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# Travel Trade Journal

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

Email: info@sampanmedia.com

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

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Dear Friends,

With the Omicron-led wave of the COVID pandemic still underway, and though the centre and the states have so far avoided lockdowns, the travel and hospitality industry is still absorbing the full brunt of the downturn. While the hotels and airlines initially witnessed a wave of cancellations and faced debilitating losses, the mild manifestation of the Omicron variant has given some relief and the resultant rise in domestic travel is now keeping them going while strategising new ideas to capture the potential market. Until international travel returns to normal, the pent-up demand and the newfound craze for domestic discoveries are likely to boost the industries' recovery from the impact of Omicron.

TTJ Feb 2022 issue features a few pages on the hospitality industry, which is still battling the COVID-19 effect and variants with its resilience and never die attitude. Hotels have learned to be continually alert while remaining functional in the new normal. It will be a treat for you to read their views.

While we have also tried to cover a few other aspects of domestic travel, we hope it will be a game-changer in shaping the future of the travel and hospitality industry, particularly in a country like ours, which has not been much explored by its own citizens.

Happy Reading!

*Ravi Sharma*

Ravi Sharma  
ravisharma@sampanmedia.com

Editor's Desk





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## No 7-day home quarantine for international travellers

The Central government on February 10, 2022, issued revised guidelines for international arrivals, doing away with the mandatory seven-day home quarantine for those arriving from overseas and the need for them to undertake an RT-PCR test on the eighth day. The demarcation of countries 'at-risk' and other countries has been removed.

A sub-section (2 per cent of the total passengers on the flight) shall undergo random post-arrival testing at the airport on arrival. They will submit their samples and be allowed to leave the airport.

Instead of the seven-day home quarantine as mandated earlier, all travellers will self-monitor their health for 14 days after their arrival.

Besides uploading a negative RT-PCR report (taken 72

hours prior to the journey), there would also be an option to upload certificates of the completion of the full primary COVID-19 vaccination schedule provided by countries on a reciprocal basis. The ministry has provided a list of 82 such countries.

Passengers found to be symptomatic during screening after arrival shall be immediately isolated and taken to a medical facility in accordance with health protocol. If tested positive, their contacts shall be identified and managed as per laid down protocol.

If such travellers test positive, their samples should be further sent for genomic testing at the INSACOG laboratory network and they will be treated/isolated in accordance with standard protocol, the guidelines state.

## UK lifts all COVID testing requirements for vaccinated travellers



Travellers who have been fully vaccinated against the coronavirus COVID-19 can now enter the United Kingdom without undergoing any coronavirus testing.

British residents and visitors who have had at least two doses of an approved Coronavirus vaccine now only need to fill out a passenger locator form before travelling to the UK.

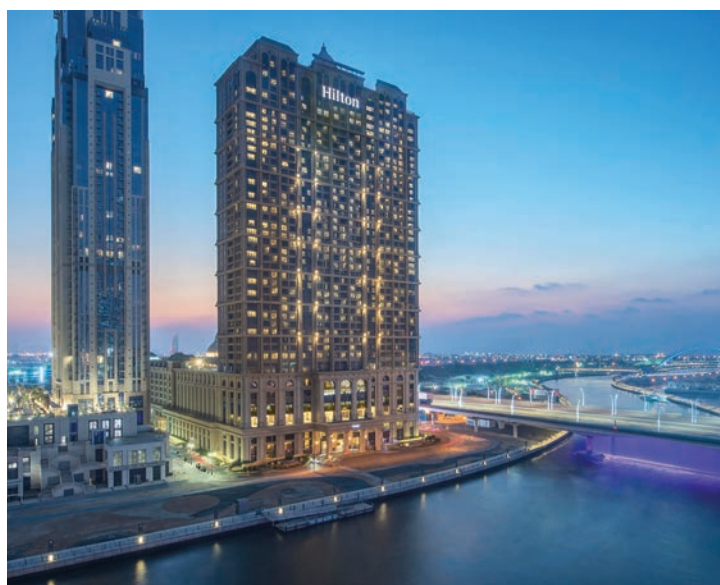
Unvaccinated people still have to take tests both before and after arriving, but no longer need to self-isolate until they get a negative result.

Airlines and other travel firms hailed the change as a lifeline after two years of severely constricted travel. But some scientists worry the government is moving too fast. Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative government lifted most domestic rules last month.

Face masks are no longer mandatory in most indoor spaces in England. Vaccine passports for gaining entry to nightclubs and large-scale events were scrapped, as was the official advice to work from home.

Other parts of the UK Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have also lifted most restrictions. Johnson announced that he hopes to lift the final restriction of mandatory self-isolation for people who test positive by the end of February as part of a plan to live long term with COVID-19.

## Al Habtoor City Hotel Collection by Hilton appoints Red Dot Representations as its India representative



Red Dot Representations, a brand of destination and event management company Tamarind Global, has been appointed to represent the Al Habtoor City Hotel Collection by Hilton, UAE.

The Al Habtoor City Hotel Collection by Hilton draws from the strong legacies of the Habtoor namesake, and the legacy of the Hilton brand, which allows the brand exceptional recognition both in the Middle East and internationally. Its hotel collection itself comprises three distinct hotel products: Hilton Dubai Al Habtoor City, V Hotel Dubai - Curio Collection by Hilton and Habtoor Palace Dubai - LXR Hotels & Resorts.

Red Dot Representations will facilitate awareness of the Al Habtoor City Hotel Collection by Hilton in the India market, as well as provide consulting on experiential marketing activities, culinary offerings and amenities to position them as the preferred destination for the most discerning Indian travellers. They will work closely on the marketing and training fronts, creating e-marketing strategies, public relations, communication, and reputation management, developing incentivising programs and much more.



Arabian Nights Village

# Experience the Charm of Luxury Winter Desert Escapes in Abu Dhabi

The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi’s new Desert Guide details the finest stopovers to try during the ‘World’s Coolest Winter’

**T**his season’s cooler temperatures mean it is the perfect time to head outdoors and experience the ‘World’s Coolest Winter’ in Abu Dhabi.

With an abundance of natural, untouched desert landscapes, undulating dunes and sandy flats, the UAE capital is an amazing destination for camping, off-roading activities and nature walks. For ‘campers’ who want to explore nature while still enjoying modern luxuries, however, the Abu Dhabi desert is also home to several exceptional five-star resorts and retreats.

In its newly-launched Desert Guide, the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) offers nature-lovers and adventure-seekers helpful tips, tricks and location information about Abu Dhabi’s natural attractions, camping grounds and hotspots for the best desert views.

For those keen for a night under the stars while staying in luxury desert resorts, we have rounded up four of Abu Dhabi’s beautiful spots for you to choose from:

## Arabian Nights Village

Located just beyond the Al Wathba region, the Arabian Nights Village is a hybrid camping-hotel resort, offering visitors the opportunity to embrace Emirati history and the timeless beauty of the desert. With four accommodation types available and several adrenaline-fuelled experiences on offer to explore the surrounding desert, there’s something to suit every taste. For more information, visit [visitabudhabi.ae/arabian-nights-village](https://visitabudhabi.ae/arabian-nights-village).

## Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort by Anantara

This five-star resort is the epitome of Arabian luxury, offering faultless service and fantastic attention to detail, with uninterrupted breath-taking views and an array of stunning accommodations and desert activities, such as camel or horse trekking and archery. Despite scaling the heights of luxury, Qasr al Sarab also stays true to Arabian heritage.

Visit [visitabudhabi.ae/qasr-al-sarab-desert-resort-by-anantara](https://visitabudhabi.ae/qasr-al-sarab-desert-resort-by-anantara) for more information.

## Al Wathba, A Luxury Collection Desert Resort & Spa

This five-star resort offers a classic Arabian ambience hidden in the desert, with luxury accommodation, a spa, Turkish hammam, plunge pools, steam rooms and salt saunas. To find out more, visit [visitabudhabi.ae/al-wathba-a-luxury-collection-hotel](https://visitabudhabi.ae/al-wathba-a-luxury-collection-hotel).



Al Wathba, A Luxury Collection Desert Resort & Spa

## Telal Resort Al Ain

This luxurious five-star resort is a family favourite thanks to its camp-like setting paired with all the comforts of a top hotel. Telal Resort Al Ain, sitting in the heart of the Rimah Desert, recreates the traditions of the Emirati experience in a comfortable luxury atmosphere. Please visit [visitabudhabi.ae/en/telal-resort](https://visitabudhabi.ae/en/telal-resort) for more information.

Whatever your desert camping desires this winter, you will find more information, tips and tricks in DCT Abu Dhabi’s Desert Guide. The comprehensive guide is free and available for download online at [issuu.com/visitabudhabi](https://issuu.com/visitabudhabi).



Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort by Anantara



Telal Resort Al Ain





# The Union Budget 2022-23 “Hits and Misses” for the Travel Industry

A mixed bag of hits and misses is what the Union Budget 2022-23 looks like for the travel industry. We compiled the feedback and initial reactions of the captains of the industry and also spoke in-depth with Rupinder Brar, Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, to understand the Ministry's perspective on issues and reassurance to continue working to smoothen the path ahead for the industry.

**Gurjit Singh**

**T**he Union Budget 2022-23 was a mixed bag of offerings, failing to tug at the right cords at the heart of the travel industry. While some long-term announcements were made on new trains, e-passports and infrastructure development, the question of the industry's immediate survival was completely circumvented and unanswered. Expectations were running high among an industry that has been severely hit and struggling to survive for the past two years. Announcement of some relief and bail-out measures for the industry's immediate survival was expected. However, a deep sense of despair prevails as the Finance Minister has completely failed to address the plight of the tourism sector.

An extension of the ECLGS was announced till 2023, which was well received by the big Hospitality industry players but was unable to lift the spirits of the small and medium players for whom a longer payback period of 10 to 15 years would have proved to be an actual respite. According to IATO, “The extension of the loan under ECLGS is of no use for inbound tour operators as they are not able to pay EMIs of the loan they have already taken. Besides, banks are not providing fresh loans to tour operators until they clear their previous loans. Further, the loans are not being given to tour operators who have taken loans under ECLGS 1 and 3.”



## Rupinder Brar

Additional Director General,  
Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

A sum of INR 2400 crores has been earmarked for the Ministry of Tourism. This budget is 18.42 per cent higher than 2021-22 and will be utilised by the Ministry for developing tourism infrastructure, marketing and promotion, and capacity building.

Out of the INR 2400 crores, INR 1644 crores has been earmarked for the development of tourism infrastructure, including an outlay of INR 1181.30 crore for the Swadesh Darshan Scheme. Fifty-five new destinations are being planned to be developed under the Swadesh Darshan scheme. The Ministry has further allocated INR 227 crore for the Northeastern states for the year 2022-23. INR 98 crores is earmarked under the Tribal Sub Plan for the creation of tourism infrastructure in the tribal areas.

Another flagship scheme of the Ministry, the PRASHAD Scheme, aims for the holistic development of selected pilgrimage destinations in the country. An amount of INR 235 crores has been allocated for the PRASHAD Scheme.

Domestic tourism surges between the various COVID phases, came as a lifesaver for the hotels in these testing times not only generating record occupancies and room revenue, all this thanks to better connectivity and accessibility to hitherto off the grid destinations making it easy and comfortable for people to commute.



'If travel cannot happen, tourism cannot happen and for travel to happen, connectivity is the key.' Announcements of road network expansion and 400 new generation Vande Bharat Express trains over the next three years and will improve connectivity, efficiency and passenger experience. In order to improve connectivity in difficult terrains and promote tourism, the National Ropeways Development Programme will be taking up the development of ropeways under the PPP model as a sustainable alternative to roadways.

The Ministry of Tourism as an advocacy and support ministry for the sector is sympathetic to the concerns and pains of its stakeholders and the inbound tour operators and has been constantly in touch with the Department of Financial Services, Civil Aviation Ministry and Health Ministry to facilitate a fast return to normalcy in these uncertain times however the benign nature of the Omicron phase now gives a ray of hope.

Streamlining the process to avail of the loans announced for the tour guides and DOT registered agents is ongoing and many have already availed of the same. Industry concerns on TCS, GST were also flagged to the Ministry of Finance and we shall again take up the matter with the finance ministry as the redressal and consideration of grievances and suggestions is an ongoing process.

Our energies are now needed to revive demand to make businesses self-sustaining, we have written to the Ministry of Health that protocols need to be eased out to encourage people to travel, suggesting that double vaccinated people need not be subjected to pre-post travel screening and restrictions like many other countries have now started doing this will revive demand. Regarding the 5,00,000 free visas announced, we are taking up the issue with the Ministry of Home Affairs to extend and we are sure they will be accommodative as the intent is to bring in the visitors. Also opening up of the airspace to scheduled airline operations is being pursued with the Ministry of Civil Aviation, given the impact of Omicron the possibility seems nearer but again the final call has to be taken by the Ministry of Civil Aviation in consultation with Health Ministry.

Regarding SEIS, we have no communication; it is not our domain subject; however, the industry can write to us and we shall seek clarification from the Ministry of Commerce. The Ministry will continue to place focus on marketing and promoting both domestic and inbound tourism, by leveraging the success of India's robust COVID-19 vaccination drive.



**Rajiv Mehra**  
President, IATO

We had requested one-time grant based on our 2019-20 turnover, reduction in GST, restoration and enhancement of SEIS benefit, reducing taxes on international airfares and overall reduction of taxes on the Hospitality sector. Most disappointingly none of these found a mention in the budget presented. There has been huge employment loss besides financial loss in our sector. Just a few years ago we were earning huge foreign exchange for the government and in this hour of despair, we expected some handholding by the government.



**Jyoti Mayal**  
President, TAAI

Our trade has been ignored once again! our trade has suffered tremendously due to the pandemic and it was expected that the government would at least work towards positive upliftment of the travel and tourism in India, which they always portray as a priority. In our representations to the finance minister over the last two months, we had requested for GST input credits be made available across states for hotels and travel-tour operators. TCS has been a hindrance to the growth of outbound tourism making Indian tour operators less competitive in the international market due to the 5 per cent being levied on all package tour options over and above the GST, we were also expecting to least that travel and tourism be brought under the concurrent list for industry status.



**Nakul Anand**  
Chairman, FAITH

The union budget provides some relief and medium to long term infrastructure measures to stressed tourism travel and hospitality industry, but there was an immediate opportunity for more direct intervention to support the highly stressed tourism travel and hospitality companies and their employees.



**Dr. Subhash Goyal**  
President, Confederation of Tourism Professionals

Nothing concrete has been announced and this industry is bleeding for the last three years. The tourism industry was expecting some relief to be announced in this Budget but we are really disappointed. The government should understand that tourism is the largest employment generator and has been contributing 9-10 per cent of GDP and about 30 billion dollars in foreign exchange earnings. The greatest need of our country is to tackle the problem of unemployment which can only be done by supporting an industry like tourism. About 35-40 million people have either lost their jobs or are in the process of losing them.



**Riaz Munshi**  
President, OTOAI

It is a growth-oriented budget, but I am disappointed that no specific measures have been announced to revive the travel and tourism sector. We were hoping for some GST relief measures (a temporary waiver or reduction) to aid the recovery for travel companies. The recent introduction of TCS also distorts the competitive landscape and makes it favourable for the foreign travel companies who do not have to abide by these rules thus making an uneven playing field. It is important that this is reconsidered and some relief measures are implemented to promote the inclusive growth of our industry.





**P.P. Khanna**  
President, ADTOI

The Union Budget 2022-23 once again, disappointed the tourism sector, which had hopes from the government, some fiscal stimulus from the government was expected for survival. Almost 40 per cent of tour operators are already out from their businesses due to COVID and we are still in the midst of Omicron and expecting some relief from the government but seems all is in vain. While there were several other announcements for the infrastructure the proposed extension to the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) and E-Passport seems to be the only news for tourism. But what about the present situation to cope with the financial aids to Tour operators or for their survival has not been looked by the govt, despite best efforts from the industry leaders and FAITH.



**Rajeev Kohli**  
Joint Managing Director,  
Creative Travel

To say one is disappointed at today's budget is a gross understatement. Horrified if more like it. It is clear that the value of tourism in the eyes of this government is even lower than that of umbrellas, which got its own special mention. The extension of the EGCL is a paper whitewash. Only those with existing debt could use the scheme, to begin with. And to make the industry take debt on debt is cruel. It does not reduce the cost as the interest clock is still clicking. The Modi government has yet again kicked an industry that is already on its knees. I am saddened for all of us in the larger tourism and hospitality space. So many people tried their best to get something for us. So many representations were made. But the truth is, we simply don't matter.



**Ankush Nijhawan**  
Co-Founder, TBO.com

The launch of the issuance of e-passports with embedded chips is a welcome move for the travel and tourism industry as it would ease international travel facilitating more people to travel abroad. In addition, the introduction of 400 Vande Bharat trains in the next three years is expected to assist in augmenting online train booking in the coming years.



**Prateek Hira**  
Chairman of IATO- Uttar  
Pradesh, Chapter;  
FICCI's Tourism Committee  
under UP State Council

Unfortunately, the tourism industry was once again sidelined in the union budget 2022 as no direct benefit was passed on to it, even though this is the most ailing of all sectors due to the pandemic. The extension of ECLGS through 2023 is a welcome step and the allocation of additional 50,000 crores dedicated to tourism will bring in some relief for the industry. It is justified to say that we were expecting much more, at least indirect benefits which we did not get.



**Jay Bhatia**  
Vice President, TAAI

It is frustrating that the Government's focus is on 2047 rather than looking at current challenges faced by the travel and tourism trade in India. In her budget speech, the Hon'ble Finance Minister set out "Amritkal" being positive for the growth of the country, we feel that this is not Amritmanthan but "Mahapralaya" – the dissolution of the travel and tourism trade in India. Our appeals to the government to liberalise taxes and grant tax holidays on GST for boosting travel and tourism has been ignored. Further, it was also expected that earnings from inbound travel would have been supported by export status, which would have enabled trade growth enhancing the economy.



**Vasudha Sondhi**  
Managing Director,  
OMPL Group

With reference to the tourism industry, while the budget talks about a 20000 crores outlay, it is not clear on its allocation. The budget has ignored completely some key aspects that are hurting the industry, like wage support, and the revival of inbound tourism, TCS issue for outbound agencies. Further, when so much is being said about domestic travel the least they could have done was to offer tax benefits to domestic travellers and/ or companies doing large MICE events in India.



**Ronojoy Dutta**  
Whole Time Director and Chief Executive Officer, IndiGo

Budget 2023 appears to be growth-oriented by increase in capital outlay of INR 7.5 lacs crores, fiscal deficit capped at 6.4 per cent and efforts are being made to reduce compliance burdens and improve ease of doing business. We expect the budget would enable India to achieve a growth estimate of 9.2 per cent. We welcome the new incentives of issuing of E-passport and the introduction of digital currency. The government's relentless focus on national transportation infrastructure development with the PM Gatti Shakti plan will strengthen the much-needed multimodal connectivity and facilitate the seamless movement of cargo while reducing logistics costs. Having said that we were expecting tax concession to the aviation industry in the form of a cut in ATF excise duty and allocation of concessional finance to airlines to help us come out of the pandemic.





**Madhavan Menon**  
Managing Director,  
Thomas Cook (India)

The union budget 2022-23 reflected the development and investment orientation, with much-needed emphasis on infrastructure, technology, skill development and health. However, from a travel and tourism perspective, the union budget has been disappointing. The budget made no reference to the industry's recommendations to aid revival, including rationalization of taxes (a complete GST holiday, exemption of TCS on outbound tours, reduction in indirect taxes), removal of SEIS benefit capping of ₹5 crore. For a sector that is a key contributor to the country's GDP and brings in valuable foreign exchange earnings, with a force multiplier impact on employment and skill development, a stimulus would have created significant value in supporting the country's road to recovery and growth.



**Sarbendra Sarkar**  
Founder, Cygnett Hotels and  
Resorts

The extension of the ECLGS scheme with an additional allocation for the hospitality sector is a welcome move. As we all are aware the hospitality sector has been one of the hardest-hit sectors because of COVID. This will help the small and mid-sized hotels overcome liquidity issues and to return to growth. The big focus on infrastructure development will also help the tourism and hospitality sector. We also welcome the announcement of the National Ropeways Development Programme.



**Kush Kapoor**  
CEO, Roseate Hotels and  
Resorts

The hospitality industry has been severely battered by three consecutive Covid-19 induced waves over the last two years. The extension of the ECLGS moratorium by one year for the hospitality sector will come as a breather for the hotel players grappling with the burden of loan repayment and uncertainties in revenue generation. The move will bolster the much-needed liquidity to the sector which employs a large number of people.



**Ruchi Uberai**  
Director, Amritara Hotels and Resorts

The much-touted ECLGS, according to me is a non-starter for small or medium players. This is a loan scheme for enabling you to borrow more money, which eventually has to be paid back. If the industry has to pay back loans that are more than business cash flow can afford then in times to come, we will be even more stressed. If the scheme was to have a 15 year or more payback period we could have still considered it, but in its current form this proposed extension of ECLGS is not worth considering as a benefit for the industry.



**SP Jain**  
Managing Director, Pride Hotels

Over the last few weeks, the government has been actively engaging with industry and other stakeholders to announce various measures to revive the economy. Tourism and Hospitality play a pivotal role in economic development and the industry was anxiously waiting for some key announcements from the union budget 2022-23. Finance Minister has considered the extension of the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) and its guarantee cover has been expanded by ₹50,000 crore to the total cover of ₹5 Lakh Crore. This will be a great boon for the hospitality and travel trade sector which has been adversely impacted by the pandemic for the last two years. This will give a much-needed boost to the sector by providing additional liquidity and helping it revive its position. The industry can now provide employment to millions of people who have lost their jobs. We welcome this announcement. This is a good budget for the hospitality and tourism sector.



**Zubin Saxena**  
MD & VP Operations,  
South Asia – Radisson Hotel  
Group

We welcome the union budget and the allocation of strategic aid that will enable the speedy recovery of the hospitality sector. The extension of the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) with an increased cover of INR 5 lakh crores for the hospitality sector is a positive move. With domestic travel picking pace, we believe that the government's highway expansion plans will facilitate accessibility and strengthen this demand further.



**H S Duggal**  
MD, Minar Group

The budget has been a great disappointment for the travel industry as it fails to address the immediate concerns for the industry's survival. We expected the government to handhold the industry out of these deep waters we all find ourselves in. Our industry has been a major employment generator and source of foreign exchange earnings, but currently, the government's indifference inaction has hit us deep.



# Domestic Tourism

## Blow hot, blow cold for the Indian hotels



The Grand Dragon Ladakh

Rising repeatedly like a Phoenix, wave after wave of the COVID pandemic, the Indian hotel industry has shown true grit and resilience. Kudos to their “Never Say Die Spirit” and the surge in domestic tourism that kept many afloat and bread-winners employed. The last two years have also witnessed a shift in consumer behavior, buying patterns, and business mix.

TTJ speaks to industry stakeholders to understand their perspectives.

**Gurjit Singh**

**T**hanks to the god sent intermittent surges and spikes of domestic tourism that have happened between the pandemic waves, providing much hope, and the badly needed financial sustenance, to this capital and manpower-intensive hospitality industry, the sector experienced great contrasts, from periods of blackouts in lobbies to periods of totally sold-out inventories. The period 2020-22 has been one heck of a ride and a great exercise in patience, hope, learning and survival.

**Gurbaxish Singh Kohli, Vice President, FHRAI** commenting on the government's announcements in the union budget says, “Though the budget has been gravely disappointing, the extension of ECLGS with additional allocation to the crawling hospitality sector and provisioning an outlay of ₹2 lakh crore through CGTMSE are the only relief measures provided as part of the union budget 2022-23. The special



▲ Gurbaxish Singh Kohli

allocation through ECLGS will support the struggling sector to mitigate some of the pandemic-induced challenges and the CGTMSE scheme is expected to facilitate additional credit of rupees two lakh crore for micro small enterprises and

expand employment opportunities. This move has come as a result of the multiple representations and extensive meetings FHRAI held with the authorities since the start of the pandemic. The Hon'ble FM acknowledged the massive losses incurred by the sector. However, this is just a drop in the ocean for a sector that has been severely battered. Given the massive damages that decimated the entire sector's ecosystem, these measures are not adequate to bridge the losses and offer impetus to the hospitality and tourism industry.”

The city hotels, business hotels, have had it much tougher as compared to the hotels, lodges, resorts catering to the leisure part of tourism. Goa, Kashmir, Leh, Ladakh, Rajasthan, Himachal, Uttarakhand, Kalimpong, Darjeeling, Sikkim, Shillong, wildlife parks and destinations with in drivable distances from home cities saw good business, not only on weekends but also through the week catering to getaways, staycations, family reunions and even weddings. The un-



coordinated travel guidelines, advisories and testing requirements issued time and time again by the national, state and district administration did not make it easy to commute interstate, nevertheless, the resilient Indian traveller hounded by days of lockdown braved it out to travel and perhaps drive down to relax, unwind and soothe their pandemic stressed nerves! Many a time leading to miles and miles of traffic jams at destinations or on the way to them.

As things were finally looking up, Omicron struck! again spoiling the party and creating uncertainty, but now almost 45 days into this Omicron wave, thanks to its milder manifestation and vaccination drive undertaken by our government the nightmarish memories of the second wave were laid to rest, re-instilling the confidence for the world to travel and with it initiating the process of easing of the guidelines and restrictions by the Indian government and governments worldwide.

Echoing the sentiment, **Himmat Anand, Founder, Tree of Life Resorts** states, "It is my belief that there is only



▲ Himmat Anand

one discouragement in terms of the domestic traveller making travel plans, the ever-changing and varied lockdowns and restrictions being announced by individual State Governments. Other than this, baring very small windows, there has never been a stronger upswing for domestic travel. What has also changed dramatically is the stay requirements of this segment. They have moved away from city center hotels with large room inventories to resort-like properties which are on the outskirts, having a limited number of rooms and large open spaces. Further, while earlier the optimal driving time to reach a holiday destination was

around 5 to 6 hours, COVID has pushed the acceptable driving time to around 8 hours."

Adding further to the upswing in the current mood, **Sarvar Hans, Vice President Commercial, Amritara Hotels & Resorts** shares, "Last month



▲ Sarvar Hans

only due to the rise in Omicron cases, we received multiple cancellations. People were skeptical to travel, the scare of the virus brought the entire travel to a halt. However, the revival is equally paced up and as soon as we witnessed a dip in the cases, we saw bookings coming in. Compared to last week, we have seen a buoyant pick up and we are hoping and anticipating a good pace."

Ladakh witnessed record numbers of domestic tourists, commenting on the situation created due to Omicron, **Danish Din, Director, The Grand Dragon Ladakh**, states "Ladakh has always been extremely popular in the summer and for the past two years,



▲ Danish Din

efforts have been put in place to promote winter tourism. Today, due to the onset of Omicron, winter tourism activities in Ladakh have also been suspended. This time of the year is known for the Chadar Trek on the frozen Zaskar and snow leopard sightings, and their suspension has disheartened adventure and wildlife enthusiasts alike. Whilst winter tourism activities have been suspended, we have had travellers who just wish to experience the snow-covered landscapes and breathe in the fresh mountain air. This is a good sign and we hope the virus wanes and the suspension on winter tourism activities is lifted soon."

**Geeta Maheshwari, Director, H&M Hospitality & Marketing Services**, whose company is currently the marketing



▲ Geeta Maheshwari

representative of 10 hotels across India, also explains, "The fear of new variants of pandemic coupled with new, different and unexpected restrictions placed in different states of the country seem to have caused apprehension among domestic travellers. The movement is slow but is increasing over time with more people fully vaccinated. It is interesting to witness an increase in intra-state travel as opposed to the inter-state getaways."

Now, hopefully, with the uncertainty of the Omicron wave behind us and the silver line visible on the horizon, a fresh wave of excitement combined with caution appears to be running through the segment. What's next? What appears to be emerging across the board is that it is high time the world moved on and stopped living under the shadow of the COVID cloud. It is time now to use your learning and move to rebuild your business in the new normal, it is time now to strategise, innovate and capture the upcoming pent-up demand of the domestic traveller till



the time the world fully reopens and the international visitors rebuild their confidence and comfort zones to resume inter-country travel.

**Syed Junaid Altaf, MD, Empyrean Skyview Projects**, elaborates, "We have also seen the trend where travellers in a



▲ Syed Junaid Altaf

bid to avoid crowds are more comfortable visiting driveable locations for safe, immersive, and experiential experiences. Skyview by Empyrean, Patnitop, UT J&K, which is only two hours away from Jammu and just 90 minutes from Katra. On the domestic front, we are targeting the religious tourism market and pilgrims to Katra are a major source of our business. Post-COVID, religious tourism in Katra has seen week-on-week growth and is now receiving over 15,000 pilgrims on a daily basis during Navratras in 2021, about two lakh pilgrims visited the holy shrine. The shrine has remained open for all pilgrims every day with COVID protocols being followed strictly. Our 22-acre property is a new lifestyle and adventure destination."

On the immediate steps to recapture the market share, **Zaheer Bagh, Proprietor, The Kargil**, a boutique hotel located at Kargil, states, "We have to be very flexible in our cancellation policies. We bank on our past client feedback and experiences; as a hotel, we strictly adhere to the COVID Safety norms. A lot now also depends on the Local administration for the COVID guidelines. We hope that flexibility in the travel norms will be the key factor for tourism to return to Kargil."

Experiential and boutique properties steeped in time, elegance, history, and folklore offering a unique and holistic experience stepped in and positioned themselves to fill in the void for the traveller to discover, experience, and



▲ Zaheer Bagh

be a part of the story. According to **Durgesh Chadha, Director Sales & Marketing, Ahilya Experiences**, "This



▲ Durgesh Chadha

crisis has proved to be an opportunity for all of us to rethink tourism for the future. Tourism is at a crossroads and the measures put in place today will shape the tourism of tomorrow. At our level, we continuously have been experimenting and innovating new marketing strategies to generate revenue. Since we are small and boutique, we offer many in-house activities and experiences for our guests as we could foresee that people will opt to stay within the properties. Our focus will always be on curating special and personalised experiences for our guests. We prefer to read the pulse and see the trends so that we can easily adapt to the ever-changing external business environment."

Further, **Vinit Chhabra, General Manager, The Khyber Himalayan Resort & Spa Gulmarg** states, "The



▲ Vinit Chhabra

existing pandemic, plus state-wise guidelines which vary are discouraging domestic travellers from firming up their travel plans. Although, in Kashmir, we are lucky enough that despite all this, we are seeing good occupancies which also show the positive approach of the J&K Government and its thrust towards tourism. Anyone planning a trip to Kashmir always puts us as a priority, wherein we have seen cases where guests have changed their plans when rooms are not available at the Khyber Himalayan Resort & Spa, Gulmarg. We are very active on social media, where we highlight our hospitality through micro-videos, pictures and also encourage our guests to share their experiences."

As domestic tourism comes to the rescue of our hotels, what stares at us is the complete absence of overseas visitors. Inbound tourism currently is almost non-existent, and many city hotels in gateway cities and destinations that relied heavily on overseas visitors have felt the brunt, as have dependent businesses like tourist guides, handicrafts and transportation but has the lack of inbound travellers made a big difference in the revenues of hotel properties or does domestic tourism fill in the gap perfectly for now.

According to Chhabra, "Kashmir, due to international advisory has been a domestic-oriented destination from the start. Closure of International tourism has been beneficial to us as Kashmir, which has been on the bucket list of domestic travellers for decades, has seen people fulfilling their dreams and coming to Kashmir in numbers which has never happened before. We have never experienced such high demand even when inbound was open. Our domestic travellers carry a high price buying potential. Our ADR has increased



by almost 65 per cent compared to pre-COVID times.”

Geeta Maheshwari, adds, “Yes! inbound travellers, contribute to the tourism industry in huge figures. But now with the pandemic in place, there has been no inbound for the past two seasons and no one knows as to when it will bounce back to the pre-COVID levels. Nevertheless, the Indian domestic market is huge, and it has filled up the vacuum created by the lack of Inbound travellers. This is absolutely true in the case of drivable destinations which have seen a robust increase in occupancies and ARR over the last 2 years. The problem still remains the large-sized city business hotels that have been primarily dependent on MICE. The larger part of corporate travel did not fructify. Once corporate travel starts the things might be different.”

“Domestic travel for India has come out as the knight in shining armour during COVID times. This segment has always been the backbone of travel in India, just that it never got the recognition it rightfully deserved. Even pre-COVID, inbound contributed only some 40 per cent to our total business. At the Tree of Life, while we will continue to welcome it, I would imagine this segment share settling at around 30 per cent of our total business. In 2020-21, the Tree of Life Resorts witnessed a 10 per cent negative growth in revenues, when the industry average was close to 40 per cent. However, in the present financial year, our occupancies have gone up by close to 30 per cent and the ADRs are up by about 15 per cent,” states Himmat Anand.

Durgesh Chadha, adds his perspective, “It will not be wrong to say that we

were heavily dependent on inbound travellers and international business and had really worked hard to create a position for ourselves and our brand in the international markets. Although domestic tourism has restarted and has helped many hotels like us to mitigate the impact on jobs and businesses in some destinations, however, real recovery will only be possible when international tourism returns. During these COVID waves, it was a challenge to maintain occupancy and decent ARR just from the domestic market. For ‘Ahilya Fort in Maheshwar’, we are currently at ₹21,000 and for ‘Ahilya by the Sea’ in Goa, we are currently at ₹26,000. Pre-COVID, for ‘Ahilya Fort’, in Maheshwar, we were at ₹30,000 and for ‘Ahilya by the Sea’ in Goa, we were at ₹25,000.”

The pandemic period where we witnessed long lockdowns, work from home scenarios led to a complete metamorphosis of internet skills across age groups and economic segments, empowering people to search, find, book and buy online. Secure online banking combined with digital payment platforms gave the comfort of using the internet for undertaking basic to complex transactions online. Perhaps one skill that can be directly credited to the COVID outbreak is the large-scale enhancement and adoption of e-skills of the consumer. This new skill set adopted by the consumer has already started making its impact on the consumer buying behavior hitting at the role of the intermediary, the traditional travel agent. Are online hotel aggregators and OTAs digging in deeper? What do the hotels say about this and their future business acquisition mix?

Sarvar Hans reiterates, “We as a brand have marked our presence on all platforms, and are receiving bookings from all sources. It is not limited to one particular resource.”

Syed Junaid Altaf puts across a more holistic picture, “We see bookings coming through our Sales offices in NCR, Gujarat and Jammu. Business is coming in equally from our sales offices, travel agents, OTAs as well as our own website.”

Durgesh Chadha explains the major shift that they have experienced “We have a good repeat guest ratio from the domestic market. The different channels of business are our extension and we like to work with all of them. This reduces our dependency on any one channel of business. We have received a fair share of business from all channels, whether it is directly through our website or our booking office, from our domestic travel partners and OTAs. There has been a dip in business coming from the B2B channel as our B2C channel has shot up. Our market share is 80/20 (B2C/B2B).”

Adding further to the evolution in booking trends, Himmat Anand, shares his experience, “I really have not seen so much of a change in booking trends pre-COVID and during COVID times other than that more and more potential guests call our reservations to seek clarifications. The domestic market has been moving and will continue to move online and direct in a large way, irrespective of the fact that the trade sees OTAs as a major threat and do not like the idea of hotels going direct. This is the way things will move. We believe that travel agents will always continue to be of value to us and we will consciously never do anything

which undermines their positioning. I am not here to cut their client, I am here to ensure that the client stays with us, preferably through them.”

Although the playing field has changed and will continue to change and evolve, the indomitable and intrinsic human need to travel, to seek, to discover and experience has not been lost and COVID has failed to dent that. It’s Time to step out of the shadows, the world will open up and people will travel trans-border very soon and hopefully, it will be business better than usual.



Skyview by Empyrean, Patnitop



# Holding on for better days ahead

The hotel industry had been recovering post the second wave of COVID-19 in India in April 2021, aided by easing restrictions, the high pace of vaccination, and pent-up demand. It was a fact that there was heavy demand for travel from September 2021 till Christmas and New Year's Eve. With the emergence of the Omicron variant in early December 2021 in India, the sharp rise in infections, and what is now the third wave, several states had to impose partial lockdowns and precautionary measures. It has curtailed travel over the last few months. While the hotel industry has witnessed cancellations and a drop in hotel inquiries, stakeholders and industry professionals expect to witness sequential improvement with better operating leverage due to the spurt in travel soon. TTJ speaks with some of them to know more about how they are coping with the third wave of COVID-19, their business expectations, marketing strategies, and current booking trends.

**Prashant Nayak**

**T**he hospitality industry, in general, is a very high-touch point activity-based industry, and the way services are being offered has been completely reworked. It is no surprise that travel confidence since the breakout of the pandemic has been low. Despite the improvement in traveller sentiment conveyed by the Government of India and State Governments, the hospitality industry needs to continue to work on their safety protocol messaging to convince the ever-guarded customers.

**Chander K Baljee, Chairman & Managing Director, Royal Orchid and Regenta Hotels**, says, "Initially, we would position our hotels as vibrant, bustling or in the heart of the city which isn't appealing our guests the way it used to. Messages on discounted rates, family staycations, and hygiene are rife. Teams have worked on redoing SOPs, changed the way they used to operate, etc. by focusing on health and safety front and centre. Communicating what steps the brand is taking is important, but

consistency and execution are even more critical."

With over 70 properties across India, Royal Orchid, as a group, is on a mission to set up 100 hotels by the end of 2022. They aim to provide value booking for the traveller with the hotel chain, subsequently providing value to their owners.

"As our hotels forecast gradual ups and downs, our focus is on liquidity management, cash flow management and allocation of working capital to stabilise the business. Identifying new opportunities, including the alignment of business volume with the right scale of workforce costs will be prioritised. Also, keeping in mind the guest experience, we are trying to attract locals to take a mini-break close to home. We have also rolled out staycation packages that offer several activities for kids to keep them engaged and give parents the much-needed break. Our cancellation policies have been updated, including offering flexible upgrades that allow guests to be able to work from and to have more space in the case of unexpected quarantines," informs Baljee.

Even during pre-pandemic times, Royal Orchid's focus was never restricted to international travellers. Being an Indian brand, it has mostly catered to domestic guests. In the present circumstances, they allow modifications up to 24 hours before arrival for current and future prepaid reservations. "We are also being flexible with check-in and check-out times to prevent guests from spending unnecessary time in the common areas. Innovative solutions such as extending the use of day rooms or offering discounts to guests are a must. We have also repurposed hotel areas by transforming a few guest rooms into workspaces, offered multiple workstation configurations, such as open desks, private cabins, remote office space, presentation-ready rooms, etc," assures Baljee.

Nobody is sure when the international market opens up, but by domestic travel, 2021 saw a huge rise in direct bookings almost across all Royal Orchid properties. Baljee says, "Since 2020, hotel direct bookings have continued to grow exponentially, recovering stronger in the wake of pent-up travel demand. We also realised that the guests were more comfortable interacting directly with the hotels. However, the trend is now showing signs that some of the major players in the OTA space are ramping up marketing investments and will soon revert to aggressive visibility in the market. In 2022, we are ensuring the direct channel of our hotels, including mobile offers, with the best value that drives direct sales. We are also enabling



▲ Chander K Baljee





▲ JB Singh

features that allow our guests to interact digitally, through social media channels or emails.”

However, running and balancing a business amidst pandemic waves is no cakewalk. Every time hoteliers prepare themselves to restart from where everything stopped, this mutation-induced COVID-19 virus brings a different wave, leading to a sudden stoppage of normal business flow. “Moreover, with these challenges, we have to follow all the work restrictions followed by travel restrictions. People are going through mental strains as they have to balance their professional and personal life staying at their homes. On the other hand, this phase has invited a lot of economic uncertainty, which has discouraged people from travelling or spending too much on something which is not a necessity,” states **JB Singh, President, and CEO, InterGlobe Hotels.**

Looking back at this recent Omicron variant and wave, people have noticed a faster recovery than the other mutations. Singh believes that “This time around, people have kind of accepted the infection and started treating it like the normal flu. So, we can assume that people will soon start making travel plans. As mentioned above, we will come up with focused marketing campaigns with attractive offers and highlighting the safety of our guests, which has always been our utmost priority. It’s been a while since everybody has enjoyed a festival or a social event, so we have decided to put some light on that part too.”

The lack of inbound travellers does impact the revenues, but being a globally known brand and steady corporate customer base, ibis captured premium against other domestic brands. Coming to the ARR’s, it had returned to 90 per cent of pre-COVID levels in December ‘21. However, with Omicron, both the occupancy and ARR have taken a beating again. “We closed January with almost 50 per cent less occupancy than December, but the good part is that ARR impact has been only 10-15 per cent. We will explore more opportunities going forward as we are yet to hit the peak demand season, which witnesses a strong leisure demand and coincides with the banquet season. Additionally, we are expecting a consistent demand from the corporate travellers as well,” assures Singh.

According to Singh, the uncertainty caused in the light of the COVID pandemic has impacted the hospitality sector, and as

a consequence, the booking windows have also been affected since most of their guests aren’t willing to book accommodations in advance. They prefer making a call for booking over the last



▲ Vishal Kamat

moment by logging in directly to the hotels’ website or via OTA platforms. Over the years, customers’ interest has been seen inclined more towards OTA as it offers the diversity and ability to discover more options. Ideally, OTAs should not be considered as a competition for the hoteliers, but as a source of customer acquisition model.

According to **Vishal Kamat, Director, Kamat Group of Hotels**, the third COVID wave has been the most devastating for the hospitality industry compared to the first or second during which they saw an immediate and robust bounce back as compared to the third. Now they have not seen such a rebound. This is most disturbing as it affects all the hospitality industry segments, be it restaurants through parcels and dining or the leisure destinations and City Sectors. He does not foresee a very strong recovery till coming September because that’s when the festivities actually start. Till then, it will be average business not comparable to pre-COVID times. Corporate movement is still slow and will pick up slower than individual travel.

To market, strategise, or innovate to capture the upcoming pent-up demand of the traveller, Vishal says, “We are continuing the same strategies as we have done in the past while keeping an eye on the market on a weekly basis rather than on a monthly basis which helps in faster decision making, high flexibility and cost control. Lastly, the business spike is a key. We cannot bring it back once the spike is gone.”

Once inbound travel opens up, it will definitely support the overall industry, but that is some time away, believes Vishal. Trickle business may start, but the main season for travel is the cooler periods of Indian weather, so whatever business will come, it will start post-September in big numbers. ARR’s are fluctuating as per seasons and times so it will not be consistent, as is the case with the occupancy.

“The current booking trends are quite moderate, but what we are seeing is a very good uptake in our own brand website and also our reward program, Orchid Rewards is quite strong



now. Many guests are booking through our central reservations and taking advantage of the various schemes and offering what we have for our 3.5 lakh reward members. This has helped our company and we are also focused on travel agents and tour operators who are also struggling and hence by being supportive of the travel industry it's a win-win from both sides," says Vishal.

**Rakshit Sharma, CEO and Director on Board, Intellistay Hotels**, sharing his point of view, says, "Looking at the demand for the hotel stays in the last few months, it has come primarily from staycations, wedding, travel to drivable/ special interest leisure destinations, special purpose groups aided by the ease of domestic travel restrictions, the high pace of vaccination,



▲ Rakshit Sharma

we have seen a massive recovery in occupancy levels. However, the risk of getting infected by the virus and various travel restrictions being imposed by each state is discouraging domestic travellers from making travel plans which are in turn affecting the hospitality industry."

Rakshit further mentions, "We aim to capture the pent-up demand of the traveller by offering them world-class hygiene and safety, upgraded travel experience, rewarding offers, sustainability to mention a few. Domestic tourism fills the gap perfectly as of now at all our hotels, pan India. Our hotels posted higher ARRs and better than expected earnings as compared to pre-COVID times in the last quarter."

According to Rakshit, OTAs are booming during this time of the pandemic. Travellers prefer to get their booking through different OTA channels followed by consolidated websites, travel agents, reservations by calling hotels directly, and direct walk-ins.

There is something that the industry can agree upon, and this is the vast and unforeseen impact the COVID-19 crisis has had on all lives. The hospitality, travel, and tourism sectors have been hit hard, but they can't ignore the impact on society. Consumer behaviour and eventually consumer spending have been and will continue to be altered, and business plans need to adapt to these new circumstances with a major concern for health and safety, and wellness.

**Naresh Arora, Founder, and CEO, Truly India Hotels, Resorts, Camps & Safaris** mentions, "As a business strategy, we will continue to strengthen our affiliates ecosystem to serve evolved travel demands of travellers. On one hand, our focus has



▲ Naresh Arora

been to build solutions to help revive our customer confidence and trust, investing in opportunities with our stakeholders to ensure that travelling during the pandemic remains safe, flexible and comfortable. The market is still very, very under-penetrated. There's a vast open area with huge scope."

Most of Truly India properties were already catering to a large chunk of domestic tourism. Due to the pandemic, when the traveller's perspectives shifted from global to local as international borders closed, the attention was focused on immediate social circles and local neighborhoods. This shift presents a boon for domestic tourism. People seek comfort in the known environment and zones, as evidenced by nostalgic #throwbacks on Instagram. Also, as seen in the spike of consumption of local delicacies or involvement in comfort cooking, people are determined to travel domestically. Road trips, perceived as a safer way to travel, are making their great comeback.

Naresh says, "The ongoing holiday season has seen hotels in India return to pre-COVID levels, both in terms of occupancy and tariffs. The impact of Omicron has been in terms of some MICE, travel being deferred. But individual thrill-seekers are travelling as per their planned itineraries and all hotels in leisure destinations are almost sold out till the first week of January. Primarily as Mid Segment Hotel chain in Rajasthan, the current average tariff is about ₹6,000, up from ₹3-4,000 before the peak season kicked in. In pre-COVID times, peak season rates would go up to ₹6000 to 7000 daily in five stars but now witnessing up to ₹9000-10000 due to the demand."

"The travel industry, in particular, has gone to great lengths to cultivate its online presence. During the pandemic, customers have more confidence in traditional agents /consolidators rather than online sites. The current business is more on relationship and loyalty," concludes Naresh.

Let us also have a look at what the industry professionals have to say!



## Saurabh Dube, General Manager, Sheraton Grand Pune Bund Garden Hotel



▲ Saurabh Dube

One of the biggest challenges we are facing is uncertainty. The various variants coming in and the changing guidelines make it difficult for travellers to plan their travel ahead of time. Each state has its own set of travel guidelines, so guests have to maneuver these restrictions while planning their vacations or even work travel.

We cannot expect what is next, but we have accepted the situation over the last two years and will be working around it. With the proactive vaccination drives by the government bodies and awareness about the virus, we are now better prepared to deal with it. We actively follow all the safety protocols and government guidelines while taking bookings, whether for a stay or bigger events such as weddings and conferences. Tailor-made packages are being designed for family outings and intimate staycation weddings. Moreover, guests are buying digitally, and the focus remains to be apt on all channels in terms of pricing and offerings.

With pent-up revenge travel as well as semi-restricted borders and travel not completely relaxed, the domestic markets seem to show resilience and have margins to provide to most hotels domestically. However, demand is uneven across regions, and hotels are trying their best to race to get their major share. Staycations and revenge travel may continue for some more time; however, gaps persist. ARR has seen a dip owing to pressures on demand and larger inventories being available across city hotels. However, premium hotels like Sheraton Grand Pune have made a conscious effort to hold on to the rates, as drop-in rates do not guarantee surging occupancies.

Long booking windows are almost like a thing of the past. Dynamic situations have coaxed travellers to plan much to the last minute. Booking windows are much shorter; we also see that guests are willing to connect to the properties directly or go with reliable partners for hotels. They are anxious and need flexibility in these times and always lean on trusted partners when they plan their travel.

## Vipul Mishra, Commercial Director, Hilton Mumbai International Airport



▲ Vipul Mishra

In the last quarter of 2021, we experienced a lot of pent-up demand, especially for leisure hotels; we were hoping the momentum would continue for the coming months as well. One of the major factors, apart from safety and security of oneself, the ambiguity regarding the rules for traveling, which may differ from one state to another, discourages the domestic significantly.

One of the most important aspects of business today is reassuring the guests of a safe environment. We have a fantastic Hilton CleanStay program that covers all important aspects of the guest stay journey; we will highly endorse the same. Along with this, our focus will be on social events/weddings and presenting some great offers online, which will give a push for staycations along with business travellers.

For a city hotel like ours, around 40 to 45 per cent of the YTD room revenue is from inbound travel, which helps us an ARR push. Currently, the average rate is not the same as it used to be, pre-COVID. The rates have dropped because of reduced demand, and the difference between a premium hotel and a luxury hotel is not as pronounced as it was before.

The booking trends have changed drastically, though we do still have bookings coming through the Wholesale segment, nearly 45 to 50 per cent of bookings are through OTAs. We do see these trends continuing in the near future; hence, it is crucial to have a strong plan and the operations team to have a high satisfaction index that will only encourage other travellers.

## Pradipta Biswas, General Manager, Radisson Jaipur City Center



▲ Pradipta Biswas

Over time, we have noticed that, due to COVID-19 and its various variants, people fear traveling along with their families. Also, domestic travellers are not planning their vacations in advance as they are afraid of infections and the uncertainties of the pandemic. Presently, our focus is on the visitors traveling to Jaipur city. Jaipur is a huge market for leisure travel. We are trying to re-invent our hotel service accordingly from time to time. We are offering and devising suitable packages for families, keeping in mind the needs of the business travellers as well.

The majority of the hotel industry is based on inbound tourists, especially in summers. Also, the hotels then get maximum revenue (Room + Outlets) from the inbound guests as they have more purchasing power as compared to domestic guests. A maximum of our guests are booking online as they get attractive deals on different OTA portals. However, we are witnessing that travellers are not making bookings in advance in order to avoid the cancellation fees.



# Sailing through the Omicron wave

India today is battling the Omicron wave and luxury hospitality groups in Kolkata have devised a plethora of novel concepts and ways that would not only help them to attract travellers but also sustain them in these difficult times. TTJ takes a peek at some of the prominent luxury hospitality groups in Kolkata to get info about the kind of strategies drawn up by these luxury properties to make use of the pent-up travel demand of the travellers, the dominant factors posing hindrances for travellers to make their travel plans, absence of global travellers causing a negative impact on the hotel's revenue and the current hotel booking trends of travellers.

Swaati Chaudhury

**T**he New Year arrived with a new set of curbs to check the surge in COVID-19 infections driven by the Omicron variant. Ever since the pandemic has hit the world, things have not fallen in place for the hospitality sector across the country, and Kolkata is no exception. However, **Dilip Mishra, General Manager, The Lalit Great Eastern, Kolkata**, said, "Business will bounce back sometime this month once the Omicron threat is behind since a number of states are looking forward to relaxing pandemic restrictions. Weddings will emerge as the main segment of the target. The FMCG sector and other segments like textiles, fashion, electric cars and

of sports. The buzzword will be flexibility and travellers are looking ahead for flexibility in cancellation policies and bookings. Packaging meals, along with limited spa sessions, will be in vogue. Staycations and drivecations are here to stay."

Mishra pointed out that frequent changes in lockdown norms, imposing of night curfews, a smaller number of flights operating leading to rise in airfares, last-minute cancellation of flights and trains and overcrowded tourist hotspots with global travel being on hold are the contributing factors discouraging travellers in making their travel plans. Mishra adds, "Inbound travellers create a sound impact on the revenue, services and amenities of the hospitality industry. These tourists tend to book all categories of rooms and their absence is affecting the overall average daily rate. Add to these, the use of other services including food and beverage, spa and laundry are affecting total revenue per available room. Online travel agents are playing a major role in hotel bookings. MICE and leisure travellers will book the hotel through travel agents in the future."

In an attempt to remain active during pandemic times and to utilize the current pent-up travel demand, luxury hospitality set-ups have rolled out an array of interesting projects. **Kumar Shobhan, General Manager, Hyatt Regency Kolkata**, explained, "The Omicron phase is still on but there has been a rise in travellers owing to revenge tourism that comes as good news. We have made a plethora of investments in digital marketing where the focus is on staycations and residential weddings. We have stressed on Covid-19 safety measures keeping with the guidelines of the authorities and GBAC certification through Hyatt. There has been a slow and steady rise in corporate demand. We are engaged in regular parleys with our guests since the human connection is highly significant in the hospitality industry. We are emphasising on geographical locations within 500 km from the city for people hailing from Jharkhand, Bihar and North-East to spend time. Innovation is the focal point of our business in order to cater to the demand of locals. We have come up with an outdoor dining space sometime in last December that has turned out to be a great success."

In the post-pandemic world driven by the Omicron threat, those on work-related trips are regular travellers.



▲ Dilip Mishra

the launch of motorbikes will begin to move. Apart from annual conclaves and budget meets for multi-national companies, there will be upcoming events in the realm





▲ Kumar Shobhan

“Frequent changes in Covid curbs cast doubt in the minds of regular travellers and create a lot of hassles for them. There are different sets of rules in each state, right from clamping of night curfew to flight timings and last-minute cancellation of flights. The flyers are gripped by fear owing to the sudden surge in Covid cases. People are in a festive mood during winter and tend to travel a lot, but this pandemic hit winter is full of curbs,” stated Shobhan. He also averred those inbound travellers not only occupy rooms but help to generate ancillary income through recreational activities like spa.

“The food and beverage vertical has been affected a lot. The Omicron wave is of short duration. We will soon tide over this period and bounce back to pre-COVID levels,” added Shobhan.

In the context of current booking trends of customers, they prefer direct booking of hotels. Shobhan further added, “Our property has registered a growth in direct booking over the past couple of years. This is attributed to an increase in digital focus since direct booking brings offers and benefits. There is a sound percentage of bookings through our travel partners, including online and traditional travel agents.”

Take the case of Rajbari Bawali, a heritage boutique resort sprawling over four acres of land area that nestles in an eco-friendly ambience for new-age travellers. According to **Ajay Rawla, Proprietor, Rajbari Bawali**, “Our estate rests in the midst of verdant greenery and is surrounded by five ponds that form the unique selling proposition of our property. Our rooms have high ceilings, absence of wall-to-wall carpets, individual air-conditioned units, open corridors and wide options for open-air dining. Our heritage property is in high demand and most of our guests prefer our hotel. We intend to generate awareness and promote our distinguishing features for today’s travellers. The lack of inbound travellers does make a difference that has prompted us to focus on domestic and local markets. It is a real pleasure for us to have visitors from the domestic sector. Our property has become their highly preferred destination. Most of our visitors make direct bookings of



▲ Ajay Rawla

the entire estate for small family gatherings and events. A limited number of guests book through online travel agents as well.”

The travel bug is stronger than the virus and this has been proved with the rise in revenge tourism. Hospitality veterans who are in this industry for a couple of decades feel that the industry is here to stay forever. **Rajib Roy Choudhury, Senior General Manager, Vedic Village Spa Resort**, explained, “We can be forced to bend by the Almighty but we will not break owing to our strong belief in Atithi Devo Bhava and this has been proved by the fact that there is revenge travel and revenge dining that is playing a powerful role in the revival of the hospitality sector. There is no such significant support from the Central government in the recent budget. The aspects that need priority in the scheme of marketing plans are hygiene, sanitisation and safety, that will form the deciding factors for travellers while selecting hotels in the upcoming times. Free Individual Travellers (FITs) constitute the prime target segment in the sphere of sales and segments. Revenue per available room will be a significant factor contributing to a healthy business scenario with optimum efforts to maximise average room rates. These days, travellers prefer expansive hospitality destinations like resorts that give them a chance to reconnect with nature and practise social distancing norms. This makes the resorts clock a robust occupancy and average room rate as compared to city luxury hospitality set-ups. Our resort is into providing holistic and practical healing that is in high demand.”

Most luxury hotels and resorts are riding high in the sphere of automation and automated service practise something that is quite mandatory in today’s era, including the system of pre-arrival check-in protocols, remote payments and remote keys. Roy Choudhury said, “We began the philosophy of automation in pre-COVID times as part of our system upgradation. Staycations, daycations, day-outs, games and activities have been our regular offerings and this gained momentum during pandemic times that have made us sustain in these trying times. The concept of cloud kitchens, bakery supplies



and Vedic Kitchen at Home has emerged highly popular since customers prefer to have parties in the comfort of their homes. Our three-year Wellness Membership



▲ Rajib Roy Choudhury

Programme is in high demand.” The resort runs the only Ayurvedic treatment centre in the Eastern region, famed as ‘Sanjeeva Spa’ that specialises in an array of treatment options ranging from post-Covid complications, joint pain, liver and skin treatment.

Some of the prominent factors that are dampening the travel plans include uncertainty that looms ahead, the threat of lockdown and curfew. In today’s times, travellers are moving with confidence since they have received double vaccine doses. Roy Choudhury further said, “Travellers prefer to have a hassle-free travel. Most of them are not comfortable with a slew of airport restrictions and tend to put their travel plans on hold. This has resulted in intra-city travel, and travellers are driving down to getaways. At the same time, inter-state travel has come down, which has considerably affected the business. While it’s true that the lack of inbound travellers is adversely affecting the revenue of the hospitality groups, the efforts like ‘Dekho Apna Desh’ and ‘Make in India’ are offering a boost to local and domestic tourism. Travel organizations like FHRAI, TAAI and IATO have taken measures that have led to a surge in travel movement across sectors. The occupancies are yielding positive results while it will take a long way for the average room rates to attain pre-Covid level.”

In the context of hotel booking trends, metasearch engines such as Trivago, Holiday IQ, TripAdvisor and Kayak have gained prominence in choosing hotels at a better price value. Roy Choudhury added, “A lot of impulsive travel is happening these days, leading to a rise in online booking trends and this allows travellers to book and go for aggressive shopping on his handset. Hence mobile-specific rates are emerging quite popular in today’s times.”

The Omicron wave arrived at the onset of the New Year

and now is on the path of decline. **Abhishek Sachdev, Hotel Manager, Fairfield by Marriott Kolkata**, informed, “We had to encounter a considerable decline in revenues but we are hopeful that the demand for travel will bounce back. Keeping with the ongoing scenario, we have gained ground with corporate trips owing to airlines resuming flight services and relaxed Covid restraint. Travel is picking up once again and we are eagerly looking ahead for a robust period this month with the support of Destination Weddings. In the wake of the Omicron threat, we have not stepped down from our marketing activities, unlike the earlier two deadly waves. We are engaged with our marketing activities on digital and other marketing platforms and we are now accentuating to move back to the pre-Omicron levels of connecting with our customers through digital medium and personal contact. With the pent-up demand of travellers, we are quite optimistic to capture the market share and the hospitality industry is expected to recover from the third wave by February-end.”

Airline restrictions, stringent travel measures and mandatory tests are some of the discouraging factors for travellers contemplating to make their travel itineraries. The



▲ Abhishek Sachdev

incidence of Covid-positive cases in tourist destinations is a matter of concern. Sachdev commented, “There was a time when travel bookings were made at least a couple of weeks in advance while 72 hours advance booking is the current trend. The last-minute travel plans are posing a big challenge. The Indian hospitality sector is facing the absence of global travellers and we expect that the industry will be back on track in the second and third quarters of the present year. Come April, we are gearing up to make up for the missed opportunities and revenues during the pandemic period.”

In the post-pandemic world, there has been a paradigm shift from a conventional system of booking to a digital landscape of websites and apps. “The Marriott Bonvoy app has been one of our largest contributors, followed by Marriott website and online travel aggregator portals,” signed off Sachdev.



# The Floating Hotel on the Ganges

Polo Floatel from the house of the largest hotel chain in the Northeast has on offer an array of luxury facilities and is all set to boost the heritage potential of the river Ganges.

**Swaati Chaudhury**

**N**obody wants to miss the wonderful opportunity of relaxing by sipping a cup of cappuccino or going for a boat ride and catching breathtaking glimpses of sunrise and sunset on the river Ganges. And to make your dreams into reality and ensure a quality break, there is Hotel Polo Floatel owned by Hotel Polo Towers Group on Strand Road in the hub of Kolkata. Once reputed as Floatel that took off in 2007, the well-established hotel was taken over by Hotel Polo Towers Group and has been renovated and reopened sometime in December 2021. The upscale boutique hotel takes enormous pride in being the country's premier floating hotel with unmatched levels of unforgettable glimpses of the river and the city's iconic heritage- the Howrah Bridge on one side and the Second Hooghly Bridge on the other end.

Hotel Polo Towers Group is the first and foremost luxury hospitality major in North-East India that began its journey in the hospitality sector with its maiden venture- Hotel Polo

Tower in Shillong. In 2012, the group made an entry in Cherrapunjee and in current times; it stands tall with an array of properties in Shillong, Cherrapunjee, Kolkata, Agartala and Jabalpur. Deval Tibrewalla, Chief Executive Officer, Hotel Polo Towers Group said, "The age-old rivers in India that form an intrinsic part of our culture have enormous potential and are not promoted for travellers. We believe that the potential of these age-old rivers needs to be harnessed fully. We have completed 30 years in the hospitality sector last year." The newly renovated hotel is a huge ship that is replete with 58 plush cabins and has made a sincere attempt to pay tribute to the one-of-a-kind maritime style.

The property boasts of elaborate banquet facilities with the finest hospitality, state-of-the-art facilities and impeccable service. The banquet sprawls from 210 sq. ft to 7,000 sq. ft. There are conferencing facilities that form a perfect venue for hosting corporate and social events. One can catch incredible views of the river Ganges and the city from the open decks. There are six different kinds of cabins for the accommodation of visitors including strand view cabins, river view cabins, river view suites with balcony, and strand view suites with balcony, strand view heritage suites that provide deck and river views and heritage suites with deck. The cabins are tastefully done up and the staircases are adorned with a sound collection of marine memorabilia and artefacts.

One should not miss out on the open-air, multi-cuisine, all-day food outlet called the Bridge-Bistro Bar on the upper deck. The fare at the outlet has been conceptualised on three pillars-the heritage of North East, the menu of Kolkata in bygone times, and the specially crafted menu of chefs. There is a weekend buffet on offer at the outlet. For wine connoisseurs, there is the newly launched Skybar on the rooftop that creates an array of cocktails and mocktails. Do not miss out on the chance of trying out the Hookah.

Tibrewalla further said, "We have placed hammocks on the rooftop, quite a rare concept, as hammocks are found on beach resorts. Our cabins come with a deck and balcony that stands out from other luxury players. Our basic room category comes for ₹4,500 on a twin-sharing basis, while rooms that offer deck views cost ₹7,500 per day. Our property has the facility of boat ride and an hour boat ride comes for ₹3,999 for two persons inclusive of food. The boat ride is open for one and all and starts from 7 am to 4 pm every day. The boats come with personalised seating arrangements and are quite popular." The property also has heritage walks on offer for its resident guests.

The hospitality player has drawn up some ambitious plans for the future. Tibrewalla added, "We are toying with the idea of building a roadmap for our visitors staying at Hotel Polo Towers Shillong or Agartala and Polo Orchid Resort in Cherrapunjee to visit Polo Floatel in Kolkata. We are looking to expand our Polo Orchid Resort in Cherrapunjee and roll out our property at Neer Mahal in Tripura. Plans are on to lay strong emphasis on our properties in the Northeast region."





# Star Shining in the East

## Summit Hotels and Resorts

An idea born in 2010, to offer quality, standardised service hotels at various hill stations of India, now stands as a shining star of the North East Hospitality sector. With a portfolio of 19 properties located at Darjeeling, Gangtok, Kalimpong, Lachung, Pelling, Rishikesh, Lachen, Shimla, and Kaziranga, Summit Hotels and Resorts has come a long way and made its presence felt in the hospitality sector. Even during the stressed COVID times, their properties have enjoyed great occupancies and ARR, thanks to the surge in domestic tourism and intra-regional tourism within the Northeastern region of the country. TTJ interacts with Sumit Mitruka, CEO and Founder, Summit Hotels and Resorts, to know more about the brand's philosophy, the journey so far, and the path ahead.

Gurjit Singh

“Success lies somewhere between patience and persistence”. This is what drives and defines Sumit Mitruka, the man and vision behind Summit Hotels and Resorts.

During his time working with hotels overseas, Sumit gauged the opportunity that existed in the Northeastern region on account of the inconvenience the tourist had to face. He estimated and realised a vast market gap that was created by the absence of factors like standardised service, lack of professionalism, and unreliable online booking systems in hotels located at various hill stations and Northeast India.

He believed that the potential of hill stations in terms of attracting tourists was immense and if he could give the customer an experience that was not available at the time, he had a Winner!

His belief slowly grew into conviction, and as a result of discussions and deliberation, Summit Hotels and Resorts emerged in 2010. “Today we stand as the largest Himalayan hospitality brand of the entire northeast region,” adds Sumit.

Sumit explains, “Hailing from the Northeast, my analysis and understanding of making a brand in the hospitality industry was no different from others, but I just did things differently. When rest of the hotel brands in my area were busy filling the vacant rooms, I, on the other hand, worked on the aspects of technology and personal aspect to present something distinct to the tourist.

“It all seems a dream as the journey we embarked upon from 2010 till date is nothing but a testimonial of exceptional value and exceptional service that we provide and is at the core of everything we do.



▲ Sumit Mitruka

“The growth was humble. We tried to outdo the mistakes that the rest were unable to address. Our concept of circuit destination was taken positively by tourists. The loopholes of the itinerary were fixed and practiced in a way to offer the utmost convenience to the traveller. In those days, issues with online bookings were the talk of the town, and Summit persevered to create a seamless mechanism to connect with the customer and guest relations we standardised.”

With each passing year, appreciation and accolades kept flooding in from all directions and expansion continues to happen. Sumit adds, “Summit is now, not just a hotel, it is a brand and we are working to leave our footprints in every hill station of India. Our principal goal to mark our presence everywhere understandably is not easy, but we want to challenge ourselves and work consistently to redefine the idea of hospitality.”

Sumit reiterates, “Location is always fundamental to our business; it plays a crucial role in determining the course of the future. We firmly believe prime location enveloping major aspects such as picturesque sites, quick circuit locations, boutique nature of properties with an inventory of not more than 40 rooms combined with personalised service to be our success mantra.”

Exceptional value combined with exceptional service at a price point which is neither too expensive nor cheap is where Summit Hotels want to strategically place themselves, offering affordable rates and good value that strike the right chord to balance the consumers' buying decision.

Sumit emphasises the role of social media for his brand and has been successfully using this medium to communicate and promote his business. They work closely with influencers, bloggers, adventure lovers, nature enthusiasts to expand their audience.

Talking about the brand's expansion plans, Sumit envisages adding another 200 keys in the Northeast soon. He elaborates, “The region has a great potential, the beauty of the major part of the Northeast is still unexplored which gives us great scope for scalability and to promote the magnificence of Northeast as a whole. Plans are already afoot to create multiple brands under the Summit umbrella. The first one coming up is a high-end wedding destination resort in the foothills of the Himalayas which will be branded under the new upscale brand ‘Singalila’, besides that we have a dream to have a Summit in every hill destination of India.”



# Lords Hotels and Resorts, on an upward growth trajectory

Lords Hotels and Resorts has become an eminent name in the Indian hospitality scenario within a decade of its inception. It is one of the fastest-growing and leading mid-segment hotel chains in India and Nepal. With over 45 hotels across both countries, it is looking further to expand its presence across India and beyond. The hotel chain's growth is evident with a portfolio of new properties signed and introduced in recent months. Pushpendra Bansal, COO, Lords Hotels and Resorts, is more than happy to share its growth story, despite the uncertainties and the ups and downs of the pandemic.

Prashant Nayak

Lords Hotels and Resorts' distinct properties in the 13 states of India make up for a unique collection of independent and pleasant hotels. With their four categories of accommodation to choose from, Lords Plaza (4-star property), Lords Inn (3-star hotel), Lords Eco Inn (economy hotel), Lords Resorts (upscale property), their penchant for perfection lies in the fact that they have always been a preferred choice of the travellers, whether for business or leisure.

Each of the brands is distinguishable by its infrastructure and facilities availed. e.g., in Lord Plaza, their top brand, each property should be of 80 rooms, and the air-conditioned room will be at least 290 square feet each, along with all other 4-star requirements and facilities. Lords Eco Inn brand believes in the concept of economy and ecology. For a resort property, it is a must that the construction should not be over ground plus two, and it should have about two and a half acres of land, and it should have a green cover.

Over the years, Lords Hotels have broadened their portfolio of hotels to accommodate better the needs of the leisure tourist, the business traveller, the bag-packer, and the pilgrimage tourists, thus covering the entire spectrum of tourist segments.

Speaking about the USP of the hotels, Bansal says, "The USP for our guests is that our brands are of international standard with the Indian tadka. We have been able to successfully offer our guests the best of services and amenities bundled together at economical tariffs, which are premium accommodation at attractive prices."

Bansal further adds, "Our USP, which attracts investors and franchises, is in a different league. As owners of hotel properties, we understand them, and we know the nitty-gritty of managing a



▲ Pushpendra Bansal

hotel. We give them full support, and they are comfortable with us as we go to the grassroots level to solve problems. We leave no leaf unturned in managing properties, right from filling the gap of employees, if someone quits or reducing cost in maintenance or achieving more revenues for them. Along with our search for stand-alone hotels, we get most investors and franchisees due to word-of-mouth publicity and recommendations."

However, Bansal says that he is on the lookout for owners who have passion and feel for the hospitality business rather than only commercial aspirations. They also train the new generation owners in hotel management at their institute in Surat. Lords Institute of Management is a state-of-the-art Hotel Management Institute for career development that has been conceptualised to develop students for a promising career in hotel management.

While the hospitality industry faces an immense challenge due to the COVID situation, Lords Hotels opened seven new hotels during the pandemic. They recently

signed another property in Jaipur, its seventh in Rajasthan. Bansal mentions, "I would say pandemic has made us realise, and many owners have also realised that it was better to do a tie-up where there was expertise, for a better outcome."

Lords Hotels and Resorts' vision is to become a trustworthy brand for delivering True value experiences to guests in the super-exciting value-driven hotel market segment. Their true value also means delivering returns on investments with tremendous growth opportunities to their investors and owners. Stand-alone hotels can take advantage of Lords, pan India sales network, dedicated revenue and market intelligence team, deepest pool of talent, extensive pre-opening support. They also go through rigorous checks and balances during operations to enable owners to maximise their revenues.

Lords has a cluster of hotels in Gujarat, with 24 properties. In every two or three hours of road travel, you are likely to find one of the Lord's brands. Being born in Gujarat, his home state, Bansal had a good local relationship and networking, on account of which he could develop and establish more properties in Gujarat. "Though we have most hotels in Gujarat, we have pan India presence and after 13 states, we will be venturing into the 14th state very soon. We have hotels in Himachal Pradesh, Jammu, Assam, Arunachal, Karnataka, etc.. We have plans to expand our international portfolio to Africa in Uganda and Kenya," informs Bansal.

Lords Hotels and Resorts' constant strive in the hospitality industry has been for nothing but excellence, where the confluence of traditional values and modern hospitality makes them extraordinary. Soon they will be launching a trendy new brand called "Weeotel," which promises of a comfortable stay, mostly targeted at the bag packers.



# The SAILING is ON

## Wave after Wave



When Waterways Leisure Tourism created Cordelia Cruises, it wanted to cover all the aspects important for India, right from great food, lovely ambience and total entertainment without having to leave the comfort of the country. Today, India's premium cruise liner, Cordelia conceptualised for the Indians, is exactly catering to the way Indians love to holiday. True to its name, Cordelia aspires to promote and drive the cruise culture in India through experiences that are stylish, luxurious and most importantly, inherently Indian. Despite the uncertainties of the pandemic, the cruise line is in high demand with the Indian holiday seeker. TTJ interacts with Jurgen Bailom, President and CEO, Waterways Leisure Tourism, to know more about the current developments at Cordelia Cruises and also about the present cruising scenario in India.

**Prashant Nayak**

**Despite all the difficulties the cruise sector is facing due to the uncertainties of COVID-19, do you still believe that the domestic cruise industry has great potential in the India market?**

The time for cruising has just begun and if I say so myself, it has begun very well indeed. That is a major part of this small victory. When people speak for your product and service is when they want it more than you want them to accept you. The response that our cruise has generated is reason enough to keep our chin up and sail through the pandemic or otherwise. This too shall pass.

The domestic cruise market in India is estimated at approx. \$2 billion and a 15 per cent market share and we believe that India has a huge potential. Given the fact that cruising is growing up to 15 per cent a year here and India having the third largest coastline in the world with 7,600 kilometers, it also made automatic sense that India deserved its own cruise line.

**Do you feel your product and services offer the same world-class cruise experience to your Indian guests?**

Yes, absolutely, they do. Our vessel, the Empress, is a world-class one with top-of-line facilities which include swimming pools, theatres, auditoriums, a spa, lounge decks, a casino, bars, restaurants, adventure activities and a lot more.

**What are your scheduled itineraries for the year 2022?**

We are excited to start sailings from February 12 onwards. Our itineraries will cover locations like Goa, Cochin, Chennai, and Lakshadweep. We also have 2-nights/3-day trips that will go from Mumbai to the high seas and back.

**What duration itineraries are most popular among Indian cruise clients?**

Our five nights' itineraries are the most popular with our travellers. Especially, the Lakshadweep route is the most preferred one. Lakshadweep is a magnet. Its inclusion amount to approximately 40 per cent of our draw. The island is pristine, untouched, and unexplored. Its inaccessibility is what is the biggest enchantment. Best of all, our day trip enables guests to get the best of the island before they return on board.

**Have you planned any international cruise itineraries for the monsoon 2022 period?**

The international cruises will be planned soon to destinations like Sri Lanka. As of now, we have a cruise planned to Chennai in the first quarter of 2022.

**Is your cruise ship going to implement new and stricter Covid-19 precautions and protocols? How are you planning now to give a seamless cruise experience, for guests booking on Cordelia?**



Cordelia Cruises has been mindful of following all protocols laid down by the Government authorities. The situation with Covid-19 is very dynamic. Our rules and regulations are in tandem with the authorities and we have taken all possible measures to ensure the safety of our guests and also our workforce on-board.

**As the only major player in the domestic Indian premium cruise industry, how do you plan to keep your travel partners and the travel industry engaged and motivated to promote your product?**

Our travel partners and our guests are very important to us. Engaging regularly with both through relevant offers and schedules keeps us on our toes. It is important to keep our ears on the ground and adjust our sails to the winds in order to be on top of our game. Our teams are agile and doing just that!

**Due to the recent developments at Genting Hong Kong, do you feel that there is now an enhanced opportunity for your cruises? Do you have any plans for a seasonal repositioning of your ship to Singapore?**

The news about Genting Hong Kong is very unfortunate. Cruise businesses

all over the world need a great push and support from authorities. We still need a lot of work to make this beautiful niche business the go-to vacation option for travellers. However, when it comes to Cordelia, we hope and endeavour to serve up a travel experience like never before.

As of now, we are catering to the Indian subcontinent. We will add more vessels as we go along and our plans will evolve in accordance.

**Passenger cruise terminals at Indian Ports leave a lot to be desired, are you happy with the infra development at the Mumbai Port?**

The port authorities have been exceptionally supportive and encouraging our efforts. We have been welcomed with open arms in the Mumbai, Goa, Gujarat, and Kochi ports. Yes, the passenger cruise terminals are yet to be developed in terms of experience and infrastructure and I am very optimistic that the State will go the extra mile to ensure that this newness in travel and tourism develops further and creates excellent opportunities for one and all.

**Are any other ports in India also actively pursuing developments and enhancements to their cruise**



▲ Jurgen Bailom

**passenger terminals?**

In recent announcements, Prime Minister has expressed his vision to boost tourism in India. So, in the next few years (by 2030) we are hoping for the inauguration of the International Cruise Terminal in Kerala, the Ro-Ro vessel service and other infrastructural developments to help boost the overall travel industry.

## Qatar Tourism, Emerald Cruises to launch superyacht sailings in 2023

Qatar Tourism has announced new superyacht luxury cruises in partnership with Emerald Cruises, sailing from Doha and launching in January 2023. Qatar Tourism is working on expanding the company's tourism value proposition. The yacht launch is part of Qatar National Vision 2030. The new itineraries being launched with Emerald Cruises are another step towards achieving this vision. Vacationers are welcome from around the globe to experience the best of Qatari hospitality on land and sea.

Team TTJ



**A**s Qatar Tourism inked the partnership deal with Emerald Cruises, the agreement further boosts Qatar's cruise industry as it bounces back from the effects of the global pandemic.

Emerald Azzurra will offer seven-night, eight-day itineraries from Doha, with stops at Sir Bani Yas Island, Abu Dhabi; Khasab, Oman; Fujairah, UAE; Zighy Bay, Oman; and Dubai and vice versa. Pre- and post-cruise tours are available where guests can opt for a three-day package to explore the sites and culture of Qatar. Highlights include the National Museum of

Qatar, designed by French architect Jean Nouvel, in the style of a desert rose, or a visit to Souq Waqif, to purchase local souvenirs and spices. Visitors can take a trip into the desert and visit the Inland Sea before enjoying dune bashing and a camel ride.

The news comes as construction continues on the new Grand Cruise Terminal located in central Doha, near the Museum of Islamic Art and Souq Waqif. The terminal will have the capacity to host two mega-ships and will offer various attractions, including an aquarium and art gallery.

The superyacht, Emerald Azzurra, can accommodate 100 guests at an impressive

110 meters in length. Guests can enjoy a Sky Bar, observation deck and lounge, wellness area, an infinity pool, and marina platform, which hosts several marina toys, including sea bobs and paddleboards.

Elaborating more on the Qatari experience, Chief Operating Officer of Qatar Tourism, Berthold Trenkel, said, "Qatar has an incredible range of hotels, restaurants, activities and cultural landmarks which can be enjoyed pre and post the cruise, allowing guests the freedom to explore Qatar at their leisure. We welcome travellers from around the world to experience our beautiful country and the best of the Middle East, all in one easily accessible place."



# Through innovation and resilience, CSMIA sets new benchmarks to enhance passenger experience



Aviation is a dynamic industry, and airports play a vital role in being a gateway to the country. The quality of airport infrastructure, its offerings and adaptability to change has proven to be essential features to have helped airports survive this unprecedented time. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA), through its endeavours, has created a benchmark in the industry in providing top-notch security and gold class services, making it one of the best airports in India.

## Team TTJ

The year 2021 proved to be a challenging year for the aviation industry, as it was for CSMIA. Despite these circumstances, CSMIA stood true to its goal of steady growth. The airport introduced several measures to up the ante of safety, hygiene and security SOPs to curb the spread of the virus and further boost passengers' confidence in air travel. At the onset of the pandemic, CSMIA was quick to adopt various smart technologies to ensure the highest standard of safety and wellbeing of the travellers. These innovations included contactless check-in through QR-code based system, Common Use Self-Service (CUSS) kiosks to generate baggage tag, Self-Baggage Drop counters and e-gates to scan boarding passes, Automatic tray Retrieval System (ATRS), installation of plexiglass barriers to minimize direct passenger contact, amongst many others. Besides, the Government's constant revision of RT-PCR testing norms resulted in the airport setting up an additional 300 machines for testing a single planeload of passengers on the go, ensuring quicker and hassle-free testing at the airport. CSMIA prioritises all the processes that involve the

health and safety of passengers and has continually facilitated and strengthened all protocols mandated by the Health and Government bodies.

With close to two years since the start of the pandemic, CSMIA stands testament to the uncertainties witnessed and yet constantly strives to provide the highest standard of services to help and facilitate convenient and safe transit for all its passengers. However, the increase in vaccination rates, ease in travel restrictions, advancing technology and health infrastructure that make travel seamless are factors that add to the rise in passengers' growing confidence in air travel.

Ranked amongst one of the busiest airports in the country, CSMIA regularly undertakes various initiatives not only for its passengers but also for its employees and stakeholders to increase the overall efficiency of the airport and set new benchmarks in Service Quality. The airport is all set to introduce a vaccination center at the Airport Health Organization (APHO) with the Government's help to vaccinate employees, stakeholders and citizens as a means to increase the vaccination drive and help in curbing the spread of the virus.

With time, the airport has also been able to constantly reinvent itself by bringing in new technological advancements and passenger-centric initiatives while also enhancing the overall aeronautical and cargo development by introducing new routes.

CSMIA's colossal structure is a beautiful blend that constitutes a modern airport that has incorporated both western and traditional elements. In addition, the airport's aesthetically pleasing interior, including its high-rise ceilings and green spaces highlighting the surrounding landscapes, is well crafted to provide passengers with a rejuvenating atmosphere. The airport envisions to offer a memorable experience to its passengers by providing a high standard of comfort and convenience and constantly bringing forth new additions in its curated, art, culinary and retail offerings. Even when the aviation industry stood at the cusp of making paradigm shifts, CSMIA, along with all its employees and stakeholders, worked resiliently towards facilitating operations smoothly. The airport managed to introduce 13 new domestic and 10 new international destinations since March 2020 and has currently reached 85 per cent of its pre-COVID domestic traffic



level while 35 per cent as compared to its pre-COVID international air traffic.

Over the years, CSMIA has introduced various firsts and unique initiatives at the airport beyond current industry practices to facilitate seamless air travel. The luxurious Adani Lounge with curated, hand-picked services offers a myriad of benefits, including relaxing pods, delicious meals, and spas, among many other facilities. The airport's passenger assistance service 'Pranaam' offers benefits such as a dedicated porter for check-in baggage, immigration guidance process and many more. With over 200 well-renowned retail and F&B outlets, CSMIA envisions creating a transformational-aviation platform that is a 'Gateway to Goodness' for the passengers arriving and departing the airport.

The onset of the pandemic had seen a nationwide lockdown; however, Mumbai's Air Cargo emerged as one of the prominent

gateways around the globe in mobilizing essential COVID-19 supplies, including the export and import of diagnostic kits, face masks, pharmaceuticals, and other medical equipment. The mobilizing of services during this unprecedented time saw Mumbai Air Cargo witnessing a 52 per cent rise in annual cargo volume in FY21 compared to FY20. In addition, the D-cube application, which can optimize digital infrastructure by reducing dwell time, was introduced for a more seamless and paperless transaction. CSMIA currently is in the process of expanding its capacity and creating additional facilities in the coming years.

Being a forerunner in sustainable initiatives, CSMIA in 2021 won the 'Energy Efficient Unit' Award by the Confederation of India Industry (CII) in recognition of the airport's tireless efforts in sustainable and green initiatives. Carbon management system, carbon neutrality, renewable

energy installations, wastewater recycling, effective waste management system, enhancement in renewable energy capacity; are some of the many projects undertaken by CSMIA as part of the airport's sustainability initiatives. By the year 2029, CSMIA targets at being net-zero as part of its sustainability goals.

CSMIA has always been a pioneer in delivering optimal services and has various contingencies set up to mitigate challenging situations. With a foresight to be the 'Gateway to Goodness', CSMIA stays determined to look beyond the challenges by putting passengers at the core of every initiative while offering a wholesome travel experience. Over the next 12 months, CSMIA aims to create a steady momentum of growth by undertaking various measures, along with its stakeholders, to increase the overall efficiency of the airport while keeping in mind the safety, security and wellbeing of passengers and its personnel.

## BLR Airport emerges as the transfer hub for South India

Kempegowda International Airport, Bengaluru (BLR Airport), the third busiest airport in India, is making significant contributions to India's aviation growth story by facilitating robust connectivity to non-metro cities, providing opportunities to people to fly as well as driving regional economic growth. In the process, BLR Airport has emerged as the preferred transfer hub for South India.

### Team TTJ

In the past two decades, a steady influx of low-fare carriers, superior regional connectivity to far-flung cities and a rise in regional air travel have transformed the face of Indian aviation, making it the third-largest domestic aviation market in the world. It has more than doubled from around 169 million in FY 2013-14 to around 341 million in 2019-20, a growth of over 10 per cent per annum.

Currently, BLR Airport serves 74 domestic destinations (in CY 2021)—the highest ever since the airport opening date, as compared to 54 routes during pre-COVID and is also the highest amongst South Indian Airports. These additions have mainly been to non-metro destinations, and as a result, flights to non-metro routes have shown a considerable increase from 58 per cent (pre-COVID) to 63 per cent in CY 2021. Moreover, between Q1 and Q4 of 2021, traffic on non-metro routes increased by 27 per cent, reinforcing strong demand on these city pairs.

During the CY 2021, nearly 19 per cent of traffic at BLR Airport comprised of transfer passengers as against 10 per cent

pre-COVID. The major airports contributing to high volumes of transfer passengers at BLR Airport were Chennai, Kochi, Hyderabad and Goa.

Apart from the increase in non-metro connectivity, the geographical location of Bengaluru and the growing economy of the State of Karnataka have helped in positioning BLR as the major aviation gateway of South and Central India. BLR Airport offers a wide catchment area of 23 cities within a convenient flying time of 75 minutes. This, coupled with growth in non-metro connectivity, has helped in building the transfer traffic market at BLR Airport. The transfer traffic flow has helped to strengthen loads on other domestic and international routes as well. Moreover, with this catchment area serving

a population of 256 million people (i.e., 1/5th of India's population), BLR Airport is leading the growth story of the region.

In addition, to cater to growing transfer numbers, BLR Airport has further augmented two of its existing transfer zones by creating an additional lane for the smooth transfer of passengers. With the opening of Terminal 2, they expect to add to the transfer experience and look forward to developing BLR Airport as the New Gateway to India.





# 'Czech' back into Czech Republic

## Reignite your Wanderlust

What inspires people to travel and explore a country? Is it the round-the-clock luxurious amenities or the breath-taking scenic beauty or the adrenaline adventure sports or the taste buds tickling food and traditions? If staying home all this while has reignited your wanderlust, then you'll love this selection of activities to do in the Czech Republic. No matter what your travel preference is, the Czech Republic is going to have you spoilt for choice.

Team TTJ

### 'Czech' out Czech's UNESCO Heritage sites

Did you know that there are less than a thousand heritage sites in the world and out of those 16 of them are in the Czech Republic? The historic town centres of Český Krumlov, Telč, Prague and Kutná Hora with St Barbara's Cathedral, the Lednice-Valtice Cultural Landscape Area, the Column of the Holy Trinity in Olomouc, the Tugendhat Villa in Brno, Vysocina boasts three UNESCO Heritage Sites, the most of any Czech region: The historic centre of Telc, the Pilgrimage Church of Saint John of Nepomuk and the Jewish Quarter of Trebic and the list goes on.

Discovering and exploring these UNESCO World Heritage sites, are pretty much the creme de la creme of Czech history, design, and architecture. Czech Republic takes real pride in its UNESCO heritage sites.



### Enjoy pitcher perfect moments when in Czech

Czech Republic is a haven for beer lovers. The Czech Republic is home to one of Europe's oldest and proudest brewing traditions. Visit the Budweiser Budvar brewery (the original Budweiser), where Czech lager has been lovingly crafted for 125 years. The largest beer event in the Czech Republic is the Czech Beer Festival Prague, usually held in the month of May. You will have the chance to taste more than 70 brands of Czech beer, always served in top-quality glass pitchers where girls and boys in Czech national costumes will be waiting to greet you and immerse you in the traditions and culture of this charming country.





If you are still thirsty and want to try something different then head on over to our beer spas where you can soak and relax in the tub of beer with drinking beer from the tap. As we mentioned earlier Czech will leave you spoilt for choice.

## Get totally blissed out at the spas

Spa days are a necessity year-round, but they are especially fun when you are on vacation and feel the need to zen out and relax and what better way to celebrate that than with a day — or two, or five — of self-care? Just west of the capital is the green and sedate spa town triad of Karlovy Vary, Mariánské Lázně and Františkovy Lázně, which comprises the West Bohemia Spa Triangle which is one of the few places that still retains the grandeur of the spa's golden age. The spas make use of the mineral-rich spring water in the area that is said to possess medicinal properties.



in the Czech Republic is home to quite a few restaurants which serve Indian food. It almost goes without saying that both lunch and dinner are accompanied by a beer!!!



## Discover a little piece of heaven in the Bohemian Paradise area

A unique combination of outlandish rock formations, dense pine forests, lordly castles and chateaux, countless lofty viewing points, hiking and cycling trails through the heart of the idyllic sandstone rocks, trips in the footsteps of Albrecht von Wallenstein and the chateau at Hrubá Skála as well as the Gold Route from the Bohemian Paradise area to Trosky Castle— you'll find it all, and more, in Bohemian Paradise. For centuries the Bohemian Paradise area has attracted painters,

So this year, make sure you take time to #CzechOutandTreatYourself to being pampered and create an experience for all your senses in a world of elegant spa houses, exquisite, blossom-filled gardens and high culture that Czech Republic has to offer.

## ‘Czech’ out Czech Cuisines, it's food for your soul!

Ever wondered what kind of cuisine you'd find in the Czech Republic? If you're a foodie, a traveller, or both, then the Czech Republic is one place in the world to check out! The Czech Republic has some delicious local food for both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. Czech cuisine is comfort food, with a focus on delicious meats, rich sauces, root vegetables, potatoes and let's not forget dumplings. But when traveling we tend to miss our home countries food and crave it eventually, don't worry for all our Indian food lovers (not only) Prague

writers, artists, and dreamers of all kinds. Discover this unique combination of bizarre rock formations in Krkonose National Park to the East and deep pine forests, majestic castles and sublime villages of timber cottages in the South. Bohemian Switzerland National Park in North Bohemia is one of the most picturesque hiking regions in the world and offers a range of walks for all abilities.





# ADTOI looks forward to involving state governments in the revival of domestic tourism

Looking at the great expectations from domestic tourism in reviving India's tourism fortune, ADTOI in early 2021 led the way and became the torchbearer when it hosted its Annual Convention in Kevadia, Gujarat. India's tourism industry witnessed its first major physical event, which boosted confidence to gain a foothold and restart tourism. While domestic tourism gradually gained traction and was gathering momentum, by the end of 2021, the new Omicron COVID variant has played spoilsport. Since the onset of the pandemic, PP Khanna, President, Association of Domestic Tour Operators Association of India (ADTOI) has been addressing challenges and looking at opportunities for the revival domestic tourism market in India. TTJ speaks to Khanna to know his views about the future of domestic tourism in the country.

Prashant Nayak

**T**hough the budget was a disappointment for the travel industry, the pandemic has reaffirmed the importance of the travel associations with the Ministry of Tourism and State governments recognizing and acknowledging the potential. However, Khanna says, "The importance of associations has always been there in the industry as they are the only platform for the government and stakeholders of the industry for reaching out to its members for promoting destinations and undertaking other tourism-related activities for progressive growth of tourism in the country. Of course, the pandemic has raised the level of the role of associations when the tourism activities came to a grinding halt in March 2020."

The year 2021 had brought some hope for the industry and saw the revival of tourism due to the efforts of both the Central and State governments. People at large also looked forward to travelling in the form of short stays and vacations, pilgrimage, business, social functions, etc. However, the Omicron struck a blow again and shattered hopes again. Khanna said, "To mitigate the suffering of our members due to loss of business, we have been constantly asking the government to provide some relief by granting some interest-free loan, tax holiday, etc. to our members who suffered business as well as income loss due to pandemic. Then again, this new wave led to restrictions by government on the movement of people, which caused distress again for our members and the travel fraternity as a whole."

There are many factors presently discouraging domestic travellers currently from making travel plans, which are affecting the recovery of the domestic travel industry. On this, Khanna points out,



▲ PP Khanna

"People will never stop travelling. It was due to the pandemic that the government had to resort to stringent measures like grounding flights, bringing rail services to a halt, restriction on movement of road transportation, etc. As the situation improves and authorities lift restrictions, domestic travellers will start to move around the country to fulfil their wanderlust. They are willing to travel, provided there are no restrictions imposed by local Government/ Authorities on their movements."

Presently, the fear of the pandemic is receding away from people's minds. The Omicron variant has not been as severe as seen during the second wave, and travellers know that one can stay safe by following protocols. "Revival of tourism had begun. Tourism activities are catching up in all places. Associations with the support of governments and their agencies are helping the members undertake visits to various places to see for themselves about the destination's safety. This further

helps them to market it with the tourists," states Khanna.

Intending to promote destinations in Uttar Pradesh intensively, ADTOI will be working closely with Uttar Pradesh Tourism. To facilitate the same, they are in the process of launching their UP-State Chapter in Varanasi. According to Khanna, there has been lots of developmental work that has taken place in Varanasi, and by connecting other nearby destinations with the city, the place is going to be one of the sought-after destinations. It will draw more tourists to the State.

Speaking about new trends and upcoming new domestic destinations during the pandemic, Khanna mentions, "The recent trend that we have seen of crowding the beaches, shopping malls and other public places by people when they get the opportunity to travel or move out suggests that they will never stop travelling and given the opportunity they are prepared to travel to places of their interest. While we help the travellers plan their journeys, we advise them to observe protocols and state regulations while on the move. Also, there are a number of destinations that are getting tourists in good number during the pandemic like Kashmir, Leh-Ladakh, Andaman Nicobar Islands to name a few. There are also plenty of weekend destinations which have cropped up and people have been discovering new places in their vicinity where they can drive and spend time with family and friends."

ADTOI's agenda will remain the same for 2022 as the last year. This year they would like to involve State governments in promoting their destinations. They are keen that governments associate with them in organising roadshows so that ADTOI members can promote the same with their customers and other domestic travellers.



## Kolkata Airport issues fresh guidelines for UK travellers

The Kolkata Airport has made COVID testing mandatory for all UK travellers on arrival. According to the Kolkata Airport, “As per the revised guidelines of Government of West Bengal, only International passengers arriving by flights from the UK to Kolkata Airport shall undergo 100 per cent COVID test

(90 per cent RAT and 10 per cent RT-PCR) on arrival”.

On the other hand, international travellers will no longer need to quarantine for seven days or get tested at the airports in the country, as per revised guidelines by the Central government.

## Australia to reopen borders to international travellers from February 21



Australia will reopen to all fully vaccinated visa holders, welcoming the return of tourists, business travellers, and other visitors from February 21, 2022.

Australia’s health system has demonstrated its resilience throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, including through the recent Omicron wave. With improving health conditions, including a recent 23 per cent decline in hospitalisations due to COVID, the National Security Committee of Cabinet agreed that Australia is ready to further progress the staged reopening of their international border.

Visa holders who are not fully vaccinated will still require a valid travel exemption to enter Australia and will be subject to state and territory quarantine requirements.

## India strengthens tourism ties with Australia

Australia will strengthen its tourism links with India to further increase visitor numbers and support local jobs and business by growing one of its largest and most valuable tourist markets.

Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment Dan Tehan and India’s Minister for Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, renewed the Australia-India Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Tourism Cooperation in New Delhi on February 11, 2022.



The MoU will help encourage more Indian visitors to Australia and the capabilities of Australian tourism businesses. Both governments will also work with airlines and airports to boost aviation capacity between Australia and India.

The Indian visitor market has huge potential for Australia. India was Australia’s fastest-growing source of international visitors. Australia welcomed almost 400,000 visitors from India in 2019, making it the sixth most valuable market for spend, contributing \$1.8 billion to their economy.

Tehan said, “Our countries also share important people-to-people links, with around 750,000 people of Indian origin calling Australia home. Hosting the T20 cricket World Cup this year will be a fantastic opportunity to encourage more Indian tourists and business travellers to visit Australia. Australia is working with India to strengthen our ties in many areas, and it’s time to include tourism as Australia reopens its international borders to the world.”

## Creative Travel signs the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism

The Creative Travel family of brands has once again created history by becoming India’s first Destination Management Company to be a signatory of the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism.

Rohit Kohli, Joint Managing Director, Creative Travel said, “Being responsible is a big part of who we are and everything we do. This goes beyond sustainability. It means we strive to be good employers, fair to our partners, conscious of the footprints our actions leave behind, environmentally conscious in our on-ground delivery, conscious of our environment.

“As an industry frontrunner since 1977, we will always create action driven examples, sharing knowledge, and catalysing collaborative action throughout the sector. With Accountability as one of our six core values, we take this responsibility very seriously.”





## France scraps negative COVID-19 test for fully vaccinated travellers

The French government on February 11, 2022, said it would scrap the requirement for a negative COVID-19 test for all vaccinated travellers arriving in the country. Proof of vaccination will be sufficient to travel to France whatever country you are coming from, just as it was before the spread of the Omicron variant.

The move coincided, the statement said, with “the new phase of the pandemic characterised in most countries by the predominance of the Omicron variant and higher vaccination rates”.

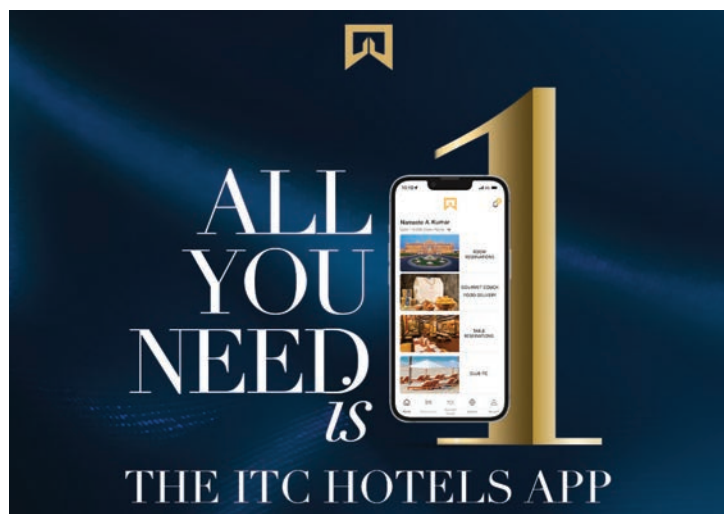
Unvaccinated travellers would still have to show a negative test, but other measures such as testing on arrival and quarantine

would be removed if coming from a “green list” country, the statement added.

Those without jabs coming from France’s “orange list” countries, however, would continue to need an essential reason to travel to France and to take a test after arriving.



## The new ITC Hotels App to be a game changer in the world of Hospitality



ITC's Hotel Group has launched a one-of-a-kind app through which guests will be able to access services like room reservations, restaurant reservations, food delivery and takeaway, loyalty membership essentials and much more, across ITC Hotels, Welcomhotels and select Fortune Hotels.

The ITC Hotels App enables guests to book their stay at over 55 hotels and resorts through a simple process, giving them access to the best rates. Club ITC members can also save up to 10 per cent on room reservations through Club ITC exclusive member rates and earn and redeem Club ITC Green Points for their stays booked directly. As an exclusive limited time offer, Club ITC members can also earn 500 bonus Green Points for materialised room reservations. Business travellers can book their stays at their organisations contracted corporate rates via the app, making the whole reservation process hassle-free and easily accessible at all times.

The App enables food delivery and takeaway across 14 cities — Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Goa, Agra, Jaipur, Vadodara, Amritsar, Coimbatore, (Bhubaneswar and Guntur coming soon). Guests can now order home their favourites from the iconic cuisine brands through Gourmet Couch — ITC Hotels pan India food delivery initiative via the Members of Club ITC and those who hold the Club ITC Culinaire membership have reason to celebrate the new app as it manages the account on their phones and keeps track of members' points, transactions, tier status and much more. Guests can earn and redeem Club ITC points on eligible orders, gift a meal or schedule a meal using the new app. For those who want a new Club ITC membership, the app enables easy and free registrations, instantly welcoming them to enjoy the benefits of the membership.

## Marriott International plans further Asia Pacific expansion with 1000<sup>th</sup> property anticipated to open in 2022



Marriott International has announced its plans to further expand its portfolio across the Asia Pacific, targeting to open its 1000<sup>th</sup> property in the region in late 2022. The company expects to open nearly 100 properties in the region this year.

Ritz-Carlton Reserve anticipates expanding its highly curated portfolio in Greater China, debuting its first rare estate in the historic Jiuzhaigou valley later this year. Additional expected luxury openings in 2022 include JW Marriott Hotel Changsha and W Macau – Studio City.

In South Korea, the company expects to bring its JW Marriott brand to Jeju with the opening of JW Marriott Jeju Resort & Spa in May 2022. The expected opening of W Sydney in late 2022 will mark the third W hotel in Australia.

With wellness and well-being remaining a continued priority for many travellers, the company's leading wellness brand, Westin Hotels & Resorts, is expected to celebrate two new debuts in Yokohama and Cam Ranh in 2022.

Four Points by Sheraton expects to continue its growth with five planned openings throughout the year, while Moxy Hotels anticipates continuing to share its playful spirit in destinations such as Suzhou and Xi'an.

The company expects to debut its AC Hotels brand in Korea with AC Hotel Seoul Gangnam and in Australia with AC Hotel Melbourne Southbank. In Japan, Fairfield by Marriott expects to continue to strengthen its presence with six new properties planned to open across Nara, Hokkaido and Hyogo along 'Michi-no-Eki' roadside stations aimed at revitalising the country's local sightseeing spots and well-hidden rural destinations.



## Amal Tamara by Tamara Leisure Experiences launches in Kerala



The newly launched Amal Tamara in Alleppey, Kerala, is Tamara Leisure Experiences' first foray into luxury wellness Ayurveda experiences. With a 7-day minimum stay at the wellness retreat, this 19-key property continues to hold the company's core values of Responsible Luxury Tourism at the root of operations and experience-design and seeks to design bespoke curative programmes for those looking for a restorative Ayurvedic wellness experience.

Amal Tamara specifically applies the unique Ayurvedic concept of Chikitsa Chatuspada – a tenet of Ayurveda which centralises healing in the synergy of four forces: physician, patient, therapist, and medicine.

Based on the ancient wisdom of Ayurveda, every programme at Amal Tamara is carefully designed to offer privacy, tranquility, and authentic programme, diets, and exercise and meditation regimes for a truly transformative experience. Every patient becomes an Amal Yatri from the moment they connect with the Amal Tamara team – a customer for life. An expert medical team composed of highly experienced Ayurvedic vaidyas will assess the unique needs, body compositions, and goals of each patient before designing personalised and specialised treatments and schedules.

Amal Tamara offers personalised Ayurvedic programmes for immunity booster, anti-aging, among other chronic conditions, providing a customised healing experience.

The property boasts of 19 luxurious rooms in three different types of accommodation – Astha Rooms (450 square feet), Ekta Rooms (550 square feet), and Idha Rooms (750 square feet). A picturesque lake view adds to the aesthetic value of the accommodation, providing both privacy and serenity. An environment for meditation, healing lamp lighting, and a serene library are some of the property's amenities.

## ADCEB and Miral team up to attract larger MICE groups to UAE Capital



Abu Dhabi Convention and Exhibition Bureau (ADCEB) has announced a new partnership with Miral, Abu Dhabi's leading curator of magnetic experiences, to strengthen the emirate's position as a leading destination for MICE, specifically targeting business events with more than 500 attendees.

The partnership has resulted in the creation of the ADCEB and Miral Joint Business Event Fund, a first-of-its-kind fund that aligns with the Tourism Strategy of the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi to synergise efforts with industry partners across different sectors aimed at attracting and generating larger meetings and inbound incentive groups to the emirate.

The ADCEB and Miral Joint Business Event Fund will create a compelling proposition to attract corporate clients and will be an additional tool for local and international DMCs and meeting planners to promote the UAE capital. With the programme adopting a gradual rollout, which started on January 1, 2022, the pilot phase will focus on meetings and incentive travel only. Based on the success of these two units, conferences and exhibitions are set to join at a later stage.

Putting full force behind their bidding efforts, both ADCEB and Miral's sales and marketing teams will pitch the emirate as a leading MICE destination, locally, regionally and globally. Leveraging stakeholder international brand hotel connections and a network of sales teams, ADCEB and Miral will join forces to strengthen sales and marketing activities, such as hosting familiarisation trips, site inspections, sales calls and hosting clients' events to promote Abu Dhabi.

## Cleartrip to hire 400 persons by December 2022

Online travel services provider Cleartrip on February 10, 2022, said it is planning to hire 400 persons to take the total headcount to 700 by December 2022. This new hiring will take Cleartrip's workforce to around 700 employees by December 2022, a three-fold jump from 240 employees in October 2021, the company said in a statement.

The company has increased its workforce strength by 60 per cent in the ongoing quarter, according to the statement. The additional hiring will be across tech, product, growth and emerging business areas, it added.

Cleartrip said, a large number of the hiring has been dedicated toward supporting its plans to scale up its hotels category business

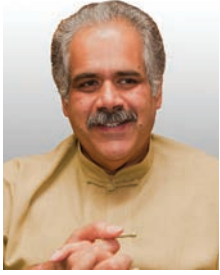
by hiring across regions in India to build out its hotel vertical

portfolio as well as build the technology and product teams for this category.

The hiring is across popular destinations in India including Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Punjab, it added.







## IndiGo

The Board of Directors of InterGlobe Aviation Limited (IndiGo), has unanimously approved the appointment of its Co-founder and Promoter, **Rahul Bhatia**, as its Managing Director. Bhatia will oversee all aspects of the airline and actively lead the Management team. Bhatia stated that his agenda would be transformational and would focus on expanding the airline's presence in India and international markets and building for the long term.



## Air India

Tata Sons has appointed **Ilker Ayci** as the Chief Executive Officer & Managing Director of Air India. The appointment is subject to requisite regulatory approvals. Until very recently, Ayci, was the Chairman of Turkish Airlines and he was on the board of the company prior to that. Ayci will assume his responsibilities on or before April 1, 2022.



## Hahn Air

Hahn Air has announced the appointment of **Kirsten Rehmann** as the new CEO. Rehmann has been part of the corporate management since 2012 alongside the owners and founders of Hahn Air, Hans Nolte and Nico Gormsen. She is now taking sole responsibility for the company's affairs while Nolte and Gormsen remain closely connected to Hahn Air in their role as owners. In the future, Rehmann will direct Hahn Air's global business, all corporate affairs, as well as operational and strategic planning.



## InterContinental Hotels Group plc (IHG)

**Deanna Oppenheimer** is all set to succeed Patrick Cescau as IHG Chair. Deanna's appointment follows a thorough and independent recruitment process supported by an external executive search firm. She will join the Nomination Committee of the IHG Board upon her appointment as Non-Executive Director from June 1, 2022, and will subsequently Chair the Nomination Committee upon assuming the role of Non-Executive Chair from September 1, 2022. Her extensive board and executive-level experience across high-profile consumer brands will bring valuable insights and perspectives to IHG.



## Amritara Hotels & Resorts

**Sarvar Hans** has been elevated to the role of Vice President-Commercial at Amritara Hotels & Resorts. Hans joined Amritara Hotels & Resorts in 2018 and has spearheaded some of the most successful hotel openings of the brand, apart from heading Sales, Marketing and Revenue. In his new role, he will be responsible for acquisitions of new properties and brand expansion. A strong believer of deliberate and instinctive thinking, he has efficaciously led his brand towards excelling in their goals.



## JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa

The soon-to-launch JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa, has appointed **Ronan Fearon** as the General Manager. From joining Marriott International over twenty years ago as a graduate trainee in the UK, Ronan has helmed marquee leadership roles across three continents with the hospitality company. His appointment as the General Manager of the new Resort will witness Ronan in an all-encompassing role responsible for positioning the hotel as a defining benchmark in luxury hospitality in the region.



## Novotel Hotels & Resorts, Goa

Novotel Goa Candolim and Novotel Goa Resort & Spa have announced the appointment of **Rohan Samarth** as Director of Sales and Marketing. Rohan will be responsible for the entire management of the sales and marketing programs, along with the implementation of strategies and budgets for the two five-star properties in Goa.



## Crowne Plaza Greater Noida

Crowne Plaza Greater Noida has appointed **Sharad K Upadhyay** as the new General Manager. In his new role, Sharad will spearhead the business operations, overall implementation, and business development at Crowne Plaza Greater Noida, ensuring its growth and expansion through innovative strategies. Sharad brings with him an extensive array of proficiency and a deep understanding of operational knowledge, especially in pre-opening setups and managing the financial sustainability of hotels.





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