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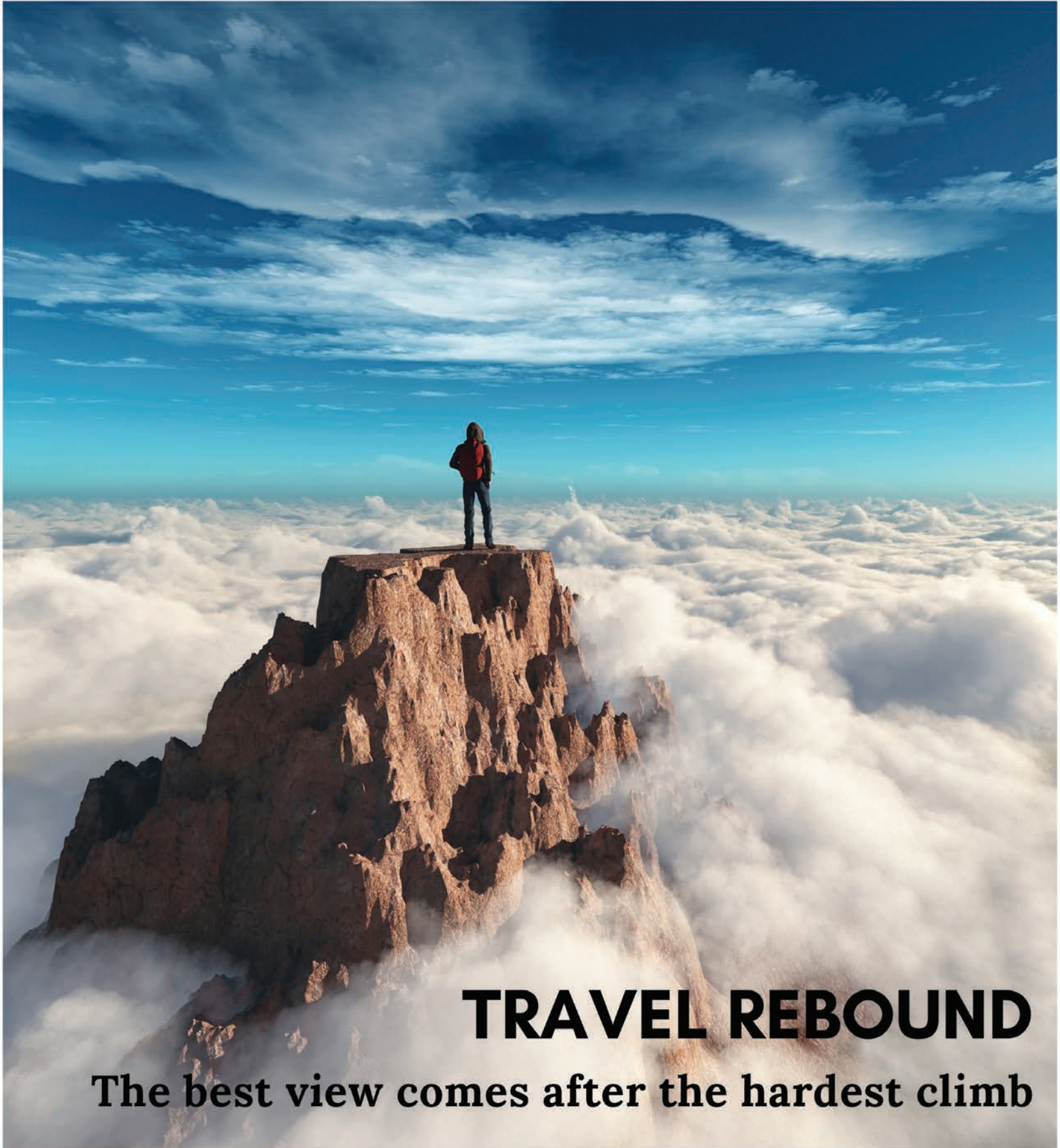
Vol. 12 | Issue 08 | June 2022 | Pages 52 | ₹150

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Owned and published by: Ravi Sharma, Editor & Publisher, 18/3, Railway Colony, Sarojini Nagar, P.S. Chanakyapuri, New Delhi 110021 and printed on his behalf at Polykam Offset, C-138, Naraina Industrial Area, Phase-1, New Delhi-110028.



Dear Friends,

With the monsoon soon approaching, India is still in its vacation mode. After almost 2.5 years of COVID-induced lockdowns and restrictions, this is the first summer that everyone is looking forward to breaking free from their mundane routine. Leisure tourism has increased in the Indian states of Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Goa have witnessed a surge in leisure tourism. It's either the hills or the beaches.

After the pandemic, spiritual tourism is also on the rise in the country. The main reason is to express gratitude to the Lord and seek blessings to revive businesses and jobs. Other travel sectors such as MICE and weddings have gradually picked up and done well. So, while the going is good, I hope you make the best out of summer, monsoon, and winter this year.

Our TTJ June issue is a mix of varied content. It will keep you engaged and motivated to know the remarkable positive developments in the industry, both in international and domestic travel.

Happy Reading!

Ravi Sharma

Ravi Sharma
ravisharma@sampanmedia.com

Editor's Desk



SBB CFF FFS

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Five crystal clear lakes, Switzerland's snow-capped mountains and magnificent waterfalls: On this almost two-hour superlative ride (a section of the GoldenPass Line and a part of the Grand Train Tour of Switzerland), you will cross Brünig Pass while relaxing in the comfort of our modern trains and enjoying the fantastic Alpine panorama.

South Korea reopens for Indian travellers

South Korea is all set to welcome outbound travellers from India post two years of the COVID-19 Pandemic hitting the world.

Indian travellers can now apply for a short-term (C-3) visa, which allows foreigners to stay up to 90 days for marketing research, travel, visiting relatives, meetings or similar reasons. The visa can be applied physically at the VFS Global centers.

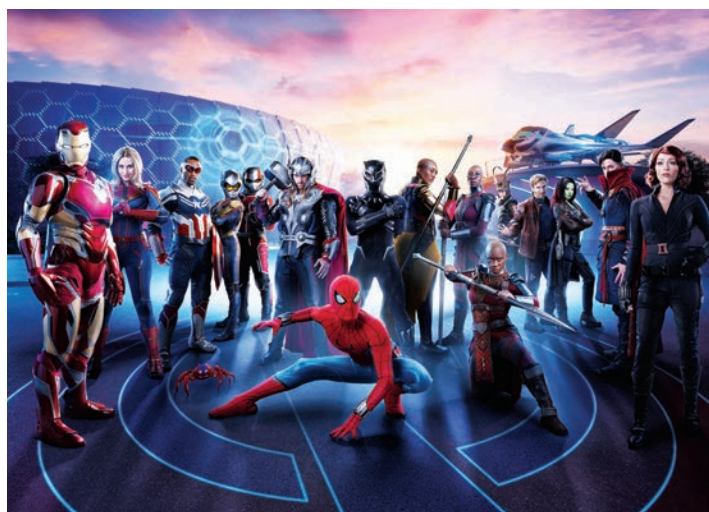
Effective from June 1, 2022, the VFS Global South Korea Visa Application Center, New Delhi and Kolkata would accept all the visa categories including express visa applications. Applicants would need to take a prior appointment to submit the application in New Delhi, however, for Kolkata, applicants can walk in without an appointment to submit the application.

All travellers must provide a negative COVID-19 PCR test result certificate from a PCR test taken within 48 hours prior to departure date, irrespective of their vaccination status. Fully vaccinated individuals are exempt from quarantine.



These individuals must have been fully vaccinated for at least 14 days, but within 180 days, or have received a booster shot (third dosage). Non-vaccinated or individuals who have not completed three doses have to undergo a mandatory quarantine of seven days.

Marvel Avengers Campus at Disneyland Paris to open on July 20



Marvel Avengers Campus opens at Disneyland Paris on July 20, 2022, with the promise to empower guests to take an active role alongside Earth's Mightiest Heroes and live out their own heroic stories. Marvel Avengers Campus is an entirely reimagined universe dedicated to discovering, recruiting and training the next generation of Heroes, right here, right now in Disneyland Paris. Everyone is invited to join the action – teaming up with the Avengers and their allies throughout the land; slinging webs like Spider-Man; flying into space with Iron Man and Captain Marvel, and suiting up and re-fueling in true Super Hero fashion.

Opening as part of the 30th Anniversary celebration of Disneyland Paris, Marvel Avengers Campus is the next key milestone in Walt Disney Studios Park's multi-year transformation plan and represents the Resort's next level of exceptional guest experiences. With Marvel Avengers Campus and Disney Hotel New York – The Art of Marvel, Disneyland Paris is poised to be the ULTIMATE destination for Marvel fans to live an immersive experience among their favourite Super Heroes.

Vietjet launches direct flights from Mumbai to Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi



Vietjet has officially inaugurated the direct flights connecting Mumbai with Vietnam's capital, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, the country's largest city.

The inaugural flight ceremony of the two direct routes jubilantly took place at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) in Mumbai with the attendance of the Consulate General of Vietnam in Mumbai, the airport authorities, Vietjet's management representatives and hundreds of passengers onboard the debut flights.

To celebrate the occasion, Vietjet will offer 19,999 super-saver tickets from just USD 0 (*) applied to all flights between Vietnam and India with a travel duration from July 1 to December 31, 2022 (**). Promotional tickets are up for grabs daily from 10:30 AM on June 7 till 10:30 pm on June 9, 2022, via www.vietjetair.com, Vietjet Air mobile app, and Facebook page.

Besides the Mumbai – Ho Chi Minh City/Hanoi services, Vietjet's direct routes between New Delhi and Ho Chi Minh City/Hanoi currently operate thrice-weekly flights on each route. From September 9, 2022, the Mumbai – Phu Quoc route will commence operation with four round trips per week, while the New Delhi – Phu Quoc will operate with a frequency of three round trips per week.



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The resort's exclusive holiday plan the **Lobi Plan™** blends fine-dining, premium beverages, spa services, non-motorised watersports, snorkelling, and other holiday essentials for a hassle-free getaway – including a spectacular underwater fine-dining restaurant; Only Blu.

OBLU SELECT Lobigili, Lobigili Island, North Malé Atoll, The Maldives

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Malaysia celebrates 65 years of India-Malaysia diplomatic relationship

The High Commission of Malaysia organised a 'Malaysia Carnival' on June 4, 2022, to kick off the celebrations commemorating 65 years of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and India.

The Carnival showcased the best of Malaysian cuisine, tropical fruits, culture, art and crafts, and other products. In addition, exciting lucky draws and a flash sale on unique tour packages and air tickets to Malaysia were offered by Malaysia Airlines, Batik Air, and Air Asia.

It provided the rare opportunity to enjoy exotic Malaysian tropical fruits such as Durian, nicknamed the "King of fruits", besides feasting on local delicacies like Malacca Chicken Wings, Nasi Lemak, Chicken Satay, Roti John (Malaysian style omelette sandwich), Curry Puff and much more. Jazzing up the evening were live cultural performances by a dance troupe specially flown in from Malaysia.

In his welcome remarks, the High Commissioner of Malaysia to India, H.E Dato' Hidayat Abdul Hamid, said, "For 65 years, relations between Malaysia and India have continued to develop well. The organising

of the Malaysia Carnival is hoped to foster greater ties and friendship between the two countries." The Carnival was officiated by the Honourable Dr. Rajkumar Rajan Singh, Minister

of State for External Affairs of India, and attended by the ASEAN Head of Missions and the Diplomatic Corps among other guests.

The Carnival is also a part of the program to highlight the reopening of Malaysia's borders to fully vaccinated travellers from India on April 1, 2022. India remains one of the top market sources for Malaysia.



Explore the whole of Germany on the 9-euro ticket for public transport

From June 1 to August 31, 2022, travellers can use all means of public transport for nine euros per month. The so-called 9-Euro-Ticket is valid for any number of



journeys in the selected month on regional trains, S-Bahn and U-Bahn trains, as well as buses and streetcars. By linking the various transport associations, it is possible to explore the whole of Germany by local transport. 9-euro tickets are not valid on long-distance trains (such as IC or ICE) or long-distance buses. Tickets can now be purchased throughout Germany at ticket vending machines, in train stations or online via the sales channels of Deutsche Bahn or the local transport associations.

Children under the age of six travel free of charge. Children aged six and over pay nine euros per calendar month, as do all users of the 9-euro ticket. There is no extra children's ticket with this special offer. The conditions of the respective transport associations apply to the carriage of bicycles.

The 3G regulation for entry into Germany has been suspended from June 1, 2022, until the end of August. Returning travellers and other entrants will no longer have to prove that they have been vaccinated, recovered, or tested.

For those arriving from virus variant areas, the stricter rules remain in place: They must undergo a 14-day quarantine in Germany, even if they have been vaccinated or have recovered. However, no countries are currently designated as virus variant areas.

The mask requirement continues to apply in local and long-distance public transport and in the healthcare sector in Germany. It also applies on aircraft departing from or returning to Germany.

DMC Reps - Partnering for success

DMC Reps' business model is to partner with travel companies seeking to establish a foothold, increase visibility, and grow their business from their target source markets. DMC Reps partners with travel companies who are passionate about their destinations, are innovative and competitive and provide world-class services to both leisure and MICE travellers.



With teams on the ground in all the markets they serve, DMC Reps does not operate virtually from one head office. Their teams have long-standing experience in the tourism industry and understand the individual local market needs and have access to the markets' decision-makers, focusing on creating and seizing opportunities within the travel industry. DMC Reps, with its experienced teams, offers a one-of-a-kind opportunity to build DMC business in the world's largest outbound travel markets while working with just one trusted partner.

Marc Sievert, Executive Board Member - DMC Reps and Head Focus Asia DMC, said, "Currently we have 75 plus destinations under our umbrella and growing. In India, we have a joint venture with Sunrise Representations, which manages DMC Reps' operations. Both Nisha and Vandana have a great working relationship with us and have their finger on the market pulse. Currently, we have our offices in Germany, the USA, Australia, Spain, and India operational. The Russian market was very important to us but unfortunately due to the current situation our Russia office is currently un-operational. Our local understanding of the India market requirements through Sunrise Representations has sensitised us to specific Indian requirements and today besides providing you with Indian food, vegetarian food, and Jain food we can also cater to Bollywood-themed events and music in Vietnam and Cambodia."

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QATAR working toward positioning itself as a regional and global attraction

With Qatar hosting the FIFA World Cup later this year, the country will have the opportunity to showcase its many tourism offerings in leisure, MICE, wedding, and as a cruise destination.

Qatar is also trying to maximise the opportunity by promoting the destination beyond the World Cup. Philip Dickinson, VP - International Markets, Qatar Tourism, discusses Qatar's tourism strategy focusing on India, a priority market with great connectivity.

Ravi Sharma

Qatar began reopening to travellers with restrictions by the end of 2021. The Tourism Department is off to a tremendous start this year, with numerous markets returning in force. There were good numbers of visitors from the local GCC market, Saudi Arabia in particular, and they have seen some good numbers coming in from Europe, the US, and Australia as these markets gradually opened up. With India reopening scheduled international flights from March-end, Qatar is getting good numbers from the country. However, India is still on the red list, which means that just one-day quarantining is still in effect.

"I believe there has been a lot of interest in Qatar, especially with all of the new tourism infrastructure and development." The new hotels, shopping malls, restaurants, theme parks, and so forth. "As we approach the World Cup, Qatar is attracting a lot of strong attention from worldwide travellers," opines Philip.

India is a priority market for Qatar Tourism. So, they are very active in the sub-continent. Currently, they have BRANDit India as their representative in India, who looks after their marketing, sales and PR and focuses on closely working with the travel trade. Philip shares more, "We are not just focusing only on leisure. We're focusing on three key segments in India. Along with the leisure, it's the MICE business and the weddings segment as well. Currently, we're very active with the trade as much as we can be, and are planning to do some consumer campaigns in India as well, which will be a mix of digital, print, and TV."

Qatar is also proving to be an ideal wedding location. Wedding venues and ballrooms abound throughout the country. Some hotels offer breathtaking backdrops for fabulous photoshoots. Regarding the wedding market,



▲ Philip Dickinson

Philip says, "This year for the wedding market, it is going to be a bit tough in Q4 due to the World Cup. However, we've already received several enquiries for early next year. We have had ultra-high net worth families coming over and having a look around Qatar in consideration for their wedding plans and options. We are working on a lot of subsidies and packages to encourage families to come and make sure they get good deals from the hotels in all aspects needed for a grand wedding. We are quite interested in seeing more big fat Indian weddings in Qatar. We also have a plethora of hotels that serve delectable Indian cuisine. Be it restaurants, fine dining, or five-star hotels, Indian food is easily found and readily available."


Qatar Tourism also has a dedicated MICE sales team, which is in constant contact with corporates, big MICE travel companies and DMCs that handle large MICE business. They also invite many MICE stakeholders to experience the destination and the MICE facilities first-hand.

Speaking more about Qatar MICE facilities, Philip says, "We have two big state-of-the-art exhibition centers. We have the DECC, which is right in the heart of downtown Doha in the West Bay area. QECC is a fabulous exhibition centre with amphitheatres where a variety of events can be hosted. There is also Katara, an expansive art and culture complex featuring performance halls, galleries, music groups, and cinemas. There is the new Fairmont Raffles, which has a lot of conference facilities too."




According to Philip, the combination of a strong sales effort, getting MICE organisers familiar with the destination through the FAM trips, fabulous venues, and different options for the MICE gives Qatar Tourism the edge and optimism about securing some great MICE business in 2023.

Qatar is also investing heavily in cruise infrastructure to enhance the appeal of Doha as a turnaround port. Qatar is pursuing homeporting deals like Dubai, and they have a new cruise facility called the Grand Terminal, which will officially open shortly this year. The Doha Grand Terminal will be able to handle two mega-ships simultaneously and welcome 14,000 guests per day.

"We have a very clear objective. We had two million arrivals in visitors in 2019. Our plan is to move that to six or seven million arrivals by 2030, thus tripling it. It's part of the national vision 2030. And we have a very clear mandate to grow our visitor numbers from key markets like India," concludes Philip.


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\$25,649
Total Sales in Current Month

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Pending Bookings

23
Pending Service Requests

Booking Queues
My Bookings
Enquiry Queue

Pending Ticket Issuance
Unconfirmed
Pending Refunds
Pending Payment

BOOKING REF	CLIENT NAME	BOOKING DATE	TRIP DATE	SERVICES	DESTINATION	STATUS
UT8806	Shishir Tour & Travels	12 Jan 2022	15 Mar 2022	Flight	DXB	Pending
UT8812	Patty Granderson	23 Jan 2022	22 Mar 2022	Flight	DXB	Pending
UT8818	Shizue Finnerty	28 Jan 2022	03 Mar 2022	Flight	DXB	Pending
UT8822	Guillermo Klutts	28 Jan 2022	10 Mar 2022	Flight	DXB	Pending
UT8836	Ressie Molinari	29 Jan 2022	11 Mar 2022	Flight	DXB	Pending


Create New Booking
View All

Activities
New Activity

March 2022

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

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The gem of the Sierra Nevada mountains **Lake Tahoe beckons you**



Lake Tahoe in the United States has been a popular tourist destination for over 150 years. It has gained popularity in the India market, where people enjoy outstanding natural beauty, crystal clear lakes, and crisp mountain air. Tony Lyle, Chief Marketing Officer, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority (LTVA), has been with the organisation since 2012 and is responsible for global strategic marketing distribution partnerships, planning and implementation. From him, we learn more about this tranquil but fun-filled destination.

Prashant Nayak

The Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority (LTVA), a non-profit organisation, was founded in 1986 to market the South Shore of Lake Tahoe as a unique year-round destination to the global market and favourably impact the South Shore economy through overnight stays and tourism spending.

LTVA markets and promotes South Lake Tahoe, a major tourist city in both Nevada and California. LTVA oversees the south shore of Lake Tahoe, which includes both the California and Nevada side. The specific jurisdiction includes the city of South Lake Tahoe- California, Stateline-Nevada, Round Hill- Nevada, and Zephyr Cove -Nevada.

"Lake Tahoe is the third-largest alpine lake in North America and a unique mountain destination in the Sierra Nevada Mountain range. It offers year-round recreation opportunities, from world-class skiing to popular water sports activities. During a specific time of the year (mostly in the fall and spring) you can ski, play golf, and enjoy the beach on the very same day," shares Tony.

As for accommodations at Lake Tahoe, lodging options are fairly large, from motels, bed and breakfasts, hotels, and casino resorts, to luxury 4-star properties and private home rentals. The new lodging options are becoming available this summer: The Villa Suites at Edgewood Tahoe are a brand-new luxury concept that will be available this September; the newly built Hampton Hill and Suites, a member of the Hilton brand will be opening in August; and the Desolation Hotel, Lake Tahoe's new premier micro resort, which is accepting bookings starting in June. A very new way of experiencing the lake from its waters will be on a 75-foot-long yacht, Spirit of Tahoe, a 133-passenger boat that will visit lake destinations such as Emerald Bay



▲ Tony Lyle

and the East Shore and departing from Ski Run Marina.

Lake Tahoe has a tourism-driven economy, and all residents are reliant on visitor spending. Tony shares, "The locals welcome and respect tourists and are always willing to give advice, recommendations, and directions. Lake Tahoe is definitely a year-round destination, and visitors are welcome every month of the year and can enjoy the region throughout the different seasons."

Pre-pandemic, LTVA had international representation in India, the United Kingdom and Ireland, Australia, China, and Germany. It did not terminate or pause any of this during the

pandemic and kept its presence the whole time. The scope of work of each was adjusted to fit the market, and it is currently increasing based on the demand from each country.

Sartha Global Marketing represents LTVA in India, reflecting the importance of the Indian market. In this regard, Tony highlights, "The India market is very important for Lake Tahoe. Visitors from India are resilient and eager to travel, which is also reflected by the spending levels in the India market. Year over year growth has been experienced, except for the pandemic period. In the first quarter of 2022, India ranked third in international visitation to the USA, excluding Canada and Mexico."

LTVA has a special destination badge focused on what's new, along with unique Lake Tahoe experiences available on USA Discovery Program, Brand USA's online training program. They encourage the travel trade to complete this badge to become a Tahoe expert. Additionally, they have been regularly participating in other Brand USA-led initiatives, such as webinars and educational seminars.

Mentioning other programs, Tony adds, "We also launched an engagement program named 'Tahoe Conquest' to educate the travel trade about Lake Tahoe's diversity via a contest-based promotion. This program received an overwhelming response. As Lake Tahoe has become one of the most popular destinations on the west coast, we will continue to actively engage with the Indian travel trade to keep Tahoe top of mind throughout the next year."

LTVA also fosters environmental sustainability that benefits residents, businesses, and tourists. It not only promotes Lake Tahoe to visitors but also promotes sustainable, responsible, and respectful visitations to protect this national landmark and its outstanding natural beauty.

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VISA TO KYRGYZ REPUBLIC MADE EASY WITH APPOINTMENT OF SALVIA VFS



Salvia VFS, part of Salvia Group of Companies, has been in the business for 20 years, specialising in outsourcing visa processing services for international government clients in India. It offers 360-degree visa facilitation services, encompassing assistance with filling visa forms to doorstep delivery of documents and passports. They recently expanded its visa facilitation services in India on behalf of the Kyrgyz Embassy. Prashant Chaudhary, Managing Director, Salvia Group of Companies, while sharing more about the Kyrgyz Republic with TTJ, also assures that while the issuance of visa will be at the sole discretion of the Embassy of Kyrgyzstan in India, their responsibility will be to efficiently, and in minimal time, process visa application requests of Indian travellers.



▲ Prashant Chaudhary

Sonika Bohra

Tell us about Salvia VFS operations in India?

Salvia Visa Facilitation Services (Salvia VFS) offers over 20 years of visa processing knowledge and expertise. We believe every traveller starts their journey with their visa processing procedure. Our goal is to make the start of their journey as memorial and effortless as possible.

We have previously worked as the outsourcing company for the Embassy of the Russian Federation in India, which led to an ease in the visa obtaining procedure for Indian travellers. We successfully made this process less time-consuming and easily available pan India, with offices in Delhi and Mumbai.

Recently, Salvia VFS partnered with the Kyrgyz Republic to process Kyrgyz visas and opened an office in Delhi. What does this development mean for Salvia VFS?

It is our proud privilege to extend visa facilitation services on behalf of Kyrgyz Embassy in India. Salvia, as a brand, has been

a trusted travel partner of Kyrgyzstan in India for decades, facilitating the travel of Indian visitors to the country for a long time. Now, Salvia is extending its visa expertise to the beautiful country of Central Asia.

Kyrgyzstan visa is needed to enter the Kyrgyz Republic for all Indian passport holders. Salvia Visa Facilitation Services, the official Visa Centre for the Embassy of Kyrgyzstan in India, is the end-to-end stop for all visa-related queries and applications in India. We provide the most convenient and quickest service for Kyrgyzstan Visa applicants with round-the-clock support from our expert team.

There are several types of Kyrgyzstan visas. The most

common Kyrgyzstan visas are the tourist visa, the business visa, and the student visa. As the official visa centre of the Embassy of Kyrgyzstan in India, we ensure hassle-free visa facilitation to make travel to Kyrgyzstan accessible and swift to all. We want to put Kyrgyzstan on every Indian's travel bucket list, which would help increase the volume of business between both



countries and create stronger bilateral relations between India and Kyrgyzstan.

Have you noticed an increase in Indian tourists seeking to visit Kyrgyzstan? Do you have any records of Indian nationals visiting the destination before the pandemic?

There is an increase in demand and inflow of great queries for those travelling to Kyrgyzstan from India. Post pandemic, people would want to travel and discover new destinations with the rise in revenge tourism. Central Asia is on top of this list and is a short-haul destination for Indian Travellers. Kyrgyzstan also offers immense potential for the Indian leisure and MICE segments. While witnessing the significant potential, direct flights between Delhi and Bishkek are all set to resume in June twice-weekly after two long years! Before the pandemic, around 25,000 Indian nationals were visiting Kyrgyzstan annually. Now, we are planning to double this number by next year.



How easy would it be to obtain a Kyrgyz visa now? What are the current regulations for Indians visiting Kyrgyzstan?

With a four-day processing time, obtaining a Kyrgyz Visa is quick and convenient. Salvia Visa Facilitation Service, the official Visa centre of the Embassy of Kyrgyzstan in India, provides the best In-class services and round-the-clock support to make visa processing even more hassle-free. Our team is further there to ensure all needs and provide applicants with the best visa assistance.

The minimum period of stay for Indian tourists in Kyrgyzstan is one month. Tourists and business visa applicants can also apply for up to two months' stay. With no COVID restrictions, an RT-PCR test or vaccine certificate is also not required at arrival.

Post pandemic, do you think India will be an important market for the Kyrgyz Republic in both leisure and MICE segments?

The Kyrgyz Republic undoubtedly has great potential in both leisure and MICE segments with premium hotels and other world-class facilities to offer, combined with a quick visa processing time of four days and soon to be resuming two-and-a-half-hour flight connectivity between Delhi and Bishkek. We are already receiving queries from travel companies and corporates about Kyrgyzstan as we speak.

What are the USPs of Kyrgyzstan? What are the major attractions, connectivity options, ideal time to visit, and the days required to see the best of Kyrgyzstan?

Kyrgyzstan has some of the most striking landscapes, from high altitude alpine lakes to velvet, green hills; 7,000-meter-high snow-covered peaks, and huge, wide valleys with plenty of wildflowers. These unique topographic features earned it the nickname "Central Asia's Switzerland."

Some 80 per cent of its territory is covered by the mountainous region of the Tian Shan, whose name means "Mountains of Heaven." The top attractions that we believe would be a hit in the Indian market include the Issyk Kul Lake, the world's second-largest mountain lake with the unique feature of not freezing even during cold Kyrgyz winters. Another majestic lake that cannot go missed is the Song Kol Lake, which is at an altitude of 3000m. Osh market, one of the oldest markets globally, and Karakol are some of the many popular attractions in Kyrgyzstan.

Summers in Kyrgyzstan are pleasant and ideally considered the best time to travel and discover the country. It's also ideal weather for horse riding, cycling, rafting, hiking, and sightseeing. However, in winter, Kyrgyzstan makes the best destination for those interested in skiing and other winter sports or those who want to enjoy the snow and relax at the stunning ski resorts Kyrgyzstan offers. Simply put, Kyrgyzstan makes for a year-round destination. We would recommend travellers to go for a minimum of four nights or a week. Travellers can plan for even longer, given the destination has so much to offer, and the minimum Travel visa duration is one month.

Tell us about the role of Salvia VFS and the Kyrgyz Embassy in India in promoting and marketing the destination?

Salvia VFS is working closely with the Kyrgyz Embassy to facilitate ease, promptness, and efficiency in the Visa processing procedure. We collectively want to increase the cross-border movement between both India and Kyrgyzstan.

Soon, we have roadshows planned out pan India to create more awareness amongst travel agents and organisations about the destination and how quick and convenient the visa process has become. We are also planning to undertake social media marketing to reach out to keen Indian travellers and promote the beautiful country of Kyrgyzstan and all that it has to offer.

From a tourism business point of view, is Kyrgyzstan looking at investments from the India market?

The Kyrgyz Republic has implemented much export promoting and facilitating schemes, including free economic zones. Further, signing the new Bilateral Investment Treaty in 2019 and the India-Kyrgyz Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) are important steps toward strengthening bilateral relations.



We see an increasing interest among Indian entrepreneurs to explore business opportunities with Kyrgyzstan in mining, agro-food, construction, ecotourism, pharma, gems and jewellery, IT, etc. Moreover, the Kyrgyz landscape offers excellent destinations for Bollywood productions with its beautiful lakes and peaks. Kyrgyzstan can surely be an upcoming avenue for Bollywood film shootings.

What are your views on the resumption of international flights to/from India?

This came as great news! After a wait of two years, Delhi to Bishkek connectivity is all set to resume. With a flight duration of around two and a half hours, Kyrgyzstan offers the feel of Switzerland so close to home. People seem very keen to travel, especially to short-haul destinations, seeing the current market trend. With such great potential, we might be seeing connectivity to Bishkek from other cities in India very soon.



Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kyrgyz Republic to India

Kyrgyzstan and India have shared history and culture spanning over a thousand years. The appointment of Salvia as a Visa facilitation centre is not only aimed at bringing greater ease and convenience to Indian travellers to apply for Kyrgyz Visa but also improving services and facilities for the people seeking to visit our beautiful country and further strengthening our people-to-people relations that is centuries old.

Vistara poised for growth, committed to enhancing customers' flying experience

Vistara's constant endeavour is to provide a holistic air network to their customers, enabling them to travel seamlessly and with better connectivity. Deepak Rajawat, Chief Commercial Officer, Vistara has been part of the airline since its inception and is presently responsible for the overall development and implementation of Vistara's robust commercial/business strategy to grow its network, maximise revenues and enhance customer experience. In this interaction with him, we get to know a great deal about the current development at the 'Full-Service Carrier' offering a world-class flying experience to passengers.

Prashant Nayak

With the resumption of scheduled international flights, how has Vistara been capitalising on the opportunity?

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, we managed to introduce our services to seven new international destinations, under air bubble agreements, including London Heathrow, Dhaka, Doha, Frankfurt, Sharjah, Malé and Paris, besides resuming operations to Dubai, Singapore, Kathmandu and Colombo. These operations not only helped us introduce Vistara in markets that were already part of our expansion plans, but also made inroads into new geographies, paving the way for a strong foothold for the brand in global aviation.

Since the resumption of scheduled international operations, we are operating flights to and from nine international destinations, including Paris, Frankfurt, London, Kathmandu, Singapore, Dubai, Dhaka, Colombo and Bangkok. While we temporarily discontinued connectivity to Colombo, we have started operations between Mumbai and Male from May 25, 2022. In order to cater to the present growing demand, we have also increased frequencies to London and Singapore, where we now operate daily flights.

We recently launched our 31st domestic destination, Coimbatore, connecting it with Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru starting May 20, May 27 and June 03, 2022, respectively. Additionally, we have also introduced several new routes, Mumbai-Srinagar and Bengaluru-Indore, Mumbai – Ahmedabad and new planned routes are Mumbai – Indore, Mumbai - Bhubaneswar.



▲ Deepak Rajawat

Is Vistara more focused on domestic or international growth?

Both, domestic and international networks are critical to our presence in the market and to our growth moving forward. In order for an airline business to be sustainable, it is important, especially for a full-service carrier, to operate at scale. Operating with a hub-and-spoke model, our domestic and international route networks also complement each other, coupled with our growing range of partnerships with other airlines through codeshare and interline agreements. India is a large market, and airlines simply cannot afford to focus on just solely building on domestic or international network. Our domestic operations helped us to navigate the toughest of times during the ongoing pandemic when international operations remained suspended for a prolonged period.

We strongly feel that there is great potential for long-haul direct flights from India, with travellers increasingly displaying a strong preference for non-stop travel, and Vistara is uniquely positioned to cater to this growing demand.

At the moment, our plan is to increase frequencies where we already fly and look at other commercially viable destinations around the world. However, the constraint is the delay in the deliveries of our Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft. We only have two of them, which limits our capacity to operate long-haul destinations. This limitation has been affecting our international expansion plans, especially our plans to operate to the USA. However, we are already evaluating feasible alternatives.

What are your present load factors? What is your capacity forecast for the next few years?

We have been observing an increase in demand across our network, especially on long-haul international routes, and hope the trend continues. Domestic travel has very recently crossed pre-Covid levels of passengers per day. The demand has come back strongly at 80 per cent to 90 per cent of pre-COVID levels on an average. For Vistara, it is more than 100 per cent, which means that we are doing better now on domestic routes than we were pre-pandemic. We have flown 35 million customers since inception, and recently we flew 1 million passengers twice in the last three months.

Vistara is also on course to ramp up its fleet in order to strengthen its network globally. Currently, we have a fleet of 52 aircraft, and we expect to take the number to 70 by 2023.

What are the new service enhancements and offerings at Vistara?

Almost all of our onboard services have been restored which include non-vegetarian options on most flights (90mins and above), tea and coffee service (including Starbucks), menu cards in Business Class and Premium Economy, and much more.

Vistara is the first airline to have introduced touchless/paperless boarding at a few Indian airports two years ago. Other technologies like Kiosk check-in (Scan-N-Fly), E-bag tag, and automated baggage drop are some of the key initiatives we took to enable a safe travel experience for our customers while minimising interactions with people or contact with surfaces. Vistara Gate-to-Gate and the option to book an additional seat to maintain social distancing onboard, Purple Ticket gift cards, travel insurance, etc. are some examples of the ancillary services that we introduced keeping our customers' requirements and convenience in mind. We also offer a host of service offerings like in-flight WiFi on international flights operated by B787-9 Dreamliner and A321neo aircraft. We are also working towards introducing new enhancements

at various customer touchpoints and are invariably committed to providing a world-class flying experience.

According to you, what are the challenges for Vistara as a 'Full-Service Carrier' in India?

India is a large market, and we believe there is an opportunity for FSCs as well as LCCs to succeed and co-exist. FSCs continue to be relevant, even more in the current scenario due to less density of seats in the cabins. Vistara also fills somewhat of a void in the market as a modern, full-service carrier offering the best of Indian hospitality while maintaining world-class standards. In the context of long-haul international operations, especially, FSCs have been successful for decades and continue to be the preferred choice of customers across the globe.

Having said that, we are also cognizant that India is a highly price-sensitive market. While we are observing a growing preference for the premium cabins, especially on metro routes, deploying the same product on certain routes does not yield similar results, and we are addressing this in a few ways. This includes the deployment of all-economy aircraft, which are a fraction of our current fleet, but help us to perform well on

certain domestic routes. The challenge of high costs is another thing - taxation is very high in our country, especially on fuel - and maintenance costs are high too. The rising fuel prices, high taxes, and the falling value of the rupee against the dollar increase the already high cost of operating FSC thereby putting pressure on the airlines' bottom-line. To tackle this, we control our non-customer facing expenses to the maximum and have done well in improving our cost structure to move towards a lean cost structure.

With Tata Group's Acquisition of Air India, how is the development advantageous for Vistara?

It is great to see Air India find a home in the Tata Group, and we believe it is a positive development for the entire aviation industry in India. Vistara continues to operate as an independent airline and compete with Air India, and both our parent companies remain invested in our growth and expansion plans.

Could you please share Vistara's vision and five-year plan?

In the next five years, we plan to further grow our wings, in terms of our fleet and network, while also launching operations to new domestic and international destinations.

The Swiss Museum of Transport Fun and educa-tion for all!

VERKEHRSHAUS – the One-Stop Shop for Edutainment!

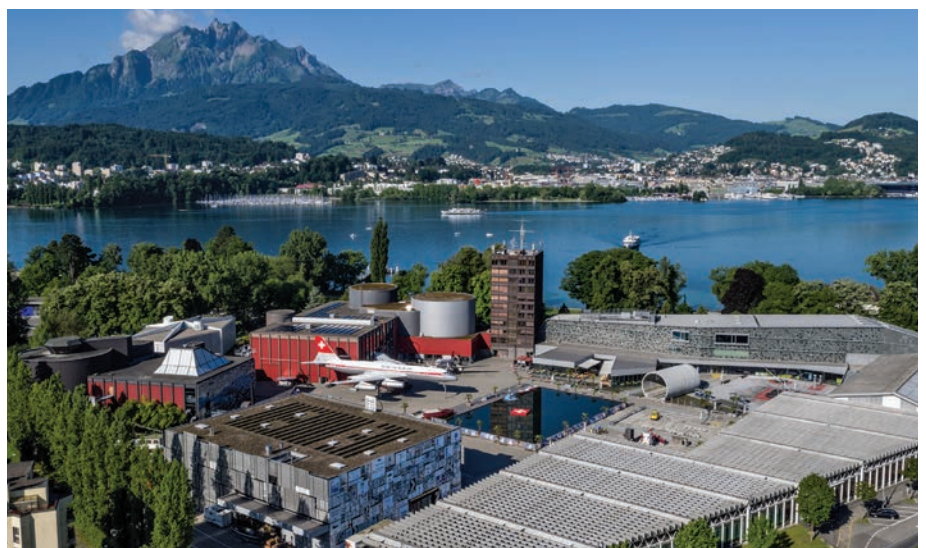
It is a unique destination for leisure and MICE guests in Lucerne which hosts the famous attractions Swiss Museum of Transport, the **Swiss Chocolate Adventure** and **"the edge"**. The unique Swiss Museum of Transport attracts with Simulators, multimedia shows, interactive platforms, VR experiences and more than 3,000 objects around 900,000 visitors a year from around the world. The museum exhibits lead visitors of all ages on a fascinating and edutaining journey from the past to the present further to the future via all modes of mobility - road, rail, water, air and space.

On a ride in the "Swiss Chocolate Adventure" visitors learn about the production of chocolate. After the 25 minutes multisensory ride, they can watch live chocolate making by a Lindt Maitre Chocolatier in the Verkehrshaus shop all year round 365 days for chocolates at factory outlet prices. The latest established attraction is the world's first combination of VR and a climbing experience, Red Bull the edge. Equipped with VR goggles and climbing harnesses, we head for the summit of the Matterhorn! An awe-inspiring fusion of the virtual and the real worlds.

Not enough action? Then watch a movie on

the largest screen of Switzerland or take a trip to the stars in the state-of-the-art Planetarium. In the Media World, you can also take a deep dive into the world of communication in an interactive experience. We'll edutain you!

India is one of its most important foreign markets. Whilst group visitors are time-barred and enjoy only one of the attractions, Indian families are seen spending a whole day and enjoying all the offers of the day pass.



Cathay Pacific

witnessing improved demand for passenger flights from India

Cathay Pacific has been operating in India for seven decades. The market has grown tremendously since their first flight from Kolkata (erstwhile Calcutta) in 1953. India has always been a key market for Cathay Pacific and will continue to be. Anand Yedery, Regional Head, Marketing and Sales - South Asia, Middle East and Africa (SAMEA) Cathay Pacific, shares the latest development at his airline, which will be resuming or increasing passenger flights for several important markets, including the US, Australia, New Zealand, and India.

Prashant Nayak

Cathay Pacific resumed its non-stop flights between Mumbai and Hong Kong on 4 May 2022 and between Delhi and Hong Kong on 6 May 2022. As per the latest development, the airline has announced an increase in the frequency of its flights from Mumbai and Delhi to Hong Kong. Cathay Pacific will be operating flights from/to Mumbai departing every Friday and Sunday and flights from/to Delhi departing every Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday from July onwards.

Furthermore, their customers can connect seamlessly with the airline's interline partners from other Indian cities such as Bangalore, Chennai, and Kolkata to Hong Kong and beyond via Cathay Pacific's Delhi and Mumbai flights. An enhanced schedule will further boost direct connectivity with Hong Kong and popular destinations such as New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Vancouver, Toronto, Melbourne, and Sydney.

"After a pause in our operations due to the pandemic, we were delighted to resume non-stop flights between Mumbai and Delhi to Hong Kong and beyond in May 2022. The resumption of our flights has been positively received by customers and trade partners alike. With the ease in travel restrictions in most parts of the world as well as our hub, Hong Kong, our focus is to cater to and accommodate the resurgent demand for international travel, particularly the Indian diaspora in our country and Hong Kong. We will be deploying the Boeing B777-300 on these routes that will cater to the cargo demand as well as the passenger traffic," says Anand.

The airline constantly monitors and adapts to the latest travel guidelines laid down by the Indian and Hong Kong governments. To provide their customers with a seamless travel experience, they have updated our website with the necessary travel requirements. Additionally, passengers are encouraged



▲ Anand Yedery

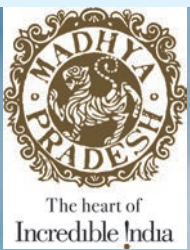
to refer to the government's websites for updated information. Passengers travelling or transiting Hong Kong must adhere to the immigration and quarantine requirements, including presenting a negative COVID-19 test result. Given the travel requirements, they have collaborated with a diagnostic lab partner across key cities in India, including Mumbai and Delhi, for travellers to conduct their RT-PCR tests at a special price.

The health and well-being of their passengers are paramount to the airline. They have introduced Cathay Care, their safety initiative that includes taking enhanced measures across every stage of their customer's journey – so they can take off with confidence. "We introduced contactless check-in and boarding, thorough sanitisation of surfaces using disinfectants recommended by IATA and WHO as well as HEPA filtered cabin air, amongst other measures. Our recently introduced 'Fly Ready' program allows travellers to conveniently upload their COVID-19 test results and other required health documents before their flight. Our

teams verify the documents ahead of time, allowing customers to have a swift airport experience. We have also launched the 'Fly Worry Free' program, providing customers greater flexibility in their bookings, with the option to make unlimited ticket changes, including travel dates and destination, until 31 December 2022," informs Anand.

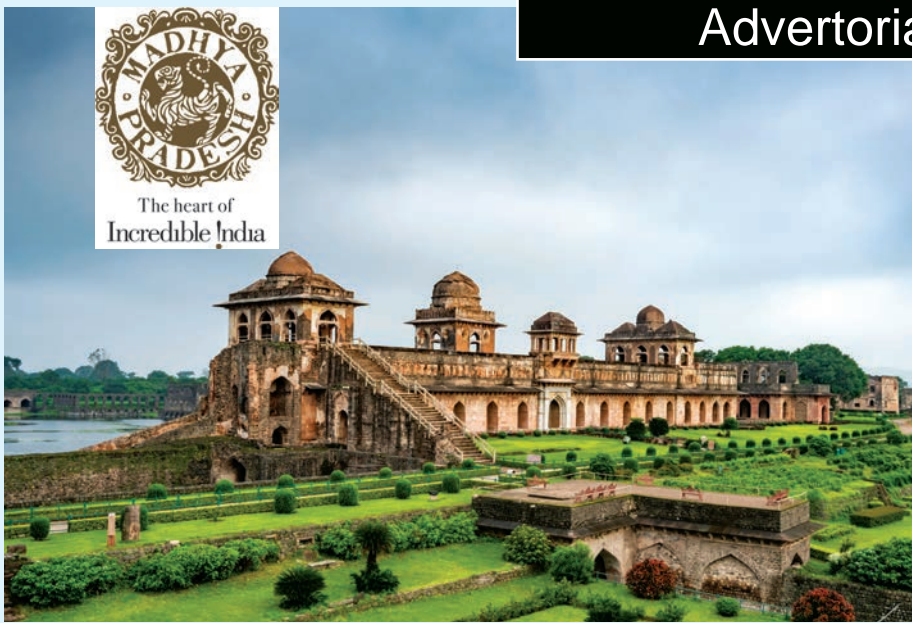
Cathay Pacific recently celebrated an important milestone in 2021 as they marked 75 years of bringing people together as Hong Kong's home airline. Through the pandemic, they have connected people to their loved ones, carried essential medical aid and vaccines, welcomed the arrival of state-of-the-art aircraft, including the latest Airbus A321neo, and launched exciting innovations across both their business functions - passenger and cargo. They continue to invest and offer services that truly allow them to become the world's greatest service brand.

India is one of the fastest-growing economies and the sixth-largest economy globally as per GDP and the third-largest in terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), after Mainland China and the US. Explaining the potential of India market, Anand says, "There is a burgeoning middle class with more spending power and an appetite to travel internationally for leisure, VFR, education, and business. Moreover, the passenger traffic in India is expected to grow at 6.2 per cent per annum by 2040, the fastest among the major economies and well above the global average of 3.9 per cent. There is huge potential for travel in the international long-haul market out of India. We are glad to have resumed international flights from the country, especially before the peak summer season, while catering to the growing demand. Based in Hong Kong, we are well-positioned to act as the carrier of choice for passengers travelling to and from one of the world's fastest-growing markets, India."



Rain, adventure and road trips: Madhya Pradesh is calling!

Explore vibrant destinations of Madhya Pradesh during Monsoon



If you want to escape the hustle and bustle of city life and spend time near glorious waterfalls and hills covered with abundant greenery, the 'heart of incredible India - Madhya Pradesh' has it all for you. Exploring the length and breadth of Madhya Pradesh during the monsoon rains is undoubtedly a lifetime experience when one can witness the true beauty of nature. You will also be able to explore wildlife, spiritual, wellness, adventure and rural tourism in Madhya Pradesh.

There is a wide range of destinations to choose from for a remarkable holiday in Madhya Pradesh during the monsoon season

Pachmarhi- Queen of Satpura

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. 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. Despite the core area of the national parks and wildlife sanctuaries are closed during the monsoon months, tourists can also enjoy the wildlife under the BufferMeinSafar campaign of Madhya Pradesh Tourism.

Attractions

Satpura National Park, Apsara Kund, Pandavas and Jata Shankar Caves, Priyadarshini - Forsyth Point, Mahadeo Temple, Chauragarh Temple, Rajat Pratap, Jamuna Prapat (Bee Falls), Jalawataran, Ramaya Kund (Irene Pool), Handi Khoh and Pachmarhi Catholic Church, etc.

Activities in and around Pachmarhi

Jeep Safari, Horse Riding, ATV Ride, Land Parasailing, Ziplining, Waterfall Trekking and Hiking, Cycling, Camping (including Tree and Gypsy) and exploring Tribal Culture and Arts.

Mandu – City of Joy

Mandu, which is known as the city of joy, is one of the most visited destinations in the state during the monsoon season. A place with countless attractive monuments invites tourists to witness the abandoned palaces of the ancient city, along with the puddles of water and lush slopes all around. You can also experience rural tourism by visiting Malipura village situated near Mandu to enjoy village life.

Attractions

Kakrah Khoh waterfall, Jahaz Mahal, Rani Roopmati Pavilion (a striking view of Narmada river), Hindola Mahal, Baz Bahadur's Palace,

Jami Masjid, Champa Baoli and Hammam, etc.

Activities in and around Mandu

Yoga session, cycling tour, heritage walk, rural excursion and musical concerts by local artists during the Mandu Festival, sound and light show and horse riding in the pristine village of Malipura.

UNESCO World Heritage Site - Khajuraho

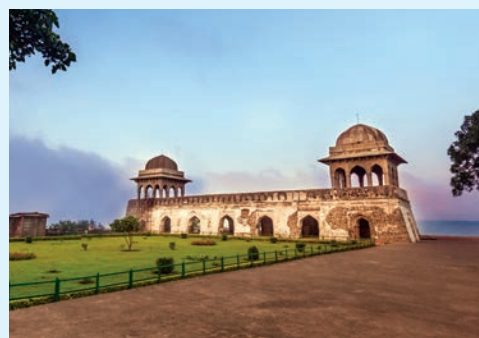
Located in the Chhatarpur district of Madhya Pradesh, the UNESCO site of 'Khajuraho Group of Monuments' is famous for its Nagara-Style architecture and graceful sculptures of nayikas and deities. If you are planning to explore Khajuraho, then do not forget to visit Panna National Park, situated just 32 km away and a mere 30-minute drive from the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Attractions

Adivart Museum, Dhubela Museum, Kandariya Mahadeo Temple, Chaunsath Yogini Temple, Duladeo Temple, Chaturbhuj Temple, Panna National Park, Fort of Ajaygarh, Mahamati Prannathji Mandir, Pandav falls, National Museum, Panna Diamond Mines, etc.

Activities in and around Khajuraho

Camping, village tour, e-bike tour, segway tour, water sports, sound and light show near western group of temple, wellness centers, relinquish yourself at Raneh Falls Canyon, Pandav Waterfall in Panna, Ruins of Mastani Mahal, Beni Sagar Dam



Amarkantak - King of pilgrimages

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 Narmada and the Son (Sone) rivers originate in Amarkantak, the town which has several ancient temples having a rich history and an amazing architectural display.

Attractions

Narmada Udgam, Trimukhi Temple, Keshav Narayan Temple, ancient temples of the Kalachuri, Mai ki Bagiya, Shri Yantra Temple,



Amareshwar Mahadev Temple, Son Udgam Temple, Bhriku Kamandal, Dugdha Dhara Fall, Kapil Dhara waterfall, etc.

Activities in and around Amarkantak

Boat ride, trekking, paragliding, wellness tourism, yoga and other meditational and spiritual practices

Orchha - Ayodhya of Bundelkhand

Nestled across the Betwa River, with ragged mountains and dense forests, Orchha is a beautiful town to experience the lush greenery of Vindhya hills. Lord Rama is worshiped as a ruler or a divine king in Orchha, which is also known as the 'Ayodhya of Bundelkhand'. One can also witness the captivating architecture of carved temples, Orchha fort, striking palaces and other structures in the town. In 2021, the Union Ministry of Tourism nominated Ladpurakhas village of Orchha for the 'Best Tourism Village' category in the United Nations World Tourism Organization Award.

Attractions

Ram Raja Temple, Orchha Fort, Chattris on the Betwa River, Laxminarayan Temple, Phool Bagh, Chaturbhuj Temple, Orchha Nature Reserve, Chandrashekhar Azad Memorial, Rani Mahal.

Activities in and around Orchha

River Rafting in Betwa River, jungle safari at Orchha Wildlife Sanctuary, boating and kayaking in Betwa River, nature trail in Orchha Nature Reserve, light and sound show at Orchha fort, experience wellness tourism.

This year, all roads lead to Jammu and Kashmir



Over six lakh visitors visited Jammu and Kashmir in the first four months of 2022. This year's total number of visitors has surpassed the previous year's total of six lakhs. Several hotels in the valley's various attractions are already fully booked for the next two months. By the end of the year, the tourist boom in Jammu and Kashmir is expected to generate a record number of visitors. In this exclusive interview with TTJ, Dr. G. N. Itoo (IAS), Director, Tourism, Kashmir, discusses the reasons for the resumption of intense tourism in Jammu and Kashmir.

Sonika Bohra

Jammu and Kashmir is among India's most famous tourist destinations, still having very rich tourism potential. Jammu and Kashmir is blessed with natural splendour; the mighty mountains, the serenely blue lakes, the lush green landscapes that don colourful flowers, and the pleasant weather are the main reasons Jammu and Kashmir is among the world-famous travel destinations. Also, the border destinations of Jammu and Kashmir with places like Karnah, Gurez, Uri, Bangus Valley, and Kargil offer diverse tourism attractions. They are famous for their many historical monuments, mountain peaks, scenic beauty, wildlife, local cultures, etc.

Heaven on Earth, Kashmir, has seen record-breaking tourist footfall this summer, the greatest in a decade. The town has never been more packed and people so happy, with hotels and houseboats fully booked and tourists lining up for shikara rides on the



▲ Dr. G.N Itoo

famous Dal Lake. The other most anticipated summer attraction is Asia's largest "Tulip Garden," which features 1.5 million multi-colored tulips in the foothills of the Zabarwan mountains. Also, the regular charming tourist places of Srinagar, Gulmarg, Sonmarg, and Pahalgam are great family-friendly destinations that make one's vacation always memorable.

When COVID brought

tourism to a halt, Jammu and Kashmir Tourism took the lead in 2020, launching a comprehensive campaign across the country. They were among the first to organise roadshows and take part in other marketing activities. As a result, tourism in Jammu and Kashmir resumed in November and December 2020.

"We had a really strong winter season from December 2021 to February 2022, but then the second COVID wave hampered our efforts. We produced a slew of confidence-building videos, including stakeholder vaccinations, sanitation initiatives, and travel trade capacity building. From July to September, we saw a surge in tourism. Despite the challenges, over six lakh tourists visited Jammu and Kashmir in 2021, the majority of whom were high-end visitors. These tourists would normally travel to Europe and other countries, but due to constraints, they chose to visit Kashmir, reflecting Indians' preference for Jammu and Kashmir as one of India's most popular tourist destinations," says Dr. Itoo.

Dr. Itoo further adds, "We have observed fantastic tourist footfalls in the first four months of 2022. Over six lakh visitors have visited Kashmir for their vacations, and the season is still going strong. Our efforts in 2021 set the road for us and helped us get back on track with tourism. I'd say the trials we endured together in 2021 taught us a lot and gave us the strength to confront new obstacles and learn how to live in the new normal. In every segment of travel, India's tourist sector has grabbed the lead, and other industries are



Tulips around Saffron shrubs, Pampore



Gulmarg Church

now looking to tourism for inspiration on how to recover. So, I think it is adept to say that 2022 is the year of tourism.”

Dr. Itoo is glad that the tourism sector has taken the lead and that the whole country is doing very well right now. He is also happy that along with Jammu and Kashmir, other states and UTs have begun to engage in rigorous tourism activities, including participating in major exhibitions such as OTM and SATTE.

With India celebrating 75 years of independence in 2021, the government of Jammu and Kashmir determined that as part of the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, they should adopt a tourist slogan that corresponds to the 75 years of freedom. Working along these lines, Jammu and Kashmir government has identified 75 new destinations with tourism potential for tourists to explore.

“In Kashmir, people usually only talk about Gulmarg, Pahalgam, and Dal Lake, although there are many other areas that have yet to be explored.” There are 38 off-the-beaten-path destinations among the 75, including Doodhpathri, Kokernag, and Verinag. These are lesser-known destinations that provide tourists with once-in-a-lifetime experiences, and spotlighting these new off-beat destinations has assisted us in attracting more visitors. Also, individuals who have already visited Jammu and Kashmir wish to return to explore these off-beat destinations,” says Dr. Itoo.

Another reason for tourists flocking to the state this summer is that Kashmir has a beautiful climate between 17 to 28 degrees Celsius and has been surprisingly cooler than the other Himalayan states in India. After witnessing heatwave conditions for the past few months, and long power cuts, people are escaping to cold places, with Jammu and Kashmir being the most visited. Tourists in the valley are enjoying the lovely weather, away from the searing sun.

Kashmir Tourism is also reaching out to solo woman travellers. In 2021, among some of the Important initiatives that helped revive tourism, there were some events they did exclusively for women to send a message that Kashmir was safe for women travellers. On this aspect, Dr. Itoo clarifies, “Kashmir has zero crime rate against tourists and

moreover against women. There are instances of women having travelled not only to Pahalgam but to faraway places such as Gurez, Drass and other interior areas. They all are safe and have been welcomed. This has instilled a lot of confidence among the women travellers and has sent a positive message. Again, in the off-beat destinations, we have identified exclusive women circuits and are encouraging more women and giving them a chance to enjoy the beauty and hospitality of Jammu and Kashmir. I believe the word has been received clearly because, at this time of year, we see a large number of tourists, many of whom are women.”

Kashmir sprang to prominence in the early 1960s as a result of Bollywood films, and the department is still promoting the destination through film tourism. Jammu and Kashmir has launched a new Film Policy now. There are several incentives for those who want to shoot in Jammu and Kashmir, and many locational advantages exist as well. The 60s,

70s, and 90s connections are again being restored, and many films are still being shot in Jammu and Kashmir. Also, many film units are exploring and searching for places to shoot their films.

Speaking of strategies and plans to attract international tourists, Dr. Itoo says, “We now have a lot of confidence because of domestic



Aharbal Waterfall

tourism. Right now, we are also focusing on international markets. Kashmir has always been a favourite adventure destination for international tourists. At Expo 2020 Dubai, Jammu and Kashmir Tourism was a major Indian player along with the Ministry of Tourism, GOI. We received a lot of queries about Kashmir from traditional tourist markets such as Malaysia, Singapore, Bangladesh, and countries. With so many international airports in our country, connectivity is not an issue. We are planning to have roadshows outside the country in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, and I am sure in the coming years we will have a number of events where we can showcase our products at many places outside the country, reviving inbound tourism to Jammu and Kashmir.”



Nigeen Lake

Saudi Arabia

Mega global tourism aspirations

A country that occupies the major part of the Arabian Peninsula. A country that is host to numerous historical, cultural, and natural wonders. A country that is home to the two most holy cities of Islam. A country that is a major player in fulfilling the energy needs of our global economy. A country ranked third in the world in terms of safety. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had never been prominently featured on the global leisure and family travel map until recently, but that is about to change. Gears have shifted. With an earmarked Investment of 800 billion US\$ into its tourism ecosystem by 2030, the Kingdom is now ready to share its wonders with the global traveller. At SATTE 2022, TTJ spoke with Alhasan Ali Aldabbagh, Chief Markets Officer, Asia Pacific, Saudi Tourism Authority (STA), to understand their vision for the India market.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

The Saudi Tourism Authority was created to develop Saudi Arabia's unique assets and destinations and market these tourism destinations worldwide by developing the Kingdom's offering through programs, packages, and business support. STA is responsible for raising awareness about Saudi Arabia as a world-class, must-visit tourism destination and to showcase the breadth and diversity of the Kingdom's dynamic tourism offering.

Saudi Arabia is home to several UNESCO World heritage sites. Each season of the year offers a different Saudi experience. From climbing mountains 3000 meters above sea level to diving into the magical wonders of the corals and marine life of the Red Sea to crossing the largest palm oasis in the world with more than 2.5 million palm trees, all these exciting experiences, and more await the traveller combined with the unique charm of Saudi generosity and heartfelt hospitality. Visitors can feast on the distinctively delicious traditional food and enjoy mesmerising iconic architectural masterpieces.

As part of the Grand "Vision 2030", the five major Giga Projects of Alula, Red Sea, Neom, Amaala, and Qiddiya are in the pipeline. Each city offers its value proposition and is being developed with a combined outlay of 800 billion US dollars, which has been earmarked for investment in

the tourism ecosystem, including the creation of infrastructure. With perhaps little or no competition from any other country or destination in the world in terms of the sheer size of its investment in tourism, Saudi Arabia has its eyes set on being among the top five destinations of the world by 2030.

SATTE is a major platform for promoting tourism in South Asia, and through its debut participation, the Saudi Tourism Authority has had the opportunity to highlight Saudi's authentic Arabian culture, pristine nature, diverse landscapes, and a rapidly expanding portfolio of offerings.

"Saudi has embarked on an ambitious programme to drive inbound visitation from India, inspiring local trade partners and the traveller to explore the undiscovered beauty and wonder of the country. As we continue to open up to the world, India is an incredibly important key source market for Saudi and presents a wealth of possibility for trade partners, to grow their business and to ultimately, create a new exciting destination for Indian traveller," said Alhasan.

India is considered among the top source markets for Saudi Arabia. The endeavor is to study the needs, requirements, and travel behavior of the Indian traveller and design and offer tourism products that best suit their sensibilities and expectations. Food, shopping, and entertainment are key to any Indian vacation experience and all



▲ Alhasan Ali Aldabbagh

these aspects are being looked into in great detail and creating "Curated Customer Journeys" for the Indian traveller.

Plans are afoot to create excitement of doing events that will be very India market-focused, collaborating with Bollywood stars, and also bringing cricket matches to Saudi Arabia. Given



Camping at AIUla

India's great love for the game, there is now an official cricket association in Saudi Arabia, which perhaps is a step in the right direction to bring the country closer through cricket bonding.

The tourist visa process for travel to Saudi is being made simpler, transparent, seamless, and cost-effective for the Indian traveller. The aim is to provide simpler accessibility and create the right environment to facilitate large inbound tourist traffic and volumes from India to Saudi Arabia. A large part of the Saudi population is now inoculated against COVID-19, as it is a mandate for its citizens to be inoculated.

As Saudi opens up to global tourism, it now welcomes cultural diversity, and women travellers are safe and greatly welcome. Abaya is no longer mandatory in Saudi, while consumption of alcohol is still forbidden even by foreign tourists without exception in the Kingdom. The holy city of Medina is now open to non-Muslims. For the devout Muslim visiting Mecca and Medina on Umrah, the Umrah Plus package is now being promoted. It is a great way to visit the twin holy cities and experience other cities and parts of the Kingdom.

"Besides being the biggest pavilion at SATTE

2022, that showed commitment to the India market, and to change the perception of the Indian travel industry that Saudi means business and has the singular focus to be a

Saudi is reaching out to all trade partners in India to create plans and initiate partnerships and collaborations with stakeholders in Saudi, which may be hotels, attractions, service providers, and DMCs, to facilitate a fast flow of inbound traffic into Saudi Arabia. There is a strong focus on educating the trade and front-liners about the destination and organising familiarisation trips to experience the destination first hand.

India is a very strong focus market for Saudi and besides making investments in conventional and online marketing and advertising campaigns to create awareness and brand equity, there is a focus on working closely with Bollywood and perhaps

having Bollywood movie sequences filmed in Saudi Arabia. Bollywood has a great fan following in the Kingdom.

To conclude, Alhasan reiterates, "Anyone who is interested in doing business with Saudi within the tourism sector is more than welcome to reach out to us. We welcome them with open arms and we want to work together with them going forward."



Hegra AIUla

game-changer and it is not holding back on focus, efforts, and investments in positioning Saudi as a top global travel destination," said Alhasan.

Many MoUs were signed at SATTE by STA with Indian travel trade associations, OTAs, and major travel industry players such as TAAI, TAFI, OTOAI, SKAL, TBO, Ease My Trip, Yatra, Alhind Tours and Travels, Sheeraz Tours, La Vacanza Travel, Travel Tours/FCM Travels, TravClan, Atlas Travels and Fly Creative to name a few. The whole exercise aims to instill a sense of mutual confidence, understanding, knowledge transfer, and commitment to propel and sustain future growth together.

Saudi Arabia's "Vision 2030", the five major Giga Projects

AIUla is a living museum of preserved tombs, sandstone outcrops, and monuments. This unique destination is transforming into a global tourist experience under the 2030 vision. The region encompasses the Nabataean city of Hegra, Saudi Arabia's first UNESCO World Heritage Site; and the ancient North Arabian Dadanite and Lihyanite Kingdoms.

The Red Sea Project is a tourism and hospitality project spread over 28,000 km² of pristine lands and waters and includes a vast archipelago of more than 90 islands and will set new standards in regenerative tourism and sustainable development, creating unique travel experiences and unforgettable memories. The destination also features mountain canyons, dormant volcanoes, and ancient cultural heritage sites. The Red Sea Project will include hotels, residential properties, leisure facilities, and entertainment ventures.

Neom is conceptualised to embody the future of innovation in business, liveability, and sustainability. Built on the Red Sea in northwest Saudi Arabia, Neom is conceptualised as a living laboratory – a place where entrepreneurship and innovation will chart the course for a new future. It will be a destination for people who dream big and want to be part of building a new model for sustainable and prosperous living. NEOM is not just a place - it's a mindset. It's being designed, constructed, and independently administered in a way that is free from outdated economic and environmental infrastructure that constrains other

countries across the world.

Amaala located along Saudi Arabia's north-western coast, is a global wellness ultra-luxury destination that focuses on transformative personal journeys inspired by wellness, arts, culture, and purity of the Red Sea. The 4,155 km² year-round destination will offer 3,000 hotel rooms across some 25 hotels and private residential villas, apartments, and estate homes, alongside high-end retail establishments, fine dining, and wellness and recreational facilities.

Qiddiya is set to become the capital of entertainment, sports, and arts. It will be a disruptive destination that offers innovative, immersive, and unparalleled experiences, all integrated on a scale never been seen before. Qiddiya's portfolio is based on five thematic cornerstones: Parks & Attractions, Sports & Wellness, Motion & Mobility, Arts & Culture, and Nature & Environment.



Jebel Fihrayn



Art hidden in the mountains

7 MOST BEAUTIFUL HOTELS TO STAY IN LAPLAND



Embracing the silence, observing pristine nature, immersing in the arctic night, and dancing Aurora Borealis on a clear-sky day – Finland is one of Europe’s last great wildernesses, with over 75 per cent of its area covered in forests and the world’s cleanest air. Irrespective of the destination and the season, the promise remains the same: unforgettable moments that will stay forever. Visit Finland offers a wide range of spectacular accommodations with an unobstructed view of nature and the magical Northern lights and the Midnight Sun.

Team TTJ

Finland – The happiest place in the world

Here are some of the most beautiful accommodations in the heart of nature without any noise or light pollution in the land of happiness!

Magical Pond, Ruka-Kuusamo

Magical Pond is a collection of luxurious and sustainable igloos in Lapland with pure Scandinavian decor and a breath-taking view of the wilderness. If lucky, travelers will be able to spot the splendour of the Milky Way illuminated by the colours of the Northern Lights. Magical Pond has not only been awarded the Sustainable Travel Finland label but also the Green Key certificate, as it is highly dedicated to social, cultural, environmental, and economic responsibility, as the electricity is obtained from hydropower. Situated only 8 km from the Ruka Ski Resort, it is also a highlight for ski fans.



Arctic Skylight Lodge, Ylläs

Nestled in the hollow of a river valley in Pallas-Ylläs National Park, the Arctic Skylight Lodge unfolds with ten glass cabins, a lodge, and a restaurant. Whether you enjoy the high-class sauna that is located down by the Kukaslompola lake or the great variety of different activities in Äkäslompola, the Arctic Skylight Lounge is a place to reconnect with nature and oneself. And because well-being and

nature are intimately linked, a glass-enclosed sauna immersing itself in nature offers a moment of absolute relaxation to experience the power of “löyly”, which is not only the name for the evaporating hot



steam that rises from ‘kiuas’ stoves after the water has been carefully poured on top of them, but also refers to the feeling of the heat as it envelopes you. The adjacent outdoor jacuzzi down by the river offers the perfect setting to enjoy the wonders of Lappish nature.



Aurora Queen Resort, Ivalo

Aurora Queen Resort comprises 14 beautiful glass igloos with glass ceilings and panorama windows for a full-immersion view of the surrounding nature and northern lights without leaving the comfort of the bed. No gimmicks – just pure nature.

Not only is the igloo designed to maximize the view of the night sky, but all the details are carefully designed for comfort and indulgence. Premium-quality materials are used on every surface for a flawless stay. All igloos are fully equipped with their bathrooms and other comforts. The resort uses geothermal heating and solid wood materials. The resort can be reached within 45 minutes from Ivalo Airport. The hotel also offers activities such as a visit to the nearby reindeer farm, aurora hunting on snowshoes, frozen ring ice karting, and husky safaris.

Arctic TreeHouse Hotel, Rovaniemi

Like nests nestled among fire trees, the 32 suites and 5 chalets of the Arctic TreeHouse Hotel offer an experience like no other. Providing a panoramic view of the surroundings with their huge bay windows, they are the perfect haunts to admire the Lappish Forest in the Arctic Circle. Outside, nature is a real playground: ice-water fishing, dog sledging or reindeer rides, snowshoeing, northern lights hunt, and meeting Santa Claus.

The Arctic TreeHouse Hotel received several international awards. Using sustainable materials such as Finnish pine and green roofs suitable for rainwater management, it has been granted the Green Key eco-label and is the first labelled company in Rovaniemi that received the

Sustainable Travel Finland label.

Apukka Resort Lappish Kamit suite, Rovaniemi

Step inside the marvellous tales of Northland in Rovaniemi. As the seasons change, the resort evolves and offers wilderness experiences like no other. The



history of Apukka Resort revolves around the North and all the stories it carries. The idea is to highlight the country's heritage and the rich stories of the past told around a campfire. Many old hand-built log homes have found new life on the Apukka premises. Here, these architectural masterpieces, all telling their own stories from the pages of history, will live on for decades.

The Lappish Kammi Suites are authentic, ecological, and most importantly, filled with stories from the past. Equipped with a kitchenette and comfortable twin bed under a sky view window, the Lappish Kammi Suites provide a perfect setting for the unfolding of your own unforgettable story.

Arctic Fox Igloos, Ranua

In southern Finnish Lapland, Arctic Fox Igloos unveils glass igloos with an impressive view of nearby Lake Ranuanjärvi. Arctic Fox Igloos is located in the heart of nature on the peaceful shores of the lake. The Igloos have been built in such a manner that each offers an unobstructed view across the open lake to the far-reaching northern horizons. On the



edge of the wilderness, outdoor activities abound all year long, including swimming, hiking, and snowmobiling. The Arctic Fox Igloos teams also offer husky- and reindeer safaris.

Near the igloos, not far from the town of Ranua, the Arctic Wildlife Park can be found, where travelers can see authentic Arctic foxes, the only polar bears in Finland, and more than 50 other Arctic animals. The animals live in huge enclosures amidst the northern forests in their natural environment.

Northern Lights Village, Levi

The Aurora Cabins at the Northern Lights Village are a magical way to experience the wintry star-filled sky and the Northern lights while laying comfortably in a warm bed. The laser-heated glass roof opens up into the northern sky, directly above the bed. At the stroke of a button, all the snow will be removed from the glass roof, allowing visitors the greatest view of the sky. The private fireplace in each suite gives an impression of extreme comfort and coziness.

With the activities and packages offered by the village, it is possible to live all the Finnish experiences even in a short stay:



skiing, snowshoeing, husky rides, reindeer safaris, northern lights photography, or visiting the farms of the resort. Everything is done to live a fantastic moment in a Finnish way.

If you are planning a trip to Finland, it is important to know the current requirements to enter this magical and stunning country.

- Person may be granted entry into Finland from any country if they present a certificate of having received complete and valid COVID-19 vaccination series at least 7 days prior to entry. COVISHIELD™, COVAXIN®, COVOVAX™ are approved by Finland.
- A certificate of a full series of vaccinations is valid for 9 months (270 days). After this, a booster shot is required. After the booster shot, the certificate is valid until further notice. The requirements apply to persons born in 2006 or earlier.
- In case of travelling with minors, Persons who meet the requirements above may enter Finland accompanied by minor children. Children born 2007 or later do not have to take part in any health security measures.



Exploring the Wonders of KwaZulu-Natal



In 1897, Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama, on his voyage to discover a sea route to India came across a large bay on the southeastern coast of Africa on Christmas Eve. He named it “Natal”, the Portuguese word for Christmas. The area today is the province of KwaZulu-Natal and is home to the important port city of Durban. The Indian traveller has always had South Africa in their cross-hair thanks to Bollywood, Miss Universe Pageants, and active campaigning by South African Tourism. Johannesburg, Cape Town, Sun City, Kruger, and Garden Route have always been a staple on group itineraries and individual travel plans, but the search for newer experiences is always on and South Africa has so much more to offer as I discovered on my recent trip to KwaZulu-Natal.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

After a connecting flight from India via Dubai and onwards on a hopping flight via Johannesburg to Durban on Emirates, our group of travel writers landed at King Shaka International Airport in the afternoon. The skies were cobalt blue with scattered cotton candy clouds, and the surrounding lush green. The sun shone brightly as these were the South African winters, and the tropic of Capricorn runs right through its heart.

The immigration was a breeze as my vaccination certificate reflected my double vaccinated status and the body temperature check set off no alarms. We all collected our luggage and were gleefully greeted by our hosts, Fundi, and our driver cum escort for the trip, Nthato, who promptly escorted us to our comfortable Toyota Quantum Van which had ample space to accommodate eight guests, and our luggage too.

After a picturesque 30-minute drive across the South African countryside with its lush green sugarcane plantations, we arrived at our resort, the “Capital Zimbali”. A luxury oceanfront resort with a private beach located within a gated community of luxury villas and well-manicured tropical gardens. The resort spelled unobtrusive class and elegance to have a calming effect on the vacationing guests. We had about two hours to settle in and be in the lobby for our dinner engagement at the Grimaldi’s. Located at the Pearl-Umhlanga, Grimaldi’s offers casual dining with an Italian twist — the oysters, prawns, calamari, and crayfish were super fresh. The steak was juicy, and the Chef recommended, “Grimaldi’s Maiale,” was delightful, and rightly polished off with



Capital Zimbali

my first bottle of authentic South African Carling Black Label Champions Beer. It was truly a delightful gastronomic welcome. We went to bed early as the day next was filled with an exciting, eventful, and adventurous agenda with shark cage diving.

A 3 am wake-up call shook me out from my slumber and by 4 am we were on the road heading for our shark cage diving experience. A two-hour drive brought us to the shores of the Aliwal Shoal, an area renowned for its scuba diving and shark cage diving experience. Our host-instructor and guide, John Miller, who operates the Shark Cage diving experience and is an experienced diver with over three decades of experience and an expert on shark behavior gave us a rundown on the “do’s and don’ts” and what to expect. He assured us that it was perfectly safe for us as long as we followed what he told us, nevertheless we all did sign an indemnity waiver.



All set for Shark Cage Diving

© Gurjit Singh Ahuja

not to be missed. Perhaps you should plan a vacation to the Aliwal Shoal where you can swim with the sharks!

Dried and changed, followed by a few cups of hot chocolate, we were on our way to the next adventure at the Oribi Gorge, located within two hours of driving distance from Durban. The “Wild Gorge Swing” at Oribi Gorge offers you a guaranteed blow you over-the-edge excitement for

Our Zodiac Boat with its twin outboard engines and a large stainless-steel cage with its heavy-duty floats was towed to the shore, and we all helped the crew launch it into the water and posed for our memorable group photo. We all wore life jackets and sat on the sides of the inflatable zodiac, holding on to the safety ropes with our feet firm in the foot-straps anchored to the floorboard.

As John powered the engines, we all lunged forward and splash and bang we rose and fell, swell after swell, a roller coaster at sea, as our boat was making it past the surf line, the sea was a little choppy due to the winds and although I had skipped my breakfast my stomach and guts were soon churning as we headed about 5 km into the sea towards the Aliwal Shoal. The churning took its toll, and we took turns at our puke marathon.

Once at the rightful spot, we could see the infamous dorsal fins cutting through the water and then John cut off the engines. His crew unstrapped and launched the shark cage into the sea. The water was not cold, perhaps between 23 and 25 degrees Celsius. Sardines were flung around our boat and soon it was party time, as blacktip sharks, bull sharks, and tiger sharks joined in the banquet.

The cage offers a complete sanctuary for the novice divers, with no special gear or breathing equipment is needed, just

the absolute thrill seekers who are looking for the adrenaline rush of a lifetime. Thrill-seekers hurl themselves off the edge of Lehr’s Waterfall in perhaps the most adrenaline-inducing jump of their lifetime! Of course, you are all strapped up, and safe and yes, they winch you all the way up after your jump. Oribi Gorge Swing is rated as the world’s highest gorge swing, you step or drive off the edge of a waterfall into the abyss of the gorge plummeting down about the length of a 55-storey building, no wonder they say “Fear Is Temporary, Regret is Forever”. The free-fall can be described as bone-chilling and thrilling, and definitely not for the faint-hearted or for people with medical conditions, as it will have you accelerating up to the astounding speed of 120 km per hour in 2.5 seconds. Other activities by Wild 5 Adventures in a setting of unparalleled natural beauty include a 110m abseil, 85-meter suspension bridge over the gorge offering beautiful views of the falls, quad biking, paintball, and guided trails for hiking and birding. A great place for corporate team-building activities.



Adrenaline rush at the Oribi Gorge



The sheer thrill of shark cage diving!

diving or swimming goggles over your eyes, you just breathe in and submerge for a few seconds below the surface to see the sleek and slender sharks swimming all around you, then pop out to the surface to breathe and submerge again. John was in the water outside the cage with the sharks, filming the experience. What a sight to behold. This was not an aquarium it was the sharks, the sea, and us! Soon we headed back to shore, bubbling with excitement, bodies aching a little, but now better tuned to the swells of the sea. Definitely an experience



© Gurjit Singh Ahuja

Boat Cruise St. Lucia Estuary



Hot Chocolate with Amarula, morning Game Drive at Thanda

© Gurjit Singh Ahuja

No visit to South Africa is complete without a visit to the African Bush and the wilderness Safari experience, so in our quest to see the Big 5 of Africa we headed out north to the Thanda Private Game Reserve, en route we made a diversionary pit-stop at St. Lucia. The Greater St. Lucia Wetland Park was declared South Africa's first Natural World Heritage Site in 1999 by UNESCO and is South Africa's third-largest park. Lake St.



Thanda Tented Camp nestled in the wilderness

Lucia is home to more than 800 hippos, 1200 Nile crocodiles, and an abundance of bird life. This is also the most extensive estuarine system in Africa.

We took a cruise on the Estuary and our very well-informed and seasoned skipper, Derrick Walsh, made it a memorable one with a great sighting of frolicking Hippo Pods. After my initiation into the drinking of South African Dry Ciders on our cruise boat, we carried onwards towards the Thanda Game Reserve to arrive just in time for lunch.

Nestled in the heart of Zulu Nation, Thanda is a 14,000-hectare fenced private game reserve offering its guests, the Big-5 game viewing opportunity from the comforts of its luxurious tented and lodge accommodation within the park. Our group was booked at the luxurious Thanda Tented camp with three-course meals, all drinks, a hot breakfast made to order, and private game drives. My



© Gurjit Singh Ahuja

A sneering Cheetah at Thanda

accommodation boasted of a luxury tent, a private sun deck, an outdoor shower, ensuite Victorian bathtub, flushable toilets, and plush beds under the canvas and beneath the starlit African sky with hooved wildlife moving around us. We experienced four game drives with our seasoned driver "Peace" and our tracker "Zeblon" enjoying our daily morning hot chocolate with Amarula and evening sun-downers in the wilderness. Thanks to their tracking and driving abilities, we had some amazing off-roading experiences and great Rhino, Buffalo, Elephant, Lion, and Cheetah sightings. The Leopard continued to elude us till our last day at Thanda. Even during our hectic schedule at Thanda, I was able to squeeze a massage session at the spa. The Thanda Game Lodge is also a member of the Leading Hotels of the World.

Bidding goodbye to Thanda, we headed back to Durban. Boasting one of the largest population of Indian origin outside India. Phoenix settlement a suburban location outside Durban and was home to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. It was during his days at the Phoenix settlement that his initiation to fight for social

justice, human rights, and equality began, later giving rise to his practice of Satyagraha, which eventually transformed him from a man to a Mahatma, during India's freedom struggle. Today, the Inanda heritage route takes you on a journey to rediscover the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, Rev. John Dubey and Nelson Mandela and their struggle and triumphs. The KwaZulu-Natal Freedom Route Bus service takes you on a tour of all these important landmarks of Indo-African history and struggles for freedom.

Durban did not feel expensive. Daily needs, experiential hotels, and attractions were all reasonably priced, almost identical to what we would pay for them in either



Freedom Route Bus – following in the footsteps of great leaders

Delhi or Mumbai, and in some instances even cheaper. The food is great, the beer is delightful and the wines are divine. Indian travellers will not be short-changed for dining options as plenty of vegetarian or non-vegetarian options are available here. English is spoken and well understood by a large population, shopping is cheap, the malls are modern, and great hotels and convention centers host large events with some great bargains to be had at the Victoria Market on woodwork, and beaded jewellery, handicrafts, and garments. Now as the world starts to travel again, Durban sure is all geared up and a strong contender to welcome you to the wonders of KwaZulu-Natal.

Africa's Travel Indaba 2022

Ushering in 'Positivity'

The Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre in Durban was abuzz with activity from May 2 - 5, 2022. Travel industry partners converged to prove that Africa was once again ready for business, showcasing the continent's best tourism products, services, and experiences. Nineteen African nations, including South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Botswana were at the Indaba which attracted 3700 delegates and facilitated 14,000 successful business meetings.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

Hosted after a hiatus of almost three years, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Africa's Travel Indaba 2022 was inaugurated on May 3, 2022, by Lindiwe Sisulu, Minister of Tourism - Republic of South Africa, who called for greater collaboration among African countries to advance tourism on the continent.

Indaba was welcomed by the continent's tourism sector as well as the host city of Durban, located in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) as hundreds of buyers and exhibitors from 55 countries descended upon the city. The resilient city of Durban bounced back and geared itself at breakneck speed for hosting the Indaba after the province had experienced some of the heaviest rainfall and flooding in recent years.

Amos Fish Mahlalela, Deputy Minister of Tourism, Republic of South Africa, said that the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on the tourism sector in South Africa, affecting almost 5,00,000 jobs. Businesses were hit and many activities had to be halted. However, many learnings emerged, primarily, a re-look at maintaining a healthy business mix between domestic and international markets and also seeing the resilience of the industry to hold on and bounce back regardless of the circumstances. "Today we are proud to be witness to Africa's Travel Indaba 2022 and seeing the enthusiasm of the exhibitors and delegates at the Indaba is a testament to the industry's resilience."

According to Themba Khumalo, the acting CEO of South African Tourism, owning Africa's narrative meant that Africans could transform the continent's story from one of people looking for succour to one that showed its present-day entrepreneurial spirit. He said, "We are a continent full of people with initiative. We have the energy and passion to revive an entire



▲ Amos Fish Mahlalela, Deputy Minister of Tourism, Republic of South Africa_ Neliswa Nkani, South African Tourism's Hub Head for the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia

industry, such as tourism, with our own hands. Our story says to the world that we are ready to welcome them and we are open for business."

Amanda Kotze-Nhlapo, the Chief Convention Bureau Officer for South African Tourism, stated that the 2022 Travel Indaba attracted 655 exhibitors and 955 buyers from various countries. She went on to say that the sheer magnitude of Africa's Travel Indaba, albeit lower than in 2019, "shows the resilience of our sector and our people, although the numbers were lower than the pre-COVID-19 times, each buyer still had 10 meetings a day on average."

Winile Mntungwa, Durban's Deputy Head of

Tourism reported that hotel occupancy rates in Durban exceeded 85 per cent, netted R29 million in direct spending, and expects a contribution of R72.5 million to the city's GDP. She said the show instilled confidence in the city of Durban as a great destination and fantastic host.

"Being physically there in a destination gives you a true picture and accurate assessment of the state of readiness to take on tourists again after the triple pandemics- July unrest, COVID-19 and recent floods," she further added, "All doubts about the city's preparedness to yet again offer its exciting tourism products have been removed through hosting this travel extravaganza."

All the boxes were checked for Neliswa Nkani, South African Tourism's Hub Head for the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia, who led a delegation of Indian tour operators and travel journalists to Africa's Travel Indaba 2022. Indian Industry partners could see and experience what South Africa and KwaZulu-Natal held in their embrace, from the perspective of the Indian traveller of today.

Experiences, adventure, culture, Indian food preferences, affordability, quality, and value for money that South Africa offered were all experienced first-hand and will reinforce efforts by the South African Tourism industry to offer a competitive South African Travel product to the Indian traveller.





THIS AUGUST, SAY KIA ORA TO LIFE'S ADVENTURES IN NEW ZEALAND

When we think of countries to experience adventure sports, New Zealand is sure to top the list. And with New Zealand re-opening its borders to fully vaccinated Indians this August, don't hold back and start planning your trip right away. Get ready to experience an adrenaline rush in your body like never before.

Team TTJ

In early May 2022, the New Zealand government announced further relaxations in border restrictions, allowing all fully vaccinated international travellers, including India, to travel to Aotearoa (the current Māori language name for New Zealand) from August 1, 2022. Thus, fully vaccinated Indian visitors will be able to travel to New Zealand without self-isolation on the provision of a negative pre-departure test. Negative Rapid

Antigen Tests [RAT] will be required on arrival and on day 5/6.

So, if you have been dreaming of challenging yourself to try something different, why not try an adventure sport? From jet boating to ziplining, you name it, New Zealand has it. Thinking about whether you should try bungy jumping from Auckland Harbour Bridge or skydiving in Queenstown or enjoy a canopy ride in the geothermal city of

Rotorua? Not sure which places to add to your itinerary? Fret not, sit back and explore this list to add to your own trip that promises thrills and excitement and will give you memories of a lifetime.

Choose from classic adventure spots below (or do them all!)

Skydive Franz Josef Glacier

New Zealand's highest skydive at 20,000ft. Skydive Franz is New Zealand's premier tandem skydiving experience amidst mountains, glaciers, lakes, rivers, and ocean views. One can find multiple height options from 9,000ft to 20,000ft. Featured on Red Bull's Most Insane Skydives. Skydive Franz has New Zealand's highest mountain Aoraki/Mount Cook and the biggest glaciers Fox and Franz Josef Glaciers immediately on the right and the wide blue ocean on the left. They are one of only a few government safety-approved skydive operators and are dedicated to the highest level of health and safety practices.



Wildwire Wanaka - Twin Falls Canyon

Get wet, get vertical, and get up close and personal in Twin Falls Canyon. Canyon and abseil down Twin Falls, two parallel waterfalls synonymous with the stunning Wildwire environment. It is an offering for the adrenaline seekers, those who feel a thrill from multiple abseils, including dropping over steep cliffs and one down a 60m waterfall. It pushes people outside of their comfort zone in a safe environment without the need to be an experienced rock climber or mountaineer. Fly to the top in a Helicopter then get up close and personal with the waterfall by abseiling/rappelling either the upper section or the entire cascade top to bottom of Twin Falls canyon. Learn abseil skills before abseiling up to 20 waterfalls, ranging from 5 to 60m! No previous abseiling or climbing experience is required, but good fitness is. Bring your sense of adventure and get ready for some fun!

Matangi Station MTB Park

On the outskirts of Alexandra, Matangi Station MTB Park is New Zealand's newest mountain bike park. With a network of trails developed in partnership with the local mountain bike community, this will open up some of the best raw, rocky and challenging trails to be found in NZ. The locals always knew that they had something special in their backyard – now the rest of the world will be able to enjoy it too. Recognizing the epic landscape and trail options, the Crankworx Summer Series event kicks off in November with the super DH at Matangi. This will pit some of the best MTB riders in the world against some of the best local riders!

Kaitiaki Adventures – Rafting

Raft the world's highest commercially raftable waterfall with Kaitiaki, New Zealand's first Qualmark Gold-rated



rafting company. A NZ must-do. Embark on the ultimate Rotorua Adventure. Navigate a wildly beautiful landscape while learning more about Maori Culture. Hit the white water, admire the lush green forests and enjoy the banter and commentary from highly

experienced kiwi guides. Raft the Kaituna River, home to the world's highest commercially raftable waterfall – an awesome 7m high! The Kaituna also has 14 awesome rapids and native bush-clad canyons. Rafting the Kaituna is 3 hours of adrenaline-pumping goodness you'll never forget.

Choose from these new experiences

Ziptrek Ecotours - Kereru Interactive Tour

Experience a world first with the newest tour, Kereru Interactive – an integration of digital storytelling in the real world. This new tour features an exciting 21m drop after the two ziplines, however, there is the option to return via a small exit zipline, for those that are apprehensive flyers. The educational component is told by your animated tour guide “Kerry the Kereru” voiced by local author and singer Craig Smith which provides a unique insight into the conservation story of Zealandia.

Highlands Motorsport and Tourism Park - Taycan Takeoff

The Highlands Taycan Takeoff is definitely not for the faint-hearted, you will be left buzzing! Experience electrified speed with the Taycan Takeoff, the first all-electric Porsche. The fastest car you can experience. No other car in the Highlands fleet will take you from 0 to 100 in 2.4 seconds. Dual electric producing 1050Nm of Torque and 750 HP. Experience individually or as a group of up to three.



Desaru Coast Malaysia offers ₹ 12 million in incentives to woo India market

Desaru Coast is a premium integrated destination resort located on the south-eastern coast of Johor, Malaysia. Located just a two-hour drive from Singapore and four hours from Kuala Lumpur by the North-South Expressway, travellers can even fly into Johor Bahru or hop on to a soon-to-be-launched ferry service from Singapore. On the sidelines of SATTE 2022, TTJ met with Roslina Arbak, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Desaru Coast, to learn more about the destination and their aspirations for the India market.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

An initiative of Malaysia's Sovereign Wealth Fund and the State of Johor, Desaru Coast is positioned as a Premium Integrated Destination Resort. Desaru Coast is one of Malaysia's most recent and anticipated tourism developments spread over 4000 acres and 17 km of coastline that offers a unique bouquet of globally renowned resorts, villas, conference center, championship golf courses, riverside dining haven, and a fun-filled adventure waterpark.

Roslina explains "Desaru Coast offers an idyllic setting for events, corporate retreats, destination weddings, and family getaways, with its portfolio of internationally renowned 5-star hotels and resorts, golf course, water park, conferencing, dining and shopping venues."

Elaborating further, Roslina says, "Although the destination was officially launched in 2019, all efforts to aggressively promote the destination in the India market were cut short due to the COVID pandemic and travel restrictions thereof, but we are now back to remind and refresh the India market that we are there and since 2019. Collectively, the destination today holds an inventory of close to 800 rooms that can accommodate 2300 delegates spread over four properties, Asia's first One&Only Desaru Coast, Anantara Desaru Coast Resort and Villas, The Westin Desaru Coast Resort, and Hard Rock Hotel Desaru Coast."

Sharing the roadmap for the future Roslina explains, "India is an important source market for Desaru Coast and we have our focus set on



▲ Roslina Arbak

three major segments, FIT, MICE and weddings and to enable a top of the mind recall and value proposition, we have announced an incentive outlay of ₹12 million to Indian operators targeting the above three segments."

Desaru Coast is introducing its popular luxury stay packages at affordable prices starting at approximately ₹6,600 per person. Packages include hotel stays and selected Desaru Coast experiences as a special value-add. Further to that, guests can purchase Adventure Waterpark

tickets, the largest water park in Asia, with every room purchased at the destination. The total incentive offered to the leisure market amounts to ₹5 million.

Under its signature MICE Reinvented, the destination will be offering incentives valued up to ₹2.1 million for events and groups. For every group booking, Desaru Coast is offering an incentive of ₹1100 per person for the Gala Dinner. Additionally, the destination will provide complimentary pocket show activities and cultural shows for the gala dinner.

To attract Indian weddings, an ₹4.4 million incentive will be presented to the first five weddings booked at the destination, equating to about ₹8,80,000 per wedding. Incentives can be redeemed in areas of connectivity, themed receptions, and wedding photography packages, among others.

Avid golfers can tee off to breathtaking backdrops of rolling valleys or the glittering South China Sea at The Els Club Desaru Coast, with its two world-class courses designed by golfing greats Ernie Els and Vijay Singh. The Ocean Course consists of 27-holes designed by Ernie Els, and boasts The Three Nines - The Ridge, The Coast, and The Lakes, and a 45,000 sq. ft clubhouse. Valley Course and Clubhouse designed by Ernie Els and Vijay Singh comprises 18-holes laid out across 41 hectares with a 25,000 sq. ft clubhouse and state-of-the-art golf shop.

The region's largest waterpark is the Adventure Waterpark Desaru Coast offers a fun-filled family experience. Adventure Waterpark is home to the first-ever water coaster in the region and one of the biggest wave pools in the world! The waterpark features more than 20 wet and dry rides, slides, and attractions.

The Desaru Coast Conference Centre is a fully equipped multipurpose venue that caters to corporate functions, meetings, exhibitions, and entertainment events. It can host up to 1,000 guests complimented with meeting rooms, VIP lounges, and pre-function rooms.

Roslina concludes, "Currently we are only at phase one of our development plans, targeting only half our land assets, and talks are already underway with many other potential and like-minded stakeholders for further developments to enhance the value proposition of Desaru Coast."



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Resorts World Cruises

All set for its inaugural voyage



Resorts World Cruises will make its debut in Singapore on June 15, 2022, with the operation of its luxurious 3,352 passengers and 150,695 gross ton cruise liner, Genting Dream.

With the inception of Resorts World Cruises, the brand aims to position itself as the leading cruise line in the region for Asian sourced markets, providing the highest standards in safety and precautionary measures.

Team TTJ

Resorts World Cruises, a brand extension of “Resorts World”, is a global brand with over 46 properties across eight countries and four continents.

Resorts World properties attract over 80 million visitors a year and have over 30,000 employees.

Homeported in Singapore, the Genting Dream will provide vacationers with a personalised cruising lifestyle experience filled with diverse international offerings. Resorts World Cruises will deliver the ultimate cruise adventure aboard the Genting Dream, the first ship of a planned fleet that is “Resorts Cruising on High Seas”, expanding the Resorts brand from land experiences to the sea.

The Genting Dream offers 35 food and beverage facilities, comprising inclusive and specialty restaurants, bars, as well as certified Halal and vegetarian dining offerings. Enjoy international performances and blockbuster movies at the Zodiac theatre with an impressive 1,000 seat capacity, a theme park at sea with pools and water slides, zip-lines, a rock-climbing wall, a wide sundeck, state-of-art Virtual Reality,



▲ Michael Goh

and popular arcade games; bowling alleys, amazing duty-free shopping, spas, and many more attractions

The cruise liner offers a variety of accommodation options from Interior Staterooms to Ocean view and Balcony Suites, including the world-class luxury accommodation, “The Palace” – a luxury ship within-a ship private enclave with its own exclusive restaurant, sundeck, gym, spa, and other facilities.

Safety is a number one priority and Resorts World Cruises has successfully completed the CruiseSafe audit by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and DNV, aligned with global health and sanitisation standards, as well as prevailing national guidelines.

“These are truly exciting times. We are thrilled to witness the start of Genting Dream as the flagship of Resorts World Cruises, new luxury and dynamic lifestyle cruise brand, affiliated with over five decades



▲ Naresh Rawal

of global experience in both hospitality and cruising. We eagerly look forward to welcoming vacationers aboard Genting Dream to experience a ‘Resort Cruising on High Seas’ from Singapore, which is full of excitement, lifestyle choices, and memorable experiences,” said Michael Goh, President, Resorts World Cruises.

Excited about all the possibilities that now open up for the Indian Cruise traveller, Naresh Rawal, Vice President, Sales and Marketing, Resorts World Cruises, adds, “All of us at Resorts World Cruises are truly excited, as we move closer towards the start of the inaugural sailing of the Genting Dream from her homeport in Singapore on June 15, 2022. With India being one of the key source markets for the Fly-Cruise segment, we look forward to welcoming travellers from India to experience an exciting cruise vacation aboard the Genting Dream, a ‘Resort Cruising on High Seas’ from Singapore, filled with diverse international offerings.”



Ark Travel Group gives more power to its travel brands, unveils new brand identity

The ARK Travel Group (ATG), one of India's leading B2B cruise and luxury resort consolidators, has unveiled its new corporate brand identity. This shift occurs at a critical juncture in the company's evolution of service offerings and ambitious worldwide expansion aspirations.

Team TTJ

The new brand identity and design system were developed to unfold and adapt as ATG's five pillars – Compassion, Competence, Commitment, Cooperation, and Celebration – continue to grow. The rich colour spectrum of the core unit depicts their curiosity and the diversity and infinite range of possibilities.

"With this growth and expansion, it was imperative to create a unified messaging of ATG and guide the synergies of its sub-brands. The objective was to create a common story between distinct identities yet reinforce the mother brand's consistency across all touchpoints for all the group brands," said Kishan Biyani, Managing Director, ATG.

Designed to work effortlessly across digital and physical channels, the new logo echoes a feeling of inspiration. The brand unit is a blend of the various facets of colours, each representing the various lines of business in the ARK Group and showcasing the various emotions that the brand would like to evoke with its range of services.

Each of ATG's brands brings with it endless possibilities that are ever-evolving. To make ATG stand out in the travel space, the bold, colourful identity was designed to match its dynamic vision. The core symbolism of the

ARKJourneys offers rare, authentic, and diverse experiences that are often spiritual, sensual, mysterious, royal, and luxurious. Anju is a master of destinations and has been creating custom-curated travel plans for years.

Anjum Lokhandwala was earlier the Founder of Outbound Konnections, which ATG acquired in 2020. ARKRep is now headed by Anjum Lokhandwala. In her current role, she is responsible for the representation business.

ARKTech is led by Prasad Bhinge. ARKTech, powered by Deckpro, has more than 15,000 registered travel agents and continues to be a leading platform for cruise booking.

Speaking about their immediate focus after the rebranding, Khalid Gori, COO, ArkCruises, says, "The immediate focus of Ark Cruises is to rebuild the confidence of our travel partners about cruising as the safest as ever with cruise companies taking utmost care by implementing various procedures for safe cruising. We have planned a pan India

presentation along with our principals to update our partners of all the protocols and new itineraries which can be promoted and booked

be to create awareness and numbers on these products. We are doing road shows and conducting online training for our retail partners. And I am glad to share that it is resulting in firm business. Our ultimate aim is to create a Win-Win for all my channel partners since they both put their trust in the Ark brand. Our retail travel partners should get a quality product and, my principals, the desired growth in numbers."

"ArkRep's focus for 2022 will be New Travel Products. We have seen a rise in demand for unexplored destinations and new experiences. People are more open to spending 10 per cent to 20 per cent extra for premium experiences. There is no doubt that the future is extremely bright; it is time for the Indian traveller to get out of the shadows of the pandemic and enjoy the blue skies and sunshine," mentions Anjum Lokhandwala, Founder and Director, ARKRep.

On his part, Prasad Bhinge, VP Operations, ArkCruises, says, "As ARKTech is powered by Deckpro, our first focus will be to make sure that factual and updated information reaches our travel partners and increase the maximum number of international cruise travellers. Also, Deckpro will empower a greater number of users by providing the solution for every aspect of cruising, be it ocean, river, expedition, or yachts. We want to reach every corner of the planet and grow tourism along with the travel partners."



Team ATG

earlier ARK Travels logo has been retained for continuity.

ATG has four verticals- Ark Cruises, Ark Rep, Ark Journeys, and Ark Tech. As India's largest cruise seller in India, ARKCruises is a prominent seller for top cruise brands across the globe. Khalid Gori leads ARKCruises. As a founding team member, he has been instrumental in creating the agent network and developing the cruise business from scratch.

ARKJourneys is headed by Anju Tandon, a veteran in the travel business. To help unlock the world's unique stories and secrets,

on our online booking platform www.deckpro.in."

On the same, Anju Tandon, CEO, ARKJourneys, shares, "Currently, we represent two brands under ArkJourneys: Club Med and Europamundo Vacations. So, my focus for 2022 will



L-R: Prasad Bhinge, Anju Tandon, Kishan Biyani, Anjum Lokhandwala and Khalid Gori





seamless access to endless travel experiences

With a strong presence across key Asia-Pacific markets, KKday Singapore is a leading mobile-first e-commerce travel platform for local experiences. KKday's main objective is to make travel more accessible, convenient, and safe. The success of KKday is built on innovation, a unique product portfolio, and digital-first capabilities, all made possible by their exceptional team. Wei Chun Liu, Co-Founder, KKday, looks forward to elevating their presence in India with enriching travel packages and leisure product offerings. They are confident that they will be well-received in the India market.

Prashant Nayak

KKday currently hosts over 30,000 travel and leisure products and services in over 80 countries and 500 cities. In addition, many of KKday's products are APAC-centric and focused on countries such as Japan, Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. KKday covers an extensive range of products, from attraction tickets to transportation to SIM cards, cruises, and staycations. With multilingual websites and mobile apps, KKday supports both traditional and simplified Chinese and English, Japanese, Korean, and many others.

At KKday, they try to understand the supplier and customers' needs and bridge that gap with marketing or technology features. They have a mobile application for consumers to ask questions and communicate with suppliers. For offline agents or DMCs, they have a separate booking system for them to serve their customers.

"We began operations in 2014, but the supply chain was not yet ready. Bookings were processed manually by the majority of suppliers. We had to educate the suppliers as well as the users on the advantages of the automation process, which has now supplanted all other booking methods. Today, with COVID being an accelerator, many suppliers are actively working with us to promote their products to overseas customers through our digitally active platform, which fulfils all their travel needs in one click," says Liu.

Since they also need to partner and collaborate with several travel experience providers, it's quite challenging as they manage over 300k products today. In addition to the usual marketing campaigns and promotions, where they do content and digital marketing for their suppliers, they also use technology to promote those suppliers with good quality. For example, suppliers with positive reviews, quick response time, and capacity will get higher ranking and more marketing resources.



▲ Wei Chun Liu

As a result of COVID-19, domestic tourism is on the rise in every country. Domestic tourism, according to Liu, is just as vital as outbound tourism for any country. They had realised its impact even more during the pandemic when the international borders were shut. Liu says, "We pivoted our model to domestic travel quite early, back in early February 2020. Since then, we have been able to cater to domestic demand. Now that the borders have reopened, we can take that domestic inventory and sell it to foreign tourists. As per the latest trend, young gen would like to experience things like a local and we at KKday provide access to those experiences."

As a pioneer in the digitisation of tours, activities, and attractions, the KKday digital team has to be very innovative while constantly adding new services. "We take pride in being suppliers' partners. We try to understand their needs and create solutions around them. All technology or digitisation should be based on

suppliers' needs and behaviours. Our team ensures that digital strategy is different for different suppliers, as they cater to various markets and have separate target audiences. The digital team ensures that our strategy and innovation are built to promote our supplier's products effectively," shares Liu.

KKday recognises the potential of the India market and has appointed AVIAREPS as its sales, marketing, and PR representative in India, to expand its presence in the India market. Along with AVIAREPS India, they plan to promote KKday in India to the B2B market to have easy access to numerous attractions and tours on their platform. Through online and offline training, networking events, and emphasising the platform's USPs, they are educating trade partners about KKday's product offerings. They also take part in roadshows with various tourism boards to promote the tours and attractions of each destination separately. Their goal is to target India outbound to various countries and vice versa.

"We would also be collaborating with the inbound industry to expand KKday's wings in the India market and placing the portal for both international and domestic travellers. Many travel agents have the best deals in accordance with the current needs of the market and have the potential to showcase and sell the same. Working with both outbound and inbound players will allow us to learn the consumers' needs and travel trends in a better way," informs Liu.

KKday expects revenge travel for the next 12 months. This means suppliers will have to transition from hibernation to high demand in a short period of time. As technology plays an important role in the tourism industry, they will need tech solutions and a diverse source of inventory more than ever. KKday being a one-stop travel provider, it allows continuous communication and streamlines the guest experience, from reservation to checkout.

LUX*

South Ari Atoll

a promising leisure and MICE destination in the Maldives

LUX* South Ari Atoll is an island resort in Dhidhoofinolhu, Maldives, surrounded by a crystal-clear lagoon and miles of the blue and turquoise ocean. Patrice Aira, General Manager, LUX* South Ari Atoll, Maldives, while giving more insights on their MICE business, also informed us that their overall business is looking strong, and they are confident that 2022-23 will be a successful year for the property.

Prashant Nayak

Patrice Aira's hospitality journey covers over 25 years of international experience. Before settling in the Maldives, he followed an extensive career path across the globe, joining properties in the United States, Canada, Egypt, and Mauritius. At LUX* South Ari Atoll, his mission is to ensure a smooth run of all operations, supporting the team in every aspect and leading the resort to new heights.

LUX South Ari Atoll, Maldives, is close to Velana International Airport and has seaplane and domestic transfer options. Highlighting the MICE elements at his resort, Patrice says, "The size of the island is ideal for MICE groups with lots of space and venue options for conferences, dinners, activities. The Inventory of 193 villas allows us to accommodate and serve up to 400-425 people. Also, there are a variety of F&B outlets – eight restaurants and five bars able to accommodate groups and private events and a large array of activities available for groups. Additionally, the wedding and banqueting options are available with the movable marquee with dedicated group concierge/coordinator to ensure flawless execution of every activity, prior and post."

In the Maldives, there has been an increase in demand for MICE, firstly, because corporate and personal budgets for MICE were frozen for a while. Secondly, business travellers are now looking at options other than the traditional MICE destinations. The Maldives is no longer considered just a honeymoon destination, and it has managed to successfully position itself in the MICE segment. LUX* South Ari Atoll is fully geared to capture this demand and handle MICE groups. And this is what they have been doing since the re-opening of the



▲ Patrice Aira

destination in July 2020.

"Our brand reputation is also about our ability to handle large corporate and leisure groups from various markets flawlessly. We handled groups from India, China, Israel (with strict kosher requirements), etc. At LUX* South Ari Atoll, we always keep in mind specific requests of any incoming client, be it a group or individual traveller," informs Patrice.

The Indian outbound business has always had a very strong MICE component over the last few years. Many destinations across the globe (in the pre-pandemic era) had experienced massive growth of Indian MICE in their respective countries. Patrice adds more on these aspects, "Many Indians in leisure

and corporate segments look at the Maldives as an exciting destination. The Maldives has started getting a share of this lucrative segment in recent times and LUX* South Ari Atoll has already got a few groups. The Maldives is experiencing events, incentives, art, and literature festivals from India and these are exciting times. MICE from India is an emerging segment for us and we are confident of winning CEO meets, incentives, social groups, and also pre & post wedding celebrations at our resort this year."

LUX* South Ari Atoll is working very closely with their trade partners in India to make sure that they get involved at the MICE planning stage itself. Their visibility and engagement with the travel trade partners and at various trade events are helping them a lot. They have Enhance Hospitality as their India market representative. Gaurav Arora and his team at Enhance have been assisting their team in making the right connections with the MICE event planners in India.

According to Patrice, an interesting thing to note is that corporate clients are mindful of their carbon footprint and are happy to support their efforts fully. On this, Patrice shares, "You won't see any plastic water bottles or plastic-packed pens at our events. All the activities we organise are waste-free and are arranged with care for the environment. LUX* South Ari Atoll also offers eco activities to the groups, following the rising green trend in the industry. Be it coral planting or junk craft workshops; we can always cater to the special requests of the client. This approach is becoming more popular in the MICE market nowadays, replacing the usual gatherings and networking events."



Laguna Phuket

putting together the best elements of a dream destination

Although Phuket is a well-recognised destination amongst outbound travellers in India, Laguna Phuket provides an experience that is a class apart and has something in store for every visitor. The brand is reaching out to the evolving traveller segment in India across key target markets and enticing them by projecting the destination's post-COVID readiness and a plethora of holiday activities. While putting the spotlight on the property, Ravi Chandran, Executive Vice President of Banyan Tree Holdings and Chief Executive Officer of Laguna Resorts and Hotels, is very keen to strengthen its India market outreach through sustained marketing and communications activities.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Ravi Chandran

As one of Asia's premier integrated destinations, what makes Laguna Phuket unique from the others?

Laguna Phuket, set against the stunning backdrop of the Andaman Sea, is home to eight world-class hotels and premium facilities spanning over 1,000 acres of lush parkland and beachfront. Situated on a 3km stretch of pristine beach, Laguna Phuket is the only destination on the island to feature both sea and lagoon access. Hotel guests staying within Laguna Phuket are welcome to visit and enjoy facilities at all the resorts and use the destination's complimentary shuttle bus and boat services. To streamline the guest experience, Laguna Phuket has a fully integrated cashless payment system, meaning guests can choose to charge expenses back to their room from anywhere in the destination.

With an award-winning 18-hole golf course, luxury spas, exceptional dining options, and unforgettable experiences, Laguna Phuket offers the perfect location for both tourists and residents. The island destination is a world-renowned and award-winning home of multiple international events such as the Laguna Phuket Marathon and Laguna Phuket Triathlon.

Brief us about Laguna Phuket properties and their USPs?

With more than 1,400 rooms, Laguna Phuket's portfolio of properties includes:

Angsana Laguna Phuket is an island within an island. Endless activities, water sports, and dining venues. Also, not to mention the 300-meter-long free-form pool and catering to families, groups, and couples.

Angsana Villas Resort has private and spacious villas surrounded by garden space and a private pool in most villas.

Banyan Tree Phuket is a sanctuary for the senses. Ideal for luxurious tropical getaways with award-winning fine dining options and full SPA services.

Banyan Tree Veya Phuket is a safe space for your well-being journey to nourish your body and mind.

Cassia Phuket offers comfy hotel apartments with a kitchen in every room in an ideal location. Family-friendly.

Dusit Thani Laguna Phuket is the first hotel in Laguna Phuket. A luxurious beachfront resort symbol of the elegant Thai heritage.

Laguna Holiday Club Resort is spacious and has big suites with a unique golf course view.

SAii Laguna Phuket is a beach resort with ocean-view suites and direct access to the beach.

The destination offers accommodations that suit all, from families with young children to intimate, luxurious stays. On top of the 8 Hotels, Laguna Phuket has a; Branded Residences; and the 'Extended Stay' Property division, which offers sales and rental of a variety of residences, apartments, and villas for guests who wish to live or invest in a holiday home within our integrated destination.

Phuket is one of the trending destinations for Indians. How many Indian footfalls have you recorded at your properties pre-pandemic?

Laguna Phuket is just a 30-minute drive from Phuket International Airport, which boasts excellent connectivity across the region and internationally and has direct access from

the Indian cities of Mumbai, New Delhi, and Bangalore.

Known as a romantic wedding venue, Laguna Phuket welcomes guests from India, particularly from the destination wedding market segment. We had seen more than 10,000 room nights yearly pre-pandemic.

How important is the India market for Laguna Phuket? Which are your target markets in India and the customer profile that you cater to? What are your marketing strategies for the Indian sub-continent?

We cater to different segments throughout different periods of the year. Family travellers are one of the key market segments from May to September, while honeymooners, golfers, and small celebration groups such as anniversaries, birthdays and family gatherings are popular all year round. Laguna Phuket is also a popular venue for large-scale weddings, a major source of business in November and early December.

We have focused our marketing strategies and efforts in different areas, especially digital marketing, to ensure we reach out to the right audience matching our selection of different hotels. The interest in travelling has always been there, but the restrictions and lack of flights didn't work in our favour in 2021. However, with travel restrictions lifted, we've already seen the market return since March 2022.

recreational activities, and water sports. Besides stringent health & safety measures, contactless service, and SHA+ certifications, we also have set up the Bangkok Phuket Hospital Clinic for the guests' convenience.

With travellers' quest for safe and purposeful travel post-Covid, our magnitude of hotels is geared to welcome leisure, MICE, and wedding segments. Additionally, we are known as the perfect venue for hosting Indian weddings, elevated by authentic cuisine by our expert Indian chefs, our unique location, and personalised services.

Are there any other details about the properties in terms of unique amenities, facilities, F&B, new and immersive experiences, etc., for your customers?

As Asia's first integrated destination, Laguna Phuket uniquely features sea and lagoon-based water sports. Laguna Beach is one of the first venues to fully integrate facilities to keep guests coming back for more. Laguna Beach offers many water sports and fitness activities, including beach volleyball, CrossFit, sailing, kayaking, jet-

skiing, and paddle boarding.

Laguna Phuket is home to more than 25 restaurants and bars, including Xana Beach at Angsana Laguna Phuket. With live entertainment and a pool bar serving refreshing cocktails, guests can enjoy a cooling dip overlooking unparalleled views. Atoll is the destination's newly opened floating restaurant and bar overlooking Laguna Beach. Atoll offers a gastronomical experience of tapas-style Asian fare. The menu presents interesting fusions of local seafood favourites, and guests can dance the night away under the stars and creative cocktails curated by an innovative bar team.

Banyan Tree Veya offers a conscious and nutritious selection of dishes that delight the senses and elevate well-being. Veya showcases plant-forward cuisine that combines Asian and Mediterranean influences in a creative, flexitarian approach that respects ingredient provenance. Banyan Tree's signature Saffron restaurant, authentic Thai flavour at its finest in an elegant setting. It presents a menu with Thai dishes, both traditional and with a modern twist.

Tell us about Laguna Phuket's initiatives and concerns regarding the environment and sustainable tourism?

Rooted in Banyan Tree Group's ethos of "Embracing the Environment, Empowering People," Laguna Phuket drives sustainability stewardship as the industry leader in Thailand. Besides building in harmony with nature in its development and land use, it has a dedicated Sustainability Team that embraces and actively initiates ongoing environmental and community projects' participation through its guests and employees. To name a few:

Sea Turtle Conservation: this is a long-term environmental conservation programme with Phuket Marine Biological Centre (PMBC) and the Royal Thai Navy since 1994. To date, 2,145 turtles have been released, and 7.5 MB was raised for the PMBC fund.

Mangrove Plantation: 32,500 mangrove saplings have been planted since 2007. Over 1,500 volunteered associates, and 700 community members have joined us since 2007.

Earth Hour: We saved over 502 kWh of electricity in a single hour during the last event. The saving is the equivalent of 4.2 months of household electricity consumption for a small family in Thailand and reduced 264 kg of CO2 emission.



In addition, for Banyan Tree Phuket, for example, there are already three large weddings confirmed and two are in the pipeline from different Indian cities: Kerala, New Delhi, and Mumbai. We believe the numbers will grow further in the next three to four months and surpass 2019 numbers as travel resumes.

Usually, flights from India tend to arrive early morning and depart early morning, so we do provide the option for guests on those flights to have breakfast on the day of arrival instead of the day of departure and early check-in.

What are Laguna Phuket's offerings for leisure, MICE, and wedding segments?

Laguna Phuket features eight luxury hotels with 1400 rooms and villas as a popular integrated destination. Set in lush, tranquil greenery, it has a private beach, a world-famous golf course, an award-winning spa, dining, retail,





▲ Desislav Gospodinov

Lily Hotels-Maldives reinforcing brand presence in India

While COVID played spoilsport for the global tourism industry, disrupting all tourism trends, followed by the recent Russia-Ukraine conflict, Maldives has been witnessing a transformation of sorts for over 18 months plus now. India has emerged as the top source market for the Indian Ocean archipelago nation, even displacing top favourites, such as China, Russia, and Europe. TTJ spoke with Desislav Gospodinov, Group Director of Sales and Marketing, Lily Hotels - Maldives, to know about the Group's focus and plans for India.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

While currently China remains locked at large to the world, the Indian tourists are thronging the island nation lured by its white coral beaches, azure blue seas, and "Tequila Sunrise" photo opportunities. The Maldives has successfully ticked the aspirational, accessibility, tranquillity, and affordability needs of the Indian traveller offering the ideal combination of sun, sea, and sand.

Desislav is no stranger to the India market, and he notes that the owners of the organisation (as an owner-operator of resorts) were perhaps among the first ones to understand its specific needs. Lily Beach Resort and Spa, one of the hotels in his portfolio, is the pioneer to introduce the high-end, all-inclusive Platinum Plan in the Maldives. This innovation helped generate a huge demand and popularity for the resort.

Lily Beach is a well-known resort located in Central Maldives, a short 25-minute flight by seaplane with 125 luxury villas evenly split between water villas and beach villas. The resort is located on the South Ari Atoll, which is the year-round habitat of the Whale Shark and a large population of Manta Rays and is immensely popular among divers. True to their pioneering spirit, the resort has just released a new excursion where guests can swim with Nurse Sharks – a very cool photo opportunity and that is certain to be an unforgettable memory.

Talking about support from the India market, Desislav said, "India market came as a lifesaver in really challenging times and great demand was generated from India. Delhi and Mumbai continued to be the two lead feeder markets from India, followed closely by the Punjab market, and then came cities from the southern states of India. India is critical to our business mix, and we are well-positioned to handle it with our Indian staff and Indian

chefs. We serve extremely tasty Indian food in all our properties, which includes vegetarian Indian food, and even Jain food. Our mantra is to offer the perfect balance between quality and price."

Located in a large island hideaway up in pristine North Maldives, Hideaway Beach Resort and Spa is a sister resort of Lily Beach, and it has a collection of elevated and curated luxury beach villas with dedicated butler service. With a 'resort in a resort concept,' this collection is called The Signature Collection by Hideaway and is located on the same island in close proximity to the best beach location – The North Point. The large beach residences under this collection offers 4-bedroom, 3-bedroom, and also 1-bedroom villa options, perfectly located at one end of the island, which is perfect for buyouts for large groups of guests travelling together.

Though all three offerings are providing distinct Maldivian resort experiences, all Lily Hotels' properties are 5-star plus and exhibit exuberance and underscored elegance.

Guests who opt for a seaplane transfer can avail of the comfortable Lily Hotels VIP lounge at Trans Maldivian Airways

Seaplane Terminal. Refreshments and complimentary Wi-Fi are available for the guests while they indulge in a little reprieve at the lounge during their journey to the resort. After which it is time to embark upon a most scenic flight, so one must keep their cameras and phones handy.

In India, LINKIN Reps represents the Lily Hotels portfolio. Komal Seth, Founder and Director, LINKIN Reps, said, "We take pride in announcing that Lily Hotels is the newest addition to our brand portfolio. We are looking forward to working closely with the Lily Hotels Portfolio, to position them as an attractive leisure destination for Indian travellers to the Maldives."

Desislav adds, "India has always been an especially important market for us, and we have spent a lot of energy and efforts to garner the market share and brand recall we now enjoy in India. We want to continue working closely with our partners and clients here and maintain and enhance our market share in India. Given the business uncertainty due to COVID and other international shocks, we are happy that LINKIN Reps will represent us, with their vast tourism experience and through their large network of travel agents in the country."





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Adapting quickly and staying future-ready for MICE business

India has emerged as one of the most sought-after MICE destinations in recent years.

The country provides impressive accommodation and other conference support facilities to hold successful MICE events. The cities of India are proving to be the best MICE destinations, with excellent amenities and services of international standards. High-tech facilities matching global standards are offered at conference and meeting venues in India. With the hospitality business coming back on track, we at TTJ explore the current MICE perspectives, expectations, and trends of a few hotels in different cities across India.

Prashant Nayak

The MICE industry is growing exponentially, and companies are emphasising the need of providing a personalised experience for their employees and other attendees. A good event and comfortable stay are always remembered and cherished by the people, and this is what MICE businesses opt for these days!

Today, the MICE industry stores a high growth potential, bringing along large industry associations with great opportunities for employment, which in turn enables efficient utilisation of assets by the Government. The Indian government recognises that state-of-the-art convention centres and an extensive network of allied infrastructure, including ample room inventories, excellent connectivity to the venue, a well-developed air, road, and transportation network, skilled and trained staff, and tourist attractions, can ensure the long-term sustainability of the conference business.

Before a pandemic, the country was keen to increase its inbound corporate travel. Thus, hotels and convention centres witnessed massive expansion programmes to make India a leading corporate meetings destination and hub. India still is in the constant process of upgrading its MICE facilities.

Presently, as the pandemic fear wanes and international travel opens, many companies are now gathering their steam and teams together for various activities such

as team building, strategic planning, and rewards and recognition events, which have been on halt for the past two years. If things go smoothly, there will be a pick-up and escalation in demand for MICE events in the second half of 2022.

Novotel Visakhapatnam from the Accor Group is one of the largest hotels in Andhra Pradesh. The property is located in front of the famous RK Beach in Visakhapatnam. It is centrally located adjacent to the Inox movie theater and a walkway to the Submarine and Aircraft Museum. Novotel has the largest pillarless indoor Convention center with the maximum number of breakout rooms and a separate banquet entry with 300 car parking spaces. All the facilities such as restaurants, spa, gym, rooms and other meeting halls are facing towards the pristine beaches. Novotel Visakhapatnam is a well-planned hotel and they have not laid off any employees due to the ongoing pandemic situation.

We asked **Ravi Rai, Cluster General Manager, Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach and The Bheemili Resort** whether they noticed the demand or pick-up in MICE inquiries and queries in the past few months. Ravi says, "Demand started increasing in September 2020 for MICE and wedding queries. We have a set of team members who are always ready to cater to the increasing demand. Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach is always prepared as a destination for MICE and social events."



▲ Ravi Rai

Accor is one of the largest international hotel chains with a strong presence worldwide. In India, they have NSO and GSO teams that help drive MICE business in domestic and international markets. "As we have witnessed a huge demand for MICE, all pending dealers meet, business conclaves, investment meets, annual summits, partnership summits, and major exhibitions all have started and are getting back on track. We also see a high demand for destination weddings," shares Ravi.

Accor India has taken the initiative of Vivaah at Novotel along with Shagun by Novotel, where they deliver exquisite, handcrafted gift hampers to relatives and friends in faraway cities. Dawat by Novotel

lets guests savor the same culinary experience served at the host hotel, delivered to their homes. If a large number of guests are expected in a particular city, in that case, one can book a banquet in that city, project the wedding on a big screen and let guests indulge in the same culinary offerings served at the wedding.

Pride Plaza Hotel, Aerocity, New Delhi resonates with true Indian hospitality. The hotel incorporates the five senses of a traditional Indian welcome with tikka/garland/flowers (if the guest approves), rustic fragrance, music, regional Indian paintings and frescoes, and mouth-watering Indian kitchen specialties.

Shoeb Mohammad, AVP, North India, Pride Plaza Hotel, Aerocity, New Delhi, says, "We



▲ Shoeb Mohammad

have witnessed an uptick in demand during this season. Pride Plaza Hotel, Aerocity New Delhi, exemplifies a luxurious brand with its banquet and conference facilities, reinforcing itself as the one-stop destination for MICE. We have a dedicated team of experts who can efficiently manage multiple events ranging from small conferences, themed weddings, and corporate conclaves to large incentive groups. The events are seamlessly managed to ensure that every detail is impeccably envisioned, created, and executed."

With tastefully designed banquet halls with attached pre-function areas, well-equipped meeting/

conference rooms, luxurious guest rooms, and a delicately chosen menu from separate vegetarian and non-vegetarian kitchens, Pride Plaza Hotel, Aerocity New Delhi is a perfect venue to host all social and corporate events. Their MICE team comprising sales, operations, and personal event managers, offers tailor-made packages as per their client's requirements.

"The domestic MICE segment has staged a remarkable recovery, and most of the conferences and events have shifted to India. We would be extensively focusing on the domestic market. Also, as we are getting used to the new normal, we are continuing to demonstrate agility and innovation to win back the MICE segment. To welcome our guests to a safe and clean hotel environment, we have rolled out enhanced technological measures like contactless check-in and check-out services. We offer digital advancement events to facilitate both physical and virtual corporate interactions such as online registrations, live streaming, and virtual reality booths," shares Shoeb.

Speaking about the upcoming trends and future outlook for the MICE business in the Indian hospitality industry, Shoeb says, "Customisation holds the key as customers value services exclusively tailor-made for them. Advancement in technology by using custom-made applications, QR codes for registration, and ultra-speed modern 5G technology will be the future of MICE."

Sayaji Kolhapur hotel has a magnificent structure and is considered the best business hotel in the city and one of the most important landmarks in South Maharashtra. Sayaji Kolhapur combines the warm hospitality of Kolhapur with the immaculate service of the Sayaji brand. Designed by the finest architects with 120 rooms, Sayaji Kolhapur succeeds in mesmerising the onlooker. The plush rooms, world-class amenities, ambient fine-dining restaurants, and grand banquets make it the perfect destination for the esteemed guests of the city. Understanding their geographical presence, they are focusing on the domestic MICE market, as the city is well connected through rail and surface.

Mukesh Rakshit, Director of Operations, Sayaji Kolhapur, shared, "Post-COVID lockdown,



▲ Mukesh Rakshit

there is a surge in all hospitality sectors, whether rooms or MICE. The corporates have resumed their offices, started their meetings, and launched their products. We have witnessed modest growth in this segment compared to pre-COVID times. Along with corporate events, there is some noticeable growth in social events. Understanding the business demand and expectations of our guests and clients, our focus area is hygiene, a clean environment, and good food and services. We at Sayaji Kolhapur are also focusing on the training of our staff to fulfill the requirement of our guests."

Sayaji Kolhapur has a wide range of venues to cater to the different needs of the MICE business. They have ten banqueting venues and have extensively managed doctor's conferences, association meetings, and product exhibitions.

Presently, the hospitality industry is paying attention to the requirement of guests and adapting towards the same. According to Mukesh, the major challenge which comes post-COVID is to make guests feel satisfied with the hygiene and cleaning practices. Their premises are sanitised and well equipped with sanitation stations to make the premises free from infections.

Vibrant shades of Vivid Vidarbha

Gavilgad Fort

As I write this second piece of my Vidarbha tour, I'm still in awe of my initial visit to the Vidarbha region, which is situated in the heart of India on the eastern side of Maharashtra. With memories still etched on my mind, the profound experiences have determined me to pen down more about this lesser-known destination loaded with incredible discoveries. The trip, which was hosted by the Directorate of Tourism (DoT), Govt. of Maharashtra for media and travel trade stakeholders, left no tables unturned in giving us the best of wildlife encounters, the will to explore local delicacies, amazing, scenic and comfy road trips, and well-contended stays.

Prashant Nayak

Maharashtra comprises mainly of five regions viz. Vidarbha - (Nagpur and Amravati divisions), Marathwada - (Aurangabad Division), Khandesh Region - (Nashik Division), Pune, and Konkan. The districts of Buldhana, Washim, Hingoli, Akola, Amravati, Nagpur, Yavatmal, Wardha, Bhandara, Gondia, and Gadchiroli make up the Vidarbha region.

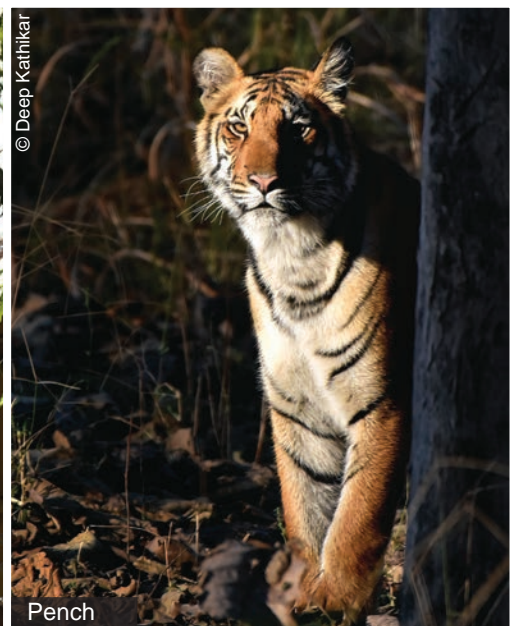
Vidarbha is endowed with a rich cultural heritage and attractive natural diversity. Vidarbha has lush green forests, home to various flora and fauna. The topography ranges from thickly wooded hill forests to deciduous forests on the plains. Rivers, forests, mountains, gorgeous lakes, national parks and tiger reserves, archaeological and historical treasures, and ancient temples abound in this region.

The Vidarbha region, also known as Berar, shares its borders with Telangana, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh, accounting for almost 75 per cent of the state's forest cover. Geographically, Vidarbha lies to the south of the Satpura range over Deccan Plateau. Wainganga is the major river running throughout the year. The land is also said to be mineral-rich, including having rich coal deposits. While the region gets quite hot during summer, it is also the state's orange and cotton belt.

Tussar, the wild natural silk obtained from a wide wing moth produced in the Vidarbha, is said to be the best in quality and colour due to the unique environmental conditions of this region. The famous Karvati silk saris are made from Tussar, have a grainy, textural feel unlike any other silk, and have a unique shade of deep yellow-brown that looks regal. One more aspect

which impressed me is the dependence of the tribes of this region on the Mahua tree. One has to witness the special relationship between the Mahua tree and the tribals. They understand the value of this tree, their Kalpavriksha, Tree of life, and Tree of Elixir.

There are many tiger reserves and wildlife sanctuaries in the Vidarbha region such as the Melghat Tiger Reserve, Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve, Navegaon-Nagzira Wildlife Sanctuary, Pench Tiger Reserve, Bor Tiger Reserve, Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary, Sayadhri, and Umred Paoni Karhandala Wildlife Sanctuary. The Vidarbha tiger corridors have more than 300 tigers thriving in the dense and diverse forest areas. Sighting them in these reserves offers an experience like never before. Despite the huge density of tigers in the area, they remain a rare sighting and reserved for the fortunate few.





Makarandeshwar Temple

The thrill of spotting one of the tigers is truly unmatched. The adrenaline rush of witnessing them in their natural habitat cannot be expressed in words. We had the opportunity of doing safaris at Melghat, Pench, and Navegoan and were quite lucky to spot one at Melghat on our last leg of the safari. If you are looking to spend some time in the lap of nature while witnessing the allure of exquisite wildlife, you must head to these reserves. The immense pleasure of soaking in the wildlife and natural realms will leave a lasting impression on your mind and soul.

The reserves offer plenty of opportunities for close encounters with the other wildlife, including leopard, sloth bear, gaur (Indian Bison), rusty-spotted cat, ratel, Indian mouse deer, spotted deer, sambar, wild boar, four-horned antelope, flying squirrel, and more. Also, there are over 200 species of birds, including the crested serpent eagle, honey buzzard, paradise flycatcher, grey-headed fishing eagle, the shy jungle fowl, and much more. Teeming with wildlife, the reserves have witnessed a rise in tourists over the last few years.

Besides the tiger reserves, one can explore places of interest like Chikaldhara. This sole hill station in the Vidarbha region is a beautiful little hill station surrounded by verdant jungles, only 230km away from Nagpur. There is also Gavilgad, a big fort and once a stronghold of the Maratha empire. Ramtek is one of the major places of interest and a holy place near the city of Nagpur. The popularity of this place is largely due to the myths and legends associated with it, including Bheema from Mahabharata and

Lord Rama. Khindsi Lake near Ramtek is one of the biggest lakes in central India and is famous for boating and water sports.

Sarus cranes have given a new identity to the Gondia district, which is famous as the 'District of Lakes' and 'Rice Bowl' of the state because of the

abundance of up to 250 rice mills here. Every year, many nature lovers come here to see the beautiful birds well-known as 'Symbol of Love' and are the most sensitive species. The Gond dynasty ruled over Gondia in foregone times. The main business during their rule was the production of natural lak (gum), known as gond in Hindi, from palas and babul trees. This commodity is said to have given this place the name Gondia.

The Bodalkasa Dam in Gondia is a well-known tourist destination near the town of Tiroda and one of the most tranquil places where one can enjoy the serenity of nature. Kachargadh is located 55 km from Gondia and is a popular tourist destination because of the 25000-year-old natural caves situated here. Here, archaeologists have found stone weapons that people of that era used. Situated in the dense forest, it's a paradise for trekkers and a place of worship for the local tribes. The popular Hazra Fall is a cascading waterfall, amidst emerald green vegetation, with a good camping site.

There are some significant temples in Vidarbha, bringing in the potential for religious tourism. Besides Ramtek, there is the Kevala Narsimha temple, the Rudra Narsimha temple, Trivikram temple, Jain temples at Muktagiri near MP border, Markandeshwar - The Khajuraho of Vidarbha in Ghadchiroli district, Rukmini Temple at Nagpur, Kalyaneshwar Shiv Mandir at Telangkhedi and Mahakali Temple in Chandrapur. Adasa is one of the Ashta Vinayak of Vidarbha and is situated at 40 Km from Nagpur.

This region has the Varhadi cuisine and the spicy non-vegetarian Saoji cuisine. Saoji cuisine comes from the Halba Koshti community, originally cotton weavers and native to the Vidarbha region. Thanks to the 24-spice mix used to make the curries, the food gets its distinct

flavour. The most popular Saoji dish is the 'Saoji Mutton Rassa, fiery mutton in thick gravy, called rassa. Patodi Rassa Bhaji, Kalnyachi bhakri, Vada Bhaat, Gola Bhaat and Varhadi Thecha constitute the staple diet of the Vidarbha region. We tasted many Vidarbha specialties on the road and at famous eateries, and it was a constant delight for our taste buds.

MTDC has a penchant for selecting hotels at the best scenic locations. It is evident from any property you visit across Maharashtra. Our stay at MTDC Bodalkasa and MTDC Chikaldhara was pleasant and serene. The resorts were in picturesque locations, one in a forest overlooking the lake and the other on a hilltop beside a deep ravine.

MTDC resorts have variable choices of stay options. People can choose from budget to deluxe rooms as per their preference and always value for money. Many properties have onsite restaurants and some churn out the most delectable fare ever tasted. Most of their properties have improved considerably in their food and service over the decade. For me, the overall experience of staying at an MTDC resort has always been awesome. I can vouch for this from my other stays at MTDC resorts: Nashik, Malshej, Panshet, Bhandhardara, Mahableshwar, Harihareshwar, Karla, and Ganpatipule. On weekends and holidays, almost all of their resort properties are fully booked, and reservations must be made at least a month in advance.

To conclude, although political issues have concealed the real potential for tourism in Vidarbha in the past, with new infrastructures, development, and tourist facilities, the region is getting attention and gaining popularity mainly due to wildlife tourism. However, there are many other attractions worth exploring. I have a new Vidarbha bucket list ready for a second trip with the Lonar Crater first on my agenda.



Mahua Tree



Saoji Non - Veg Cuisine

Aurika Udaipur: An opulent MICE and Wedding destination

The first of Lemon Tree's luxury hotels, Aurika Udaipur, is located on an undulating hilltop.

Away from the hustle and bustle of Udaipur, but still a comfortable distance from all that the city has to offer. The regal decor and design, complemented by state-of-the-art facilities, versatile seating arrangements, and thematic menus, make this one of Udaipur's best event and wedding venues. Sameer Singh, Senior Vice President, Operations, Lemon Tree Hotels, tells us more about the magnificent resort's forte in the MICE offerings.

Prashant Nayak

Sitting atop its hill, Aurika Udaipur is spread across five acres with grand courtyards, terraced gardens, and ornately gilded interiors. The resort has four blocks, including three room blocks and a public block with Mirasa – the all-day dining restaurant, Ariva – the bar, and extensive banquet facilities, including the ballroom and adjacent courtyard, the boardroom, multiple outdoor terraces, and recreational facilities including Araya – the spa, the fitness center, the outdoor swimming pool, the Library and the Rumpus Room for the tinier guests.

The 139 aesthetically designed rooms and suites offer unparalleled views of this picturesque city's rolling hills and scenic Aravalli hills and lakes. Moreover, Aurika Udaipur is the only resort in Udaipur with a complete Maharaj kitchen where guests can enjoy preferential meals curated by their personal Maharaj. The hotel's strategic location places it close to major sightseeing destinations in the city, including City Palace, Jagmandir, Saheliyon ki Bari, Bagore ki Haveli, Jagdish Temple, and the Vintage Car Museum, amongst others. The beautiful Sajjangarh Monsoon Palace is visible from the rooms and public areas and is a short drive from the hotel.

From a MICE infrastructure point of view, Sameer said, "There is over 22,000 sq. ft. of banquet and meeting space at the resort, including the ballroom, Ekaara, the Ekaara Courtyard, and the boardroom, Aurum.



▲ Sameer Singh

The large pillar-less ballroom, Ekaara, is connected to a 1500 sq. ft. pre-function area and adjacent to the ballroom is the Ekaara Courtyard, which can be accessed either through the ballroom or directly from the main porch. Ekaara and Ekaara Courtyard can be combined to cater to single events or can function independently. The boardroom, Aurum, with its adjoining 1000 sq. ft. terrace, is the perfect venue for smaller meetings and conferences. Aurika Udaipur offers extensive banqueting and unique dining spaces for all manner of celebrations and events, from the grandeur of a royal destination wedding, to the intimacy of a private candlelit dinner under the stars."

The resort also offers many unique venues for exclusive experiences and private events, including Amritbagh, Suryabagh, Chandbagh, Paheli Bagh, and The Baoli. These scenic

venues, spread across the resort, are just right for those intimate occasions. From greeting the dawn with sunrise breakfasts to champagne toasts and sundown canapés at dusk, from romantic candlelit dinners to toasty barbecues with friends, their chefs are always at service to craft unusual experiences and create lasting memories.

Aurika Udaipur has been witnessing an increase in demand in MICE queries, especially in the last few months, and they are expecting a further escalation in the upcoming months with ease in COVID restrictions. Sameer further assures, "We are well prepared to host all manner of events and weddings. In our continued effort to provide a clean, comfortable and safe stay every time a guest visits us, we also remain as committed as ever to our Rest Assured initiative. We have extensively researched, benchmarked, and implemented stringent cleanliness, sanitisation, and social distancing protocols across all our properties, in India and abroad."

Companies across all industries are gearing up for in-person engagements amid the easing of restrictions and reopening of global travel; conferences, seminars, corporate off-sites, and events are picking up pace, which were on hold for the last two years.

"In the last few years, the hospitality industry has gone through many ups and downs and is now in a phase of recovery and growth. We expect demand for MICE, fundamentally meetings and conferences, and weddings to see substantial growth this year. Since Udaipur is a very well-known wedding market, Aurika Udaipur was designed with expansive banquet and meeting spaces and many outdoor venues to cater to this demand. As global travel resumes, most destinations are betting on a faster revival of MICE and Bleisure tourism this year and since the potential of the Indian MICE market is huge, we are consistently leveraging our position as a MICE destination in both domestic and international markets," concludes Sameer.



SKAL International - India launches its Lucknow and Chandigarh Chapters

SKAL International India launched its Chandigarh Chapter on May 21, 2022, at the Mohali Club followed by the Lucknow Chapter at the Centrum, Sushant Golf City, Lucknow on May 23, 2022.

Team TTJ

Sunil B. Satyawakta was sworn in as the first President of the Lucknow Chapter, alongside five new board members, including Suresh Bahadur, Vice President, Anupam Shukla, Hon. Secretary, Bhagwati P. Pant, Hon. Treasurer, Deepak Khare, Internal Auditor, and Sagar Srivastava, Officer Membership Growth, as well as nineteen founding members, in the presence of Carl Vaz, President, National President, Sanjeev Mehra, 1st Vice President, Venkat Reddy, 2nd Vice President, Krishna Gopalan, National Secretary, and Sarvanan Palanivelu, International Skal Councilor.

The ceremony was witnessed by guests of honour Kanishka Sharma, IFS - The Regional Passport Officer, Prof. Alok Kumar Rai, Vice-Chancellor of Lucknow University, and Sarvesh Goel, Chairman, Mansingh Goel Group. Speaking at the occasion, Sunil B Satyawakta, said, "The introduction of SKAL Lucknow has happened at a crucial juncture when the Government is being proactive in branding Uttar Pradesh internationally."

The SKAL International Chandigarh Chapter was also launched on May 21, 2022, at the Mohali Club, in the presence of Carl Vaz, National President, and other National Board members. SKAL International Chandigarh is the 15th Chapter in India with members from Chandigarh, Punjab, Haryana and Himachal.

Rishi Kapoor was sworn in as the Chandigarh Chapter's first President, with Vinod Sharma as 1st Vice President, Karan Anand as 2nd Vice President, Piyush Kohli as General Secretary, Sumeet Gandhi as Treasurer, Kanav Aggarwal as Director of Public Relations and Communication, and Pankaj Sharma as Director of Membership Development.

Chandigarh Chapter is aiming to expand in terms of numbers in the coming months. The idea is to create one of the biggest platforms for networking and friendship in the region by inviting members from 42 different verticals such as travel agencies, hotels, airlines, tourism boards, tourism government authorities, education and hospitality.



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SATTE
South Asia's Leading Travel Show



2022

Reflects industry's upbeat mood



The 29th edition of SATTE was held at the India Expo Mart in Greater Noida. The event was inaugurated by Shri Shripad Yesso Naik, Minister of State for Tourism, Govt. of India; Dr.

M. Mathiventhan, Minister for Tourism, Govt. of Tamil Nadu; Rupinder Brar, Addl. Director-General, Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India; Alhasan Ali Aldabbagh, Chief Markets Officer – Asia Pacific, Saudi Tourism Authority; Jyoti Mayal, President TAAI and Vice President, FAITH; Rajiv Mehra, Hony. Secretary, FAITH, Subhash Goyal, Member, National Advisory Council, Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India.

The three-day event, which took place on the 18th-20th of May 2022, had an air of optimism around it from day one. Almost 1000 exhibitors and co-exhibitors showcased their destinations, products and services to 100 hosted international buyers, 500 hosted domestic buyers and over 25,000 visitors. 25 NTOs and 25 state tourism boards also exhibited. Notable among the international exhibitors were the Saudi Tourism Authority, Malaysia Tourism, Tourism Authority of Thailand, Singapore



Tourism Board, Tourism Indonesia, South African Tourism, Visit Zimbabwe, Maldives and Turkey. The host state for SATTE 2022 was Uttar Pradesh.

Optimism prevailed at the event, with the Saudi Tourism Authority signing multiple MOUs with industry associations and stakeholders. Malaysia's Desaru Coast announced ₹ 12 million in incentives



to facilitate FIT, MICE and wedding business to the destination. Indonesia announced the resumption of Visa on Arrival and the removal of all testing requirements and restrictions on fully inoculated visitors. Resorts World Cruises announced its debut from Singapore w.e.f. June 15, 2022, with cruises onboard their flagship "Genting Dream". Vietjet announced the launch of their Mumbai-Hanoi and Mumbai – Ho Chi Minh City from June 2022 and New Delhi - Phu Quoc and Mumbai - Phu Quoc from September 2022. Phu Quoc is a no visa destination.

Many international and domestic, travel and hospitality organisations and associations extended their support to SATTE.





Nijhawan Group appointed as India Representative for ONYX Hospitality Group

Nijhawan Group has been appointed the India sales, marketing and public relations agency for ONYX Hospitality Group.

Nijhawan Group would be responsible for strategising and executing ONYX Hospitality Group's in-market trade engagements, joint marketing cooperation, product advocacy, brand collaborations and building trade and media relations.

With decades of experience of promoting some of the most successful hospitality brands and emboldened by the experience of a team that spans across the country, Nijhawan Group is one of the leading travel conglomerates with diversified entities within the Indian travel industry.

On this occasion, Priyanka Nijhawan, Director-Representations, Nijhawan Group said, "We take pride in announcing that ONYX Hospitality Group is the newest addition to our brand portfolio. We are prepared to magnify and pave the path for extensive trade and media outreach for one of the top hospitality brands in the world."

"India has been a key source market for us, and with a new representation in the country, we are optimistic of this growing opportunity. With our diverse portfolio catering to the many needs of our guests, we are confident of strengthening our presence amongst Indian travellers," said Hazel Chua, Senior Director of Commercial Operations.



Jazeera Airways implements IATA Financial Gateway as additional mode of payment for group bookings



Jazeera Airways has successfully implemented payment through the IATA Financial Gateway (IFG) as a new and additional Mode of payment for Group Bookings. IFG (BSP) payment is only available for Travel Agencies registered with Jazeera Airways.

IFG is a system designed to facilitate and simplify the selling, reporting, and remitting procedures of IATA-accredited passenger sales agents, according to the IATA website. As a response to this decision, everyone has highly appreciated and mentioned that this mode of payment has indeed enhanced yet simplified the business experience for the travel partners. This new and additional Mode of Payment was introduced when the Airways decided that they will discontinue its availability on all GDSs (Galileo and Amadeus) about 15 months ago. The availability of the IFG (BSP) payment will be for travel agencies registered with Jazeera Airways only.

LOT Polish Airlines starts direct flights between Warsaw and Mumbai

LOT Polish Airlines increases its footprint in India and has now integrated Mumbai into its global route network. On June 2, 2022, LOT Polish Airlines and Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport Mumbai jointly celebrated the launch of the new nonstop service between Mumbai and Warsaw. The Polish capital is LOT Polish Airlines' global hub, providing seamless connectivity to many destinations throughout Europe and North America.

Flight LO-076 takes off from Mumbai every Sunday at 8:45h and every Wednesday at 8:25h and arrives at 13:40h and 13:20h respectively (local times) at Warsaw's Chopin Airport (8:25 hours flight time). On the way to India, flight LO-075 departs from Warsaw every Tuesday and Saturday at 15:40h and lands in Mumbai at 2:45h (the following morning) after 7:35 hours of flying time.

Amit Ray, Director India at LOT Polish Airlines, said, "Today marks a special day for LOT Polish Airlines. After the successful launch of our Delhi to Warsaw operations in September 2019 and based on positive feedback from our customers and trade partners in India, it has always been our desire to add Mumbai to our passenger route

network. We are delighted that the inaugural flight between Mumbai and Warsaw has been launched today, providing guests from India with a greater choice of travel options, not only to Poland but also to many other popular European and North American leisure and business destinations."



US Embassy in India to resume tourist visa interviews from September

Following the end of the student visa rush, the US Embassy in India announced on May 29, 2022, that it will be resuming routine in-person tourist and visitor B1-B2 visa appointments in India from September. Previously scheduled placeholders have now been cancelled. Applicants who had their placeholder appointments cancelled can now re-enter the system to schedule regular appointments. Appointments are available till 2023. Visit the website for availability.

Cyprus to get rid of required COVID-19 tests for visitors from June 1

Travellers entering Cyprus will no longer be required to submit a valid COVID-19 vaccination certificate or a recovery certificate, as well as a negative recent COVID-19 test as of June 1, 2022.



With the exception of hospitals, nursing homes, and other indoor medical institutions, the government also decided to abolish the requirement to wear face masks in all indoor venues in Cyprus as of June 1, 2022.

Transport Minister Yiannis Karousos said the decision to lift COVID-19 screening requirements at airports signals the tourism-reliant island nation is ready to return to normality.

Over 10 per cent of the island's gross domestic product comes directly from tourism. Authorities are hopeful that a post-pandemic desire for travel will boost arrivals to Cyprus significantly, despite the loss of a significant number of Russian and Ukrainian holidaymakers as a result of the war in Ukraine.

Malaysia offers visa on arrival for Indian travellers

Malaysia has announced Visa on Arrival (VOA) for Indian travellers arriving in Malaysia through selected entry points via Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, or Indonesia, with a valid visa from either country.



According to the Immigration Department of Malaysia (Mumbai Attaché), the VOA fee is MYR200 (USD 46) and travellers must show that they have at least USD 500 cash/ credit card/ debit card/ traveller's cheque or any electronic money which is certified by the Central Bank of Malaysia (Bank Negara Malaysia). Travellers are allowed to stay up to 15 days with a confirmed return air ticket.

Malaysia had reopened its shores for quarantine-free travel and welcomes fully vaccinated international travellers starting May 1, 2022. Fully vaccinated inbound travellers are no longer required to undergo pre-departure and on-arrival COVID-19 tests, including children aged 17 and below. Currently, Malaysia's eVISA can also be applied online and more than 18,000 seats are offered weekly between India and Malaysia through Malaysia Airlines, Malindo Air, AirAsia, IndiGo, and Air India Express.

Oman Tourism appoints Buzz Travel Marketing as its India representative

Following a two-year hiatus, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism of the Sultanate of Oman has restarted promotional strategies aimed at sector operators, media, and Indian consumers. The Ministry will oversee the development and promotion of tourism in the Sultanate under the direction of His Excellency Salem bin Mohammed Al Mahrouqi, the new Minister.

In line with this, Oman Tourism has named Buzz Travel Marketing India as its new Indian representative. The alliance intends to successfully increase the destination's reach in India. Through its extensive network and dynamic team of professionals, Buzz Travel Marketing India will ensure that Oman's diverse tourist attractions reach every travelling Indian.

The organisation's marketing initiatives for Oman will be positioned to meet the needs and developments that have shaped travel demand in recent years, such as the preference for large spaces,

seeking experiences in harmony with nature to rejuvenate in complete safety, and connecting with the locals and the culture. Oman is recognised for its rich cultural heritage and traditions, as well as the art of hospitality and hearty welcome.



Hideaway Beach Resort and Spa recognised as a 'Best of the Best' Romantic Hotel in Asia by Tripadvisor

Hideaway Beach Resort and Spa has been awarded the Travellers' Choice Best of the Best for the first time in recent years, the highest honour Tripadvisor bestows with winners of this award ranking among the top one per cent of listings on Tripadvisor in various categories. With this award, guests have recognised through Tripadvisor that Hideaway is one of the Best of the Best Romantic Hotels in Asia.

"Considering the vast number of romantic sanctuaries in the Maldives, to be ranked as #11 in the whole of Asia is a privilege and honour. We will make sure we offer some great romantic experiences in the resort in terms of private dining and excursions and beyond to hopefully keep being one of the best in this category in the years to come. Can't have done this without the help of the dedicated team from the amazing butlers, the creative and dedicated housekeeping team, the multi-talented F&B team, and the rest who are going the extra



mile to make sure to create dreamy experiences that couples will love and cherish during their lovely stay in the Maldives", says Christophe Adam, General Manager, Hideaway Beach Resort and Spa.

Singapore Airlines unveils revamped SilverKris and KrisFlyer Gold lounges at Singapore Changi Airport Terminal 3



Singapore Airlines (SIA) unveiled its all-new flagship SilverKris and KrisFlyer Gold lounges at Singapore Changi Airport Terminal 3 on May 30, 2022, following a S\$50 million re-design, upgrade, and expansion project. This will further enhance the on-ground customer experience at the Airline's main hub and comes as the demand for international air travel from and through Singapore takes off once again.

The Private Room, the First Class section of the SilverKris Lounge, the Business Class section of the SilverKris Lounge, and the KrisFlyer Gold Lounge can collectively accommodate around 1,150 customers within their 6,100 square-metres, translating to 30 per cent more seats and space. This also doubles the capacity that was available during the pandemic while the upgrading works were going on.

The Airline has created a sanctuary that has been thoughtfully designed to enhance the comfort and convenience of diverse groups of travellers, and meet their evolving needs in the coming years. Customers will be able to enjoy world-class products and services, as well as enticing food and beverage options, around the clock at the lounges before their flight.

Seventh edition of Global Hospitality Conclave (GHC) held in New Delhi



A dynamic event in the hospitality industry, the GHC has over the last seven editions raised the bar of discourse on critical issues impacting the world in general and hospitality in particular. After a hiatus of two years, this year, the Conclave discussed and debated the way forward in a post COVID scenario in the travel and tourism sector with a focus on: Business in a world between orders, Permanent changes after covid, Empowering your business and digital disruption.

This edition of the GHC opening keynote was addressed by diplomat and Former Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon, and the participation of entrepreneur Sanjeev Bhikchandani, founder of InfoEdge on 'Empowering your Business.'

Obero Alumni and industry stalwarts Ranju Alex, Area Vice President South Asia, Marriott International, Anuraag Bhatnagar, Chief Operating Officer, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, Kapil Chopra, Founder – EazyDiner and The Postcard Hotel, and Ashish Vohra, Founder and CEO Justa Hotels and Resorts, discussed their journeys and experiences.

Invited panelists from across sectors such as Ritu Mehrotra, Regional Commercial Director – APAC, China and Oceania at Booking.com, Manoj Adlakha, SVP and CEO, American Express Banking Corp India, Natwar Nagar, Founder and CEO, The People Network, also shared their views on What is the new Normal. While Sandeep Bhushan, Director Meta Business Group India, Neetan Chopra, Chief Digital and Information Officer, Indigo, Vipul Prakash, Chief Commercial Officer, Make My Trip spoke about Digital Disruption. And Shukla Bose, Founder and head of Parikrama Humanity Foundation spoke on the importance of CSR in today's world.

Dilip Puri, Founder, and CEO of Indian School of Hospitality Ajay Bakaya, Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels and Resorts, and Rattan Keswani, industry expert moderated the panel discussions and sessions.

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