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Dear Friends,

For the past two years, celebrations were either muted or altogether cancelled. Now with festive fervor back and the festival of light, Diwali, around the corner, many Indians across the globe will be looking to reconnect with loved ones and holiday with them seeking out hidden gems, dream destinations, and opportunities for nature-focused activities. Also, as we move towards the end of 2022, enriching travel experiences will be on top of mind for today's evolved travellers.

TTJ October 2022 issue keeps its momentum of highlighting the many aspects of domestic and international travel as we hope the upcoming festival and holiday season enhances our businesses and keeps us all motivated to travel. The industry is looking for a significant rebound in 2023, and as travel grows, we are also hopeful that it will be a year when businesses will come roaring back.

With this, I take this opportunity to wish you a Happy Diwali and a prosperous New Year!

Stay Safe and Take Care Always!



Ravi Sharma

Ravi Sharma
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Editor's Desk



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Banyan Tree AIUla debuts in Saudi Arabia

Banyan Tree has launched its first property in historical AIUla in Saudi Arabia, ushering in the Group's debut in the Kingdom.

Inspired by the nomadic nature of Nabataean architecture, the all-villa, tented resort epitomises Banyan Tree's commitment to local influence. The fundamental principles of the resort are designed around three concepts that allow guests to immerse themselves in the resort and the destination:

'In-villa' provides guests with made-to-measure offerings brought to life by the talented cast of Banyan Tree hosts.

'In-valley' takes guests into the essence of AIUla through exclusive outdoor treatments, nomadic chef's tables, active adventures, and private events staged in spectacular settings.

'En-voyage' brings guests through privileged immersions

crafted with local talents, continuously unlocking new facets of AIUla's rich legacy. Bespoke wellbeing and adventure excursions show a glimpse of the ancient landscapes of AIUla and the lives of the people who call it home.

The resort will feature two dining venues, including Saffron, Banyan Tree's signature Thai restaurant, offering contemporary Thai cuisine. The renowned Banyan Tree Spa welcomes guests with carefully curated wellness experiences that combine Asian traditions and local elements.



JW Marriott Khao Lak Resort and Spa redefines Thailand's integrated luxury resort experience

JW Marriott Khao Lak Resort and Spa is embarking on an exciting new era of luxury



hospitality in southern Thailand, as it prepares to unveil the newly-transformed five-star beachfront retreat that has been enhanced and reimagined with new activities, experiences, restaurants, bars and accommodation to truly become a "destination within a destination".

Nestled on a pristine beach in Khao Lak, an hour's drive north of Phuket International Airport, JW Marriott Khao Lak Resort and Spa has gained a strong reputation as a luxurious hideaway for mindful global explorers. Now, this elegant resort readies to reveal its spectacular resort extension which introduces 127 additional keys: 76 deluxe lagoon pool view rooms, 28 deluxe lagoon pool access rooms, 20 family pool access studios, two one-bedroom villas, and, for the ultimate escape, the two-bedroom villa.

Following this expansion, a total of 420 rooms, suites and villas – including 178 with direct access to a private pool or the resort's sparkling 2.4 km long lagoon pool waterway – will provide intuitive options for every type of traveller.

Hyatt Centric Sector 17 Chandigarh now open

Hyatt recently

announced the opening of Hyatt Centric Sector 17 Chandigarh, marking the debut of the Hyatt Centric brand



in Chandigarh. Paying homage to French architect Le Corbusier who designed the city along with Pierre Jeanneret, Jane Drew, and Maxwell Fry, the hotel celebrates both Corbusier's design philosophy and the vibrant and bold culture of Punjab.

Built for the adventurous spirit, Hyatt Centric Sector 17 Chandigarh opens its doors to savvy travellers, business and leisure guests alike. Just as the brand is known for being in the heart in some of the world's most exciting cities, Hyatt Centric Sector 17 Chandigarh connects guests to discover the action throughout Chandigarh, with the cities popular parks, cafes, shopping plazas and restaurants at its footsteps.

Hyatt Centric Sector 17 Chandigarh, ideally situated in the city's commercial and shopping district, has 144 guest rooms, perfect for families travelling together or business travellers on the go.

With modern architecture with little traditional touches, the entire property gives guests a chance to immerse in playful details and sophisticated furnishings that uniquely capture the spirit of Chandigarh, and get a feel for the area before one even sets foot out the door.

ibis Bengaluru Hebbal now open

Strategically located opposite Manyata Tech Park, ibis Hebbal Bengaluru is straddled between the IT Hubs of Outer Ring Road-Whitefield and the Bengaluru Airport.

This 21st ibis hotel in India reflects vibrant interiors, lively ambience and new-generation design, making it an Instagrammable hotel for the new age travellers from across the world. The hotel is also a quick 30 mins drive from the Kempegowda International Airport Bengaluru, as well as the well-known Bengaluru CBD area.

The 8-floor ibis Bengaluru Hebbal features 154 comfortable rooms with large windows, sleek TV panels and the much loved 'Sweet Bed' by ibis. The new-age rooms are designed to ensure comfort, featuring a couch that can be used as a third bed, a lounge chair or a mini-workstation. The hotel design balances style and functionality, showcasing amenities that meet the needs

of new-age travellers who prioritise both work and leisure. The colourful and trendy aesthetics reflect the vibrancy of ibis brand.

The hotel features progressive technology, including digital menus in the restaurant, mobile check-in and access to OTT entertainment channels in the rooms, making it the ideal choice for business and leisure travellers. The interactive and pleasing public spaces are sizeable and expansive with fantastic external views that the guests and visitors can enjoy all day long.



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VietJet launches two new routes from Ahmedabad to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City

Constantly expanding the flight network connecting India with Vietnam, VietJet recently inaugurated two new routes connecting Ahmedabad to Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. The Vietnamese carrier will operate four return flights every Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday, offering easy options to Indian travellers at competitive pricing along with great discounts.

With a flight time of just over four hours, VietJet is making it easier and affordable for Indians, and now travellers from Ahmedabad, to visit Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh City an economic icon with a vibrant pace of life, offers

various entertainment experiences.

Currently, operating 17 direct routes connecting India and Vietnam, VietJet has emerged as a pioneer airline bridging the distance and travel time between the two.



Azerbaijan Airlines to operate direct flights from Mumbai to Baku from November

Azerbaijan Airlines, the flag carrier of Azerbaijan intends to commence its direct flights between Baku



and Mumbai – the commercial hub of India from November onwards.

The airline will operate twice-a-week flights between Mumbai and Baku. Azerbaijan Airlines has started ticket sales for flights. Zeal Global Group- the exclusive partner of the airline in India, has confirmed this expansion of Azerbaijan Airlines.

The airline has already been operating flights from Delhi to Baku twice a week since August and is now starting direct flights from Mumbai too. Mumbai travellers can now reach Baku in just four hours to witness the picturesque beauty of Azerbaijan.

Flight tickets for these flights can be booked on the official website of the Airline, as well as at the air carrier's accredited agencies. The ticket price includes free baggage allowance (up to 23 kg in economy class and up to 32 kg in business class), as well as a full range of cold and hot meals.

Star Air launches direct flight services between Mumbai and Kolhapur

Star Air, the aviation arm of Sanjay Ghodawat Group has commenced direct flight services between Mumbai and Kolhapur under the Regional Connectivity Scheme.



The launch of Kolhapur not only celebrates the expansion of Star Air's travel route but also marks the airline's homecoming, as it serves as the base of Sanjay Ghodawat Group's operations. With Kolhapur transitioning itself into a commercial hub, Star Air looks forward to serving its passengers with seamless connectivity, utmost care and comfort by reducing the current 8-10 hour travel time via road and rail to just under an hour.

Star Air will operate thrice a week between Mumbai and Kolhapur on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday to begin with and will plan to expand the frequency to a daily service after observing the passenger response.

Currently, Star Air offers scheduled flight services to 19 Indian destinations that include Ahmedabad, Ajmer (Kishangarh), Bengaluru, Belagavi, Delhi (Hindon), Hubballi, Indore, Jodhpur, Kalaburagi, Mumbai, Nashik, Surat, Tirupati, Jamnagar, Hyderabad, Nagpur, Bhuj, Bidar, and Kolhapur..

Air India announces 20 additional weekly flights to Birmingham, London and San Francisco

In a major initiative to bolster its international footprint, Air India, India's leading airline, today announced 20 additional flights every week to Birmingham, London and San Francisco. This is part of the airline's on-going endeavour to reclaim its position as a leader on the international aviation map.

The additional flights to these three global destinations will be introduced in a phased manner from October to December this year.

With five additional flights a week to Birmingham, nine additional flights to London and six additional flights a week to San Francisco, Air India will be able to offer over 5,000 additional seats every week to customers and ensure ample choice in terms of connectivity, convenience, and cabin space.

Air India's current schedule of 34 flights every week to the UK will now go up to 48 flights. Birmingham will receive extra five flights per week, three from Delhi and two additional from Amritsar. London will receive nine additional weekly flights, of which, five are from Mumbai, three from Delhi and one from Ahmedabad. Altogether, seven Indian cities will now have non-stop Air India flights to the UK's capital.

Flights from India to the United States will increase from 34 to 40 per week. Air India will now connect Mumbai with San Francisco with a thrice-weekly service, and reinstate a three-times-weekly Bengaluru operation. This takes Air India's San Francisco offering from 10 to 16 weekly, with non-stop service from Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru.



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tripjack MICE all set to reshape the business travel landscape in India

TripJack, the fastest-growing B2B Travel technology company in India, has ambitious plans to expand the business and achieve its goals by empowering its travel partners to grow their business and succeed with them. They have now ventured into the business travel space with TripJack MICE as they feel tourism is gaining momentum in India with global travel restrictions normalising and business travel continuing to get back on the calendar. TTJ learns more about the new enterprise from Kiran Vinchhi, COO, Corporate, Marine, and MICE, and Amit Parkar, Business Head, MICE at TripJack, as they share their perspective on the business expansion.

Prashant Nayak

Have you been witnessing recovery in MICE movements in India? What was the rationale for the introduction of the TripJack MICE vertical?

Kiran: The recovery of businesses has already started, and the MICE aspect of the business is recovering and doing well. I feel it is faster than leisure travel. Since there was a lull in the MICE movement for the last two years due to COVID-19, most of the corporates with their travel budgets yet to be utilised are looking forward to connecting with their people and their industry. Hence, the demand has shot up rapidly. At TripJack, we have a strong portfolio of travel products and offerings. Thus, MICE has become a natural extension of our service portfolio. There could be no better time or opportunity to set up our MICE vertical.

What will be TripJack MICE's forte as a new brand and as a MICE operator? And from where does the brand derive its strength from?

Kiran: Precision, Consistency, and Excellence will be TripJack's MICE forte. The company derives its strength from the management who are driving this new vertical and are keen to go out for the venture to succeed. Our MICE team onboard is also a great mix of experience and passionate young minds, which also happens to be our core strength.

Will you be focusing on the domestic MICE market or the international MICE market?

Kiran: We will focus on both, as we feel there are opportunities for both the MICE segments. India also is doing well in the MICE movement with plenty of infrastructures and convention centres and now with the growth of domestic travel. Also, our team has proven expertise in international and domestic travel markets.

How confident are you in capturing MICE business in India? What are your expectations?

Amit: We are optimistic about creating our own space in the MICE business in India by leveraging our existing network. Besides, we expect the MICE demand to grow rapidly from this quarter, which reflects on some of the potential projects our team is working on already. We are very bullish about the MICE



▲ Kiran Vinchhi

business, especially in the next three quarters.

What will be the specialisation of TripJack MICE, and what novelties will you introduce to entice MICE customers?

Amit: MICE is a very competitive segment. However, we are confident that right from scouting for unique destinations and to delivering unique experiences, if we keep our customer at the heart of everything we do, we will be able to deliver tailor-made 'wow' experiences for them which are specially curated by our passionate team. Since TripJack is a tech-driven organisation, we are also exploring how our expertise can help us deliver a seamless experience to our customers..

According to you, what are corporate/ MICE travellers looking for while selecting a MICE venue?

Amit: The Corporates are always looking for unique experiences at unique destinations, but within their budget limitations. Sky is the limit on what can be offered by TripJack.

How will you reach out to your customers? What strategies will you employ to stay ahead in the MICE competition?

Kiran: We have three defined avenues to reach out to our target customer base. Our team brings to the table some strong corporate



▲ Amit Parkar

relationships which we are leveraging to our advantage. Besides, our existing corporate database is also giving us some great leads to work on. Lastly, we also have a very large Travel Agent network in our B2B space which we are capitalising on. In addition to that, we will be reaching our clients on various social media platforms and will be doing Corporate FAM trips for all our potential customers.

Do you think India makes up for a good playground for inbound MICE business?

Amit: I think we are getting there. With the strong infrastructure push-ups, we are now witnessing things like the upgrade of the railways, record-breaking speedy work to boost road connectivity, port developments under the Sagarmala project, etc. We should be able to dish out world-class experiences for our inbound MICE travellers in the times to come.

According to you, what factors can help the faster recovery of MICE tourism in India?

Amit: The things that come to my mind are the good infrastructure, ease of visa norms, and promotions by the State Tourism Boards to showcase the real India and its heritage to the world. All these efforts will be big steps in the right direction to put India on the World MICE tourism map.



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All About Sri Lanka's Back-to-Action Plans

Sri Lanka to Bounce back Stronger after Internal Turmoil

The recent political and financial meltdown in Sri Lanka was a massive blow to its growth and development, as well as its global image. Along with larger overall losses, the tourist sector of the country suffered the consequences of the internal turmoil. In a recent interaction with Travel Trade Journal, Harin Fernando, Tourism Minister, Sri Lanka, shared the country's grand comeback plans with the press. Read on to know more about Sri Lanka's back-to-action strategies and plans.

Vartik Sethi

Sri Lanka Tourism organised a three-city roadshow in India to garner attention towards Sri Lanka and revitalise the country's tourism sector. The roadshow housed a 50-member strong team of Sri Lankan tour operators and hoteliers accompanied by the delegation from Sri Lanka. The show hosted a large number of buyers from pan India. Singing, dancing, and numerous cultural performances added bouts of energy to the event.

In a press conference at the event, Harin Fernando, Minister, Tourism and Lands, Sri Lanka, announced the opening of Sri Lanka for everyone and assured that they are carefully planning a comeback that is loud and clear to the world. With the help of roadshows in Delhi, Mumbai and Hyderabad, Fernando shared the country's strategy of sharing the plans with the Indian travel trade.

Addressing Sri Lanka's strategy to bounce back, Fernando shared, "Sri Lanka has tied up with potential travel planners, hotel chains, as well as indigenous stakeholders to carve out a unique experience for visitors." He lamented that the global image of Sri Lanka has been heavily tarnished and exaggerated. He vehemently denied the rumors around the shortage of food, fuel and electricity and implored the media consumers to take sensationalised news with a pinch of salt. The tourism minister reinstated that the country is recovering and is in high spirits.

Highlighting the strategies, Fernando shared that Sri Lanka is looking at capitalising on key events as well as promoting its own rich heritage. The visitors are by and large from India, followed by the UK, Germany, France, and Spain. The Sri Lankan tourism sector is looking at attracting young and old, and providing unique experiences to all. The country has identified potential partnerships at a global level. In India, the partnerships range from travel apps like MakeMyTrip to airlines like Indigo and Air India. The



▲ Harin Fernando

tourism board has come up with packages that are lucid and attractive to visitors. The country is open for luxury and leisure tourism, destination weddings, conventions and gatherings. Visitors can choose to spend their days and look for experiences ranging from luxury ones to the local, more indigenous ones.

In addition to the promotion of Sri Lanka's cultural richness, the country is also looking at potential partnerships for major global sports events. Fernando shared the country's enthusiasm, availability, and interest to host the FIFA world cup. The partnership has been proposed keeping in mind the cost along with the luxury experience of staying in Sri Lanka.

The country has also expressed its vision to collaborate and partner with Indian artists from the entertainment sector. They are in talks with iconic musicians, singers and actors. Fernando vividly painted the country's grand plans for December 31, 2022, where the country will be illuminated and ready to welcome the visitors with

grand pomp and show. The tourism minister unveiled the hashtag #SriLankaCan, capturing the country's never-give-up spirit and the smiling disposition of its residents. The 'New Sri Lanka' will be built on solid foundations and policies, a more transparent and accountable Sri Lanka.

On the digital marketing front, the tourism minister shared, "Sri Lanka is looking at developing its own apps for easy navigation and recommendations. The strategy is to provide both app-based planning as well as tour operator-based planning for visitors." He added that the younger generation prefers to plan their visits based on reviews, while the older generation still prefers an in-person planner.

Sri Lanka has witnessed one of the biggest internal turmoils in history and is taking its time to bounce back into the global market. While speaking to Travel Trade Journal at the press conference about the country's sustainability plans on a global level, Fernando shared, "Sri Lanka is sitting on a treasure bed and there is a dire need to capitalise on its invaluable resources. At the same time, we are reaching out to global supporters and friends to build back the country's global image. Sri Lanka will bounce back as a mature, rational nation on a global level." He added that they are looking at a plethora of crucial public-private partnerships to nail this comeback.

Sri Lanka's target is to attract about a million tourists by the end of 2023. Fernando shared that he is optimistic and looking forward to this target, along with chasing the pre-pandemic 2018 target of 3 million visitors. He shared that the future looks bright for Sri Lanka; the country has immense potential and will soon display this on a global scale, with meticulous planning and spectacular execution. The comeback will be grand and will promise that the country is deeply rooted in its values and will keep displaying the same in the years to come.

SriLankan Airlines notches up its sustainability game



Thinking out-of-the-box SriLankan Airlines and Mangroves

Sri Lanka's internal turmoil as well as the political and financial meltdown cost the country its global stability and financial growth. However, true to its spirits, the country has been actively making efforts to bounce back and reclaim its glory. Saminda Perera (Director of Marketing, SriLankan Airlines), in a cheerful dinner conversation with Travel Trade Journal, shared some very important aspects of the airline's back-to-action plan. Read on to know more.

Vartik Sethi

SriLankan Airlines has been famous for its impeccable service and out-of-the-box initiatives on a global level. In a recent dinner conversation, Saminda Perera, Director of Marketing, SriLankan Airlines, candidly talked about the airline's upcoming plans. India is one of the biggest markets for the airline, and the organisation has been actively tapping into this opportunity. Talking about their marketing plans, he shared that they have been in talks with over fifty Indian bloggers and influencers to promote Sri Lanka and the sector. Perera recollected some fond memories of his from India and was delighted to experiment with new ways to service the India market. While the Sri Lankan tourism sector continues to brainstorm over potential ways to attract tourists, the airline's mission is to enable a seamless journey to Sri Lanka.

Touching upon other crucial points, Perera shared, "We will continue to serve the B2B customer segment and build trust and stability as part of our strategy. We have partnered with various travel agents who in turn check the value proposition before initiating partnerships." Talking about the frequency of the airline from India, he shared that the city of Chennai tops the charts. Travellers from Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Bengaluru visit Sri Lanka for leisure travel

as compared to corporate travel. Perera also touched upon Sri Lanka's back-to-action plan and highlighted the country's need to focus on reviving the tourism sector. "As compared to the rest of the world, Sri Lanka has an edge and can capitalise on its scenic beauty. There is a temperature difference that one can experience on a beach. The festivals are mostly religious and follow the Ramayana stories. There are many tourist spots in Sri Lanka such as the Ramayana trail, the Vatika and the tooth relic of Buddha. In terms of new avenues, the country needs to focus on sports tourism, like hosting IPL matches," added Perera.

Stating some of the highlights of the country, Perera shared that Mastercard rated Colombo as the best city to stay in Asia. Sri Lanka has good infrastructure like roads, cleaner cities and overall safety. In fact, India's familiarity with Sri Lankan culture is an excellent aspect that attracts Indian tourists to the country. This familiarity is heart-warming and acts as a catalyst in joining people from both lands. In a light-hearted comment, he shared how their internal meetings emphasise three main tourism markets for Sri Lanka - India, India, India!

Sustainability and the overall reduction of its carbon footprint have been major challenges for the tourism and aviation industry. Perera

shared that their journey on this path was deeply impacted by COVID-19 when plastic was back. Each item had to be separately packaged, leading to waste generation on a larger scale. However, new problems need innovative solutions. "I'm deeply appreciative of my team. They challenge me and keep me on my toes," shared Perera, and talked about their latest initiatives in reducing carbon footprint. "When you buy a SriLankan Airlines' ticket, you can redeem the carbon footprint at a mere additional cost," added Perera. In addition, their most innovative solution, to be launched soon is the planting of mangroves! They will first plant about 1000 mangrove plants and aim to expand this area to about 6 acres and 6000 plants. The team plans to join hands with the local stakeholders and allot caretakers for this nursery. The next project in line is to utilise the potential of sowing sea-grass to tackle the overlooked predicament of blue carbon.

Perera concluded, "Little things go a long way, and little joys need no great investment. The mission of the airline is to actively work towards excellent services while being mindful about climate change and the reduction of our carbon footprint." The team is highly passionate and strives to discover and propose innovative ways to add feathers to its cap.

5 Reasons To Visit OBLU XPERIENCE Ailafushi

Xperience the magic of connection at COLOURS OF OBLU's happening new resort - OBLU XPERIENCE Ailafushi. Translating from Dhivehi as 'family island,' this 4-star resort offers a refreshingly laidback experience.



Families, friends, teenagers, and kids can all enjoy a carefree holiday at Ailafushi Island. From the heartfelt, all-inclusive Fushi PlanTM to invigorating activities – immerse in a vibrant Maldives holiday.

Not convinced yet? Read on for five reasons why you'll love this fabulous new resort – we assure you there's hours of happy sunshine times here for everyone.

1. Live it up in bright, cheerful villas – all with direct beach or lagoon access

By the beach or over the crystal waters – your choice! OBLU XPERIENCE Ailafushi offers 268 beach side and over water accommodations in 4 categories. The two-bedroom Ocean View Family Room is perfect for large families. It offers a comfortable master bedroom linked to a storybook children's room with a bunk bed and a playfully decorated ambiance to delight kids.

2. Laze around our 1000 sqm swimming pool or drift away in the ocean blues

Right next to the beach, is X360 Bar with a 1000 sqm infinity pool - one of the largest

pools in the Maldives. With shaded sun loungers, gently swaying palm trees, and infinite blues on the horizon, this is the perfect spot to laze by the water. Don't miss the crisp Maldivian snacks (called Hedikha) – served in the evenings. At night, the resort's X360 Bar is enlivened with a buzzing party vibe with live music and dance floor and dazzling colours in the sky.

3. Relish memorable meals including Spectacular Under Ocean Dining at Only BLU

Memorable meals with scenic pool views. Yes, please! OBLU XPERIENCE Ailafushi



Only BLU

offers delicious all-day dining with Western, Central Asian, and Far Eastern cuisines. Treat your loved ones with a reservation at Only BLU – the largest underwater

restaurant in the Maldives. Settle into one of the window tables and delight in your front-row

seat to the views of brilliant coral reef as you relish modern gourmet cuisine with wine pairings.

4. Over-the-top fun and parties galore for little ones at our multi-level kids club with snack bar

Let your kids Xperience the natural world of Ailafushi island and unique Maldivian culture through fun, enriching guided activities – organised every day at the resort's sprawling Kids Club. One of the largest in the Maldives, this Kids Club comes with a pool, a top-level for older kids with PlayStation and Xbox, and a lower deck for younger kids. A dedicated food corner serves popular and easy-to-eat dishes, like pasta, pizzas, and cakes.

5. Sip, shop, and socialise at La Promenade

Walk up to the scenic La Promenade and explore a chic retail and café scene – featuring a wine boutique, souvenir shop,



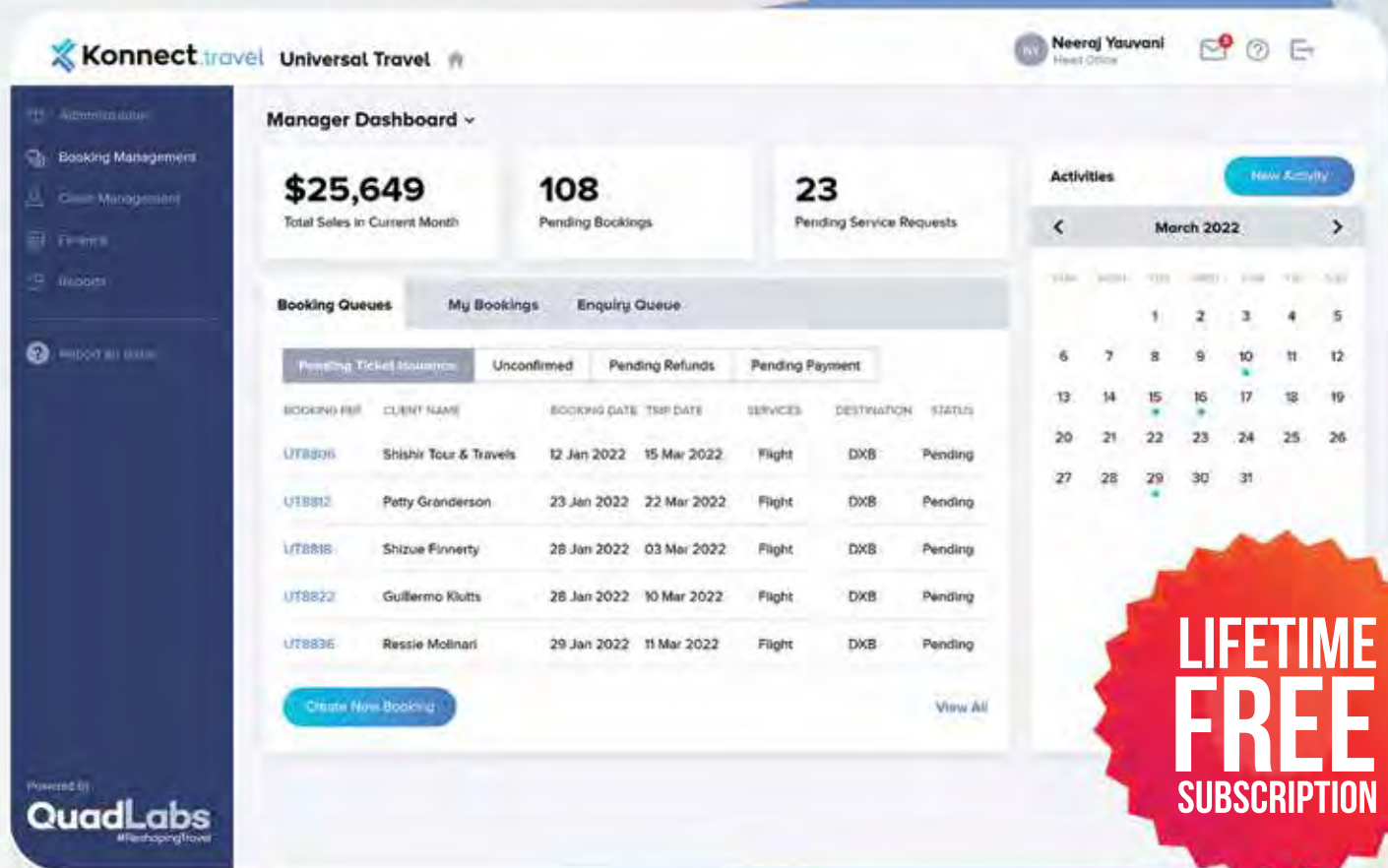
La Promenade

and patisserie. A super-inviting deck with overwater hammocks and cosy seating makes it easy to relax, sip a cup of coffee, and socialise with like-minded travellers.

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Palladium Hotel Group

targeting the upmarket Indian traveller

With over 50 years in the hospitality industry, this Spanish hotel chain has received international success and acclaim. Operating under the umbrella of ‘Grupo Empresas Matutes,’ today they are present in six countries with 41 hotels located in Spain, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Italy, and Brazil. TTJ spoke with Sandra Polo Canudas, Asia and MEA Commercial Director, Palladium Hotel Group, on her recent visit to India to understand the brand, its differentiators, and its offerings for the India market.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

Palladium Hotel Group is no stranger to the needs and wants of the India market having initiated its marketing efforts way back in 2014. They have since witnessed the India market evolve and appreciate their offerings and portfolio that now offers 14,000 room keys spread across its nine distinctive brands positioned in the premium to luxury segment.

Sandra elaborates, “Grand Palladium Hotels and Resorts offers exclusive vacation hotels in paradisiacal destinations. Palladium Hotels offers 4-star hotels for adults-only and families with stunning views of the Mediterranean Sea. TRS Hotels located in the most exotic destinations in the Caribbean and now also on the island of Ibiza are the group’s most exclusive adults-only hotels. Agroturismo Sa Talaia offers accommodation where intimacy in a relaxed and exclusive atmosphere prevails. Fiesta Hotels and Resorts is a unique 4-star establishment. Ushuaïa Ibiza Beach Hotel offers the best music and entertainment for adults only. BLESS Collection Hotels elevates luxury in vacation and urban destinations where quality is a priority. Only YOU Hotels, betting on urban tourism for leisure and high-level business, and finally, Hard Rock Hotels in Ibiza, Tenerife, and now also in Marbella, with modern design and the latest technology, are inspired by music



▲ Sandra Polo Canudas

and spread the Rock ‘n’ Roll spirit”.

BLESS Hotel Madrid is located on the Golden Mile, among the most exclusive shops in the luxurious Salamanca neighborhood, an iconic city hotel of Madrid. Guests enjoy their stay experience in a historic building with interiors designed by the renowned Lázaro Rosa Violán. This hotel is also the Madrid home of the acclaimed Salvaje restaurant serving signature food by chef Fermín Azkue, whose immense culinary creativity puts it among some of the finest restaurants in Europe. Picos Pardos, the hotel’s rooftop bar offers spectacular views of Madrid, that go very well with delicious light tapas and cocktails.

Sandra reminisces her initial visits to India, when she had to educate

trade partners about Ibiza, making them break out of the traditional Barcelona, Costa del Sol and Madrid mindset. “Being a company that originated in Ibiza with a huge inventory of rooms, it was critical to my efforts to carve out a niche market for my brand in India, and now everyone knows Ibiza and its vibrant parties.”

The beaches of Ibiza are some of the best in the world, thanks to their fine sand texture, turquoise waters, and Spectacular sunsets. The Palladium group today has a portfolio of 10 hotels in the premium and luxury segment spread across the island of Ibiza. Fans of live music should not miss out on the events at Hard Rock Hotel Ibiza and likewise, for EDM fans, the open-air parties at Ushuaïa Ibiza Beach Hotel are where they should be.

Both these properties are a part of the Palladium portfolio. Ushuaïa Ibiza Beach Hotel is located at Playa d’en Bossa, the perfect destination to enjoy the best parties on the beach and at the swimming pool, with live performances by the world’s top DJs. The hotel features 415 luxurious rooms and suites, two swimming pools with cocktail bars, three à la carte restaurants, two beach restaurants, and a Centre stage with a music show and DJs. Located approximately 300 meters from the Ushuaïa Ibiza Beach Hotel is the Hard Rock Ibiza, again a 5-star property, with 493 rooms, four restaurants, and six bars.

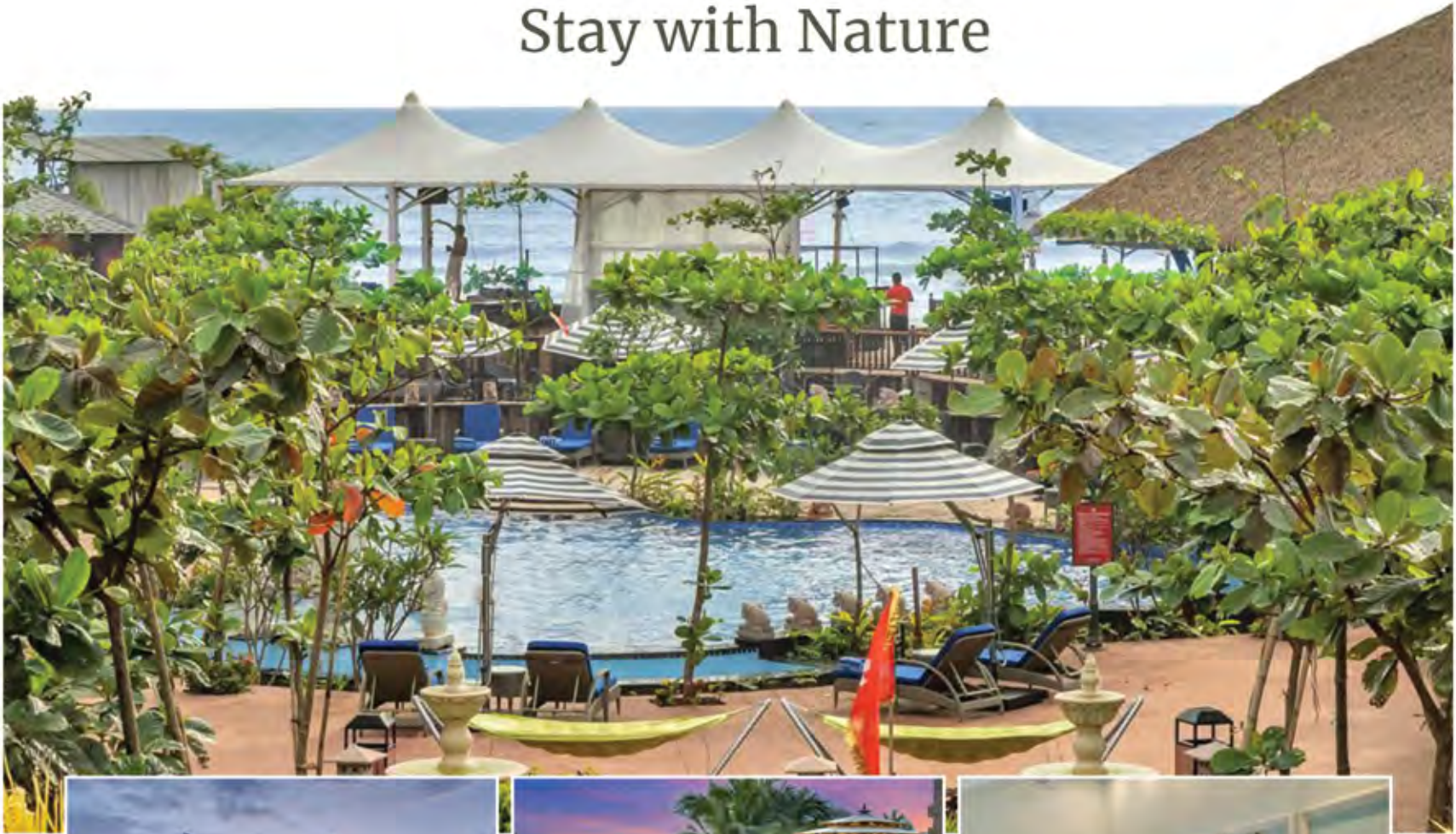
As a product that is clear in its placement among its target profiled clientele and perfect for small discerning groups, Sandra optimistically states, “Business from the India market has constantly been growing for us over the years, yes the pandemic played spoil-sport for all, and we were no exception but 2022 is looking good for us. The fact that I am here the second time this year to meet up with our trade partners in India reflects on the response we are receiving and I am sure 2022 will be a good year for us and 2023 even better.”



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Punjab

Celebrate diversity in its unique attractions

The land of five rivers, Punjab, is synonymous with food, colour, and happiness. It is a state rich with culture and full of beauty that one should experience first hand. So here are some of the must-visit old and new attractions and experiences in the dynamic destination that you should not miss out on your trip.

Team TTJ



Punjab – The land of rich heritage, culture, and ethnic diversity, originally derived its name from the words Punj and Aab. ‘Punj’ means five and ‘aab’ means water, signifying the land of five rivers - namely the Sutlej, Beas, Ravi, Jhelum, and Chenab. However, post-partition only three rivers Sutlej, Beas, and Ravi remained in Punjab of India.

Punjab welcomes people from around the world who are keen to experience its cultural warmth, delectable cuisines, and beautiful architecture. People of different

faiths such as Sikhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam, and more inhabit the State. Punjab has a total of 22 districts, each having its own identity and importance.

Punjab has a lot to offer - from lush green fields to free-flowing rivers; from rich cultural and natural heritage to varied architecture; from traditional arts and crafts to cheerful fairs and festivals; from mouth-watering cuisines to a never-ending list of enthralling festive experiences. The flora and fauna in the lower Shivalik area of Punjab are a treat to visit. The wetlands of international

importance attract lacs of migrating birds every year, which offer a rich experience to nature lovers and photographers from around the globe.

The people of Punjab are known for their bravery, hospitality, colorful attire, fairs and festivals, and their zest for celebrating every occasion. “Bhangra”, Punjab’s vibrant folk dance represents the way Punjabi’s expressing their joy and celebrates happiness. It is performed at weddings and festivals, especially Baisakhi, which is also the birthday of Khalsa in Sikh history.

Golden Temple, Amritsar

The history of the Golden Temple also known as Harmandir Sahib dates back to the 16th century when Sri Guru Amar Das Ji, the third Sikh Guru, purchased the land, it stands on from the Mughal Emperor Akbar. A tank was excavated at the site by the fourth Sikh Guru, Sri Guru Ram Das Ji, and it came to be known as Guru ka Chak or Chak Ramdaspur. The fifth Sikh Guru, Sri Guru Arjan Dev Ji, started the construction of the Golden Temple in the late 16th century to house Sri Guru Granth Sahib the holy scripture of Sikhism. His son Sri Guru Hargobind Singh Ji, the sixth Sikh Guru, built Sri Akal Takht Sahib in the complex in 1606, representing both spiritual and temporal authority. After its destruction by the Mughal rulers in the 18th century, Maharaja Ranjit Singh undertook major works of renovation of Sri Harmandir Sahib with marble and copper in 1809. In the year 1830, the Maharaja donated a large quantity of gold to overlay the sanctum and thus came to be known as Golden Temple.

A blend of Hindu and Islamic architectural styles, Sri Harmandir Sahib, or the Golden Temple is located in the heart of the city where pilgrims of all faith from all over the world come to seek blessings of the divine and experience a sense of peace and serenity. The Golden Temple has four entrances, symbolising its openness to people of all castes, creeds, colors, or religions. The Holy tank or Sarovar surrounding Sri Harmandir Sahib is believed to have healing powers that draw people from around the world to experience its touch for themselves. Also don't miss Jallianwala Bagh, the historic garden and 'memorial of national importance' close to the Golden Temple complex.

Attari – Wagah Border

The retreat ceremony at Attari-Wagah Border evokes a sense of enthusiasm and patriotism in every visitor as Indian Border Security Force Jawans and Pakistani Rangers stand face to face during the flag lowering ceremony held every evening. A huge crowd gathers to witness and cheer for the Jawans (soldiers) of the Border Security Force as they perform spirited drills. The crowd heartily responds with patriotic slogans like 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai'



and 'Jai Hind'. Patriotic songs are also played before the ceremony begins. To get a convenient seat with an unhindered view of the entire drill ceremony, visitors are recommended to reach the gallery at least 45 minutes before the ceremony.

Hola Mohalla, Rupnagar

The festival of Hola Mahalla was instituted by Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji on February 22, 1701, as a showcase for Sikh martial arts. 'Hola' or 'halla', means a military charge, while 'mohalla'



means a procession, or an army column, meaning the festival derives its name from 'the charge of an army'. Some of the most breathtaking feats at Hola Mohalla are performed by the skilled marshal army called 'Guru ki Fauj'. These include the dangerous arts of tent-pegging and gatka, 'warriors' engaging in mock fights with the use of real weapons, and feats such as bare-back horse riding, and acrobatics on horseback. During the festival, the langar is served along the roads leading to Anandpur Sahib from different parts of the State.

Virasat-E-Khalsa Museum, Rupnagar

Designed by acclaimed architect Moshe Safdie, this repository of stories is the first of its scale in the world, and has been envisioned as the world's largest cultural and historical museum dedicated to a single community. It is recognised as the most visited museum in the history of the Indian subcontinent with more than 10 million visitors in just 8 years. Virasat-e-Khalsa is a storytelling museum located close to Gurudwara Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib and is spread over an area of 120 acres, consisting of 40 acres of built-up area. The museum gives visitors an insight into Sikh history, including the birth of 'Khalsa' displayed through a series of beautiful paintings, the lives of all the revered Sikh Gurus, as well as their struggles and heritage.



Shaheed-E-Azam Bhagat Singh Museum

A tribute to the brave Indian freedom fighter, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Ji, this museum was inaugurated on 23rd March 1981, on the 50th anniversary of his martyrdom. This museum is situated



in Khatkar Kalan, the ancestral village of Shaheed Bhagat Singh Ji. Photographs, personal belongings, and pages from his diary are well preserved and displayed in the museum with several other belongings related to his life. A copy of the judgment passed in the Lahore Conspiracy Case, sentencing the brave hero to death by hanging, is also displayed in the museum along with a 'Bhagwad Geeta' (religious book of Hindus) with his autograph on it.

Farm Stays in Punjab

The best way to experience the heart of rural Punjab is to veer off the main cities to experience a slice of rustic life on a farm. Farm stays have sprung up all across Punjab. Ranging from luxurious old-world bungalows and private cottages to more modestly priced ones, they all offer modern amenities that make for a comfortable stay. In most cases, the farm owners themselves are the hosts and are happy to engage with the visitors, share anecdotes and provide firsthand insight into life in the countryside. The winter months from November to March are the best time to go on a farm stay.

Life on the Farm: Amid sprawling fields, a range of activities take you through the apical life of a farmer: wake up to birds singing, ride or even drive a tractor, take a walk or cycle through fields, sit under the shade of the tree, pluck fruits, milk cows and buffaloes or get your hands dirty in the field. Some farms are situated close



to canals that cut through the countryside where can go fishing and angling. You can explore nearby villages and might be invited to homes for a cup of tea with the locals.

Farm Fresh Food: The food served at farm stays is home-cooked and prepared fresh, very often with ingredients just sourced from the fields. Meals will usually consist of quintessential Punjabi dishes such as aloo paranthas, sarson ka saag (mustard greens), and makki ki roti (a flatbread made from maize flour) during the winter season, fresh milk and white butter, and generous glasses of creamy lassi. Some farm stays host evening barbecues and bonfires in the middle of the fields to the tune of Punjabi folk songs or puts on cultural programmes with displays of the traditional Punjabi dances, bhangra, and giddha. Punjab's bountiful crops include wheat, mustard, cotton, and rice, but many farms also grow fruits such as kinnows and plums. Some farmhouses are nestled in luxuriant groves of fruit.

Dastaan-e-Shahadat (A Saga of Sikh Sacrifices)

The prestigious Theme Park at Sri Chamkaur Sahib showcasing the saga of Sikh sacrifices is an instant hit with tourists ever since it was dedicated to mankind in November 2021. 'Dastaan-e-Shahadat', a museum or a theme park showcasing the saga of Sikh sacrifices at Sri Chamkaur Sahib, was dedicated by the Government of Punjab to mankind on 19-11-2021 on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev. Built by the Department of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Punjab, the world-

Slow Travel: While many people choose a farm stay for a weekend, a longer halt helps to get into the rhythm of the slow and tranquil pace of life in the countryside. Farm stays are highly recommended for those travelling with family, giving children an insight into a life that is close to nature.

class museum commemorates the 'Saga of Chamkaur' by paying a befitting tribute to the unparalleled sacrifices made by Sikh Gurus, the Four sons (Sahibzadas) of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji and a handful of Sikh warriors who had laid down their lives fighting valiantly against the oppressive rule for the protection of humanity.

Daastan-e-Shahadat showcases the 'Saga' in chronological order; starting from an introduction to Sikhism and its Gurus, the sacrifices of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the Four Sahibzadas, and the subsequent re-establishment of Sikh Rule under Banda Singh Bahadur, in its 11 galleries with the help of latest multimedia techniques, Audio-Visual Shows and a blend of traditional and contemporary art, giving the visitors a glimpse of the bygone era



Anmol Gagan Mann, Minister, Tourism and Culture, Punjab

The Punjab government's impetus is to take tourism forward and showcase Punjab's diversity to the world. A plethora of historical tourist attractions abound in Punjab and combined with its rich heritage and vibrant culture, Punjab can be a major destination for tourists both from India and overseas.

This is the land of maharajas and warriors, and many of the places and forts of the bygone era still exist. For example, the Gobindgarh Fort of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh and even his Summer Palace stand with pride even today. It is interesting to see such splendid heritage and know the history of its creation. The world must know about Sikh history, heritage, and the sacrifices of the warriors.

Punjab's many festivals – Teej, Lohri, Basant, and Baisakhi, to name some are celebrations that mirror the farming ethos and its spirit. Bhangra, the traditional dance of Punjab, revolves around and replicates a farmer's daily life. Our old songs and instruments have different tunes and tones. The local Punjabi food is classic and well known. The produce from our farms and dairy is super fresh and full of flavours. We invite people to come and taste our fresh desi ghee, makkhan, sarso ka saag, makke di roti, gurr and shakkar, etc. Our farms and villages still maintain their original ethos.

We are creating new experiences for people to come and stay at our farms, try organic food, stay in an open atmosphere, and learn and experience village life. Locals here still enjoy their village life and our countryside air is so fresh. So this is the time to show the world how unique Punjab is, and everyone is welcome to Punjab.

Stakeholders interested in investing in Punjab's tourist sector can get in touch with me as I oversee both the tourism and investment promotion departments. We seek to develop cutting-edge tourism projects. I assure you that Punjab today has a single window system and is devoid of corruption. You don't need to keep running from pillar to post for NOCs and the processes will be smooth. Our new government has dedicated people who take pride in Punjab, and our department is working hard to establish Punjab as a top-of-mind travel destination.



▲ Anmol Gagan Mann



Experience

Jal Mahotsav

One of the largest water carnivals in India, 'Jal Mahotsav,' is all set to host you to experience adventure activities and the beautiful tent city of Hanuwantiya in Madhya Pradesh

If you are planning an adventure-packed vacation, then Hanuwantiya Island in the Khandwa district of Madhya Pradesh is the place you should add to your bucket list this time. One of India's longest watercation presented by Madhya Pradesh Tourism, 'Jal Mahotsav' is a combination of food, art, nature, culture and adventure where you can experience clear skies, sparkling blue water and the thrill of scuba diving, bumper boats and much more.

This picturesque destination awaits your presence for 'Jal Mahotsav', the festival which will commence in the last week of November 2022 and will continue till the last week of January 2023. A watercation to Jal Mahotsav has all the elements to give a boost to your body, mind, and spirit.

It offers an array of adventure activities organised at nature's paradise, Hanuwantiya. Located on the banks of Indira Sagar Dam (India's largest reservoir), this is a perfect holiday destination for spending an exciting vacation with your loved ones.

At Jal Mahotsav, you can start your day with the golden rays of the rising sun lighting up the tent city, followed by a delicious breakfast and

beautiful Mediterranean blue water views to admire.

What to see and do

At Jal Mahotsav, visitors can enjoy adventure activities based on land, air, or water.

Air and water activities: The major attraction of this festival are air and water activities which include windsurfing, water parasailing, water zorbing, jet-skiing, speed boats ride, cruise boats ride, paramotoring, banana boat ride,



hot-air balloon ride, zip line and more.

Land-based activities: Yoga camp, wellness and spa, cycling, volleyball, archery, tug of war, climbing, kite flying, bull carting and other activities in the adventure zone. One can also go for nature walks, cycle around the island, and visit the local villages. Food zone, craft bazaar, stargazing, island camping and experiencing melody of folk, classical and pop music and dance will keep you going throughout the festival.

Other Attractions

Apart from these amazing activities, Khandwa District has several other tourist

attractions as well that include Nagchun dam, Ghantaghar, Omkareshwar Jyotirlinga, Tulija Bhavani temple, Indira Sagar Dam and Sailani Island. Also, it is a must-visit place for



nature enthusiasts as they can indulge in bird watching, trekking, and night camping.

Way to Hanuwantiya

Hanuwantiya is located in the Madhya Dweep islands, about 3 hours' drive from the closest airport in Indore. If you are travelling by rail, you need to get off at Khandwa, 50 km away. Hanuwantiya is also easily accessible by road from Indore, Bhopal, and Khandwa.

To make reservations, visit www.jalmahotsav.com.



Subhash Goyal

Five decades of Excellence

It is indeed my privilege and honour to be able to pay this tribute and share the journey and experiences of a charismatic and untiring individual, a champion of the travel industry, and a spokesperson for its demands under whose tutelage I first set foot in the Industry some three decades ago. Subhash Goyal, President of Confederation of Tourism Professionals, Chairman of STIC Travel and Air Charter Group, is not only one of the founding pillars of the Indian travel trade but also one of the key visionaries who have dedicated their life's work in shaping it to its present form.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja



As the man who always stood out in the crowd, come summer or winter, impeccably dressed in his suits, gold-rimmed spectacles, double-cuffed shirts, cufflinks, and a well-curated collection of neckties and pocket squares, Subhash Goyal has not changed to date. Neither changed are his levels of energy, his vivacity, his quest to question practices, network with people, seek justice, and find solutions.

A humble leader who until now makes it his mission to meet and greet maximum attendees at any event or get-together irrespective of their lineage or position of authority. He was and is a man on a mission as seen from the thickness of his current passport and the many booklets from the past that have since been confined to the archives of his travel memoirs.

His repeated and unending travel sojourns to more than 140 countries around the globe tell us a story of the efforts of an individual who hand in hand with his wife Gursharan Goyal, carved out a legacy that deserves its rightful place in the "Halls of Fame".

The seed of inception was planted way back in 1970 when he was invited for an overseas conference as a student leader, he was the Past President of Delhi University Student's Union and the then President of the All India Central Board of University Students' Union. Unwilling to take any financial assistance from the University authorities or his parents, he learned that if he could gather 15 students, he could go for free. This was the start of the STIC Travel Group.

In 1973, Dr. Karan Singh, the then Tourism and Civil Aviation Minister, inaugurated his office. The Company

started as Student Travel Information Centre and later went on to be renamed STIC Travels and now STIC GSA Services.

Initially started as a student and youth travel service provider, they entered the GSA and representation business in 1976 with their first contract with Air Ceylon, now known as SriLankan Airlines. Realising quickly the absence of any travel company in the market promoting Sri Lanka as a leisure destination they became the first company in India to launch tour packages to Sri Lanka and also Nepal. It was during the late seventies and early eighties that they expanded further with the launch of both Outbound and Inbound Tour Divisions.

With the economic liberalisation in the early nineties and the boom for outbound leisure travel, they felt the need to expand their product offering to the market and it was in the late nineties that they launched their Cruise Marketing Division and re-launched their student and youth travel business and started exploring other verticals.

STIC, today is one of the largest travel and tourism organisations operating as a wholesale travel agent, professional tour operator, Air charter operator, and GSA for some of the best airlines and brands like United Airlines, Air China, Ethiopian Airlines, SriLankan Airlines, Myanmar Airways International, Royal Brunei Airlines, Ukraine International Airlines, Croatia Airlines, Cambodia Airways, Royal Jordanian, Nordwind Airlines, Holland America Cruise Line, Windstar Cruises, A-Rosa – European River Cruises, Pacific High – Cruises, Alamo, National and Enterprise Rent-a-car.

Having seen and been a part of the evolution of the travel industry over the last 50 years, Subhash reminisces, “There has been a tremendous amount of change from 1973 till today. In the seventies, it was very difficult to even get a passport issued or even procure foreign exchange. Later policies saw the capping of maximum foreign exchange limits under FTS (Foreign Travel Scheme) to just USD 500. There were no computerised reservation systems, except the airline’s own reservation systems. The airfares were regulated by the Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and the airfares had to be filed in DGCA and only after they were approved you could use them.”

All that has now completely changed and the fares have been deregulated. He further explains, “Today, we have various reservation systems, and you can also book directly through the airlines’ websites or API links that are connected with the airline reservation systems. So,

life has become very easy and convenient for the travel agent and tour operator.” But now, the industry faces a new set of challenges. Subhash elaborates, “The dynamic, flexible pricing regime practiced both by airlines and hotels today is the biggest challenge. How does the travel agent today quote a particular airfare or a hotel rate? The other major challenge the industry faces is the TCS (Tax collected at source) which has to be added to all the packages being issued by Indian travel agents and tour operators. However, if the same package is bought on the internet or through an international travel agent, that tax is not applicable.”

When asked to share some critical business decisions he had to take for the betterment and growth of his organisation, Subhash explained, “The first critical



decision we took was to change the name from Student Travel Information Centre to STIC Travels. Because as Student Travel, we were limited to serving just student customers and with the change of name, we were able to expand our clientele and also started getting airline representations. After a few years, we made the second important decision: to stop doing retail business and focus only on B2B business. This has helped us in winning the trust and confidence of the travel and tourism industry of the country.”

As a relentless crusader for industry needs and demands, Subhash Goyal was instrumental in building IATO as a strong and powerful association. He has actively been fighting for an Open Sky Policy for India for economic growth and has seen great strides being taken in the right direction thanks to his efforts. However, his single biggest achievement has been the introduction of the E-VISA system for India, for which he also had the honour of announcing it as industry association President along with the Home Minister of India at the Ashok Hotel, New Delhi. He has also played a crucial role in the formation of the Federation

of Associations in Indian Tourism and Hospitality (FAITH) and as the first Chairman of India Tourism Mart (ITM).

Building an organisation requires a talented pool of leaders and workers, and as the head of the organisation, Subhash zeroed down on the following traits in choosing the right talent for his leadership team.

1. The individual should take initiative and have the ability to lead.
2. They should be able to motivate and inspire their team.
3. They should be a team player and offer credit wherever due and take responsibility for failures, if any.
4. They should have thorough domain knowledge.
5. They should be able to motivate and train their team members.

An articulate public speaker and motivator, Subhash Goyal is actively involved in delivering lectures in schools and colleges to motivate the generation NEXT, in his quest to shape entrepreneurs and leaders. He is also actively involved in social work and loves to write. He is currently penning down his travel memoirs, a book loaded with his travel adventures, experiences, and anecdotes across 140 countries elaborating on happening and incidents over his many years of travel. Through this book, he will share trivia and incidents from his travel escapades, such as how, he was one of the first Indians to travel on an official passport and a one-way ticket to Israel, how he arrived in the UK on a one-way ticket without a visa but still managed to get entry, and how he missed his connecting flight in Paris and stayed there for a week without a visa or money.

STIC will be completing 50 years since its establishment next year. Looking back on the journey so far, Subhash Goyal looks pretty satisfied with his accomplishments. He states, “When I started the organisation, I wanted to build one of the most honest, professional, reliable and dependable organisation which would be right on the top. By God’s grace and with the help of my friends and well-wishers, we have grown to become the largest B2B travel/GSA representation company in India. I have already handed over the entire operations of our organisation to my daughter, Isha Goyal, an MBA from ISB-Hyderabad and a thorough professional. She is building her own team and my message to them is to expand all over the world, we may or may not be the biggest but we should be recognised as one of the most honest and professional organisations in India.”



River cruising in India

Bringing in new opportunities for Tourism

Rivers constitute a major tourism resource, providing spectacular settings, recreation facilities, means of transport, a sense of heritage and adventure, and links with the environment and natural world. In our country, they provide tourists a wonderful insight into the historical, cultural, and traditional aspects of the country. River tourism in India is picking up and it is time for many of the States to develop tourism on their major rivers.

Raj Singh

An ageless trip down India's lifeline – a window into the country's culture, religion, industry, birth, love, and even death! Not only do the rivers of India transport the prayers of believers visiting its waters, but it also provides sustenance for hundreds of millions of people, vast industry, agriculture, and endangered wildlife.

The rivers of the subcontinent have been the cradle of civilisations and society. Since time immemorial our inland waterways have been instrumental in trade and economy, despite the many challenges the life of a constantly shifting riverscape poses.

If I have to date back, the earliest known river expeditions in the subcontinent were taken by the Greek Ambassador, Megasthenes, who sailed the Indus and the Ganga as early as the 3rd Century BC. Travellers have often thereafter, set out seeking knowledge and wisdom by the rivers, returning home to tell tales of vast intangible and tangible riches.

It is safe to say that our land's many admirers and colonisers too, found their way to the cities by ships and large brimming rivers. Water transport in India reached its zenith in the 14th century with the introduction of navigation facilities for both trade and passenger transport. By the 19th-century steam engines revolutionised river sailings across long distances.

Having been closely curating special



▲ Raj Singh

interest travel for the larger part of my career, I realise how India's rich heritage of travel and trade, was deeply entrenched in its riverine network forming creative channels that fuelled epic zeitgeist of artisans, and mavericks in architecture, politics, philosophy, literature, and science; that changed the world forever.

Gradually, with the development and investments in railways and road networks, the necessity of river transport became defunct. After independence, faster travel became the norm, and the backbone on which our civilisation had been developed

over millennia, was forgotten in a mere century. Today, most rivers are extracted for commercial purposes or ritualistic identities, depleting and polluting our natural resources.

We started the parent company for Antara River Cruises to reintroduce the magic of that slowness of river transport that put on offer kaleidoscopic views that are just so unique. Stealing through murmuring waters, the rivers meander through life. The life they give sustenance, thus creating an unbroken chain of connection to and through India. I am excited even more now as in 2023, our ships will reconnect the Ganga and the Brahmaputra River systems for the first time in 80 years through one seamless journey – all the way from Varanasi to Dibrugarh.

River Cruising has great opportunities, especially in lands of South Asia and Europe where culture and community, and history, developed and thrived around its river systems. The appeal of low volume and low impact, slow tourism upon a river cruise, is unparalleled. One can joyfully explore the hidden aspects of the history, culture, traditions, and wildlife that are otherwise inaccessible by land. Regions untouched by mass tourism or pollution create unforgettable memories of a lifetime.

At Antara River Cruises, our name comes from the Hindi word "antar" – difference; and we ensure we respect this opportunity our natural river bounty presents to us, and run very responsible, boutique experiences.

For one to use the rivers selfishly would be a loss for our civilisation. Mostly, because this mode of travel gives an immense opportunity to give privileged access to domestic and international travellers that seek the land's strength of spirituality, gastronomy and art. These factors allow people to develop destinations.

However, like every good thing, running river cruises comes with its own set of challenges. Erosion, floods, drought, large often unmapped distances, movement restrictions, and lack of access and facilities are just a few of the more common to understand. These are also coupled with irresponsibility, mass and over-tourism, and a lack of mindfulness of the traveller.

River cruising internationally is defined as sailing for one night or more, aboard world-class hospitality ships with full marine and pollution prevention technologies. They are popular for a small intimate setting, luxury living, and immersive itineraries, atop a vessel of high standards. However, I proudly say that our luxury cruises put India on the map for world-class river cruising and we have seen a growth in passenger numbers up until the pandemic. Some of our guests merely postponed their travel indefinitely instead of cancelling and are now coming in October 2022!

We also deployed strict protocols to make "covid safe" sailings continue in small numbers even in the last two, very difficult years for our industry. We got an opportunity to cater to our domestic market which was looking for an authentic secluded experience. We also managed to thereby help a lot of our partner villages during this period and that was truly special. We realised with domestic travelers, that there is a need to empower and if I may say educate our country's people about the riches and unique experiences, like luxury high-end river cruising that is relatively new to our spending pattern. The India our river cruises offerings could be rediscovered with a pause. Admiring the beauty and grace of heritage and ecosystems of our rich land, the silent motion of a field ripe with harvest, sound of tugboats, squawking of birds, people watching us as we watch them and traversing horizons full of secrets – familiar and unfamiliar around every turn.

Internationally too, high-end river cruising is seen as the epitome of luxury slow travel where there is enough and more to do every day without the need for generating onboard entertainment as in a sea cruise for there one is in the middle of nowhere quite often! You unpack once, pay once, get an opportunity to meet like-minded travelers, and immerse in a set of unparalleled unique experiences.

Is it easy? No, it is not. High-quality shipbuilding is expensive, time-consuming, and a highly skilled job. Designing luxury ships to cater to Indian River systems is also an expert's job. Finding the right talent to cater to that experiential hospitality is another important aspect. Creating the balance to develop destinations but not oversaturate them or be extractive is much nuanced. However, do we enjoy it? Hands down the most interesting chapter of my career have been the last 10 years of pioneering Luxury River cruising in India.

Thus, when low-quality built, over saturating tourism opportunities dot the landscape, I worry. People across the world are seeking newer experiences, but also need to be taught the value of a slower form of travel and tourism, whilst being conscious of the ecosystem. Only when we as an industry realise the value of that can we attract the right set of guests to our brands and products. The task is to feature India as a global river cruising destination and hub, whilst ensuring that even with traveller numbers increasing; the quality of experiences is maintained. Also, tourism positively contributes to habitat restoration and economic development.

Rivers are also still key access routes for commerce, and thus any new commercial vessel must also be properly regulated to global standards, built to last long, prevent pollution and ensure that the benefits of that travel are widely felt. Rivers are ultimately the magic, moving, living parts of the earth!

Going ahead, I feel, we as patrons of trade and travel in the country must realise the importance of sustainable tourism and invest wisely in that. All Antara River Cruises are "Swadeshi Ships". Built, designed, and run by Indians in India with Indian products. Each ship has been designed for its unique river network, ensuring pollution prevention technology and water treatment plants are established onboard. Plastic-free, our ships use local produce and work with the artisans and wild lifers along the way to directly enhance social and conservation efforts.

We are still in the ever-dynamic process of cultivating cruising circuits on the Ganga,

Brahmaputra, Indo-Bangladesh protocol route, and the Mahanadi is amongst the 52 waterways that I have personally surveyed along with the government to build a strong nexus.

The government policy has played a pivotal role over the last 20 years to develop and establish river cruise infrastructure that can make the subcontinent one of the world leaders in trade. Facilitating development in the form of jetties, shore electrical connections, waste management systems, recycling protocols, and navigational channel management, are some to name a few.

I was proud to be a keynote speaker, representing our company at the Incredible India International Cruise Conference, held earlier this year in Mumbai. There, the central government recognised cruise tourism as one of the fastest-growing leisure segments worldwide and thereby announcing a range of initiatives to facilitate further integration with roads, rails, and eventual destination promotion.

With a maritime vision for 2030, river cruising is seen as a key link between sea-faring journeys across all ports. The future looks bright, and India has a mine of resources we still are not apprised of. The country continues to surprise and bedazzle



me. And the rivers continue to be the ever-changing, ever flowing, ever the same.

About the Author: Raj Singh is the Founder and Chairman - Group, Antara Luxury River Cruises.

Norwegian Prima

The first and most exciting experience from bow to stern



The first of six ships in the ground-breaking Prima Class, NCL's Norwegian Prima, recently debuted to more than 2,500 guests who enjoyed an immersive experience in the beautiful Icelandic capital of Reykjavik with a christening celebration like no other. As the industry's most spacious new cruise ship, featured in the pages are some of the Prima's fresh and elevated experiences.

Team TTJ

Norwegian Prima is the first of the six ships in NCL's brand new Prima Class of ships. It is 965 feet long, 143,535 gross tons, and can accommodate 3,099 guests at double occupancy. The vessel is a game-changer for NCL, offering guests exciting itineraries, more wide-open spaces, thoughtful and stunning design, and a variety of new experiences as well as NCL's exceptional service.

Wide Open Spaces

Norwegian Prima is the most spacious new cruise ship with up to 36 per cent more space per guest than the competitors. It also offers the most outdoor deck space of any new cruise ship including more total pool deck space than any other ship in NCL's fleet as well as multiple

infinity pools and vast outdoor walkways allowing guests to take in the sea, the ocean breeze, and a variety of elevated experiences.

Designed by Miami-based Studio Dado to evoke the sense of wonder felt by the ocean's earliest explorers, NCL's first three-story, glass-walled Penrose Atrium spanning Decks six, seven, and eight is one of the focal points on Norwegian Prima. Retail spaces and high-end luxury shops are also located throughout the Penrose Atrium's three levels, including the Brand's newest Starbucks Coffee. Penrose is also home to the decanter-inspired Whiskey Bar offering guests a curated selection of drinks and the Prima Casino and The Penrose Bar featuring video poker machines.

Prima also offers the largest variety of suite categories available at sea with 13 suite categories as well as the largest three-bedroom suites and the Brand's largest-ever inside, with ocean views and balcony staterooms. Norwegian Prima offers the highest staffing levels and space ratio of any new cruise ship in the contemporary and premium cruise category, delivering an unrivalled guest experience.

Thoughtful Design

Created to be a destination in and of itself within Norwegian Prima and furthering the

day-to-day elevated guest experiences available on Ocean Boulevard, NCL unveiled additional "firsts" for the Brand including The Concourse, an outdoor sculpture garden that features immersive art inspired by ancient mythology and contemporary abstract forms. The seven sculptures, valued at over \$2 million, offer stunning effects that change as the sun sets, making them perfect for photos and social media posts. Guests can also relax at Infinity Beach featuring two infinity pools, one located on each side of the ship and close to the ocean surface, which is an industry-design first that allows pool-goers to take in the vastness of the ocean while soaking in the open air. The two Oceanwalk glass bridges, also new to the Brand, provide guests with photographic, breathtaking views that make them feel as if they are walking on air over the water.



Experiences beyond Expectations

For the most extreme adrenaline rush at sea, Norwegian Prima debuted The Drop, the world's first free fall dry slide where users



get to experience a 10-story plunge reaching the highest G-forces of any cruise line; more Gs than an accelerating F1 racecar, leaving racer's hearts with the thrill of a lifetime. The edge-of-your-seat experience takes a competitive turn with The Rush, featuring duelling dry slides where guests can race each other for the ultimate in bragging rights.

As the only Cruise Line to offer go-karts at sea, NCL has up the ante on Norwegian Prima, offering the largest and first-ever three-level racetrack with the Prima Speedway. The Galaxy Pavilion levels up to offer guests 14 attractions to choose from, including four new hyper-immersive simulator experiences only available on Norwegian Prima, two different escape rooms, and showcasing the only Topgolf Swing Suite, available at sea. The Topgolf Swing Suite is powered by Full Swing golf simulator technology, the same simulator used by PGA Tour pros such as Tiger Woods and Jon Rahm.

Elevated Dining Experiences

NCL's first-ever food hall was thoughtfully designed, offering various cuisines and showcasing captivating colors and smells with 11 venues including returning guest culinary favorites Coco's, serving artisan

sweet treats, Q Texas Smokehouse, boasting delicious American Southern comfort food and barbecue; and Starbucks. Indulge includes first-ever dining venues like Seaside Rotisserie, offering a wide array of rotisserie-cooked dishes; Nudls, an

emporium serving noodle dishes from around the world, from Italian to Thai cuisines; Tamara, preparing classic Indian dishes and multiple vegetarian food options; The Latin Quarter, serving classic Latin food with a twist; Tapas Food Truck, cooking elevated Spanish-inspired

street food; Garden Kitchen, where guest can order customised salads with more than two dozen ingredients to choose from; Just Desserts, featuring classic dessert items such as pies and cakes and Just Ice Cream serving all guest favorite ice cream flavors and over-the-top decadent creations.

Adding to the culinary offerings, there are other dining options like Onda By Scarpetta, Los Lobos, The Local Bar and Grill, the all-new Mediterranean seafood specialty restaurant Palomar, the Japanese Hasuki, and NCL's new contemporary sushi house Nama. One can sample mouth-watering menu items in the elevated new main dining room at Hudson's or The Commodore Room or the Surfside Café and Surfside Grill located on Deck 17 featuring a diverse menu.

Elevated activities for every guest

Norwegian Prima also debuted The Bull's Eye, an elevated twist on the classic game of darts featuring a sophisticated video tracking system that automatically calculates each guest's score and even offers instant game replays to ensure a fun, competitive play. NCL introduced Tee Time, supercharged versions of minigolf, where guests can enjoy nine interactive holes set among a Vegas-

style backdrop and even have a chance to win worth-your-while prizes.

Making its splashing first appearance on Norwegian Prima as part of the ship's Aqua Park and Main Pool area, which is NCL's first Tidal Wave waterslide featuring gushing surf where guests can ride an innertube to catch the perfect wave. Vibe Beach Club, NCL's adult-only area returns on Norwegian Prima providing enhanced experiences including a dedicated bar and two infinity hot tubs where guests can enjoy the ocean's horizon at leisure. Syd Norman's Pour House, the onboard guest-favorite classic rock club features a stellar house band playing the greatest rock songs of all time from Aerosmith to Led Zeppelin.

Immersive Star Power Entertainment

The ship also has a variety of entertainment from Broadway shows to family-friendly game shows. From the powerhouse production team that brought "Jersey Boys" with current residence on Norwegian Bliss, comes "Summer: The Donna Summer Musical." Taking guests from the disco glam of "Summer" to the neon lights of "Light Balance Universe" featuring Light Balance, the golden buzzer winner from "America's Got Talent," the one-of-a-kind dance crew brings their jaw-dropping visual effects and style to Norwegian Prima.

All of Norwegian Prima's headlining acts take centre stage in the ground-breaking transformational Prima Theatre and Nightclub. A Multi-Purpose Masterpiece heater, the three-story venue, is designed to seamlessly convert the space from a state-of-the-art performance stage to an expansive dance floor, featuring a customisable seating layout and awe-inspiring moving LED screen that lowers from the ceiling and is nearly half the size of the venue. The extravagant high-energy nightclub's SENSORIA theme provides club goers an out-of-body experience where they can dance late into the night and enjoy a kaleidoscope of high-energy music and innovative special effects.



South Africa Tourism

Aiming for accelerated recovery in India

India has gone from being South Africa's 8th largest international market post-pandemic to being the 6th largest. South African Tourism is confident of further climbing up the ladder in terms of footfalls and is strategising on value-driven offerings, which are expected to significantly support and encourage the rapidly growing Indian tourist footfalls to South Africa. Neliswa Nkani, Hub Head – MEISEA, South African Tourism shares more on their recovery efforts in India.

Prashant Nayak



South African Tourism is expanding and deepening its footprint across tier-II and tier-III cities in India, given the rise in discretionary spending power in these areas. They understand that affordability is the key, as is building aspiration to travel with localised content that resonates and speaks the language of their audiences. Towards this end, they will be hosting Indian influencers at the destination to create 'desi' content that will have a greater impact and recall with consumers across the country.

"We have been deliberate in widening our offerings and building awareness for them in India by ensuring market access for new South African players ranging from DMCs, hospitality brands, tour companies, provinces, and experiences. Our efforts to showcase diverse South African products and new regions are paying off with KwaZulu-Natal, greater Mpumalanga, and the Eastern Cape now enjoying a larger share of the India market," shares Neliswa.

Adding on she says, "Along with travel conferences and trade shows, we are witnessing amped up interest from Indian corporates for meetings and conferences. MICE is back with a bang! We have multiple groups travelling to South Africa in the next quarter. Group size varies from 50 to 1000. Additionally, we anticipate bookings from the financial, information technology, beauty, insurance, coal and mining, pharmaceutical, entertainment, and sporting sectors in India."

While South Africa does not have a direct flight, it enjoys great connectivity with extremely short layovers across all major international airlines. The destination also revised regulations related to the surveillance, control, and management of COVID-19 to allow ease of travel. Travellers from India to South Africa are now not required to produce a complete vaccination certificate or a negative PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test.



▲ Neliswa Nkani

Regarding visas, travellers can apply via VFS, where the visa processing time is extremely short. We are currently processing Indian tourist and business visas on priority – the validity depends on the trip duration and the request for single-entry / multiple entries made by travellers. While the e-visa for Indians is in the testing phase, availing of a South African visa in India takes anywhere between 5 to 10 working days, which is significantly faster than other long-haul destinations.

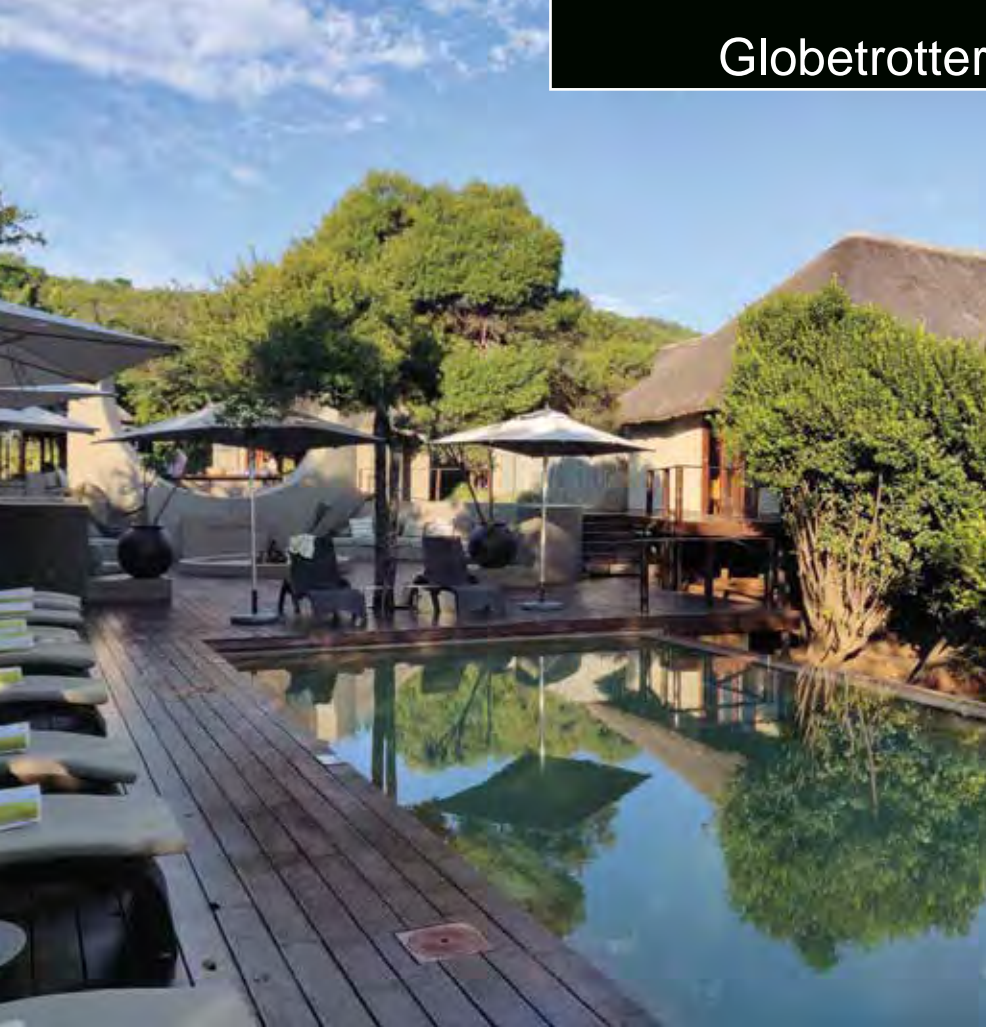
Highlighting some of the destinations experiential, Neliswa says, "A South African style vacation can be as laid-back or as active as travellers would like it to be. They can go on a safari, indulge in adventure activities, enjoy a city break, relax by the beach, or sample delicious food and wine. Breathtaking landscapes, awe-inspiring wildlife, warm local hospitality, rich history, and culture come together to weave unforgettable memories. There is the formidable and astoundingly beautiful Drakensberg

Mountain Range in KwaZulu-Natal – as well as the wild stretches of bushveld in Mpumalanga, Limpopo, and the North-West provinces. The Free State offers big skies and homegrown hospitality, and the Northern Cape's mesmerising lunar landscapes offer a new way to interpret adventure."

To position the destination as one of the most preferred destinations for Indian travellers, Neliswa shares, "Since we have seen demand for offbeat, non-touristy experiences, we are packaging and selling itineraries that include the new regions of South Africa, which go beyond the popular cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg and Sun City (North West). Travellers can use these anchor cities as a gateway to the rest of these picturesque new regions, including the stunning and relatively unexplored Port Elizabeth, Robertson, West Coast, Drakensberg in KwaZulu-Natal, Panorama Route (Mpumalanga), and Garden Route.

Given that India is one of their largest international source markets, South African Tourism has accelerated recovery initiatives this year. In the first quarter of the year, they rolled out the More and More campaign. Additionally, efforts are being made to directly dial up the consumer and build aspiration for the destination South Africa.

"Another large focus area for us is mobilising niche communities in India. We are already seeing an increase in biking groups, who want to explore the spectacular South African terrain. We are also looking at having more runners from India participate in South African ultra-marathons like the Comrades Marathon and the Two Oceans Marathon. We expect self-drives to be popular with Indian travellers given that South Africa has some of the most beautiful self-drive routes in the world, along with solo/group women travel and golf-themed holidays," concludes Neliswa.



Thanda Noah's Arc in Zululand

Safari in Africa is highlighted in bold on the wish list of any avid traveller, and South Africa holds close to its heart a treasure trove of wilderness havens that would leave a traveller and his senses enchanted, beckoning for more. Recently, on the invitation from South African Tourism, I discovered the delights that unfurled before my eyes during my wilderness experience at the Thanda Safari Private Game Reserve, tucked away in the vastness of the Zulu nation.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

My journey began in Durban, located in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal. Durban probably is home to the largest Indian diaspora outside India and was the initial staging ground for the fights of Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi in his quest for social justice and human rights.

Thanda Safari is situated in northern KwaZulu-Natal, some 260 km north of Durban, and it is a comfortable drive right up to the gates of Thanda. Here I was transferred from the comforts of my Toyota Quantum van to the rugged joys of a Toyota Land Cruiser specially designed to withstand the cross-country and off-roading vigours of the African Bush.

Initially, the hunting grounds for the Zulu Nation, Thanda, which translates as "Love" is a 14,000-hectare fenced private game reserve inaugurated by the late King Zwelithini Goodwill kaBhekuzulu, the eighth monarch of the Zulus on May 2004.

Thanda offers its guests the Big-5 game viewing opportunity from the comforts of its luxurious tented and lodge accommodation within the park. Thanda offers three stay options for its safari guests to choose from, each unique and luxurious, and experiential in its own right.

Villa iZulu was designed and created for Thanda Safari's owners, Christin and Dan Olofsson. Voted as Africa's Leading Luxury Villa Accommodation at the World Travel Awards. This magnificent and luxurious villa has five lovely rooms, a heated swimming pool, a wine cellar, a library, a games area, and a wide observation terrace overlooking a waterhole. It is the ideal safari retreat for

visitors who want complete solitude, as well as for families, friends, and gatherings. Villa iZulu features its own helicopter pad as well as separate accommodation for accompanying staff and VIP security officials.

Thanda Safari Lodge offers nine bush suites designed as a tribute to African abundance, with a spacious lounge, majestic master bedroom, fireplace, and indulgent bathrooms, with indoor and outdoor showers. Thanda Safari Lodge's shared areas are thematically African that include an inviting lounge, an expansive deck, and a library overlooking a waterhole, cigar bar, impressive wine cellar, and the Thanda Safari Spa.

I was booked at the luxurious Thanda Tented camp, with its three-course meals, all drinks, hot breakfast made to order, and private game drives. My accommodation boasted of a luxury tent, private sun deck, outdoor shower, en-suite Victorian bathtub, flushable toilets, and plush beds under the canvas and beneath the starlit African sky.

I experienced four game drives with my seasoned driver "Peace" and tracker "Zebulon" enjoying my daily morning hot chocolate with Amarula and evening sun-downers in the wilderness. Thanks to their tracking and driving abilities, I had some amazing off-roading experiences and great Rhino, Buffalo, Elephant, Lion, and Cheetah sightings. The Leopard continued to elude me all through my stay at Thanda.

I have been on multiple safaris to East African countries and experienced great sightings and moments and even captured some great

shots some of which have had the privilege of being published on magazine covers, but the cross-country and off-roading experience at Thanda was a different ball game altogether. The driver and the tracker knew the turf understood animal behavior and ensured that the personal space of animals was never transgressed.

You can experience guided Bush walks with experienced rangers, where you learn to read and appreciate every situation in the wild and fine-tune your senses and responses, in case you do come face to face with an elephant, buffalo herd, or lions nearby.

Christian Sperka is the resident wildlife photographer at Thanda Safari and he works as a Photography Specialist and Field Guide. He also teaches wildlife photography at the reserve, Thanda offers a complimentary photography lesson to its guests to fine-tune their passion.

Even during my hectic schedule at Thanda, I was able to squeeze in a massage session at the Thanda Safari Lodge spa. The lodge is also a member of the Leading Hotels of the World. So all relaxed after my lovely session it was time to bid adieu to Thanda, till I return, hopefully soon, to discover more.



The Cape

experience like never before



Cape Town Helicopters is the largest scenic helicopter operator in Cape Town and promises to give tourists an unrivalled experience of the city that is unimaginable from the ground. During his visit to India, Neil Warren, CEO, Cape Town Helicopters, in this exclusive interview, shares about his helicopter touring company and about the fantastic range of copters and packages that suit all holiday preferences.

Prashant Nayak

Cape Town is a dream destination in South Africa and a great place to enjoy many bucket list adventures. It is a magical city, with flat-topped Table Mountain looming over it. It stretches around the mountain, and wherever you are, there are often glimpses of the sea and golden beaches, not to mention that iconic mountain as its beautiful backdrop. The city is so diverse, ranging from mountains to the sea, to vineyards, to safaris – it's difficult to fit it all. That is where Cape Town helicopters come in. They provide services where one can enjoy everything Cape Town has to offer. They will fly you to interesting destinations, whilst giving you an amazing bird's eye view of the beautiful city and countryside.

Cape Town helicopter tours range from 12 minutes to 3 hours, which makes it easy to find something to fit into the schedule - whether it is busy or relaxed. Their range of tours includes scenic flights, wine lands flights, and other experiences.

For example, in scenic flights, the Twelve Apostles flight promises breathtaking views of South Africa's iconic natural wonder, Table Mountain, and the Twelve Apostles overlooking Camps Bay. As a second example, The Creation Wine Estate Cape Town Helicopter's flight package includes a private helicopter flight to and from Creation Wine Estate and a half-day experience at the estate. However, tourists can enjoy the tasting, pairing, shopping, and lunch on their own account. In the experiential tour like the Magical West Coast Mussels experience, it includes the flight right to the property, where mussels and oysters are farmed, followed by a delicious meal of mussels and oysters and champagne (with some starters of bread and

smoked fish) as well as soft drinks.

The company also offers exciting add-ons, such as an ocean safari, or a sunset cruise, and fliers can even make the flight exclusive for themselves or their guests. These wonderful additions to their already memorable experience will highlight the exquisiteness of Cape Town. They are bound to experience the beauty and culture of the city, uniquely and memorably.

International arrivals had been on a steady growth since 2010 in South Africa and halted during COVID-19. Now the India market has been one of the fastest growing source markets. With over 17,627 Indian visitors travelling to South Africa between January to May 2022, the country expects to see a substantial increase in Indian travellers in the next year.

Neil says, "In 2022, our Indian business has increased thrice. Our interest in the India market is therefore great. We see a great deal of potential, which is why I travel to India twice a year to see our clients and partners and participate in road shows. Among the two most successful markets in the world that is growing are The United States and India. Thus, the India market is significant for us."



▲ Neil Warren

Cape Town Helicopters also has the most cutting-edge fleet that operates in South Africa. The helicopter that one flies makes a huge impact on the quality of one's sightseeing experience. Their Airbus H 120 and H 130 make use of a Fenestron-enclosed tail rotor with unevenly spaced blades that break the frequency to allow for lower levels of noise output. Operating below 60 decibels, these are one of the few machines allowed to operate in sensitive areas. They also have the Bell 206 helicopter, which can comfortably hold up to six passengers and one pilot. There are also the four-seater Robinson R44 Raven II and Clipper II helicopters that are high performing, reliable, and easy to maintain.

When asked about expanding his fleet, Neil mentioned, "We have increased the number of helicopters from 10 to 12, which is currently more than adequate. It is difficult to add to this business and it is preferable to work more intelligently. Additionally, three helicopters in our fleet are six-seaters, which is more than what our competitors in Cape Town are offering. We, therefore, have a lot of capacity."

Cape Town Helicopters is represented in India by Ark Travel Group, managed by Anjum Lokhandwala, Founder and Director, ARKRep and they are very keen to develop and multiply their client's market share in India.

Neil concludes, "On a visit to South Africa, Indians should visit Cape Town. It's a highly recommended and alluring place to visit. I love the adventurous spirit of all Indians to explore, young and old. However, I would like to state that the Indian customer's level of satisfaction is far higher than the national average. But our product is perfectly suited to provide memorable and exhilarating experiences to all our Indian visitors."

Israel more focussed on untapped business segments

In addition to continuing its focus on building leisure travel, MICE, and religious tourism, the Israel Ministry of Tourism office in India has increased its focus on education tourism, sustainable travel, and other group-based travel segments while promoting tourism. Sammy Yahia, Israel Tourism Consul, Israel Ministry of Tourism, gives more insights into the latest developments at the destination.

Prashant Nayak

While India is gradually recovering its outbound tourism, the Israel Ministry of Tourism foresees the end of the year to have a boost in leisure travel. With international events in sports, nature and natural phenomena, lifestyle, as well as other events like destination weddings and honeymoons, family holidays, etc. on the rise, there is bound to be high outbound travel from India.

“Outbound travel from India has reached a very exciting time for the global tourism industry. With a growing middle class, we have seen an increase in the desire for international travel, especially to offbeat destinations. I have noticed that the younger Indian traveller is craving new travel experiences that are off the beaten path, be it solo travel, backpacking, outdoor adventures or simply relaxing,” says Sammy.

To encourage more Indian travellers to visit Israel, they simplified the visa application procedure for Indian citizens a few years ago. The relaxed visa rule involves less documentation for Indians who have availed of visas for and completed a trip to Schengen countries, the US, Canada, Australia, or Israel. For these travellers, the documents include a valid passport, a completed Visa Application Form, two photographs (5.5cm x 5.5cm), a cover letter with travel information, traveller's insurance, and a passport copy (first and last page).

Since the signing of the Abraham Accords between Israel and UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco, connectivity from India has been increasing.” In addition to the flights from Turkish Airlines and Air India, Egypt Air, Emirates, Flydubai, Etihad Airways, and Gulf Air have also added Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport to their roster. El AL has also announced they



▲ Sammy Yahia

plan to restart their Mumbai – Tel Aviv sector and intend to create a new direct route from Delhi. Air India has also expressed interest in adding direct flights from Bengaluru and Mumbai to Israel,” informs Sammy.

Israel is a country of fascinating history and past and has become a dynamic destination in the Middle East that offers luxury and leisure to all travellers. Israel has every geographical element to lure its visitors, from mountains to beaches, to plains, to deserts. One has to visit Israel to view the passionate Mediterranean Sea, the stillness of the Dead Sea, the Sea of Galilee, the multi-colored canyon of Makhtesh Ramon, and the amazing red sea. The small country has the most sacred sites, which are highly visited by tourists and pilgrims alike. Speaking about their current marketing mix to promote the destination, Sammy says, “The Israel Ministry of Tourism does many activities in India to keep Israel in the minds of the travellers. We host familiarisation trips for travel agents, corporations, journalists, bloggers,

travel influencers, etc. The India office also executes marketing agreements with travel partners. I participate in speaking engagements in the different sectors that impact tourism. We also attend meetings with members of the entertainment industry, be it films, TV shows, OTT, etc. We also conduct seminars for our partners in the travel industry as well as corporates in business, agrotourism, hi-tech medical, etc. We are also now targeting industries that were previously untapped by Israel Tourism, like education.”

Education tourism has been a growing segment for many countries, and Sammy believes that this segment has the potential to significantly contribute to tourism. While targeting the new business segments, when asked about MICE business expectations from the India market, Sammy says, “India is a vast market with untapped potential. There are many sectors of the Indian industry that we are yet to approach to build our MICE business. While medical, financial, security, technology, and agriculture are industries that have MICE movement to Israel, I am working on attracting alternate industries as well as education, health, wellness, automotive, FMCG, metal works, and others.”

The cities of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem are popular MICE destinations and have renowned hotels, modern infrastructure, and well-equipped convention centres. The Dead Sea and Eilat are great MICE add-ons, especially with the recently opened Ramon International Airport (ETM) in Eilat, servicing the region. Israel has hosted several international conventions and conferences. Owing to Israel's modern infrastructure, impressive hotels, availability of international cuisines- vegetarian, vegan, and non-vegetarian options, as well as the state-of-the-art convention centres and leisure activities, Israel makes for a great MICE destination.

Bahrain planning to double the size of its tourism sector in five years

The Kingdom of Bahrain is keen to attract more visitors to the destination from the India market. Arzan Khambatta, Head- Tourism Services, VFS Global, says that the destination is already well-known in the India market, and hence their primary focus will be to build a brand recall for Bahrain as the ideal leisure, MICE, and wedding destination for Indians.

Prashant Nayak

Bahrain, the island nation and India have always shared a close trade relationship for many years now. Bahrain has been promoting itself as a short-haul destination from India with a focus on MICE and business travellers. As a wedding destination, it has positioned itself as a much-loved fairy-tale dream destination. From a leisure point of view, Bahrain has a little of something for every traveller.

“To provide tourists with an unforgettable vacation experience in Bahrain, we strive to highlight the area’s abundance of attractions and range of services. Our goal is to rebuild trade relations with regional stakeholders and promote Bahrain through various online and offline marketing channels, including social media and public relations. The destination will be promoted through various B2B and B2C activities such as sales visits, trainings, multi-city roadshows, familiarisation trips, joint co-ops with various travel agents, a few exciting contests, celebrity/influencer engagements, and a slew of other promotional activities. In doing so, we hope to triple the number of visitors to Bahrain soon,” conveys Arzan.

The visa application process for Bahrain is simple and Indian travellers who wish to visit the destination for tourism purposes can apply for an e-visa. The cost of a single-entry visa is BHD 9 for a 2-week stay, and the documents need to be uploaded on the e-visa portal. Indian citizens with a valid visit visa to the UAE, UK, USA, KSA (excluding Hajj and Umrah visa), Schengen, or USA Green Card can also apply for an e-visa on arrival in Bahrain for BHD 5.

From a COVID-19 protocol perspective, for visitors, the Kingdom of Bahrain has finished its opening process and the destination is

ready to welcome Indian travellers. Arzan shares, “Both the ability to enter the country and the ability to hold significant gatherings and festivities are unrestricted. For visitors entering Bahrain, there is no vaccination requirement, nor do they have to undergo any quarantine or a PCR test on arrival.”

In the next five years, Bahrain plans to double the size of its tourism sector. Several initiatives have been taken up to strategically boost tourism within the country. Investments of over \$10 million have been made towards tourism infrastructure like museums, hotels, new attractions, etc., to attract 14 million visitors to Bahrain by 2026. “Bahrain as a destination has invested in several ecotourism projects, such as the brand-new premium and unique eco-tourism project in the region, the Mantis Bahrain Hawar Island Hotel, and Resort, which is set to open in 2024. The property will be surrounded by a wildlife sanctuary, making it one of the first such environmentally focused projects and a one-of-a-kind destination in the Middle East,” informs Arzan.

Bahrain as a destination has a lot to offer its visitors in terms of experiences. From heritage to culture, food to adventure sports, it has it all. The destination has many architectural marvels and three UNESCO World Heritage Sites. One of the most unique things to do in Bahrain is the pearl diving experience, where travellers can collect 60 oysters and if they find a pearl, it is theirs to keep. Not to mention the adrenaline rush of watching a Formula One race at the Bahrain International Circuit. In Bahrain, one can even defy gravity at GRAVITY, an indoor skydiving facility with one of the world’s tallest indoor wind tunnels.

Sharing more on the destination, Arzan says, “Bahrain is a multifaceted destination with something to offer people of all generations. The



▲ Arzan Khambatta

main attractions are the stunning and pristine beaches, dazzling nightlife, great food, and direct flight connections with numerous Indian cities. Whether you want a luxurious vacation or a budget-friendly vacation, Bahrain, with its variety of options for accommodation, food, and activities, can accommodate both. Of course, it depends on your travel preferences. Bahrain has many high-end luxurious 5-star and 4-star properties, as well as many reasonably priced properties with world-class facilities. You won’t have to worry about the cost of accommodation in Bahrain because it caters to all budgets and the hotels will ensure you have the best experience. Also, with an endless list of indoor and outdoor activities, this country will spoil you for choice.”

The WoW Advantage

Wow Holidays, which began operations in 2014, has now positioned itself as one of the pioneers of B2B outbound group tour packages designed specifically for travel agents. Having established their niche, Rakesh Shetty, Managing Director, Wow Holidays, aspires to expand the company's vision by offering innovative itineraries and promoting new and hitherto undiscovered destinations to their travel agent partners.

Prashant Nayak

Rakesh Shetty joined Wow Holidays in 2017 as Vice President-Sales and Operations. For the first three years, his primary focus was to drive the sales vertical, develop a pan India presence and build up a 'top-of-the-mind-recall' for WoW Holidays in the B2B fraternity. After his subsequent elevation to COO in 2020, he devoted his energies to curating fresh itineraries and undiscovered tourist excursions, tie-ups with new suppliers, and improvements in on-tour experiences, all of which were intended to expand the bouquet of global holiday experiences offered by WoW Holidays for Indian leisure travellers. He was recently elevated to the position of Managing Director. "This journey has helped me to broaden my knowledge of destinations, sales, itinerary planning, and booking software platforms," mentions Rakesh.

There has been a seismic change in the travel industry with traveller's preferences and the way we work due to the pandemic. When asked about the three key challenges that he encounters at work, Rakesh responds, "The single biggest challenge that we face today is the huge backlog of visa applications at consulates which is hindering the travel plans of travellers tremendously. The second challenge that the entire travel industry faces is the current shortage of airline seats in the Indian aviation sector over the last three years. The third challenge that stares us in the face today is the chronic shortage of experienced and skilled travel professionals. The devastating impact of the pandemic brought the industry virtually to a grinding halt and demoralised the labour market to the extent that many people opted to change careers. The challenge now is to induct fresh talent and train them on the job."

Wow Holidays is trying to play its small role in this endeavor through the launch of a free training initiative 'Usha Careers' with the Usha Pai Foundation



▲ Rakesh Shetty

which will induct fresh talent and provide them with classroom training on weekends coupled with on-the-job-training at the office.

Wow Holidays was established in 2014 by Founder and Chairman, Madhav Pai. The organisation has vast experience in designing curated travel itineraries across the world and has created unprecedented and seamless experiences for Indian tour operators and outbound travellers, especially in Europe, which is always the favourite destination of choice for all Indian travellers. They enjoy an impeccable reputation with many renowned hotels, sightseeing attractions, and restaurant chains worldwide. Their experience and expertise ensure the best possible services at extremely competitive prices.

"Post pandemic, WoW Holidays launched a dedicated portal for the B2B trade, which has received an extremely encouraging response from our travel partners. Recently, we operated groups to emerging destinations in Europe such as Greece, Turkey, Slovenia, and Croatia," informs Rakesh.

According to Rakesh, the WoW advantage as a DMC is that the company

commands an excellent relationship with renowned hotels, especially in the UK, Continental Europe, Scandinavia, and North America, all of which are favourite destinations for the Indian traveller. They are happy to offer Indian travel agents the benefits of their exclusively contracted wholesale rates with renowned hotels across the globe.

"The distinct advantage that Wow Holidays has is that it is the first Indian-based specialist DMC for Europe, Scandinavia, East Europe, Russia, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and India. Also, as we work in the same time zones, not only do you save on communication costs but also get faster reverts. What's more, we work 7 days a week! We maintain the highest level of confidentiality with our partners. B2B being our core focus, our team ensures much-needed confidentiality. There is a 24 x 7 Emergency Team in London, Paris, Zurich, Rome, New York, and Mumbai during the summer travel period. Our Team of dedicated and destination-specific Tour Managers ensures the highest level of personalised service while on Tour. Our Managers will be the best Brand Ambassadors our partners can hope for," assures Rakesh.

As a travel industry professional, on asked about the 'Power of Travel', Rakesh states, "It is no secret that we all have stress in our lives. Constant change and continuous lists of to-do keep us busy, and boredom and monotony can overwhelm even the best of us. And leisure travel is a supreme vehicle for recharging our mind, body, and soul. The act of getting away and opening up to new experiences can give a profound sense of well-being and peace of mind. Travel is transformative and full of life-changing power. Getting away from our day-to-day schedules is a powerful change of pace, and the benefits of far-away travel are so vital, so vivid and clear, that travelling is not a luxury, it is a necessity. "The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page."

Discover the depths of BHUTAN with the ancient Trans Bhutan Trail



The tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan reopened to tourism on September 23, after two and a half years of border closures. However, for the first time in 60 years, the breath-taking Trans Bhutan Trail (TBT) is back with an alluring trekking experience for the adventurous seeking out nature.

Team TTJ

The India-Bhutan border gates in Assam and West Bengal have been reopened for tourists. However, the gates have been reopened with some new rules, including a cost for sustainable development.

Bhutan recently announced that it would raise its Sustainable Development Fee (SDF) from USD 65 to USD 200 per person, per night, which will go towards projects that support Bhutan's economic, social, environmental, and cultural development. Travellers from India are levied an SDF of Nu. 1,200 or equivalent

Beyond protecting Bhutan's natural environment, the SDF will also be directed towards activities that preserve Bhutan's built and living cultural heritage, including architecture and traditional values, as well as meaningful environmental projects.

In addition to the fee, visitors from India will have to produce a voter ID card, passport, or any other identity proof at the immigration check posts, while children have to produce birth certificates. Eco-tourism, bird watching, and other tour packages have been planned by the Bhutan government for tourists.

Bhutan has exciting events planned in the next few months, including the Snowman Race, which is the ultimate race for climate action, happening on October 13, 2022. However, to get the best of Bhutan and to discover the charismatic depths of the kingdom of Bhutan, the ancient Trans Bhutan Trail is now open.

The Trail offers trekkers an inclusive and adventurous experience with nature. The Trail was named in TIME's 50



amount in INR per person per night, which will remain in effect for two years.

The levy of SDF is not a new concept for tourism in Bhutan. The tourism industry in Bhutan was founded on the principle of 'High Value, Low volume', and the SDF was introduced when tourism started in the country in 1974. The levy of SDF for Indian guests was in place since 2020.



extraordinary travel destinations around the world for 2022. Travellers on its routes can chat with local monks, students, and villagers, learning first-hand why Bhutan is the birthplace of the innovative Gross National Happiness concept. Bhutan is consistently ranked one of the happiest places on earth and holds the coveted title of one of the only carbon-negative countries in the world.

The Trans Bhutan Trail dates back to the 16th century and used to serve as a pilgrimage route for Buddhists from the



east, travelling to the most sacred sites in the western region and Tibet. Bhutan is considered one of the world's top ten biodiversity hotspots and the world's first carbon-negative country. The 403km trail connecting nine districts, 28 local

pilgrims fell into disrepair as the national highway was constructed in the 1960s. With the foresight of His Majesty, The King of Bhutan, and the support of the Tourism Council of Bhutan, along with the Bhutan Canada Foundation, a non-profit organisation behind the restoration, led the revival of the ancient Trail, making it accessible once again to locals and visitors alike.

The Trail connects the town of Haa, in the western

extremes of Bhutan and near the border with Tibet, with Trashigang in the East, bordering Arunachal Pradesh. This ancient trail runs from

The Trail contributes significantly to sustainable development, setting global standards for environmental preservation. One can hike, bike, raft, and camp as they pass through spectacular scenery, ranging from mountain ridges to lush valleys, through the lush meadows and dense forests all with breath-taking views of the Himalayan peaks. The trail passes at least 400 historic and cultural sites on its way. It is hoped that the Trans Bhutan Trail will benefit the communities along the route by providing new opportunities for economic growth.



governments, and two national parks now welcomes visitors from all over the world, allowing travellers to explore the mystique of this land. The path that was once used by monks, messengers, traders, and

All aspects of guided walking and biking on the Trail can be arranged directly via TBT on a not-for-profit basis. The restoration of the Trail is intended both as a homage to Bhutan's ancestors and as a gift to its present and future generations.

The Trans Bhutan Trail will give visitors an incredible insight into life in remote parts of Bhutan as they hike from east to west (or vice versa) through pristine forests, past alpine lakes, meadows, and across high passes—experiencing first-hand the country's unique culture, cuisine, and hospitality along the way.

Haa passing through Paro, Thimphu, Punakha, Wangi Phodrang, Trongsa, Bumthang, and Mongar.

The Trans-Bhutan Trail can be hiked or biked. True adventurers can complete the trail in just over a month. Half-day and full-day treks are also available, with three, four, or seven-day section hikes expected to be popular among most visitors. The Trail offers a diverse experience for birdwatchers and botanists, photographers, rafters and runners, and those seeking spiritual, wellness, or religious fulfillment. Signature campsites, homestays, and hotels will be available along the way. Curated options for shorter-duration tours are also available.



Sam Blyth, Chairman, Bhutan Canada Foundation

The Trans Bhutan Trail will significantly contribute to the expansion of sustainability and ecotourism by encouraging intrepid visitors and explorers from India to participate in community-based experiences. We aim to help local communities to enhance tourism amenities and provide visitors with the experience of a lifetime.

Hahn Air's Ticketing Solutions

Boosting business for travel agencies and airlines

Aviation distribution can be quite complex. Travel agencies don't have access to all airline content and airlines cannot make their flights available via every travel agency. Hahn Air is closing this distribution gap with their ticketing solutions, making hundreds of additional airlines available to travel agencies. In an insightful conversation, Bharat Kapoor, Regional Vice President of Hahn Air, shared with us how the company is generating incremental revenue for travel agencies and airlines.

Vartik Sethi

What are the services Hahn Air is offering for travel agencies? How can they benefit from additional ticketing opportunities?

Hahn Air has been offering ticketing services to travel agencies since 1999. By partnering with Hahn Air, airlines can sell their flights in markets where they would normally not be available. If an airline is, for example, not in the Indian BSP or does not grant ticketing authority in India, they can still be issued by travel agents in India in their GDS on the Hahn Air ticket. Our services are strictly B2B, meaning we provide our partners' tickets via travel agencies only. The advantage for travel agents is that they have access to more routes, more destinations, more airlines and more combinations of airlines on one single HR-169 ticket. And they can even use the standard processes of their GDS, no training is required. They only need to choose HR as the validating carrier. And best of all, the service is absolutely free. Even partner airlines that are not a member of any GDS themselves are available to Indian travel agents in all major GDSs via the Codes H1 and X1. Hahn Air is currently partnering with over 350 airlines.

How does Hahn Air's ticketing services work? Please throw light on Hahn Air Systems' and Hahn Air Technologies' distribution solutions.

To issue a Hahn Air ticket, travel agents do not need to leave their GDS. All they need to do is go through the standard ticketing and payment processes and simply choose Hahn Air (HR) as the validating carrier. They will then be able to use the familiar GDS processes to issue a Hahn Air HR-169 ticket. On the Hahn Air website,



▲ Bharat Kapoor

we provide easy step-by-step guides on how to issue a Hahn Air ticket in each GDS (www.hahnair.com/de/gds-ticketing-assistant). For airlines that are not in a GDS at all under their own two-letter code, we make them available in all major GDSs. If they are a partner airline of Hahn Air Systems, they are available under the code H1. If they are a partner airline of Hahn Air Technologies, they are available under the code X1. As Hahn Air Systems and Hahn Air Technologies are sister companies of Hahn Air, the travel agents can simply select Hahn Air as the validating carrier and issue a Hahn Air HR-169 ticket.

How important is India market for Hahn Air?

India is one of the strongest markets for us at Hahn Air. Over the years we have added many airlines for our travel agency community and thereby provide additional ticketing opportunities. The agencies benefit by being able to serve their clients in a

more efficient and profitable manner. Ultimately, our partner agencies saw a strong revenue growth and, therefore, more and more agencies were wanting to work with us. To acknowledge the importance of the market, we also established a dedicated Service Desk for India. The 24/7 Service Desk can be reached by e-mail at serviceindia@hahnair.com. In addition, I am happy to provide trainings, sales support and answers on how to increase a travel agency's revenue with the Hahn Air solutions.

Hahn Air strives to support the local community and a more environmentally friendly air transportation. Tell us about Hahn Air's current nature-positive initiatives.

We are assuming responsibility for our impact on the environment and on society. We, therefore, believe that it is our duty to invest in a sustainable future and support social projects benefitting our local community and people in need around the world. To mitigate climate change, Hahn Air partners with veritree, a technology platform enabling and tracking global restoration projects. Hahn Air committed to restoring coastal mangrove forests in Kenya and Madagascar by planting 150,000 trees which equals an area of 15 hectares. The Hahn Air tree population, once matured, will sequester for an average of 32,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide. To contribute to a more sustainable air transport, we are also looking into solutions for our travel agency and airline partners. It is our declared goal to offer carbon compensation options for flights distributed through Hahn Air in the future. In addition, we are supporting social projects around the world via our own foundation, the Hahn Air Foundation.

India fundamental to Finnair's future growth strategy

Finnair has been serving the India market for the last 15 years now. However, the conditions created post the COVID-19 meltdown and the current war in Europe have made a deep impact on Finnair's Asia focus. This rethink has only worked to the advantage of India. TTJ speaks to Sakari Romu, General Manager - India, Finnair, to know more about the airline's plans and vision for India.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

It has just been three months since Sakari moved into his new role as General Manager - India and the twinkle in his eyes and emphatic appreciation of the dynamics of the India market are an instant giveaway to the fact that his tenure in India will be a transformational one.

Sakari elaborates, "Asia was a major focus market for us but the war in Europe and closure of Russian airspace have decimated the geographical advantage enjoyed by Finnair's hub of Helsinki for its Japan, Korea, and China markets, forcing them to rethink their strategy and also their Asia strategy. This has resulted in singling out India from the other Asian markets. Today India single-handedly enjoys Finnair's focus as a top Asian market."

Sakari emphasises, "India enjoys the benefit of emerging as the fastest growing market for aviation in Asia and perhaps the world, and hence its importance cannot be undermined under any circumstances."

He further adds, "Perhaps it has been India's biggest failing that it has been unable to project and highlight to the world the change and massive strides it has made over the last 10-15 years in developing world-class facilities and infrastructure. Today Indian airports and infrastructure compete with some of the very best in the world."

With seven flights a week out of Delhi to Helsinki, using state-of-the-art Airbus 350 and 330 aircraft combined with Visit Finland's ambitious target to triple its overnights from India in the next 3 years from 1,00,000 to 3,00,000, India is the market to be in for Finnair. India's growth story offers tremendous business opportunities and besides ambitious targets of promoting tourism between India and Finland, a tremendous opportunity exists for inbound tourism into India. The world has started discovering



▲ Sakari Romu

India, its tourism potential, and its market potential as a humongous consumer of goods and services, so not only will that warrant an increase in the tourist or leisure traveller but also the business traveller into India.

Sakari shares, "Finnair has currently undertaken an ambitious 200 million Euros, upgradation program under which the seats on board its entire Airbus 330 fleet will be completely

revamped starting from economy class, premier economy to business class also the seats onboard its Airbus 350 fleet will fully be replaced in the premier economy and business class. The idea was to innovate and create Finnish products with a Finnish identity that stands out and speaks for itself. It is not an improvement, but the creation of something absolutely unique and new."

Finnair has been enjoying exceptionally good flight loads and fare yields all through the summer and this fall but a steep escalation in costs of aviation fuel combined with the fallout of the closure of Russian airspace resulting in longer flight routes have played a major role in escalating the price of air tickets for the end user. The airlines have lost a lot of money over the last few years and the immediate focus for all is to return business to profitability, including Finnair.

"With our new strategy focusing on markets in the USA, Europe, Asia, and India, Finnair strives to return to profitability within 2024. India offers great potential and we are continuously evaluating and studying options for future growth from other cities in India. Hopefully, may peace prevail soon and normalcy return," concludes Sakari.



Asiana Airlines to capitalise on the India opportunity

After a hiatus of almost three years, the airline resumed its India operations earlier this year in April. TTJ spoke with Song Jung Sub, Regional Manager - Delhi Station for Asiana Airlines, to know the airline's route map for the future.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

Having operated in the India market for almost two decades, Asiana Airlines bid adieu to its India operations due to strategic reasons in 2019, much before the COVID-19 pandemic had tightened its grip on the world. On April 29, 2022, Asiana Airlines resumed operations with its twice-a-week operations between Seoul and New Delhi instead of the daily service that it had earlier. Song mentions, "India was always on our radar and our two decades of operations earlier in this market gave us a deep understanding of its behaviour and market dynamics, so as the opportune time came we resumed our India operations."

"India is a growing market, it has an active aging population and great

purchase power, Asiana Airlines has a great network and convenient connections into China, Japan, and Trans-Pacific into the United States of America so it is a very important market for us," says Song.

Currently operating with the twin-aisle Airbus 330 in a two-class configuration, Asiana is even considering the introduction of Airbus 350 on this route and working towards the possibility of increasing the flights from the current two to four a week in the near future.

China is yet to open up its doors but the business traffic between India and Korea and India and Japan is already on the rise. Asiana Airlines offers great Trans-Pacific connectivity to West coast

American cities of Seattle, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York on the East coast. Connections are good from Seoul. However, in the case of longer layovers, Asiana Airlines is looking at the possibility of offering lounge access to the passengers.

"We understand the special food requirements for our Indian guests, including vegetarian meals and Jain meals, and can very well cater to these requests," mentions Song. He further adds, "We have a great product and great service, however the biggest challenge that we face currently is for the market to know that we are back with the resumption of our services and our future commitment to the market."



▲ Song Jung Sub

flynas to launch direct flights to Mumbai from Riyadh and Dammam from October 20

Daily direct flynas flights will connect Riyadh with Mumbai, and four direct weekly flights will depart from Dammam.

Team TTJ

flynas, the Saudi carrier, has announced the launch of weekly direct flights from Riyadh and Dammam to Mumbai, starting from October 20, 2022.

Daily direct flynas flights will connect Riyadh with Mumbai, departing from

King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh back and forth. In addition, four direct weekly flynas flights from King Fahd International Airport in Dammam will be departing on Saturday, Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday starting from October 31, 2022, and reservations are now open through all flynas booking channels.

These routes came in light of flynas expansion strategy under the slogan launched recently under the title of "We Connect the World to the Kingdom," and after the growth achieved by the company in all its operations during the

first half of 2022, in line with the strategic vision of the Civil Aviation Authority aims to double the capacity and reach 330 million passengers annually, from more than 250 destinations from around world by 2030.

flynas succeeded in scaling up its fleet to 38 aircraft in June 2022 compared to 25 aircraft in January 2021, an increase of 52 per cent. Meanwhile, the number of passengers on its flights increased to about 4 million passengers during the first half of 2022, up from about 1.8 million in the same period last year, an increase of nearly 120 per cent.

The Saudi carrier connects more than 70 domestic and international destinations and, since its establishment in 2007, has transported more than 60 million passengers.



As India celebrates the 75th Independence Day,

Let's revisit the incredible stories of courage and valour.

On the 75th anniversary of our independence, let's set out and explore those historic sites that stood witness to our freedom struggle and remember the countless sacrifices done by those who dedicated their lives and resources for the country.



Sabarmati Ashram,
Gujarat

Home to Mahatma Gandhi and the ideology that set India free - non-violence.

Jallianwala Bagh Memorial, Punjab

This sacred pilgrimage site honours the fallen victims of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre.

Cellular Jail National Memorial, Andaman

A former British prison, the Cellular Jail now serves as a shrine to the political dissidents it once imprisoned.

Red Fort,
Delhi

On August 15, 1947, India's first Prime Minister hoisted the national flag at the Lahori Gate here.

INA Memorial,
Imphal

Dedicated to the soldiers of the Indian National Army, it pays tribute to the soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the nation.

Jhansi Fort,
Uttar Pradesh

The Fort stands as a tribute to the warrior queen Rani Lakshmibai who fought against the British.



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Incredible India

The National Conference of State Tourism Ministers

India aspires to be a global leader in the tourism sector by 2047

The recent three-day National Conference of State Tourism Ministers in Dharamshala aimed to bring in diverse viewpoints and perspectives from all the states and Union territories of India on tourism development and growth. The conference concluded with the 'Dharamshala Declaration' which affirms commitment toward developing 'sustainable and responsible tourism and positions India as a global leader in the tourism sector by 2047.

Ravi Sharma

The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India had organised a three-day National Conference of State Tourism Ministers from September 18-20, 2022, in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh, to discuss issues related to the development of tourism in the country.

G Kishan Reddy, Union Minister for Tourism, was accorded a Ceremonial Guard of Honour on arrival in Dharamshala, on September 18, the first day of the conference. The three-day National Conference kick-started with a press conference chaired by Minister Reddy. During the press meet, Ajay Bhatt, MoS Tourism, Shripad Naik, MoS Tourism, Nakul Anand, Chairman, FAITH, Rakesh Kumar Verma, Additional Secretary Tourism, and G Kamala Vardhana Rao, DG Tourism were also present. The event was also attended by Jai Ram Thakur, CM of Himachal Pradesh.

During the course of three days, in his speeches, Minister Reddy spoke on varied topics. On the first day he stated, "In the past 75 years, India has become synonymous with tourism, spirituality, transformation, culture, and diversity. It is a matter of great pride to celebrate the record-breaking expansion, leading India to become the fifth largest economy in the world."

He also said that establishing the tourism sector was a primary concern, and the Ministry of Tourism has started various initiatives government has taken a four-fold strategy for the development of tourism in the country that focuses on improving connectivity, enhancing tourism infrastructure, streamlining branding, and showcasing culture and heritage.

The Union Tourism Minister urged all states to share and adopt best practices to boost the tourism sector. He also said that the States must organise conferences at the state level with district officers of different departments and stakeholders to improve and promote tourism destinations. Reddy also stated that the National flag will be installed at tourist places. He appealed to the states and stakeholders to install flags at all hotels and tourist places.

The Minister also informed that a National Tourism Policy will soon be brought out in India while also giving the slogan of #VikasBhiVirasatBhi. The National Tourism Policy has been drafted to revive India's tourism and targets to achieve USD 1 trillion in the tourism sector in 2047. Against this backdrop, the Ministry is also paving the way for developing responsible and sustainable tourism destinations.

In the coming days, a PanchTeerth joining important places in the life of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and an Ambedkar Circuit will also be launched. The government has also announced a special tourist train to cover the 'Ambedkar Circuit.' With a focus on tourism, the idea is to attract tourists beyond the Dalit community, who mostly visit these places as a pilgrimage. The journey will include meals, ground transportation,

and entry to the site. The creation of special circuits allows the government to focus better on the comprehensive development of all sites related to the theme, including infrastructure, road and rail connectivity, and visitor facilities.

Emphasising the importance of air connectivity, Reddy said that the number of airports in the country has increased from 74 in 2014 to 140 now, and it is further proposed to increase the number of airports to 220 by 2025. He also said that the Prime Minister's vision of associating the Indian diaspora and NRIs for promoting tourism will be encouraged and urged each diaspora of Indians to motivate at least five foreigners to visit India as per the vision of PM Modi.

The tourism conference had been divided into thematic sessions on the 'development of tourism infrastructure, cultural, spiritual and heritage tourism, tourism in the Himalayan states, responsible and sustainable tourism, the role of digital technology in the marketing and promotion of tourism destinations, emerging importance of homestays in



the Indian hospitality sector, ayurveda, wellness, and medical value travel and lastly on forest and wildlife tourism.

The conference also had sessions of motivational speakers like Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, the yoga and spiritual guru, Kapil Dev, former cricketer, and Anand Mahindra, Chairman of the Mahindra group.

Approximately 250 delegates attended the conference including tourism ministers from several states and UTs like Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Goa, Mizoram, Haryana, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Karnataka, Ladakh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, etc. Many officials and dignitaries like central ministers, governors, administrators, and senior officials of the central government, state governments, and heads of tourism and



in the country, the government has been bringing in an initiative that promotes domestic tourism, medical tourism, religious tourism, and more.

The ministry has sanctioned Rs 7,000 crore for the development of tourism infrastructure throughout the country under its various infrastructure development schemes. As many as 76 projects have been sanctioned under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme in 30 states and UTs for building tourist infrastructure across various themes. The

tourism ministry recently launched the Swadesh Darshan Scheme 2.0 to develop sustainable and responsible destinations following a tourist and destination-centric approach.

The conference was also important in

the context of India's G20 presidency for 2023 and aims to unite objectives and efforts to showcase India as a must-visit destination at a global level. Regarding this, Varanasi has been nominated as the first-ever SCO Tourism and Cultural Capital. India also plans to showcase its cultural richness and bring in necessary interventions including visa reforms, ease of travel, traveller-friendly immigration facilities at airports, and openness to international travel to ease tourism during the presidency. India will assume the presidency of the G20 for one year from December 1, 2022, to November 30, 2023.

On the concluding day of the Conference, Minister Reddy stressed cooperation between the centre and the states for the development of tourism. He called on states to start work on "a war footing" by establishing tourism clubs. A document titled 'Dharamshala Declaration-2022: Sustainable and Responsible Tourism' was released at the end of the day. The document asserts that India will play a pivotal role in contributing toward global tourism recovery driven mainly through domestic tourism.



hospitality associations were also seen at the event.

Among the other topics discussed, emphasis was also laid on the importance of Yuva Tourism Clubs, which can become a game changer for the sector. The vision of these clubs is to nurture and develop young ambassadors of Indian tourism who would become aware of tourism possibilities in India, appreciate our rich cultural heritage, and develop an interest and passion for tourism. These young ambassadors would be catalysts for promoting tourism in India.

Furthermore, the government continues to support MSMEs in tourism and capitalise on the employment generation potential in the sector. Various initiatives of the Ministry of Tourism aim to strengthen the recovery from the disruption caused to the tourism economy due to the pandemic. To promote tourism



TTJ-TRAVMART Jaipur

RECEIVES AN OVERWHELMING RESPONSE

The sixth TTJ TRAVMART for the year 2022 at Jaipur was a first-time experiment by the organisers, based on a two-day, two-business session format. It turned out to be a successful event.

TTJ TRAVMART has resumed once again in 2022, with vigour and resilience, post the COVID-19 pandemic meltdown by hosting very successful marts at Guwahati, Kolkata, Lucknow, Chandigarh, and Ahmedabad earlier this year.

The fifth edition of TTJ-TRAVMART organised its sixth TRAVMART for the year, at the Radisson City Centre, Jaipur, on September 23-24, 2022.

Despite the heavy rains and traffic disruptions, the event was well attended by the travel fraternity from Jaipur, other cities of Rajasthan, and periphery states, with 196 buyers pre-registering for the event.

There were 28 exhibitors, including airlines, cruise companies, tourism boards, destination management companies, hotels, and travel automation companies, who showcased their products and services to the buyers and updated them on their services and offerings for the upcoming festive season.

The event was supported and well attended by members and Office bearers of leading national and regional trade associations, such as TAAI, ADTOI, OTOAI, TAFI, IATO, ETAA, FHTR, and RATO. Trade stalwarts, luminaries, and dignitaries present were also honoured and presented mementos by Ravi Sharma, Convener, and Gurjit Singh Ahuja, Co-Convener, TTJ TRAVMART.



Events





Convention 2022

sets the pace for future of tourism

The “Build Back Better” topic served as the foundation for the TAFI convention in Sarawak in 2022, which delivered on its promise to foster insightful discussions with some thought-provoking material about the future of travel, tourism, and sustainability.

Team TTJ

The TAFI convention 2022 turned out to be a successful event as nearly 500 travel delegates and media attended the international event. The convention was hosted by Tourism Malaysia, Sarawak Tourism Board, Business Events Sarawak, and MyCEB at Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia, from September 20-23, 2022. The Borneo



Convention Centre at Kuching made up a great venue for the three-day event. The

reorient tourism business strategy post-COVID.

Commenting on the theme and outcome of the convention, Ajay Prakash, TAFI President, said, “We’re holding a convention after four years in a world that has undergone a radical change. The



consumer and expectations have changed and it’s critical that stakeholders in the industry change to keep pace with the new travellers. Responsible Tourism is no longer an optional

luxury; it’s a dire necessity if we are to remain relevant. I’m very happy with the response from our members, and I hope that everyone who attended will go back with some new ideas and a new attitude to the business.”

There were three knowledge sessions, and while travel industry stalwarts and leaders from India and across the world participated, it was a delight to hear from them and ponder on the depth of

the subjects. The first one went with the theme, Build Back Better, and it focused on the responsibility of the travel and tourism industry to learn from past mistakes and to restructure tourism with sensitivity towards the planet and in line with the changed consumer behaviour and expectations. The second one, “Change the Tune,” focused on the need for travel agents and tour operators to look beyond airline commissions, which have disappeared, and creatively devise new revenue avenues. Finally,



‘The Big M in Tourism’ addressed the issue of magnifying and resurrecting brands in the post-COVID world to stay relevant to the younger generation.



travel insurance; DreamFolks, which offers airport lounges and related services



across the globe, Verteil, an NDC aggregator, and VFS Global, the pioneers of visa services facilitation, gave some informative and excellent presentations that were very informative and had a big impact on the audience.

Keynote speeches were also delivered by Zubin Karkaria, Founder and CEO, VFS Global, Ankush Nijhawan, Co-Founder, TBO.com and MD Nijhawan Group, and Vinay Gupta, Founder and Group CEO, TripFactory.com. They kept the audience riveted to their speech and seated throughout.



The TAFI-Travel Biz Monitor Awards were one of the convention’s highlights (TAFI-TBM). The Global Ambassador for

Sustainable Tourism Awards, Superwomen of Tourism Awards, Torch Bearers of Tourism Awards,





Torch Bearers of Tourism Innovation Awards, Global Business Leader Award and a special recognition Award for Exceptional Contribution to Tourism were among the categories of awards given out by TAFI-TBM.



The finale was TAFI's tribute to the late Ankur Bhatia of the Bird Group for his significant contributions to the Indian travel industry. The same was presented by

Ajay Prakash on behalf of the travel fraternity.

On the occasion of the gala farewell dinner hosted by Tourism Malaysia and Business Events Sarawak, Nancy Shukri, Federal Minister of Tourism,

convention's theme, Build Back Better. The first was to lend assistance to the "Books Build Legacy" initiative led by Amelia Roziman, CEO of Business Events Sarawak, who established free youth libraries throughout Sarawak's interior areas



our members will adopt the pledge and work towards implementing it."

Talking about the success of the convention, Abbas Moiz, General Secretary, TAFI, said, "Initially, we had a lot of challenges,

starting with the visa process and the rebooking of airline tickets on account of the pre and post-convention itineraries, but the team came through, and I believe this was a landmark Convention – the biggest such event post-COVID."



for young people. The second initiative aims to accelerate gender parity in travel and tourism. TAFI, in association with VFS Global, has launched a pledge to be signed by all members to promote gender equality in the workplace. "The empowerment of women and gender parity is not just a politically correct idea," said



Malaysia, recounted the traditional ties between India and Malaysia. She hoped that the TAFI Convention will encourage more Indian tourists to visit Sarawak and experience its pristine beauty.

To urge members to help create a more equitable society, TAFI also started two CSR initiatives in keeping with the

Ajay Prakash, "studies have shown that it actually leads to better bottom lines. We hope that



India is travelling!

India is a huge market for countries worldwide when it comes to travel and tourism. Tourism Boards worldwide need to go beyond their reach to travel agents to strike a chord with the travellers directly. It is time for International Tourism Boards and National Tourist Offices to communicate with Indian travellers differently.

Akash Dahiya

Tourism worldwide has been through a rough patch. It started with COVID-19 in 2020 and though showed signs of recovery in the past two years; it was further hit by the negative sentiment towards travel to Eastern Europe, thanks to the Ukraine-Russia face-off!

As many tourism boards like Maldives struggle to fill the gap of lost travellers from Russia amidst the war, most South Asian countries have realised the immense potential of India as a fertile ground for global tourism boards. As the demand for new experiences spikes back home from the highly savvy younger generation of Indian travellers, the tour operators need to mirror their aspirations.

Indian traveller is not just limiting themselves to the usual International destinations, but are willing to explore new experiences and new destinations abroad.

Riding on this demand, in June 2022, Türkiye (formerly Turkey) hosted the highest ever number of travellers from India (more than 27,300 tourists from India) in one month alone, breaking all previous inbound travel records from India. This was enabled by the ease of visas and direct flights other than the efforts made by the Türkiye Tourism Board (TTB).

As travel exhibitions and roadshows are back post-pandemic, the Azerbaijan Tourism Board and Singapore have also been investing in advertising in India to entice Indian travellers. The Azerbaijan Tourism Board has been eyeing Indian travellers as a wedding and conference destination.

Maldives saw India as its top sources market with nearly 3, 00,000 Indians that



▲ Akash Dahiya

visited Maldives last year. Seeing this potential, Maldives is further looking to build upon its credentials, especially in tier I and tier II cities in India.

South African Tourism has done multiple multi-city roadshows in India. South African Tourism is not just offering discounted fares, but also peculiar experiences like glamping and snorkelling with sharks.

Qatar Tourism too has been actively working to tap the Indian outbound market by conducting roadshows and rolling out special offers to Indian tourists for the FIFA World cup and other segments like MICE, wedding destinations, and leisure.

Global destinations are viewing tourism as key to the revival of their economies. Hence,

governments worldwide are laying out the red carpet for inbound tourists. This includes not just the destinations whose economies depend on tourism but new to inbound tourism countries too.

With India's mammoth scope, as one of the fastest growing and largest outbound travel markets globally, with approximately 80 million passport level of purchasing power, among the middle class and poised to grow to \$42 billion by 2024, it's only logical for these tourism boards to woo the Indian travellers.

This could have a cascading impact on their economies. Closer home, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and Nepal are examples of how dependence on tourism has impacted their economies.

However, as the landscape of the Indian traveller changes and International tourism boards are eager to leverage this opportunity by reconnecting with their Indian partners and agents. However, the old-school method of approaching demand through travel agents alone would not work. It's time that the International Tourism Boards start to reinvent and reimagine. It is always the early bird who catches the worm. Along with travel trade partners, they also need to look at other opportunities to enhance their reach.

The Tourism Boards will also have to devise strategies to create a pull directly through D2C marketing initiatives and roll out some red carpet for D2C products and offerings. Though the travel agents cannot be surpassed completely, the Tourism Boards can work on attracting the much savvy and 'ready to experiment' travellers directly through their product offerings.

About the Author: Akash Dahiya is the Co-founder of SanKash, a travel FinTech start-up.

Akasa Air to operate 300 weekly flights by October end; to allow pets on board from November 1

Akasa Air, India's newest airline, has successfully completed the first two months of its commercial journey in building India's greenest, most dependable, and most affordable airline. Akasa Air launched its maiden Delhi flights on the Delhi-Bengaluru and Delhi-Ahmedabad routes, on October 7, 2022. Both routes will be served with daily flights in each direction. The airline has announced eight destinations so far, including Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Kochi, Chennai, Delhi, Agartala and Guwahati being covered with 11 non-stop routes.

By expanding their network with an aircraft arriving every 15 days, the airline aims to fulfil our goal of developing a strong pan-India presence and expects to operate 300 weekly flights by October end.

With the vision to create an inclusive and humane travel experience, Akasa's pet-friendly service will commence on November 1, 2022, wherein passengers flying on Akasa Air will be able to travel with their pets in the cabin. The airline has joined hands with Umeed for Animals



Foundation to ensure smooth pet-friendly travel.

Akasa Air has been progressively expanding its network across the country, in a phased approach with a commitment towards making travel accessible in India through the introduction of routes in tier 2 and 3 cities. The company has recently received its sixth aircraft and will have a fleet size of 18 aircraft by the end of March 2023. Over the next four years, the airline will add 54 additional aircraft, taking its total fleet size to 72 aircraft.

Paxes to revolutionise business travel, scheduled for pan-India launch

G Paxes, a SAAS based platform for corporates and travel management companies (TMCs) to upgrade their business travel experience, has announced that they are primed for a pan-India launch after their beta phase roll-out. The platform is an offering of TBO Tek Limited, one of the leading global travel distribution platforms connecting 100,000 travel buyers with a millions of suppliers over 110 countries. TBO has introduced Paxes as a purpose-built platform for TMC's powered corporate travel. The platform has been utilised and acknowledged by some of the leading corporates fulfilled by Paxes network TMC's who welcomed digitisation as the only way of corporate travel program management going forward.



The SAAS-based platform enables corporations and TMCs to manage business travel globally and is a mobile-first corporate travel automation and self-booking solution focused on the business travel market. It offers TMCs the entire gambit of functionalities including corporate profiling, implementation, inventory type and form of payments. The platform provides for multiple invoice profiles and also helps corporates and TMCs undertake return on investment calculations. Additionally, Paxes allows users to create dynamic custom fields for granular reporting and analyse expenses through the spend analyser.

Speaking about the great reception and pan-India launch, Gaurav Bhatnagar, Co-founder, TBO.com, said, "In the contemporary world, business travel is a very significant aspect that needs attention within all organisations. The vision at Paxes has always been to create made-to-measure solutions for TMCs and be their go-to partners for business travel needs. We have been tried and tested within the ecosystem by some leading companies, and they have acknowledged our services. There has never been a better time to make business travel in India easier and give many companies the power of Paxes."

Ediwanto Eddie appointed Deputy Director of Tourism Malaysia Mumbai

E diwanto Eddie has joined Tourism Malaysia Mumbai office w.e.f September 1, 2022 as Deputy Director.

Previously, he had worked for eight years at the Tourism Malaysia headquarters in Putrajaya, Malaysia. At the headquarters, he was involved in organising various domestic tourism roadshows and familiarisation trips.

His key role now in Tourism Malaysia Mumbai will be to encourage marketing Malaysia as an attractive destination, organise trade and media FAMs, collaborate joint promos with trade and media partners, participate in various trade fairs and organise Tourism Malaysia roadshow.



Jazeera Airways enhances its presence in India market

Jazeera Airways continues to support an expanding network of routes. Jazeera Airways currently flies to over 50 destinations operating a reliable fleet of Airbus A320neo and A320ceo aircraft.

With the return of international travel in 2022, the airline is going forward with its expansion plans offering affordable travel across the Middle East, Central & South Asia, North Africa and Europe.

Jazeera has been established in the India market for five years and now has a strong pan-India presence with six destinations, namely Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Kochi and Chennai. Later this year two additional routes will be added to Thiruvananthapuram and Bengaluru.

Jazeera Airways is responding strongly also to the 2030 Vision that is driving growth in travel to Saudi Arabia. Jazeera is working closely with the Saudi Tourism Authority to support the marketing of eight routes they currently operate into the Kingdom.

The growth plan constitutes Romana Parvi, Regional Manager – South Asia engaging in showcasing knowledge about products

and its offerings and exchanging business ideas by participating at various travel trade marts like TTF Ahmedabad, BLTM Delhi and OTM Mumbai.

Jazeera Airways will also participate in various tradeshow in Indore, Raipur, Jaipur, Chandigarh, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and Chennai.

Parvi mentioned, “The response has been positive as we’re seeing healthy load factor for forward bookings. We are continuously reviewing the opportunities in the India market and will work upon it to meet these demands.”



South Korea scraps COVID tests for arrivals

Effective October 1, 2022, visitors to Korea are no longer required to undergo PCR testing upon arrival. The announcement was made by the health authorities in South Korea, keeping in mind the gradual decline in infections in the country.

With this, Korea will no longer have any travel-related COVID-19 restrictions, as the authorities had previously already lifted pre-arrival PCR tests and mandatory quarantine for tourists.

Since the re-starting of travel in June of this year, KTO New Delhi office has been actively engaged in multiple promotional activities with a special focus on the Luxury and Educational Tours segments.

In the coming time, KTO New Delhi also plans to engage directly with fans of K-Culture and give them a taste of Korea in India, through various consumer events, in collaboration with other Korean organizations in India.



Promotion of Korea travel packages, including special segments like Hallyu and ESG, is already ongoing with OTA and travel agency partners, with more collaborations planned in the later part of this year.

German National and Schengen visa fees reduced for Indian nationals, students

The German Consulate in Mumbai on Wednesday announced that the fee for national and Schengen visas have been reduced, which is significant news for Indian students and citizens who want to travel to Germany.

The National visa fees have been reduced to Rs. 6,000 and for minors, the amount is Rs. 3,000. On the other hand, Schengen visas amount to Rs. 6,400 and Rs. 3,200 for adults and minors respectively.

The Schengen Visa is a short-stay visa for Europe that permits the bearer to travel anywhere within the Schengen Area. You can travel to any Schengen nation for up to 90 days total within 180 days with this sort of visa, which is issued by one of the Schengen states, including Germany. While the national visa allows a holder to enter Germany for a specific purpose, in most cases employment or study, and is issued for more than 90 days.



US student visa interviews to start from November

The US embassy in India on September 29, announced that the embassy will be conducting interviews starting from mid-November till the end of December. The first half of the appointment slots will open in mid-October and the rest around mid-November. The United States will also open 100,000 slots over the next few weeks for applicants of H and L worker visas, especially for drop box cases.

On September 8, the embassy authorities said the US Mission in India has issued a record-breaking 82,000 student visas in 2022 to date, adding that Indian students received more US student visas than those from any other country.

However, many across the country are concerned over the

delay in the processing of US visa applications from India. They said that the delay was “hurting” working professionals and students.

Meanwhile, in Washington, Jaishankar had raised the issue of the huge backlog of US visa applications from India with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to which the top American diplomat said he was sensitive to the matter and had a plan to address it.

He said, “To the people who are concerned about the visa issues, I would like to give the message that I understand their anxiety and the urgency and which is precisely the reason why I took up the matter.”

Visit Brussels organises roadshows in Mumbai and Delhi

Aimed at strengthening existing relationships while building new ones with the local travel trade fraternity, visit.brussels organised a two-city roadshow earlier this month in key source markets namely Mumbai and Delhi.

The roadshow in Mumbai covered two separate days, wherein day one was organised at the residence of H.E. Frank Geerkens, Consul General of Belgium and which, was attended by key partners and luxury agents.

On the second day, a seminar was held at a leading prominent hotel in Lower Parel and was graced by our Chief Guest H.E. Frank Geerkens, Consul General of Belgium in Mumbai accompanied by Trade Commissioners, Emmanuelle Timmermans (Wallonia), Patricia Motte (Hub. Brussels), Wouter Vanhees (Flanders Investment and Trade). The key delegates present were the spokesperson for visit.brussels Pieter Callebaut (Visit Brussels), Philippe Steenberghe (Mini-Europe) and Tania Ter-Ossepianz (Brussels Airport). While presenting the City of Brussels reimagined offerings, Pieter Callebaut, Business Development Leisure, visit.brussels, said, “The roadshows were great opportunities for visit.brussels to reconnect with the trade fraternity while at the same time highlighting their commitment to this amazing market, as India was a key outbound tourism market and how Mumbai and Delhi, in particular, continued to be important source cities in terms of tourist arrivals”.

In Delhi, the roadshow was held at the Embassy of Belgium and was graced by Arnauld Lion, Chargé d'affaires a.i. Embassy of Belgium, New Delhi. The amazing afternoon was spent devouring a course of Belgian delicacies, insightful business conversations and travel dialogues.



Lindt Home of Chocolate hosts networking lunch for media partners in New Delhi

The Lindt Home of Chocolate opened its door to the public in September 2020. This visionary project provides an exhaustive chocolate experience to chocolate lovers worldwide. More than 100 million Swiss francs have been invested into this extraordinary building project at Lindt and Sprüngli's historic headquarters in Kilchberg. Located near Zurich, with excellent connections to the city, Tours to the Lindt Home of Chocolate can be booked to be a part of the Switzerland experience.

In its bid to strengthen ties and increase visibility in the Indian market and welcome Indian guests for an immersive experience in the whimsical world of premium Swiss chocolate, Lindt Home of Chocolate hosted an exclusive networking luncheon for its key Indian media partners in New Delhi.

The event was hosted at The Imperial, New Delhi, and linked through an online interactive session between media partners and Mr. Daniel Huggenberger, PR Manager of Lindt Home of Chocolate, who joined in directly from the museum in Switzerland. The session observed a virtual tour of the museum with stimulating facts about chocolate and the history of chocolate through the millennium. A series of interactive displays and life-like illustrious models showcased the chocolatier's journey, talking about the inception of chocolate in Switzerland, and the art of chocolate making at the heart of the Lindt Home of Chocolate is the chocolate fountain over nine meters in height in the entrance area. It is the only one of its kind in the world and features real flowing chocolate.



ATOAI's new office Bearers and EC members elected unopposed, Ajeet Bajaj is the President

The Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) 2021-22 and Elections 2022-24 on September 21, 2022, at The Metropolitan Hotel and Spa in New Delhi.

In the course of the AGM and election process, Vaibhav Kala, acting president of ATOAI, greeted the attendees to the meeting. Vinayak Koul, honorary secretary of ATOAI, then reported on the yearly activity flow for the fiscal year 2021-2022. The new group of office bearers and the executive committee of the ATOAI were chosen without opposition and will serve for the following two years after the new resolutions were approved at the AGM, announced Rajiv Kohli, the returning officer.

Ajeet Bajaj has taken charge as the President and Tejbir Singh Anand is now the Senior Vice-President. Vaibhav Kala has been elected as the Vice-President, Ronny Gulati the Hon Secretary and Nirat Bhat is the Hon Treasurer. The office bearers were elected unopposed.

In the new Executive Committee, Vishwas Makhija who had stepped down as ATOAI President in February will now be the seventh member as the immediate Past President. The others are, Pradeep Murthy, Tundup Dorjay, Ravi Kumar, Rahul Sharma, Amit Perival and Sanjay Basu.

The new ATOAI team will strive to work diligently for the sustainable growth of adventure travel in India by taking forward the association and its aims and shaping government policy for this sector.



TAAI's current national office bearers to continue to represent trade in 2022 – 2024

TAAI – the oldest and largest travel tourism association in India had invited nominations from its members for the post of President, Vice President, Hon. Secretary-General, Hon. Treasurer, and seven Managing Committee members for the 2022-2024 term. The last date to file the nominations was September 15, 2022, and the withdrawal of nominations was September 23, 2022. And, for the first time in the history of TAAI, National Office Bearers and proposed Managing Committee members have been chosen unopposed for 2022 – 2024 as no nominations were filed to contest elections, challenging the current Office Bearers or nominations of MC members.

Jyoti Mayal will lead TAAI as President, Jay Bhatia will continue as Vice President, and Bettaiah Lokesh will continue as Hon. Secretary-General and Shreeram Patel as Hon. Treasurer.

Along with the Office Bearers, the following seven Managing Committee will play a crucial role in running the association smoothly. Anoop B Kanuga, Devesh Kumar Agarwal, Dr P Murugesan, Paras Lakhia, R Venkatachalam, Sameer Karnani, and Amish Desai who too were elected unopposed by the members of the Premier Association.

Sharing views on the election process, Jyoti Mayal, who has been appointed as the President said, "We have done our best for the fraternity. We left no stone unturned and represented the travel trade on every front. Our hard work won us many accolades because TAAI's relentless support to the travel trade and tourism industry has been appreciated at both national and international levels. Our presence at UFTAA, with Global Tourism Boards, with FAITH and state tourism boards as well as IATA shall certainly be more aggressive and interactive."



Southern Travels establishes its footprint in East India

With travel becoming a growing passion and Indian travellers finally stepping out, Southern Travels has kicked off its Travel Brand Store in Kolkata on the eve of World Tourism Day. For the past five decades, the travel group has been making its conspicuous presence in the sphere of travel and hospitality.

A V Praveen Kumar, Joint Managing Director, Southern Travels, said, "We have a wide array of tour options like cruise holidays, corporate tours, MICE and adventure tours for both luxury and budget travellers. We are quite strong in religious tourism. Our Chaar Dham and Do Dhaam tours are highly preferred by pilgrims."

The group has drawn up an ambitious expansion plan and would make its presence as a service provider across 50 cities in the country by the year-end. Praveen Kumar further said, "We will soon come up with our travel brand outlets in Bhubaneswar, Guwahati, and Raipur. We are looking forward to having our presence in the Middle East and South-Asian destinations by 2024." The travel company has both online and offline services on offer for travellers.



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Saudi Tourism Authority

Saudi Tourism Authority has elevated **Anand Menon** to the position of Trade Director – India Subcontinent. In his previous role, he was the Country Manager – India. In his new stint, Anand will work closely with the Executive Team to bring to fruition STA's global vision and growth agenda in the Indian Subcontinent region. As Trade Director – India Subcontinent, he will be tasked with driving commercial growth and increasing visitation to Saudi from the India market as well as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar.



The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru

Virender Razdan has been appointed as the General Manager at The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru. With a career spanning over three decades, Virender is a performance-oriented senior hospitality professional who has worked at Hyatt Regency Delhi, Hilton New Delhi, Oberoi Hotels Mumbai, The Leela Mumbai, and ITC Hotels in Mumbai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Bengaluru. His expertise will help drive strategic conversations with both internal and external stakeholders and his valuable experience will further strengthen The Leela's positioning within a key market like Bengaluru, further consolidating the positioning of the newly opened property.



Hyatt Hotels, West India

Sonia Paul has been promoted to her new role as Cluster Director of Marketing for Hyatt West India where she will overlook the marketing operations for brands – Grand Hyatt Mumbai, Hyatt Centric, Hyatt Regency, Hyatt Place and Hyatt Hotel in Mumbai and Pune. Sonia joined the hospitality industry in 2014 with Keys Hotel – Berggruen Hotels as General Manager Marketing. Sonia joined the Grand Hyatt Mumbai Hotel and Residences as a Marketing and Communications specialist in 2018. In 2020, she was promoted to Director of Marketing at the hotel.



Novotel Kolkata Hotel and Residences

Novotel Kolkata Hotel and Residences has appointed **Arjun Kaggallu** as the new General Manager. With over 17 years of industry experience, Arjun will be responsible for looking after the overall operations of Novotel Kolkata Hotel and Residences with 340 keys. Arjun comes with over 17+ years of rich hospitality experience in leading global hospitality brands across India, Europe, and United States of America. His last assignment was at the Hyatt Centric Candolim Goa as a General Manager and looks forward to his new role and time in the City of Joy.



The Clarks Hotels and Resorts

The Clarks Hotels and Resorts has appointed **Gabriel David Gunsekere** as Head Development Hotels and Resorts – Sri Lanka, Maldives and International. He will be responsible for negotiating management contracts, branding, and recruiting teams in certain geographical locations with a focus on the expansion of properties in Sri Lanka and the Maldives with representations internationally. Prior to the present assignment, he was working as Director of Sales and Marketing for The Kingsbury Hotel Colombo, Sri Lanka and The Rose Garden Hotel, Yangon, Myanmar.



Thomas Cook India

Thomas Cook (India) has elevated **Abhishek Nagpal** to Business Head, Visa and Passport Services. He has been associated with the Company since 2018 as General Manager – Visa and Passport Services. Abhishek will now lead the Company's visa functions pan-India and manage consular and key stakeholder relations. As a part of his new role, Abhishek's key responsibilities will include adherence to compliance, smooth operations, and efficiencies in end-to-end visa processing. Prior to Thomas Cook India, he worked with Udaan Visa Facilitation Services, Cozmo Travel World, Udaan India, and Wipro.



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