and travel agencies for the next five years under the new FTP;
- the admissible rate of SEIS may be hiked from 7 per cent to 10 per cent of net foreign exchange earned by the tourism industry.
- SEIS should continue to be available to the first recipient of foreign exchange.

IATO wrote to Director General, Directorate General of Foreign Trade with a request to open window for selling of duty scrips by the tour operators

We have also requested Secretary Tourism, Govt of India

regarding confusion created by Travel Advisories/Guidelines of State Governments for foreign/international travellers and MOT to take up with MOHFW to issue guidelines to all the State Governments/Union Territories which they should follow so that once normal international flight operation resumed, foreign tourists could travel to India without any confusion or hesitation. I spoke about this during my interview on Zee Business on 30th December 2021 at 5 pm.

After the situation becomes normal, our main objective would be to start marketing and promotions in overseas markets and the Ministry of Tourism by conducting roadshows, participating in overseas travel marts, and requesting the Government for aggressive promotions and publicity through electronic and print media.

Secondly, once the travel and business conditions become conducive, there have to be policy formulations that must look at opening the borders, at least with those countries who have recovered to a sizable extent and are also opening up to tourists.

Other policy facets need to be viewed to promote solidarity within the travel industry, such as:

- Removal of cascading effect of GST on Tourism Industry
- Removal of GST on services provided outside India to foreign tourists
- Withdrawal of tax collection at source (TCS) for the foreign tourists
- Refund of IGST paid by the tourist leaving India on supply of goods taken out of India-Tax Refund for Tourists (TRT) Scheme to be implemented.

Besides the above, we have also requested that the Government extend the time limit for 5 lakh free tourist visas until March 2023. If required, we will ask to extend this till March

2024 as inbound tourism is still on hold and free tourist visas are not being utilised, and the time limit is going to be over, which is March 31, 2022.

Meanwhile, IATO members are also engaging and creating confidence with their customers while keeping the personalised

touch, briefing and educating them about destinations, staying in touch with them while they are on their tour, and ensuring the SOPs at every point with trained personnel. These are the strategic areas where associations like ours and others are always ahead in the present circumstances.



Jyoti Mayal
President, TAAI

As the President of TAAI, I would like to state that the unprecedented COVID time was truly an opportunity to work closely with MoT, resonating travel policies as the topmost priority. The Government also realised the same. As

staring at multiple challenges of COVID and its variant, TAAI is strongly advocating for a health insurance policy for all travellers to give them the confidence to travel to and in India.

Also, we need to rethink and develop policies and rules that are in the best interest of the travel fraternity. The travel, tourism, and hospitality sector have witnessed so much turmoil that we cannot wait for the right time; we need to make it the right time to re-establish and reboot our business and sector. It's time to evolve, consolidate, take cautious but necessary decisive actions, and build a robust structure and a sustainable environment.

TAAI is the oldest travel organisation serving people since 1951. We have our reach in almost all the parts of the country, and our regional chapters are working tirelessly day in and day out to give maximum benefits to our members. We are doing our level best via webinars, virtual and physical meets, signing MoUs with many old and new destinations, and working closely with all suppliers and stakeholders in the huge value chain. We have started skilling members and educating them to become specialists. Tomorrow, correct, timely information, knowledge with soft skills, technology, and ease of business will be the game-changer which we are investing in. We are working towards all these attributes to promote to a large number of people eager to travel, to make it fully experiential.

the leader of an association, I believe we are the driving force to suggest policies in harmony with the sector's interest in developing the travel trade industry and, eventually, the economy. I reiterate that an effective National Task Force needs to be established not only for namesake but also as an efficient policy body to collectively bring changes, work in a coordinated, collaborative manner, and this plan since 2021 will be pushed forward. It would play a major and decisive role if conceived and executed properly. For 2022, as we are still



Ajay Prakash
President, TAFI

For TAFI, consumer protection in the case of airline failure remains a prime concern. We have broached the matter with the Ministry, and we intend to follow up on this. As part of the operating conditions, we demand that the DGCA mandate

FAITH the voice of the entire industry - a voice strong enough to influence policy. While we have managed to come to a point where FAITH is called in regularly for discussions and meetings, our ability to have a say in policy formulation is still a distant dream. For that to happen, the various associations need to make greater efforts to create common ground; one-upmanship doesn't benefit anyone. I would go so far as to say that there should be just one Association of travel agents - that will promote solidarity and amplify the voice of the trade manifold.

The pandemic has led to a new phenomenon of Revenge Travel; however, 'Revenge Travel' is an ugly term that has no place in the lexicon of the tourism industry. Revival Tourism or Responsible Tourism or Rejuvenating Tourism is what we should be looking at. Any business that panders to the lowest common denominator at the lowest price is doing an enormous disservice to the industry and the planet - OTA or bricks and mortar. The discerning traveller will shun them. As a responsible association, TAFI urges our members to connect more personally, more meaningfully with their clients and potential clients to provide personal service far beyond what any portal could provide. We have seen travellers gratefully acknowledge the value of a professional travel advisor and a TAFI member.

insurance against airline failure on every ticket issued in the country.

Another thing that could go a long way in reviving the industry would be a common visa for India and the neighbouring countries - like the Schengen visa. That could be a radical game changer!

When we founded FAITH in 2012, it was with a vision to make



Riaz Munshi
President, OTOAI

At OTOAI, we are in talks with the MoT to include the outbound sector as part of its tourism policies. Outbound tourism hardly finds any support from the Government of India even though India is the fastest emerging outbound market with approx. Thirty million outbound travellers and yet continues to remain the most neglected one in the eyes of

the Government. We believe the outbound sector should be given equal importance as inbound or domestic as Outbound Tourism helps generate equal employment. Because of India's outbound numbers, many foreign tourism boards, national tourism organisations, representations, and embassies spend millions of dollars in India for marketing. Through MoT, we would like to voice our concerns on TCS and hope that the Ministry will help us by taking our appeal for TCS rollback with the concerned Ministry.

It wouldn't be unfair to say that the tourism industry has been one of the most severely hit sectors in the pandemic.

No solid announcements were made to support it have further deteriorated its condition. In an endeavour to rectify this, we at OTOAI are in talks with the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India to address a major concern in outbound – lack of monitoring and validated data of Outbound Tour Operators. We have requested the Government to develop a licensing plan; wherein every genuine Outbound Tour Operator will first have to acquire a government authorised license and then practice selling outbound tours from India. By doing this, the Government will regularise a sector and gain authentic first-hand data on Outbound Tourism in India. With the good data on how many travel companies in India are selling outbound, the Government will be in a much better position to plan any policy or decide on the sector.

I feel that revenge travel is a negative term, and we should use rebound travel instead, which is something we are all looking forward to. While inspiring people to travel is the work of consumer-centric organisations. Since ours is a B2B Association, our focus is to motivate and inspire our members to perform better. In the last 20 months, OTOAI has hosted country-specific presentations, webinars on new and revised travel guidelines, motivational sessions, and more for our members and will continue to do the same in the coming times. Once the pandemic becomes endemic, people who have stayed locked inside would like to travel. Outbound Tour Operators must put their best foot forward and make most of the time when international travel resumes.



Biji Eapen
President, IAAI

The need of the hour is for the travel and tourism sector to strategically take steps for survival, build capacities and services for revival, and thrive. The spread of the new variant Omicron is alarming. Travel restrictions and travel bans continue to affect many parts of the world even today.

The two years lesson taught that self-preservation or survival has priority. Our mission in 2022 is "Survival, Revival and Thrive the Travel Tourism Industry," a new campaign on behalf of the entire travel and tourism fraternity that makes us stay and support our families.

Towards that, IAAI is spearheading a nationwide signature campaign to support our appeal to the MoCA seeking the reinstatement of the Travel Agency commission, a legal right of Travel Agents in India as provided in DGCA Order on 5th March 2010.

I feel many prevailing regulatory policies could promote solidarity and help for survival. Travel and tourism in India are represented through various trade associations, bifurcated and calibrated to its nature and scope like adventure, medical, wellness, cruises, sports, MICE, eco-tourism, film, religious and rural (village) tourism.

MSME should not be a yardstick for tourism subsidiaries. Many agents are out of the ambit that stimulus package offered by the Government unless the policy is changed. Travel agents or tour operators' basic income legally comes from air tickets,

and we only ask government authorities to implement and enforce the law that mandates "commission." Our mission is to save the industry where no one is deprived of law. Post lockdown predictions and preparations would need a better understanding of the current situation. The pandemic effects are effectively visible on inbound, outbound and domestic tourism, adventure travel, business travel, cruise holidays, and air travel. Governments must take all the trade associations and organisations into confidence and plan future strategies accordingly to revive the sector.

The Travel & Tourism sector is one of the world's largest economic sectors. Digital technology provides new communication and distribution channels for consumers and travel services suppliers. The Internet enables travel agencies to adopt digital marketing to attract, inform and serve travellers. Many travellers believe that traditional travel agents and tour operators are accessible, reliable, accountable, and trustworthy for customer loyalty and personalised services, rather than depending on OTAs and other online portals that could provide or inflate digital inspiration for those dreaming of travelling.

Our study shows that many travellers had bitter experiences in transacting with toll-free customer care numbers for cancelling and refunding their air tickets and hotel bookings made through OTAs and airline websites during the early Covid-19 pandemic. The lesson they learned gives us the insight and spirit that traditional travel intermediaries have more weightage in responsibility, consciousness and dependability in this modern age. The new manner shall require a substantial livelihood to all stakeholders to survive. We need unity to create a unique perception to solve our problems. Let us get inspired by the words of Henry Ford, "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is a success." Let us unite and change our existence, whether traditional systems, responsible tourism, or revenge travel.



Rajan Sehgal
President, India Golf Tourism Association

Being in the travel industry for more than 35 years, I have seen a lot of ups and downs. But this pandemic has brought the entire world to a standstill. During this time, there was a lot of learning, such as respect the nature, safe and responsible travel, control on spendings, and collaborations. It is seen that the future of travel will be different, which can be seen with

domestic travel getting more importance.

The world has seen the power of the Indian Travel Industry, and that's why the presence of foreign tourism boards from all over the world are here. But as an industry, we are not united and unable to show our strength and always present ourselves as divided. First of all, we need to unite and go to MOT or others concerned with a crisp and clear plan, mostly by taking the suggestions from Industry members, not leaders.

It's too early to make policies or plans as watching from last two years; the travel world is unpredictable. We have to be self-sufficient, get multi-skilled and find new segments related to Travel and Tourism of which there are many. I always give the example of Jammu & Kashmir Tourism department and their travel industry as to how they welcomed more tourists with a smile than what they received before this crisis. We have to learn from them!



Vaibhav Kala
Vice President, ATOAI

We have been pushing for demands to open ETVs and international flights, which is a sign of confidence for overseas travellers to begin making plans. Waiver of peak fees, free ETVs for adventure tourists, have been discussed with the MoT.

With the advent of what may potentially be a massive surge in the 3rd wave, the

Also, the promotion of India as a prime destination for adventure travel needs to be strengthened, rebranded, and reinvented, with positive communications about our outdoors and its potential.

We are seeing some concern, slight trepidation on the new phenomenon of revenge travel, but all plans are going ahead now. There is a feeling that this may not last as long, and people are still going ahead with having conversations and planning for their 2022 travels. Bookings are coming with short notice for quick getaways, but conversations for longer vacations continue. Staycations, workations, homestays emerged as a new trend in 2021. For shorter stays, this trend will continue as we see impending lockdowns, curbs, and restrictions in travel. However, outdoor travel will increase with better knowledge of to-dos, pre-planning, SOPs, etc.; we see longer and longer custom-built vacations for bubble groups. Fluctuations in access regimes, needing to adapt, innovate, offer new products, ensure customers feel secure, keep teams together, reach out even more. So much more of running harder to stay in the same place for now; yet being ready for an exploding market as the pandemic leaves us in 2022. Being ready for increased demand is what I can put money on.

priority is to keep safe, stay responsible, keep our teams out of harm's way, and keep clients safe in the outdoor arena. Most importantly, offer products that can follow good practices, with small bubble groups, keeping the learnings from the 1st and 2nd waves top of mind. We feel this is possible and maybe the only approach to keeping operations alive and sustainable.



Jagat Mehta
President, ETAA

Once again, the Omicron Variant, weekend curfews, partial lockdowns have again screeched the travel momentum built over the last few months. Travel has become very uncertain with the changing protocols. ETAA's WhatsApp group is the best ready source of information available to our members. Any queries posted by our

Meanwhile, we urge all to follow the laid down protocols and hope that the administration will do everything possible to return to normalcy at the earliest. We are required to keep vigil, stay safe and adhere to guidelines. ETAA, as an association, works towards educating our members. We have been doing regular webinars and knowledge sessions for our members.

It is great to realise that now the MOT and state government have started giving importance to tourism stakeholders like us. We would want the Government to consult the heads of all associations while making any policy decisions as we understand the needs of the agents and our clients at the same time. In the upcoming budget, we expect some tax benefits, such as tax rebate on domestic travel, reduction in GST on hotel rooms, etc.

However, the tourism industry is the worst affected, the first industry to suffer, and probably the last one to recover. Hence, it is important to rethink some of the government's policies. The travel agents/tour operators should be made a part of all the policies formed from the very grassroots levels.

members get instant reverts. Further, we are planning to form an all-India Telegram group that will assist our B2B members to expand on an all-India level, further giving our B2C members a better rate to compete with the OTAs.

Optimistic and Prepared

Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) hosted a one-day experiential event, 'Korea MICE Experience Day 2021' at Pullman, Aerocity, New Delhi on December 10, 2021. TTJ interacted with Young Geul Choi, Director, KTO, New Delhi, on the sidelines of the event to understand the organisation's roadmap for the future.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

The 'Korea MICE Experience Day 2021' event was intended to prepare the travel agents for the re-opening of destination South Korea shortly, while the pandemic restrictions have yet not been lifted for India and the Omicron shadow looms large. Choi mentioned that this was the first physical event after the pandemic, with the sole aim to connect with trade partners and prepare them for selling South Korea when travel opens up.

"We want our travel partners to be fully prepared when this happens and demand for South Korea starts flowing in from the customers. We plan to work closely with the tourism associations, OTAs, corporates, and other NTO's to rebound the tourism. Although the growth pace will be slower than the pre-pandemic times, but we are positive to reach pre-pandemic numbers by 2024," shares Choi.

Talking about South Korea's preparedness to welcome tourists because of the pandemic and any special protocols Indians need to follow, especially regarding Omicron, Choi said, "South Korea as it is holds its reputation as a destination for safety and hygiene standards against the pandemic. It will be early to comment on how Omicron will change the travel protocols while travelling to South Korea, as currently, leisure travel to South Korea has not opened for Indian travellers. However, visa for Korea has started for Indians who want to travel to Korea for long stay like work or study. An RTPCR test at the airport and a 10-day quarantine upon arrival in South Korea is the protocol which is currently being followed."

Civil aviation plays a major role in enhancing tourism between two countries. Without regular flights or air bubble arrangements between India and South Korea, this position currently remains a challenge. Choi added, "Travel bubble is a bilateral decision. I am positive that a dialogue will start from both ends very soon in this regard."



▲ Young Geul Choi

As soon as travel resumes, South Korea plans to focus on luxury travel, special interest groups, and K-Pop, K-Drama Fans in limited numbers to start with. Plans are underway to work closely with OTAs and specialist travel agent partners to create new travel products. The packages will be designed keeping in mind the pandemic era and the travellers' evolved safety and hygiene demands. Reaching out to the Hallyu Fans with consumer events and catering to them with specially curated packages with K-Pop, K-Drama tourist spots is part of the plan.

Touching on the role of technology, Choi mentioned that KTO very successfully used it in these times of pandemic to connect with trade partners and consumers through virtual networking platforms, online events, and social media channels. For the B2B partners, KTO organised a fully virtual roadshow earlier last year, followed up with this hybrid event today.

"For the B2C segment, the focus was to bring Korea to Indian homes, and we partnered with multiple consumer brands and succeeded in reaching 20 million consumers through our online consumer initiative, 'The KXperience'

event," said Choi. He further added that until physical travel is possible, KTO will focus on virtually providing complete MICE business solutions. The current MICE website has been fully updated. New websites have been developed where all information about hotels, unique venues, and other aspects of MICE are available with VR experience videos so that people can experience the product sitting in their offices. These will help them finalise venues and hotels for their events in the future early and at good rates.

On being asked if there were any special incentives for travel trade partners to boost tourism to South Korea, Choi explained, "We are looking forward to signing MOU with companies who are confirming their interest in sending MICE groups to South Korea by 2023. These companies will be eligible for exclusive and additional support or incentives by KTO when travel formally resumes. We have also trained 45 premium travel consultants PAN India this year who are highly specialised for catering the demand of South Korea packages in FIT and SIT segments." He added that KTO will be very happy to join hands with other tourism board partners in India. It all depends on the region-specific objectives of the NTO's.

"We already have plans to connect with Asian NTO partners in India to co-promote the destination and create a win-win situation for both the destinations. After all, we are targeting the same consumer group of Indian outbound travellers. Co-promotion will not only increase visibility and reach of the destinations, but will also bring a new experience for the consumers," concludes Choi.

Cautiously optimistic about 2022

The roller coaster ride through 2020 and 2021 gave the industry a fair share of lows with lockdowns, job losses and business freeze followed with the highs in form of the silver lining of the vaccine development, worldwide inoculations and possible containments, but then the low struck us again with the catastrophic second wave, we suffered but braved that too! Now when we were about looking at the trade winds blowing for us all in 2022, Omicron appears to be playing spoilsport, so what does 2022 hold for us? We cannot go into a state of paralysis, the world is changing and it will no longer be business as usual, get prepared.

Vasudha Sondhi

2020 caught us unawares and stopped us dead in our tracks, but as the year progressed, we picked up the threads of our lives to think and react differently. 2021 was a paradigm shift from just about how we had done everything in the past: our learnings, processes, systems, client-supplier interactions, and so on. Most of our clients came back to the OMPL Group regularly. While we did maintenance activity for them in 2020, we started the regular business, especially to Dubai and Maldives, in Q1. Our clients continue to invest in us and the market, for which I am intensely grateful.

The second wave was heart-breaking as we lost many friends and colleagues to COVID. After it ebbed, we picked up a serious amount of business for our European hotel client. Almost at par with 2019 (and that's saying a lot), and for Dubai and some months, we surpassed 2019 figures. After some initial hiccups, South Africa showed a great pick-up with business on the books. Somehow, Asia remained elusive. There were new learnings with our Indian wellness client, and it was a good opportunity to give the clients what they wanted: good health, immunity, and a great offering next to central Delhi.

I could keep most of my team, for which I am grateful. I took this opportunity to keep them motivated with a sense of routine and went back to kickstarting our week with Monday sales meeting, of course, virtually, and our end of the week Friday wrap-up meetings. At least for me, this provided some semblance of normalcy. We rebranded ourselves as the OMPL Group with Outbound Marketing, OM Tourism, OMTH Hospitality, and Annapurna Charitable Foundation under this umbrella.

In all this, opportunities knocked at our doorsteps. It remains to be seen whether it came because it was supposed to or we saw it at the opportune time. Parvada Bungalows, our first venture in owned, responsible and sustainable hospitality, took off from 2020 and did some impressive numbers in 2021. It also allowed us to find our space for our foundation to do some legacy work in the hospitality industry. We took ahead our rural homestay project by creating rural homestays in Parvada and going the whole nine yards with training and audits and, of course, driving business into the homestays. When I look back, I did not make a lot of revenue in 2021, but it was a year of fulfilling deep-rooted desires of building a community project.

For 2022, we have business in the books even if some groups get postponed with the third wave upon us. I am fairly confident that we will do good business this year. Hotels are hiring again in India. It will be fabulous to see the travel industry hiring in big numbers again. When we open up all of our offices, the industry will hopefully be processes driven by using technology better. We will see the old guard making way for the youth, leading the way and heading up businesses in the travel and hospitality space. We also have newer hotels and destinations reaching out, setting up their representatives in India. All this is very positive for our industry. We should continue to focus on people to have the most professional and qualified young people wanting to join the workforce.



▲ Vasudha Sondhi

In the industry, though, most of us have accepted that some form of this virus will continue for some more years, as history has taught us too.

There should be no policy paralysis in the decisions the government takes. Eco-sensitive zones in India should have a different policy for land acquisition for any commercial activity. The Ministry of Tourism should very quickly identify such zones, and it would also be a huge shift in the proper direction to include "controlled tourism" initiatives for such zones. Sustainability will be more than just jargon, with travellers and sellers opting for products and destinations that care for the environment. OMPL Group is sure to include sustainable strategies in all our plans.

So, I am optimistic...cautiously optimistic about 2022 (I never thought I would use this term).

Vasudha Sondhi is the Managing Director at OMPL Group

Sailing with the tide with continued confidence

While the hospitality industry grapples with finding an answer to increase footfalls and occupancies to the pre-COVID levels, there are many other matters that hotel brands have to look at; among them, the important one is finance. TTJ touched base with a few hoteliers in various accommodation businesses on how they have planned their year ahead to control finances and strategies to boost their revenues for 2022. Though with high levels of uncertainty ahead, it seems they are focused on innovating while managing their way through the crisis and accelerating when the situation is adept.

Prashant Nayak

Undoubtedly, the pandemic has made a profound and significant impact on the hospitality industry and its stakeholders, and to counteract it, one of the major factors in 2021 was flexibility in commercial terms and conditions, given the unpredictable times.

Puneet Dhawan, Senior VP Operations, Accor India & South Asia, says, “2021 has taught us several lessons, and while we combated the unprecedented events, we also witnessed a significant improvement in occupancies and bookings towards the latter half of the year. As a company, we have furthermore incorporated several cost-saving measures. We are exploring new trends like sub-leasing, creative and optimum utilisation of space in hotels. For example, we convert meeting rooms at the hotel into offices that could be rented out to start-ups.

“We are also taking a renewed approach towards our existing partnerships and campaigns and continue to provide our guests the most memorable experiences curated by our loyalty program, ALL - Accor Live Limitless. As per ALL's current offer, guests get to save 25 per cent on stays with a chance to win 1 million reward points when they stay at any of Accor's participating hotels and resorts across India and Sri Lanka.”

The face of travel has changed completely, priorities have shifted, and the future of the hospitality business is now based on a new belief with an inclination towards the highest standards of safety amongst guests. “For this reason, we have implemented ALLSAFE across all our properties, which represents industry leading cleanliness and prevention standards, launched in association with Bureau Veritas. The label rolled out across

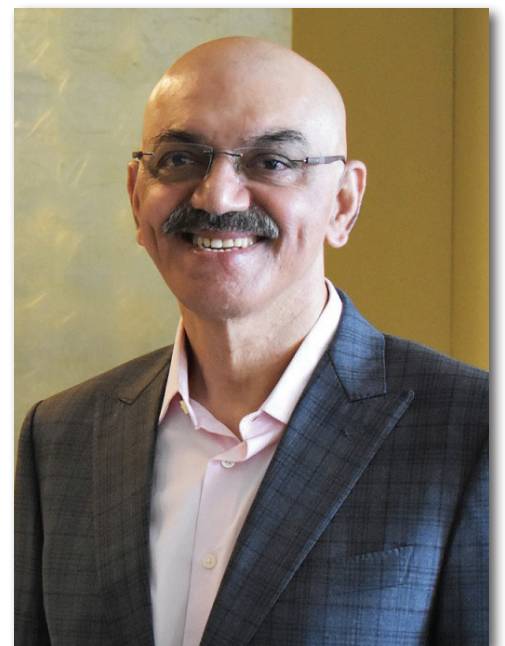


▲ Puneet Dhawan

all properties covers critical areas such as enhanced cleaning protocols, enhanced staff training, new guest contact measures, enhanced food safety measures, and much more,” assures Dhawan.

Through effective communication with their partners, clients, and management, along with high-level engagement, the properties can contrive a strategy to help them navigate the new environment. Dhawan further shares, “We have currently placed our focus on domestic leisure travel, staycations and workcations and expect our properties that are geographically covering popular leisure destinations to cater to the diverse demand. Additionally, we are exploring inventive approaches in the F&B segment with concepts like cloud kitchen, home deliveries, and DIY food kit.”

Accor also looks forward to some of their much-awaited new openings like Novotel in New Delhi City Centre and Jodhpur, an ibis in Mumbai Thane, and another in Hebbal Bangalore. However, they continue to monitor the ever-evolving situation to adapt to any new restrictions,



▲ Raoof Dhanani

trends, and requirements that their guests may have.

At Sayaji Hotels, they have survived during the toughest times while exploring and evolving themselves to deliver the best of hospitality. **Raoof Dhanani, Managing Director, Sayaji Hotels**, says, “The foreseeing of the corporates opening up soon in this quarter is still bleak. In response to the market conditions, we have started exploring different business sectors and focus on various other segments, such as sports-oriented groups check-in. We serve different aspects, but we also master our service deliveries with check-ins for young individuals and sports personalities. Our prime focus is the Corporates and our adaptability has paid us well for going over long runs with these segments.”

The plans and strategies go hand in hand, but the market scenario plays a vital role. Sayaji Hotels focuses more on the FIT and family segments looking for vacations and celebrations with their close and dear ones. “We also focus on



▲ Rajiv Kapoor



▲ Amit Damani



▲ Noshir A Marfatia

social events in banquets and social event days for capitalisation in terms of F&B and combo stay packages. Taping the regular corporates and MICE gives us a fruitful business to emphasise upon. The luxury stay packages paired with leisure services to offer are perfect for capitalising on staycations which are in trend these days," informs Dhanani.

For Fairmont Jaipur, it will be a continuous endeavour in 2022 to manage cash flow throughout the year while exploring innovative ways of unleashing the hotel's creative business propositions and exploring smart and ethical partnerships with like-minded stakeholders. **Rajiv Kapoor, General Manager, Fairmont Jaipur**, says, "To keep sustainability as a consistent benchmark, one of our endeavours is to achieve continual usage of recyclable energy sources via our solar panels and electrical charging stations powered by Sunfuel. Also, we will be looking into training teams for multitasking and providing cross-cultural exposure for better servicing and enhanced guest relations.

"To boost up our revenues for 2022, we will look forward to explore business within and beyond feeder markets via curation of exclusive, meaningful experiences for multi-generational travellers. To nurture lasting relations with all new guests and rekindle with previous guests. Providing competitive rates and offers to our guests for indulgent, palatial vacations and improving and elevating experiences with finer attention to detail in departments like the lounge area, cigar shop, spa and health club at Fairmont Jaipur," adds Kapoor.

By merging homestays into domestic tourism, COVID has succeeded in altering traveller's dynamics. Travel is no longer regarded as a luxury but rather an essential

part of life. And having a comfortable place to stay, much like at home, is an important element of traveling, which homestays have been giving to the traveller for a long time. Presently, homestays offer their guests playgrounds, rooms, kitchens, theatres, gardens, swimming pools, chefs and laundry, high-speed wi-fi, other amenities, etc. Due to the overwhelming demand, Vista Rooms have already onboarded nearly 60 homes in India and 10 in Dubai.

On this, **Amit Damani, Co-Founder, Vista Rooms**, shared, "We've had to respond to the increase in demand for villas due to a shift in how people travel and even live. We've partnered with local specialists across all regions to expand our F&B, tours, and activities offerings. Before COVID, a few of our homes featured environmentally friendly features like solar electricity, organic vegetables, rainwater collection, waste management (no plastic or other environmentally detrimental materials are used), and so on. This has been a long-term policy that we have implemented before the pandemic to ensure that we produce local jobs and sustainably deliver authentic experiences. Both are good for the environment and very cost-effective in the long run."

Vista Rooms' goal is to make every moment of their guests and stay with them memorable. Whether it's fantastic meals, tailored experiences, or transporting local delicacies to them while they spend quality time with their friends and family, there is something for everyone at Vista. "We intend to delight each and every guest, whether it's with fantastic meals, personalised experiences, or delivering local delicacies while they spend quality time with their friends and family at our vacation homes. In the hospitality industry, service apartments have become the

norm. As the category leader, we are defining the standards for serviced villas. Our goal is to grow our network from 500 villas to over 1000," shares Damani.

The Fern Hotels & Resorts have successfully opened 13 new hotels in the pandemic year 2021-22. Four new hotels are planned to open in the next four months, taking their total operational hotels to 88. They are on track to reach their goal of 100 hotels by 2023. **Noshir A Marfatia, Senior Vice President - Sales & Marketing, The Fern Hotels & Resorts**, expressed, "Almost all our resorts have done higher revenues in 2021 than even 2019 and our business city hotels are seeing growth spurts that are encouraging. Being leading environmentally sensitive hotels, we provide a product that is comfortable, safe, hygienic, offers all modern amenities and luxuries, and all these at price points that are affordable, giving our guests great value for money. We offer a range of stay options and packages to suit all requirements. That is why our occupancy levels are high, with repeat guests being our biggest brand ambassadors."

"In these uncertain times, our hotel occupancies and revenues have been roller-coastering in sync with the pandemic surges, from all-time highs to the lowest of lows. Based on the trends we saw since last September; we are budgeting for 2022 with expectations of a revival and maybe even a boom. Our services and offerings are being calibrated back to full-service levels, to meet guests' growing expectations. However, all our hotel operations are geared to keep expenses in proportion to revenues. So, if business drops in any month(s) due to the pandemic restrictions etc, then all our hotels are geared to proportionately roll back their expenses as well, to keep the operations viable," concludes Marfatia.

Bracing up for difficult times again

The year 2021 was full of optimism as India rolled out the world's largest COVID-19 vaccination drive. By the end of 2021, the travel and hospitality business gradually picked up force, and domestic tourism gained traction. The hospitality industry was getting its smiles back, but now, in 2022, with the advent of the new COVID variant, it has dashed hopes for the fast recovery once again. TTJ interacted with a few hoteliers in West and South India to know their analysis of the situation last year and now. It looks like with Omicron presenting another challenge, the industry is working to be better prepared this time around. Once again, they are strategizing to stay relevant to their customers in this ever-changing travel and hospitality scenario.

Prashant Nayak



Tejas Jose

General Manager, Renaissance Bengaluru Race Course Hotel

The domestic travel demand is soaring for two reasons; number one is the pent-up demand coming from when the nation had lock-downs. There's only so much that situations can stop us from travelling, so when the curbs go, travel starts. Secondly, international travel is still very unclear with bio-bubbles, the spike in COVID cases in destination countries, vaccination prerequisites, etc., so travelling outside India is not easy. However, that desire and budget for travel still exist, and therefore we see a surge in ADRs in resort locations.

In the past few months, not just Renaissance Bengaluru Race Course Hotel, but most city hotels have seen a rise in stay-cations and work-cations, considering that most customers are tired of being largely holed up at home and a sense of being 'trapped' and a stay at a hotel is a micro-break, which helps re-energize.

Now, in 2022, I believe it's still a wait-and-watch approach that customers have due to the new variant, Omicron, and the surrounding ambiguity. However, the situation will clear out

sooner or later. I believe recovery is inevitable, and times are several signs across various markets globally and locally. I believe Omicron will be a speed hump on the road to recovery, but the road is open, the fuel tank is full, and we have our foot on the pedal!

At our hotel, most decisions are tactical due to the (continuing) unpredictable business environment. Still, even in the current business landscape, it's crucial to keep the ear to the ground to understand guest expectations. I wish to stress the fact that the guests themselves have very transitional expectations. For instance, from a few months ago, when most guests wore masks while at the hotel and were very disciplined about it, voluntarily, then gradually a large number of guests didn't bother to wear one and perhaps couldn't care less.

So, in this 'new normal' period, guests' expectations are very dynamic and is a representation of the guest's mindset, given the COVID numbers in the locality the hotel is in, where the guests come from, the news the guests read, cultural influences, etc. So, there's no shortcut; the team needs to keep high levels of engagement with guests to assess, understand and see how we can make amends to our offering to ensure the hotel is aligned. The 'moving goal post' is the best description of how the current times need to be seen.



Ravi Rai

**Cluster General Manager, Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach,
Novotel Vijayawada Varun and The Bheemili Resort managed by Accor**

While the pandemic poses a challenge; however, with since the restrictions being lifted and the vaccination drive gaining momentum, we see a lot of positive movement in domestic travel. The guest's interests in domestic staycations have peaked due to restrictions on international travel, and the whole concept of revenge travel is only adding to our favour.

With Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach having a scenic view of the Bay of Bengal as a backdrop, we have received a healthy number of wedding bookings in the past few months. We are hopeful that it will continue. With the slow yet steady increase in corporate travel, MICE events are also looking up. Attributing to the above pointers and the boom in domestic travel nationally, we have seen 85 per cent occupancy at our

hotel for the last few months.

Regarding the Omicron variant, I foresee that impact on domestic travel might not be as significant as it might be on international travel. Regardless of the variant, we do prioritise our guest's health and hence practice utmost precautions and hygiene practices at every corner of our hotel.

With the new normal, we had to accept that travel trends have changed and have to adapt them to maintain relevance. Since safety has been a primary concern, we ensured that all hygiene and sanitisation protocols were upgraded to ensure the safety of our guests in accordance with Accor's latest label program 'ALL Safe'. Since international travel is not as functional, we can maintain relevance with destination weddings, staycations, wellness packages at our retreat property, The Bheemili Resort, and bundled packages for all three Accor properties of Andhra Pradesh – Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach, Novotel Vijayawada Varun, and The Bheemili Resort managed by Accor.



Sunil Kumar

General Manager, The Westin Goa

As we entered the last month of the year in 2021, I had noticed an opportunistic growth in the Goa market. With tourists mostly vaccinated, there was an increase in domestic travel, and I am hoping that in 2022 our state regains its footprint in the tourism sector and hopefully reaches stability.

In 2021, we saw consistent growth in our hotel's occupancy in the last few months of the year, whether in staycations, vacations, or even visiting the hotel on the weekends. Further,

we hope that our well-placed strategies will help guests enjoy our top-notch services and explore the lesser-known aspects of Goa, and ultimately create everlasting memories.

Goa is constantly evolving in terms of attractions and offerings. Our strategy, therefore, is to keep up with the interests and demands of our guests. Right from the artist featured in the flea market as a part of our theme-based Sunday Brunch, to the curated menus, or even the Sundowner events at Drift – the poolside deck, has in this short period, truly proved to be a delight. We will hence keep innovating experientials to engage with our guests. Last but not least, it will be our constant endeavour to incorporate the local Goan culture in our offerings, thus keeping the Susegad life intact.



Sumit Kumar

General Manager, Hyatt Pune, Kalyani Nagar

The pandemic has had most people locked up at homes for long periods. This had made people seek every opportunity to travel domestically when the restrictions were relaxed. Domestic travel has existed even before the pandemic, but it has come out in a pronounced way now. Our

hotel has seen building up fairly healthy occupancies in the past many months as guests searched for hotels offering relaxation, hygiene, and safety for their families.

We have begun to understand the impact of COVID variants, such as Omicron and others, on the economy. However, in the case of tourism and travel, the fear created in travellers' minds impacts decision-making. We have already noticed some of the impacts in terms of cancellations. However, it is unlikely to dash hopes of revival completely.

Hyatt was one of the first hospitality companies to introduce strict COVID guidance protocols. We are maintaining the highest standards of hygiene and as much social distancing as is medically decreed. We also have a Hygiene and Wellbeing Manager at all our hotels to ensure we subscribe to all COVID protocol guidelines. Like other Hyatt hotels, Hyatt Pune has reimagined experiences to ensure guests enjoy the comfort and luxury of a hotel stay at Hyatt.



Shiv Bose

General Manager, DoubleTree by Hilton Goa - Panaji

The pent-up travel demand combined with an easing of restrictions on domestic travel and with a significant portion of the Indian adult population being fully vaccinated, we have seen an uptick in domestic travel bookings. To provide a safe and comfortable vacation to our guests, we

have implemented measures in conjunction with the "Hilton Clean Stays" program. We have seen room occupancies over 85 per cent in 2021 and robust average room rate growth by over 25 per cent from the previous year. I am optimistic about the growth in domestic tourism and its consistency with time.

Regarding the new COVID variant, I can say that travellers are cautious these days, and it's important we travel with responsibility for the welfare of others around us. Since we have withstood the ravages of the pandemic, we at the hotel are better geared to adapt to new developments to benefit travellers and ensure they have a memorable experience at the resort.

While customer preferences and market dynamics are constantly evolving, our strategy to stay relevant is to ensure we stay true to the core of providing warm hospitality and are constantly innovating for the welfare of our guests. Our resort activations allow guests to mingle over fun sessions and soak in the ethos of Goa. Curated gifts and a personalised amenity program add to the experience of a perfect vacation. Our "Dream Stay" offer provides a holistic experience to guests and ensures they have a vacation to reminisce.



Mahema Bhutia

Consultant Sales & Marketing, Aramness Gir

We have seen a boost in the domestic travel industry in the pandemic. There are indicators in the industry pointing out that inbound and outbound travel will come back with a vengeance. More importantly, people are looking to reconnect, explore new destinations, or revisit reliable favorites. We see that

leisure travellers are now flying to non-metro destinations and ready to explore uncharted territories.

We have seen this with the response received at the opening of ARAMNESS Gir; our uber-luxe 18 key lodges spread over 12 acres in Gir, Gujarat. There have been multi-generational travellers coming, along with couples and individuals seeking an experience far more engaging than from pre-COVID times.

Our initial research into Omicron showed that this variant is not as serious as first thought of. Of course, even if it is, the world is now better positioned to tackle such outbreaks. Not only do we have protocols across industries, but we have found a way to

work so that life and livelihood do not come to a standstill. In fact, the hospitality industry has set some of the highest standards in terms of hygiene and sanitation with general care.

Our experience in 2021 shows a high trust quotient amongst travellers and tourists using hospitality products and services. This is also reflected in domestic travel this winter, buoyant and radiating hope and positivity. With news of the Omicron variant, the Government has its SOPs in place to ensure we are able to live with this "new normal" and exercise caution.

One of the key trends we have witnessed post-COVID is that customers demand more from brands in terms of engagement and their sensitivity to the environment, sustainability, and social responsibility. Keeping this in mind, we have created a natural luxury sanctuary called ARAMNESS Gir, where sustainability is not a one-step equation but a multifaceted process towards lasting change.

Looking at this response for the resort, we are enthused to open new ARAMNESS luxury safari lodges in Pench National Park, Bandhavgarh National Park, and Ranthambore Tiger Reserve. As a new entrant in the hospitality industry, the focus is to offer unique experiences in a new unexplored destination.



Abhijit Dey

Associate Vice President, VITS-Kamats Group

In 2021, a dip in daily COVID cases had given a chance to domestic travellers to travel for their business and leisure. Ease in quarantine policy of many state governments across India had also helped the domestic travellers decide to travel. Aggressive vaccination has helped to assure low risk

while travelling.

Domestic travellers are looking to travel within 100-200 km for leisure. Long-distance travel was also gaining momentum, but it would have taken some time to reach its previous status.

Now, the new COVID variant has started causing worries.

Travellers are watching the developments for not only the infection type and pattern but also quarantine policies of various states, which are regularly changing. 100 per cent passage for double vaccinated travellers should have been allowed, but now some states have made RT-PCR tests compulsory for travellers, even if they are fully vaccinated. To top that, uncertainty in universal policy on quarantine and vaccinated travellers is causing some worries and has kept the travel momentum slowed down.

However, we are ensuring the business is not lost due to the status of the pandemic, as all our retainership efforts are in place through our very popular VITSCOINS Loyalty program. We are adding values to their future bookings even if they are rescheduling their present dates due to the uncertainty of the pandemic. We have increased our efforts on health and hygiene standards to ensure a safe stay. Family stay, staycation all have contributed substantially in the past, and we expect that to continue.



Ajay Kanojia
General Manager, Sayaji Hotel Pune

The pandemic has taught tourism and the hospitality industry new ways to deal with guests and their bookings. The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 swept like a hurricane, adding a layer of panic and depression in the hospitality industry. The second wave was even more severe, as a

result, the travel was impacted, and yet again the impact was immense. Nevertheless, the situation got stable, and people are now cautious of their safety. We have been taking extreme precautions, and at the end of 2021, we have seen a hike in occupancy up to 85 per cent, and we hope to see the rise continue and wish to see stability in the industry.

Following difficult times, 2022 offered to coruscate hope for the return of travellers and guests. Now, due to Omicron, the world is in a state of flux, and no one knows what will happen. Everyone is very cautious nowadays, and we continue to follow safety norms. We understand how safety is important for our guests, and our guests trust that they are safe with us. We prioritise safety by incorporating masks, social distancing, placing hand sanitizers, and everything related to safety. COVID-19 has fundamentally changed the way we travel, and we believe in delivering in-depth cleanliness and ensuring safety right from check-in to check-out. We will continue to deliver the same to ensure our guests and staff remain safe.



Koustuva Mukherjee
Regional General Manager, Pride Plaza Hotel Ahmedabad

At some point in 2021, the hotel industry had started coming back on track, and people have started going out again. Since October, there has been a surge of bookings (especially revenge tourism) as the majority of all segments and industries present in Ahmedabad have opened their offices. With

the help of Government and corporate initiatives, big events like Vibrant Gujarat, DefExpo, and Medical conference in 2022 would have helped city hotels reach the pre-COVID ARR. However, we believe some have been postponed or cancelled due to the surge in Omicron infections.

With the Omicron threat, the situation has become dynamic, and travellers and companies are seeking more clarity. It has been almost two years, and people would be reluctant to cancel trips and plans now. We are all waiting and watching. The pandemic has taught us to revive all the tough situations, and we had good and bad days successfully. In the present situation, we will focus on managing our expenses. We will love to target the leisure segment besides our regular corporate as the business flows.

Betting high in post Omicron period

Pride Hotels is gearing up to accentuate on corporate sector, weddings and MICE groups. Binay Thakur, Associate Vice President, Pride Hotels throws light on the future plans of the Group.

Swaati Chaudhury

In the wake of a massive spike in Omicron cases across the country, the hospitality sector is sailing through tough challenges. Hospitality groups in Kolkata have put their plans for 2022 on hold and are just waiting for the opportune moment for the third wave to fade into oblivion.

Binay Thakur explained, "Our hospitality business will start off in February-end or March, this year when the business will pick up in the sphere of corporate travel, meetings, MICE and weddings. Come March and we are eagerly looking forward to have 75 to 80 per cent occupancy in all our hotels across the length and breadth of the country. We plan to focus on corporate sector, weddings and MICE

groups to boost our revenue in 2022."

As of now, the Pride Group of Hotels stands tall in owning 36 properties all across the country. Thakur said, "We have added 12 hotels in our Group in the year gone by. Plans are on the horizon to have 50 hotels at the year-end. Plans are on the cards to open the doors of our business properties in Agra, Chandigarh, Nasik, Varanasi, Hyderabad, Amritsar, and an upscale property in Ayodhya this year. At the same time, we will be rolling out our hotels in Bhubaneswar, Ranchi and Darjeeling in the current year."

Online business is going great guns in today's time and age. Thakur further said, "Online business depends upon pricing and online reviews. Since the



▲ Binay Thakur

online reviews of our hotels are quite sound and we do boast of reputed customers through online reviews, we are highly confident that customers will select our hotels depending on the online ranking of our hotels. Visitors usually view the online ranking of hotels and then check the pricing. Our business volume will be high in the coming days and our performance will be on par with pre-Covid level in the year-end."

Amritara Hotels and Resorts aligning growth with vision in 2022

Having started some fifteen years ago as a hotel marketing and representation company, Amritara Hotels and Resorts has come a long way since and is now a full-fledged hotel brand with a portfolio of thirteen operating hotels on a pan-India basis many more additions in the pipeline scheduled for 2022. TTJ met up with Ruchi Uberoi, Director, Amritara Hotels and Resorts, to learn more about the transformation, the brand philosophy, positioning, experience, and future growth.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

Having gained a strong foothold while marketing hotels for almost a decade, a paradigm shift happened in the thought process at Amritara around the year 2015. The intention was to transition from being marketers to hoteliers. The management donned the thinking caps, and around 2018, the results started showing up with an even spread of properties across the country.

Ruchi explains, "The focus was not on plain standardisation of product across a star rating or category but to create experiences, every property in the Amritara bouquet is unique in its category with each having its own unique location, character, history soaked in local culture and steeped in folklore. So, we created a unique story and experience across each property highlighting their individuality while retaining their originality and identity." This approach has indeed worked very well for Amritara, so whether it is a wellness retreat in the Himalayas or Kerala, a beach resort in Goa or Kerala, a city of religious importance like Amritsar or Varanasi, palace forts at Udaipur, or Wilderness outposts at Jawai the right blend of owned, leased and managed properties and curating unique experiences is the perfect mantra and the way forward.

Bringing the local flavours into the food, furnishings, furniture, colors into the décor combined with the local hospitality is a key ingredient for every property. Ruchi adds that Amritara as a group lays a lot of importance in employing local talent and workforce generating employment opportunities and a better life for the local populace because not only do they see it as their corporate social responsibility but also the local talent pool brings in their unique expertise, warmth and feel that add to the aura and essence of the property. The group emphasises training and sensitising their staff to modern

Indian and international sensibilities, expectations, and service standards, but feel a few rough edges left, add to the local feel, as true service comes with a genuine smile straight from the heart.

This finger on the pulse feeling, according to Ruchi, gives her the confidence to go out and make statements, like the one she makes for her Jawai property, that there is a 99 per cent guarantee of leopard sighting during the guests' stay with them.

Talking about the tough times faced by the hospitality and travel sectors over the last two years due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Ruchi elaborates that, like everyone else, they were no exception and the initial few months were unprecedented with lockdowns. Everyone was scared to travel, with international and domestic business coming to a standstill. However, they took this low period to improve their internal systems, reservation, and property management systems, enhance computing technology and train their staff. Also, they undertook intensive safety training to sensitise their teams to enhanced safety requirements and protocols that will become almost a given for future hotel operations. Except for the second wave and the last 15-20 days of 2021-22, the Omicron variant playing spoilsport, 2021 was a decent year for their chain. Although international guests are no more coming and will still take some more time once the Pandemic is behind us, the hotel chain is well evolved to cater to its domestic clients with easy booking and cancellation policies.

Talking about changes in ARR and occupancies, Ruchi clarifies that room rates and occupancies have stabilised in almost all leisure destination properties post the initial shocks and setbacks. However, weekends are better performing, and weekdays are also not bad. However, the same productivity does not apply to city hotels, where surplus inventory in the market makes



▲ Ruchi Uberoi

things extremely competitive.

Also commenting on the evolution of consumer buying behavior, the role of the travel agent, tour operator, online hotel consolidators, and OTA's, Ruchi elaborates that no one can match the advisory one-on-one consultative role that a travel agent or tour operator plays with their clients. However, lately with the lockdowns and reduced connection between people, consumers are doing major buying online. As a hotelier, she is committed to maintaining complete price parity amongst all stakeholders. Still, she cannot do anything about big players' aggressive and predatory marketing practices if they subsidise the end-user from their huge marketing kitty. Human nature is to go with the lower price and immediate booking, but hopefully, the client will realise the added value that an experienced agent brings to the process.

Talking about future expansion plans, Ruchi says, "2021 slowed down our expansion drive but we trudged on diligently and are confident of increasing our hotel count from current 13 to 17 and also increasing the key count from the current 400 keys to 500 keys plus by end 2022.

Assuring safety and instilling brand confidence

With its presence in India for over a decade, ibis has established itself in the smart economy segment. Given the consistent offering by the brand irrespective of the location, there is a substantial number of travellers who prefer ibis for both their personal and business travel needs. The excellent occupancies and leading market share of 20 ibis hotels spread across 13 cities in India are a testimony of guest preference. Vineesh Kurup, General Manager of ibis Chennai City Centre and ibis Chennai Sipcot, shares more about ibis Chennai City Centre which has created a niche for itself and is a most sought-after hotel in its segment in the region.

Prashant Nayak

Like the whole hospitality industry, the ibis Chennai City Centre was also severely impacted by the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. However, during the pandemic, the hotel supported the state health department in accommodating the front-line medical staff. Even though the revenues and profits were severely impacted, the hotel continued to serve the few guests and retained the staff.

After the second lockdown was lifted in July 2021, the hotel quickly ramped up with public channel bookings surging month on month. The confidence of travellers was reinforced by the COVID safety protocols under the ALLSAFE label, that ensures intensified hygiene and prevention measures. The ALLSAFE procedures were carefully prepared and followed religiously to ensure the safety of their guests and staff.

“Our ALLSAFE procedures played an important role in instilling the confidence in our guests about their health and safety. Customers are themselves aware and conscious about their safety and appreciate the hotel’s efforts to prevent the pandemic. Both guests and staff are adjusting themselves well with the new ways of conducting business at the hotel, shares Vineesh.

While leisure travellers are increasingly becoming more confident in travelling because of the safety protocols followed at the hotel, they are also particular about the hotel where they choose to stay. Vineesh states, “I believe the hotel selection depends a lot on the safety assurance and the confidence in the brand. Although

MICE is growing, the pace is slow. We see a month-on-month improvement in meetings from our corporate clientele. Yes! We see a bounce back in the leisure and MICE segments.”

Located on the city’s main arterial road known as Mount Road, the hotel is close to the US Consulate, commercial hubs like T. Nagar and Egmore. It is located next to a metro rail station with direct connectivity to the airport and the Chennai Central railway station. Vineesh says, “The USP is the location of the hotel. In addition to the location, the strong reliability of the network of ibis hotels is also a key driver of business for the hotel.”

Discussing the role and importance of technology in the pandemic, Vineesh points out, “While technology upgrade is inevitable and plays a key role in guest experience in the hospitality industry, just like any other industry, the essence of hospitality lies in the personal touch. There is no replacement for personal interaction, smiling faces and the expression of gratitude. For a hotel stay to be made memorable for a guest, it is the personal touch which paves the way.”

While the threat of Omicron is present, all the major south Indian cities have been witnessing a very good business ramp-up in the last couple of months and are expected to continue. While the IT industry hasn’t completely switched over from the work-from-home mode, other industries such as automobiles, banking, insurance,



▲ Vineesh Kurup

pharmaceuticals, and FMCG have started travel for business purposes. Leisure destinations are also witnessing tremendous demand during weekends and holidays.

“The hotel industry is one of the most resilient, and it has been proven time and again. The hospitality industry will certainly bounce back and that too sooner than what was anticipated by experts. Few changes, such as a heightened focus on the safety of guests and staff, efficiency in utilisation of manpower, frugal ways of operations, have been embraced by the industry and those are likely to stay for long. The worst days for the industry seem to be behind us and together we hope for the prosperous and glorious days of the industry to return soon,” speaks Vineesh with much optimism.

On an expansion binge

Hotel Polo Towers Group, the hospitality major in Northeast, has an array of pipeline projects in the current year. Deval Tibrewalla, Chief Executive Officer, Hotel Polo Towers Group, shares the exciting plans of the Group.

Swaati Chaudhury

As we have entered into another COVID-19 year full of new challenges and uncertainties, it's time to take a peek into the strategies and plans drawn up by luxury hospitality groups in the East. Hotel Polo Towers Group has acquired Kolkata's Floatel, the premier floating hotel in the country, and has re-launched the property sometime in December last year.

Deval Tibrewalla commented, "Ranked as the largest hospitality group in Northeast India, we have centralized a plethora of sourcing and purchases that we intend to take ahead in the New Year. We are always on the path of building novel projects and we have optimised project costs using technology. We have lined up the launch

of two fascinating spas, known as Tattva Spa in Agartala and Cherrapunjee. Our website has been fully revamped and our customers are booking end-to-end itineraries. We are adding to our fleet of hotel-operated luxury cars for hygienic transfers. Our properties occupy the top slot on Tripadvisor, including the newly launched Polo Floatel. We are highly popular in the hospitality industry and we operate in large markets like Kolkata. We can bring our signature experience to our guests across a range of markets as we keep evolving in the current year. Online reviews constitute a significant barometer for building trust among customers."

The Tattva Spa at Cherrapunjee provides unforgettable views of the



▲ Deval Tibrewalla

Cliffside and has a glass roof that provides great views of the sunset.

The hospitality identity is contemplated to grow by each channel in the ensuing year. Tibrewalla said, "We will own one more hotel, add two hotels on lease and two on a contractual basis with the group's management. With the growth of our hospitality chain, we have realised the value that we can bring to other asset owners in the North-East region who own huge hotels but are not able to run them efficiently."

2022 is set to witness the rise of rural travel entrepreneurs

Travel Union, India's first rural B2B travel tech platform, designed for the rural travel industry. As the travel industry gradually starts to pick up the pace, Travel Union hopes to build a robust travel business community in rural India. Dilip Modi, Founder, Travel Union, shares his outlook for the rural travel sector in the year 2022.

Team TTJ

Rural tourism has gained major traction in the past few months as governments globally imposed international travel bans and COVID restrictions. While making their travel plans, many domestic tourists have shown a growing inclination to explore the rural regions of the country.

Hence, 2022 is the time for rural travel entrepreneurs to take advantage of the tourism potential. With the intervention of tech, aspiring entrepreneurs in the rural travel sector can now start their own business with effectively zero investment. This will not only open new avenues of income for these new-age travel agents but also result in greater profits and greater contribution towards the overall sector.

Modi says, "For decades, the rural travel sector has missed out on technological innovations that have

transformed urban travel. 2022 might be the year that disrupts the status quo. The advent and penetration of tech will introduce some much-needed order to the otherwise unorganised sector. Rural travel agents are set to have greater control over the different elements that they have to offer. Aided by tech, they will have better access to inventory, aggregation of services, digital payment modes, etc. This will have a positive domino effect on their margins, thereby increasing their profitability, while also providing a boost to the sector as a whole."

2022 is also going to be a transformative year for the rural traveller. With a new breed of tech-enabled travel agents coming to the fore, now rural travellers are set to experience this change. Travellers who had to go to faraway bus stops or train stations for pre-booking,



▲ Dilip Modi

get minimum options of stay, wait in queues for hours to make payments, cancellations, and refunds, will not only be able to get these done at the tap of a button or over a phone call with one of these new-age travel agents but will also have a host of options and deals to choose from.

"Thus, in 2022, rural travel agents are set to take the lead in transforming the rural travel sector. With the assistance of technology, rural travel agents will now have tech-driven solutions for inventory, competitive prices, and direct aggregation from airlines, railways, hotels, and wholesalers. This will introduce some much-needed order and organisation in the sector," opines Modi.



The 36th IATO Annual Convention concludes on a high note

The 36th IATO Annual Convention was held at The Leela, Gandhinagar, from the 16th - 19th of December 2021 and the Chief Minister of Gujarat Bhupendra Patel inaugurated the convention. IATO members from across India came to Gujarat to attend the 3-day event and more than 600 delegates participated. It was after about eighteen months that the tourism fraternity was under one roof to witness one of the biggest tourism conventions since the pandemic. The convention aimed to discuss the measures to revitalise the tourism sector after the COVID-19 pandemic and rebuild confidence among members and the tourism industry.

Team TTJ

The highlight of the 36th Annual Convention of IATO was that it saw huge footfalls of officials from the Ministry of Tourism, GoI, officials from various state tourism departments, travel and hospitality stalwarts, and other dignitaries from across the country. This reflects involvement at a higher level for the future of tourism.

The convention received whole-hearted support from Hareet Shukla, Secretary Tourism and Jenu Devan, Managing Director & Commissioner Tourism, Gujarat Government, and the team. Other top officials from MoT, such

as Arvind Singh, Tourism Secretary, G Kamala Vardhan Rao, Director General Tourism, and Rupinder Brar, Additional Director General Tourism, also graced and supported the event.

The senior government officials from the Centre and state governments in the panel discussions and the valedictory session included Rakesh Kumar Verma, Additional Secretary Tourism; Rajiv Jalota, Chairman Mumbai Port Trust; Raj Muthuraj, Additional DG. Directorate General of Foreign Trade; S.K. Srivastava, Dept. of Forests & Environment, Government of Gujarat; Shilpa Gupta, Additional Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism

Board; Manoj Kumar. Managing Director, Jungle Lodges & Resort, Govt. of Karnataka; G.S. Itoo, Director Tourism Kashmir; Rajiv Jain, Addl. GM, IRCTC; Abhay Sinha, Director General, Services Export Promotion Council (SEPC).

Various business sessions were held during the three days, including the theme for the convention, 'Brand India - The Road to Recovery for Revival of Business.' Besides a bevy of speakers from government and state-run institutions, panellists included Sanjay Kumar, Chief Strategy & Revenue Officer, IndiGo; Nakul Anand, Executive Director, ITC Hotels & Chairman FAITH; Puneet Chhatwal, MD & CEO, IHCL;

Anuraag Bhatnagar, COO, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts; and Ajay Bakaya, Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels & Resorts.

The business sessions held at the event gave rise to many new ideas for the development of the country's tourism sector and the creation of Brand India. Interesting topics such as Hotels in the NewNormal, Connectivity: NewFrontiers, SEIS: New Policy under FTP 2021-2026, Responsible Tourism, Automation, Digital Marketing, Preparedness under New Normal, etc. were discussed in the sessions. Constructive outcomes emerged during the panel discussions, during one such business session "Hotels in the New Normal," Taj Hotels announced the facilitation of a special Promo Code, using which IATO member tour operators and travel agents had access to special rates by Taj Hotels.

In between sessions, state representatives of Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu & Kashmir, Kerala, and other states of India also gave their presentations.

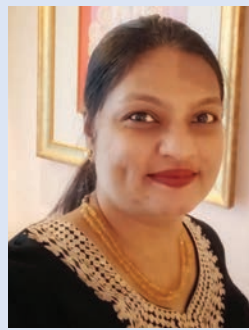
At the convention, industry veterans Subhash Goyal, Chairman of STIC Travel Group, and Mahender Singh Vaghela, popularly known as Mike Vaghela, a tourism industry stalwart from Gujarat, were conferred the 'Hall of Fame' award by IATO, and the awards were given by Bhupendrabhai Patel, the Chief Minister of Gujarat.

The IATO Run, a regular affair at the convention, took place this year in a 'zero-pollution environment,' with an AQI level of less than 50 as informed by the organisers. On all three days, entertainment programmes were hosted with singers such as Abhijeet Sawant, Jimmy Felix, and Urvashi Arora, besides a karaoke competition. On the last day, actor and motivational speaker Ashish Vidyarthi addressed delegates to inspire the travel industry to stand strong during crises like the COVID pandemic and look for future opportunities.

Five post-convention tours were organised following the convention, with over 200 delegates exploring Gujarat and visiting places such as the Statue of Unity, Somnath, Dwarka, Jamnagar, Porbandar Modhera, Bhuj, Patan, and the Little Rann of Kutch.

IATO has announced that the next convention will take place in Bengaluru in September 2022, which will be hosted by Karnataka Tourism.

TTJ is proud to be honoured and humbled to receive the Best Digital Travel Media award at the 36th IATO Annual Convention at Gandhinagar.



Meera Rajaram, Partner, Narmada Holidays

Due to COVID, we have not been able to interact in person with our trade contacts in the last two years. We were very happy to attend the convention again, especially this time. We had to anyhow meet and reconnect as an industry. Thus, we appreciate all the hard work done by the IATO convention team for formulating the event. It was organised very well and was carried out very smoothly for all three days. Luckily, there was no impact of the virus at the convention in December. We enjoy meeting our industry partners/service providers/hoteliers from all over the country during every convention to discuss new ideas and possibilities. This time the business sessions were of great quality due to senior executives from the hotel industry and senior officials of the Ministry of Tourism.



Sarvar Hans, National Sales Director, Amritara Hotels & Resorts

Being the first massive event after a long time, post the second COVID lockdown, our expectations were very high from the IATO committee. We expected this to be a major networking event where we could interact with the major agents from Gandhinagar, Ahmedabad, and other nearby cities. The core concept of networking was not well organised as we had expected. It seemed to be a missed opportunity. The event was segregated at three different venues, with the local agents unable to join us during networking sessions and dinners. This made it impossible for one individual to network at three different locations simultaneously. As the event was held in Gandhinagar, we expected the local agents to also be a part of the core event for us to interact with. Some of the travel fraternity members had travelled from Delhi, Mumbai, and Kerala for the convention. We did not need to travel to Gandhinagar in specific to interact with them.



Siddharth Joshi, Director of Sales & Marketing, The Radisson Blu Hotel & Spa Nashik

It is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the tourism industry quite hard worldwide. This was indeed a great industry initiative to engage with industry experts and see how we can get better sail through these tough times as partners. The topics were interesting and, overall, a productive event. Radisson Blu Hotel & Spa Nashik recently opened in Oct 2021. Our key expectations were to create an awareness of the new hotel and destination via networking at the convention. It was also important to understand the current industry insights and trends at these times. The convention was very well planned and executed. It certainly met my expectations.



Rakesh Mathur, Honorary President, RTSOI

I take this opportunity to note our nine-point recommendations at the IATO Convention. We at RTSOI believe that the tour operators are the best ambassadors of the tourism Industry.

1. Travellers most often have the Tour Operators as their first contact. Thus, it becomes imperative that IATO members should consider it necessary- educate/sensitise the traveller before embarking on their journey. E.g., dissuading the traveller from taking an elephant ride at Amer Fort or promoting 'Experiencing the Jungle' instead of chasing the elusive Tiger. Unfortunately, the success or failure of a beautiful and exciting safari depends on the sighting of the glamorous species when there is so much else to see and admire.
2. IATO members should sell a complete immersion in a good local Experience that includes understanding and respecting local customs, cuisine, lifestyle, and beliefs.
3. IATO should promote Gender Sensitivity and Inclusiveness. We are learning from Bhutan, where the ladies operate a major part of tourism.
4. We are all aware that the tourism industry generates substantial affluents, waste, and garbage. At IATO, we need to impress our local facility providers to ensure Waste Management. It would be criminal to see the most pristine locations going to the dumps.
5. IATO members should support organisations that employ and empower local communities. There are almost no other livelihood opportunities for the locals in most of the locations.
6. IATO can take up field staff training and skilling to provide a complete experience as an organisation.
7. IATO may impress the government on the need to carry capacity studies in high tourism density destinations.
8. IATO may impress the government to put in place and enforce a mechanism to fine/ punish violators of necessary environmental practices, including in the informal sector (unregistered guest houses, dhabas etc.) utilising Tourism Warden, etc.
9. Since the effective implementation of Responsible and Sustainable practices requires a Change of Mindset, it is very important to impart this Responsible Citizen education in all schools across India, including compulsory social service, and also support the Responsible Travellers Campaign.

Offbeat Villas partners with One Rep Global



Offbeat Villas, a leading provider of custom technology for professional trip designers, is pleased to announce its partnership with One Rep Global. Offbeat Villas is a B2B booking portal connecting travel agencies in India and the Middle East with the world's most unique private residences, villas, homes, and other one-of-a-kind accommodations.

Available exclusively to the trade, Offbeat Villas offers travel professionals insider access to private retreats spanning a range of price points and global destinations, from beach villas and heritage estates to serviced apartments and ski chalets. In contrast to peer-to-peer homeshare platforms, every property available through the dedicated Offbeat Villas website, travel professionals can easily search and book residence-style inventory around the world. Trip designers also have access to a range of proprietary tools and services for personalising stays, crafting custom client presentations, and tracking booking activity.

Speaking on this partnership, Hemant Mediratta, Founder of One Rep Global stated, "Offbeat Villas is backed by some great technology and can be a potential game changer for booking alternate accommodation. Being a B2B only platform, it brings tremendous value to the travel trade with a choice of over 175,000 private residences and vacation homes worldwide. The next few years are likely to see a further surge in travellers booking alternate lodging experiences for a more immersive and experiential stay."

Thailand reopens three more Sandbox destinations

Thailand's Centre for

COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) recently approved a new round of relaxed entry measures for international arrivals to Thailand, reopening 3 more Sandbox destinations – Krabi, Phang-Nga, and Surat Thani (only Ko Samui, Ko Pha-ngan, and Ko Tao) from January 11, 2022, – in addition to Phuket.



The Sandbox entry programme is now available at four destinations. International travellers can travel to Thailand under the Sandbox programme, and choose to undergo their mandatory 7-day stay in either Krabi, Phang-Na, Phuket, or Surat Thani (only Ko Samui, Ko Pha-ngan, and Ko Tao).

However, all travellers must make sure that they arrange everything in order before applying for the Sandbox Thailand Pass. This can include but is not limited to, a vaccination certificate, a pre-arrival negative RT-PCR test result, prepaid 7-night's accommodation in an approved hotel, prepaid RT-PCR tests for when in Thailand, and insurance policy with coverage no less than US\$50,000.

Travellers must stay at least the first 7 nights within a Sandbox destination if planning to continue the journey to other destinations in Thailand. If staying less than 7 nights, the traveller must leave Thailand to another country immediately.

The CCSA also approved the measure to maintain temporary suspension of the Thailand Pass system for new registrations under the Exemption from Quarantine (Test & Go).

Entry measures for travellers who have obtained their Thailand Pass QR code before December 22, 2021, with scheduled arrival dates in Thailand from December 24, 2021, onwards, are currently under review by the CCSA.

Alternatively, travellers who are currently planning to enter Thailand can apply for the Thailand Pass under either the Sandbox programme or the Alternative Quarantine system.

From April 2022 onwards, Thailand will charge foreign tourists an entry fee of 300 baht (\$9). This move is part of the Tourism and Sports Ministry promotion plan for 2022, themed "Amazing Thailand New Chapter".

The 300 baht entry fee would be used to develop tourist attractions and for accident or death insurance for all tourists. The maximum insurance payout would be 1 million baht in the case of death and 500,000 baht for medical expenses. The charge would be included in air fares. The means of collecting the entry fee from people arriving by land was still being considered.

TBO.com files draft papers to raise ₹ 2100 crore via IPO

The IPO consists of a fresh issue of ₹900 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of ₹1200 crore by its existing shareholders and promoters. The proceeds from the fresh issue will be used for the company's growth, strengthening of its platform by adding new buyers and suppliers, for strategic acquisitions and investments towards inorganic growth.

Axis Capital, Credit Suisse Securities India, Jefferies India, and JM Financials are the book running lead managers to the issue.

TBO is a global travel technology company focused on providing a range of travel services to its buyers (travel agents, TMCs, Super Apps and tour operators) across the world. The company has also constituted a stellar board of independent directors.



Tourism Malaysia New Delhi hosts networking session with travel trade partners

In preparation for the reopening of its borders, the Malaysian Government has selected Langkawi as the pilot holiday destination to receive tourists under the 'Langkawi International Travel Bubble' from November 15, 2021.

In conjunction of the recent travel bubble, Tourism Malaysia New Delhi hosted a networking session with travel trade partners at The Imperial, New Delhi on December 13, 2021. The event was attended by travel agents, wedding planners and media representatives from the northern and eastern regions of India. The attendees were briefed about Malaysia's tourism development and tourism products, the latest Covid-19 situation as well as the pilot travel bubble and the expected reopening of Malaysian borders in early 2022.

Sulaiman Suip, Director of Tourism Malaysia New Delhi said, "Malaysia has successfully reached vaccination of more than 97.3 per cent of its adult population against COVID-19, making it one of the highest vaccinated destinations in the Southeast Asian region. In addition, fully-vaccinated individuals have also started receiving their booster shots."

"We are thrilled and excited to welcome back tourists. All our



attractions, tour operators, airlines, hotels, and resorts are operating under strict SOPs. Our industry players are offering value-for-money packages while health and hygiene will be of utmost importance as your safety is our priority. Also, the highlight for 2022 will be the opening of Genting SkyWorlds, the much-anticipated outdoor theme park in Genting Highlands. This is sure to be and take everyone's adventure quotient on a new high," said Suip.

Summit Hotel & Resorts looks forward to expand its presence in India

Summit Hotels & Resorts, the largest Himalayan hospitality brand in the Northeast, is known for its premier leisure hospitality services. The



▲ Sumit Mitraka



▲ Shikha Khanna

hotels under the brand are majorly located in the eastern circuit of India, namely Gangtok, Lachung, Lachen, Pelling, Kalimpong, Darjeeling, and Kaziranga. They also have properties in Shimla and Manali.

Sumit Mitraka is the CEO and Founder of Summit Hotels & Resorts. Prior to founding the hospitality brand, he had worked at various hotels in the UK while pursuing his MBA. After completing his formal education, he headed back to India and decided to start a hospitality business in India. Here, he observed that the hospitality industry lacked basic infrastructures and facilities pertaining to standardised hospitality and value for money. Hence, he came up with a vision of starting a brand with "Exceptional Value Exceptional Services". Hailing from the Northeast, he started his first project in the Northeastern hills, which became a benchmark in the region over the years. The brand is spread across various scenic hill stations across the Eastern Himalayas and a few places in Himachal and Uttarakhand. Sumit also looks forward to having the brand established at all the hill stations in India in the near future.

Acknowledging the growth of the brand, Sumit says, "We would like to thank all our B2B partners who have helped us grow and we are looking forward to connecting with new agencies designated across India. We wish to build great relations with all the trade partners."

Recently, Summit Hotels & Resorts appointed Shikha Khanna as the National Head of PR and Marketing. Shikha brings with her experience of over 18 years in tourism and hospitality. At Summit Hotels & Resorts, Shikha will be guiding the marketing team in establishing great relationships with reputable B2B agents across the country.

Sri Lanka launches luxury train service in Jaffna with India's assistance

Sri Lanka has launched a luxury train service connecting the country's Tamil-dominated Jaffna district to the capital city Colombo with the help of a Line of Credit offered by India, in another significant landmark in bilateral ties.

The intercity rail service with all facilities was launched on January 9, 2022, for passengers travelling from Colombo's Mount Lavinia suburb to Jaffna's Kankesanthurai port suburb in the north, covering a distance of approximately 386 km. The train service will criss-cross the island nation, connecting Colombo with Kankesanthurai on the northern tip of the Jaffna Peninsula, which has a Tamil-majority population.

Sri Lanka's Minister of Transport Pavithra Wanniarachchi, who undertook the inaugural ride, was welcomed by India's Deputy High Commissioner Vinod K Jacob at the Colombo Fort Station during the inaugural ceremony.

India had provided AC Diesel Multiple Units (AC DMUs) under the loan facility. The supply of air-conditioned diesel multiple units is just one of the many railway projects being undertaken by India in Sri Lanka, the Indian High Commission said, adding that there are also other ongoing projects, which include the supply of passenger coaches under an Indian Line of Credit.

India's total development portfolio in Sri Lanka is over USD 3.5 billion, of which around USD 570 million are purely grant projects. Modernisation of railways and creation of new railway infrastructure have been important sectors of focus under the Indian Government's development portfolio in Sri Lanka, in line with the priority of the government and people of Sri Lanka.



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