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Editor & Publisher	:	Ravi Sharma
Consulting Editor	:	Gurjit Singh
Bureau Head (West)	:	Prashant Nayak
Contributing Editor	:	Rachita Sehgal
Contributing Editor	:	Sonia Dutt
GM - Marketing	:	Sonika Bohra
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Assistant Manager	:	Avantika
Bureau Head (East)	•	Partha Chatterjee
Contributing Editor	:	Swaati Chaudhary
Manager PR	:	Ankit Dixit
Cordinator (West)	:	Bharti Kalia
Consultant (West)	:	Sameer Montario
Photographer	:	Parth Sharma
st. Manager Administration	:	Kuldeep Singh
Accounts Manager	:	Priyesh Ranjan
Email: info@sampanmedia.com		

As

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

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Dear Friends,

Happy Reading!

With the resumption of scheduled international flights, the National Tourist offices (NTOs) and DMC operators in India are banking on the burgeoning Indian outbound market, which is expected to gain



an uptick post the pandemic. India presents an immense opportunity for destination marketers to leverage the country's holiday seekers and the young population, which includes Gen Z and millennials who are more likely to travel internationally.

Air connectivity between India and other countries is also improving tremendously, with many international airlines resuming their services to India. Outbound travel in India has also been reasonable because of the growing low-cost airline market.

Looking at the positive developments, the TTJ April 2022 issue focuses on Outbound Travel. In this issue, we spoke with NTOs, DMCs, and other tourism stakeholders such as airlines and cruise operators to get their perspectives on international travel from India. Most are happy, as travel sentiments are beginning to brighten up.

Thus, we at TTJ wish you all much brighter days ahead!

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News You Can Use

Qantas launches direct flights on Sydney and Bengaluru route

ustralia's national airline Qantas will fly non-stop from Bengaluru to Sydney and is finalising a codeshare partnership with IndiGo to make travel between India and Australia easier.

From 14 September, Qantas will operate four weekly return flights between Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru and Sydney's Kingsford Smith International Airport with its wide body Airbus A330 aircraft. These are the first direct flights between Australia and southern India by any airline, cutting almost three hours off the current fastest trip between Bengaluru and Sydney.

Qantas will continue to operate up to five flights a week between Melbourne and Delhi, making it the only airline offering direct flights between both northern and southern India and Australia.

Travellers are also set to benefit from improved one-stop access to Sydney from more than 50 Indian cities, as part of a proposed codeshare agreement between Qantas and

IndiGo appoints Vinay Malhotra as Head of Global Sales

ndiGo is expanding its global as well as domestic presence post-COVID by launching new routes and reinstating its older routes. Effective April 1, 2022, Vinay is heading Global Sales for IndiGo as the domestic and International travel is pegged to pick up sharply.



In his last assignment, he was Regional Group Chief

Operating Officer for South Asia, Middle East and North Africa, and Americas, and led business operations for VFS Global in these regions. He was responsible for driving strategy, new business development, and managing key client relationships besides operations delivery across these markets. Having joined VFS Global in 2013, he successfully managed multiple roles across the Globe and was appointed as a member of the VFS Global Executive Board in December 2018.

His professional career spans 30 years in the travel industry. Prior to joining VFS Global in 2013, he worked with Emirates, Swissair and Galileo in key roles. Vinay has diversified aviation experience in managing passenger sales and ticketing, airport, as well as cargo operations.



IndiGo. Once finalised, customers will have more convenient access from not only the major Indian cities, but many popular regional cities such as Pune and Goa. The proposed codeshare agreement will enable seamless connections via Bengaluru, Delhi, or Singapore into Australia's largest capital cities.

Japan lists Covaxin as recognised COVID-19 vaccine to facilitate travel



he government of Japan has included Bharat Biotech's Covaxin in the list of recognised vaccines to further facilitate travel from India. Japan also recognises Pfizer's Comirnaty, AstraZeneca's Vaxzevria, COVID-19 vaccine by Moderna and Janssen COVID-19 vaccine.

COVID-19 vaccination certificates issued outside of Japan are accepted in Japan if they are in Japanese or English and contain the following information: name, date of birth, vaccine product name or manufacturer, vaccination date, and number of COVID-19 vaccine doses.

LINKIN Reps to represent Lily Hotels in India market

INKIN Reps has been appointed the India sales, marketing and Public Relations representation office for the Lily Hotels, Maldives. LINKIN Reps will be responsible for driving holistic sales, trade marketing and PR Strategies in India for the popular destinations offered by Lily Hotels. Lily Hotels is an owner-operator of resorts in the Maldives. Lily Hotels is dedicated to creating high-value, sophisticated, authentic, and enjoyable holidays – all with a local touch.

As a local operator in the dynamic Maldivian tourism market, Lily Hotels has achieved much success in its operation since 1993. Lily Hotels currently operate Lily Beach Resort & Spa, a large island hideaway resort located in the northern Maldives with privacy at its core – Hideaway Beach Resort & Spa, and its collection of elevated and curated luxury beach villas with dedicated butler service as a 'resort in a resort concept' – The Signature Collection by Hideaway.







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Tourism Fiji gears up to enhance its brand visibility and expand its reach in India

The island nation is now open to fully vaccinated travellers. Brent Hill, CEO, Tourism Fiji, in this interaction with TTJ, conveyed his dual-pronged approach to reviving and physically reconnecting with the Indian travel trade after a gap of two years and promoting a gamut of experiences and accommodation options across the Fijian archipelago.

ith borders now open for Indian travellers, Tourism Fiji has an aggressive action plan in place with a line-up of several trade initiatives and consumer campaigns to go live in the coming months. Tourism Fiji's participation at OTM Mumbai 2022 proved to be an excellent opportunity to reconnect with travel agents, revive, refresh, and amplify the destination's visibility. Tourism Fiji is planning trade and media familiarisation trips to rebuild confidence in the destination and provide a first-hand experience of the health and safety protocols in place, as well as exposure to their products. They are also exploring the idea of resuming their annual roadshow; however, that would be towards the second half of the year. Presently, they are setting short-term goals, reviewing and realigning them as needed, keeping in line with the global parameters, market sentiments, and emerging travel trends.

India was included as part of Fiji's 'Travel Partner' country list effective March 2, 2022, thus enabling Indian tourists to travel to Fiji to enjoy a 'quarantine-free' holiday. Travellers must be fully vaccinated (Children under 18 can travel with a vaccinated adult), providing a negative PCR test taken within two days prior to departure or a negative RAT test taken within 24 hours prior to departure. Additionally, they must hold a confirmed minimum three-night booking with a Care Fiji Commitment (CFC) certified accommodation and confirmed approved transfer from the airport. Medical travel insurance is a must. Travellers will need to take a mandatory RAT test at a CFC-certified resort two days after arrival in Fiji. Once travellers arrive on Fiji's shores, they can enjoy the best of Fiji knowing that everyone they interact with is adhering to the highest health and safety practices.

Visa for Indian citizens continues to be on arrival and is free of charge, thus making Fiji an absolute hassle-free destination for Indian visitors, whether they are travelling to Fiji alone or combining with an alternate destination. "This also works as an excellent USP with travel agents, making the destination easy to package and sell to their clientele. Indian visitors can travel to Fiji via the currently open transit routes of Singapore and Australia. Our national carrier Fiji Airways has direct flights from Singapore to Fiji. In addition, you can connect from multiple

Prashant Nayak



A Brent Hill

hubs in Australia using Fiji Airways or Qantas," informs Brent.

While Fiji is an island nation, it is not just a sun, sand and sea destination. A variety of experiences are offered to Indian travellers across different regions of Fiji. Brent adds, "From adrenaline-pumping activities such as water sports, world-class diving to shark feeding, cave tours, quad biking, zip-lining. Fiji also has a

very rich local culture, which is the core to Fijian hospitality. Visitors can indulge in cultural tours, local experiences, spas and other wellness offerings across the islands. With this, we aim to enhance the perception of Fiji in India as a safe, welcoming, diverse and advanced destination meeting the requirements of all segments of travellers. In the upcoming months, we aim to aspire Indian travellers who seek premium and personalised experiences to travel to Fiji, thereby capturing a greater share of India's outbound travel market."

Honeymooners and couple travellers remain Tourism Fiji's key focus segments in India. However, they are also focusing on the family segment, high-end consumer groups, and niche segments of diving, golfing, weddings, to name a few. Pre-pandemic, they had seen interest from the MICE segment as well for hosting conferences in Fiji, which was a good step for them to foray into the high-value customer segment from India. They are also focusing on the evolving needs of Indian travellers, attracting those seeking a more experiential holiday.

Tourism Fiji has been in regular touch with its travel partners in India and has always jointly considered their feedback for all in-market activities. On a final note, Brent says, "The Indian trade and our private stakeholders are looking forward to reconnecting face to face through in-person events to renew and strengthen their existing and develop new relationships. We do intend to include traditional physical campaigns in our plans. These would complement the virtual ones that have helped us during the pandemic to reach and keep Fiji alive in the minds of our partners and travellers. We are also sure to look at our traditional markets and develop emerging markets in India, especially the hubs that connect travel to Fiji."



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Los Angeles fully committed to India market

Los Angeles is home to 300 days of warm sunshine, 75 miles of idyllic shoreline with many museums and performing arts venues than any other U.S. city. Also, the place has an innovative culinary scene led by influential tastemakers. With Los Angeles fully open to travellers from India, Seema Kadam, Regional Director – India, Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board, and her team are solidifying plans for deeper engagement in India.

he Los Angeles Tourism Convention Board has & continued its presence throughout the pandemic. They are proud to be the only U.S. Destination Marketing Organisation with full-time staff overseas, including one team member based in Mumbai. India has long been a very important market for Los Angeles. In fact, before the pandemic, India represented one of the fastest-growing international markets, with 135,000 Indians visiting in 2019 alone, injecting \$301 million in visitor spending into the local economy.

With US borders fully open, L.A. launched its global comeback campaign in 2021, complete with a new look and branding for the Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board. "We invited travellers from across the globe to start their #ComebackStory in L.A. and localised this campaign in India. Our campaign in India has two distinct legs, one targeted at the upcoming summer travel season for travellers with existing US visas who are seeking to travel immediately and just need a nudge. The second leg involves long-term efforts targeted at potential firsttime or repeat travellers looking for reasons to travel internationally, starting with this year's Diwali and year-end travel period. We have relaunched intensive communication efforts in India to support both these sets of strategic recovery efforts," shares Seema.

While the U.S. is open to fully vaccinated travellers from India, proof of vaccination status is required to board an airplane into the United States. International travellers aged two and

Prashant Nayak



Seema Kadam

older must show proof of a negative COVID-19 viral test result taken no more than one day before travel. Both nucleic acid amplification tests, such as PCR and antigen tests, qualify. Aspiring travellers will be required to fill out the DS-160 visa electronic application form online. Subsequently, two appointments must be scheduled, one with the Visa Application Centre (VAC) and one for the visa interview at the Embassy or Consulate.

Speaking about the connectivity, Seema says, "India and Los Angeles are wellconnected, with multiple flights scheduled each day from almost all major international airports in India. In fact, given the high frequency of flights and ample seat capacity



between India and the United States, we are already seeing forward bookings from the market, with L.A. being a city of choice."

To position the destination as one of the most preferred destinations for Indian travellers, the tourism board will be working out a mix of aggressive consumer communication strategies, media familiarisation trips, and influencer marketing that inspires wanderlust. "We hope to introduce the Indian consumers to the ever-evolving, dynamic destination that is Los Angeles. Additionally, to better help Indian trade partners understand our destination, we continue to offer a refreshed version of the L.A. Insider training program, found at insider.discoverlosangeles.com. This B2B platform highlights Los Angeles with three chapters and educates the travel trade on selling and promoting Los Angeles. We also have a dedicated B2B Facebook page to keep the travel trade updated on what's new in the destination, as Los Angeles is a creative destination that is constantly evolving," informs Seema.

The Tourism Board will also continue working with partners like Brand USA and the travel trade in India to ensure that itineraries are structured and customised to suit Indian traveller's tastes and demands post the pandemic.

Los Angeles has continued to push the envelope on creativity throughout the pandemic, bringing new experiences to travellers. A decade of unforgettable sporting events is underway with state-of-the-art venues, including the new SoFi Stadium, which hosted the Super Bowl last month. The arts and culture scene is also accelerating with new offerings, including The Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, which recently opened its doors, telling the stories of moviemaking through immersive and dynamic exhibits. There is also an abundance of new and iconic hotels found in the many neighbourhoods of L.A. There are more accommodations options than ever, with many new hotels opening their doors last year, including the iconic Fairmont Century Plaza and a crop of boutique properties in Downtown Los Angeles and Hollywood.

As they are keen to promote their destination to the Indian travellers, Seema particularly mentions, "We believe that the Indian traveller is evolving to seek more nuanced experiential holidays. Wellness-focused trips, road trips, culinary explorations, sport-inspired travel and smaller destination weddings are here to stay. This bodes well for Los Angeles, as our remarkable city is a world-class destination for all of these trends."



The Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi invites families and tourists to spend a splendid summer in luxury.

bu Dhabi, located on the island of Persian Gulf, is a collage of magnificent architecture, stunning beaches, traditional and cultural monuments, adventure-sport activities and premium ultramodern shopping plazas. With a perfect mix of traditional ethos and contemporary culture, Abu Dhabi has repeatedly proved to a tourists' paradise and is all set to welcome your clients this summer to a world beyond imagination! Summing it up, Abu Dhabi's array of lavish Arab experiences are the ideal indulgence this for families this summer.

Apart from the natural islands, luxurious resorts, shifting sand dunes and cool oases, Abu Dhabi has something for everyone. Some of the mustvisit sights one can unravel on their next vacation at the island city of Abu Dhabi are:

Jubail Mangrove Park: Jubail Mangrove Park is one of the most soughtafter destinations in Abu Dhabi, located between Saadiyat Island and Yas Island. The stunning park is the first self-contained educational, nature and leisure hub of its kind in the emirates. There are multiple activities to do within the park like a guided walking tour, kayaking, yoga and e-canoe tours. Experience exotic Turtles, gazelle, crabs, flamingos, and herons at Jubail Mangrove Park. For those who would like to stay for longer, there are now glamping pods on the island at the Pura Eco retreat.

Note: book your visit through your preferred partners beforehand

Qasr Al Watan: It is a working Presidential palace and a majestic cultural landmark that invites the world to discover the rich legacy of knowledge and tradition that has shaped the UAE's journey. Boosting cultural understanding of the nation and emphasising its incredible history, this is more than just a traditional palace. Qasr Al Watan is an exquisitely crafted tribute to Arabian heritage and artistry, with its architecture and design echoing the significance and function of the impressive exhibits and iconic rooms housed within its halls. One of the palace's most impressive and unmissable attractions is the family-friendly Palace In Motion event, a spectacular light and sound show that celebrates the UAE's journey in three breathtaking acts that unfold in front of the main palace every 30 minutes after sundown.

Warner Bros.World[™] Abu Dhabi: Visit the world's largest indoor theme park named by Guinness World Records. It spreads across 1.65 million sq. ft with 29 state-of-the-art rides, interactive family-friendly attractions, live entertainment, exclusive stores, and a range of eateries. Warner Bros. World[™] Abu Dhabi is divided into six zones: Warner Bros. Plaza, Bedrock, Dynamite Glutch, Cartoon Junction, Gotham City and Metropolis. The theme park made Time magazine's list of the "World's Greatest Places to Visit" in 2018 and won the "Middle East's Leading Tourism Destination" award at the 2020 World Travel Awards, making Yas Island one of the world's top 10 vacation and entertainment destinations.

Marina Mall: Located in one of the city's most prominent and picturesque districts, Marina Mall takes up over 122,000 square metres of impressive

retail space, housing more than 400 high-end and high-street stores, car showroom, speciality shops, bank offices and a hypermarket. Spend the day indulging in one of the many upscale cafes, tourists can try their hand at a state-of-the-art bowling alley or visit the nine-screen VOX cinema. Being one of Abu Dhabi's distinctive landmarks, Marina Mall also puts on a range of exciting events that draw crowds of all ages.

Louvre Abu Dhabi: Experience Paris in Abu Dhabi, the largest art museum in the Arabian Peninsula. The Louvre Abu Dhabi, at Saadiyat Island, Saadiyat Cultural District, is home to over 120 masterpieces including The Virgin and Child by Francesco Traini, The Bohemian by Edouard Manet, Van Gogh, Monet, Degas, Renoir, and many more. The venue offers different activities for adults, including kayaking around the museum, sunrise kayaking and yoga under the dome. The Arab Louvre also has a Children's Museum with a new exhibition 'Emotions' and the new art adventure' which is free for children.

Note: Do purchase your ticket online through your preferred partner before the visit.

Al Qana: Abu Dhabi's Stunning Waterfront Destination stretches across 2.4 km. This makes it to the attraction list as it is home to Middle East's largest aquarium. Located within the Rabdan Area, the National Aquarium is one of the 11 anchors found within Al Qana, one of Abu Dhabi's most iconic touristic and lifestyle destinations. With innovations including video mapping technology and signage guides on your personal device, this attraction is expected to quickly take its place among the world's best aquariums.

Emirates Park Zoo: It is one of the most exciting educational places in the UAE and is now home to various animal species, including an evergrowing list of attractions and fun activities such as animal feeding, animal shows, ziplining and climb and car adventures. The zoo was built on the premise that every guest will be able to appreciate nature all over again, after

encountering new discoveries, unique experiences and unforgettable memories, including interacting with its many farm and wild animals.

While these are the highlights, the city offers a wide



palette of touristy spots! For more information, visit https://visitabudhabi.ae/en

Ras Al Khaimah keen to attract Leisure and MICE traffic from India

Offering magnificent landscapes, breath-taking coastlines, rich desert plains, and the highest mountain peak in the UAE, Jebel Jais, combined with ancient history, Ras Al Khaimah has firmly established itself as one of the most authentic destinations in the Middle East. Iyad Rasbey, Executive Director, Destination Tourism Development, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA), is excited to welcome Indian tourists and business travellers to their stunning destination while looking forward to forging new partnerships, campaigns, and collaborations.

Prashant Nayak

ndia is among the top five source markets for Ras Al Khaimah, and the Emirate is continuously looking at ways to increase arrivals from India.

RAKTDA, representing the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah in the UAE, hosted its first in-person event in India earlier this month since the onset of the pandemic. The Destination Tourism Development and MICE team, alongside a number of hospitality representatives from Ras Al Khaimah, presented the leisure offerings of the destination as well as updates that position Ras Al Khaimah as an attractive MICE and wedding destination for the India market.

Iyad says, "We are excited to be back in India. As we enter into a recovery year, we are taking the opportunity to update our trade partners on the importance of safety and peace of mind travel to Ras Al Khaimah alongside everything the destination has to offer from nature, adventure to world class hotel brands, destination weddings and more."

Currently, fully vaccinated passengers arriving in the country no longer require PCR tests. Vaccinated visitors must carry a valid proof of vaccination. Unvaccinated visitors must provide a negative RT-PCR test issued no more than 48 hours before departure. RAKTDA has also recently announced the roll-out of AED 65 return RT- PCR test in Ras AI Khaimah for any visitors requiring a test to return home, as well as complimentary extended stays for those testing positive for COVID-19 on return were not covered by insurance and booked through a DMC or tour operator.

Indian nationals arriving in the UAE will need to apply for a prearranged visit visa. They can apply for a Service Visa (14 days), Tourist Visa (30 days) or Visit Visa (up to 90 days). This can be easily organised via airlines such as Emirates, FlyDubai, Etihad Airways and Air Arabia, hotels or travel partners with



Iyad Rasbey

whom they have booked a trip. UAE residents (friends or relatives) can also apply on the visitor's behalf, subject to guidelines.

Just 45 minutes from the busy metropolis of Dubai, Ras Al Khaimah is the fastest growing and most diverse Emirate in the UAE. With over 7,000 years of fascinating history and culture, Ras Al Khaimah is the perfect getaway from everyday life. A haven of year-round sunshine, Ras Al Khaimah features pristine beaches, lush mangroves and terracotta dunes, as well as the dramatic, awe-inspiring vistas of the majestic Hajar mountains. "This enables us to cater to a full suite of travellers, from cultural escapes to ecotourism and adrenaline-fueled adventures to beach retreats. The unique natural beauty of the Emirate has proven extremely appealing for those looking to relax and unwind in a seeking safe and expansive destination," assures lyad.

Ras Al Khaimah also offers its visitors

the best in hospitality, with a wide choice of accommodation – from ultra-luxurious beach resorts managed by some of the most notable names in the business to the family-friendly city- and beach resorts. With over 7,000 keys available, the Emirate has world-class hotels and resorts, including properties such as Waldorf Astoria, Hilton, Rixos, Rotana, The Ritz-Carlton and many others. Most recently, the InterContinental Ras AI Khaimah Mina AI Arab Resort & Spa opened its doors, the first property of the luxury brand in Ras AI Khaimah, offering a range of rooms, suites, and private pool villas.

Highlighting more about the offerings and attractions, lyad says, "Over the past years, RAKTDA has unveiled a series of exciting sustainable adventure projects on Jebel Jais, cementing its standing as the adventure hub of the Middle East. The Bear Grylls Explorers Camp made its regional debut on Jebel Jais, offering the world's first Bear Grylls Branded accommodation. In addition to the Jais Adventure Park attractions, thrillseekers can enjoy a rush of adrenaline while hiking, climbing, backpacking, abseiling, and canyoning, all with the support of adventure tour companies that provide certified and knowledgeable outdoor guides."

Efforts are also underway to re-attract MICE and wedding travel. Ras Al Khaimah has strong credentials in this space, having already hosted several large destinations weddings this year. "We have a strong pipeline for the rest of the year and we anticipate increased interest in our Emirate, particularly for destination weddings, with travel restrictions from India continuing to lift. As part of our efforts to strengthen our position in the market, we have increased our budget in India to promote our destination in-market and grow all travel segments from leisure, families, business to MICE and weddings," concludes lyad.



'Looking forward to an exciting and active year ahead'

Australia has progressively been reopening its borders to fully vaccinated travellers, first allowing students, parents, and migrants, and now all visitors. Also, the Australian Government has announced several initiatives to encourage visitors back to Australia. Nishant Kashikar, Country Manager (India & Gulf), Tourism Australia, gives in-depth details of the latest development at Tourism Australia in the India market and other helpful information if one has plans to visit Australia.

Manisha Patel

to be submitted 72 hours prior to departure. Pre-departure COVID test for international travellers will no longer be required wef, April 17, 2022," states Nishant on Australia's travel and pre-entry requirements.

Upon arrival in Australia, all travellers must take a self-monitored RAT test within 24 hours of entry. In case one tests positive for COVID-19, the results will need to be reported to the local state authority. For those who intend on travelling to South Australia, an RT-PCR will need to be taken within 24 hours of arrival, and travellers to Western Australia will be required to take a RAT test within 12 hours of arrival.

Speaking more on promotions, Tourism Australia, in partnership with their Key Distribution Partners (KDPs), has recently launched a campaign called 'Australia is Yours to Explore' on a mix of print, digital and social media, enticing Indian travellers to take a holiday in Australia. A robust PR program thought of will support the direct-to-consumer campaign, including leveraging influencers and advocates through their 'Friends of Australia' program to showcase Australia's most sought-after experiences.

"Australia offers a wide range of diverse experiences and there is something for everyone within a family or friends' unit to enjoy on a holiday. At Tourism Australia, we are anticipating a pent-up demand for travel from India to Australia, especially for young families and couples. We are also eager to utilise the opportunity provided by highoctane events like the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, which Australia will be hosting from October 22, 2022, to November 13, 2022, as such big-ticket events help mobilise India's burgeoning cricket fanbase, encouraging cricket enthusiastic tourists as well as business travellers to visit to attend the championship and explore everything Australia has to offer," concludes Nishant.

encourage visitation to 0 Australia, Tourism Australia will be pursuing collaborations with travel partners such as MakeMyTrip, Pick Your Trail, Thomas Cook, SOTC, Kesari Tours, Kulin Kumar Holidays, Travel Tours, and Veena World. They are also exploring partnerships with major airlines such as Singapore Airlines, Malaysia Airlines, Air India, and Qantas. Their upcoming Virtual Travel Fair will offer exclusive airfares for travel to Australia. They are also keen on reconnecting with their trade community and are gradually reintroducing physical and inperson gatherings as restrictions are further eased.

"Australia ranks high in most key factor associations, including natural beauty, wildlife, food and drink against key competitor destinations and we are confident that our partnerships and other marketing initiatives will attract High-Value Travellers to holiday in Australia," shares Nishant.

Following the reopening of Australia's borders, the Department of Home Affairs has witnessed a bounce back in Indian visitor visa lodgements, back to 2019 levels. As the Department has commenced processing all visa categories, travellers are requested to apply for their visas at least 30 days before their intended travel date. The Australian High Commission will also be offering a personalised visa service for large corporate or incentive groups who intend to visit Australia.

On visa requirements, Nishant informs, "Through the introduction of the Visa Application Charge (VAC) waiver, those travellers who were in possession of a Visitor visa that has expired or is due to expire between March 20, 2020 and June 30, 2022, are eligible for a waiver of their future visitor visa fees. However, registration and



Nishant Kashikar

application for the visa must be completed by December 31, 2022, in order to avail the VAC waiver."

Australia remains reachable from all major Indian cities through several direct as well as one-stop flight options via the South East Asian Hubs. With the introduction of direct flights by Australia's national carrier, Qantas, on the Sydney - Delhi and Melbourne – Delhi routes, direct aviation capacity on India – Australia route has more than doubled compared to pre-pandemic levels. Air India has also introduced non-stop direct flights between Delhi - Sydney and Delhi – Melbourne.

"Prior to departure, travellers will require a valid visa, a vaccination certificate indicating that both doses of an approved vaccine have been administered (such as Covishield and Covaxin), a negative Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) under medical supervision undertaken 24 hours prior or an RT-PCR COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours prior to departure. A Digital Passenger Declaration (DPD) is also required



Azerbaijan Tourism Board (ATB) has long been working on developing sustainable tourism experiences that are well-suited to the expectations of today's travellers, while at the same time prioritising its mission of preserving and reinforcing the existing resources of the country. Bahruz Asgarov, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Azerbaijan Tourism Board (ATB), in an exclusive interview with TTJ, shares some in-depth details of new offerings in Azerbaijan, a country that blends the best of East and West.

Prashant Nayak

et on the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan is widely considered a part of both Europe and Asia. Azerbaijan is known as the Land of Fire and includes ancient historical empires intertwined with the modernity of a nation undergoing rapid transformation.

After welcoming over 790,000 visitors in 2021, Azerbaijan is prepared to welcome tourists in 2022 with safe, sustainable, and immersive experiences, with the anticipation that India will soon be among the top source countries, as it was before the pandemic. Azerbaijan is ready to conquer the Indian hearts once again.

"India remains an important market for us, and we are set to restart our activities to attract travellers from this beautiful country," says Bahruz. ATB aims to reconnect with industry partners and media representatives in India after quite a long pause and convey the novelties in Azerbaijan, where recovery from the pandemic is going according to plan.

Baku, the capital city, is the gateway to Azerbaijan. Baku provides an eclectic mixture of architectural phenomena from the likes of Paris and Dubai, and is rapidly changing. You will discover a constantly evolving tapestry of life and energy from bazaar to penthouse in Baku. Being a coastal city, Baku is intrinsically open-minded and hospitable.

Sharing more on Baku and the nearby places, Bahruz informs, "Baku is the main hub where we receive the tourists along with Gabala and other destinations in Azerbaijan. The city is amazing. Our biggest city is and cultural center in Azerbaijan, and it has this European outlook, very nice,

the economic

also



Bahruz Asgarov

very modern, and with very good infrastructures. There are also many cultural sites in Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan that tourists can visit. In a few hours of travel, one can connect Baku with other destinations, such as Gabala, and Lankaran. If one stays, even more, they can go to Sheki, which was recently inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site."

Azerbaijan is now open to eighty-seven countries by air travel. With a restored connection via multiple international airlines and easy e-visa procedures, passengers aged eighteen and over can now fly to Azerbaijan by submitting a COVID passport/certificate and a negative PCR test taken within seventy-two hours before the flight. Only the latter needs to be provided within the indicated time for minors.

Azerbaijan has a very simplified visa regime. Bahruz mentions, "Before the pandemic, Azerbaijan became popular with Indian tourists. It was because of the ease of the visa application process. For a visa, one only needs a passport. Travellers can visit the website and apply for this visa, and they can get a regular visa issued within three days, but usually it is issued in one day. They can also get an urgent visa in a couple of hours. It's very easy, and applicants don't face any problems applying for a visa. Also, when they arrive in Azerbaijan, there is basically no chance of being

deported. Hence, everything is very smooth."

Azerbaijan is full of contrasts, with nine climate zones stretching across the country. On a journey across the Caucasian leg of the Silk Road, you are bound to witness history and modernity collide across dreamy semidesert landscapes. One is surprised to see the snow-capped Caucasian Mountains border the hot deserts while sun-soaked meadows merge with Caspian Sea coasts.

When it comes to attractions and offerings, one of the best examples among these offerings is Slow Food Travel, developed within an EU-funded project which ATB and Slow Food International have jointly implemented. This experience is now accessible across the north-western route, with about sixty local partners providing local gastronomic experiences and accommodation options. It is also planned to be expanded to the subtropical south of Azerbaijan, where a perfect combination of rice, tea, and citrus plantations awaits travellers.

When Indian tourists started visiting Azerbaijan, the country only had a few restaurants offering Indian food. "Right now, there are so many restaurants that offer Indian food because hospitality stakeholders began to understand that when the Indian travellers come to Azerbaijan, they would at some point like to have their food as well. So, in many streets, one can find Indian restaurants, and they are getting quite popular. It's not only in Baku but also in Gabala that restaurants cater to Indian food. Since Baku is a dynamic city, it is known for all kinds of cuisines right from European, Asian, Russian to Indian and Arabic cuisine," states Bahruz.



ATB has also managed to achieve considerable progress in developing hiking routes, with sixteen new trails marked across Azerbaijan's northern and north-western routes, passing through remote mountain villages surrounded by breath-taking nature. Moreover, 97 km of hiking trails through the lush, forested mountains of Sheki and Zagatala have recently been added to the Transcaucasian Trail, and more routes are still to be added in cooperation with the Transcaucasian Trail Association.

Azerbaijan is becoming an increasingly attractive birdwatching destination thanks to its diverse landscapes and interesting bird species, and there is more to be done in this direction as well. ATB is planning to



organise a birdwatching festival where international media and relevant partners will also be invited, in cooperation with the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

After the pandemic, ATB sought to create some unique and sustainable experiences. They are beginning to understand that people want something new, which is also sustainable. They didn't want to go into mass tourism. "That's why we developed a few offerings for this type of tourist. Besides hiking, Azerbaijan is also turning out to be an amazing birdwatching destination. The region is one of the few hotspots where migratory birds from Eurasia during winter make a stopover while flying from the north to the south and from the east to the west. During this migrating season, there are lots of exotic, beautiful, and wonderful species of birds to be seen. Besides the migratory, bird lovers will also be surprised at sighting birds endemic to the region. We hope to generate a lot of worldwide media attention around the destination during the bird-watching festival in November this year. But meanwhile, we are working on the infrastructure. We will make sure that bird watchers and wildlife aficionados can view this one-of-a-kind experience", explains Bahruz.

Bahruz further adds, "And for travellers visiting in winter, we have amazing ski resorts in Azerbaijan in destinations such as Gabala, Qusar, and Nakhchivan. The development of new tourism offerings has also continued Safari tours in Shamakhi, surrounded by the Caucasus Mountains for ecotourists and wildlife lovers, the Alpine Coaster at Shahdag Mountain Resort, the world's first oil tanker museum, and a reconstructed zoo in Baku."

Another integral part of ATB's activities is to continue researching how best to develop tourism offerings in Karabakh, where major restoration work continues at full speed. With one international airport opened and two more under construction, this destination is set to combine interesting experiences across outdoor activities, health and wellness, cultural routes, and other tourism offerings.



One more much-anticipated plan for 2022 is opening the Mud Volcanoes Tourism Complex, which will allow its visitors to enjoy multiple experiences from quad biking and zip-lining to workshops for children, along with a trip to the moon-like landscape home to an enormous collection of mud volcanoes. This June, Azerbaijan will host the sixth Formula One Azerbaijan Grand Prix from 10th to 12th.

ATB had been very active throughout the pandemic, and now they are restarting everything again. During the pandemic, they had a few platforms that they launched for their travel partner to keep Azerbaijan on the top of mind for the travellers. "It was surprising to know that the highest certificates were awarded to our Indian trade partners in our destination expert program, which shows a great deal of interest in Azerbaijan by the Indian trade. Now, we further want to recommend our partners and show what more Azerbaijan offers. Since we have also developed a few new products in Azerbaijan, we really want to showcase those to our Indian partners," concludes Bahruz.

CzechTourism focused on reconnecting and consolidating its position in India

The Czech Republic has become one of Europe's major tourist destinations and has been witnessing a steady growth in Indian tourist arrivals in the past few years. From the streets of Prague to the central Bohemian highlands, the Czech Republic is overflowing with experiences for every kind of traveller. Marek Kroutil, International Marketing Manager, CzechTourism India, gives an insight into their on-the-anvil promotions for the India market.

zechTourism India has planned many B2B events in the coming months. From a B2C perspective, they have stayed on the minds of travellers by showcasing the various assets of the Czech Republic through their India-specific Instagram handle. They have various promotional events planned for the coming months, including FAM tours, media collaborations, and a few exciting contests. For the discerning travellers, they aim to showcase the destination's plethora of attractions and diversity of offerings for an elevated holiday experience in the Czech Republic.

Presently, for all travellers entering the Czech Republic, there is an obligation to provide a filled passenger locator form. The form must be filled out before arrival and provided on request while at the airport of departure.

In the case of fully vaccinated travellers, intending to visit the Czech Republic, Marek explains, "Fully vaccinated travellers can visit the Czech Republic with an EU digital COVID certificate EU (Indian Vaccination Certificate is recognised by the EU) which is valid for 14–270 days after the completion of the second vaccination dose (Covishield). Otherwise, one is considered non-vaccinated and needs to arrive with a PCR test and take another one within 5 to 7 days after arrival. However, it is recommended to carry a negative RT-PCR test taken within 72 before departure to the Czech Republic.

Unvaccinated travellers can also enter the Czech Republic. However, they must carry a filled passenger form, and provide a negative RT-PCR test that is not older than 72 hours from the date of undertaking the journey. They will also have to undergo an RT-PCR test between the fifth and seventh day after entering the

Sonika Bohra



A Marek Kroutil

Czech Republic. Antigen tests cost between 8 and 10 euros, whereas PCR tests cost between 30 and 35 euros.

Children under 12 years of age have an exception from all hygiene measures. Children from 12 to 18 years of age do not have a time-limited validity of the vaccination certificate.

CzechTourism also aims to showcase the gastronomical and traditional aspects of the Czech Republic. This land-locked country in the very heart of Europe has the potential to offer numerous experiences. For the next two years, the main focus will be on the history of their people, handcrafts, unique traditions, and habits. This is closely connected with the traditional gastronomy, from crafted beers to exquisite, delicious dishes. CzechTourism perceives India as one of the most important growing source markets and wishes to bring more interest to the Central European destination. Marek shares, "The Czech Tourism India team has been making the most of the current situation by educating and informing the travel trade as well as end consumers about the various facets of the destination that are still unknown to visitors to keep the Czech Republic on the minds of travellers and ensure that it is on their bucket list for 2022."

Leisure, Weddings, and MICE are three segments that the tourism department is focusing on to promote the Czech Republic in India. However, they will also be promoting the destination in other segments such as FIT travellers, families, experiential travellers, millennials, business visitors, and honeymooners. Their aim is to get back to the 2019 figures of nearly one lakh visitation to the Czech Republic from India.

CzechTourism has pursued several initiatives to stay connected with the Indian B2C market during the COVID-19 pandemic through virtual events. However, as the pandemic situation is easing out and now that tourism has restarted, they intend to host physical events in the upcoming months. Marek adds, "We think it is very important to reconnect with our trade partners in the India market as they play a major role in promoting our destination to the Indian travellers. Our India team has been reaching out to the trade and has started arranging in-person meetings to understand the new travel trends and the new mindset of the Indian travellers. Apart from that, we also plan to host a few B2B events such as webinars, roadshows, do joint corporations with trade, networking gala events, mall activations."

Mauritius invites Indians to explore beyond sunsets and beaches

Mauritius Tourism recently introduced a new advertising campaign, 'Where Else but Mauritius,' designed to enthrall Indian travellers. The multi-faceted campaign is aimed at a wide range of audiences, with the first phase focusing on raising awareness of the destination's varied attractions. The tourism board encourages Indian visitors to explore the wide variety of offerings that make Mauritius unique. Arvind Bundhun, Director, Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MPTA), speaks with TTJ about the India-Mauritius relationship and the new campaign.

Prashant Nayak

ndia and Mauritius are united by history, ancestry, culture, language, and the shared waters of the Indian Ocean. This new island nation could rightly be called the second home of Indians. Around 52 per cent of Mauritius's population has Indian origins, and there's no language barrier. Also, most culinary habits are similar. That's why Mauritius is also known as 'Chota Bharat.'

"There have always been strong ties between Mauritius and India, and the relationship between the two countries is a pure love story. Wherever love stories prevail, the best love story lasts and I think Mauritius and India tick these boxes. India has always been important in terms of tourism arrivals and Mauritius has a diverse product offering that relates to Indian travellers. In Mauritius, Indians don't feel out of place," expresses Arvind.

Mauritius welcomes visitors from four continents, and its people have learned to live in peace and harmony with everyone. The nation has built its legendary hospitality because of the local population. "I want to thank our people who have been the soul of the tourism industry because without them we would have reached where we are today," says Arvind.

The new marketing campaign's primary focus is to create the destination's appeal to Indian visitors. Arvind elaborates, "Basically, we had to refresh the image to highlight that Mauritius is more than its scintillating waters and golden beaches. We needed to highlight the other attributes of Mauritius and we



Arvind Bundhun

wanted to differentiate our product offerings from our competitors through this campaign. As you can see, Mauritius is more than simply a bay island; it's a whole world in its own right. It has a lot to offer: weddings, honeymoons, MICE, adventure, films, wildlife, gastronomy, and much more."

Air Mauritius has started operating five flights a week from March 27, 2022, and fully vaccinated international travellers need not carry negative test reports. Upon arrival in Mauritius, they must still undergo a COVID-19. Meanwhile, the country is promoting itself as a safe island for all visitors, with the motto 'Be safe and keep your guests safe' being followed by everyone on the island.

Scenic Cruises on Lake Lucerne

Lake Lucerne has captivated travellers for centuries due to its spectacular Alpine landscape and breath-taking scenery. There's no better way to explore the heart of Switzerland than by boat! Whether on a historic steamboat, an innovative yacht or a modern catamaran, thanks to the varied fleet of Lake Lucerne Cruises, guests always glide across the water in style. In summer, the sightseeing yacht Saphir will have multiple sailings every day.

Visitors can combine sightseeing with tranquil relaxation and enjoy the comfort of the cutting-edge yacht "Saphir" or the catamaran "Bürgenstock" during a one-hour cruise alternatively, hop on the modern motor vessel "Diamant" or one of the nostalgic paddle steamers to reach the numerous lakeside railways such as the cogwheels to Mount Pilatus or Rigi.

Lake Lucerne Navigation Company also offers a wide range of Culinary Cruises for individual travellers and groups. What could be nicer than to enjoy mountain magnificence combined with innovative seasonal cuisine? Let the creative chefs on board prepare a freshly cooked meal for you, which is ideally complemented by the selection of international wines or popular non-alcoholic beverages. After your meal, you might enjoy taking a step onto the open deck and feeling the slight Alpine breeze. As a special offer this year, in Spring and Autumn, all 2nd Class Swiss Rail Pass holders will be entitled to 1st Class travel and seats on the Lunch Cruise.

The vessels of Lake Lucerne Navigation Company are

much more than just fabulous vehicles for public transport or leisure travel. They are floating attractions perfectly suited as extraordinary event venues with almost endless possibilities for functions such as exclusive banquet dinners, weddings, concerts or conferences.



Yas Island Abu Dhabi luring Indian tourists with a Bollywood twist

Yas Island is one of the world's fastest-growing leisure and entertainment destinations, located just twenty minutes from downtown Abu Dhabi and fifty minutes from Dubai. Given the location proximity, it offers holidaymakers a diverse mix of experiences within the 25 sq. km Island. Besides the destination's attractions and travel requirements, Liam Findlay, Chief Executive Officer, Experience Hub, shares with TTJ about their latest Bollywood-themed marketing campaign, 'Yas Hai Khaas,' targeting consumers in India.

Prashant Nayak

ourism was and continues to be vital to the recovery of the world economy in the post-pandemic period. With India resuming scheduled international flights, the tourism sector continues its plans for an early recovery. The Experience Hub team has also been proactive in the India market with their promotions. Before the resumption of regular international flights, Liam Findlay met with key and strategic partners in Mumbai and Delhi to cohesively work on the reopening of the market and promote Yas Island as a preferred holiday destination.

As India is one of their largest focused markets, their confidence in the market reflects with Yas Island Abu Dhabi launching yet another viral marketing campaign, 'Yas Hai Khaas' with Bollywood's most boundary-pushing star, Ranveer Singh, targeting consumers from India. Ranveer, in the mesmerising video, is seen showcasing an electrifying journey of the destination's attractions, offerings, and the warm Yas Island welcome.

"With Ranveer Singh as the destination's brand ambassador, we aim to showcase the destination's plethora of attractions, diversity of offerings for discerning travellers for an elevated holiday experience at Yas Island," says Liam.

As one of the world's leading leisure and entertainment destinations, with the 'Yas Hai Khaas' campaign, they have endeavored to highlight Yas Island's vibrancy and non-stop energy, its award-winning theme parks, recordbreaking attractions, and legendary hospitality across hotels, dining and retail amongst others.

"Given the overwhelming positive response in such a short time, we hope our campaign inspires viewers to visit Yas Island as the ideal holiday destination. Yas truly is Khaas! whether you are



Liam Findlay

looking for a dose of adrenaline or a peaceful sanctuary to unwind, Yas Island caters to all segments and age groups," expresses Liam.

If fully vaccinated, visitors can travel quarantine free to Yas Island, Abu Dhabi. Yas Island is a safe destination to travel to, and they have regulated control and maintained COVID-19 protocols, which ensured safe operations in their record-breaking Theme Parks even during the pandemic.

Liam adds, "To ensure the safety of our customers we have a standard requirement of negative PCR report to enter attractions and public places as per the government guidelines. Requirements and procedures have been eased and visitors can check the latest updates on the official Abu Dhabi website."

Presently, the visa process for the UAE remains unchanged and one of the easiest to



be obtained. Many airlines, including Etihad Airways, offer direct connectivity in Abu Dhabi from various points in India. With India opening its scheduled international flights at Yas Island, they expect the flight seat capacity into Abu Dhabi to increase.

When asked about the focus segments and destinations they want to promote in the India market, Liam mentions, "We are keen to promote to all segments of travellers i.e., family, leisure, incentive, and events. We have numerous live concerts/events at Etihad Arena, sporting events such as F1 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, and electrifying outdoors at the recently opened one-of-a-kind waterfront leisure destination at Yas Bay Waterfront."

Yas Island is home to the award-winning theme parks Ferrari World Abu Dhabi, Yas Waterworld Abu Dhabi, Warner Bros. World™ Abu Dhabi, the record-breaking CLYMB™ Abu Dhabi, Yas Marina Circuit (home to the Formula 1 Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Grand Prix[™]), Yas Marina, the award-winning Yas Links golf course, as well as Abu Dhabi's largest mall, Yas Mall, Yas Bay Waterfront and a variety of world-class dining, leisure, and entertainment brands and hospitality with some of the world best hotels, including W Abu Dhabi - Yas Island, Hilton Abu Dhabi Yas Island, The WB[™] Abu Dhabi, the world's first Warner Bros. themed hotel, DoubleTree by Hilton Abu Dhabi Yas Island Residences, Crowne Plaza Yas Island Abu Dhabi, Yas Island Rotana, Centro Yas Island by Rotana, Radisson Blu Hotel Abu Dhabi Yas Island, Park Inn by Radisson Hotel Abu Dhabi Yas Island and Staybridge Suites Abu Dhabi Yas Island.

For trade engagements in India, Liam says that they will soon be working on traditional physical campaigns like in the pre-pandemic days, in full swing.

Hotel Connect

Emaar Hospitality Connecting with India and the world!

Dubai-based Emaar Hospitality Group has defined its credentials in the hotel industry, managing a diverse portfolio of luxury, upscale and contemporary mid-scale hospitality assets and brands. The Group recently held roadshows in New Delhi and Mumbai along with their decade-long trusted and dynamic partner in India, the Nijhawan Group. TTJ met up with Mark Kirby, Head of Emaar Hospitality Group, who shared his vision for the Group, and their expansion plans at the New Delhi roadshow.

ark Kirby is not new to Emaar Hospitality Group, having been associated with the Group since 2014 in his earlier role as the

General Manager of Armani Dubai. He took over the reins of his current role as Emaar's Head of Hospitality in January 2021.

Having visited India many times, Mark is no stranger to India and was delighted to be back in Delhi. He said, "India remains very close to my heart as I love the energy that this country has to offer. I've travelled here multiple times, and I've always enjoyed coming back. It's a monumental occasion for us because we have done roadshows here in India for many years, having worked very closely with the Nijhawan Group for over a decade now."

Emaar Hospitality Group has positioned itself as a perfect choice for business, leisure, and group travellers with distinctive brands such as Address Hotels + Resorts. Vida Hotels and Resorts, and Rove Hotels. Elaborating on the Group's brand portfolios, Kirby explains, "Emaar Hospitality Group is a home-grown business; it's part of the Emaar PJSC conglomerate. So, it's an entity within itself. The Address Hotels + Resorts, the luxury five-star category, is a very important brand for us. Again, as a home-grown brand, it signifies its tagline of "Where Life Happens" through all its experiences and offering guests a home away from home experience. It's about really being able to welcome guests, and offer them the hospitality of the UAE."

The Vida Hotels and Resorts by Emaar Hospitality Group are upscale lifestyle hotels and residences which present a refreshing and invigorating atmosphere where style meets convenience and creativity. "Vida Hotels and Resorts fit across the four and five-star markets. We recently opened up our first Vida Beach

Gurjit Singh Ahuja



Mark Kirby

Resort in Umm-Al-Quwain, which is a fivestar resort on the foreshore of the Arabian Gulf with beach access," shares Kirby.

Kirby also updates on their other unique hotels in Dubai, "The Manzil Downtown, a boutique hotel with an arabesque vibe, is very much a lifestyle hotel. Palace Downtown, a resort that many of our guests from the region are familiar with, is almost like a city retreat resort, in the heart of Downtown Dubai. Most of our hotels are in prime locations of the city and offer their unique experiences. Finally, we manage two Armani Hotels located in Dubai and Milan as a joint venture between Emaar Properties and Giorgio Armani. Over the years, we've had a superb working relationship with Giorgio Armani."

The Emaar Hospitality Group is looking outside Dubai and UAE for its next openings on the expansion front. With well-thought plans aimed at strategic growth, expansion outside the UAE has resulted in the opening of Address Istanbul in the heart of the iconic city. This hotel very much represents the UAE's home-grown culture outside of the UAE. The end of 2021 saw the opening of Vida Beach Resort Marassi AI Bahrain, which is the first Vida outside of the UAE, with grandiose expansion plans for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia already underway.

The roadshows in New Delhi and Mumbai were an endeavor to reconnect face to face with trade partners and showcase to them the current travel situation in Dubai, and welcome Indians back to Dubai. India has been a priority market for Emaar Hospitality Group, accounting for almost eight per cent of the total business mix across its brands. "All through the pandemic, we have been working very closely with partners just to stay connected. Checking in on each other's well-being was very important to us to keep connected. We did a lot of online sessions with each other, just to keep everybody engaged in the industry. Staying connected and building strong relationships in the industry has always been our focus and we worked very hard and collaboratively over the last two years to ensure that is achieved," says Kirby.

Presently, international guests are returning to Dubai in large numbers. Call it revenge tourism or just the pure lure of Dubai, the international guest ratio at Emaar properties is already up to sixtyfive per cent, which is perhaps almost the same as pre-COVID levels.

As Emaar Hospitality Group is growing very strategically and organically, these aspects enable it to put its brands in destinations with key partners and key investors. They are careful with whom they partner and have to protect the brand values. The love for these hospitality brands nurtured in the UAE has now moved slightly further afield within the GCC, and talks are already underway with partners in destinations beyond. So, it's a very exciting phase as Emaar Hospitality Group, primarily a very UAEcentric stellar brand, now spreads out its wings to new horizons.

Hotel Connect

A perfect balance of Swiss Professionalism with Asian Passion

Swiss-Belhotel International, with a growing portfolio of more than 125 hotels, resorts, and projects, manages properties across 19 countries, including Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Australia, New Zealand, and Switzerland. Priyanka Kapoor, Group Director, Sales - Marketing, Branding, Communications; Sr. Regional Director EMEA and India, Swiss-Belhotel International, is more than happy to share about the brand, a symbol that guarantees a combination of quality, convenience, and dedication to providing excellent value to both business and leisure travellers.

he name Swiss-Belhotel International conjures up images of a European hotel conglomerate. The hotel group, however, has a significant presence in Asia, but has a Swiss heritage from its founder, hence the name Swiss-Belhotel. In the last 34 years, with their growth largely in Central Asia, they have curated a perfect balance of 'Swiss Professionalism in hospitality with Asian Passion for service.' That is their USP. Their philosophy is 'Passion and Professionalism,' which reflects in their high service standards designed around the commitment to quality, efficiency and excellence,

The hotel group provides comprehensive and highly professional development and management services in all aspects of hotel, resort, and serviced residences. "Swiss-Belhotel International is a Global Hotel Management Group. Over 90 per cent of our portfolio is managed hotels and an ownership of less than 10 per cent. Hence, our business model is based on the philosophy of working hand in hand with our owners and partners," informs Priyanka.

Today, Indonesia has the most number of Swiss Belhotel properties in its global portfolio and is expanding. Indonesia was among the first destinations where Swiss-Belhotel International established a property. With the property's success and the needs of the developing market, it became the preferred international hotel chain for owners and investors within a short span.

The hotels are extremely popular among Indian visitors. Priyanka explains, "Our properties in cities such as Sydney, Auckland, Bali, Jakarta, and Switzerland have been among the most popular with Indians. We provide complete value for money service while our guests have the most memorable times at our properties. There is a special kitchen space for special Indian vegetarian meals in most of our properties."

In India, Nijhawan Group represents

Sonika Bohra



🔺 Priyanka Kapoor

Swiss-Belhotel International and is responsible for sales, marketing and public relations. Partnering with Nijhawan Group was a strategic step to entering the Indian landscape with a well-established network.

When asked about her expectation from the India market post-COVID and about the business segments they will be tapping, Priyanka said, "The India market is so huge, and with COVID-19, travellers have been confined within

within the country for too long. Hence, the demand for all types of businesses is expected. Leisure and FIT travel will undoubtedly be at a much greater level than any other segments."

During COVID-19, technology and digital tools have



played an important role in the hospitality industry for communication, and Priyanka believes that technology will grow further. With COVID, everyone was forced to get used to it, which was a very big leap to the next era. Now, one can expect even more advanced and immersive technological experiences coming in the future.

The e-commerce business has been one of the new growing trends as a result of technological advancements, and the Group is focusing and investing extensively to ensure that they keep up with all the updates and changes that are put in place.

Speaking about Swiss-Belhotel International's expansion plans, Priyanka shares, "Asia has been our main focus and will remain to be so for future expansion. We have ten hotels in the pipeline and a hundred and fifteen are operating. Maua, a sustainable high-end eco-friendly resort, and Bohemia - a chic luxurious experience, are two new brands we're launching to the global market."

Swiss-Belhotel International has not ventured into India yet. However, the Group plans to introduce its hotels in India soon. "We are in talks with a few developers to enter India, and a few of the deals are at the negotiation stage. So, hopefully, very soon we will have our presence in India as well," concludes Priyanka.

Signature Tours on a new adventure as 'ANAY&CO'

Creative Travel, serving the travel industry since 1977, has been at the forefront of service-led experiential travel. With that philosophy, they have rebranded their luxury outbound brand 'Signature Tours' to its new avatar 'Away&Co'. This brand is created to sell experiences rather than just focusing on the destination. The concept will surely score with the highly cultivated traveller with an appetite for the unusual, looking for something enriching and authentic, discovering new secrets, and finding new stories across continents. With their deep knowledge and great partnerships across the world, Away&Co intends to rewrite the idea of experiential travel in an ever-changing world. Speaking exclusively to TTJ, Rohit Kohli, Joint Managing Director, Creative Travel Group, shares more about the venture.

What was the thought behind rebranding Signature Tours to its new avatar Away&Co?

The world of experiential travel has changed, and so has the consumer's mindset. We felt it was time to refresh the brand to appeal to the new, evolved consumer. The Creative Travel family has been a leader in luxury and experiential travel for over four decades. We are proud of our legacy and the opportunities this brings us. Taking our expertise to the outbound business is the most natural progression for the organisation.

Please tell us about Away&Co from your perspective?

Away&Co intends to become a statement in experiential journeys. It's never going to be just about the destination. Our focus will be on what we know best – experiences. Our amazing global relationships, built over forty-five years, will ensure we have access to some of the finest experiences around the world. We will never be just a 'travel company'. Even though travel is what we sell, our guests will come to us when they seek life-altering experiences.

Can you tell us about a few unique experiences that Away&Co curates?

I can't give 'away' too much, but I can tell you, none of our trips will be led by just guides in any part of the world. Our guests will travel with experts in their respective domains, whether it's a journey focused on wildlife in Rwanda, the cuisines of Puglia, or an adventure to the Antarctic polar region.

Prashant Nayak



Rohit Kohli

How do you ascertain that some travel experiences that you curate will be ideal and loved by the Indian traveller?

The Indian traveller has matured to a level of sophistication over the years. We see many parallels in the expectations of an evolved Indian traveller and one from the western world. Most destinations on the planet are seeking out Indian traveller because of this level of maturity. Money is no longer the only decision driver for those who appreciate the nuances of luxury travel.

How do you scout or connect with your global partners to bring out these extraordinary experiences? We are very fortunate to have fostered amazing relationships around the world in our four-plus decade journey. It's been relatively easy for us to establish a pool of partnerships that will allow us to create some of the best journeys across the world. Our long-standing legacy has also helped us open many doors from which our guests will benefit a lot.

How do you reach out to your segment of hi-value or the discerning traveller in the Indian market?

There is obviously no easy answer for this because customer acquisition in today's crowded space is the key to any company's success. We believe referrals from our wonderful guests will play a very large role in our growth. Our marketing activities will be highly targeted towards a very specific niche and subsect of the customer base.

From your experiences, can you let us know about the evolution of the outbound Indian travellers in the past decade and more so with the pandemic?

India, like many other mature travel markets, has now become multidimensional and multi-layered. All segments of the industry continue to grow. There is growth in the mass group market as much as there is a demand for very high-value private trips. This evolution has happened over the past years due to many factors, key of which are economic growth, exposure to the world, and most importantly, the desire for more existential journeys around the world.

Specialising and creating travel demand where none exists

Subhash Motwani, Founder and Director of Namaste Tourism, has been in the travel trade for over 34 years, combining a blend of experiences. Having visited over fifty countries, Subhash ensures every bespoke itinerary is unique and authentic, as he believes in encouraging the discerning traveller to explore the world experientially. Excerpts from the interview with Subhash...

Ravi Sharma

With India resuming its scheduled international flights, how excited are you?

The resumption scheduled of international flights augurs well for the tourism industry. However, the challenges will be the efficient management in terms of flight schedules, frequency, pricing, and how the demand outlook will be visà-vis supply. It appears that there will be greater demand than inventory available. We do not expect the airfares to go down phenomenally, also considering the rising fuel prices with the Ukraine-Russia crisis. Another challenge is to have efficient personnel at airports to handle pre-COVID level crowds, and here too, we will see at least for a few months, the reporting times at airports will be longer. It's fantastic that scheduled flights have restarted, although one has to be ready to face the harsh reality as highlighted.

With outbound travel opening up, how will you be optimising your efforts to unlock the potential of India's leisure and business travellers?

With changing times, we have to change our concept of dealing with our clients as we are experts in our domain. Specialisation is the key. Given our product knowledge and expertise, especially in offbeat destinations and outof-the-box ideas, we are approached by several retail agents too for a few offbeat ideas. Even in the limited B2B space that we are into for our highly specialised destinations, we will only be assisting agents against payment of a nominal fee, which could be subsequently adjusted in bookings. Also, we have reviewed our core strength, itinerary planning. We assist clients in visa consulting and flight tickets only if they plan their itineraries and holidays with us. Free advice is passé and specialisation is in.

Which are some of the destinations that you are currently promoting with your trade partners?

Our tagline has been "Exploring places



Subhash Motwani

like never before." We have always been an experiential-centric company and not destination centric in our approach. Destinations vary based on seasonality, client choices for experiences, budgets, and several other variables. Let us take France as an example; in addition to Paris, we would focus on the Occitanie region and its beautiful villages. For those who are into spa experiences - affordable, world-class spas are available in Central Europe - the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, to name a few. In Morocco, one can offer self-drive experiences to clients or offer culinary and historical experiences in Israel. A wildlife enthusiast may want to explore wildlife in Kenya or Tanzania, South Africa or ZimZam (Zimbabwe Zambia) combo, Botswana or even Namibia. It all depends if it is the client's first safari or whether the client wants to include varied experiences - such as exploring the Big 5 of the ocean. That is why we distinguish ourselves from others and call ourselves ELIC (Experiential and Luxury Itinerary Curators). We are not travel agents. We are in the business of match-making,

matching the right product portfolio to a client's needs to ensure that we exceed clients' expectations.

Are you working out new and attractive packages, to entice Indian travellers? What new attractions and experiences have come up at some of your destinations?

We wish to distinguish ourselves as an organisation that creates demand where none exists. There are some stunningly unknown places in proximity to major cities that many people are unaware of. In Asia, our focus will be on the Indo-China circuit as the Far East sells on its own. In the Australia Pacific region - Australia has amazing experiences to offer across its seven states, South Africa has amazing train journeys - Limpopo, Kwa Zulu Natal province along with the North West could offer several exciting choices along with Eastern and Western Cape, Gauteng and the Mpumalanga Region. Europe is rich in culture, cuisine, wine, and history. If clients want to explore the WWII story trail - we can offer Berlin to Warsaw and take clients to locations that have been part of WWII history. South America has more to offer beyond Machu Picchu in Peru, which is a must-visit. Central America has exciting culture, stunning landscapes, and self-driving holidays covering the longest road trip in the world, the Pan American Highway starting from Prudhoe Bay in Alaska and ending in Ushuaia - the southernmost city in the world, can be broken into segments and offered to driving enthusiasts.

We have been an official travel partner of the BMW Berlin Marathon and we will be taking a few runners to run the marathon later this year, followed by some exciting post tours to offer. In 2023, we plan to include a few more exciting runs across the world. From Svalbard and Greenland in the North to Antarctica in the south, the world is waiting to be explored experientially and we are geared up for it.

ONE<mark>ABOVE</mark> poised for growth, helping partners grow

Mumbai-based One Above is an all-inclusive global Destination Management Company (DMC) with a flair for handling MICE groups, corporate tours, FITs and events with ease, expertise, and efficiency. They recently launched their portal oa195.com, a seamless and easy booking platform that provides their B2B partners with a one-stop-shop for all of their destination requirements. TTJ interacts with B.A. Rahim, the Founder and Consultant, One Above, and Saroj Jena, SVP-Online Products and Distribution, One Above, to know more about the portal, its features, and recent developments at the fastest growing DMC in the country.

Prashant Nayak

ne Above has become a DMC of repute, and their portal oa195.com is an amalgamation of multiple destination booking platforms where

One Above has a presence and works as a ground handling partner.

"The name says it's all! oa195.com means (One Above 195 DMCs). Our company's objective is to be the search engine for the tourism industry. We want to create 195 DMCs across the globe and offer services offline and online through oa195.com. The portal, apart from APIs integrated from various top hotel search engines, also has our own contracts incorporated for Maldives, Bali, and Greece. We will have Turkey, Sri Lanka, Dubai, Bahrain, and South Africa in the near future," shares Saroj.

Reputation either makes or breaks a business, and at One Above, they are very particular about their service levels. They've found that having Relationship Managers on staff helps to put the finishing touches on numerous checkpoints, ensuring that consumers have the holiday of their dreams.

One Above's ability to introduce new products, hotels, attractions, and experiences in every destination is its greatest USP. Rahim adds, "This year, we have introduced golf packages in the UK, Emily in Paris tours based on the famous Netflix series, and hidden gems of South Africa, which are some of the examples. Through instructional webinars, FAM trips, and events, One Above strives to consistently educate and empower the travel community. We also provide constant opportunities to our travel community to grow and grow along."

With most of the destinations opening to travel and with open sky policies back, all DMCs of One Above across the globe are fully functional and have started receiving a



A B.A. Rahim

great number of inquiries. Their destinations, such as South Africa, Mauritius, the UK, Malaysia, Dubai, and Bahrain, are gaining traction.

"We are strong players when it comes to FIT/MICE/Events and Weddings too. One Above has different departments for different verticals and thus we can easily manage all the travel requirements of our clients. In addition, One Above has launched two new departments: cruise and travel insurance. We are known for our Indian Ocean and South East Asia destinations, but we have also introduced Bahrain, Georgia, Greece, Turkey, and a few other destinations in Europe. We would definitely want the trade to connect with us for these destinations as well," informs Rahim.

On the launch of their online portal, One Above issued loyalty cards, better known as Trust Cards, to their trade partners. Explaining more about the cards, Saroj shares, "These cards are the first of their kind in DMC and online business. White 🔺 Saroj Jena

Trust, Blue Trust, and the Ultimate Black Trust card are the three cards we've introduced. More than loyalty, we call it Trust Cards, as clients need to feel secure and at the same time rewarded for doing business with us. These cards open up doors for One Above's various tourismrelated benefits and cashback rewards."

Highlighting more about the benefits of the Trust Card, Rahim further adds, "Every booking with us will make the cardholder eligible for points which can be redeemed against the next booking with cash reduction. Members will also be eligible for FAM trips and special offers."

One Above is on a mission to establish 195 DMCs in 195 countries, operating offline and online. Aligning with their motto, "YOUR TRUST IS OUR SUCCESS," their vision is to create the best B2B space in India and the global arena. This vision also encompasses their staff members, with an intent to create the best working atmosphere in the industry.

Getting a strong foothold on outbound business again

With the pandemic showing signs of waning, 2022 is anticipated as a turnaround year for outbound tourism, and now stakeholders are banking on the burgeoning Indian outbound market. Also, the resumption of scheduled international flights to and from India comes as a huge respite for players in outbound travel after a break of two years. There is a strong pent-up demand for international travel in India, and many destinations are looking forward to welcoming Indian visitors back safely and responsibly. To get the hang of the current situation, TTJ interacts with a few outbound DMCs to get their views on the same.

Prashant Nayak

double vaccination of a large portion of the populace the and almost minuscule rate of infection, the resumption of international flights was a much-awaited action by the industry and it couldn't have come at a better time at the start of the summer season. The world is doing away with restrictive curbs and testing protocols. People are itching to formalise their travel plans, normalisation of flight schedules should now translate into lower airfares and enhanced

ost

the



🔺 K.D. Singh



🔺 Prashant Yadav

capacity. The outbound DMCs are optimistic and gunning to go.

K.D. Founder and President, Singh, TravelBullz, says, "As a DMC, we are focusing on leisure travellers and MICE group movements out of India and into Thailand, Singapore, Maldives and Dubai. We have also been working on our dynamic packaging booking engine, which is a game-changer, as far as the booking experience of the travel agents and tour operators is concerned and we look forward to leveraging the user interface to meet last-minute demand. As a marketplace and aggregator for hotel bookings around the world, we now have over 300000 hotels in our system."

TravelBullz has already been engaging with the travel trade through various initiatives such as the Indian Travel League (ITL), the Amazing Thailand Grand Sale, roadshows, and participation in trade fairs. Soon they will be carrying out other marketing engagements like in the pre-pandemic days. They would now like to reach out to their partners across India for many purposes.

"For TravelBullz, it is 'business as usual' and back to pre-pandemic days. We will soon launch a major initiative for our customers in collaboration with the Tourism Authority of Thailand. Themed packages, such as Party in Thailand, workcation/staycation in Thailand, Family Offers, and Honeymoon Offers, will be available soon," informs Singh.

Prashant Yadav, CEO, Liberty India, senses that there is already a massive surge in clients' travel needs. However, he advises caution in business, as the number of requests is bursting through the roof. According to him, many clients are simply shopping around. With a shortage of





Rohit Shorey

🔺 Deepika Khanna

workforce in India and worldwide in tourism, one needs to be very careful of what they pick up for business.

"One really doesn't need to unlock the tourism potential, and it's as good as handling a dam which has just burst. The only way to rationalise is to pick and choose what you and your teams can handle and deliver to the client's expectations. On-ground knowledge of what's operational and in which part of the world and at what prices are paramount now as all learnings of pre-pandemic prices are more or less obsolete. Almost all businesses, aside from hotels, are operating as usual as in the pre-pandemic days," opines Prashant.

Regarding some of the destinations they are currently promoting, Prashant shares, "It depends on where the flights, visas are easy and COVID protocols are easiest. Across Europe, there are still doubts and clarifications, while new situations are still evolving due to which travel planning is still tentative."

Liberty India utilised the last year to create and re-sharp their pre-pandemic offerings. However, for Prashant, one needs to offer firmness of travel plans to the clients, reduce the "tentative feelings" in their minds, and reassure them to confirm their travel plans.

Presently, they are not working on any physical campaigns for their promotions. They rely on virtual interaction, which has become the entire meeting ecosystem now and is widely used across the globe.

Rohit Shorey, Founder and CEO, Kazin DMC, is very excited about the developments but with a touch of caution, "With new strains of virus lurking in the corners, I hope we don't head for another lockdown, although it is an unlikely scenario. Airlines are cautiously increasing their schedule, which means flight tickets will remain expensive for the next few months. COVID protocols for some countries still remain confusing, hence detrimental to travel. 2022 will remain a year of choppy waters, but I guess the worst is behind us."

He further adds, "India was and will continue to remain а major source market for many international destinations, especially those with direct flights of 4-5 hours. We will invest more in social media marketing activities in order to reach our target audience. We will also continue to educate the channel partners about our destinations by organising FAM trips,

one-on-one meetings and participation in BSM programs.

Kazin continues to be very focused on its destinations and area of expertise. Rohit explains, "Kazakhstan will remain our key product with 90 per cent focus, followed closely by Belarus. We don't intend to aggressively expand our portfolio anytime soon but instead tap new markets such as GCC to sell our destinations, after all, we have spent years building our products, why should we limit ourselves to selling it in just one market! moreover, our travel fraternity is wise enough to know that DMCs handling multiple portfolios are not very reliable. It's a simple case of jack of all trades, master of none. Today nobody is taking chances."

Deepika Khanna, Founder, and CEO, Anchor Destinations, believes that the news of the resumption of scheduled international flights has created a positive and almost a thunderous response from travellers. There is a huge demand for short-haul destinations such as Thailand and Singapore and medium-haul destinations such as Mauritius for the upcoming season.

"The skies are open, and huge passenger traffic is expected now. Our focus will remain on our expertise of our DMC network and providing the best-on-ground solutions with added advantages of booking and paying locally. However, it is still important that for outbound travel, our partners and clients are aware of any travel guidelines and protocols to have a hassle-free holiday," remarks Deepika.

Meanwhile, Anchor Destinations is promoting Maldives, Mauritius, Thailand, Dubai, Sri Lanka, and Bali, among other destinations. They are currently just using online and social media to reach out to their clients for promotional efforts. After the second quarter of the year, they will begin planning their physical campaigns.

Outbound travel on revival path

International travel has made a comeback, and it's time to emerge out of the darkness for the country's outbound travel industry. TTJ takes a look into the latest trends that are catching up with the outbound travel trade in the East.

Swaati Chaudhury



🔺 Manoj Saraf

Sanjeev Mehra

🔺 Dinesh Kumar

ith India resuming its international flight services last month, the long wait

is finally over. This has been one of the biggest news trending in the Indian travel industry in the postpandemic world. Today, when things have gradually started to fall in place, the outbound travellers with the help of the travel trade, have begun to give wings to their global dreams.

Manoj Saraf, Managing Director, Gainwell Travel and Leisure informed. "We need to take precautions in the wake of a massive spike in Omicron cases in some parts of the world. In the context of the opening of outbound travel, the Central government should stick to its decision. There has been a steep surge in airfares and with the onset of the summer season; we are expecting the airfares to drop. In the pre-pandemic days, our global fliers constituted around 80 per cent. During the pandemic, we received around 60 per cent domestic travellers. Global travel is likely to go up while domestic travel will drop slightly. The domestic segment will remain significant in the coming times. Pandemic and border restrictions will prevail. We are heavily promoting sports tourism, such as the Formula One Bahrain Grand Prix in 2023 and the FIFA World Cup in Qatar in 2022. In addition, we are promoting the best chocolate store in Lucerne and the world's largest chocolate fountain in Switzerland."

Most travel companies are hoping for global airlines to open fully. Sanjeev Mehra, Director, Aryan Leisure and Holidays and President, SKAL International Kolkata 127 said, "The rising cost of airfares will play a significant role in outbound travel. If the cost does not come down, there will not be a large number of travellers. We require mass fliers for the global travel and we are looking for travellers to get back on track. We have to offer the best to our clients and move beyond boundaries and imaginations. Travellers will prefer low-cost destinations like Thailand. We are promoting 365° destinations such as Maldives, Singapore,

Dubai, Oman, Mauritius, Indonesia, and the United Kingdom. We are into MICE and offering fixed departures for leisure travellers."

🔺 Aparna Basu Mallik

Global tourism has suffered a hugesetbackowingtothepandemic. **Dinesh Kumar Bhatter, Director, Neptune Holidays Private Limited** commented, "Once global travel begins, our business will take a forward leap. We are highlighting Turkey, Singapore and the water sports activities in Maldives. We will receive a number of corporate fliers when corporate travel takes off."

The mood for revival is quite upbeat in the outbound trade segment. Aparna Basu Mallik, Country-Head, Europamundo Vacations "We have stated. announced the entire product range for the global market in the year gone by. Our products are valid till the next fiscal and our tours are all operational. We have upgraded our system in the last two years and are into imparting training to our agents. We are offering discounts for Senior citizens and honeymooners."

Air Seychelles continues to keep the Seychelles colours flying

Air Seychelles had ceased its commercial services in Mumbai in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The airline utilised its fleet of A320neo aircraft to operate a series of charter, repatriation, and cargo flights on this route. It resumed scheduled passenger flights between India and Seychelles in December 2021 and now operates weekly flights from Mumbai to Seychelles. While sharing more about the airline's operations in the Indian context, Charles Johnson, Chief Commercial Officer, Air Seychelles, is equally thrilled that their airline is once again offering regular commercial flights between India and Seychelles.

Prashant Nayak

uring the pandemic, as an island nation, Seychelles was very much dependent on its national carrier, Air Seychelles, due to other airlines pulling out of flying to Seychelles. As a result, they were the main source for transporting commodities such as food and medical supplies. Despite this, they did operate many flights to India because there was a lot of movement for medical purchases, supplies, PPE, and even vaccines, all of which went to Seychelles from India.

From a commercial standpoint, the airline turned itself into a charter airline. So even though Seychelles was closed for tourism, the airline operated across Europe, Africa, and Australia, some of which were repatriation flights. Air Seychelles became very well known and popular in the sports industry, as they were also into sports charters. The airline flew India men's national cricket team to Johannesburg for the 2021-22 South African Tour three four-day matches and series. They are also catering to sports teams all across Africa.

"In India, Air Seychelles on a commercial basis operates flights only to Mumbai, but we do charters to multiple destinations in India. Presently, Air Seychelles is operating one scheduled flight a week. However, to meet additional demand for May and June, we have increased connectivity to two times a week to Seychelles and Johannesburg. We have the ability to do more flights a week, but we need to judge the increase in demand in the coming months. Before the pandemic, we were flying six times a week into Mumbai and I think probably by the end of this year, we'll be able to get



Charles Johnson

back up to that frequency," says Charles.

For the island nation, Air Seychelles stands as a pillar of tourism, which is the country's strongest and growing economic sector. Air Seychelles is also closely working with Seychelles Tourism in promoting the destination. Taking forward, they will work together in multiple ways. Basically, it's a symbiotic relationship between each other. The Tourism Department helps the airline with all the marketing support and, in return, the airline provides the department with ticket support and other requirements whenever needed.

Seychelles is a unique destination of its own, encompassing 115 islands. It was always known to be a very high-end, exclusive destination. Now, they are marketing it as a familyfriendly destination and not only as an exclusive luxury, honeymoon, or wedding destination. Talking about connectivity from India to Seychelles, Charles says, "We are the fastest way to get from India to South Africa, and Johannesburg is a very big market for us. Seychelles is between India and South Africa and we are the fastest carrier to get anywhere between India and South Africa. So, once you depart Mumbai, you have a brief stop in Seychelles for one hour in the same aircraft, before continuing on to Johannesburg. This aspect is one of our unique selling factors."

For India operation, Air Seychelles operates the A320neos, consisting of 168 seats, including 12 seats in business class. They also have Twin Otter aircraft in their fleet, used for all their domestic flying and island hopping. The best way to explore Seychelles is through island-hopping, therefore it is a popular tourist activity.

With India resuming international flights, the Air Seychelles team is thrilled because even though they have been part of the air bubble agreement and have been operating scheduled flights for a few months now, the traffic still has been very limited and the real traffic is just now starting to bounce back.

Charles shares, "Air Seychelles has been very reliant on the Eastern European and the Russian market. Now, with all the challenges that are going on there, the passenger numbers are decreasing. Taking this into consideration and with the resumption of international flights, the India market has become even more important for us. However, we used to fly six times a week, but presently we fly once a week and will soon fly twice a week. So, there is a lot of scope and room to grow in the near future."

'Striving to keep the spirit of enterprise alive with exceptional customer services'

Founded in 1975, Global Aviation Services (GASPL) was one of the two major GSA startups, a concept that was novel to the Indian aviation industry at the time. Initially, starting with sales and marketing services, more and more services came into the ambit of their GSA's operational scope over time. Global was the first Indian organisation to be accredited as a General Sales and Services Agency (GSSA) agent by IATA. The organisation's strong belief in good corporate governance and following the best business practices ensures its synonymity with high-quality and reliable service. In an interaction with TTJ, Prabodh Tipnis, Group Managing Director, GASPL is more than happy to share the organisation's background, strengths, present operational scenario, and vision post the pandemic.

ith over 45 years into business in India, is aviation still a major focus area of Global Aviation Services operation? Do you have other diversified interests in the travel and tourism industry in India?

Aviation remains the main focus, with our flagship company Global Aviation Services, running in its 46th year of operation. However, in the past 20 – 25 years, we have diversified in airport services, travel, destination management, skills development, logistics, floriculture export, RFS, and freight security services. Quality service and customer satisfaction played a very important role in the expansion of Global. Satisfied customers brought more trade partners and more demand for various services.

What is Global Aviation Services' business model, and what services does your company provide to clients?

In 1975, when Global was launched, airline representation meant only sales services. Over the years, the GSA's role was expanded to provide other services to the customer airline or the end customer of the airline partner. The GSA was perceived as the airline itself, where it had no presence or very minimum representation. So, over some time, due to the demand for good governance, the GSA started functioning in airline management, accounting, taxation, strategy planning, regulator coordinator, airport services, warehouse manager, compliance director, etc. The bundle of services grew, and soon, the GSA became not just a sales and marketing arm of the airline but a plug n play model essential for a large country like India. Our objective is to provide all such

Prashant Nayak



Prabodh Tipnis

services using the best talent in the industry and at the highest level, with minimum cost to the airline partner. That does not mean that we undervalue our resources. We are known for being the best company to work for in our segment, both for our business values and the growth opportunities we create.

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

The Aviation business is evolving all the time. What we did in 1975 changed exponentially and for the better, of course. Aviation today is no more limited to just air services operations. All aspects of aviation, such as commercial, repair and maintenance, training, air safety, and management of air routes, are now related to tourism, hospitality, international trade, commerce, etc. As such, the growth prospects are immense. One needs to think and strategise about business development within the legal and policy framework of the industry. An organisation needs to identify its strengths and chart out a flight plan for the next 5 to 10 years. Of course, with a quick correction to the plan, things will change along the way.

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

When we speak about clients, we need to think of the 'Airline partner, the end customer, and the internal customer - our staff. Be it a travel agent, tour operator, air freight agent, passenger, and exporter/importer, it has been a tough two years for the industry. Companies have somehow managed to stay afloat, some with not-so-good consequences. The story of 'Global' during this pandemic is no different. We maintained our full complement of resources for the first fifteen months and juggled our revenues without discounting our services. The business was firing on 40 - 45 per cent of normal volumes. Of course, by mid-2021, we did some corrective measures which have helped us to stand erect and face the upswing that is expected from April 2022. COVID taught us to forge ties with partners and keep up with service standards at minimised costs. For this, I must thank the stakeholders for trusting and having faith in the management of our company. We are also aware of the airlines, destinations, and hotels going through in the last two years. Fortunately, all have been able to strategise their business and channel their resources into evolving opportunities.

How are you connecting and reaching

out to existing B2B travel partners and new travel agents in India to get their attention?

In our experience, every new airline customer soon realises the vastness of India. It is such a large country with zonal differences and cultures that one needs to fit in that suit effortlessly. Global has a vast network in India, with a robust presence in all the regions. This network is available to our airline clients from day one for it to plug its products and services into. We have the ability to introduce products and services across the board evenly by using high standards of delivery, striving beyond the expectation of the airline customer. Our people, the most important tool for success in our business, are well experienced, well trained and, more importantly, motivated to take the business to the next level. As we say in this industry - "this is a people's business." Our Founder Chairman H. K. Vithalani has taught us to be sensitive towards people, be it airline customers, travel/freight agents, passengers, shippers, or our staff.

The agent community, both in the travel segment and the freight segment, grew rather quickly during the pre-COVID days. However, from April 2020 to March 2022, many had to change their business focus, and thus there was a lull in the growth. We consider it our duty to support such businesses and help them back to face new challenges.

According to you, how important is innovation and technology in your line of business?

When we started Global, the level of automation was very low compared to the current times. Technology has grown in leaps and bounds. It has helped us conduct our business with lightning speed and widen the horizon for new business opportunities. Growing technology does not mean replacing people. In-fact, staff and available industry resources have become more highly skilled and tech-driven than before. Those who entered the industry in the late 70s had to upgrade their skills. Business Houses had to invest in new automation, hardware, software, data capture, etc. This investment was huge, but very wisely undertaken. Now you can achieve at a "click" of a button what you took days to do in the past. This is neverending, and we believe Global will be a part of this development forever.

Post COVID-19, what is the new vision and mission of Global Aviation Services?

Firstly, we are very positive that FY-23 will take us from here to a new high, then pre-COVID times. All stakeholders in Aviation will create new business opportunities for each other and ensure that. Our commitment to the airline customer is to bring business back on track. We need to add to the revenues and ensure that the airlines regain lost ground. That does not mean we price ourselves beyond the reach of the end-user. We need to upgrade service levels and ensure that it is value for money and a dollar well spent for them. It's a fine balance, as we need to support local businesses to thrive in the international marketplace, and our great country benefits from trade and commerce.

'We have significant expansion plans'

Rohit Ramachandran, CEO Jazeera Airways, is credited with turning around the airline and putting it on the path to profitable growth. Presently, Jazeera Airways has returned to the ASA (Air Services Agreement) arrangement flying to the five Indian cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Kochi, and Hyderabad. TTJ interacts with Rohit Ramchandran to know about their India operations and future developments at the airline.

ndia has always been an important market for Jazeera Airways. There are over one million Indian ex-pats living and working in Kuwait, making them the airline's largest home base target market. Their travel to and from their home country and visiting friends and relatives makes India strategically very important. The airline also connects many Indians to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. In addition, through Kuwait, they offer Indian tourists the travel option of leisure destinations, such as Turkey (Istanbul, Bodrum, Antalya), Amman, Tbilisi, and Baku.

On resumption of international flights from India, Rohit says, "This is great news for India and the aviation industry. The fast removal of all restrictions to travel is important for passengers, airlines, and general economic recovery. That includes the ending of RT-PCR testing and wearing the mask."

While operating in India, the airline is adhering to all local regulations directed by the government regarding passenger requirements, COVID protocols, and

Sonika Bohra



A Rohit Ramachandran

caution. As these norms constantly change, the airline works according to the directives received by various governments.

Rohit further adds, "We have conducted and continue to operate full cleaning procedures of aircraft cabins and have HEPA air filters, which are highly effective in ensuring clean, safe air inside our aircraft. Passengers are no longer as concerned as they were during the outbreak.

Having worked with four major airlines across three continents, Rohit has rich domain knowledge in full-service traditional airlines, as well as hybrid and low-cost carriers. As CEO of Jazeera Airways, Rohit has led an ambitious restructuring programme that has resulted in significant cost reductions, renegotiated major costs (including aircraft leases), network expansion, fleet renewal, and significant increases in seat factor and yield, all while maintaining focus on profit and loss.

On expansion plans, Rohit shares, "We have significant expansion plans. We recently placed an order with Airbus for twenty-eight new aircraft valued at \$3.4bn. Our fleet will grow from seventeen aircraft in 2022 to thirty-five by 2026 with some older aircraft that will be retired during this period. This will help us to expand our network from over fifty destinations this year to around eighty in four years."

oneworld . . .

Ready to cater to strong pent-up travel demand

ndia has always been an extremely important market for Malaysia Airlines and being the fastest growing economy in the world, it offers a huge potential for the airline. Since customers have been cooped up in their homes for approximately two years, Malaysia Airlines believes there would be a strong pent-up demand to travel again, especially to closer destinations, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Singapore. In addition to outbound travellers, they also see many people flying to India from Malaysia, Australia, Indonesia, and other countries.

Effective March 27, 2022, Malaysia Airlines started operating twenty-five weekly flights from India, including flights from five major cities, viz, Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Chennai. The airline will continue to deploy a mix of the B738 and A330 aircraft on India routes.

Amit shares, "While we expect to see an uptick in outbound travel, we also have to be mindful of potential COVID-19 variants, which may derail or prolong the recovery. We are bullish for 2022 but remain cautious of the environments and will deploy fleet and network expansion opportunistically during peak periods to service high demand/capacity sectors."

To enhance tourism to Malaysia from India, Malaysia Airlines has been working closely with Tourism Malaysia. With the borders Following the reopening of Indian borders for scheduled international flights, Malaysia Airlines resumed its operations and looks forward to welcoming Indian passengers back to 'Fly Malaysia' and enjoy its full-service offerings. Amit Mehta, Country Manager- South Asia, Malaysia Airlines, in this exclusive interview with TTJ, assures that the airline is committed to facilitating safe and seamless travels so guests can continue to 'Fly Confidently' and experience a smooth journey, underpinned by inimitable Malaysian Hospitality.'

Prashant Nayak

opening again, they are looking forward to seeing good growth in their international passenger figures and rejuvenation of tourism in Malaysia.

Speaking about the passenger requirements, covid protocols, and caution the airline must ensure while operating in the Indian sectors, Amit says, "Currently, entry requirements and travel guidelines vary from one destination to the other. Malavsia Airlines is committed to facilitating safe and seamless travels for its passengers. We provide our passengers with necessary updates following the COVID-19 outbreak at its impact on travel arrangements. We have a dedicated page on our website that gives a complete download of the country-specific protocols and travel regulations. Passengers are also reminded to check the entry and exit requirements at the official countries or immigration websites before embarking on their journey. Malaysia Airlines will continue to ensure the health and safety measures taken across the traveller's

journey."

The 7-star rating for COVID-19 health and safety measures from 'Airline Ratings' is a testament to the airline's excellence in implementing comprehensive safety protocols. Among measures taken include aircraft operations by fully vaccinated pilots and cabin crew, mandatory use of face masks, frequent aircraft disinfections following guidelines prescribed by the Ministry of Health Malaysia and World Health Organization, and utilisation of aircraft HEPA filters that are proven to filter out 99.97 per cent of viruses on board.

"Additionally, in January 2022, we launched the MHFlySafe campaign that reinforces our commitment to putting safety and hygiene as the anchor across all end-to-end consumer touchpoints, beginning from the check-in counters, lounges, on-board our flights and through to the point of arrival, to ensure that passengers can continue to Fly Confidently with us," assures Amit.

LOT Polish Airlines resumes flights to Delhi, to commence Mumbai operations from May 31

OT Polish Airlines has announced the commencement of passenger flights from Warsaw to Mumbai, effective May 31, 2022. Furthermore, the Polish flag carrier resumed passenger flights to Delhi effective on March 29, 2022. All booking systems have been updated with the latest fares and timetables.

After a two-year hiatus owing to the pandemic, LOT has resumed flights to Delhi. These flights, like all LOT Polish Airlines longhaul flights, will be operated by Boeing 787 three times a week, with a capacity increase to five times a week beginning in May 2022.

Delhi is not the only city in India for Star Alliance member LOT Polish Airlines. With effect from May 31, 2022, Mumbai (BOM) will be joined to LOT's global network. While India originating passengers get a convenient flight option to Europe, the United States, and Canada, it is also a great offer for Polish travellers choosing India as their holiday destination.

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Amit Ray, Director India, LOT Polish Airlines, said, "LOT Polish Airlines is pleased to provide India originating passengers a convenient flight option to Europe, the United States and Canada. Passengers can seamlessly and stress-free connect via Warsaw, giving guests what they value. LOT deploys its flagship aircraft on the Delhi and Mumbai routes, and to cater to the Indian consumer, Indian meals and inflight entertainment, including Bollywood movies will be available for guests."



Events

South Africa Roadshows receive great response; big expectations from India market

South African Tourism in the last month hosted its biggest independent travel trade initiative in the country - the annual roadshow in the four Indian cities of Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, and Mumbai. Neliswa Nkani, Hub Head, MEISEA, South African Tourism and a few stakeholders shared their views on the India market with TTJ.

Sonika Bohra



Neliswa Nkani

his year, the 36-member South African trade delegation reiterated the tourism board's emphasis on expanding the destination and product offering – thus, offering Indian consumers more options. In addition to experiences, representatives from accommodation establishments, destination management companies, South African Provinces, SMMEs, and women-owned companies showcased their products and services while engaging Indian travel and trade associates.

"Given that we were one of the first movers when it came to a physical tradeshow in India post-pandemic, the response we received from trade and media was phenomenal! We had over 1113 Indian

buyers interact and do business with the thirty-six suppliers at South African Tourism's 2022 India Roadshow," said Neliswa when asked about the response to the roadshows.

The roadshow saw tremendous interest from Indian buyers in the adventure and glamping experiences that South Africa has to offer, in addition to unexplored provinces and offbeats regions. Neliswa also said, "We get a sense that MICE is going to drive a large percentage of Indian corporate visitors to South Africa this year. Over one in four Indian arrivals to South Africa are motivated by MICE. There has been an increase in production companies and corporates booking group trips to South Africa, for film shooting, incentives and business travel."

Gerhard Louw Sales Manager - Intl. Inbound Tsogo Sun



Now that our borders are open to the world and especially India, airlines are committing to return to either increased or full flight schedules. This is great news for us, especially just ahead of peak travel time, when we historically received the majority of our patrons from this market. We have seen some FIT business returning, but we are hopeful that, with the increase in flights connecting to SA, we will steadily begin to see the return of leisure, group, corporate, and MICE business. While we realise that the volume of visitors won't necessarily be as substantial as it was before the pandemic, we are optimistic that it will gradually increase (and possibly even exceed pre-COVID numbers) as travellers become more confident about travel in a post-pandemic world.

Jamie-Lee Ackerman Trade Relations Executive Aquila Collection



Our recent visit and South African Tourism activation in India proved that travel is on the brink of a major restart. It has been noted that travel has changed to smaller FIT and family groups, although we are still seeing group and incentive enquiries, with the easing of restrictions as of March 27, 2022. As the Aquila Collection portfolio, we have always made an effort to cater to the needs of the Indian traveller, from a price point of view, offering value for the experience and catering to the dietary requirements.

Nhlanhla Themba Regional Marketing Manager South African National Parks



It has always been our pleasure to welcome the people of the world into our shores in order to share and

shores in order to share and showcase the beauty of our country. We have heritage, culture and wildlife to showcase to the India market whenever they visit our beautiful country South Africa. We anticipate that the India market will find our destination attractive and affordable for them to visit in large numbers. As South African National Parks, we allow our guests to design their own packages for flexibility.

Harshvardhan D. Trivedi Manager - Sales and Marketing Air Seychelles India



Air Seychelles resumed flights on December 4, 2021, and we have seen

steady growth from the India market to destination Seychelles and onwards to South Africa (Johannesburg). We have seen very high demand for South Africa due to our excellent connectivity. Passengers can depart from Mumbai at 0510 Hrs. and arrive in Johannesburg at 12:30 Hrs with just 1 hour and 20 minutes' stopover in Seychelles. As South Africa is a long-haul destination, travellers can enjoy 6-night/7-day or 12-night/13-day itinerary with Air Seychelles. Airfare to South Africa starts at ₹37,700, which is the best price considering the ever-increasing fuel pricing.

Sail Along

NCL all set to raise the bar with its new Prima Class Ships

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) has now returned to sailing with most ships in their fleet back in the waters. NCL is doubling down on India and is committed to the market for the long term. Eamonn Ferrin, Vice President of International Business, Norwegian Cruise Line, was in Mumbai to meet and encourage the key trade partners from across India. TTJ virtually connects with him to learn more about their latest sailing developments and new offerings for Indian cruise enthusiasts and sellers.

Prashant Nayak

pandemic ebbing, NCL's first sailing on their 'Great Cruise Comeback' as they refer to it - was on July 2021. They've been sailing and adding new ships to their itinerary since then for the past year. And since then, they have just seen their sailings growing and strengthening as every month has moved on.

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"To sail again, for our people and our crew, it was a very emotional time because they really missed working on the ships. They missed serving the customers. We love what we do and it was great to be back in the water and sailing once again. I often phrase it like, "You don't jump to the top of the stairs; you walk up one stair at a time," and every month is better than the last month. Of course, it does vary by geography and by the marketplace. So, some governments had opened much sooner than others, for example, in the UK, all restrictions are currently off. This means that we've seen a bigger bounce back in some markets than others, but generally it's going on very well," says Eamonn.

In the context of cruising, Eamonn explains that in 2009, 18 million people took a cruise worldwide, and by 2019, that number had risen to 30 million people. So, every year the industry has seen a compound growth of six to eight per cent, for those ten years. When the pandemic hit, that led to almost two years of not operating, so by that math, it means 50-60 million people have not had a cruise.

According to Eamonn, the bounce-back has been really strong, and he has witnessed this in many

markets. He says, "I'm absolutely sure that the same will happen with India as restrictions come off and as people start feeling more and more confident. I have had meetings with a number of our valued travel partners here in Mumbai and every one of them was very confident about the future and about the bounce back."

Safety is a priority at NCL as per their Sail Safe initiative. They consult on safety issues with experts and public health departments on a monthly basis. They still have stringent standards in place when it comes to safety and protocols. However, different destinations have different rules and regulations. Thus, they have to work with local restrictions that the different governments have implemented. It depends on which destination they working in and which ports they are calling in.

Sail Along

NCL can't wait for Indian travellers to have the chance to be the first to sail on their new Prima Class ships – kicking off with Norwegian Prima in August this year when she makes her maiden voyage in Iceland. The word Prima, which means 'first' in Italian, is designed to be the most innovative, contemporary, and prestigious ship out on the seas.

Mentioning the USP of the ship, Eamonn says, "The first key point is, it's almost the same size as our Breakaway class of ships. So, it's a hundred and forty-two and a half thousand gross tons of a ship. It's got the biggest space ratio of any contemporary ship out there. It's 36 per cent more than our competitors set on average. The bathrooms are bigger. The staterooms are bigger. We have a guest ratio of roughly two guests to one staff member, which is the highest service level we have ever had- because there are only about 3100 or so 3200 guests onboard which obviously makes this a huge ship with a lot more opportunities."

The ship has two infinity pools on each side of the ship. The Haven complex in the ship has a three-story racetrack, the longest in the sea ever or the biggest ever. Elaborating more on the ship, Eamonn adds, "The whole ship is innovative from stem to stern. And it's all about a new class of innovative processes that we were super excited by. And of course, what we're very excited by is that there's not just one coming, but there's six over the next six years."

NCL witnessed some good numbers from India between 2017 and 2019. Eamonn believes that cruising has a bright future in India because he sees a lot of potential in the India market, considering the rise in people's affluence and the number of individuals who haven't tried cruising yet. "In that sense, India is more of an immature market compared to the US or compared to the UK or Europe, but we think that it will grow over time. And as more Indians experience the product, the more they are going to love it and the more they are going to book with us. We are keen on the future and we see an awful lot of opportunity in the India market for growth in the years ahead," opines Eamonn.

According to Eamonn, Europe is by far the most important destination for the India market on NCL. However,



Eamonn Ferrin

he mentions, "They love going to the Mediterranean. They love going to the Baltics. The second biggest market for Indian travellers would be Alaska and a little bit of Hawaii. We have seen a strong demand for Alaska. Bahamas and Bermuda are being explored from New York as well. So, ultimately, I can only say that Indians love cruising."

NCL has been a consistent brand andacompanyforoverfifty-fiveyears, and they have learned a lot when it comes to the cruising business. They have two key principles, the first of which is 'Guest First'. Whether it's the accommodation, food and beverage, the entertainment, or the quality of their services and experiences onboard, it has always been an important factor to ensure that guests are comfortable and happy. Once customers have a great experience, they are bound to come again.

The second principle is their marketing. NCL has an internal concept that they call Partners First, and that's all about building long-term relationships. "We're not here to do short-term things. We're here to build long-term business philosophy. So, we also work very hard with our Indian travel partners. We are happy to invest in marketing and co-operate with our partners in various growth aspects because ultimately, we believe that in each market, there are people promoting our product, which works to our advantage. We have Norwegian Central, which is a hub for all of our marketing material that many of our travel partners utilise for their own marketing purposes. Of course, we

also have an agent booking engine, which they can use to book with. NCL also has its own university, 'NCLU' as we call it, where one can learn extensively about our products, how to sell them better, and get real experience in what it means to be an NCL loyalist," shares Eamonn.

NCL's capacity will expand by 40 per cent in the next six years as a result of the six new ships, which is fairly significant. And obviously, they will need customers to fill that capacity on a global level. And they hope they will get many, many more Indian clients joining them on their ships and enjoying the product for the foreseeable future.

"In terms of growth at NCL, we have a very bright future ahead. Our six prima class ships are so innovative and distinctive that they will add a different dimension to our brand and will elevate our brand. That's a 20000 extra capacity over the six-year period with these six ships. We see a very bright future for NCL and a very bright future for the India market if they fill as many of those ships as possible. And we're here to help," assures Eamonn.

Eamonn wants to get the message of serious cruising out here in India. To be successful in the mission, they must continue to engage with their travel partners in India and expand their network as much as possible. "We're very keen to get the message out there because the India market is a little more immature than others. There is an opportunity to grow the market, and to grow the business. And we want to grow our business in a way that helps our partner too. So obviously, we pay good commission. We ensure good support as well so that they can grow with us. If they grow with us, then it's a win-win situation for both of us. We're not here for a quick win, but here for the long run. We want to be here ten years from now, and we want to see the business from this market double, triple and move forward as we race ahead," speaks Eamonn.

Finally, expressing his optimism, Eamonn says, "It's been a tough two years for all of us, but it's coming back. It's looking very exciting. I'd like to express my gratitude to all our Indian partners for their continued support in the last few years. And we look forward to working with them very strongly in the future ahead."

Go Global

Small in boundaries, big in discoveries

TAR

The countdown has now begun to the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022TM. This will be the first time the world's biggest football tournament is being hosted in the Middle East. Qatar Tourism is calling on holidaymakers, and fans attending the FIFA World Cup Qatar to plan day trips out of Doha and discover Qatar beyond the capital. For those who intend to stay more, there is much more to explore in Qatar and there is something for every type of traveller and budget.

Team TTJ

long with plans for the football matches, visitors can also plan outings out of Doha for amazing adventures in mesmerising desert dunes, UNESCO heritage sites, ancient rock carvings, water parks, golden beaches, eco farms, and lush green mangrove forests and so much more. From Doha's central West Bay area these trips hardly take 25 minutes to 90 minutes to reach these easily accessible

take 25 minutes to 90 minutes to reach these easily accessible tourist attractions.

Top day trips out of Doha

Banana Island Resort: The glistening crescent-shaped Banana Island is accessible by boat only. A 25-minute journey from Al Shyoukh Terminal in downtown Doha, the island beach offers an ideal escape from the hustle and bustle of city life. Guests can travel for the day or stay overnight at Banana Island Resort Doha by Anantara, featuring a lagoon pool, spa, golf court, cinema and several restaurants.

Heenat Salma Farm: Fans of organic, natural produce should visit Heenat Salma Farm for an eco-conscious experience. A working agricultural farm that grows more than 30 different crops, fruits and vegetables, and produces dairy, eggs, honey and meat, Heenat Salma is a centre for hospitality, education and wellbeing. Visitors can stay overnight in traditional tents positioned around a central fire, which instils a sense of community.



Purple Island: Bin Ghannam Island, popularly known as Purple Island, is a hidden gem famous for its abundance of mangroves. The island's association with purple comes from an ancient Kassite-controlled dye industry, which started more than two thousand years ago when the colour was coveted by Roman royalty for their clothing. Sunset is an opportune time to visit Purple Island: go kayaking, or hike around the island to scout the perfect sunset spot for photos.

Baladna Park: A green refuge on the outskirts of Doha, Baladna Park is a fun-filled family day out with a children's adventure land, bumper boats, a petting zoo and a reptile

Go Global



cave. The park is run by Baladna Farm, a 100 per cent Qatari business that is one of the largest cattle farms in the region, and it provides fresh milk and dairy products to Qatar's restaurants and residents. The farm is also open to members of the public, who can discover the milking process in purpose-built farms that protect animals from harsh changes in climate.

Dhal Al Misfir Cave: One of the country's most exciting natural sites, the 40-metre-deep Dahl Al Misfir is considered the largest accessible cave in Qatar. Estimated to have been formed around 300,000-500,000 years ago, the cave emits an otherworldly moon-like glow due to gypsum despots in the centre of the peninsula. These same minerals give rise to 'desert roses' – clusters of crystals that inspired Jean Nouvel in his iconic design of the National Museum of Qatar.

Al Jassasiya Rock Carvings: Nobody quite knows when these nearly 900 carvings, known as 'petroglyphs', were created. Discovered in 1957, the distinct carvings feature shapes including fish, ostriches, dhow boats and cup marks, across a 700-metre area. Some suggest the art dates back more than 2,000 years, others put the date at just a few centuries ago. Either way, the carvings offer a tantalising glimpse into an ancient past and are Qatar's most exciting enigma.

Al Zubarah Fort: Qatar's UNESCO World Heritage Site, Al Zubarah Fort is a pristine example of a traditional Arabic fortress. The walls overlook the ruins of a once-bustling pearling town that saw fierce tribal battles as powerful empires fought for regional dominance. Visitors who head up to the site will find a museum with artefacts from this historical era, including cannonballs, coins and the weights used by pearl divers who used to plunge down 14 metres to search among thousands of oysters before finding that one rare gem. On the way to Al Zubarah are the remains of the ghost town of Al Jumail, which offers another fascinating glimpse into Qatar's humble past.

Hilton Salwa Beach Resort & Villas: On Qatar's southwestern tip is one of the country's best-kept secrets. A nirvana for lovers of sun, sea and sand, Hilton Salwa Beach



Resort has 3.5 km of soft white beaches and landscaped gardens. Within the grounds is one of the largest theme parks in the Middle East, Desert Falls. The park features 18 attractions, with 56 rides and slides, from the Sea Caves Water Park to the Desert Street Circuit GoKarting.

East-West / West-East: Richard Serra's breath-taking public art installation in the Qatari desert comprises four 14-metre-high steel plates spread out over a kilometre. Pictures of the striking display routinely set Instagram accounts alight, as the pillars



stand in stark contrast to the soft brown hues of the surrounding desert. Also in the area is the Umbrella Rock Mountain, Zekreet Fort and the abandoned film set known as Film City, all worth a quick look.



Inland Sea: There are rare few places in the world where desert dunes greet the shores of the sea. The spectacular 'Inland Sea'. or Khor Al Adaid, in the south of Qatar is one, and those with an afternoon to spare should seriously consider visiting, accessible only by 4x4 vehicles. Visitors should coincide their excursion with the sunset or sunrise for the best photos, and keep an eye out for turtles, the Arabian oryx and flamingos, before taking a dip in the warm sea waters.

Besides being the world's safest country, ancient in origin with a fascinating heritage, when travellers visit Qatar, they find the best of the Middle East all in one place, with a variety of exciting adventures and activities they never knew were here.

Go Global

Elevate your senses on this gastronomico journey through

When we think of Brussels, most people think of BEER, WAFFLES, FRIES AND CHOCOLATE. This cosmopolitan has so much more to offer. It is one tasty cultural melting pot to indulge for every kind of palate.

Team TTJ

he people of Brussels truly know how to cherish good tasty food. So maybe you would like to put aside your diet for a couple of days and savor what the city has to offer.

Beer in Brussel: to enjoy, to savour, to appreciate, to unite friends

What better way to celebrate a special occasion than to share a cold artisanal beer with some of your loved ones. Beer is booming, beer is everywhere, everyone wants to create yet another beer. That is the reason why trendy microbreweries keep mushrooming throughout the city and country. Belgians take pride in their national drink where each brewery boast about its in-depth knowledge and precision in creating its distinct ale.



There are about 1500 beer brands and over 700 different tastes, so there is a beer for every taste with all sorts of alcohol percentage.

What sets the beer of Belgium apart from the rest? The reason Belgian Beer is so famous and different from any other country, is the ingredients, the way of brewing, the tradition and the variety of beers.
Specialising in trappist beer (beer made by monks from Trappist order), abbey beer, pils or pale lager, bock (A strong flavor customised to a

Belgian requirement), white or wheat beer, blonde or golden ale, hopaccentuated beers and India pale ale, lambic beers (A wheat beer that undergoes a long ageing process), amber ales, tripel, dubbel, flemish red, stout, champagne beer, brown ale, scotch ale and fruit beers.

• Served in pint glasses, beer mugs, goblets, snifters to thistle glasses, cause every beer deserves its own glass, hence showing respect for the beer.

• Very often a meal may seem incomplete without a chilled beer, sometimes beer is used in different local stews. Several restaurants carefully select the beer that would pair well with the food, showing the importance and quality of Belgian beer.

Do check out some of its breweries and museums and you might end up exiting the country as a beer sommelier.

• Some of the notable breweries in the city are: En Stoemelings, No Science, La Source, Brasserie de la Senne, Cantillon, L'Annexe, Nanobrasserie de l'Ermitage, Brussels Beer Project... amongst a few.

• Beer tours hosted by expert guides that delve into the ancient brewing techniques, while you get a taste of a wide selection of beers complemented with meats and cheese.

Not missing on an opportunity to gather and have a good time around beers, Brussels offers some nice beer festivals, BXLBeerFest - The Crossroads of Beers and Friends, Belgian Beer Weekend and Wanderlust Craft Beer Festival which stand out when it comes to providing you with a one of a kind local Belgian experience.

If spontaneity is something you are looking for, then a beer bus tour might just be perfect for you, hop on to a Vintage bus! And discover the city while tasting different local beers and stopping at all major attraction sites in Brussels.

The most exciting news is that right in the heart of Brussels, in the summer of 2023 there will be the grand opening of Belgian Beer World. The former stock exchange will be converted into the most spectacular touristic attraction in Belgium. This will be the place to have the ultimate beer experience, the place for your selfie in beer heaven, the place where you can have an incredible view of the city on the rooftop terrace while enjoying beers. Welcome soon to the best Beer experience in the world.



Chocolates: A treat for your eyes and taste buds

If one has ever fantasized about the kind of joy Charlie may have experienced from one of Roald

Dahl's infamous books, 'Charlie and the chocolate factory', then look no further. Brussels could very well give you that and more, delve into this sweet journey and enjoy some unadulterated gournet pleasure.

Home to some of the renowned brands Neuhaus, Mary, Leonidas, Godiva, Galler, Marcolini, and more, this trip could end up in a sugar rush! The two biggest chocolate factories in the world (Callebaut and Puratos) are also house based in Belgium.

It is evident that a chocolate country needs chocolate museums of experience centres, and therefore:

• Take a step into history and walk down the Belgian Chocolate Village which is located just off city centre. Along an interactive trail, the museum tells you about the history of chocolate and reveals the secrets of its production.

• Closer to Grand Place and right in heart of the historical centre you find Choco Story, an interactive Choco museum experience with fun elements you will surely enjoy.

• Get involved in the process of chocolate making, and create some goodies to take back home, learning from the best at Concept Chocolate, Planète Chocolat, Lauren Gerbaud or many others still.

Different Guided tours associations can take you around some of the noteworthy confectionaries, giving you a once-in-a-lifetime sweet chocolate experience. During these visits and tasting sessions, the guides will tell you all secrets of Belgian chocolate and how to pair chocolate with beer and other culinary specialties from Brussels.

Did you know that Brussels Airport is the largest chocolate outlet in the world? About 1.5 kg of chocolate is sold per minute, about two tonnes per day.



Waffles: Breakfast fit for a king

What better feeling than to wake up to the sweet smell of waffles on a bright crispy day. Like the city, the waffle too has undergone small but significant transformations. Catering to the sweet and savory breakfast clan alike, this waffle comes in two specific types Brussels waffle and a Liège waffle (pearl sugar). But if you ever have a problem deciding, it's best you gorge on both. • Some places that are worth making that extra trip to are Maison Dandoy, Aux Gauffres de Bruxelles, The Waffle Factory, Mokcafé, Gaufres & Waffles, Pardon Brussels

After one bite, you may wish to learn the art so as to enjoy the pleasure of a freshly made waffle for a very long time, look no further and head to the Brussels Waffle Workshop During this 90-minute workshop, wherein you'll prepare a traditional Belgian waffle dough, cook it, and then decorate your waffles with icing sugar, whipped cream, chocolate sauce or other toppings, and seasonal fruits, though Belgians only put icing sugar mostly.

Belgian fries!

Belgian is famous for its unique fries, and in every village and every city you will find the typical Belgian fries stalls (over 5000), where every Belgian family on regular basis meet for some delicious fries with a variety of sauces, meats. The success and taste of Belgian fries comes from the special fat which is used, and how the fries are fried. A secret! Belgians and fries, it's a tradition.



International Palate

Brussels is a multi-cultural city, with most different nationalities, and the food scene is therefore ready to welcome any type of visitor from around the world, looking for food they are used to. The city has ample vegetarian and vegan options (Le Botaniste, Humus x Hortense (green Michelin star), Fourchette a Bicyclette, Dolma, Ici, Ami, Liu Lin, the Judgy Vegan, Savage, La Canne en Ville, enough to win over the taste buds of even the most precise palate.

Out of the box gastronomic experiences

• Tram Experience is an entirely unique concept offering you a gastronomic trip through Brussels aboard a tram. It will take you on a journey through our capital while you are enjoying a gourmet meal.



Dinner in the Sky: Fasten seatbelts to be lifted to the sky of Belgium where the most renowned Belgian chefs treat 32 guests to an incredible gastronomic lifetime experience. Take a seat at the table the air and in

• Food markets: Brussels has some of the nicest food markets, with local specialties and international cuisine. Ideal to taste a bit of all of the Belgian gastronomic offers. Go to Wolf Food Marketor Gare Maritime Food Market and be amazed by the incredible food.

A trip to Brussels, Belgium will not only leave you with memories of a lifetime, but an insatiable hunger to return for more.

enjoy.



Maharashtra Tourism organised a series of familiarisation (FAM) trips in March 2022 covering the regions of Nashik, Nagpur, and Konkan to showcase the diverse experiences in Maharashtra and for pan India travel and media participants to get a closer glimpse of Maharashtrian heritage, art, and culture. They aimed to promote Maharashtra in domestic and international markets. Since the Nagpur- Amravati trip had four wildlife safaris scheduled and with wildlife close to my heart, I am super glad to have chosen one of the most experiential trips of my life.



together on WhatsApp. I had a late evening flight on the day of departure, so everyone had arrived in Nagpur by afternoon, and they all had a delicious lunch at the Chalets Boutique Hotel. The food here was a subject of discussion for many, and it appeared



Prashant Nayak

that I had missed out on the best deal in Nagpur city. Due to a prior obligation, I had to fly to Nagpur at night and arrived at MTDC Bodalkasa Resort around 2 a.m. I thoroughly enjoyed my two-and-a-half-hour drive from Nagpur on the wide and smooth highway. I had never anticipated that such kind of road existed beyond Nagpur.

The MTDC Bodalkasa Resort is flanked by the Bodalkasa Dam and the Nagzira forest, making it an ideal site for nature lovers. The resort has luxurious and spacious rooms with a spectacular view of the greenery and the still waters. During a late-night stroll, our pals were ecstatic to discover two species of nightjar birds. As a birding enthusiast, I was super happy to stay awake at night as the place came alive with the chirping of nocturnal birds, and one could also hear the eerie call of the owls. We spent two nights at the resort.

Our first safari was at the Nazgira -Navegoan Wildlife Sanctuary, situated in the Gondia district of Maharashtra. The small reserve is rich in bio-diversity and has linkages with Kanha, Pench, and Tadoba Tiger Reserves. Its rocky and undulating terrain is covered with thick teak forests that support some of India's most endangered floral and faunal biodiversity. The reserve has a low tiger occupancy but is crucial owing to its linkage with other tiger-rich areas. Our whole group did the Safari in a Canter. Though we didn't sight any tigers, we were awestruck by the hilly topography, which seemed to exist in its own realm. We saw a variety of deer species here, including spotted deer, sambars, and nilgais. The place was teeming with white eye buzzards, a medium-sized raptor.

We were taken to a lake near Navegoan to see the vulnerable and endangered sarus crane in our bird-watching safari. The sarus cranes can only be found in two districts in Maharashtra: Gondia and Bhandara, and nowhere else till further south. Sarus cranes have given a new identity to the Gondia district, as every year many nature lovers come here to see the beautiful birds that are regarded as the 'Symbol of Love' and are the most sensitive species. We were fortunate to see a pair of tallest flying birds with an alluring backdrop of the glistening sun after a long wait and some hustle and bustle of changing locations.


Into the Wild



While traveling from one place to another took time, it was certainly a captivating road journey, and the pit stops for savoring local food added great fun elements to the trip. In the region, the one thing that stands out is the Mahua tree. They're likely to be found in every nook and cranny along the road or in the forest. The Mahua is truly a tree of life in tribal India! The tribals use its bark for medicine, its fruit for food, and its flowers for wine.

Ramtek was our next destination and is situated around 50 km from Nagpur. It is known for its ancient fort and the Lord Rama temple that beholds a considerable amount of mythological importance in itself. It is believed to have been the place where Lord Rama stayed during his exile. It is the reason why Hindus flock to this place for blessings. Ramtek would be of high interest to those who are up to exploring Maharashtra's cultural and mythological roots. Besides having pilgrimage importance, Ramtek is developing into an attractive tourist destination considering the proximity to Nagpur, the Pench National Park, and various other attractions.

At Ramtek, we stayed at The Greenland Resort and Villa, an enchanting property surrounded by lush green lawns and an ideal place for a relaxed holiday near Nagpur. Situated on the foot of the hills and beside a lake, one can get excellent lakeside and hillside views from the rooms. I spent my major time in bird photography, wherein the next morning, I captured a cool 32 species of avian wonders in just three hours.

The Pench forests are spread over Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. The forests, which inspired Rudyard Kipling to write Jungle Book, are divided by the Maharashtra-Madhya Pradesh interstate boundary, creating an artificial divide for the wildlife. The Pench forest in Madhya Pradesh covers an area of 1180 sq. km, including 411 sq. km of the core area, whereas the Pench forest in Maharashtra spreads across 741 sq. km, inclusive of 257 sq. km core area. However, wild animals know nothing of the complexities of the divide or rules and roam free and cross over from one side to the other as and when they wish.

The Pench Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra has more of a diverse dry deciduous forest landscape, with regions rich in bamboo, riparian forest, and meadows formed near the backwaters of the Totladoh dam built on the Pench river. Here, we had a great time on our jeep safari. It was almost towards the end of our safari that people in three jeeps including mine could see a tiger from far, lazying on the lake's edge. We closed in and tried to capture the majestic animal, but the thick, grassy vegetation eluded us from a decent shot. We definitely wanted to stay and photograph when the beast rose, but the guides and the drivers requested against it as they had to get out of the reserve or they could be fined for staying late. We had to depart with a heavy heart, much to the amusement of the tiger, who appeared to be totally at ease in the thickets while watching us.

The beautiful mixed forest majorly has teak, tiger, leopard, wild dogs, nilgai, sambar deer, Indian gaur, spotted deer, barking deer, wild boar, sloth bear, jackals, langoors, peacocks, vultures, and around 350 bird species.

Situated in the Satpura range at a height of 118m, Chikhaldara is a green and unspoiled and the only hill station in the region. On the Maharashtra-Madhya Pradesh border, it's around 120 km from Amravati. Chikhaldara is the base point to visit Melghat Tiger Reserve, a prime bird-watching site in winter. Melghat is home to more than 250 bird species, including the rare and endangered Forest Owlet.

The MTDC holiday resort at Chikhaldara is an old resort but more rustic and charming property with attached balconies and valley views. Our group enjoyed the verdant, cool place and the storytelling sessions around



bonfires. We were specifically warned not to leave the property at night, as there had been numerous sightings of tigers, leopards, and sloth bears.

While its tigers are spotted occasionally, Melghat might best be known as an eagle sanctuary. It's a birdwatcher's dream come true. I can vouch for this by saying that you can spot the Crested Serpent Eagle at every mile, and it seems like they are following you. Melghat is also where we sighted our first Sloth Bear, a female with two grown-up cubs. It was a sight to behold. They were straight in front of us on the road. After a few moments of curiosity, they scampered up a hill and out of sight after the mother gave us a mild threat. In Melghat, we also found huge herds of gaurs in the vast golden pastures. Our jeep also sighted the elusive jungle cat and the barking deer with plenty of waterbird species. Between the three tiger sanctuaries, Melghat impressed me more.

On our final leg, we were back in Nagpur, where we once again had a lovely threecourse lunch at Chalets Boutique Hotel and enjoyed the authentic Vidarbha cuisine. The trip had surely ended, but I knew it was only the beginning of new friendships, immersive memories of some amazing experiences, and well-spent time.



Advertorial

BEAT THE HEAT SITTING IN THE LAP OF NATURE

Here are two getaways in Madhya Pradesh to escape the roasting heat this summer

ith the advent of the summer season, you may have been mapping out tourist destinations to escape this scorching heat. Here we are, making it easier for you; let's have a peek into Madhya Pradesh's tourist destinations to explore wildlife, heritage, nature and spirituality.

Amarkantak

The 'King of Pilgrimages'

If you are mulling to get refreshed and calm in the lap of nature, experiencing religious and spiritual tourism, this place is for you.

Origin of Narmada River

Lies at the meeting point of the three central India hill ranges- Vindhyas, Satpuras and Maikal, Amarkantak popularly known as Teerthraj, or the 'king of pilgrimages. The largest flowing and holy river of Madhya Pradesh, the Narmada River and also the Son (Sone) The river originates in Amarkantak, the town which has several ancient temples having a rich history and an amazing architectural display.

A place of devotion

Amarkantak or Teerthraj is a place of worship as gods, Gandharvas (celestial beings), asuras (demons), saints and common people are all said to have achieved great spiritual powers here. There are many places associated with the names of ancient sages such as Bhrigu Rishi, Kapil Muni, Adi Guru Sankaracharya, Rishi Markand, saint Kabir Das and others.

Let's start your journey from here ...

As you walk through the alleys of Amarkantak, you will reach a premise covered by many small and bigger temples. There is a pond called Narmada Kund at the Narmada Udgam (Origin point of Narmada River). Here



you will also witness Narmada Mata Temple and Sonakshi Shaktipeeth Temple.

Seek the blessings of Lord Shiva

To seek the blessings of Lord Shiva, you need to travel one km from Narmada Udgam towards the south. There is the Trimukhi Temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, constructed between 1042 and 1122 AD. There is also the 18th century Keshav Narayan Temple.

Places to visit

This pilgrim town, situated at an altitude of 1000 m, has so many attractive destinations for tourists that including Shri Yantra Temple, Amareshwar Mahadev Temple, Son Udgam Temple, Bhrigu Kamandal, Durga Dhara Fall, Jwaleshwar Temple and others.

Things to do in Pachmarhi:

Boat ride, trekking, paragliding and the most important part is experiencing wellness tourism, yoga and other meditational and spiritual practices to get rid of stress and anxiety

Pachmarhi

'Satpura ki Rani'

Situated at the mounting height, Madhya Pradesh's most verdant charm, Pachmarhi, also known as 'Satpura ki Rani' (Queen of



Satpuras) rules the range of Satpura. This is the best time to meet the queen at Pachmarhi. You can also enjoy a jeep safari to experience the beauty of this place.

Nestled in the hills and filled with scenic beauty all around, Pachmarhi not only has spiritual spots and gushing waterfalls but also has a lot of adventure. The highest point in the Satpura range, the Dhoopgarh hilltop, is a beautiful spot to see spectacular sunsets and sunrises.

Pandavas and Jata Shankar Caves

'Pandavas Caves' is the most eye-catching spot. As per the legend, Pandavas and their wife Draupadi built it and lived there during





Incredible India

their exile. Another attraction, Jata Shankar Cave, displays the hundred-headed divine snake Seshnag. The rock of this sacred cave depicts snarled hair of Lord Shiva.

Satpura National Park

Satpura National Park is the perfect place for all those who are tired of the unadventurous sanctuaries and wildlife parks and want to have a unique experience.

One of India's most beautiful tiger reserves, the sanctuary was adjudged TOFT Wildlife Tourism Award for the most visitor-friendly wildlife destination in the year 2010.

Places to visit

A few other destinations to explore in Pachmarhi. Priyadarshini - Forsyth Point, Mahadeo Temple, Chauragarh Temple, Rajat Pratap, Jamuna Prapat (Bee Falls), Jalawataran, Ramaya Kund (Irene Pool) and Handi Khoh.

Things to do in Pachmarhi

Jeep safari, horse riding, ATV ride, land parasailing, ziplining, waterfall trekking and hiking.

So there is no point in refraining from travelling to the heart of the country to explore such beautiful places.



Travel Trade Cricket League Season four concludes

The fourth season of the Travel Trade Cricket League (TTCL) concluded on March 27, 2022 at the Warriors Cricket Club Grounds at Baliawas, Gurugram. Over the course of two days, 18 travel industry teams from around India competed for the Cup. "India Yatra Guru" took first place in the men's category this year, while "Wonder Womens" took first place in the women's category.











TJJTRAVMART Sets the ball rolling with successful marts at Guwahati and Kolkata

TTJ resumed its B2B travel networking mart, TTJ Travmart earlier this month. Travmart is a city-specific networking event where DMCs, airlines, tourism boards, hoteliers, and travel service providers are given the opportunity to have ample business meetings with their prospective partners and network further over cocktails and dinner. The first mart at Guhawati and the second at Kolkata witnessed good footfalls. It brought together the sellers and local buyers after a long hiatus, something the industry really valued.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

TTJ organised its first mart since the COVID-19 pandemic at Novotel Guwahati GS Road on April 4, 2022. The mart witnessed interactive business meetings between sellers, including DMCs, tourism boards, hotel chains, airlines, cruise lines, and visa facilitation companies showcasing their latest product offerings to eighty buyers from Guwahati and adjoining cities.

Indiatourism Guwahati, Destination Masters, Travel Boutique Online, Yorker Holidays Services, Europamundo Vacations, Kazin DMC, GRNconnect. com, Holidays Bookers DMC, Tripjack, One Above DMC, Jetsave India Tours, Thai Smile, Nepal Airlines, Fortune Hotel and Resorts, Cygnett Hotels and Resorts, Udaan Hotels and Resorts, Chocolate Hotels, and Summit Hotels and Resorts, participated in the mart as sellers.

The event was well supported and welcomed by the local and national travel trade associations, whose senior office-bearers were Guests of Honour at the event. S.S.Devbarman, Regional Director, North East, India Tourism, Arijit Purkayastha, Chairman, ADTOI– North East Chapter, Debajit Kr. Bora, President-TOAA, Kundal Roy, Secretary-TOAA, Ranjeet Das, Advisor- TOAA, were honoured with mementos by Ravi Sharma, Convener-TTJ Travmart.

The lucky draw at the event added a spark as Chocolate Hotels gave away 2Nights/3Days hotel stays to six lucky winners at their hotels in Goa, Jaipur, and Mandarmani. Gurjit Singh Ahuja, Mart Director, TTJ-Travmart, delivered the vote of thanks.















Ministry of Tourism Government of India	CHOCOLATE HOTELS PVT. LTD.	HOTELS & RESORTS	Jetsave	Obstination Mattern	Holidaya Bookers DMC Abad Ware per of Test		Europamund?	
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KOLKATA

The TTJ Travmart Kolkata mart came in quick succession to its successful Guwahati Travmart, which was organised at the Park Prime Kolkata on April 6, 2022. This event, too, witnessed engaging and interactive business meetings; the sellers showcased their latest product offerings to about a hundred and ten buyers from the City of Joy.

Indiatourism Kolkata, Cordelia Cruises, Destination Masters, Travel Boutique Online, Yorker Holidays Services, Kazin DMC, Rayna Group, Holidays Bookers DMC, Tripjack, Jetsave India Tours, Thai Smile, Nepal Airlines, Fortune Hotels and Resorts, Cygnett Hotels and Resorts, Udaan Hotels and Resorts, Chocolate Hotels, and Summit Hotels and Resorts participated in the Kolkata edition.

Manav Soni, Chairman, TAAI-Eastern Region, Debjit Dutta, Chairman - West Bengal and North East Chapter, ADTOI, Sanjeev Mehra, President SKAL-Kolkata and Koushik Banerjee, Chairman, ETAA Eastern Region were the Guests of Honour at the event and were presented with mementos by Ravi Sharma, Convener, and Gurjit Singh Ahuja, Mart Director, TTJ Travmart.

The buyers also got a chance to try their luck at the lucky draw where hotel stay packages were awarded to the lucky winners, courtesy of the Chocolate Hotels, Summit Hotels and Resorts, and Cygnett Hotels and Resorts.







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The event reflected a sense of optimism among the buyers and sellers as the world continues to open up post-pandemic. The general consensus among the participants was that organising the mart was the step in the right direction at the right time towards tourism revival. The industry leaders present complimented TTJ for infusing optimism among the travel fraternity by bringing the mart to Kolkata.

News You Can Use

RK Roja is the new Tourism Minister of Andhra Pradesh

ilm star RK Roja, an MLA from the Nagari constituency, has been appointed as the new Tourism Minister of Andhra Pradesh. She was a leading actress in Tamil and Telugu cinema from 1991 to 2002. She has also acted in a few Kannada and Malayalam-language films. Recipient of three Nandi Awards and a Tamil Nadu State Film Award, Roja joined the Telugu Desam Party in 1999 and has been a member of the YSR Congress Party since 2011. She was elected to the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly twice, in 2014 and 2019. She is also the state women's president of the YSR Congress Party. Roja was the chairman of APIIC Andhra Pradesh from 2019 to 2021 until she was appointed as the new Tourism Minister of Andhra Pradesh.

Welcoming the new Tourism Minister on behalf of the Tours and Travels Association of Andhra (TTAA), K. Vijay Mohan who is also the ADTOI Chairman Andhra and Telangana said the association is looking forward to working closely with the new honourable Minister for promoting tourism sector in the state.



Kerala launches country's first WhatsApp Chatbot, 'Maya' for tourists



n a country first, Kerala Tourism recently launched its 24×7 WhatsApp chatbot 'Maya' to enable tourists to access all information and updates about the tourism ecosystem in the state by just sending a 'Hi' to WhatsApp no 7510512345, or by scanning the QR code to access the service.

Maya will serve as a virtual travel assistant for tourists to ask and get complete information they need for a hassle-free travel experience in the state.

Shri PA Mohamed Riyas, Tourism Minister, said, "The chatbot service, which leverages the potential of the technology for tourism development, will help attract more tourists to Kerala. The tourists can easily access a lot of information regarding the prime attractions in each place, our cultural diversity, culinary traditions of different regions and the routes and means for transport to reach various places."

Maya shares all information on destinations, experiences, stay, travel and a lot of details that will keep them updated about the places they travel through or stay in any part of Kerala.

Maya also assists tourists to know about the experienceoriented locations, never-miss spots, historical places, ecotourism, arts and culture hubs, festivals, local food, visa information, Covid protocol, weather updates and provides links to the official Kerala Tourism social media pages. The Hyatt Regency brand debuts in Uttarakhand with Hyatt Regency Dehradun



yatt Hotels recently announced the opening of Hyatt Regency Dehradun. The 263-room hotel marks the first Hyatt hotel in the state of Uttarakhand and strengthens Hyatt's brand footprint across the country. As part of the Hyatt Regency brand, the hotel has been designed with productivity in mind to deliver seamless experiences and an energising hub for both leisure and business travellers alike.

Spread across an area of approximately 4.25 acres, Hyatt Regency Dehradun is conveniently located in the foothills of one of India's popular tourist attractions, Mussoorie, known for being a popular destination to retreat from the summer heat or for a snowy, winter getaway. Nestled in the scenic surroundings of Malsi Forest and the Himalayan range, the hotel is well-connected to major Indian cities both through air and rail services. The easy accessibility it offers from and to neighboring locations makes it a premier destination for celebrations as well as for travellers to unwind amidst pristine natural settings and unobstructed panoramic views.

Commenting on the opening of the hotel, Harkaran Singh, General Manager – Hyatt Regency Dehradun said, "Hyatt Regency Dehradun has been designed to meet the needs of travellers who seek flexible and energising experiences in pristine surroundings, and offers the perfect setting for celebrations, relaxing stays and everything in between."

News You Can Use

Tek Travels DMCC acquires 51 per cent stake in BookaBed AG

ek Travels DMCC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of TBO Tek Limited has acquired 51 per cent shareholding of BookaBed AG. TBO is one of the leading global travel distribution platforms connecting over 100,000 travel buyers across more than 110 countries with millions of travel suppliers, as of October 31, 2021.

Investment in BookaBed will enable TBO to scale up its business's services and offerings. BookaBed AG, based in Switzerland, is also a B2B accommodation provider to the Irish and UK travel industries. BookaBed intends to increase its market share in Ireland and the UK by leveraging TBO's global API business, and TBO Academy that trains and educates travel agents and travel trade partners.

Gaurav Bhatnagar, Co-Founder and Joint Managing Director of TBO, commented on the news and said, "We are excited to welcome everyone at BookaBed to the TBO family. BookaBed allows TBO's entry into the Irish market and strengthens our



UK presence. Both TBO and BookaBed have a significant opportunity to leverage each other's strengths and further expand our presence in current and future markets. What really makes this truly promising is our shared core values. There are synergies in our business models and vision, but the core values we share are vital when building for the long term. Under Karl's continued leadership, we look forward to strengthening BookaBed's business."

Rester Hotels and Resorts debuts in Kota



Rester Hotels and Resorts forays in a popular tourist destination in Rajasthan at KOTA. Designed around the brand's philosophy of extending heartfelt moments, the hotel features newly designed signature rooms and other amenities such as a swimming pool, restaurant cum lounge and bar.

Located in the heart of the city, in Dhanmandi this hotel will target both business and leisure travellers.

Commenting on the occasion, Rakshit Sharma, CEO said, "Kota is a key market for us and a prominent destination for business and leisure travellers. Our guests can now look forward to a refreshing stay at this centrally located hotel."

Rizwan Sheikh, COO further added, "We are proud to mark our signing in such a significant market and vibrant destination. This development is in line with the brand's growth strategy of expanding its presence in key commercial hubs."



Om Leisure Group is pleased to announce the addition of two new properties in the temple city of Bhubaneswar and Satapada (Chilika), the dolphin island.

Om Leisure Holidays, as a holiday/destination company, truly understands the needs of our guests. In 2012, we launched Om Leisure Resort- Puri. After nine years of guest operations experience, the company is now ready to service our guests in the temple city, Bhubaneswar and Satapada (Chilika).



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Appointments



Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park

Manish Garg has been appointed as the General Manager for the twin properties Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park. Having been associated with the

Hilton Group for close to 11 years, Manish has focused his effort to successfully lead his team in opening the hotel in a phased manner. Prior to this, Manish was General Manager at Hilton Bengaluru Embassy GolfLinks, Hilton Garden Inn Gurgaon Baani Square, Hilton Garden Inn Trivandrum, and Director of Operations at Hilton Chennai.



Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park

Rajani Nair Deb has taken charge as the Commercial Director for the twin properties Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park. In her new role, Rajani

will leverage her skills to work with Hilton Hotels Embassy Manyata Bengaluru services and offerings for existing clients and build new business opportunities. A meticulous convention planner, armed with experience spanning 22 years in the hospitality industry, Rajani brings to the table vast knowledge on convention space having successfully envisioned and executed global-scale events.



The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace

Amitabh Rai has been recently appointed as the Cluster General Manager for The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace and Hyderabad market. In his current role, along with The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace, Amitabh will also be heading Hyderabad Marriott Hotel and Convention Centre,

Courtyard by Marriott Hyderabad, Le Meridien Hyderabad, and Marriott Executive Apartments. Amitabh has been awarded Marriott International's APEC General Manager of the year 2020 for his 'Spirit to Serve Our Guests'.



Crowne Plaza Today New Delhi Okhla

Crowne Plaza Today New Delhi Okhla has appointed **Tanay Shankar** as the Director of Sales and Marketing. In his new role, Tanay will relentlessly focus on strengthening the hotel's position as a destination for business and leisure travellers and providing the best of Crowne Plaza's hospitality.

He will work towards optimising hotel revenue performance across the verticals of room sales, social and MICE business as well as creating strategic partnerships for marketing activations.



Courtyard by Marriott Faridabad, Aravalli Resort

Rajneesh Kumar has been appointed as the General Manager of the soon-to-launch Courtyard by Marriott Faridabad, Aravalli Resort. In his new role as the General Manager, Rajneesh will take on an all-encompassing role, and will be responsible for the

hotel's overall performance in addition to front-lining all conversations. Prior to this, he was the General Manager of Courtyard by Marriott Raipur since 2018. He has been a part of six pre-opening properties for Marriott International in India.



2HUB

Kavita Bhalla has joined 2HUB to bolster its B2E offerings. Kavita will be looking after MICE and other Special Projects. Kavita has successfully developed new destinations and markets for the Indian MICE clients and has also handled numerous governmentrelated projects. In her new role,

Kavita will be responsible for further enhancing 2HUB's market positioning as a premier MICE operator and also will be responsible for developing new business avenues under special projects.



Accor

Aniruddh Kumar hasbeen appointed Vice President – Development, at Accor India and South Asia. Due to his prior positions in investment, merger and acquisition, joint ventures, strategy and business planning, commercial and contractual dispute resolution, development, corporate finance, accounts, and taxation, he brings over

23 years of diversified expertise to the role. In his new role, Aniruddh will lead Accor's expansion strategy in the region, concentrating on consolidating the company's present brand base while also extending current and new brands.



JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar

JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar has appointed **Ayesha Bhalla** as the new Director of Sales and Marketing. In her new role, Ayesha will be responsible for leading strategic sales, marketing and business operations and overlook all aspects of the sales and marketing department. Ayesha will work towards

the reinforcement of the brand and its core ethos. She will also strive to create new and sustainable business streams for the hotel and drive the hotel's revenue performance and brand positioning.

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