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Dear Friends,

The travel and tourism industry is optimistic that its current momentum will continue unabated. There is also optimism amongst industry players that the upcoming months look promising, giving the travel trade faith not just in their industry but in their individual businesses, too. It is certainly a more travel-positive marketplace out there.

As travellers increasingly accept health risks as manageable due in part to rising vaccination rates, we anticipate the year 2023 will be characterised by growth in vacations, enhanced length of stay, and travel farther from home, as against frequent weekend and local getaways.

Once again, at TTJ, we are reflecting on the many aspects of a positive travel outlook in our August 2022 issue. So, while you read, we hope you are ready and well prepared to handle the rush during the long weekend ahead and also joyfully celebrate Raksha Bandhan and Independence Day.

Happy Reading and Jai Hind!

Ravi Sharma

Ravi Sharma
ravisharma@sampanmedia.com

Editor's Desk



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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.

France lifts COVID-19 restrictions for international travellers

Effective August 1, 2022, all travellers will be able to enter France without having to follow any COVID-related entry rules as the country has decided to drop all of its restrictions.

Travellers no longer need to present a sworn declaration that they are not infected with COVID-19 and pledge to take an antigen test or biological exam upon arrival in France. This also applies to travel between mainland France and each of the overseas territories.

Similarly, the French authorities no longer require proof of a compelling reason for travel or a certificate of international travel from mainland or overseas France to another country.

In addition, they will be able to enter France for all kinds of purposes without having to provide a compelling reason to justify the need to enter the territory of France.

"Faced with the new phase of the pandemic, the border health control system is lifted, in accordance with the law putting an end to the exceptional regimes created to fight against the



epidemic linked to COVID-19. As a result, since August 1, 2022, the rules previously applied to travellers to France no longer apply," the statement of the Ministry reads.

VietJet Air to launch direct flights between key Indian cities and Da Nang

VietJet Air has announced its new route plan with flights directly connecting major cities in India to Vietnam's top destinations, including Da Nang.

VietJet will launch two first direct services linking Mumbai and New Delhi with Da Nang starting October 17 and 18. The airline will launch three more routes to Da Nang from Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad on November 28, 29 and December 1, respectively.

Additional services from New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad to Vietnam's economic and tourism hubs Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, Da Nang, and Phu Quoc will also get operational starting in September. Travellers can book promotional tickets from India to Vietnam with fares as low as INR 9 (excluding taxes and fees) on every Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from now until August 26 for the travel period from August 15, 2022, to March 26, 2023 (excluding public holidays) at www.VietJetair.com

"With 17 direct services, VietJet will operate the largest flight network ever between India and Vietnam from September onwards," said Jay L Lingeswara, VietJet Commercial Director. "Travellers from five key Indian cities can now take direct flights to visit the beautiful coastal city of Da Nang, and then to surrounding tourism destinations including Hoi An ancient town, Hue Imperial city, My Son sanctuary and Son Doong, the world's largest cave, etc."



Turkiye creates a new record of welcoming the highest ever number of Indian Tourists in June 2022



With Turkiye recently relaxing all the COVID-19-related travel restrictions for Indian visitors, the country hosted the highest ever number of travellers from India in June 2022. Turkiye received more than 27,300 Indian tourists in June 2022, breaking all the previous inbound travel records from India, in a single month. As the demand for international travel pick-ups, this sudden boost to Turkiye tourism from the Indian sector can be attributed to several factors such as the country's mesmerising destinations, fascinating history, intricate architecture along with ease of procuring visas for personal and leisure travel. Moreover, with carriers like Turkish Airlines and Indigo resuming direct flights to the country, travelling to Turkiye has become more convenient for Indians.

India has been one of the top source markets for visitor arrivals into Turkiye and the current peak travelling season has also favoured the numbers immensely. Given that May and October are the most preferred months for Indian tourists to visit Turkiye, the all-time high volume of travellers witnessed in June not only comes as a surprise for the Turkiye Tourism market, but also indicates that more record-breaking numbers will follow in the coming months.

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Malaysia Airlines launches new baggage self-service reporting feature

Malaysia Airlines passengers can now instantly report any delayed or missing baggage at any time of day with the introduction of its Baggage Self-Service Reporting feature. The launch of this new feature is in line with Malaysia Airlines' bold step in digitalising the end-to-end traveller touchpoints and facilitating a seamless travel experience.

This feature allows Malaysia Airlines passengers to easily make a report, track and monitor the recovery process via their personal devices (mobile, table, laptop, etc.) in a safe and contactless environment. Passengers can also seamlessly communicate with airline representatives to get the latest information on their reports. The Baggage Self-Service Reporting feature is available for passengers across all Malaysia Airlines' domestic and international networks.



IRIS Reps to represent 25hours Hotel One Central Dubai in India

25hours Hotel One Central Dubai has joined hands with IRIS Reps for Representation Sales and Marketing in India.

Overlooking the Museum of the Future and boasting 434 bedrooms and suites, 25hours Hotel One Central tells the region's story through its interiors, combining the ancient traditions of the Bedouins with a progressive, forward-thinking design and a nod to the future. Masterminded by Christoph Hoffman and renowned interior design firm, Woods Baggot, elements of tales where the traditional meets the modern are intricately woven and exhibited floor-by-floor, creating an entirely contemporary narrative, promising a truly one-of-a-kind experience featuring over 6000 pieces of art and objects throughout.

Offering a unique take on living areas and co-working spaces: 25hours Hotel One Central provides an inviting space fully equipped with a modern 'open' pantry concept to encourage a community feel, allowing local heroes to connect with the well-travelled. The impressive lobby includes a Fountain of Tales which is home to 5,000 books, while a podcast recording room and analogue circus pay homage to the group's love for practical devises – offered in true 25hours style. In addition to the impressive rooftop pool, a total of five characterful restaurants and bars take guests on a culinary trip around the world from Northern India to the Beer Gardens of Bavaria: there is something for everyone at the hotel – including an outdoor cinema which will open in October. Alongside rental of MINI cars and Schindelhauer bikes, for unwinding the hotel features The Extra Hour Spa and Dubai's first mixed-use rooftop sauna.



Korean Food Extravaganza organised at Crowne Plaza, Greater Noida

The Korean wave is seen sweeping across the country, with K-Pop, K-Drama, and K-Beauty, so how can Korean cuisine be far behind? The Delhi-NCR has a high connect with all things 'K' and all things Foodie!

Food is very close to all Delhi Wallahs, and they have a great passion to try cuisine from different countries, regions and cultures. To satiate the taste buds of our dear Dilli and NCR Wallahs, Crowne Plaza Greater Noida, flew in



experienced Chefs, Nam Yeon Hwang and Joon Seok Park from the Intercontinental Hotel, Seoul. These expat chefs curated an array of Korean vegetarian, and non-vegetarian delicacies, salads, and desserts.

The 10-day-long Culinary Marvels of the Korean Cuisine Festival was set at the Mosaic, Crowne Plaza, Greater Noida's award-winning multi-cuisine restaurant from July 8, 2022, till July 17, 2022.

The festival featured exclusive dishes high on authentic and varied flavors. The soulful food menu from Korea curated by chefs included the classics like Jjigae, Bosa, Bibibap, Korean kimchi, Japchae, Samgyeopsal, and Suogi Bulgogi.

Talking about the festival, Sharad K. Upadhyay, General Manager, Crowne Plaza Greater Noida said, "We are glad to host the 'Culinary Marvels of Korean Cuisine' at our hotel. This one-of-a-kind experience will give food lovers the opportunity to taste authentic South Korean cuisine without having to travel thousands of miles to its country of origin."



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Isada Saovaros is now the Director of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Mumbai Office

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has appointed Isada Saovaros as the Director of the Tourism Authority of Thailand Mumbai Office, effective August 1, 2022, responsible for western and southern India as well as Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

Prior to joining the India office, Saovaros was the Director of Trat province. With over 23 years of experience, Saovaros is well versed with the travel industry.

"I am looking forward to working closely with trade partners and

media in this region to make sure Thailand remains one of the top overseas destinations in the India market. We are aiming that the numbers will hit 500,000 by the end of the year," said Isada Saovaros.



TAAI to hold its 66th Cruising Convention in Singapore from August 22-25, 2022

Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) will be organising its first-ever Cruising Convention on Royal Caribbean mega ship Spectrum of the Seas from 22nd – 25th August, 2022.

Speaking about the event, Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI, said that the association's strength is in facilitating business-to-business and people-to-people contacts to support its members. And, therefore, we are inviting members to embark on a journey to rebuild the network and relationships post-pandemic.

A strong and committed travel trade professional for four decades, Mayal has been advocating the need for bilateral and multilateral tourism promotion even before taking over as the President in 2019. She shared that the close proximity of Singapore and the opportunity to promote regional tourism is the need of the hour to strengthen bi-lateral relations, develop trade, investments and tourism, to experience the serene beauty of destinations like Singapore and Penang, Malaysia.

Jay Bhatia, Vice President, said that the TAAI's 66th Cruising Convention will be a lifetime experience. "The Cruise-to-Cruise experience will begin and end in Singapore. We have roped in the Royal Caribbean International and shall be boarding the Spectrum of the Seas. The largest, best, and newest cruise ship in the world, Spectrum of the Seas offers great food, warm hospitality, and various other unique experiences," apprised Bhatia.

Those looking forward to learning, networking, exploring, and connecting to situations and people beyond their current, ones must immediately plan their participation and not miss out on exciting and momentous opportunities emphasised Bettaiah Lokesh, Hon Secretary General.

Shreeram Patel, Hon Treasurer, informed that TAAI will soon be rolling out the registration opportunity. This 66th Cruising Convention is designed to be numbers restricted. However, basis availability we shall accommodate the maximum number of members, Patel assured.



TAFI Convention to be held in Kuching, Malaysia from September 20–23, 2022

After a gap of four years, the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) has announced its Convention at Kuching in Sarawak, Malaysia, from September 20-23, 2022.

Elaborating on the theme, 'Build Back Together', Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI,

said, "As we seek recovery post-COVID, it is vital that the tourism industry does not forget the lessons of the pandemic. As one of the biggest global industries, the power of tourism to shape the world is phenomenal. It can be a powerful force for doing good, not only for the stakeholders but for the entire world. Build Back Better encapsulates the resolve to rebuild tourism in a more responsible and sustainable manner."

The convention committee is Chaired by Seeraj Sabharwal and Jigar Dudakiya is Deputy Chairman.

Commenting on the choice of destination, the Convention Chairman Seeraj Singh Sabharwal said "Sarawak is a relatively unexplored destination for the Indian Traveller. Sarawak is an excellent destination for family travel, honeymooners, MICE, Weddings and the Film industry. TAFI has often organised conventions in Unique and unusual locations to expand the portfolio of Travel Agents and Tour Operators of India." The Convention package will be inclusive of 3 Nights Pre or Post Convention tours to beautiful places within Malaysia.

The Deputy Chairman Jigar Dudakiya further commented on the choice of the Borneo Convention Centre Kuching (BCKK), "With its state-of-the-art equipment and facilities, BCKK is the first International purpose-built convention centre in Kuching Sarawak, Malaysia. The convention centre can host up to 5000 People with uninterrupted WIFI internet services for up to 8000 simultaneous users."

The TAFI Convention is supported by Tourism Malaysia, Sarawak Tourism Board, Business Events Sarawak, Malaysia Airlines, Malindo (now rechristened Batik) and Air Asia.



'Cruising around the world could be your dream travel, make sure you have the right travel protection'

Travel protection helps you to deal with many difficult circumstances while you are travelling and provides you with multiple benefits. So when on a dream cruise vacation, ensure that you choose a customised protection plan for your travel to inculcate all the features that you may require as per your travelling needs! says Dev Karvat, Founder and CEO, Asego, a visionary and thought leader in the global assistance and travel insurance industry.

Team TTJ

There has been a drastic change in demand and perception towards cruise travel in India recently. What are your thoughts on the new cruise trends?

The surge in cruise trips could be attributed to the pent-up demand for travel owing to the travel restrictions over the past two years. Travel enthusiasts, irrespective of their age are now seeking unexplored experiences and today's cruise lines provide exotic choices in terms of destination and experiences.

Furthermore, the growing emphasis on health and safety precautions onboard have encouraged the travellers to pack their bags and explore the cruise travel. Additionally, cruise operators have also been promoting customised packages including travel assistance services with special cruise covers which has instilled a great deal of confidence amongst travellers.

We have also been witnessing huge spike in the number of people opting for exclusive cruise protection plans that safeguards them against exigencies not only on the cruise, but also while they are out on excursions and tours.

Why should travellers opt for an exclusive cruise protection, rather than a regular travel insurance while cruising?

Sailing through the open seas midst serene landscapes and luxurious provisions is an amazing experience. But what if an unforeseen emergency or mishap arises? That's when a cruise protection cover comes into the picture.

There is a general misconception amongst cruise enthusiasts that a regular travel insurance should be sufficient to keep them secured while enjoying the high seas. However, travel



▲ Dev Karvat

insurance does not cover passengers while on a cruise. For instance, if a mishap strikes before you even begin the journey, you may have to cancel your trip. The cruise line won't reimburse you, but a dedicated cruise trip protection can. Further, if a passenger is affected with COVID-19 or any other medical emergencies on board, they will be confined to their cabins and eventually miss their excursion. Cruises protection plans such as Asego's exclusive cruise cover does not only safeguard travellers from such losses but also covers emergency evacuation and subsequent

medical care expenses in case of serious injuries.

According to you what are some points that travellers should note before buying a cruise protection plan?

We have been in the travel protection space for more than 22 years now, and as per my experience every travellers embarks on a trip with a different set of preferences and needs. Hence, they should always opt for a protection plan that can be customised as per their respective travel needs.

While holidaying abroad, every second counts and even the slightest delays may cost a bomb.

Though weather is one of the most crucial aspects, cruise trips are always prone to glitches such as mechanical issues, human error or improper maintenance that may cause unexpected delays and detours. Hence, travellers should consider a cruise protection plan that covers their losses against trip delays, missed cruise departures and other unforeseen emergencies.

Also, since we are now living in an age of uncertainties, travellers should ensure that the cruise protection plan they opt for covers them against losses due to cabin confinement and new-age travel risks such as loss of baggage and gadgets.

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More than just sun, sand, and sea

SEYCHELLES IN A NEW LIGHT

In an attempt to reduce its reliance on the European market, Seychelles tourism looks at India as the key prospect. Bernadette Willemin, Director, General Marketing, Tourism Seychelles, urges travellers to look at the destination past its contemporary image of a honeymoon destination.

Vartik Sethi

When we think of Seychelles, some of us might still visualise rays of sun in our eyes and sand on the sides. However, according to Bernadette Willemin, Director of General Marketing, Tourism Seychelles, the destination has a lot more to offer. In a closed press meet in New Delhi, Willemin shared how Seychelles has curated cultural experiences, adventure tourism, and diverse products to cater to all segments.

Laying down the objectives of Seychelles Tourism's efforts to reiterate the importance of the India market, Willemin shared countless reasons that make Seychelles a desired destination for the Indian traveller. One of the hooks that pull Indians to Seychelles is its flight duration. The 3.5-hour short haul makes the country an out-and-out long weekend destination. Its convenience is heightened when you know that Seychelles is a visa-free destination for travellers from any nation recognised by the United Nations.

Surveying Seychelles beyond beaches, the destination has a diverse set of products right up its alley. From scenic views, and adventure activities to cultural experiences, Seychelles claims to have it all.

Addressing the press, Willemin implored that the travellers dig a little deeper and find their own Seychelles. She said, "Seychelles is for all of you. We cater to all tastes, for all budgets, for all different market segments, everybody can find their own Seychelles."

The post-pandemic response to the destination has made the season a quite busy one for hotel owners. Willemin shared that the hotel occupancy has reflected much better results post COVID-19. The tourism board projects 3,20,000 global visitors for the year 2022, which is still far behind the benchmark set in the pre-pandemic era. The best year for Seychelles Tourism was in 2019 when they touched 4,28,000.



▲ Bernadette Willemin

Europe has always constituted a massive chunk of business for Tourism Seychelles. The contribution of Europe to the Seychelles tourism economy is a whopping 60-70 per cent of its total business. During the pandemic, when western Europe was still closed – the business from Eastern Europe, Israel, the Middle East, Russia, and Ukraine helped Seychelles stay afloat.

Moving forward, the strategy for Seychelles Tourism is to reduce its reliance on Europe and increase its share from the rest of the world. Willemin said, "Reducing reliance from Europe does not mean that we stop growing our business in Europe but we want to increase market share in other countries."

A myriad of luxury options in Seychelles exists like premium resorts, hotel properties, and cruises. Contrary to popular belief, more than 60 per cent of the hotel properties in Seychelles are homegrown hotels, boutique hotels, and self-catering properties. This makes Seychelles a destination that serves the affluent as much as it serves an explorer on a budget. As the trends suggest, mostly the cash-rich populace of the globe has been visiting the country. However, through the diversification of its products and offerings, Seychelles has allowed itself to serve more than just the premium segment. With the introduction of varied cultural experiences, and activities, the country can cater to anyone and everyone.

Tourism is quintessential for the Seychelles economy. The wealth of Seychelles as a country is the environment, making sustainable



Feeding Giant Tortoise at the Botanical Gardens

tourism a key proposition for its economy. Seychelles has time and again promised to continue its legacy of non-mass tourism. Willemin stressed how Seychelles prioritises sustainability over everything else. Additionally, Seychelles is amongst very few archipelagic states that offer island hopping options, cultural experiences, and adventure tourism, which positions it as a tough competitor to countries in the same segment. The country is positioned right on the equator, which allows it to be a year-round destination with consistent weather conditions.

Incorporating digital promotions into their marketing campaigns has become imperative for tourism destinations. Willemin spoke in favor of social media platforms, and influencers, saying the modern-day media undoubtedly plays an important role in promoting the destination. "Traditional media interactions and digital media together are key catalysts to drive traction to Destination Seychelles," she added.

Willemin acknowledged the late introduction of Seychelles in the India market compared to its counterparts. She shared that the destination is amping up its efforts in trying to strengthen ties between the two countries. The way forward is to



▲ Lubaina Sheerazi

synergise, coordinate, collaborate, and place India as a bigger contributor to the tourism economy of Seychelles.

Seychelles eyes a quick yet steady recovery from the India market. Transportation and a higher frequency of flights and carriers will be instrumental in increasing tourism for Seychelles. "We are currently operating only one run out of Mumbai. However, we are looking at

increasing the frequency of direct flights to Seychelles." Furthermore, there is a huge scope for improvement in Indian vegetarian cuisine. Seychelles needs to fine-tune its offerings to make the stay comfortable for the diverse Indian audience.

The wedding and MICE business is also a major contributor to business for Seychelles. Acknowledging India as a core market for destination weddings segment in Seychelles, Lubaina Sheerazi, CEO and Co-founder, BRANDit, said, "Along with destination weddings comes these milestones celebrations, which I think has even more potential, we want to target that in a focused manner."

Within India, Seychelles has mostly looked to promote itself in the metro cities, particularly Mumbai, because of its connectivity with Seychelles. "Delhi is equally important to us. Typically, we have seen that landlocked places in India have a greater affinity towards beach destinations," added Sheerazi. Seychelles also has plans to penetrate deeper into the India market. The strategy is to employ a focused approach through seminars, workshops, and roadshows in cities such as Bangalore, Pune, Gujarat, Chennai, and gateway cities.

Da Nang Tourism, Vietnam holds its first roadshow in New Delhi

Da Nang Tourism Department organised a roadshow in New Delhi on August 4, 2022, in collaboration with VietJet Air.

Team TTJ

The Da Nang roadshow showcased the destination and introduced new direct routes connecting Da Nang to major cities in India.

The event presented Da Nang, one of Asia's top trending destinations, the city of exciting events and festivals to Indian tourism partners. It was packed with all information on tourist products and services of Da Nang and Central Vietnam, especially for leisure, MICE, and weddings, with an aim to boost the tourism exchange between Da Nang and India.

"Da Nang Tourism Roadshow in India 2022 is a great opportunity for us to showcase our beautiful coastal city along with its diverse tourism products and services as well as promote the MICE and wedding destinations to India," Nguyen Thi Hoai An, Director of Da Nang Tourism Promotion Center.

17 tourism enterprises representing Da Nang, Central Vietnam tourism community including Furama Resort Da Nang, Vietnam Travel Mart, Vinpearl Group, Hoian Express,

Almanity Resort & Spa, Hoa Binh Events, Vedana Lagoon Resort & Spa participated in the event to connect and introduce their products and services to over 120 tourism and media partners in India. The event generated over 1000 business meetings and interactions.

Pham Sanh Chau, The Ambassador of Vietnam Republic Socialist to India, Rajiv Mehra, Chairman of the Indian Association of Tour Operators, also graced the event.

Giving his speech at the roadshow, Pham Sanh Chau emphasised on the remarkable increase in outbound tourism from India due to the pent-up demand over the last two years. According to Pham, the average number of visas for Indians to enter Vietnam has surged after COVID-19, it has increased 24 times i.e., from 250 visas per day pre-COVID-19 to 6000 visas per day.

VietJet announced the launch of two direct services linking Mumbai and New Delhi with Da Nang starting October 17 and 18. The airline will launch three more routes to Da Nang from Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad on

November 28, 29 and December 1 respectively.

Da Nang Tourism Association (DTA) signed an MOU with Global Aviation Services to promote Da Nang in India. According to the MOU, the Da Nang agency pledged its support to Indian clients looking to learn more about the new destination.

DTA also signed an MOU with the Network of India MICE Agents (NIMA) aimed at developing MICE segmentation. DTA will respond to its partner's request for MICE products and services, meanwhile, attract more MICE groups through the association with NIMA.



Emirates back to pre-pandemic flight frequencies in India

As India resumed scheduled international flights from the end of March 2022, Emirates re-introduced pre-pandemic flight frequencies to its destinations in India from April 1, 2022. While India is performing well for the Dubai-based carrier, Mohammad Sarhan, Vice President, India and Nepal, Emirates, shares the latest development at the airline which is constantly on the lookout to elevate its service and technology standards for a better customer experience.

Prashant Nayak

India has always been an important market for Emirates, and the country's decision in March 2022 to resume international scheduled flights was a significant moment for the airline. They continuously monitored the situation in India and collaborated with the authorities to resume services safely, as early as possible. In line with the established bilateral agreements between the two countries, Emirates restarted regular flights to India on April 1, 2022.

The resumption of services provided a great opportunity to cater to the rising demand aiding recovery. The development supported network recovery and a responsibility to steer positive travel sentiments. With pent-up travel demand being unlocked by easing travel restrictions and improved cross-border coordination, the development helped them boost their operations.

"As travel picks up the pace with robust customer appetite driving huge improvement, we see healthy demand from India on the back of strong leisure and growing business travel demand. We have already recovered our network in India to 170 weekly flights across nine cities. After a hiatus of two years, we have seen India enjoy peak summer travel with heavy outbound traffic to several international routes within Asia, Maldives, Middle East, and Americas," says Mohammad.

The 170 weekly flights include 35 services to Mumbai, 28 to Delhi, 24 to Bengaluru, 21 each to Chennai and Hyderabad, 14 to Kochi, 11 to Kolkata, nine to Ahmedabad, and seven to Thiruvananthapuram. In March this year, they also brought back the customer-favourite Airbus A380, which now operates daily between the Dubai-Mumbai route.

During the pandemic days, the safety and health of their customers and employees have always been taken very seriously, and the airline undertook several measures to ensure a safe flying experience during the pandemic. "We liaised on an ongoing basis with international and local health organisations to ensure that we followed



▲ Mohammad Sarhan

the most up-to-date medical guidelines and directives. Emirates implemented enhanced cleaning and disinfecting measures on all aircraft departing Dubai as a precaution, and worked closely with airports to implement screening measures as required by the local authorities," reminds Mohammad.

Redefining safety and hygiene standards on board and on the ground, Emirates unveiled multi-faceted employee and customer care measures at every step of the travel journey. Mohammad further shares, "Since flights have been reinstated post-pandemic, Emirates has been going the extra mile to ensure a safe flying experience for our passengers. Safety measures are adopted at every step of the customer's journey to keep them safe and protect their interests, starting right from the stage of booking tickets where we are offering flexible date change options to our customers. Further, we have also taken several steps ahead, by using biometric facial recognition at the check-in kiosks. Whether at arrival, departure, or transit, Emirates strives to maintain all safety protocols to make the experience a safe one."

Emirates also accelerated digital initiatives to provide customers with smoother and safer journeys, being the first airline to implement the IATA Travel Pass solution across its network on six continents; expanding its biometrics and contactless touchpoints at Dubai airport, and partnering with Al Hosn app to enable quick and secure digital verification of COVID-19 travel documents.

Speaking of technological advancements on board and on-ground at Emirates, the airline was the first to equip its entire fleet with mobile phone connectivity in 2007, and now every aircraft is equipped with Wi-Fi services. Last year, they replaced Mb-limited plans with unlimited or timed plans, simplifying the options available for their customers. Their award-winning inflight entertainment system, ice, offers over 4,500 channels of on-demand movies, music, TV shows, documentaries in over 40 languages, and even premium content such as HBO Max. Emirates customers can browse the extensive range of content available on ice, create their playlist in The Emirates Mobile App, then sync it on board for a more personalised travel experience.

The airline recently launched Dubai Experience, a powerful and intuitive platform for customers to easily browse, create and book their customised itineraries, including flights, hotel stay, visits to key attractions, and other dining and leisure experiences in Dubai and the UAE.

"The pandemic further accelerated our digitisation efforts. We adapted quickly to ensure we were ahead of the curve through our digital and mobile channel design and functionality, as well as the customer experience touchpoints we are developing on-ground, on-board, and online. We will continue to roll out cutting-edge technologies like biometrics, AI, and robotics across our operational and customer touchpoints to ensure a touchless and seamless experience on the ground, and will be making announcements in the near future around changes to elevate the passenger journey. We are fortunate to work with like-minded partners across the travel ecosystem

who have a laser focus on innovation and optimising digital platforms and advanced technologies to improve processes and ultimately, the customer experience,” explains Mohammad.

Currently, Emirates flies to over 130 passenger destinations across the world. Their customers in India would be able to fly to all these destinations through our hub in Dubai. Emirates now has 25 codeshare partners (codeshare arrangements with 24 airlines and one Air/Rail codeshare arrangement with SNCF/TGV Air) and over 100 interline partners in 82 countries, extending the reach of its global network by over 5,250 additional cities. This offers passengers in India ample choice and flexibility to travel to destinations of their liking.

With UAE being a prominent tourism destination for Indians, Emirates’ unparalleled inflight offerings, rich in luxury, pamper their customers and are thoughtfully designed to cater to every aspect of the journey - be it the on-board cuisine or the award-winning inflight entertainment. More than pricing, their customers enjoy these signature Emirates offerings on-board, the airline’s

great connectivity options, and the bundled experiences they offer, such as My Emirates Pass. Emirates customers travelling to Dubai before September 30, 2022, can avail of exclusive offers at more than 500 locations, including top restaurants, branded retail outlets, spas, and other exclusive attractions in Dubai, simply by showing their Emirates boarding pass.

“Emirates also works closely with its travel trade partners to offer them access to the complete range of information about its latest products and services, and policies through its platform, Emirates Gateway by offering exclusive rich content for travel agent partners to deliver better customer experiences through bespoke products and services. Information for travel partners is also available on Emirates Partners Portal, Emirates.com, Emirates call centre, and retail offices,” informs Mohammad.

Presently, the airline’s overall focus remains on recovery through rebuilding its network and capacity to pre-pandemic levels; helping the industry recover through close cooperation and meaningful partnerships, and investing for the future to position

themselves on an even stronger footing.

On the expansion and future plans, Mohammad says, “As travel restrictions ease or are being completely removed, we are expanding our network to serve the present demand levels. Emirates will ramp up global operations this year with the restart of services to London Stansted, Rio de Janeiro, and Buenos Aires. We are also boosting our services to Singapore, Mauritius, Nigeria, and Singapore to serve the rising demand.

“Also, by the end of this year, Emirates will kickstart a major retrofit programme where 52 Emirates A380s and 53 Boeing 777s will be fitted with the new highly sought-after Premium Economy cabins. We are also considering installing a brand-new Business Class product on our Boeing 777 aircraft, with customised seats in a 1-2-1 layout. Our Premium Economy Cabin will be available initially to Emirates customers travelling on popular A380 routes to London, Paris, Sydney, and Christchurch. We intend to offer this experience to many more markets across our network,” concludes Mohammad.

Akasa Air commences operations, maiden flight from Mumbai to Ahmedabad

The first commercial flight from Akasa Air lifted off on August 7, 2022. This heralded a new era of empowerment for the Indian traveller.

Team TTJ

Akasa Air, India’s newest airline, commenced its commercial operations on August 7, 2022, with its first flight taking off from Mumbai International Airport, bound for Ahmedabad International Airport.

As a symbolic gesture to mark the occasion during the ceremony, Akasa Air’s boarding pass was handed over to Jyotiraditya Scindia, Union Minister for Civil Aviation and General (Dr) V. K Singh, Union Minister of State for Civil Aviation. Both guests of honour addressed the gathering and officially flagged off the event. Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra, extended his wishes on the commencement of Akasa Air’s operations while addressing the gathering.

Commenting on the commencement of commercial operations, Vinay Dube, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Akasa Air said, “Today marks a significant milestone in Akasa Air’s journey as we successfully commence our commercial operations with our maiden flight from Mumbai to Ahmedabad. This is not just a testament to the women and men of Akasa that have made this day possible, but also

a testament of India’s ongoing economic transformation and that of the country’s rapidly progressing civil aviation landscape. The Akasa story is aligned with the nation’s journey towards making air travel affordable through PM Modi’s clarion call, Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik. We want to serve our country by creating strong transportation links which are the underpinning of any economic growth engine.”

“We are thrilled to finally begin our commercial journey and bring alive our vision of supporting India’s economic progress and building India’s greenest, most dependable, and most affordable airline. Akasa Air’s empathetic and youthful personality, employee-friendly culture, customer-service philosophy, and tech-led approach will make this commitment a reality for us. We are now focussed on delivering a flying experience unlike anything witnessed in the Indian skies thus far,” he added.

Akasa Air will offer

weekly flights between Mumbai and Ahmedabad. Progressively adding cities and routes to its network, the airline has already announced a total of five routes along five cities, including Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Kochi, Bengaluru and Chennai. With a fleet induction plan of two 737 MAX aircraft each month, the airline is looking to establish a strong pan-India presence, with a focus on metro to tier 2 and 3 route connectivity. The fleet size will be raised to 18 aircraft by the end of March 2023 and over the next four years, the airline will add 54 aircraft, taking its total fleet size to 72.



The New Avatar of Online Travel

'B2B2C' and 'B2E'

The world of online travel is fast evolving and so are the business models based on fresh requirements, needs, and consumer buying behaviour. COVID-19 and the ensuing meltdown have created a strong rethink among the travel agent community to transform into a smarter, faster, better, and more economical business setup. The opportunity thus created has led to the creation of platforms that ease and cater to this transformation. TTJ spoke to Anirban Sengupta, Chief Operating Officer, 2HUB, to understand how his company plans to empower its partners with their travel technology platform.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

2HUB is a part of the Eastbound Group, a well-established player in the Inbound business space. Expansion plans into the domestic market led to the creation of 2Hub as a B2B reseller platform. Initially starting operations offline as the online platform was still under development, 2HUB remained focused on its efforts to carve out a unique position and proposition as a B2B2C-Business to Business to Consumer platform.

Anirban, a seasoned hotelier with over two decades with The Oberoi, Park, Hyatt, Leela, and Kempinski, brings his expertise and learnings to 2HUB. He explains, "Technology is not the easiest or cheapest to create and takes a long time, business knowledge and understanding to be put together and make it all happen. Thankfully, with our in-depth understanding of processes, market dynamics, and buying power, we were successful in creating a meaningful platform. We endeavour to offer an online seamless solution from procurement to distribution to consumer sale by the intermediary travel agent."

Elaborating further, Anirban mentions, "The immediate advantage we enjoyed was great buying power, pricing, global partnerships and contacts, thanks to our holding company. That, however, was just the starting block, and to all that, we added on technology, processes, accounting, analytics, forecasting, customer management, and customisation. Thus creating a B2B2C ecosphere, where benefits are very cost-effectively and competitively used for business retention, servicing,



▲ Anirban Sengupta

and enhancement by our partners."

The other segment that we are actively pursuing is B2E-Business to Enterprise. 2Hub offers a complete corporate travel management suite for corporations and enterprises catering to their individual corporate business travel and MICE requirements.

Optimistic about business growth, Anirban says, "Domestic remains the strength of our business at 2Hub, and to add to that, we have strong global tie-ups for our international component, we were expecting a business mix of 60/40 between our domestic and international but because of the various factors still at play globally our current mix stays at 80/20."

Further segregating their hotel business, he mentions, "Top luxury and 5-star hotels account for 70 per

cent of our business. First-class hotels come second at 20 per cent followed by boutique standalone properties at 10 per cent. Due to the strategic mix of the product portfolio with the concentration of top-end properties tilting the scales in the North and West of India, this region drives 60 per cent of the business, with the rest of the country following at 40 per cent."

The focus on creating this platform lies in the basic principle of ease of doing business and being proactive. Any agent can sign up on the 2Hub platform after completing some very basic formalities and be ready for business in a matter of minutes. 2HUB understands that not only competitive pricing is a driving factor, but in the long term, the real success lies in retaining the customer. There is a need to be proactive in your approach to your customer and understand their motivation to travel, their buying patterns, and their preferences.

The 2HUB system monitors the customer as they navigate and buy and then shares suggestions and offers with its partners to propose further to their clients from time to time. This intelligent system not only enthruses customer confidence in the abilities of the travel agent but also generates future business and impulsive buying at times.

With almost 20,000 travel agents from all across India already onboard, 2HUB now aims at getting every transacting agent onto their platform and their sales team is actively pursuing this goal. The platform also has the flexibility for various levels of customisation by their agents, from very basic branding to complete white labelling.

Germany regains its popularity, all set to welcome tourists

Germany is all set to boost its tourism industry as international travellers prefer Germany as one of the best destinations. The country is now one of the top five destinations in Europe. Its focus is now on mindful travellers, emphasis on sustainability and creating an experience that blends nature with culture. Read on to know more.

Vartik Sethi

Germany climbs the charts of being one of the most preferred destinations for inbound travellers as the desire to travel internationally continues to increase in the post-pandemic world. The country ranked fourth in Europe as a go-to destination for tourists. Europe's hot destinations include Turkey, France, Spain followed by Germany. In its annual conference, GNT0, India shared the travel trend analysis (globally and for the India market). The press conference showcased India as an important market for inbound travel to Germany with genuine hospitality to inspire potential Indian visitors to Germany.

The most popular and hot destination state in Germany is Hessen, accounting for about 25.2 per cent overnight stays, followed by Bavaria and Berlin, respectively. Along with these cities, Germany's landscape is dotted with culturally vibrant towns and islands that boast of an experience like never before. Germany's very interesting strategy of blending Nature with Culture to provide a holistic experience has attracted visitors from far and wide. The country is inviting visitors to experience and embrace the German culture that is a blend of authenticity and modern art and is naturally beautiful.

Germany ranks number one in health and hygiene, one of the top most and vital factors that travellers are looking for, especially after the pandemic. In comparison with 140 countries across the globe, Germany did excellent in bagging positions across categories: ground transport and infrastructure, tourism infrastructure, safety and security along with cultural resources, education and environment.



▲ Romit Theophilus

Sustainability has emerged as a mega trend in tourism in recent years and has been largely amplified by the pandemic. About a quarter of Indian visitors deeply value and give considerable thoughts to the sustainable aspects of their travel. The country has valued sustainability and is driving changes along various fronts: locally sourced food, reducing and eliminating plastic, nature parks and biospheres, cycling routes and UNESCO World Heritage Sites. City tourism has witnessed magnanimous growth and has been a preferred form of travel in the post-pandemic world. More than half of the tourists adore Germany's climate and weather round the year. The country enjoys pleasant weather round the year and has thus become a prominent choice in the list of visitors.

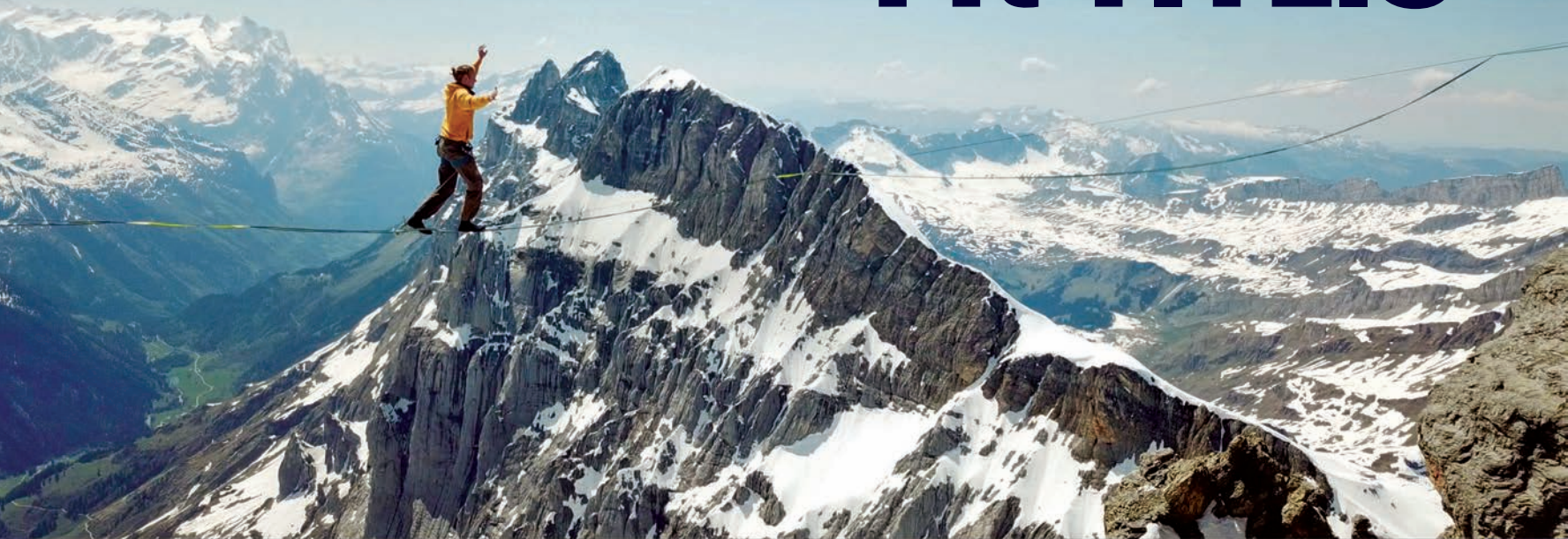
Another piece of good news for travellers in Germany is tax-free shopping and the country invites travellers to take advantage of the tax-free shopping plans and shop to their heart's content.

Based on the consumer surveys, visitors have shared their satisfaction levels as optimum and value for money. The concept of 'revenge-tourism' has accounted for more international visits than domestic, reveals the survey. Germany offers a plethora of options to explore, ranging from sightseeing and experiencing art and culture coupled with landscape and architecture. Culinary delights, traditional craftsmanship and Germany's unique and exquisite local culture attracts visitors across the globe.

Specific to Indian travellers, Germany accounted for 9 per cent of European trips of Indians. 55 per cent of Indian tourists visit Germany for leisure while 38 per cent travel for business. The ease of direct flights (international travel) and trains (travel within Europe) has been in favour of the country. German tourism invests 5 lakh euros to promote tourism in India. Speaking of India, the country has recorded 52 per cent of its travellers wanting to visit new places and immerse themselves in authentic and rich local experiences. Travelling to Germany is convenient and is a family destination. India is a growing market with more than 160,000 overnight stays recorded until May 2022 - a whopping increase of about 214 per cent.

Speaking exclusively to Travel Trade Journal, Romit Theophilus, Director, German National Tourist Office (GNT0), India, said, "Germany is all set to welcome India as India ranks number 4 in Asia and is in the top-20 all-incoming list of Germany." He added that the tourism board has plans to incorporate virtual reality (VR) as well as Augmented Reality (AR) to promote the country online as well as during offline events. GNT0 has also launched Instagram filters that can be used by the users to superimpose destinations from Germany."

More to enjoy at Mt TITLIS



TITLIS is the highest glacier excursion destination in Central Switzerland, Lucerne, and Lake Lucerne. The Glacier excursion at this place includes TITLIS Rotair – the world's first revolving cable car, glacier cave, TITLIS Cliff Walk – Europe's highest suspension bridge, Ice Flyer chair lift, and TITLIS glacier park.

There is lots of fun on the mountain in winter, and they also offer snow-sure conditions from October to May. In summer, there's a host of other activities, such as hiking, mountain

biking, climbing, rowing on Trübseelake, scootering, and the TITLIS Adventure Park. One can look forward to a wide range of culinary delicacies when they visit the mountain's restaurants and can also book overnight accommodation at one of their establishments.

Recently, TITLIS has come up with a few new attractions to their stunning glacial landscape, which are surely not to be missed!

Sleep on the Peak - Highlight of an overnight stay in an Aurora Hut

At over 3,020 metres above sea level, everything feels a little more intense, and the conditions are perfect for spectacular views beyond the horizon and into space. Enjoy an overnight stay for two in the Aurora Hut at the top of TITLIS and experience an unforgettable night under the stars. It's like being on another planet!

TITLIS Starry Night: A spectacular insight into the night sky

While this experience includes cable car, snacks, and stargazing, learn more about the night sky – with the help of experts from the Urania Observatory in Zurich and their telescopes. However, before this fascinating insight into space, you'll get to experience a spectacular sunset.

Spaceline: Just watching will make your knees wobble

Weekends in summer will be more spectacular with the Spaceline walks. One can see the world's best highliners walk and perform ultimate tricks on a 90-meter slackline with nothing underneath them. The slackline is just

below the main terrace and stretches from the mountain station to the rock. If the weather is uncertain, a Highline is set up by the tower (near the TITLIS Cliff Walk).

Selfie Universe: for the coolest photo

Even in the event of gale winds and summer hail, the newly designed Selfie Universe on the 4th floor will be fun and a new place to hang around. Irrespective of the weather, spectacular selfie photos are assured.



South Korea re-opens for Indian travellers

Keeping up with the re-emerging travel boost, South Korea has now re-opened its borders for Indian travellers. The country is focusing on imparting a luxury experience to its travellers and has entered the market with a series of well-thought campaigns and programmes. Read on to know more.

Vartik Sethi

In a closed press meet, Korea Tourism Organization announced the re-opening of its borders to Indian tourists. With a revised set of services from the pre-pandemic era, Korea looks to host a high influx of Indian travellers in their country. Shedding light on the extended services to welcome tourists into the country from all segments, Young-Geul Choi, Director of



▲ Young-Geul Choi

Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) India, said, "We have further elevated traveller experience with immersive experiential centres, re-imagined tourism offerings and look forward to hosting our Indian visitors."

With the introduction of the two-year campaign 'Travel to Korea', the tourism board aims to relax travel restrictions to rekindle its tourism sector. KTO India has also been active in promoting educational tours to Korea through various offline and online activities. Acknowledging the new trends, the KTO India Director, believes that the popularity of K-culture (K-pop, K-drama, etc) amongst people of all ages will help increase tourism. Moreover, various events and special travel packages are in place to promote luxury travel to South Korea, "luxury travel is one of our focuses," Choi added.

Elizabeth Samuel, the Deputy Regional Head at VFS Global, addressed important touchpoints for procuring visas to South

Korea. The largest outsourcing visa service provider, VFS Global, is involved in administrative and non-judgemental tasks, enabling client governments for diplomatic missions abroad. The company has a legacy of 21 years, with 65 client governments, 3530 Visa centres globally, 243 billion applications, and a huge fleet of experts, nurturing 8500+ people in the organisation globally. The applicant Journey in VFS Global is carried through two contact points, the VFS Global website and a dedicated contact centre team. The current wait time for citizens of New Delhi is 7-10 working days, however, the wait time can be reduced if one opts for an express visa.

Niketan Sharma, Sales Manager, Asiana Airlines said, "Currently, Asiana Airlines



▲ Niketan Sharma

operate two flights in a week, every Monday and Friday connecting the two capital cities: Delhi and Seoul. Asiana is reviewing the increased demand to Korea and will respond with increased frequency at the earliest."

Asiana Airlines debuted in the India market in 1995 and now has a global reach in 21 countries. Their inclusivity ensures facilities to take care of the disabled, along with provisions to cater to the needs of infants, unaccompanied minors and pets. The Magic Boarding Pass gives out 10, 20 or 30 per cent discounts on tours,



▲ Tejpreet Singh

entertainment, food and travel.

Tejpreet Singh, Sales and Marketing Manager, Korean Air, shared the history of the airlines and the ray of positivity to match the pre-pandemic numbers in the near future. Speaking on the sidelines of the event to travel trade Journal, he said, "Korean Air currently operates two flights a week, connecting Delhi and Seoul on Mondays and Thursdays. We're ready to meet the (high) demands in the near future and are waiting on nations to lift the COVID-19 restrictions."

Aufrin Rahman, Assistant Manager, Korea Tourism Organization, India shed light on using the K-quarantine model to fight COVID-19 and quickly flatten the curve. The prerequisites to travel to Korea do not include quarantine needed (regardless of vaccination status). Visitors need a visa along with COVID-19 test report. The entry process to travel to Korea includes an easy, four-step process.

Highlighting the upcoming activities and marketing strategy, Let's go Korea Savings plan was discussed, launched in April 2022 and is a Recurring deposit scheme. The focus of the Korean office is on luxury travel and promotion of certain destinations in Korea by collaborating with local Korean governments, educational trips and 'Bleisure' - business travel extended for leisure purposes.

The Khyber Gulmarg

to focus on Wedding and MICE market

Since its launch in December 2012, The Khyber Himalayan Resort and Spa, Gulmarg, has won several accolades and appreciation for its impeccable service, warm hospitality, and facilities at par with international standards. This magnificent resort is truly a fantasy, straight out of a postcard, as the drama of the shifting seasons plays out here all year long. Vinit Chhabra, General Manager, The Khyber Himalayan Resort and Spa, Gulmarg, is more than happy to share the dynamics and allure surrounding this breathtaking property, which has been luring visitors to come back time and time again, as we at TTJ delve deep to learn more about the exquisite mountain resort.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Vinit Chhabra

When did The Khyber Himalayan Resort and Spa, Gulmarg restart operations? How has your revival story been since the restart?

The Khyber restarted operations in September 2020 after the first wave of the pandemic hit the world. Fortunately for Kashmir, and The Khyber, in particular, the revival was quick as everyone was looking for travel after the lockdown and we offered a safe and healthy outdoor environment. So far, Kashmir has been a hot, favourite destination for top-end domestic travellers who had to put their travel overseas on hold due to travel restrictions. Thanks to the proactive steps taken by the UT and airlines offering daily flights to Srinagar, the destination became easily accessible to all.

What has been the resort's biggest challenge in navigating COVID-19 to date?

The pandemic, coupled with the varying

state-wise guidelines, was extremely discouraging for domestic travellers whilst firming up their travel plans. However, in Kashmir, we were truly fortunate that despite all these challenges, we experienced good

occupancies. The positive approach by the J&K Government also worked well for all of us. The winter of 2020 was a blessing for tourism in Kashmir and to date, we have had a dream run.



Living Room, The Presidential

What makes your property unique from the other hotels and resorts in Gulmarg? What are the current average occupancies and ARR's at the resort?

The Khyber is located at an elevation of 8,825 ft. in the Pir Panjal range of the majestic Himalayas is spread over seven acres in a pristine pine valley. Our international class, 85-key resort, clad in timber and stone, offers breathtaking views of snow-capped Affarwat peaks. The resort is an easy walk from the Gulmarg Gondola, the highest ski lift in the world. Also, situated here is The Khyber Spa by L'OCCITANE with stunning vistas from all its treatment rooms, offering luxurious and holistic spa treatments inspired by the rituals of Provence, France.



Calabash Lounge

The Khyber is a recognised brand that has been a favourite hotel of many travellers for the last ten years and has consistently won awards too. It's the only international class hotel and offers the best accommodation, services and views in Gulmarg. Average occupancies are 90 per cent and the ARR of ₹ 35000 has been constant for the last four months

What are the types of lodging and adventure activities available at the resort and what are the immersive experiences to do while at The Khyber Himalayan Resort and Spa, Gulmarg? Which season sees the most visitors?

The Khyber truly embodies the magnificence of Gulmarg. We offer a range of accommodation, from a Presidential cottage to Luxury one- and two-bedroom cottages, luxury balcony rooms

with a view of the Himalayan ranges or the Gulmarg meadows and premium rooms.

Guests can enjoy a host of activities such as ATV rides, mountain biking, gondola rides, horse riding, rock climbing, trout fishing, photography safaris and jeep excursions throughout spring and summer.

For the adventurous, the most exhilarating is the hike to the frozen Alpathar Lake, at the base of the Apharwat peak at 4200 m, for once you get there, it is a sight to behold!

Come winter, Gulmarg's snow-scaped vista lends a fairy tale air to the entire area. For many, the sight of the first snowfall gives a feeling of excitement like no other. The unique, backcountry skiing slopes add to its attraction and of course, staying at The Khyber, located right next to the ski lift, is an added advantage.

Winter activities include skiing, heli-skiing, ice-skating, snowboarding, snowmobile rides, sledging, etc. And if

you aren't feeling adventurous, just sit back, enjoy a warm cup of Kahwa, and read your favourite book while it snows in the background or opt for a relaxing spa treatment or a dip in the all-weather indoor pool.

We have a year-round 'Activities Concierge' who helps guests plan these exciting outdoor activities as well as those offered at the resort, such as films at The Den our mini cinema, the igloo play area for younger children and snooker to name a few which are also very popular with our guests.

The resort is also known for weddings and MICE events. Tell us about your hotel's forte in the wedding and MICE segment?

Gulmarg, Kashmir as a destination, is blessed with immense scenic beauty and it is our endeavour to bring it alive for all market segments. Though Gulmarg has always been known as a popular holiday and honeymoon destination, we are now focusing on promoting it as a wedding and MICE destination.

Until the opening of The Khyber, there were no hotels



Conference set up

offering a large inventory of rooms or even banquet facilities. The Khyber offers more than 10,000 square feet of meeting, banquet and event space, including the beautifully landscaped Paradeez gardens and an amphitheatre.

The Khyber offers a unique setting round the year and is well set up for any gathering - for board meetings or brainstorming sessions, a destination wedding or a motivational corporate offsite, and can easily accommodate a wedding or corporate event for up to 200 guests.

Please shed some insight on the appeal factor of Gulmarg in terms of tourism and hospitality business?

Gulmarg is an important part of the Kashmir tourist circuit and one with the best development and infrastructure. It features the prime attraction- the Gulmarg Gondola that takes tourists right up to the Kongdoori Mountain in Phase 1 and the Affarwat Peak in Phase 2 at 4390 metres where tourists can experience snow throughout the year.

What are your marketing initiatives and strategies thought of, about retaining old trade partners and exploring new business from potential markets in India?

We have a strong relationship with all our trade partners. We attend trade shows regularly to network and increase our market base. However, domestic tourists remain the backbone of tourism in Kashmir and the metros, the major source markets but HNI in tier two cities in Punjab, UP and the south are new markets that we are also targeting now.

J&K has received tremendous tourist footfall this year. How have the tourism stakeholders in Gulmarg maximised the potential? What are the sentiments of the travel and hospitality business in the state?

Gulmarg has always witnessed massive traffic, mostly during the winters, and this has been evolving and growing over the past few years. But, with the opening of The Khyber ten years ago, the destination has transformed from a popular winter tourist spot to a year-round destination. This has undoubtedly been supported by the controlled situation in the Valley and the active roles of all stakeholders, including hoteliers, Government departments, transporters, artisans and local guides and vendors. The consistent flow of tourists since December 2020 is further encouraging and creating the interest of the stakeholders, and this development will surely pave the way forward for a better future for the travel and hospitality business in Jammu and Kashmir.



The Khyber Wellness Block

Reimagine Krabi with stay at The Scene Cliff View Villas by Swiss-Belhotel

Located in Krabi, The Scene Cliff View Villas by Swiss-Belhotel is the newest and distinct addition to the hotel properties in the province. Situated five minutes from the picturesque Ao Nang Beach, a tropical wonderland with the majestic backdrop of Ao Nang Cliff, the beautiful boutique hotel is surrounded by lush rainforests and majestic hills. Lee Richards, Senior Vice President, Operations and Development, Central Asia, The Scene Cliff View Villas by Swiss-Belhotel, while sharing a great deal about the exquisite property, looks forward to offering guests an unrivalled hospitality experience in one of Thailand's most sought-after destinations.

Prashant Nayak

Swiss-Belhotel International, in early July 2022, announced its return to Thailand with The Scene, Cliff View Villas by Swiss-Belhotel. With this, Swiss-Belhotel International reinforces its commitment to developing in the Asia-Pacific region, which has been an integral part of where most of their hospitality portfolios operate. Part of their expansion in Central Asia is focused on Thailand, where they opened a regional office in Bangkok last year. With several properties under negotiation in Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia, their development plans in the area look exciting. They are making great progress in the region and expect to have up to 20 properties under management within the next 18 months.

"The Scene Cliff View Villas by Swiss-Belhotel marks our return to the beautiful land of Thailand. It is a fantastic addition to our expanding footprint in Southeast Asia, which is one of our largest growth markets. We look forward to offering guests an unrivalled hospitality experience in this haven of serenity located in one of Thailand's most sought-after destinations. It is a place where travellers can connect with nature while enjoying excellent facilities, making it the perfect choice for all types of guests," shares Lee Richards.

Aside from its convenient location, 5 minutes from the beach and night market and 15 minutes from Krabi Airport, The Scene Cliff View Villas by Swiss-Belhotel stands in awe culturally and architecturally. The hotel's distinctive architecture combines folk art with stylish touches. The combination of the decorative heritage embellishments and the canopy that shelters every villa makes the property unique and culturally gorgeous. Imagine swimming in the pool that overlooks the stunning cliff. Guests who have visited the place are awed by the location.

Adding more to the USPs, Richards says, "The staying experience goes beyond a destination resort or villa, we offer a cultural



▲ Lee Richards

stay where guests can explore the history of local fishermen and unique traditions of Krabi way of life. Our service-minded staff have been trained to treat guests not as visitors but as a family coming to their hometown. Hence, they will be willing to go the extra mile providing the best caring assistance for the guests to enjoy their stay. Whether giving the best beach spots, finding car rent, or chatting in the restaurant, we understand what makes a great journey pass beyond 'where' and 'what' you see and visit! It is also who crosses your path to make memories with you. This is how we deliver our Swiss-Belhotel International Passion and Professionalism™ service."

The Scene Cliff View Villas by Swiss-Belhotel is a tranquil one-of-a-kind sanctuary with 24 one- and two-bedroom villas with captivating views

complemented by a wide array of thoughtful facilities and services, including the biggest swimming pool in Ao Nang. When guests want to stay and chill in the villa, they are provided with superb amenities, including free Wi-Fi, LCD TV, kitchenette, microwave, coffee/tea maker, minibar, safe box, and ironing board in their villas ranging from 40 to 54 sqm.

Enriching the guest experience are the resort's extensive facilities ranging from a 24-hour fitness centre to a swimming pool, kids pool, Vibe Café, a pool-side bar, BBQ facilities, beach club, kids' club, a garden, business center, meeting facilities, shops, car rental, library, free parking, and laundry and dry-cleaning services. Recreation options include bicycle rental to fishing, hot spring bath, diving, and varied water sports.

As a new entrant, managing the property would have its challenges. When asked how they will establish the property and expand its presence in the Thai market, Richards said, "Thailand is blessed with beautiful nature destination spots as well as lively city attractions. Even if the beauty of Krabi's scenic view is undoubtedly breathtaking, it also requires a continuous effort to push the destination to stay on the 'top of mind' of the travellers when they plan their travel to Thailand. How the islands can mutually work in sync to devise comprehensive travel hops for the travellers to immerse in each spot's



unique offers is what we have to reinvent.”

Thailand is a big outbound destination for Indians. According to Richards, since January 2022, the largest foreign arrivals to Thailand have been Indians. As restrictions have been eased and travel has regained normalcy, they hope more Indians can start to return to their favorite spots in Thailand to enjoy the tropical weather, sunny beaches, and exquisite cuisine of Thailand.

Explaining their marketing strategies for the India market, Richards shares, “India is a key market for us. Leisure and FIT travel will undoubtedly be much greater than any other segments we are targeting from India. We keep refining plans to provide complete value for money service while our guests

have the most memorable times at The Scene Cliff View Villas by Swiss-Belhotel. Developing wellness services and activities and special kitchen space for Indian vegetarian meals are one of our plans to welcome Indian travellers to our property.”

MICE is one of the aspects that they would like to drive further at The Scene Cliff View Villas by Swiss-Belhotel. Krabi has the advantage of plentiful untouched beautiful beaches and landscapes. It is the perfect place for one-of-a-kind team-building activities beyond the four walls of a conference room.

“For both leisure and MICE, proximity-wise, we feel neighboring ASEAN countries such as Singapore, and Malaysia, will bring so many prospects of business. The 1-2 hour of flights from the countries conveniently makes Thailand a quick weekend destination. That being said, the



statistic has also shown the greatest surge of travellers coming from India, which is on our watch list, along with UK and US travellers,” opines Richards.

At Swiss-Belhotel International, they have seen a significant rebound in 2022, recovering almost to the pre-pandemic era. Travellers are now eager to pack back their suitcases and explore the world once again. “This is the momentum that we all, hotel operators, investors, and owners, are waiting for and have been preparing. As our philosophy of working hand in hand with owners and partners, we are currently in the critical time of executing strategies to reaffirm our presence in the Asia Pacific with more expansions to come. The Scene Cliff View Villas by Swiss-Belhotel is the gong of our promising growth in the region. We are very excited to announce a few lineups in the coming time,” states Richards.



One Rep Global appointed India Representative for Dwarika's Group of Hotels and Resorts, Nepal

One Rep Global will exclusively represent Dwarika's Hotel Kathmandu and Dwarika's Resort Dhulikhel in India for sales and marketing outreach

Team TTJ

One Rep Global has been appointed India representative for Nepal's premier hospitality brand, Dwarika's Group of Hotels and Resorts, that operates Dwarika's Hotel Kathmandu and Dwarika's Resort Dhulikhel. Host to international celebrities, royalty and official dignitaries, both properties are the epitome of luxury complemented with authentic Nepali hospitality, finesse and grace.

Established in 1972, the Dwarika's Hotel, Kathmandu has become synonymous with a 'living museum' as it continues to preserve, restore and revive Nepal's historic, cultural and architectural heritage. Started as the founder, Dwarika Das Shrestha's quest to rescue intricately carved wooden masterpieces that were being used as firewood, the hotel has evolved to become one of the biggest sanctuaries for original carved woodworks. With an in-house heritage and training workshop, Dwarika's continues to rescue and restore original wooden artefacts to this day as its impressive collection displays original

wooden masterpieces dating as far back as the 13th century.

Tucked away amid 25 acres of preserved jungle on the beautiful hills of Dhulikhel, the all-suite Dwarika's Resort offers pure escapism with a touch of spiritual charm. The 40-suite luxury resort represents unpretentious luxury, exuding the ambience of an opulent residential compound. The resort draws its inspiration from the Himalayan holistic lifestyle which believes in the need to maintain harmony between the body, mind, spirit and Earth for a peaceful life. And its design respects and accentuates the pristine qualities of its picturesque natural setting.

René Vijay Shrestha Einhaus, Executive Director, Dwarika's Group said, “We believe to have found the perfect partner that understands and shares our values and that will allow us to maximise our sales potential in the India market. Due to Nepal's deep cultural connection with India, the beauty of the Himalayas, the close proximity and Nepal's pleasant climate, we are certain that the India market offers huge scope. We are eager to

explore this scope with One Rep Global.”

Hemant Mediratta, Founder, One Rep Global commented, “I instantly fell in love when I first visited Dwarika's Kathmandu about 20 years ago. Charmed by its grandeur, beauty and heritage, it reflects escapism, spirituality and harmony in a picturesque natural setting. It's our privilege to represent such a magnificent hotel deep-rooted in Nepalese culture. The evolved Indian luxury traveller would truly appreciate the value that Dwarika's offers. The Dwarika's Kathmandu and Dhulikhel are the perfect combination for an experiential 5-night Nepal itinerary, ideal for HNI FITs, family travel, small corporate groups and high-end incentives.”



Kempinski

keen on re-creating an India presence

Known for its discerning taste for luxury, service, and panache, Europe's oldest luxury hotel group Kempinski is celebrating its 125th anniversary. Today, their portfolio consists of individually positioned landmark hotels, operating 80 five-star hotels and residences in 34 countries, with many more in the pipeline. Kempinski is also a founding member of the Global Hotel Alliance (GHA), the world's largest network of independent hotel brands. TTJ spoke to Amanda Elder, Chief Commercial Officer, and Kempinski Hotels Management Board member, on her recent visit to India.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

With great expectations from the India market, Amanda led a battery of General Managers from fourteen top Kempinski properties on a two-city roadshow to New Delhi and Mumbai this July. The Kempinski India Roadshow, which was an annual ritual for the Indian travel partners, was organised after a gap of more than two years due to the COVID-19 situation. Kempinski Hotel Group is represented by their longstanding partner, the Nijhawan Group in India.

"It is absolutely wonderful to be here and have an opportunity to connect and share more about our company. We are celebrating our 125th anniversary and it's a company that was born out of love for hospitality by Berthold Kempinski. Over the ensuing years, Kempinski has always been known as a pioneering company, we would open in cities that others would have never considered going to, and that reflects when we opened in Beijing in the early days, Riga in Latvia, and now Havana in Cuba," said Amanda.

With ten new hotels in the pipeline, Amanda adds, "A very exciting pipeline it is! All completely different places, where we have never been before. It is all about that European style and flair, with each and every individual hotel bringing its own story to the local area. We want each one of our General Managers to be a true host, and that is what we have been working on for over 125 years."

Some upcoming properties include the incredible Kempinski Floating Palace Dubai, with villas floating on water, a hotel and residential tower coming up in Kuala Lumpur and Mecca, a resort in Yanbu, followed by Riyadh. Adding more about new openings in



▲ Amanda Elder

South East Asia, Amanda mentions, "There are three very exciting projects that we should be announcing by the end of this year."

Talking about Kempinski's India portfolio and plans, Amanda said, "I wish I could have something concrete to say. We want to come back to India, and we really want to. We have such good memories of our partnership here, as everyone knows about the association of Kempinski with Leela. Now with us both in the Global Hotel Alliance, we remain very good friends. However, currently, there is nothing concrete for India. I sincerely hope someone approaches us soon to take over management of their hotel or build us a new hotel in this wonderful country. So perhaps it now remains a question of finding the right partner, the right hotel, the right location, and perhaps a meeting of minds to work together."

Elaborating on the challenges faced by the hotel industry due to the COVID-19

pandemic, Amanda explained, "Our owners, the Thai Royal Family and the Bahraini Royal family, were incredibly understanding and supportive, thus, we held on to the maximum number of people for as long as we could. However, this was very different from many other companies in the hospitality space. So, we can say we could retain and hold a lot of our staff and weathered the storm rather well."

Amanda explains the key learnings during the pandemic as she mentions, "We learned a lot during the pandemic when international travel was greatly restricted. We welcomed the local population to come and experience our magnificent properties. People from the city and around the city came up to stay with us and enjoy our facilities. This created a new segment of clients and businesses we had completely overlooked. We now look at this segment as a key part of our business mix and have created special programs and modified our loyalty program to cater to this segment. We call it: Living Local."

"Dubai was a market that showed a strong international business mix even during the pandemic due to their travel guidelines, and our hotels in Dubai experienced record occupancies. What we lost out on international arrivals was well covered up by the local population from the Emirates and from the strong GCC arrivals. Our hotels' ARR showed an upswing, as did the hotels' F&B billings," said Amanda.

Amanda sees travel agents and tour operators as partners, essential and integral to their business. She believes that being digital savvy is critical to all travel businesses of the future and ensures that they maintain price parity for all their stakeholders.

Punjab aims big with heritage and contemporary attractions

Tourism in Punjab today is not only confined to Amritsar and Chandigarh but has spread across the length and breadth of the state. The land has set many milestones in the realm of tourism, ranging from pilgrim and heritage to farm tourism and eco-tourism. Karnesh Sharma, Director, Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Government of Punjab offers a peek at the tourist hotspots and the developmental trends prevailing in the state tourism sector.

Swaati Chaudhury

Best known as the “Land of Serenity”, Punjab is one of the few states that form the starting point of India from the Indo-Pakistan border and is steeped in a plethora of traditions and heritage. The state is not only famed for Amritsar’s Durbar Sahib but has a wide array of exciting destinations for pilgrims, heritage lovers and connoisseurs of food.

Karnesh Sharma explained, “We have homestays, 11 tented accommodations and 47 farm stays in the state. There are six wetland sites declared as Ramsar sites such as Nangal wetland, Harike wetland in the district of Ferozepur, Kanjli in Kapurthala, Keshopur in Gurdaspur, Ropar and Beas Conservation Reserve in the state. The former princely state of Kapurthala has emerged as a heritage city. Our upcoming project is the Anandpur Sahib-Naina Devi ropeway project that is going on in full swing. The ropeway project intends to connect pilgrims visiting the highly revered Anandpur Sahib, regarded as the birthplace of Khalsa with Naina Devi shrine in Himachal Pradesh. Pathankot has emerged as a miniature Goa for travellers. The state government has allotted ₹100 crore for aggressive marketing of tourist destinations in the state in the current year.”

The department of tourism has developed seven popular tourist circuits with Chandigarh and Amritsar as the take-off points. These include Chandigarh-Patiala-Fatehgarh Sahib, Chandigarh-Chamkaur Sahib-Anandpur Sahib-Ropar, Amritsar-Gurdaspur-Pathankot, Amritsar-Jalandhar-Kapurthala, Amritsar-Harike-Ferozepur, Amritsar-Fatehgarh and the Anglo Sikh War circuit. Sharma further said, “We are consolidating the three significant tourist circuits- Amritsar, Chandigarh and Anandpur Sahib. With an aim of



▲ Karnesh Sharma

retaining travellers for a long time, we are rolling out tour packages of four-day stays in Amritsar that will motivate travellers to visit the nearby destinations like Jang-e- Azadi, Jallianwala Bagh et al. We are looking forward to coming up with road shows across Indian metros in a month. The most-visited tourist destinations are Amritsar, Roopnagar, Kapurthala and Patiala. With two international airports in Chandigarh and Amritsar each, the land occupies a pride of place in being a highly secured and safe state in the country.”

The land of composite culture is replete with palaces, museums, war memorials, and forts. Sharma added, “The Golden Temple in Amritsar has nearly 1.25 lakh daily visitors, thereby making the destination figure the most visited pilgrim point in the world. We have Asia’s most visited museum- Virasat-e-Khalsa Museum in Anandpur Sahib that provides free entry for travellers. Patiala is replete with magnificent palaces including Sheesh Mahal and Moti Bagh Palace. While Jagatjit Palace and Moorish Mosque are

in Kapurthala, Amritsar has Gobindgarh Fort, Maharaja Ranjit Singh Palace, Partition Museum, War Memorial and Museum. At a distance of around 50 km from Amritsar in Kaler is Bhagwan Valmiki Tirath Sthal or Ram Tirath which boasts of a massive temple complex of which Ram Valmiki temple is quite well known. We have planned a historical panorama based on the life of Maharishi Valmiki this year. The newest attraction of Amritsar is Sadda Pind, a living rural museum spread over 12 acres of area, offering an authentic experience of Punjabi culture and the best cuisine of the land. It’s a one-stop destination to soak in the flavours of Punjab.”

Community-based tourism is another major area of focus and the state has 82 bed-and-breakfast units. “Dastan-e-Shahadat Theme Park at Chamkaur Sahib showcases the entire Sikh history dating back to the times of the birth of Guru Nanak; the sacrifice of the sons of the 10th Guru to the journey of Banda Singh Bahadur that has been inaugurated at Chamkaur Sahib. The project has attracted nearly 60,000 visitors in the first quarter,” further added Sharma.

Other destinations like Shakti Sthal in Jalandhar and Takht-e-Akbari or the Coronation site of Emperor Akbar are frequented by travellers. Takht-e-Akbari is a historical landmark in the district of Gurdaspur. The department of tourism has taken up a slew of renovation works of heritage monuments and age-old buildings like the ancestral home of Lala Lajpat Rai and Shaheed Sukhdev Thapar in Ludhiana.

The state received around 2.5 crore domestic tourists and 3 lakh global visitors last year. “Punjab occupied the tenth slot in terms of domestic tourist arrivals and seventh position in global tourist footfall in 2020. We aim to be in a better position this year,” quipped Sharma.

Madhya Pradesh 'India-ka-Dil' and the heart beats on!

Lying at the heart of India, at the crossroads of North and the Deccan Madhya Pradesh never fails to amaze, geologically, mythologically, naturally, or culturally. Each day turns a new chapter and uncovers a new facet of the many legends, folklore, and history that remain waiting to be discovered and shared. TTJ spoke with Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary, Tourism and Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, to know more about what lay ahead on the tourism roadmap for Madhya Pradesh.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

Madhya Pradesh has remained focused and directional in its endeavors and efforts to highlight and develop a 360-degree travel product that is both evocative, responsible, and in tune with the current trends, needs, and demands. From its position as the Tiger state of India, combined with its recent positioning as the leopard state and the gharial state, Madhya Pradesh stays at the forefront of wildlife tourism. A position viewed with both awe and seriousness is now combined with eco-tourism and responsible tourism best practices. Madhya Pradesh has always been proactive and progressive regarding its approach to tourism.

Talking about some key learnings from the COVID-19 situation, Shukla mentioned, "COVID-19, was a tough time for all in tourism but we took this time to think, evaluate and anticipate the trends that would emerge post-pandemic. We realized people would avoid going to crowded places, opting for destinations to rejuvenate and relax in natural settings, and rural settings. We then created a very well designed 'Rural Tourism' vertical which was acknowledged and awarded at the WTM London last year as the Best Post Covid Project in the World."

The department created almost a hundred rural homestays across Madhya Pradesh after identifying the right kind of people to run these establishments. The rural homestay owners were then provided operational training, sensitised to the travellers' needs, hygiene factors, marketing skills, and accounting. The setting up of these homestays was also incentivised, marketing and distribution support continue to be provided to these homestay owners, and all these rural homestays are bookable online. The emphasis is on providing a wholesome, rustic rural experience with exposure to local art and crafts, cuisine, and culture.



▲ Sheo Shekhar Shukla

The target is to increase these rural homestays to 1000 across Madhya Pradesh.

Talking about the rich cultural heritage that abounds almost every nook and corner of the state, from pre-historic to medieval to modern, Shukla said, "Madhya Pradesh currently hosts three UNESCO World Heritage Sites, namely, Khajuraho, Sanchi and Bhimbetka. With our ongoing efforts, we have been successful in getting Mandu, Orchha, Satpura National Park and Bhedaghat (Marble Rocks) also included in the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites."

"Another important aspect that we have engaged ourselves with UNESCO is the Historic Urban Landscape programme (HUL Programme) under which heritage conservation is at the core, and the entire development of the city happens around it. UNESCO has picked up Orchha and Gwalior under this programme and we are working very closely with UNESCO and creating a master plan for these two

cities. This master plan, once finalised, will be legalised and the entire future development of these cities will only happen in cognizance of this master plan. This will go a long way in preserving the inheritance of our heritage, conserving it, and passing it on to the future generations," explained Shukla.

Tourism is a huge employment generator and contributes hugely to the economy of the state and country; we all are absolutely conscious of this fact. Regarding employment, Shukla shared, "Madhya Pradesh has also taken up a one-of-its-kind ambitious programme in the country and the sole aim of this programme is to involve women in the tourism arena, train them, empower them and also make travelling safe for women travellers. We have identified fifty tourism destinations within the state. Women from these areas and around will be trained in various aspects of hospitality and travel."

Thirty trades have been identified, and women will be trained according to their aptitude and employed as frontline staff. More trained women in the tourism arena in these cities will not only instill a sense of safety among the women travellers but also provide employment and financial independence to the women of these areas.

Tribal tourism has a great scope to be experienced and explored. Recently, a group of bloggers was invited and sent into the tribal hinterlands to experience the tribal culture, art, customs, cuisine, and way of life first-hand. This exercise proved to be an eye opener for many, and stories were shared by these bloggers on their respective platforms, generating curiosity and interest.

"Coming to Madhya Pradesh has a calming and relaxing effect on the visitors, and plans are afoot to develop and promote Pachmarhi and Tamia as our new wellness destinations," concluded Shukla.

Seek blessings of Shiva during the month-long festival of Shravan in MP

Shravan, a month devoted to Lord Shiva, falls in July-August every year. This is not just a month but a festival that is celebrated with supreme zeal in the heart of 'The Incredible India' Madhya Pradesh. This festival also opens up great scope for all the travel enthusiasts, to experience and cherish the unique celebrations across the state. Madhya Pradesh is blessed with two Jyotirlingas. One is the Omkareshwar Mahadev at Omkareshwar while the other is the Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga in Ujjain. Besides, many ancient shiva temples are there.

While travelling to these places in Shravan month, you would also witness groups of Kanwariyas (pilgrims), who travel barefoot wearing saffron robes carrying Kanwar. As the country gears to celebrate this month-long festival, we welcome you to witness beautifully adorned temples bathed in fresh blooms and glittering lights. Witness the grandeur of Shravan month at these temples in the Heart of Incredible India.

Mahakal Temple, Ujjain

One of the 12 Jyotirlingas, Mahakaleshwar temple, popularly known as Mahakal temple, is one of the most sacred Shiva temples in Ujjain. During Shravan month, devotees gather in large numbers every Monday to witness 'Mahakal ki Sawari', a special procession that is taken out on Mondays of this holy month. The procession is taken out with full glory in which police on horses, Special Forces, police bands, and devotees chanting spiritual and religious songs



march ahead of the palanquin. Thousands of devotees sought Lord Shiva's blessings during the spiritual and breath-taking view of procession. Police personals give guard of honour to the Lord Mahakaleshwar at temple gate.

If you have planned to visit Mahakaleshwar temple this month, do not forget to seek blessings from Harsiddhi Temple, Kal Bhairav Temple, Mangalnath Temple, Shri Chintaman Ganesh Temple, Navgrah Shani Mandir, and Gadghkalika Temple.



Nagchandreshwar Temple, Ujjain:

This temple is opened only on the occasion of Naag Panchami in the month of shravan, making it a special day for devotees to worship the snake deities. Inside the temple are the rare idols of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati with family placed on Sheshnag. It is located at the third floor of the Mahakal temple. Lakhs of people from across the country seek blessings at Nagchandreshwar Temple on Naag Panchami.

Shri Omkareshwar Jyotirlinga

The key attraction for the pilgrims who visit Omkareshwar is Omkareshwar jyotirlinga, one of the



ancient sites of the 12 sacred jyotirlingas. The sacred island that is shaped like 'Aum', draws millions of travellers from across the globe. There are two Jyotirlingas, Omkareshwar and Mamleshwar. Both are the form of the same Jyotirlinga. Mamleshwar Jyotirlinga is on the south bank of the Narmada and Omkareshwar sits on the Omkar Mountain towards the north bank of Narmada River. Narmada River flows in the middle of both the temples. It is believed that a pilgrimage to the Omkareshwar isn't complete

without paying homage to the Mamleshwar temple.

Chauragarh temple, Pachmarhi

Chauragarh temple is situated at an altitude of 1326 metres in Pachmarhi. The temple courtyard is stacked with thousands of Trishuls (tridents). Most devotees carry the Trident on their shoulders and complete the determined journey moved only by their faith. Tridents stuck in the ground around the temple create a forest of Trishuls. There are two stories related with the Chauragarh temple. It is believed that Lord Shiva took refuge in these hills to escape from Bhasmasura. Another significance is that Chaura Baba did 'Tapasya' for many years on this hill. After which Lord Shiva appeared to him and said that this hill will be known as Chauragarh from today.

Pashupatinath Temple, Mandsaur

A site of spiritual significance in Mandsaur, Pashupatinath Temple is popular for its eight-faced shiva linga. The shivalinga weighs approximately 4,600 Kgs and is almost 7.25 feet tall. The eight faces are carved upon the linga into rows and depict Shiva as Bhava, Pashupati, Mahadeva, Ishaan, Rudra, Sharva, Ugra, and Ashani. This is a very unique Shivalinga and people from all over the country visits here for Darshan.

Bhojeshwar temple, Bhopur

Situated around 28 km from Bhopal, 'The capital city of Bhopal', Bhojeshwar Temple is also dedicated to Lord Shiva and beckons a large number of devotees especially during Shravan month. Carved out of a single stone, the massive linga in the sanctum stands tall at 2.35 m with a circumference of nearly 6m. It is set upon a three-tiered sandstone platform over a 6m square. Its amazing architecture has earned it the title 'Somnath of the east'.

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board organises 'Interactive Trade Meeting' with industry stakeholders

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board organised a 'Travel Trade Meeting' at Minto Hall Bhopal on the of July 19, 2022. It was a first-of-its-kind, hybrid meeting with stakeholders of tourism in the state of Madhya Pradesh post the COVID-19 meltdown.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja



Travel industry stakeholders from across the state of Madhya Pradesh were linked virtually to those present at the venue. The objective of the meeting was to share the tourism initiatives, promotional strategies, difficulties faced and support required to promote tourism in Madhya Pradesh.

The meeting was chaired by Usha Thakur, Honorable Tourism Minister, Government of Madhya Pradesh. Also present on the dias were Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary, Tourism and Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, S. Vishwanathan, Managing Director, MPSTDC, and Vivek Shrotriya, Additional Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board. Yuvraj Padole, Deputy Director, Events, Marketing and Film, welcomed the dignitaries and shared the objectives of the meeting.

A comprehensive presentation was made by MPTB. Speaking at the meeting, Sheo

Shekhar Shukla highlighted the vast potential that Madhya Pradesh offered for natural tourism, historical-archaeological tourism, religious, wellness, rural, and responsible tourism. He said all these possibilities will have to be worked on with mutual cooperation.

He requested industry stakeholders to increase their participation with MP Tourism, and promote MP Tourism's TVCs, and promotional videos through their website and social and digital media and actively participate with MPTB in national and international events and exhibitions. He further highlighted the opportunity offered by the hosting of the Pravasi Bharti Divas and G20 Ministers Meetings in the state.

MPSTDC also made a detailed product presentation highlighting its property portfolio and addressed issues faced by its General Sales Agents, and welcomed their suggestions.

The international marketing and PR agency made their presentation and explained

international travel and tourism trends, position, and participation of the State, in upcoming events.

Vivek Shrotriya concluded the session. He explained that MP Tourism is actively working to promote not only MPSTDC properties but to promote the tourism sector of Madhya Pradesh. He stressed the need to regularly connect with stakeholders through meetings and social media platforms. He also shared information about the oldest Ganesh statue in the Udaigiri caves and the biggest Natraj Statue discovered in Vidisha.

In her address, Usha Thakur said, "There are many holy and unique places in the state like the ancient river, Maa Narmada, two Jyotirlingas in Ujjain and Omkareshwar. The birthplace of Rahu Griha Kukshi which is famous all over the world. Tourists can also be attracted by showcasing and highlighting these heritage and religious sites."

Call of tea, cruise and wildlife tourism

Assam tourism is actively boosting wildlife, tea tourism and the indigenous culture of the land in a major way. Rituparna Barua, Chairman, Assam Tourism Development Corporation shares significant insights on the current developments of the state tourism.

Swaati Chaudhury

Assam, the land of the mighty river Brahmaputra and Goddess Kamakshya, is a fast-growing state in the sphere of tourism. The state not only forms the gateway to North-east India but also South-East Asian destinations. The land is endowed with five national parks- Kaziranga National Park, Manas, Dibru Saikhowa, Pobitora in the district of Morigaon and Dihing Patkai. Both Dibru Saikhowa and Dihing Patkai national parks are in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts of the state. Kaziranga and Manas National Park are UNESCO's World Heritage sites. The land has 60 distinct ethnic tribes.

The state contributes to around 50 per cent of the country's tea production. The three major tea-growing districts are Dibrugarh, Tinsukia and Sivasagar. Most of the tea gardens are in

the lower region of the Brahmaputra Valley. Rituparna Barua commented, "There are heritage tea bungalows in Upper Assam and 15 golf courses. The tea bungalows are concentrated in the tea town of Jorhat. There are lavish, spacious, age-old tea bungalows that form an exciting part of tea tourism in the state."

In the post-pandemic times, more travellers are looking ahead to spend quality time in nature. The forested state has virgin destinations that provide a pollution-free ambience. Kaziranga National Park is famed for one-horned rhinos. Barua also pointed out that the state is famed for Ahom heritages that are concentrated in Sivasagar- the bygone capital of Ahom dynasty that had established its stronghold in the state for six centuries. "There are Satras or monasteries that were established by the saint

Shankardev dating back to 15 the century and till today there are 65 Satras in the state," said Barua.



▲ Rituparna Barua

The state government is all set to launch cruise tourism in the next couple of years. Barua further said, "In an attempt to spruce up the banks of river Brahmaputra and to pull tourists into the state, cruise tourism will be the calling card of the state tourism. The Union Ministry of Tourism will kick-start an interesting project- Swadesh Darshan sometime in August, this year. The 100-crore project will come up at Manas, Pobitora, Dibru Saikhowa national parks and Majuli River Island. The project will have log huts and cafeterias for travellers and is expected to offer a big fillip to state tourism."



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Karnataka Tourism accentuates unexplored destinations

Bringing in an air of rich history, jungle jaunts and the finest fare, very few states like Karnataka can promise many worlds for discerning travellers. Armed with a plethora of unspoilt destinations and beaches, there's no stopping for Karnataka Tourism in its quest to lure travellers. T Venkatesh, Director, Department of Tourism, Karnataka throws light on the state's emerging, little-known, interesting destinations.

Swaati Chaudhury

Ranked as the largest state in South India, Karnataka is a wildlife wonderland with incredible biodiversity and forms the site of the country's premier coffee plantation. The land is home to several renowned dynasties of India including Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Hoysalas, Kadambas and Wodeyars. The state has a nearly 320 km long coastline with unspoilt beaches. There are two UNESCO-listed World Heritage sites – one in Hampi or the "City of Ruins" and the other in Pattadakal, lying in the district of Bagalkot in the state. The land boasts of Kabini rated as the best wildlife destination in the country. The region has 35 wildlife sanctuaries and national parks. The hill resort of Coorg tucked away in Western Ghats has a lot of attractions, including coffee plantations, exotic traditions, home stays and the best South Indian cuisine.

In an effort to bring an impetus to domestic tourist footfalls, the Department of Tourism, Karnataka, along with Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation Limited (KSTDC) hosted a roadshow in Kolkata in July. The roadshow is expected to provide a thrust to the promotional campaigns of state tourism. T Venkatesh shared, "We intend to boost the state as a major tourist destination for leisure travellers, MICE, adventure tourists, wildlife enthusiasts and destination wedding visitors. An increasing number of domestic tourists are heading to our state in the post-pandemic era. We have bolstered the infrastructure facilities for tourists visiting the state. We are trying to emphasise on 27 unexplored destinations in the



▲ T Venkatesh

state. The state tourism has geared up with sound subsidy schemes for the travel trade. We are highlighting the coastal region of the state in a big way that prides in having 93 beaches." The director also informed that apart from beach tourism, the state tourism department is putting a thrust on caravan and wellness tourism, agriculture, nature camps and jungle resorts. This kind of roadshow provides a window of opportunity for the tourism stakeholders to renew their links with the travel fraternity.

The state was once the third preferred tourist destination for domestic travellers in pre-COVID times. The land has a number of discoveries in the vertical of tourism to its credit. The first coffee plantation in India has been at Chikmagalur. Mysuru Palace has been rated as the second most visited monument in the country. Venkatesh said, "Lying in the foothills of the Western Ghats in Hassan district of Karnataka

is Sakleshpur, a virgin hill resort replete with tea, coffee and spice plantation sites. There is the 18th-century, star-shaped, Manjarabad Fort that provides breathtaking views of the mountains of the Western Ghats. Some of the other attractions are Sakleshwara Swami Temple, Manjehalli Falls and there are trails leading to Bisle Reserve Forest. One can get to view Jenukallu Gudda peak that provides sound vistas of the Arabian Sea."

Travellers today are looking forward to visiting heritage monuments dating back to epic and medieval times. Venkatesh further said, "We are trying to popularise the Mahadeva temple at Itagi- an hour's drive from Hampi in Koppal district. The temple represents the best example of Chalukyan architecture. Another lesser-known pilgrim point that is in focus is Anjanadri Hill in the vicinity of Hampi. Regarded as the birthplace of Lord Hanuman, Anjanadri Hill forms a significant aspect of the epic Ramayana."

When it comes to the most frequented destinations in the state, it is undoubtedly Coorg and Mysuru. Venkatesh added, "The state has the highest number of tourist count from Gujarat and West Bengal. The rise in the flow of domestic travellers was around 50 per cent in the pre-COVID times and we are confident that the influx of domestic tourists will climb by 80 per cent in the current year. We are looking for a positive outcome in terms of global tourist figures in the present year."

The department of tourism is into organising road shows across the country and global destinations as well. Apart from this, it is looking forward to hosting the Karnataka International Travel Expo to be held in Bengaluru in February, next year.

'Behind glitter and glamour, it's hard work and grit'

The world of hoteliering looks all enamoring with tailcoat valets, liveried doormen, chandeliered lobbies, mirror polished Italian marble floors, high-speed elevators, themed restaurants with celebrity chefs, plush suites, nightclubs, and lounges that are the talk of the town. However, to make this crisp dream façade run like clockwork requires a strict sense of discipline, an eye for detail, empathy, and sheer hard work and grit. TTJ recently spoke to Sharad Upadhaya, General Manager, Crowne Plaza Greater Noida, to know more about his motivation to join the Hotel industry, his journey so far, and his hotel.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

With over twenty-two years in the hotel industry, overseas stints in China, Nepal, and Thailand working for Hyatt, Radisson, and now IHG. Sharad retrospects, "It all might sound cliché, but coming from a family of academicians, I actually aspired to be a doctor as was expected of me, but after a couple of futile attempts at medical entrances it dawned that I was trying to climb up a wrong tree. That is when my maternal grandfather suggested that I should try to be a hotelier, as it appeared to be a very lucrative and sophisticated career with great prospects. So as destiny would have it, I was soon at IHM-Mumbai, and here I am today as the General Manager of Crowne Plaza Greater Noida."

Sharad is also an alumnus of the illustrious Cornell School of Hotel Administration, USA, where he attended the General Managers Training Programme. Sharad moved into his current assignment at Greater Noida just six months ago from Holiday Inn Mumbai International Airport, which is also under the IHG umbrella.

Sharad now conducts this 400-roomed property with 49 serviced apartments, six dining outlets, 47,000 sq. ft. of banqueting space with 16 breakout rooms, a swimming pool, and a fitness center with panache and skills exhibited by a Maestro conducting a Philharmonic Orchestra. His endeavor and focus are to position his hotel as a meeting point, and social hub for the residents of Greater Noida and around to converge on.

The hotel is well patronised by business visitors and corporates as it lies in the proximity of the Expo



▲ Sharad Upadhaya

Center Greater Noida and around 300 manufacturing units located within a 10 km driving radius. It is hugely popular with ex-pats from Japanese, Korean and Chinese conglomerates also having their manufacturing units in the area.

The hotel currently enjoys a 60 per cent corporate and 40 per cent leisure-business mix and its 49 apartments are well patronized for long stays by expatriates and corporates. The hotel's large assets for banqueting services, including a 7000 Square feet pillarless hall, make it an ideal venue for large conferences, corporate events, product launches, and weddings and has hosted many residential weddings of up to 400 guests.

A variety of food and drink options are available at the hotel throughout the day, from fine dining to lighter meals at full-service, onsite restaurants, and

lounge bars. Mosaic, the all-day dining restaurant, serves Western cuisine and Asian flavours. Chao Bella offers Italian and Chinese casual dining in a tastefully done-up setting of red and gold interiors. Mosaic Pastry Lounge has great options of mouth-watering desserts and savouries, with a selection of beverages. Spice Art, a fine dining Indian restaurant serves a handpicked menu of culinary delights from Awadhi and Mughlai cuisines covering regions of Punjab, Delhi, and Lucknow. Live Ghazal singing at Spice Art elevates the dining experience. ConneXions Bar offers a wide selection of gourmet bites and invigorating beverages.

Sharad explains that he has set out to create a buzz around the F&B muscle that they have at the hotel. They recently curated a food festival at the hotel 'Summer Cuisine of the Nawabs of Delhi' by Master Chef Osama Jalili and guests were amazed at the gourmet offerings. This was followed by a 10-day 'Korean Food Festival' where ex-pat Korean Chefs Nam Yeon Hwang and Joon Seok Park were flown in from the InterContinental, Seoul bringing authentic Korean flavours to the table offering a variety of Korean salads, main course dishes, and desserts. These efforts will be ongoing at the hotel and are sure to add a loyal following of food aficionados.

Sharad advises all aspiring hoteliers, "There are no shortcuts to success. This is a lovely career to be in with a global reach and demand. Yes, the job is demanding, disciplined, requires long hours and dedication, but once you learn the ropes and are good at your work, the sky is the limit. This industry will only grow and expand with the right people for the right job always being in short supply."

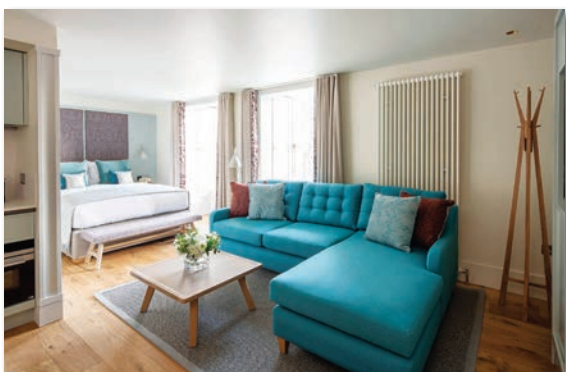
Cheval Abbey Strand Apartments, a slice of history in every corner!

Cheval Abbey Strand Apartments in Edinburgh is a historic landmark beautifully located at the foot of the Royal Mile. This spectacular property has history woven around it, with each apartment telling a different story.

Team TTJ

Cheval Collection is an award-winning hospitality company specialising in high-quality serviced apartments worldwide. The collection includes the Cheval Residences, Cheval Maison brands and MY Locanda brands.

The Cheval Abbey Strand Apartments at Holyrood is a remarkable property prestigiously located on the doorstep of the Palace of Holyroodhouse in the royal heart of Edinburgh. This luxury residence features nine utterly



original and beautifully designed serviced apartments, available to book for any length of stay, from one night to one year or more.

Sharing an unrivalled pedigree, the building has been home to several courtiers during its 500-year history. This rich past meets contemporary living within its characterful walls. Designed with a nod to the colourful assortment of former inhabitants, the collection of open plan, one and two-bedroom apartments are unique and intriguingly unconventional. All apartments are equipped with luxury extras to enhance your stay, whilst each apartment is uniquely versatile, featuring a range of shapes and sizes, sleeping from one to five guests.

The Old Town is the name for the original and oldest part of Scotland's capital, which naturally evolved around the fortified Edinburgh Castle. The castle sits at the top of what is known as the Royal Mile, which leads on a downward slope to Cheval Abbey Strand Apartments at Holyrood and the Palace of Holyroodhouse, the

official residence of the British Monarch when in Scotland. Construction of the Palace as we see it today was largely complete by the late 17th century, but it is believed monastic buildings existed on the site from as early as the late 12th century.

Also adjacent to Cheval Abbey Strand Apartments is the Scottish Parliament, which opened in 2004 and is free to visit, and Dynamic Earth, a family-friendly futuristic science and nature attraction. If you are planning on exploring the city's green spaces, Holyrood Park is only moments from your front door, leading up to Arthur's Seat, the highest point of what is an extinct volcano.

It's about a 10-minute walk to reach the main Old Town area where you'll find an extensive range of restaurants, bars, shops and other attractions guaranteed to keep you busy during your visit. You will also not struggle to find somewhere to sample Scotland's arguably most famous export, whisky.



▲ Shiv Bose

Devising family-friendly monsoon escapades

With stunning views of the Mandovi River, the DoubleTree by Hilton Goa-Panaji is located a short drive away from the capital city of Panaji, providing a serene retreat for discerning travellers. Shiv Bose, General Manager, DoubleTree by Hilton Goa – Panaji, shares about the occupancies at the resort and the range of resort activities that guests and families can partake in during their stay.

Prashant Nayak

This summer holidays have been a boon for travel. The compressed travel plans of domestic travellers saw the light of day, and occupancy surged in all destinations. Goa was no exception to this rule and saw a tremendous inflow of travellers for leisure.

DoubleTree by Hilton Goa-Panaji clocked over 80 per cent in occupancy consistently and the average rate surged by over 30 per cent from previous trend lines. Literally, all the occupancies came from domestic travellers. "I personally believe that the lack of inbound is getting over-compensated by domestic travellers. The rise in disposable income coupled with the hunch for luxury amongst domestic travellers has boded well for hotels and resorts. Revenues are on the rise as more Indians seek the best holiday vacation for

themselves and their loved ones," says Shiv.

Usually during monsoon occupancy levels dip by 20 per cent to 25 per cent every year as retail slows due to weather conditions in Goa. However, this year there has been a pleasant exception, with consistent retail and MICE business growth. The pent-up demand could be the reason for the consistency in travel, which is undermining the inclement weather conditions.

To cater to the demand following COVID, the resort has reworked its offerings to make it more family-oriented. "Our #KidsCertified program is one such initiative that has robust recreational and gastronomic delights for families. Our intent was to offer a very immersive resort experience, which is satisfying for both the child and the parent. If early reviews are any indication, we

have successfully managed to bring this to life. For the monsoon, our 'Chai, Chops & Chatter' package is thoughtfully curated to pamper guests with the best of seasonal bliss the city has to offer. The iconic Mandovi river's calming view from the room balcony, distinctively themed hi-tea inspired from different states of the country, and similar entertainment delights will give the guests a chance to reconnect and relax at this memorable monsoon getaway," briefs Shiv.

DoubleTree by Hilton Goa – Panaji has relaunched its signature restaurant, Feliz, which is its signature dining venue serving authentic coconut-rich, Coastal, Mangalorean, and Goan cuisine in a relaxed outdoor setting. The resort also recently launched the Elle Spa and Salon, with a series of spa treatments for travellers and residents of Goa.

Travstarz looking forward to a promising time ahead

Since they started full operations in April 2022, Travstarz Global Group has covered only one quarter so far, and it seems the going is good for them. Pankaj Nagpal, Managing Director, Travstarz Global Group, while responding to some of our queries, is happy to state that in a short time, they have successfully revived their agents' network, and has started supporting them even more now owing to their past relationships.

Prashant Nayak

Since April 2022, at Travstarz Global Group, there has been an uptick in the reservations, but due to visa delays, high ticket pricing issues, etc., the focus has been majorly on destinations like Thailand, Singapore, Dubai, Maldives, Turkey, etc. There are many queries for Europe, but conversions are a challenge given the visa challenges at present.

"We still have some challenges that will take more time to get sorted. The airfares are still very much on the higher side as compared to the pre-COVID levels, and the additional burden of the declining rupee against the USD has made outbound travel more expensive. Secondly, visa delays stretching for months has been a major issue since most of the embassies had

reduced staff strength during covid times and the manpower is still not adequate to handle the sudden load of outbound travellers," informs Pankaj.

When asked if they were able to streamline the workforce, Pankaj said, "As for our workforce, we had reduced our team size initially and as a revival policy, we have decided to work with a small yet effective team for now. We are focusing on our core strength of our DMCs in various locations, visas and ticketing to some extent and on getting new products and destinations to India and working with our partners and promoting them. We recently brought Vana Nava Water Jungle, Hua Hin, Thailand, Asia's first water jungle to India."



▲ Pankaj Nagpal

The July to September quarter has been a traditionally low season, and at Travstarz, they expect the same this year as well. Pankaj says, "Since we have a strong presence at places like Dubai, Singapore, Malaysia, Nepal, and Thailand, we do expect good volumes to come in for us. However, we expect a good time for travel from October onwards into the festival season provided the airfares stabilise by then and gets back closer to pre-COVID levels. Also, hoping that visa delays are sorted by then as the embassies and VFS are taking steps to get adequate manpower for the timely processing of visas. We expect 100 per cent of airline capacity to come in after September with Jet Airways returning and Air India and Vistara adding new routes."

Getting ready for the festival travel season

Sunrise Representations offers a holistic spectrum of sales and marketing solutions customised for all travel industry interfaces. Its mission is to be the preferred representation company for DMCs, hotels and other travel-related products. We at TTJ spoke to Vandana Mathur, Director, Marketing and PR, Sunrise Representations, to learn more about their business and plans in the current scenario.

Prashant Nayak

Sunrise Representations manages DMC Reps' operations in India. DMC Reps specialises in promoting a unique selection of Destination Management Companies to outbound global markets. In India, through Sunrise Representations, they have a sound understanding of the India market, which has sensitised them to the specific requirements of their clients.

"We assist DMC Reps' partners to grow business from the India market. There are almost close to 25 DMCs in countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Croatia, Slovenia, Spain, Malta, Georgia, and South America that we are promoting to potential tour operators and travel agencies pan India," shares Vandana.

They also assist REPS Unlimited, a division for

hotel representation that offers a global platform to promote locally owned and managed hotels, resorts, and cruises to the biggest and most potential outbound markets from Europe, Asia, Oceania, and North America. REPS Unlimited has recently partnered with The KATA Group Collection, which owns and operates luxurious beach-front resorts in the most desired locations within Thailand: Phuket, Krabi, and Khao Lak.

After the covid slowdown, Sunrise has fared well in the first two quarters of 2022. "Focus Asia, Best of Bahrain, 8 in Spain, our represented DMCs have had good response due to various reasons like better airline connectivity, value for money hotels and popularity of the destinations," says Vandana.

There are still a lot of challenges they face. Inquiries are high, but the conversion is low. High airfare on long-haul destinations and visa



▲ Vandana Mathur

appointment issues still remain. They were able to multitask with the workers during COVID, effectively utilising their services.

Throwing light on their plans for the next two quarters of this year, Vandana informs, "We will participate in OTM in Mumbai and TTF in Ahmedabad in September to get a good share of the holiday and festival season. We hope to confirm inquiries, especially from Kolkata, Gujarat, and Maharashtra, as these are strong markets where people do travel during festivals."

According to Vandana, for outbound travel, a greater focus is on destinations with lesser formalities and ease of visa. Their focus is also on short-haul destinations such as Thailand, where they have partnered with KATA Group Hotels, and new trending destinations such as Vietnam.

Fusion of modern and traditional cultures: KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan is heaven on earth for nature lovers, the country boasts an array of picturesque locations, one better than the other. With remnants of modern European architecture and untouched natural beauty, this destination provides the best of both worlds.

Ravi Sharma

Whenever I asked someone about the countries on their travel bucket list, Kyrgyzstan often went unnoticed. This lesser travelled nation in the Central Asian region is hands-down one of the best places to experience the nomadic life in the being. It made me curious to take a trip around the country mostly surrounded by hills and mountains, which translates into a blend of modern European infrastructure and mesmerising nature.

Although the voyage commenced with a few passport hiccups during airport check-ins, my flight was a smooth sail. I almost felt like flying in a chartered plane. The flight was decked up with no other than the group of travellers Salvia Promoters arranged the flight for.

Despite being a small Central Asian nation, the development around the cities left me spellbound. The roads and markets were neat and clean, with a lot to offer from an architectural and infrastructural standpoint. Our hotel bookings and travel to-and-from the destinations were smooth - credit to our meticulous travel guides.

The Capital City- Bishkek

We reached Bishkek by 16:00 local time, ready to set our journey from the airport to our reserved accommodation on the well-architected roads of Kyrgyzstan. After an hour-long drive from the airport, we finally checked in at the Hyatt Regency, a luxury five-star hotel offering a pool of amenities for a comfortable stay. We took up abode at the hotel and some downtime to revive from our post-flight jet lag. It was then time to move ahead in forage for a scrumptious authentic

meal at the Pishpek Restaurant. I was astonished to witness such a busy day at the restaurant and innumerable



vegetarian options which would work perfectly well for the Indian traveller.

Around the City

On our way to our dinner reservations, we moved around in exploration of the city. Being a traditional Islamic nation,



it was quite intriguing to find imprints of Russian architecture. Bishkek offers a quaint juxtaposition of Islamic as well as Soviet-style compositions. The peculiarity of the European infrastructure can be traced to the foundations of educational and governmental establishments built around the city.

Osh Bazaar

Followed by a wholesome breakfast spread at Hyatt on our second day of the trip, we went forward for hotel inspections at Plaza Hotel, Orient Hotel, Ramada, and Novotel, where we stopped by for lunch. Although the hotels we inspected were good and reasonably priced 4-star, we did struggle with parking space at Hotel Ramada.

We left for an on-foot tour around Bishkek's streets during the day's second half. One can learn a lot about the culture of an unknown land by walking around the streets. It is rightly said that a trip to Bishkek is incomplete without a visit to Osh Bazaar, a flea market brimming with local delicacies, herbs, spices, and premium dry fruits, to mention a few making it a perfect stop for some souvenir shopping.





The Bishkek Weather and Food

Although a more significant percentage of Kyrgyzstan’s topology is mountainous, the mercury during the day tends to touch 33 degrees. As the sky turned a little dusky, we moved to the upper side of the country to enjoy a delectable meal at Supara Restaurant, surrounded by the hills, where we had a fortuitous encounter with a council minister of Bishkek. A lot of good Indian restaurants can be found around this area. The weather amidst the hills was comparatively pleasant and could get as low as 20 degrees.

Burana Tower

The Burana Tower is a minaret, originally built at a height of 44 m which now stands 25 m tall due to historic predicaments. We



stopped at this historic landmark on our route to Issyk Kul Lake from Bishkek. This tower is a remnant archive of the ancient city of Balasagun that survived. The tower is surrounded by several Balbals (gravestones built by Turks during their voyage through the Central Asia), serving as an open-air museum for the visitors.

Gold Shopping

Like most Middle East countries, there happen to be plethora of options for the lovers of gold. The gold rates are slashed by 15-20 per cent in Kyrgyzstan compared



to India. One such store with great hospitality was the Yuvelirnyy Kholding Altyn Jewellery store. Unlike in India where 22-24 karat gold is widely used, the trend in Kyrgyzstan suggests that the people prefer to adorn 18 karat ornaments over higher quality gold.

Issyk Kul Lake

Surrounded by the majestic snow-capped Tian Shan mountains, this lake is known to be the seventh deepest lake in the world, offering the most picturesque views of all time. On our route to the main destination, we made pit stops for nomadic activities like exploring the yurt, taking Shyrdak (traditional felt-rug) making workshops, and observing the nomadic life of Kyrgyzstan. We also had an opportunity to attend the national horseback riding games and other games played by the country’s nomadic population, like eagle hunting.

The activities in and around this beautiful lake are not limited. Covered by a diverse range of flora and fauna along

with horticulture, this place consists of spectacular hikes and trails accompanied by salubrious weather.

We stayed at Raduga Resort, with a sandy beach near the property and a spa for people looking for some relaxing time-out. The boat cruise we took during the golden hours was the cherry on the top as the lake surrounded us alongside a captivating view of the sun setting on the other side.

After the cruise, we headed back to Bishkek to make it on time for our last dinner reservation of the trip at Barashek before boarding our morning flights the next day.

Did You Know?

Kyrgyzstan’s flag features 40 sun rays acknowledging the lucky number as per the beliefs of the residents of the country.

Trade Speaks

Rashmi Chadha Wovoyage
“The FAM trip was amazing, I loved all the arrangements, especially the food and hotels. I even loved the food and beautiful landscapes of Kyrgyzstan. It felt like a short trip and I’m already planning for a longer trip. The destination will definitely create an impact, as the flight is just three hours and not too expensive. As a woman who works with female influencers, I can say it is a safe destination.”

Sharique M. Siddiqui It’s Global
“The FAM was beautifully organised by Salvia Promoters. Everything was good i.e. airlines, hotel, vehicle, food choice, restaurants, and sight visits were strategically planned. Smaller MICE movements and family trips to Kyrgyzstan have the potential to sell in India.”

Suresh Pendakur Fiesta Vacations
“The FAM was very good and well organised. The highlight for me was nature and an amazing experience of Nomadic life. The trip would be value for money as it beats Switzerland in terms of beauty.”

Mahendra Singh, Unique Holidays
“I feel that it will be a hot selling destination one day for short-haul tours. Flight connectivity is great. The country is full of natural beauty, the only gap that needs to be filled for the Indian audience is adding a few more vegetarian options.”



Bahrain

An inspiring destination within reach

A hidden gem located in the Persian Gulf in the Middle East, Bahrain is an exotic island destination with endless discoveries and experiences. Bahrain is a multi-cultural destination that welcomes travellers from all over the world. If Indian travellers want a vacation filled with stunning heritage, exhilarating adventure activities, breath-taking architecture, local treasures, and eclectic food experiences, then Bahrain is the destination for them.

Team TTJ

A journey through culture

Bahrain is a one-of-a-kind country with a long and illustrious history. Despite modernisation and cosmopolitanism, Arabic culture is still deeply rooted in the roots of this destination. Bahrain is considered one of the friendliest countries in the world, with a level of hospitality second to none. Bahrain's Arab culture is proudly displayed in its architecture, mosques, and communal entertainment venues, such as souks and cafes. While

traditional pastimes such as falconry, horseback riding, and poetry remain popular, more modern activities such as soccer and international travel have gained popularity.

Bahrain has an interesting fact. The capital city, Manama, was named the Capital of Asian Tourism in 2015 and the Capital of Arab Tourism in 2013. It was also nominated as the Capital of Arab Culture in 2012.

Island escapes and beachy days

Bahrain is the only island nation in the Middle East region making it exotic. The islands here have pristine beaches, luxury beach resorts, amazing water sports activities like jet-skiing, paddle boarding, kite surfing, stand-up paddle boarding, SUP yoga, and the list goes on. Some of the islands and beaches

one should definitely visit for the first time should be the famous Al Dar island, the magical Jarada island, Ritz-Carlton beach, the one-of-a-kind white sandy beach of Solymar Beach, adventure-filled Coral Bay Beach, Marassi Beach, etc.

One very exciting and unique activity that everyone must try is pearl diving in Bahrain. For more than 2,000 years, Bahraini pearls have been prized as some of the best natural pearls in the world. People can hunt for their very own pearl in the waters of Bahrain and enjoy the thrilling excitement of opening the oysters to discover if they have found a pearl. Over here they have something they call "finders keepers", which means if you find a pearl, you get to keep the pearl.

A journey through heritage

For the history buffs out there, Bahrain is home to three UNESCO World Heritage sites and has a history dating back to the ancient Dilmun civilisation. The three sites recognised as UNESCO World Heritage





Sites are the Pearling Path, Qal'at-al-Bahrain, and the Dilmun Burial Mounds. The destination is rich in Arabic culture, which is reflected through its architecture, mosques, and souqs. There are many places that tourists can visit in Bahrain where they can experience the rich heritage and culture, like the Arad Fort, Bahrain Fort, Sheikh Salman Bin Ahmed Al Fateh Fort, Al Fateh Mosque, the 200-year-old Hindu temple, over 19 churches, and even a synagogue.

Enjoy local food and world cuisine

The real treasure in Bahrain is their beautifully simple yet distinctly delicious local cuisine. From traditional Bahraini cuisine to fine dining to burger places, Bahrain's food scene will satisfy one's cravings. Most Bahraini traditional food consists of fish, meat, rice, and, of course, dates. The cuisine is renowned for its fusion of many flavors. Some must-try local delicacies are machboos (meat or fish served with rice), falafel, balaleet (sweet saffron noodles served with a savory omelet on top), and, of course, every Indian's favorite biryani and the traditional Gahwa coffee. The destination is picking

up its game when it comes to vegan and vegetarian food as well. When in Bahrain, one can enjoy and indulge in cuisines from all over the world, like Japanese, Thai, Irish, European, American, seafood, Italian, Mexican, just name it, and they have it. For an amazing gastronomical experience, visit Block 338.

Shop till you drop

All that glitters in Bahrain is usually really gold! The Gold Souq



in Bahrain is without a doubt a must-see attraction for anyone visiting Bahrain, and it draws a large crowd due to its Hallmark gold. As one travels around this exotic destination, one will come across the best malls that not only define luxury but also provide the experience of global shopping with stunning architectural malls housing world-famous brands all

Bahrain is the place for adrenaline junkies and sports fans

The country also provides many exciting activities and attractions for the whole family, and even for kids. So, take the time to explore some places and discover the best activities in Bahrain. When one travels to the destination, here are a few things they should definitely do. Camping in the Sakhir desert is one of the most

popular activities in Bahrain. Experience the beauty of the desert and the stunning sunset on the Karbabad beach and Bahrain Fort on horseback. Spend the day at thrilling water and amusement

parks with the kids. At the Bahrain International Karting Circuit, people can put their need for speed to the test and give their racing skills a test. Even the little speed racers



under one roof. Some of the shopping places in Bahrain include Moda Mall, The Avenues, Souq Waqif, Soup Al Manama, Seef Mall, Bahrain Mall, City Centre Bahrain, Dragon City, etc.

can race on this track. Defy gravity and experience the feeling of free fall at Gravity, the first ever indoor skydiving facility in Bahrain with the tallest wind tunnel in the world. Kids and adults are both welcome to experience this thrill. And let's not forget that here one can watch the world-famous Formula 1 race live at the Bahrain International Circuit.

Well, no matter what the traveller's preference is, the spectacular Kingdom of Bahrain is going to have them spoilt for choice.



A walk through Melbourne Victoria

From colourful racing carnivals and Grand Slam tennis to performances of Tony, Grammy, Olivier and Pulitzer Prize-winning musical Hamilton, there's always something exciting happening in Victoria.

A wealth of diverse regions and attractions are packed into this compact area, with sweeping coastlines, pristine beaches and national parks and forests teeming with wildlife, plus wineries, lakes and mountains offering skiing, climbing and hiking. Best of all, many of Victoria's unique and varied landscapes are easily reached as day trips from Melbourne.

Team TTJ

The Great Ocean Walk and 12 Apostles

Created by constant erosion of the limestone cliffs of the mainland beginning 10–20 million years ago, the stormy Southern Ocean and blasting winds gradually eroded the softer limestone, forming caves in the cliffs. The caves eventually became arches, and when they collapsed, rock stacks up to 45 metres high were left isolated from the shore. View the 12 Apostles at sunrise and sunset as they change colour from dark and foreboding in shadow to brilliant sandy yellow under a full sun.



Stretching from the seaside village of Apollo Bay west to the 12 Apostles, the Great Ocean Walk passes along a dramatic coastline of soaring cliffs and remote beaches, with tangents exploring giant eucalypt forests full of kangaroos, wallabies and koalas, and meandering estuaries brimming with birdlife. Strap on your walking boots and hit the spectacular Great Ocean Walk. Taken as a multi-day adventure, the east-to-west epic has been labelled a 'mild to wild' journey as its remoteness and ruggedness increases the further towards the 12 Apostles you step.

Native Wildlife

Birdwatchers will love the 350 species of birdlife, including kookaburras, lyrebirds and brightly coloured parrots. Looking for bigger thrills? Head to the coast to see migrating whales



or take a Port Phillip Bay cruise to see the dolphins and seals.

Watch Little Penguins dash home across the sand at Phillip Island Nature Parks' Penguin Parade. Explore boardwalks after dark to see, smell and hear these penguins in the colony, greeting neighbours, partners and their chicks. While you wander, keep an eye out for resident wildlife including Swamp Wallabies, Eastern Barred Bandicoots, Cape Barren Geese and Short-tailed Shearwaters.

Aboriginal Victoria

Journey through Aboriginal Victoria for a traditional and



contemporary experience of this ancient land. Learn more about the spiritual beliefs and unique traditions of South Eastern Australia's first people, culturally significant sites, renowned art and original crafts, and a living history which reaches back more than 60,000 years.

Visit cultural centres, national parks, wetlands and wildlife reserves, public and private art galleries. Head to a cultural and community event like 'Dreamtime at the G' in Melbourne. Take a tour with a traditional owner, or dine out at restaurants cooking with native Australian ingredients.

Road Trips and Itineraries

Travel across Victoria and experience the region's stunning landscapes, historic towns and renowned food and wine. The state's compact size means you can travel from high in the mountains to the rugged southern coast and back to the city in just a short space of time. So hit the road on a touring route, make your own way around, or follow an itinerary and see the wonders of Victoria for yourself.

Spa and Wellbeing

Home to an abundance of natural mineral springs and ancient geothermal springs, Victoria offers a unique spa and wellbeing experience. Rejuvenate in the nutrient-rich waters and indulge at boutique spa resorts, luxury accommodation and day spas. With its long spa tradition, more than 100 springs and every kind of luxury throughout the state, Victoria is the perfect place for an indulgent escape.

Fun Activities

Want to sprinkle a bit of fun on top of your stay? We've got awesome attractions, exciting adventures and leisure activities for the young – and young at heart – no matter how hard to please. For a relaxed day out, get beachy in Melbourne's bayside suburbs. Keep boredom at bay on thrilling high-speed



rides at Luna Park in St Kilda, or try your luck at carnival games and circle sweetly on the carousel. Buckle up for indoor go-karting or catch waves at an urban surf park.

Regional Victoria has a high fun quotient, too. Work up an appetite at mini-golf courses, and get lost with the little ones in mazes and adventure parks. Burn off energy on wetlands walks and waterways, or hike and cycle through diverse terrain, filled with Victoria's natural beauty. Count koalas and kangaroos as you go, and soak in natural hot springs afterward. It's easy to find parks and beaches too – just perfect for ball play, sandcastles and water fun.

And finally, Coffee

Not many cities take their coffee as seriously as Melbourne does. Here, the bean and beverage are almost as sacred as footy, which is good news if you're in the mood for the perfect caffeine hit.

At the city's best cafes, professional baristas will happily talk beans and machines while carefully tending to your brew. And, not content to simply perfect the cafe creme, these caffeine gurus are riding the 'third wave' of coffee, at the crest of which are pourovers, syphons and clovers and cold-drip coffees. Next to an old-school Gaggia these new coffee machines look more like Beaker's lab equipment but promise a perfect drop.

Need your special single origin at home? Speciality roasters are springing up faster than ever and most of the best cafes sell their supplier's coffee, so it's easy to bag locally roasted beans to take home. Look out for local favourites Padre, Seven Seeds, St Ali, Five Senses and Di Bella.



Cedarmint Global

The new one-stop solution to move your hotel and resort business forward

With an experience of over two decades in the hospitality sector, Vinay Singh has embarked on an entrepreneurial journey by announcing his new venture, Cedarmint Global, a Hospitality Management Company. The newly formed company recently announced the signing of their debut resort property, The White Resort and Spa Pawna. His career span includes multiple brands of the Marriott International, including St. Regis, Renaissance Hotels, Westin Hotels, and Marriott Executive Apartments, to name a few. In this exclusive interaction, Vinay Singh, CEO, Cedarmint Global, tells us about his background in hospitality and entrepreneurship, his hotel management philosophy, and the difficulties that lie ahead.

Prashant Nayak

Now that you're an entrepreneur, tell us about your motivation, entry, and journey so far in the industry?

My journey is one that I look back on, and feel inspired each day. Every young boy aspires to achieve bigger dreams and goals. With a keen interest in management studies, I remember I used to travel extensively and learned a lot during my college tenure. While I pursued it, I was inclined toward hospitality and gradually paved my path towards it. For someone who learned through interactions and on-ground learning, the goal was set. To run the overall operations and manage properties was something that motivated me to serve a greater purpose and work towards relationship building at the same time. Being in a fast-paced city also motivated me to dream big and do bigger. The hospitality industry provides you with an opportunity to meet, build relationships and



▲ Vinay Singh

interact with people from different walks of life and different industries. It allows you a warm and beautiful working atmosphere to work in. Working with international brands of Starwood Group, now Marriott International, the entire transition and journey has been one enriched with learnings and growth.

You have worked with many luxury properties while with Marriott. Which are the qualities and traits that you have inculcated from the Marriott brand?

The brand, Marriott International is a statement today. With hotels and resorts spanning the entire globe, there is no dearth of opportunities. There is so much potential with Marriott International brands, that each one teaches you brand values that serve you for years to come. To state, The St. Regis is the personification of luxury, and it was

all about the grandeur and extravaganza that we delivered. Westin Hotels, being a brand focusing on wellness and well-being, made us focus on six wellness pillars and heightened its effect on our guests accordingly. Each brand collectively teaches you certain focus elements and how the desired target audience relays or reacts to them. The Marriott International group also teaches you that it's all about the people and team that makes things possible, successful, and wholesome.

What prompted you to be an entrepreneur in the hospitality segment?

With hotels and resorts, each day is different. There is no dearth of challenges or opportunities. The extremes that I have witnessed are what roused the idea of embarking on an entrepreneurial journey. To have something of my own was a budding thought and to see it materialise and come to life is another feeling altogether.

In my 22 years of experience, I have always taken small risks at certain intervals, and that has always driven me to explore untapped potential. Be it stand-alone restaurants, private banquets, boutique hotels, or working with international brands like Marriott International; in totality, there were many avenues that I explored. Plentiful encounters like working on the pre-opening team or revamping brands only drove me to discover further. This could be considered as the last risk, or as some may call it, a leap of faith, that I took to test my extremes.

What are the new elements and concepts you have visualised for Cedarmint Global? How different will it be from other hotel management companies?

Cedarmint Global is a concept with which



Vinay Singh and Vikas Jain

I am focusing on providing overall project development and management of hotels and resorts, along with handling management contracts. With my team, I want to focus on overall hotels, branding, and NFTs (Non-Fungible Token) on the whole. With an in-depth understanding of the hospitality industry, we provide professional advice to investors and individuals alike. For those looking to invest in the ever-evolving hospitality sector, we are your one-stop solution for all queries.

We take up new projects with independent hotels and resorts that are already operational. Our team of experts possesses over two decades of hotel expertise that enables them to understand the minutest of details about any department. To adapt, nurture and take advantage of upcoming opportunities, we make sure our client's resources are optimally and strategically used. If there is something different and interesting about Cedarmint Global, I would say it's the NFT

effective solutions at affordable costs.

What potential challenges do you foresee in your new venture?

Being an entrepreneur is not an easy feat to achieve. I am sure there are multiple challenges that we will face along the way, as both life and the hospitality industry are unpredictable. With our core being development, overall project management, and management contracts, we are placed in a very competitive market with national and international brands. However, it does become an exciting placement to contest with the best players in the market.

Identifying and aligning the right team is the foundation for any company and that is something that I am extremely focused on.

With unprecedented things that happen around us, we cannot be in complete control. For instance, COVID-19 took the world by surprise, and it did take time for the masses and industries to identify their way around it. Such challenges cannot be foreseen, however, the approach towards dealing with them and overcoming them with

tasteful solutions is what makes us different.

Tell us about your debut project, The White Resort and Spa Pawna, and its USPs?

The White Resort and Spa, Pawna is a 100-keys resort, spread across 25 acres of land, engulfed by mountains has a 9-hole putting golf course and comprises a luxury Wellness Spa, three food and beverage outlets, a ballroom with 5500 sq. ft. space, and two grand open-air lawns. The entire project is being developed, managed, and will be launched by Cedarmint Global along with Vikas Jain, owner of the resort. The location is one that is perfect for staycations and getaways from the hustle and bustle of

city life. With villas and rooms detailed to perfection, along with the grand ballroom, events and functions are also bound to be a core USP of the resort.

What will be your way forward and strategies to establish your brand and expand it?

With Cedarmint Global coming to life, there are multiple avenues that we intend on tapping with our customised and personalised approach. Our impeccable standard of delivery and project management is what makes us different. The vision that I have for my company is bound to curate the required demand and buzz in the market with the properties we associate with. Now, we are associating ourselves with the luxury segment and hotels around the state. Eventually, we have expansion plans in the pipeline.

How do you look at the hospitality business shaping up in India in the next few years?

The hospitality industry is an ever-evolving domain. There are multiple avenues and innovative methodologies that are being integrated and explored today. With major technological integrations and developments in the industry and globally, aligning our products with these is essential to maintain the upkeep and remain updated in the market. India and the hospitality industry have been interlinked using the approach of 'Athithi Devo Bhava', wherein our guests are at the epitome of hierarchy, and we want to tend after the same. Irrespective of how technologically advanced we become, the personal touch is what will differentiate hospitality across the world and in India.



segment that we are targeting with our company. Being among the first few in the country to align it with the hospitality sector is one to generate curiosity and interest in our client's mind.

What will the Cedarmint Global brand's credo be?

It is our constant endeavour to establish and maintain service excellency by providing integrated marketing solutions in hospitality projects. To provide our clients with value-added offerings and ensure high standards of professionalism cascade through all avenues.

Our motto is to deliver optimum results through product enhancement, guidance, and commitment to ensuring financial stability and growth. Build a level of commitment while managing our client's assets with a sense of true ownership. Our multi-skilled resources, intensive supervision, and personalised assistance grant our team to stay updated with recent innovations, industry trends, and market needs. Our focus is to deliver tangible and



Sun International awaits Indians with upgraded hotels, services and experiential activities

Sun International, in association with the South African Consulate General Mumbai, India, and Airline partner, Air Seychelles, recently organised a 'Trade Appreciation Evening' in Mumbai. TTJ met up with Andrea Kuhn, Consul General, Republic of South Africa, Sherene Allaman, VP - Sales and Marketing, Sun International, and Vasudha Sondhi, Managing Director, Outbound Marketing, and they were happy to share their enthusiasm for renewing ties with Indian travel fraternity, on new developments at Sun International and travel to South Africa.

Prashant Nayak

With international tourism reviving after more than a two-year hiatus, Sun International is all set to renew ties and network once again with the Indian travel trade. At the 'Trade Appreciation Evening' they invited tour operators, MICE agents, wedding planners, and media to thank them for their continued support in keeping the business flowing to the hotel group. Their trade partners were appreciated for creating and maintaining an aspiration amongst the consumers in India to visit Sun International properties in South Africa.

The event started with a brief on the destination, South Africa. Then showcased were Sun International's diverse portfolio of assets including world-class premium five-star hotels and resorts, modern and well-located casinos along with their offerings of experiential luxury, enduring quality, and incredible adventure supported by a genuine dedication to personal service.

Elaborating more on the event's purpose, Sherene Allaman expressed, "We are thankful to our clients in India who have been relentlessly promoting South Africa and motivating tourists to stay at Sun International Hotels. We have seen an extremely positive trend in the last two months where the business is flowing in from all possible travel segments, including leisure, corporate, MICE and social events. There cannot be a better time than this to celebrate our bond with our travel partners in India. And that is why I decided to be here and appreciate their support and thank them personally through our appreciation night."

The event ended with a lucky draw. The winners won hotel stay vouchers for Maslow Time Square, Maslow Sandton,



▲ Sherene Allaman

The Table Bay, Boardwalk, and the mega prize included free air tickets for a couple by Air Seychelles and a stay voucher for a couple at The Palace of the Lost City. There was also a farewell ceremony for

Rakesh Bhandari, Account Director, who had been working with Sun International for many years.

India is now one of the largest international source and focus markets for South Africa Tourism globally. Over the years, Indian tourist footfalls are rapidly growing in South Africa. Now, there are several stop-over flights from India to South Africa, including Emirates, Air Seychelles, Qatar Airways, Etihad, RwandAir, Ethiopian Airlines, and Kenya Airways. However, strategically located directly between both countries, Air Seychelles offers the fastest connection between India and South Africa.

Mentioning more on connectivity, Andrea Kuhn said, "The South African team in India is working hard to re-introduce direct flights between India and SA, especially considering that we will be celebrating 30 years of our bilateral relations in 2023. Though we have many airlines connecting India and South Africa, we are also keen to start direct flights as it is important for both tourists and business travellers alike. Even our visa process is easy and we have a turnaround time of





▲ Andrea Kuhn

five working days to issue visas provided the requirements are met.”

Sun International’s iconic Sun City Resort has always been on the bucket list of Indian travellers. The Sun International brand has a proud legacy in the gaming, hospitality, conferencing, and leisure sectors. The Group’s diverse South African property portfolio includes 15 hotels, 2 premier resorts, and 11 well-located casinos, all of which offer modern, fully equipped conferencing and banqueting facilities. It is also the local industry leader in online gaming and betting through the SunBet platform, which offers the latest global technology and the most innovative and exciting online betting experience.

In addition to the iconic Sun City resort, Sun International’s other equally exciting properties include the Wild Coast Sun resort, a slice of beach paradise on the tropical South Coast, the luxurious Table Bay hotel in Cape Town, The Maslow Sandton, and The Maslow Time Square in Gauteng, The beach facing Boardwalk in Gqeberha, The Golden Valley Lodge in Worcester’s beautiful Hex River Valley, The Sibaya Lodge in Durban’s Umhlanga Rocks, and Meropa in Polokwane, an ideal gateway to the Kruger National Park.

Speaking about the India market, Sherene Allaman said, “India is an important market for Sun International, and we are keen to tap all travel segments like leisure, MICE, FIT, group, etc. We have multiple properties ranging from five-star luxury to three-stars. South Africa is also an incredible wedding destination and we have an efficient events team to cater to the segment as well. We are also tapping all markets and all regions in India.”

Besides the exciting hotels and their

value-added stays, Sherene says they also look forward to giving memorable experiences for their guests to take back. Their destinations offer experiential luxury, enduring quality and incredible adventure, supported by an authentic dedication to personal service.

In 2021, Sun International launched a direct booking hotel reservation platform, allowing hotel guests to book and secure their reservations through a simple and safe online payment process. The new booking platform also allows users to purchase accommodation vouchers to gift to others and for corporates to use as part of their rewards and incentive programmes.

While discussing the new additions, Sherene said, “Sun International has upgraded its hotels, services, and activities. We are ready to welcome our guests with impeccable hygiene and the highest service standards.” Serene added, “We are proud to mention that we have taken up the mammoth task of upgrading all rooms in our Flagship Hotel. The Palace of the Lost City, including a brand-new Spa and Gym. The Table Bay celebrates 25 years as we continue to deliver the most memorable experiences at the best address in Cape Town. We are delighted to include SIBA Restaurant and a renowned local celebrity chef infusing African and European dishes.”

Outbound Marketing, the India Representative of Sun International Hotels has been strengthening Sun International’s presence in the India market over the years. To enhance its market share in India, it has consistently made the appropriate moves. Outbound Marketing provides India source market solutions to hotel companies and tourism destinations through full-time sales, marketing representation, and projects.

Sharing about the marketing activities,



▲ Vasudha Sondhi

Vasudha Sondhi said, “Even during the peak of COVID-19, we never stopped doing our work for Sun International in South Africa. We were conducting webinars and training with the stakeholders who were already in the business. We did not have clear strategies for 2020 or 2021 and picked up whatever business was coming in. Now in 2022, we have started strategising with many luxury travel agents and are also focussing on MICE groups as we have a huge inventory in all the sun international hotels in South Africa.”

“It’s great that travel to South Africa is picking up. Travellers are looking at experiences, and South Africa has that rare combination of offering experiences at every level backed by great infrastructure and products. We are encouraged with the bouncing back of the business to Sun International Hotels and South Africa,” she added.



The Palace of the Lost City

Rhythm Hospitality planning on more acquisitions and strategic alliances

Vaibhav Jatia, Managing Director, Rhythm Hospitality, has pioneered the ResiTel concept in India. Rhythm ResiTel currently owns and operates resort properties in Lonavala and Kumarakom and is also involved with upcoming projects across Maharashtra, Karnataka, and other parts of India. TTJ caught up with Vaibhav to learn about the ResiTel model, factors driving revenues, challenges and plans, new trends like staycations, and more.

Prashant Nayak

With a long-term goal of revolutionising the hospitality industry in India, Rhythm ResiTel, a diverse conglomerate in the hospitality and real estate industries, pioneered the novel concept of ResiTel. Rhythm ResiTel offers a synthesis of resort ambience and real estate ownership, where individuals can buy resort suite units as a convenient property investment, yielding long-term secured returns and capital appreciation. The ResiTel asset class ensures productive use of the property both for superior income generation purposes and for hassle-free enjoyment.

Rhythm Lonavala, a ResiTel hotel, is built on the land that belongs to Karsandas Mulraaj, a freedom fighter. The Jatia family acquired that land for the grandson of Karsandas Mulraaj named Jawahar Mulraaj. During the property's inception, the Jatia family gave strict instructions to retain and maintain all the trees and continue the legacy of the Mulraaj family. The property proudly holds trees that are 80 years old and more. Also, all the artifacts in the property are specially handpicked from around the world.

At Rhythm Hospitality, there has been an uptick in reservation bookings and higher average room rates (ARR) for hotels. Across their portfolio, they are currently doing anywhere between 30 per cent to 40 per cent more business than before the pandemic. However, their offerings are tailored more to the leisure segment. On the other hand, business hotels are still taking some more



▲ Vaibhav Jatia

time to cross pre-pandemic levels.

"Room rates and occupancy are a function of demand and supply. While the demand has increased, supply has not been added as no new hotels have come up in the last 3-4 years. For Rhythm, this has translated to an increase in occupancy, reservations as well as ARR," explains Vaibhav.

Due to COVID-19, there has been an increase in attrition in the hospitality industry, adding to the challenges in business. Vaibhav says, "Attrition that used to be around 5-10 per cent is probably now closer to 20 per

cent. However, it is up to each group to put in well-balanced SOPs and other HR policies to ensure that there is loyalty within the organisation. We have been fortunate to attract and retain good talent at Rhythm Group."

Some of the other challenges that have been prevalent in the industry for quite a

few years are things like access to capital. Hospitality projects require substantial capital, and in India, access to the right capital to enable the scaling of this sector is limited. The sector is also looking forward to implementing various policies, such as expanding industry benefits to hotels, announced by Maharashtra Tourism in April 2021.

For the next two quarters of this year, at Rhythm on their existing portfolio, they plan to continue increasing profitability while maintaining their guest satisfaction ratio. This is done by ensuring that all their properties score high on the ORM tool, a performance metric tool they use to measure guest satisfaction across their portfolio. "We are also using this time as an opportunity to build our company via inorganic growth. We are planning on more acquisitions and strategic alliances. There are good assets currently on the market at attractive price points. Hence, we are trying to make the most of the opportunity and add more resorts to our portfolio," shares Vaibhav.

'Staycation' was an interesting new trend that developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a trend that is likely to continue in the future as most of us have got accustomed to the 'work from anywhere' lifestyle.

Elaborating more on this trend, Vaibhav says, "I think it developed because many five and four-star hotels in cities kept lowering their rates to attract customers, to fill rooms and get business. For instance, a five-star hotel in Chennai with 700-rooms offered accommodations at a very less price point to attract the local city crowd. However, this is a price-sensitive business. These city hotels would have to keep their prices extremely low or balance them to capture such markets. Due to the low price factor and the COVID-19 safety provided by the hotels, the concept of staycations picked up. However, in due course, once the business starts returning to normal, with corporates and other outbound and inbound businesses back again, the city hotels are bound to increase the tariffs. These will lead to a reduction in staycations. However, for the time being, this concept has been very well accepted, and thus the trend is likely to continue."



Western Australia on a mission to promote tourism, unlock business opportunities in India

Recently, Roger Cook, Western Australia's Deputy Premier, visited Delhi and Mumbai as part of a 7-day India Trade Mission to highlight Western Australia's diverse opportunities. Carolyn Turnbull, Managing Director, Tourism Western Australia, was a part of the mission and was keen to engage with key travel, media, and aviation stakeholders. They had also roped West Australian cricketer legend Brad Hogg to India to promote Australia's largest state as a must-visit destination ahead of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup later this year. We have a gist of the event that was held in Mumbai.

Team TTJ

This was the Western Australian Government's first official visit since 2019. The mission, led by the Deputy Premier, included ministerial meetings, group briefings, industry roundtables, one-to-one business matching, and networking events in Delhi, Vijayawada, and Chennai.

To strengthen awareness and relations, the multi-sector Trade Mission aimed to unlock opportunities for Western Australian businesses in India while promoting Western Australia as a destination for tourists, students, events, businesses, and investment.

Roger Cook, Deputy Premier, Minister for State Development, Jobs and Trade, Tourism, Commerce, and Science said, "India remains a priority market for Western Australia, and I'm delighted to be leading this trade mission to meet with key partners and stakeholders in-person."

Following the return of international visitors to Western Australia has seen an influx of visitors from India, with arrivals in May reaching more than 90 per cent of pre-COVID levels, and forward bookings for July and August are even higher than before the pandemic.

"Securing a direct aviation route from India to Western Australia is a key aviation priority for the Western Australian Government, as it would create even more opportunities for tourism and investment in both destinations while helping to reconnect visitors from India with their loved ones in Western Australia while providing a huge boost for WA travel and accommodation businesses," stated Cook.

Cook also added, "Tourism Western Australia's research indicates travellers from India are especially interested in nature and wildlife, stunning coastlines, beaches and marine wildlife, local cuisine and a family-friendly destination – Western Australia has all this to offer and much more."

Around the size of Western Europe, Western Australia accounts for one-third of the Australian continent. It boasts 20,000 kilometres of mainland and island coastline,

the world's oldest minerals, and a host of natural wonders found nowhere else on earth.

Carolyn Turnbull said that the mission had received a very warm welcome in India. They have hit the ground running, engaging with key travel and media contacts and meeting with aviation stakeholders to showcase all the adventures awaiting visitors from India.

"Another focus of the mission has been promoting Western Australia's blockbuster events, in particular the upcoming ICC Men's T20 matches in Perth, with India's national team to play South Africa at our world-class Perth Stadium in October," informed Carolyn.

Around three-quarters of the state's population of 2.6 million people live in the Perth region. Perth is Australia's sunniest capital city. The city's spectacular natural surroundings are rivalled only by its vibrant city life.

"Events in Western Australia cosmopolitan capital city of Perth complement the incredible range of activities available to visitors to enjoy all across our beautiful state – whether it's the stunning forests and wine regions in Western Australia's South West, or our pristine beaches along the Coral Coast, we're using this mission to promote that Western Australia truly has something for everyone," expressed Carolyn.

Brad Hogg spoke about all things cricket, from the highly anticipated ICC Men's T20 World Cup to his infamous wicket of Andy Flower in the 2003 World Cup. Brad also shared his favourite spots in Perth, and why Western Australia is the ideal destination for cricket lovers, travellers, and adventure seekers.

Brad and the Deputy Premier highlighted Western Australia's "Venue of the Year"- the Perth Stadium, which will play host to many key matches, including India's game with South Africa in less than four months.



▲ Hon. Roger Cook



▲ Carolyn Turnbull



▲ Brad Hogg

RDTM 2022

boosts industry confidence

The second edition of the Rajasthan Domestic Travel Mart (RDTM) 2022 came to a close on July 24, 2022, at the Birla Auditorium in Jaipur, boosting confidence and optimism among the travel and hospitality fraternity. The event was jointly organised by the Department of Tourism, Government of Rajasthan, and the Federation of Hospitality and Tourism of Rajasthan (FHTR).

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

The three-day event witnessed many pre-scheduled B2B meetings between the buyers and sellers, bringing together travel industry stakeholders for interaction and business generation. RDTM 2022 has been a step in the right direction at the right time for the revival of tourism post the struggles and challenges of the pandemic.

The mart was attended by a large number of dignitaries, including Dr. B.D. Kalla, Rajasthan Minister of Art and Culture, Shakuntala Rawat-Rajasthan Minister of Industries, Usha Sharma, Chief Secretary, Government of Rajasthan, Gayatri Rathore, Principal Secretary, Rajasthan Tourism, Gaj Singh, President Emeritus, Indian Heritage Hotels Association (IHHA), Dharmendra Rathore, Chairman of RTDC, Rashmi Sharma, Director of Tourism, and Rajiv Arora, Chairman of Rajasthan Small Industries Corporation (RSIC).

Apurv Kumar, President, FHTR, informed that apart from registered buyers, many non-registered buyers also attended the travel mart and engaged in fruitful networking. RDTM 2022 saw 200 exhibitors showcase

their tourism products and 400 buyers pan-India, and 150 buyers from Rajasthan attend the mega travel event.

Spread over three floors of the spacious halls of Birla Auditorium, numerous tourism product owners were in attendance, staging their wide range of hotels, resorts, and services. Eminent speakers were a part of a wide range of 'Knowledge Sessions' organised for detailed discussions and exchanging valuable information.

Speaking to TTJ, Mohan Singh Mertia, Secretary General, FHTR, said, "When we were conceptualizing this second edition of RDTM, it seemed a very uphill task to get so many people together on a single platform as the industry was re-emerging from the



shadow of the pandemic. However, thanks to the financial support received from the Government of Rajasthan, the enthusiasm of our stakeholders, and support from associations like ADTOI, IATO, TAAI, and TAFI, we had 200 plus hosted buyers from across India."

He further added, "All trade associations and hotel associations from Rajasthan such as HRAR, IHHA, RATO and hotel associations of Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Bikaner, Jaisalmer, and Ranthambhore have worked together to make this mart a grand success."

Reflecting on the momentum of positivity generated at RDTM 2022, Rajendra Singh Pachar, Convention Chairman IHHA and Executive Committee Member, RDTM, stated, "RDTM has been a great platform for the hotel industry to showcase their products and services to buyers from across the country. We have participation from rural homestays, small guest houses, heritage





hotels, modern hotels to palace hotels here at the mart. It is nice to see that all these segments have evinced great buyer interest."

"Almost 10,000 B2B meetings fructified during RDTM, generating business inquiries not only from our 200 hosted buyers but also the other 400 plus buyers who attended the mart. Not only did the mart serve as a platform for networking, but its purpose of bringing all stakeholders to speed on the latest developments will also go a long way in generating actual business for the state in the upcoming pooja holidays and winter months," said Mahender Singh, Chapter Chairman, ADTOI Rajasthan and Executive Committee Member RDTM.

Khaled Khan, Chairman, RDTM, also shared, "This was an opportune time to host the mart. We had great participation from our exhibitors and successfully got quality buyers with the efforts of all National associations like ADTOI, IATO, TAAI, and TAFI. The government of Rajasthan offered full support and now, thanks to the interaction at the mart, we have many well-informed and educated ambassadors who will promote Rajasthan in the coming months."



Hyatt Regency Delhi appoints Barun Gupta as Director of Sales and Marketing

Hyatt Regency Delhi has appointed Barun Gupta as the Director of Sales and Marketing. Specialising in room and MICE sales, Barun has a rich experience spanning over a decade with leading international hotel chains. Highly motivated and passionate, he has always had a razor-sharp focus on building long-lasting customer relationships and is known for his ability to scale new business segments.

In his new role, Barun will be responsible for leading strategic sales, marketing and business operations and building up MICE strategies. Prior to joining Hyatt

Regency Delhi, Barun was working as the Director of Sales & Marketing for IHG's biggest Hotel in Southwest Asia – Crowne Plaza Greater Noida where he played an instrumental role in transforming the hotel's positioning and driving commercial excellence for the property.

He is currently also serving as the President of the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE), India chapter, which is dedicated to strengthening and supporting the incentive travel industry.



Prateek Hira appointed as member of 'Tourism and Medical Value Travel Committee' of Govt. of Uttar Pradesh.



Uttar Pradesh govt. has formed a high-level committee for export promotion through tourism and medical value travel under the Department of MSME and Export's Export Promotion Council headed by the Commissioner of Exports.

Prateek Hira President and CEO of Tornos and Director of River Rhapsody who is a renowned name in the travel industry has been appointed as a member of this committee to provide his expertise in tourism and help the state of Uttar Pradesh augment service exports through tourism and medical travel.

Prateek Hira said, "Uttar Pradesh is taking tourism very seriously and trying to make tourism one of the key drivers to make the state a \$1 trillion economy. I am delighted to contribute my bit to the development of my own state and I really hope I would be able to contribute to the vision of our Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath."

ATOAI Women's Collective organises farewell evening for former ADG

ATOAI Women's Collective (AWC) organised a fun-filled evening at Kunzum Lounge, Jorbagh on July 27, 2022, to bid adieu to Rupinder Brar, former Additional Director General at Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India.

In addition to the women's wing, the event was well attended by prominent association members as many came to thank and wish well to the former ADG. Speaking at the farewell, Brar emphasised the importance of collective work by the team and was thankful for the support of ATOAI members.

In June 2021, ATOAI formed the 'Women's Collective' with a focus to strengthen and empower women in adventure travel and explore innovative approaches to have an appropriate representation of women in the Association. Arshdeep Anand led this initiative, and now the platform nurtures women in adventure travel by giving them a voice and visibility. Today, the AWC is well recognised and it encourages more women entrepreneurs to take up leadership roles by mentoring them.





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Air India increases Delhi to Vancouver flights to daily from August 31

Air India has announced the increase in frequencies between Delhi and Vancouver, Canada, from 3x weekly to daily service with effect from August 31.

This enhancement in frequency caters to growing traffic between India and Canada and has been enabled by the return to service of the wide-body Boeing 777-300 ER aircraft with a three-class configuration of first, business and economy.

Manufacturer Boeing has been working closely with Air India following its acquisition by Tata Group to restore aircraft that had been grounded for prolonged periods due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other reasons. The progressive restoration of these aircraft has already allowed Air India to increase schedule resilience and will allow further frequency and network increases over the coming months.

“This increase in our frequency between Delhi and Vancouver is very welcome for many reasons. It is another sign of recovery from the pandemic and caters to strong customer demand. More importantly, it marks the first step in restoring Air India’s



fleet and international network. We are pleased to mark this significant milestone, and the team at Air India is hard at work to enable more expansion in the near future,” said Campbell Wilson, MD and CEO, Air India.

Japan Airlines increases flight frequency between Bengaluru and Tokyo

Japan Airlines (JAL) currently operates the only non-stop air service connecting Bengaluru and Tokyo. JAL has now increased the flight frequency from twice a week to three times, starting August 6, 2022. This additional flight is another convenient option for persons travelling to and from Japan and for passengers connecting to and from the United States and Canada.

Hailed as the latest ‘cloud service that techies are looking forward to’, in their launch campaign back in 2020, JAL was scheduled to inaugurate the first and only direct flight connection between Bengaluru and Tokyo (Narita) in March that year. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the airline started operations with special flights only when it was necessary. Under the Indian Government’s Air Bubble arrangement, JAL operated regular flights once a week from March 2021. Following the gradual recovery around the world from the pandemic, JAL is pleased to increase its flight frequency. The airline’s latest flight schedule operates three weekly roundtrip flights. JAL is working towards the original plan of operating one daily flight.

JAL operates the route with a Boeing 787-8 aircraft equipped with 30 Business Class and 156 Economy Class award-winning seats. With a flight schedule that leaves Bengaluru past midnight, customers can conveniently arrive in Japan the next morning for a full day’s activity. Furthermore, this provides ample layover time for

passengers connecting to 11 destinations that JAL flies directly to in North America, from Tokyo Narita Airport.



The Unbound Collection by Hyatt brand to debut in India

Hyatt Hotels Corporation recently announced plans for the debut of The Unbound Collection by Hyatt brand in India with the signing of a management agreement for

Bhopal’s Noor-Us-Sabah Palace. One of Bhopal’s oldest and most sought-after hotels, Noor-Us-Sabah Palace will undergo extensive refurbishment to join The Unbound Collection by Hyatt brand as a 60-room heritage hotel and is expected to open in 2025.



Noor-Us-Sabah Palace will offer cultural moments for guests seeking a sophisticated yet unscripted experience. Spread across 18 acres, the hotel was originally built as a royal residence in the 1920s by Bhopal’s erstwhile ruler, Begum Sultan Jehan and it was subsequently converted into a hotel in 1998. The hotel will be completely renovated to bring alive the history and legacy of the Nawab’s royal residence through its interior design, and its storied past will be harnessed to deliver unique and authentic experiences. The hotel will also provide a distinctive and unique location for weddings and events, in addition to catering to premium business and leisure travellers. Currently situated in one of Bhopal’s most affluent neighborhoods, the hotel offers a commanding view of the Upper Lake – one of the largest artificial lakes in the nation. The hotel’s regal architecture, coupled with the legacy of Bhopal’s Nawabi culture and the hotel’s scenic landscape, offers guests an unmatched experience.

The Unbound Collection by Hyatt brand is a collection of truly distinctive properties, all with a different story to tell. Inspiring guests to discover new places with rich history, a fascinating past, or a distinct sense of place, each property embodies the uniqueness of its location.



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Travstarz Global Group and Vana Nava Water Jungle, Hua Hin host networking dinner

Travstarz Global Group in association with Vana Nava Water Jungle, Hua Hin, Thailand hosted a Networking Dinner and Product Presentation in Delhi on July 7, 2022.

The event was supported by the Tourism Authority of Thailand with the presence of Khun Vachirachai Sirisumpan, Director TAT, Aso Lori, Marketing Officer, and Pinky Arora, Executive Director, Direct Representation Consulting.

Travstarz introduced the Vana Nava Water Jungle, Hua Hin, Thailand, Asia's First Water Jungle Park in India with the event which was represented by Khun Tip Arpa Kaewnoi (Fon), the Cluster Senior Sales Manager, and Khun Mutjarin Namkhampa (Ning), Cluster Director of Sales and Marketing. Khun Fon made the presentation on the Water Jungle Park, which was followed by a Quiz Session with a free couple passes to the winners. Travstarz also announced the start of full-fledged operations of its various DMC locations.

Khun Fon explained that the park has 20+ adventure and leisure activities, including a rope course and climbing wall, flow rider, abyss, and boomerango. It also boasts of first virtual reality slide in Asia. Khun Ning added that Vana Nava Water Jungle, Hua Hin, was very happy to partner with Travstarz



Global Group, "I am sure our partnership with them will go a long way in bringing much-needed exposure to our parks. Both Sucheta and Pankaj have been very hands-on and have personally ensured the success of the event and we are very thankful to them for their support to us."

Global Destinations Expo and Conference (GDEC) – Weddings and Films held in New Delhi

The first edition of Global Destinations Expo and Conference (GDEC) – Weddings and Films was held at the JW Marriott, Aerocity in New Delhi. This 3-day B2B event, scheduled from 14 to 16 July 2022, was organised by the India Advantage Foundation and managed by iCONEX Exhibitions. The event provided a platform with the core objective of bringing together the wedding planners, hotels, filmmakers, photographers, and tourism boards to exchange ideas, share knowledge and showcase their expertise in their respective industries to promote India as a destination for weddings and film shoots.

The event saw the presence of the stalwarts from the film, wedding, and hospitality industry, such as famous Bollywood actor Rajpal Yadav; filmmaker Omung Kumar, Maharaj Kumar Lakshyraj Singh Ji Mewar of Udaipur, Mohamad Gulamali Morani, Managing Director, Cineyug Group of Companies and Rituraj Khanna, Director – Q Events. The event was inaugurated by Shri. S. Viswanathan, IAS, Managing Director - Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation. Other distinguished guests at the ceremony were Dr. Bharat Pathak - Vice Chairman MGNCRE Hyderabad MHRD, Govt of India; and Dr. Nandita Pathak - Founder Director JP Foundation.



Dwarka Association of Tour Operators hosts annual bash



Dwarka Association of Tour Operators (DATO) hosted their Annual Bash on July 15, 2022, at Dwarka, a sub-city, in New Delhi. The event was well attended, with a gathering of almost 115 guests that included hoteliers, travel companies and trade media.

This is an annual event by DATO however the current event was held after a gap of almost three years due to COVID-19. DATO President Shiv Ram along with Secretary V. Jayaram and Treasurer K K Shivdas welcomed the guests and spoke about the strong bonds of friendship that DATO and its members enjoy with the hospitality industry and mentioned that the occasion was to celebrate the spirit of friendship and resilience.

They also expressed their gratitude to all guests for gracing the occasion, which reinforced the strong belief of their support in rebuilding this tourism industry and restoring the ecosystem of the industry to its former glory.

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