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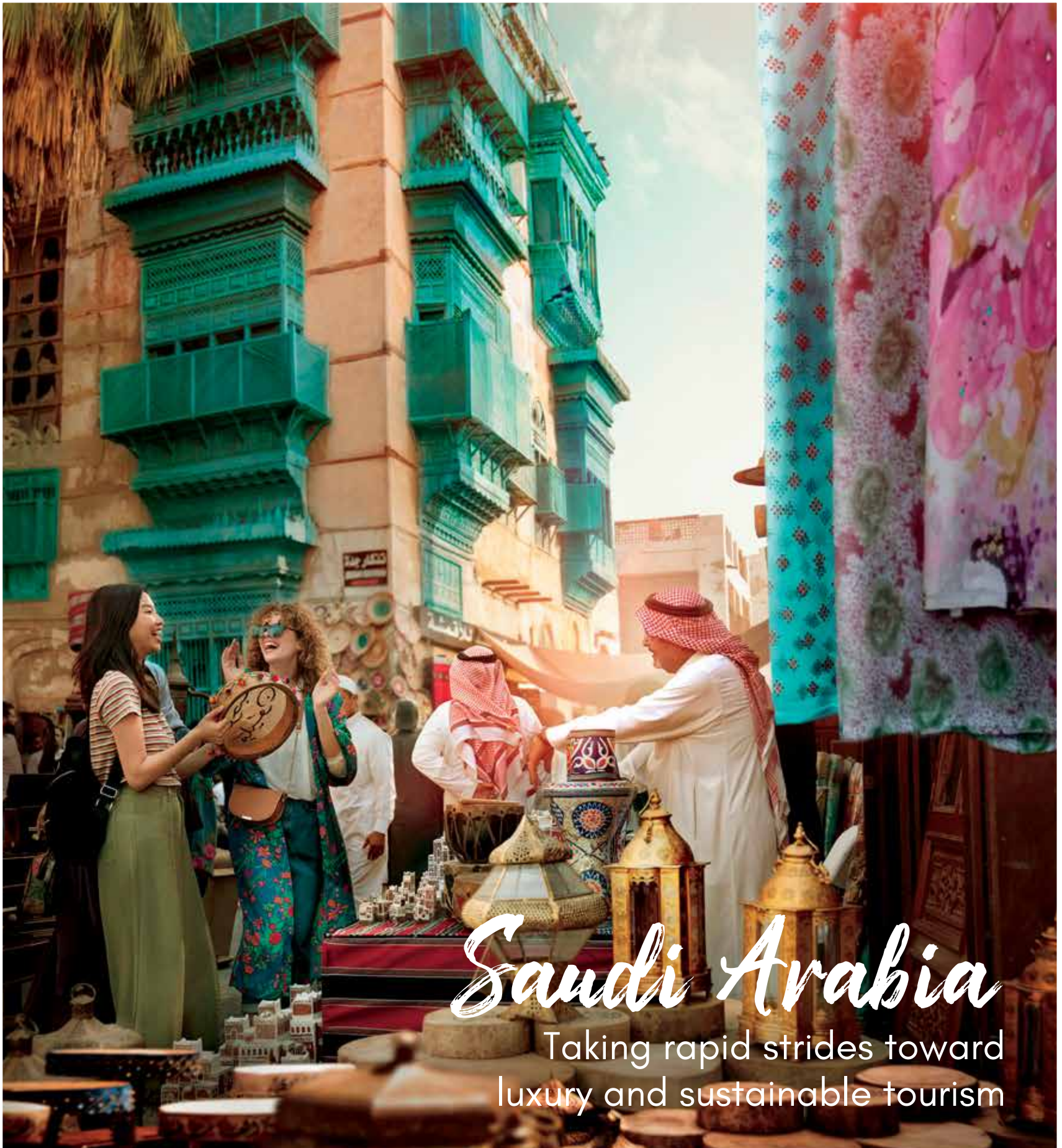
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Dear Friends,

It's almost the end of this year and the time to let the beginning of winter warm our hearts. Every December, as the year ends, we get our party hats on and welcome the next year to make things right. With Christmas and the New Year on the anvil, it's time to celebrate the coming out stronger, after the COVID crisis, and continue doing so.

TTJ's December 2022 issue features a few interesting topics highlighting the hospitality business. We have targeted much about inbound travel as we have the IATO convention coming up in mid-December. Besides our interaction with the IATO convention committee, we have a few pages on Uttar Pradesh since the convention is taking place in Lucknow.

So, as we wrap up the year, we wish you, our readers, well-wishers, our contributors, and to everyone who has been associated with this magazine, a merry festive season. Please stay tuned with TTJ as we continue to explore the dynamics of the travel and hospitality industry well into 2023.

Happy Reading!

Ravi Sharma
ravisharma@sampanmedia.com

Editor's Desk

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India to resume e-Visa facility for UK nationals

For the first time since the COVID outbreak in March 2020, India is all set to resume the e-Visa facility for UK citizens travelling to India, the High Commissioner of India to the UK, Vikram K Doraiswami announced in a video message on December 5, 2022.

Doraiswami said that the service will be made available to the citizens forthwith and the dates will be announced shortly. He further added that the resumption of the facility will enable friends from the UK to travel far more easily to India.

“We are rolling out e-visas once again and this service will be made available to you forthwith. (Dates will be announced

shortly). That should enable friends from the UK far more easily to India. So welcome back, e-visas are up ahead and all of our other services including visas at your doorstep remain available to you. We look forward to a good winter season in which everyone gets to celebrate their festivals in India which is the land of festivals,” the High Commissioner said.

Earlier in August, UK Immigration Statistics said that Indian nationals were issued the largest number of UK study, work and visitor visas.

India has now overtaken China as the largest nationality being issued sponsored study visas in the UK.

SCTDA unveils brand identity of Al Rafisah Dam

The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) recently unveiled the brand identity of Al Rafisah Dam, a premier leisure and tourist destination that offers enriching experiences in Sharjah’s eastern region. The move aims to bolster the destination’s position and support the inflow of tourists as well as promote its array of inclusive entertainment and tourist offerings.

Al Rafisah Dam’s brand identity is inspired by nature and the environment around it and is rooted in the authentic heritage and cultural legacy of the region. It reflects the passion of adventure enthusiasts and their affinity for mountain and water sports activities as well as lovers of culture, history and nature. The new identity motivates tourists and visitors to explore thrilling adventures that promise fresh and exceptional experiences.

Al Rafisah Dam is one of the most attractive and beautiful eco-friendly projects in Khorfakkan and the eastern region with a 13 m-deep, 82,000 sqm wide lake that is home to wildlife and offers water sports opportunities.

The destination offers plenty of world-class tourist and service amenities to meet the aspirations of all visitors. These include boat tours and rides, including pedal boats, kayaks, and doughnut boat rides for cruising around the lake, feeding ducks, spotting and watching migratory birds and water turtles as well as exploring the lake and enjoying its scenic natural environs.



Hyatt to expand Independent Collection brands in key global destinations through 2025

Hyatt Hotels recently announced continued global growth of its Independent Collection brands, including recent openings and a strong development pipeline through 2025 across The Unbound Collection by Hyatt, Destination by Hyatt and JdV by Hyatt brands. This collection of brands encompasses diverse properties, each true to its destination and offers the modern traveller enriching luxury and lifestyle experiences in new and exciting ways.

“Each brand in the Independent Collection offers distinct properties that are all unique and feature one-of-a-kind experiences for every occasion with more than 100 properties worldwide across all three brands – from on-site beekeeping and aerial yoga at Rancho Pescadero, part of The Unbound Collection by Hyatt brand, to embracing local history in Kelso, United Kingdom at Schloss Roxburghe Golf Hotel, part of the Destination by Hyatt brand,” said Katie Johnson, global brand leader, Independent Collection, Hyatt. “We are excited to continue adding new luxury and lifestyle hotels on an even greater scale globally with openings in new key leisure markets like Mexico”

“Through our intentional long-term growth strategy and by working closely with owners, Hyatt boasts five years of industry-leading net rooms growth driven by our unique position against the competition,” said Jim Chu, Chief Growth Officer, Hyatt. “Hyatt is able to better care for luxury and leisure travellers and our award-winning loyalty program, World of Hyatt, has grown 20 per cent in the past 12 months alone, delivering record levels of high-quality revenue to our owners.”



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Fortune Hotels expands its footprint in Uttar Pradesh

Fortune Hotels, a member of ITC's hotel group recently signed a new property in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh. Furthering the national footprint, this new property will be Fortune's fourth hotel in UP.

Fortune Park Aligarh, set to open in the winter of 2023, is strategically located on the Grand Trunk Road just off the RTO office and well connected with the upcoming Noida International Airport via Aligarh - Palwal Road offering easy access to the university town. The hotel is also in close proximity to prominent tourist attractions like Jama Masjid, Aligarh Clock Tower, Aligarh Muslim University, and Khereshwar Mandir.

Highlighting Fortune Hotels' India expansion spree Samir MC, Managing Director, Fortune Hotels said, "Our focus on building the brand footprint in tier 2/3/4 markets continues as we forge another new partnership to enter Aligarh, the heartland of Uttar Pradesh. The state has always been a strong growth market for us and is poised to develop even more speedily in the next few years. Aligarh will be our fourth property here and we thank the owners for recognizing

the Fortune Advantage and showing their trust in us."

The modern hotel offers spacious rooms, complemented by a multi-cuisine all-day diner, large multifaceted banquet spaces and a rooftop restaurant with a trendy bar making it a perfect option for city residents and the upbeat business and leisure travellers to celebrate, engage and unwind.



Outrigger Koh Samui Beach Resort now fully open at Koh Samui's beautiful Lamai Beach

Outrigger Koh Samui Beach Resort completed its opening on November 26 by unveiling its final complement of 102 rooms. The finishing phase comprised elegant colonial-style rooms with balconies, including 32 inter-connecting pairs of rooms designed for families and small groups of friends.

Outrigger Koh Samui's all-day dining restaurant, Mala Kitchen, and an additional courtyard swimming pool were also unveiled in the final phase. The 146-room and suite property now has two restaurants, a Coral Kids club, a games room, the Voyager 47 Club lounge, a fitness centre, three massage salas and four swimming pools, one with a children's waterslide adjacent to the beach.

The 146-key property on Lamai beach in the southeast of the island, 30 minutes from Samui International Airport, has an elegant colonial feel.

Like all Outrigger properties, live music from either a DJ or a band, will be a key feature at the resort,

as well as private romantic dining and vow renewal options for couples. Apart from day trips to the spectacular Anghong marine national park and assorted waterfalls around the island, visits to Haven Elephant sanctuary for rescued elephants are also proving popular.

Outrigger Koh Samui Beach Resort is putting its new facilities to good use this Christmas and New Year. The resort has arranged festive dining, drinks, entertainment and fun for families and couples on 24, 25 and 31 December.



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Air India resumes its most popular Bengaluru and San Francisco non-stop service

Air India, in line with its vision to strengthen and expand its global footprint, is resuming its non-stop flight connecting Bengaluru to San Francisco. This will connect the world's two tech hubs – the original Silicon Valley and the Silicon Valley of India. The flight will operate thrice a week on Fridays, Sundays and Wednesdays with the Boeing 777-200LR aircraft

The direct distance between Bengaluru and San Francisco is 13,993 km approx. and the cities are diametrically at opposite ends of the world with a time zone change of approx. 13.5 hours. The total flight time on this route will be of more than 17 hours depending on the wind speed on that particular day. The route for this flight will be the safest, fastest and most economical.

This will take Air India's India-US frequency to 37 non-stop flights per week. At present, Air India operates non-stop flights from Delhi to New York, Newark, Washington DC, San Francisco and Chicago and from Mumbai to Newark. Air India is set to spread its wings

further in the United States with the commencement of its first-ever non-stop service between Mumbai and San Francisco and to New York.



Tourism Western Australia appoints T&A Consulting as its Marketing Representative in India

T&A Consulting has been appointed as the official Indian Marketing Representative for Tourism Western Australia (TWA) through a competitive tender bid process.

T&A Consulting will be responsible for defining and executing TWA's trade marketing and public relations in India market as of November 28, 2022, for an initial six-month period.

Commenting on the appointment, Carolyn Turnbull, Managing Director, Tourism Western Australia said, "We are excited to have T&A Consulting as our partner in India to promote TWA's value proposition to tour operators, online travel agencies and consumers at large. The team at T&A demonstrated a deep understanding of TWA's positioning and proposed an integrated approach that will elevate Western Australia in the minds of Indian travellers. We look forward to working with them."

Tarun Gupta, Global Managing Partner at T&A Consulting said, "T&A is delighted to work with Tourism Western Australia as their partner in India. Both countries have vastly expanded areas of collaboration and tourism is a key enabler for the people-to-people connect. Western Australia with its immense geographical beauty, rich historical lineage and of course the vibrant metropolis of Perth provides a compelling proposition for the Indian traveller."



IndiGo announces 32 new connecting flights between India and Europe

In line with its vision to strengthen international connectivity, IndiGo has announced 32 new connecting flights to Milan, Manchester, Birmingham, Rome, and Venice, effective December 07, 2022, through its codeshare partnership with Turkish Airlines. These new routes will offer more options and add capacity for customers travelling between India and Europe in the upcoming holiday season.

Speaking on the occasion, Vinay Malhotra, Head of Global Sales, IndiGo said, "We are extremely pleased to add more capacity between India and Europe during this holiday season, given the high demand for international travel. These flights will cater to travellers exploring Italy and UK, with one stop connections to Milan, Manchester, Birmingham, Rome, and Venice via Istanbul. These new routes will not only strengthen international connectivity but also enhance affordability for travel to Europe. We will continue to strive to stay true to our promise of affordable fares, on-time performance, courteous and hassle-free service."



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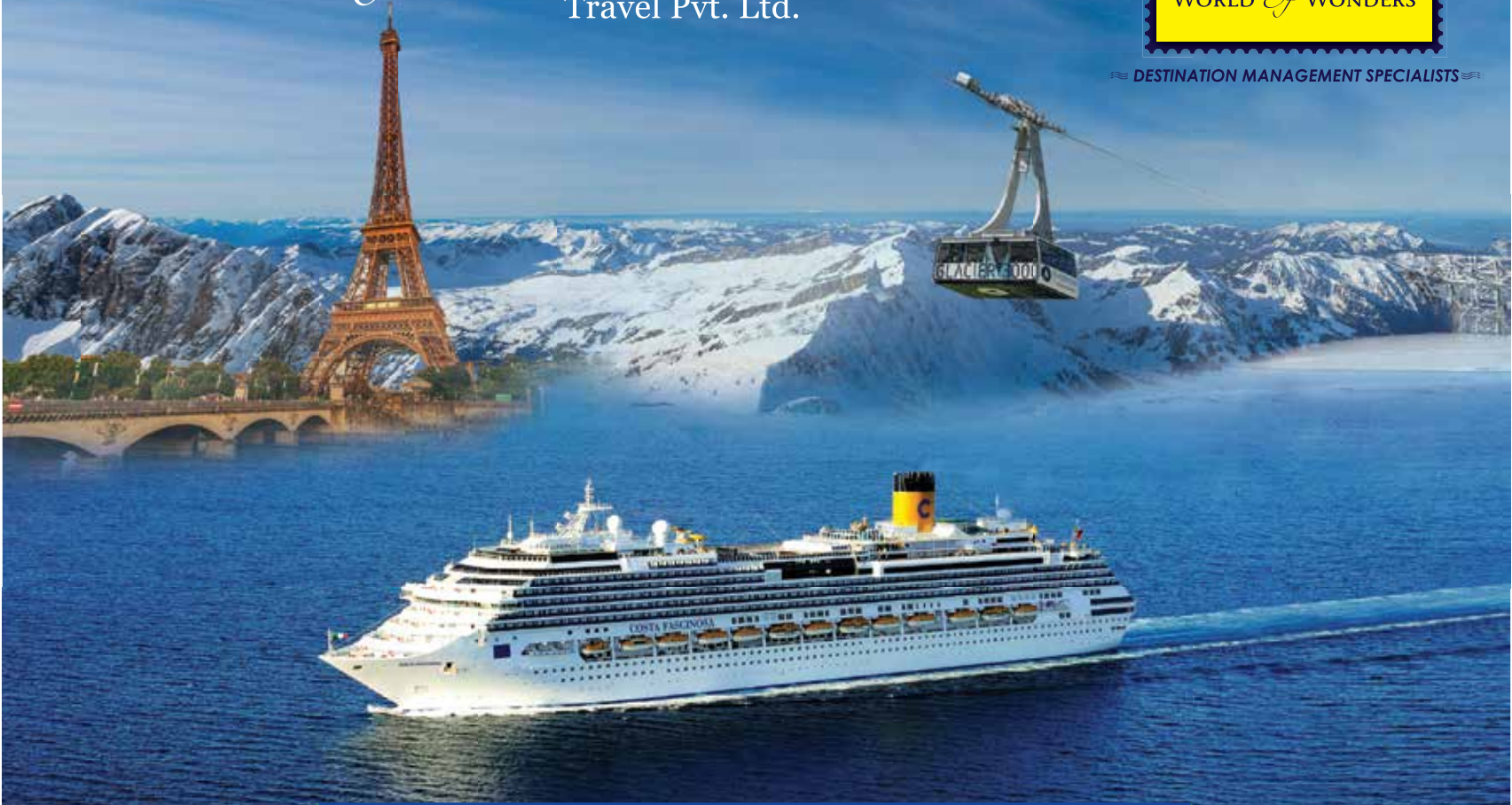
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Uttar Pradesh

building an image as an attractive investor-friendly destination

Uttar Pradesh is working on a very industry-friendly tourism policy. To liberalise the policy and make it broad-based, a greater number of sectors have been included for the promotion, support, and nourishment. In this interaction with TTJ, Mukesh Meshram, Principal Secretary, Tourism and Culture and Director General, Uttar Pradesh Tourism, reveals that in the upcoming new policy (2022), the State has identified thirty-three sub-sectors to be promoted. This will attract investments of 10,000 crores and create an additional one million jobs in the tourism sector.

Ravi Sharma

The vision of UP Tourism rests in the seven 'S,' namely, Sookna, Swagat, Suvidha, Suraksha, Swachhta, Sanrachna, and Sanyog. Currently, Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, is heading to different countries to promote 'Brand Uttar Pradesh.' His efforts to promote the brand abroad are aimed at building State's image for promoting its tourism potential and also as an attractive investor-friendly destination. A major effect of the shows would be on the Indian diaspora, for it will advance the connection with them, helping them invest back in the tourism sector of the State. The move is sure to provoke the UP-stated 1-trillion-dollar objective and the need for international investors to be a part of the new growing economy.

Uttar Pradesh has a rich history of art, culture, and heritage for thousands of years. The State is yet to promote the unexplored areas, viz. eco-tourism sites, rural tourism sites, forts, palaces, food, cuisine, and local culture. Many plans have already been made by the State to organise festivals in India and abroad to promote its rich culture aggressively using digital and print media.

Uttar Pradesh is in the process of developing exotic eco-tourism and rural destinations, such as forts, palaces, etc. "Since the State has the top tourism draw of India, easily recognised worldwide, it calls for a lot of destination weddings. The State is to develop wedding tourism as a niche product in its policy. Some efforts include offering palatial-heritage properties and gardens for hosting events. Incentives shall also be decided by the Department to aid grand marriages taking place in heritage properties. Apart from this, the Department of Tourism is all set to participate in Indian and International events to promote Uttar Pradesh as a wedding destination," shares Meshram.



▲ Mukesh Meshram

The State is progressively promoting public-private partnerships. The Department has made an industry-friendly tourism policy that is inclined to attract 10,000 crores of investments. The new policy is well-positioned to call for investments in over 33 sub-sectors with a very liberal and investor-friendly subsidy structure.

The tourism department is making Ayodhya a most sought-after tourist attraction, as it is a multi-faceted destination. Explaining more on the destination, Meshram says, "Most of the development work in the holy city is being covered under 'Ramayan Circuit' of Swadesh Darshan Scheme funded by the MoT, Gol. Under the scheme, works worth ₹127.20 crore have been approved for the integrated tourism development in Ayodhya. Some of the major attractions which are being developed in Ayodhya are Guptar Ghat, Lakshman Kila Ghat and the International

Ram Katha Museum. However, to make Ayodhya the most sought-after tourism destination, ensuring maximum facilities to the travellers has the paramount focus."

To allow access to facilities and make the entire stay for visitors a pleasant experience, the development of Ram Katha Park, Ayodhya bus stand, multi-level parking, Digambar Akhara-multipurpose hall, shed throughout the Panchkoshi Parikrama route, rejuvenation of pedestrian street and landscaping of park were envisioned as a key feature of a city with a deep religious relevance and the potential from the tourism point of view.

There are also plans to develop Ayodhya in a big way to attract more foreign travellers. "Foreign tourists do come to Ayodhya and to increase their number of tourists coming from different parts of the world, untiring efforts are being made by the Department. A significant step taken in this regard is the exploration of investment opportunities by international investors in tourism. The marketing and branding of diverse fairs and Mahotsav organised by the UP State government were also showcased on an international platform," informs Meshram.

Considering sustainability, Meshram feels that new development works are being carried out in a manner that the heritage city of Ayodhya does not lose out on its true nature and character, nor will it take away the local essence and character of the city. The regional heritage, culture, art, and handicrafts are being preserved so that many generations in the country can live 'Ram' for centuries to come. The development of international centers and facilities for national and international tourists will also bring immense opportunities for livelihood and income generation for the local community.

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Uttar Pradesh

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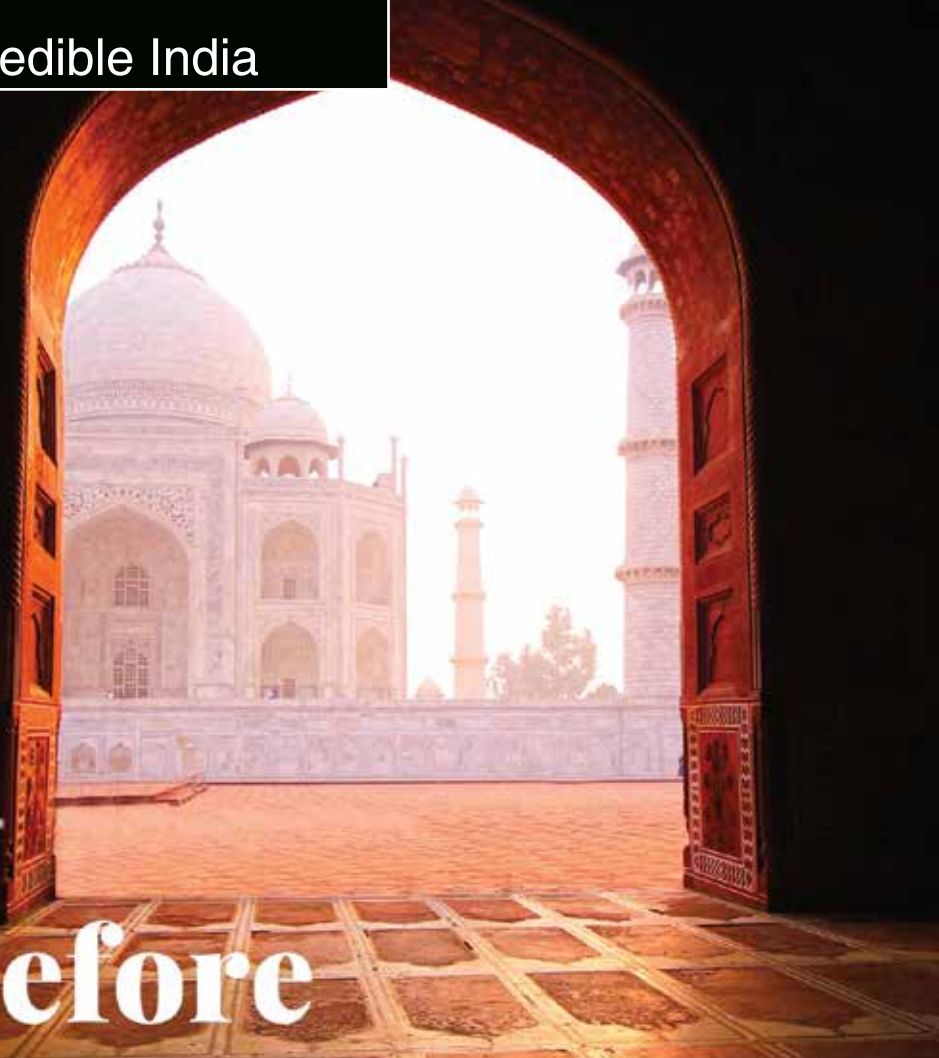
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Besides the usual but enchanting places like Lucknow, Agra, Vrindavan, Allahabad, and Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh has some classic hidden gems waiting to be explored. From historical monuments and forts to religious centres and unrivalled nature, these vibrant destinations in Uttar Pradesh could be a delight for history lovers, or the pious and the devoted, or the nature aficionados. TTJ highlights three such places in Uttar Pradesh to enhance your list of 'Places to Visit' in the state.

Team TTJ

Sonbhadra

Captivating travellers with historical culture and ancient wonders

Sonbhadra, or Sonebhadra, is the second-largest district of Uttar Pradesh. Sonbhadra is the only district in India that borders four states: Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Bihar. It is also called the 'Energy Capital of India' due to the multiple power plants in the area. Sonbhadra tourism has immense historical and cultural significance and is home to several ancient monuments, forts, and buildings.

The district of Sonbhadra is also known



for its several cave painting sites found in the Vindhya region. The Lakhania caves are located in the Kaimur ranges and are known for their beautiful ageless rock paintings. These historical paintings are about 4000 years old and bring to life the culture and beliefs of an era gone by. Khodwa Pahar, or Ghoramangar, is another well-known ancient cave painting site.

Several interesting monuments and buildings serve as important tourist places in Sonbhadra. The Vijaygarh Fort, located here, dates back to the fifth century. Agori Fort is another iconic fort that lies surrounded by three rivers on three sides. The region also has two dams, the Rihand Dam, and the Barkandhara dam. You can also see the Lorika Rock, a colossal historic rock. Shiv Dwar is a famous temple dedicated to Lord Shiva and the Goddess Parvati. Other places of interest, of which many are ancient, are the Gotthani Shiv Mandir (Gupta Kashi), Kund Vasini Dham, Shivdwar, Panch Mukhi Mahadev, etc. Places like Mukkha Falls, Mahuariya Kaimur, Anpara, and Renukoot have their own charm.

Sonbhadra is getting much attention as it is also home to the Salkhan Fossil Park, a place of great geographic and historical significance. The fossils here date back

to the Proterozoic period, meaning they are more than 1400 million years old. Salkhan Fossils Park, officially known as Sonbhadra Fossils Park, is located 12 km from Robertsganj, near Salkhan village on state highway SH5A. The fossils found in the Sonbhadra Fossils Park are algae and stromatolite. The park is spread over about 25 hectares in Kaimur Range, adjacent to Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary.

When it's time to learn, discover and experience: Sonbhadra is best visited between November and March. The nearest airport for Sonbhadra is Babatpur in District Varanasi and 110 km from Robertsganj, the district's capital. The nearest railway station is again Robertsganj on the loop line from Chunar (Delhi-Howrah line). Sonbhadra is well connected to Lucknow, Allahabad, Varanasi, Mirzapur, etc., by road.



Chuka Beach (Pilibhit)

Be one with nature, feel the soothing joy and happiness

Pilibhit is one such district in Uttar Pradesh with a lot to offer its visitors. Tourists from different parts of the country visit the district for its beautiful ambience, peace, and presence of various religious shrines. Pilibhit Tiger Reserve is your go-to wildlife destination. A favourite spot for travellers, explorers, and wildlife enthusiasts, it is a sure-shot haven for sighting the great concentration of exotic animals it houses.



Chuka is one of the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve's ranges and is untouched by the urban world's madness. Serene and surreal, Chuka Beach is not on the river but is situated between the reservoir of Sharda Sagar Dam and the Sharda canal. It is a secluded, safe, scenic tourist spot surrounded by dense Terai jungle. The Sal forests, known for their rich biodiversity, are home to various species of birds and animals. These forests offer an opportunity to renew one's ties with nature.

One of the most exciting highlights of visiting the Chuka spot is the journey by road. The wide road and the dense stretch of Pipal and Pakar trees on both sides of the highway bows down to give a grand welcome and thrilling experience. Nearby the reservoir, a gigantic stretch of grassland is present where one can view many animals and birds. The usual animals one can see are wild hares, monkeys, wild boars, crocodiles, woodpeckers, snakes, black partridge, quails, flamingos, and ducks, along with migratory bird species in winter. The best way to feel the adventure of the place is to take a jeep safari with the forest staff and enjoy the place up close.

Night camps are the best way to spend an exciting night at Chuka Beach. Four forest huts have all the amenities and the best arrangements to spend the night at Chuka. There is also a forest Rest House at Mahof, a little far from Chuka. A walk on the sand in the early morning, around dawn, and in the evening, before sunset, gives one a great connection with nature and its beauty. Overall, all those who love to visit adventurous places and have a definite love



for forest life can consider this a good tourist destination in Pilibhit.

When nature beckons you: The best time to visit Chuka Beach is between November to January. The nearest Railhead to Chuka Beach is Pilibhit Junction Railway Station. However, a drive-through to the eco-tourism zone is the best way to reach the spot.

Naimisharanya

Evoking a sense of positivity and spirituality

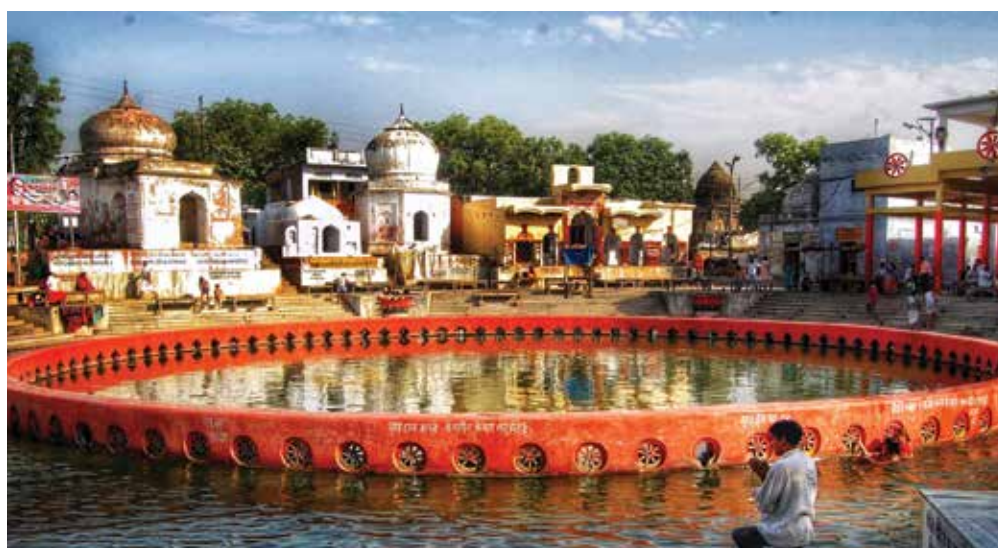
A vacation to a pilgrimage centre is a unique spiritual experience and, as an ancient and also the most sacred tourist attraction, Naimisharanya is one of the most visited religious travel destinations in Uttar Pradesh.

Naimisharanya occupies a significant place in Hindu mythology. The legend behind the origin of Naimisharanya is a well-known story of Sage Narad in the scriptures of Hindu mythology. This small town had encountered many religious activities in ancient times such as Lord Brahma's Maya Chakra struck this very place. Lord Vishnu visited this place in the pursuit of killing some demons. Lord Rama performed Aswamedha Yaga here at this place after killing Ravana. The most famous Hindu epic 'Mahabharata' has also mentioned this place as a refuge for Pandavas during their exile. So, this place may not be as famous

as other holy places in India, but it has played a very spiritual significance in the history of India.

From Sita Kund and Chakratirtha to Lalita Devi Temple, Naimisharanya is known for housing some of the most sacred sites visited by many devotees throughout the year. Vyasa Gaddi is yet another spiritual spot in Naimisharanya and is often visited by locals and tourists daily. Dashashwamedh Ghat is a peaceful bathing ghat where many devotees come every day to take a dip in holy water and wash away their mortal sins. Hanuman Garhi is another popular temple in this small town dedicated to Lord Hanuman. It is believed that when Lord Hanuman defeated Ahiravana in Patal Lok, then it was this place where he first came after that fight. When you are in Naimisharanya, you find yourself overcome by intense spiritual emotion and will be fascinated by the aura of this place.

For your spiritual journey: Winter is probably the best season to visit Naimisharanya, starting in October and ending in March. Naimisharanya is connected to the other cities and towns of India with all three means of transport, rail, road, and air. Reaching it is relatively easy. The nearest airport to Naimisharanya is Lucknow. The distance between the airport and the town is around 107 km. The nearest railway station is the Sitapur Railway Station, or one can also get down to Lucknow.



37th IATO Annual Convention

Setting the stage to showcase Uttar Pradesh

One of the most awaited travel industry events, the 37th IATO Convention, will be held from December 16 to 19, 2022, in Lucknow. IATO Conventions have distinguished themselves as an exciting travel industry event that offers opportunities to meet, review trends and help boost tourism wherever it is held. TTJ speaks to the core IATO Committee members to know their views on the upcoming convention, its theme, and its importance this year.

Prashant Nayak

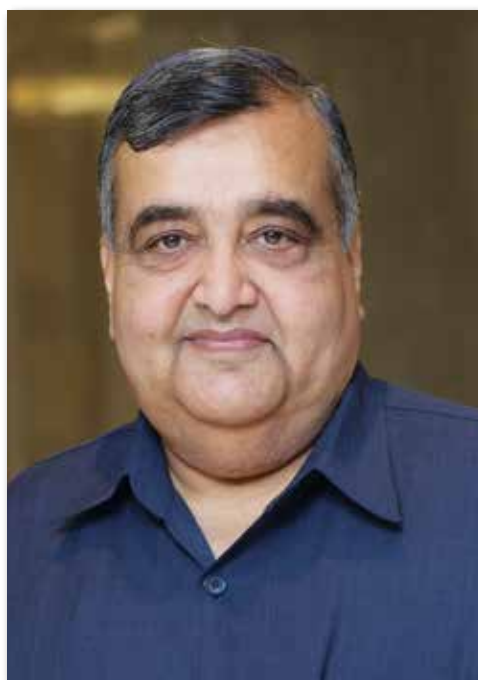
The Hon. Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath, graciously consented to grace the event with his presence and inaugurate the Convention, making it the highlight of the convention this year. The inaugural function will be held at Indira Gandhi Pratishthan, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, and The Centrum Lucknow will be the venue hotel for all other activities, including registrations, business sessions, and evening programmes.

The Convention is returning to Lucknow after 26 years, and it will be an excellent opportunity for IATO members to see the improved and developed infrastructure in Uttar Pradesh. Since 1996, Lucknow and Uttar Pradesh have undergone a major transformation. Many significant developments, like Ram Mandir at Ayodhya, the larger-than-life Kashi Vishwanath corridor connecting the Mandir with Lalita Ghat, and the Heritage Walk in Lucknow and Prayagraj, have come up. The Uttar Pradesh Government is looking forward to aggressively showcasing its new developments and promoting Ayodhya globally.

The IATO Convention is expected to boost the tourism focus on Uttar Pradesh as around 1000 delegates are expected to participate from all over the country. Senior officials from the Ministry of Tourism, the Government of India and States, industry leaders, tourism and hospitality professionals, and travel trade media will be present at the Convention.

About 18 to 20 State tourism boards are also expected at the Convention as every state is keen to re-kindle inbound tourism to their respective states. This year's focus in the Convention would be to deliberate on the revival of inbound tourism to India; therefore, the theme of the Convention is Inbound tourism - What Lies Ahead!

The three-day Convention will be witness to deliberations on burning



▲ Rajiv Mehra

issues during the business sessions. A Travel Mart will also be organised during the convention, allowing exhibitors to showcase their exciting and diverse range of destinations, conferences, and incentive venues, especially the state governments. Post-convention tours to Ayodhya and Varanasi are an added attraction for the delegates to this year's convention.

Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO

The world has now opened up, COVID is now behind us, and this is the opportune time to promote inbound tourism. The Inbound tourism segment has suffered the most. The agenda of this Convention will revolve around tourism and shall address the key facets of the sector. We have connectivity, investment, hotel and tour operators' synergy, and inbound tourism—a session with key policymakers, marketing and promotion, new ideas, and state presentations.

We at IATO think that this Convention is critical in rebuilding inbound business. As we all know, Inbound tourism caters to foreign tourists coming to India, and at

this juncture, post-COVID, with the world opening up, it is imperative to gauge how the diverse facets of inbound travel will shape up in the days to come. We are in the midst of the peak season and the right time to find out the SWOT of Inbound so that remedial actions can be taken if required.

Post-COVID, the focus will be on eco and wellness products catering to sustainable and responsible tourism, hygiene, health, and safety. The products and the stakeholders catering to them will evolve on these parameters.

There are challenges when organising an event, however, the challenges come to us as opportunities – the more, the better. We look forward to quality participation, crafted business sessions, meaningful state presentations, and the entertainment of the stakeholders with our various offerings.

This year's Convention will be interesting for the participants. The theme, the business sessions, new ideas from the host state and the participating states, and excellent networking opportunities with a larger cache of stakeholders are things to look out for. As they say, the taste of the cake lies in the cake itself. One will witness the new evolving features of the Convention itself. All our conventions have made the desired impact, catering to the Theme and the discerning audience, and this one will take it further.

Our discussion with the policymakers will revolve around the strategic issues faced by our valued members. Our conventions are crafted for them. We shall highlight the need for physical road shows, FAM trips for bloggers and foreign tour operators, and e-Visa for the UK, Canada, Germany and other European countries besides other issues, and we shall look for plausible, viable solutions.

Ravi Gosain, VP - IATO, Chairman - IATO Convention Committee

The IATO Convention, which is being held in Lucknow this year, is against our usual timing, which is in September every year. However, even in 2021, our Convention in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, was shifted to December due to the COVID lockdowns. We needed enough time to finalise the preparation this year, so we decided to hold it in December.

This year, the IATO Convention will be critical for the inbound tourism industry because post-pandemic members look forward to the leadership for suggestions or a roadmap to regaining lost ground in the past two years. Everyone engaged in inbound tourism is still struggling to stand up. It was important for the IATO Executive Committee to bring up a well-thought theme for the annual Convention, which depicts the present situation, and discussions would revolve around this theme and come up with fresh ideas. We have thus chosen the convention theme "Inbound Tourism- What lies Ahead!"

Primarily, IATO looks after the interest of the inbound tourism industry in India, but in each of our conventions, we try to cover other important tourism-related subjects. This year also, we will talk about sustainability, responsible tourism, and new ideas in tourism, to name a few.

All our sessions will have intense discussions among the tourism fraternity across India and will come up with concrete ideas and solutions to rebuild our inbound business. In our sessions, we will take up essential subjects relating to relationships with stakeholders, marketing, business development, new products, exploring new areas, etc. Inbound tourism in its current form requires lots of innovation in product offerings, optimise pricing, bringing experiences, and promoting new places. However, since India is known for its heritage and cultural diversity, it remains the epicentre of all tour itineraries we create.

We are very grateful to the Department of Tourism, Government of Uttar Pradesh, led by Mukesh Meshram, Principal Secretary Tourism, for facilitating and providing the desired support and co-operation in organising the Convention in Lucknow. This year, we expect over 1000 delegates due to an overwhelming response from members and others from the tourism industry. This will be a great platform for members to exchange ideas, network with suppliers and listen to eminent leaders from the tourism and hospitality sector. Apart from business sessions, we have team-building activities like



▲ Ravi Gosain

IATO Run for responsible tourism, a karaoke singing competition, and other entertaining events and celebrations. The Convention Committee is putting efforts into making the 37th IATO Annual Convention worthy and memorable for all delegates.

Pratik Hira, Co-Chairmen, IATO Convention Committee

There is indeed a lot of excitement among the members for the Convention. We are out of COVID, and everything has opened up now. During our last convention in Gandhinagar, we were limping back to normalcy, but today, the world has come back to being normal, with almost all restrictions lifted. Now there is renewed excitement in the air and so much more enthusiasm for the Convention.

Uttar Pradesh seems to be an ideal setting for the Convention. It has been projected as the most happening destination in terms of the Kashi Vishwanath corridor Inaugurated by the Prime Minister. The Ayodhya temple construction is now slated to be completed by December 2023. There is huge excitement about this development, and these are the places people want to see because it is much talked about in the news. Our Prime Minister and Chief Minister are brand ambassadors. We may not realise it, but wherever they go, they create hype for the destination. There is also a lot of contribution by the media in this direction, thus garnering more attention. All this adds to the excitement.

Currently, connectivity is great in the state of Uttar Pradesh. We are now becoming a state with top airports, domestic or international. The state has



▲ Pratik Hira

easy access from all across India making it convenient for our members to easily attend this Convention. The destination is enthralling our members too, and many will attend the Convention with their spouses. There are also their older kids joining them. Some companies are bringing all their employees to familiarise them with the destination.

Also, the last IATO convention that happened in Lucknow was in 1996. Hence, there has been a huge gap till 2022. That is one point the members across India are so excited about, returning to the city after 26 years.

The Government of Uttar Pradesh is excited to welcome the IATO members to Lucknow. This is because, in one go, they can focus on a huge audience of 1000 members who are selling India or, for that matter, Uttar Pradesh. There is a lot of support and preparation on the part of the Government of Uttar Pradesh, leaving no stone unturned to make the Convention a grand success. The state is particularly excited to host 1000 operators who will become the brand ambassadors for the state in their respective markets.

The FAM tours being organised will be the high point of the Convention. It is surprising to know that many people in Delhi and Agra have yet to hear about Chitrakoot, or for that matter, even Mathura. Hence, first-hand experience for tour operators is a must. So, Ayodhya, Varanasi, and Chitrakoot are a part of our post-convention tours. I call Ayodhya India's newest destination. Everything else is unparalleled with the work that's going on there. We are taking members to such destinations to showcase them and them a first-hand experience, which will help them to create better itineraries.

Marketing India crucial for inbound travel to make a positive comeback

With inbound travel not making the desired or expected recovery in the country post-COVID leaves a lot of unanswered questions. TTJ speaks to Rajeev Kohli, Joint Managing Director, Creative Travel, well known for always candidly speaking his mind, where he shared his strong sentiments on the inbound travel scenario in this interaction.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Rajeev Kohli

As per MoT data, due to the impact of the pandemic, only 1.54 million foreign tourists arrived in India in 2021. That compares with 10.93 million tourists in 2019. This year there are estimates that India received 2.1 million foreign visitors in the first six months of this year.

When asked about his expectation of inbound travel returning to the pre-pandemic levels. Rajeev stated, "First things first, returning to pre-pandemic levels should not be the objective. Achieving profitability and stability in the immediate short term is objective number one for any sensible business owner. Getting to 2019 levels will probably only happen in 2024 and even longer if the destination ignores our overall marketing needs. All my colleagues need to focus on increasing margins, the bottom line. Refrain

from having an irrational focus on the top line. I am still finding so many operators dumping prices just to get business. They will hurt even more in the time to come. Very suicidal!"

Earlier, the lack of e-visa for the British and Canadians worsened the matter of inbound travel, as these are key source markets. But now, India has finally confirmed that Britons will again be able to apply for a visa online. On this development, Rajeev expressed, "I think it is amazing, even if we are late, we still have three months left of the remaining season to get some traction. We are happy, as this was long overdue."

Strongly advocating the concept of marketing to enhance inbound travel, Rajeev reiterates, "The Ministry of Tourism and Travel Associations should focus on

Marketing! Marketing! Marketing! That's all. The government has yet to act due to its internal strife. The associations have simply failed the industry by doing nothing. They have the money but neither the imagination nor the will to think out of the box and recognise the need of today. I am most disappointed. Thus, we are waiting for the government to start marketing and promoting. We need to get started to get at least something for the next year."

Rajeev will attend the next IATO Annual Convention in Lucknow and is looking forward to meeting his industry colleagues there.

Awaiting the inbound bounce back in 2023

Numen Hospitality handles a portfolio of 18 hotels spread across India. They provide sales and marketing support to branded and independent hotels and resorts. They also offer a comprehensive accommodation and banquet space solution for family travellers, corporates, and MICE travellers. Nidhi Gupta, Founder and Director, Numen Hospitality, shares her views on inbound travel and her expectations of 2023.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Nidhi Gupta

The year 2022 has offered huge opportunities to Numen Hospitality. With the country doing away from all the covid restrictions, they have seen demand like never before. Nidhi says, "In fact, there was no off-season in 2022. The corporate and MICE demand has kept us busy, supplemented by domestic leisure travellers. Most of the destinations have seen the scaling up of ADRs and occupancies."

It is very clear that the pandemic was tough for the entire industry, but it has taught many takeaways. "COVID-19 has made us extremely versatile. We have never given such strong importance to the domestic business that it deserved for so long. It was the survivor for the entire industry, complemented with the small

weddings. Digitalisation is the biggest learning of the pandemic," said Nidhi.

Numen Hospitality recently opened offices in Gujarat and Bengaluru and also inducted two beautiful heritage hotels in Rajasthan (Mandawa Haveli Jaipur and Castle Mandawa) into their portfolio.

For the tourism business, inbound travel is one of the vital segments for many destinations, primarily Rajasthan and Kerala, which sustains on inbound business. It is also significant to many hotels and resorts. "We, too, are focusing on our portfolio where Inbound is a key market. One of our Ayurveda Centre, Shinshiva Ayurvedashram in Trivandrum, is largely dependent on inbound tourists from MEA and CIS countries. We have started seeing some numbers pouring from a few other

international markets. I think that the inbound groups will start moving strongly in 2023. We are immensely looking forward to welcoming them," shares Nidhi.

Nidhi shares her expectations from 2023, "I think domestic will remain our key feeder business for 2023. Domestic MICE will have a big presence. However, I think the domestic share will reduce, with some international destinations offering free visas and excellent flight connectivity and fares. Inbound will surely complement our business in 2023 and onwards."

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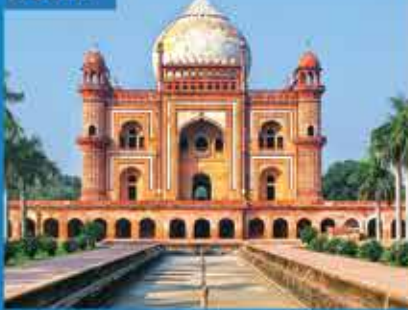
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Committed to deliver excellence and take success to higher levels

As the new General Manager at The St. Regis Mumbai, the young Varun Chhibber leads a dynamic luxury team to sustain the hotel's positioning as one of the most awarded hotels and as the preferred destination for the social elite. In this interaction with Varun, he comes across as determined, driven, and keen to take efforts to another level, from good to great. Here, he shares his hospitality experience and his new role at India's most iconic and luxe hotel property.

Prashant Nayak



He says that it is the guests who have taught him the finer nuances of hospitality. Also, the leadership lessons that he deploys in hotels with his teams are because of his inclination toward sports. "Indeed, I have picked up a lot of leadership lessons from the world of sports, and I play a lot of sports. And that makes me believe that only a team can deliver the gold standard. Managing a hotel is a team sport. As my learnings and my investment in sports are high, it's easier for me to build high-performing teams," shares Varun.

The St. Regis Mumbai, as it is the topmost luxury hotel of India in an urban city. Mumbai is the number one city in India, in terms of the kind of guests who come to the city whether for business, for investment or as a tourist. Mumbai is on everyone's mind and to lead Mumbai's numero uno hotel means leading India's number one. So, this aspect makes me excited and I think I am ready and motivated to take it to the next level," affirms Varun.

The St. Regis Mumbai is considered "The Best Address" in the city and is one of the most iconic hotels in Marriott International's diverse portfolio in India. It is rightfully called "The Best Address" as it is located in the heart of India's 'commercial capital.' With fascinating character, the property features world-class epicurean experiences amidst breathtaking vistas. It sits next to Mumbai's high-end shopping mall, the Phoenix Palladium. The hotel has also transformed into a well-known MICE destination with plenty of high-profile events occurring all year round.

Post-COVID, business is in full swing at The St Regis Mumbai. Varun says, "We are lucky to have had a V-shaped recovery. During COVID, it went down dramatically and when it came back, it also came up dramatically. So, we have to carefully enjoy this wave of the return of business without becoming complacent. So, as a team, we are extremely careful working with the return of business in a way where we have long-term gains from it and not just short-term windfall gains. Moreover, we have to continuously nurture relationships. Our data tells us that a large part of our luminaries are our regular guests and they're all returning back to our hotel."

Looking forward to 2023, Varun says, "Next year will be the golden year for sales and the new leaders will emerge and there will be tectonic changes in the way hotels position themselves. The hotels which will have the spine and the courage to stick to quality and deliver exceptional guest experiences will be the leaders of tomorrow."

Varun Chhibber's early education was a blend of formal schooling and extensive travel, resulting in diverse cultural exposure and practical experiences, which he brings daily to work. He started his hospitality career in 2000 when he enrolled as a management trainee with the Oberoi Group. He has worked with many Oberoi Hotels. He has also worked overseas on island properties. His last stint was leading two Leela Hotels in Delhi-NCR as the Complex General Manager. Having worked with the Oberoi and Leela Group, Varun's expertise in luxury is extremely strong and well-defined.

Varun's exposure in the hotel business has always been very guest and team-centric.

Varun's early years of experience allowed him to develop award-winning concepts, especially in Food and Beverage, and drive revenue and reputation. Varun is known for his people-centric leadership style, which embodies his deep-rooted beliefs in the infinite power of team brilliance and exponential growth. Varun is presently focused on steering his team to drive revenue and maintain the property's reputation of having the highest turnover in South Asia while ensuring guest voice scores remain a priority for The St. Regis Mumbai.

In the last 22 years, Varun has only worked in top-class luxury hotels. He has been fortunate to lead some of the top-of-the-line luxury hotels. "I am very excited to be at



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SAUDI ARABIA

taking rapid strides toward **luxury** and sustainable **tourism**

The largest country on the Arabian Peninsula, Saudi Arabia, has hitherto been primarily known as the home to the two most holy cities of Islam and a country that is a major player in fulfilling the world's energy needs. However, the winds of change of perception are underway as the kingdom brings forth its historical, cultural, and natural wonders and showcases them to the world. With an earmarked investment of \$800 billion into its tourism ecosystem by 2030, the kingdom is now ready to share its wonders with the global traveller. Megaprojects and developments combined with ambitious marketing plans now project a country making rapid strides into the future, redefining luxury, sustainability, and responsible tourism.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

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



Speaking to TTJ earlier this year, Alhasan Ali Aldabbagh, Chief Markets Officer, Asia Pacific, Saudi Tourism Authority, had mentioned, "Saudi has embarked on an ambitious programme to drive inbound visitation from India, inspiring local trade partners and the traveller to explore the undiscovered beauty and wonder of the country. As we continue to open up to the world, India

is an incredibly important key source market for Saudi and presents a wealth of possibility for trade partners, to grow their business and to ultimately, create a new exciting destination for Indian travellers."

The tourist visa process for travel to Saudi is being made simpler, transparent, seamless, and cost-effective for the Indian traveller. The aim is to provide simpler accessibility and create the right environment to facilitate large inbound tourist traffic and volumes from India. Women travellers are safe and greatly welcome. Wearing an Abaya is no longer mandatory in Saudi, and now even the holy city of Medina is open to non-Muslims.

As the grand 'Vision 2030,' unfurls, the developments at the five major giga-projects of Alula, Red Sea, Neom, Amaala, and Qiddiya are well visible. Asir, Diriyah, and Tabuk are also transforming to welcome tourism while retaining their essence. Saudi Arabia is set to be among the world's top five destinations by 2030.

Diriyah

Diriyah is located at the historical crossroads and is home to one of the kingdom's most ambitious heritage developments. Diriyah's mud-brick walls once housed a thriving desert city that was a powerhouse of culture and commerce and the original seat of power for the kingdom's Al Saud family. The city was named the country's capital in 1727. Diriyah fell in 1818, at the culmination of the Wahhabi war, and was succeeded by Riyadh as the nation's capital. The ruins of At-Turaif were designated a UNESCO heritage site in 2010, and the area has since been under painstaking restoration, a plan to bring its historical legacy back to life.



Diriyah's Al Bujairy district is a maze of twisting streets that leads to low-lying mud huts that have been transformed into heritage sites like the Diriyah Museum, a former palace with exhibits on Saudi history, and the restored Al Zawiha Mosque. Colorful geometric patterns decorate the walls, and heavy wooden doors guard the entrances of the district's buildings. Visitors can enjoy street side demonstrations of traditional crafts, such as weaving and calligraphy. Numerous cafés and restaurants dot the area, offering authentic local fare alongside gift shops selling trinkets.

Aseer

Aseer Region in Southwest Saudi is situated on a high plateau that receives more rainfall than the rest of the country



and contains the country's highest peaks, which rise to almost 3,000 meters. The sharp, sweet scent of coniferous forests with awe-inspiring views from mountain tops and cooler temperatures make Aseer stand out. The unspoiled wilderness throughout this mountainous region is great for exploration, especially in Aseer National Park, which is home to more than 300 bird species. Explore the park's nature and camping trails on foot, or spend the night under the stars at one of its campsites.

Visitors can also explore The Hanging Village of Al Habala, composed of sandstone homes perched on the ledge of a sheer cliff built almost 400 years ago by the Qahtan tribe. The caves of Shada Mountain date back hundreds of millions of years to before the Cambrian period. Geological phenomena created the caves; they best suited early humans and were used as dwellings. Engravings left behind by early civilisations have been found in caves. When in this region, sample the region's signature honey and ghee dish, freshly baked bread, and local Shadawi coffee. One can feel the local culture at Al Muftaha art village or shop in traditional markets in the capital city of Abha.



AlUla

AlUla is a living museum of preserved tombs, sandstone outcrops, and monuments. This unique destination is transforming into a global tourist experience under the 2030 vision. The region encompasses the Nabataean city of

Hegra, Saudi Arabia's first UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the ancient North Arabian Dadanite and Lihyanite Kingdoms.

The Red Sea Project

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

The Red Sea will be ready to welcome the first guests in 2023. By 2030, it will be home to 50 hotels, 8,000 rooms, up to 1,000 residential properties, and its international airport. 75 per cent of the destination's islands are being preserved for conservation. The aim is to achieve a 30 per cent net positive conservation benefit by 2040 by enhancing key habitats that help biodiversity flourish. The Red Sea International will serve one million passengers a year. It will be the first airport in the Middle East and North Africa that serves amphibious seaplanes and is linked to water aerodromes.

At the Red Sea, the aim is to align with all 17 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals by pioneering a new regenerative approach to tourism, free from single-use plastics, running entirely on renewable energy, and with zero landfill waste.



Tabuk

In north-western Saudi Arabia, Tabuk has long been a resting point on the pilgrim's trail from Jordan and Egypt. Tabuk is known for ancient archaeological sites and the setting of the story of the prophet Moses, who lived east of the city for a decade.

Haql and Sharma, charming coastal towns of Tabuk, offer clear seas and pristine beaches. Other attractions include the carved tombs of Maghaer Shuaib, the Moses Springs near Magna, or the stunning Tayeb Al Ism- a valley of steep granite stones separated from the turquoise-fringed Gulf of Aqaba by only the road. Tabuk's rich culture can be felt in Souq Twaheen, famed for selling patterned rugs and goat-hair tent covers.



Japan ready to welcome Indian Tourists

Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) Delhi office recently held seminars in Delhi, Bengaluru, and Mumbai, announcing the opening of the Japanese borders for Indian FIT tourists on October 11, 2022. The events aimed at providing the latest updates about the new travel regulations and Japanese travel products to Indian travel industry partners. TTJ spoke to Yusuke Yamamoto, Executive Director of Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), Delhi Office, to understand the path ahead.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja



Japan had already opened its borders to group travel in September 2022, but on October 11, 2022, it also lifted all restrictions on FIT travel to the country. Now to enter Japan, visitors must be fully vaccinated and carry proof of vaccination, i.e. initial two vaccination shots and a third booster shot or have a negative COVID-19 PCR test taken within 72 hours of their departure flight. A Fast Track function has been added to the Visit Japan Web portal on November 1, 2022. Visitors need to register for Fast Track via the Visit Japan web portal. Travellers need to fill out a fast-track questionnaire, upload a photo of their passport, vaccination card, or COVID-19 test results, and review and submit. It is recommended to do it at least a day before the scheduled departure.

The three-city event targeted select travel agents and briefed them on the latest guidelines, travel rules, product, destination, and attraction updates. The sessions were conducted by JNTO. 28 travel agents attended the session in each city. Three DMCs from Japan, along with senior delegates from Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways along with Yusuke Yamamoto, Executive Director of Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), Delhi Office, welcomed the trade partners and addressed queries and concerns along with their detailed product briefings.

Speaking to TTJ, Yusuke San said, "Japan is now ready to welcome back Indians. In 2021, 175,896 Indians visited



▲ Yusuke Yamamoto

Japan, of which nearly half were tourists. The others were primarily business and student travellers. We welcomed 6000 Indians In October 2022, which is almost half of the pre-pandemic figures for the same month, nevertheless, it is a positive sign and we are optimistic."

Elaborating on Indian travel patterns and needs, Yusuke San elaborates, "Indian food is no problem in Japan. We have close to 2000 Indian restaurants all across Japan. Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Mt. Fuji, and Hiroshima are part of the standard itinerary to Japan, which is also called the 'Golden Route' and it is very popular with the India market, with the average duration of the vacation being 7-10 days."

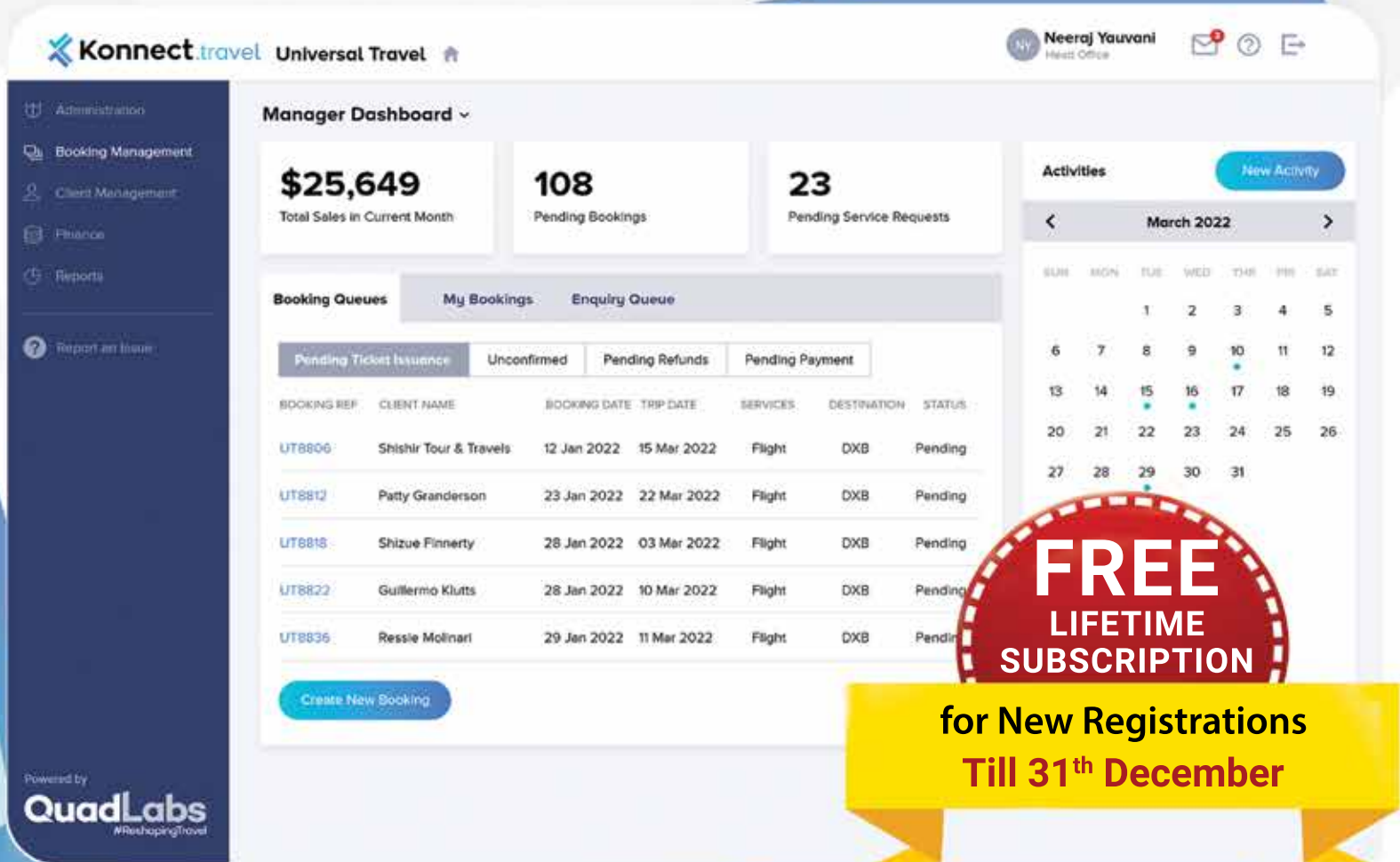
Japan has a lot more to offer than just the Golden Route. Spread over four major islands of Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu, travellers have a lot more to explore and more cities to visit. The Tateyama Kurobe Alpine Route opens up a different dimension to Japan.

Japanese culture holds a lot close to its bosom. May it be Japanese cuisine, painting, pottery, origami, performing arts, martial arts, woodworking, and metalworking, the Japanese take great pride in perfecting and refining their skills to levels of no error. Age-old traditions and skills still abound in modern Japan and are even now passed down from generation to generation or teacher to apprentice.

As the purpose and horizons of travel, broaden and the definition of travel experiences undergoes a sea change, the wonders of Japan offer a lot for the yearning and inquisitive. If you are looking for the perfect bloom, a cherry blossom, sushi washed down with soul-endearing sake or a dram of the master-crafted Japanese Single Malt served with a Wagyu steak, Japan is the place to be.

"2025 is a very important year for Japanese Tourism as Osaka plays host to EXPO 2025. We are sure tourist numbers that are already on an upswing will bounce back and arrivals will perhaps surpass the pre-COVID levels," concludes Yusuke San on an optimistic note.

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My Bookings | Enquiry Queue

| Booking Ref | Client Name | Booking Date | Trip Date | Services | Destination | Status |
|-------------|------------------------|--------------|-------------|----------|-------------|---------|
| UT8806 | Shishir Tour & Travels | 12 Jan 2022 | 15 Mar 2022 | Flight | DXB | Pending |
| UT8812 | Patty Granderson | 23 Jan 2022 | 22 Mar 2022 | Flight | DXB | Pending |
| UT8818 | Shizue Finnerty | 28 Jan 2022 | 03 Mar 2022 | Flight | DXB | Pending |
| UT8822 | Guillermo Klutts | 28 Jan 2022 | 10 Mar 2022 | Flight | DXB | Pending |
| UT8836 | Ressie Molinari | 29 Jan 2022 | 11 Mar 2022 | Flight | DXB | Pending |

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For the Wedding Vows, some Wow destinations in Thailand

A destination wedding is a dream for many young couples who fantasize about taking their vows amidst beautiful views and picture-perfect backdrops. And with destination weddings very much in demand for the discerning Indian audience, Thailand is the place to head to if you are looking for an exotic setting for your pre-wedding shoots or to host a dream wedding or reception.

Team TTJ



Thailand, over the years, has played host to many Indian weddings and even today is the most sought and preferred destination by Indian couples and wedding planners to host their glamorous Indian weddings. Nowadays, couples from all over the world aspiring for a destination wedding are narrowing on Thailand as one of their favourite locations for tying the knot.

Besides tourism, there are several reasons why Thailand is one of the most popular wedding destinations in the world. For the Indians, along with proximity and easy visa procedures, the tropical paradise offers scintillating beaches, lush evergreen hills, state-of-the-art venues, and historic landmarks and more. Along with these aspects, Thailand offers many spectacular wedding hotels and resorts locales that can accommodate many guests while showcasing amazing hospitality.

Situated on the country's most exclusive beaches and capes, Thailand's resorts and hotels offer world-class service, beautiful beaches, expansive views, and proximity to nightlife and restaurants. Choosing a resort wedding allows access to each resort's outstanding facilities, such as contemporary dining rooms, beautiful spots for post-ceremony cocktails, experienced chefs, on request cuisine, premium function equipment, and access to efficient service staff. The destination wedding in

Thailand can also be a perfect honeymoon for the couple and an amazing holiday in the sun for the guests. Here is a look at a few of Thailand's hotels and resorts and their specialisation in the destination wedding scenario.

JW Marriott Khao Lak Resort and Spa Versatile venues for the perfect destination wedding

JW Marriott Khao Lak Resort and Spa is the leading venue in Thailand for Indian destination weddings. Over many years, they have built up a reputation for delivering weddings of the highest caliber. Their accommodation, facilities, and food and



beverage are second to none. Their beautiful beachfront setting offers the most romantic and flexible space to create a dream wedding for every couple. The brand-new JW Grand Ballroom can host up to 800 guests and offers a stunning evening venue for elegant and refined show-stopping and opulent receptions.

JW Marriott Khao Lak Resort and Spa caters to all sizes of wedding celebrations. Their facilities and setting allow for intimate and romantic gatherings and large, extravagant wedding parties. Their mix depends on the requests they receive each year. As a beachfront property, they provide the perfect canvas for couples, families, and wedding planners to create something spectacular and unique. They do not offer a specific concept; they allow dream weddings to come to life and do everything they can to support the creativity of every bride and groom. Customisation is essential to deliver the perfect wedding for every couple. The resort offers packages showcasing the best Indian, Thai, and international cuisines that their team of chefs work on individually until couples have curated the perfect menu.



Setup and accommodations

JW Marriott Khao Lak Resort and Spa is located on a long stretch of golden sand beach in Khao Lak, a quieter destination with unspoiled nature on southern Thailand's Andaman coast. The resort boasts South East Asia's longest lagoon pool at 2.4 km, resulting in a large inventory of pool access rooms. With the new renovation and extension, the resort now offers 420 rooms, suites, and villas that feature a variety of accommodation choices to cater to all guests.

Centara Grand Mirage Beach Resort Pattaya

Extensive experience in hosting Indian weddings

Centara Grand Mirage Beach Resort Pattaya specialises in the wedding segment and has extensive experience hosting large-



scale ceremonies and celebrations, including Indian weddings. They also understand Indian culture and the requirements of wedding planners from the country. Their in-house wedding professionals will work with every bride and groom – and their wedding organiser if necessary – to create the perfect occasion.

The property sees a healthy mix of intimate gatherings, from about 50 guests to large-scale weddings with up to 1,000 people. Their large inventory of rooms and suites and diverse indoor and outdoor venues allows them to cater to any size and event style. The main wedding concept they offer is the beachfront nuptials. With a private, west-facing beach right in front of the resort, they have the ultimate setting for daytime ceremonies, sunset cocktails, and receptions.



Setup and accommodations

The resort has 555 rooms and suites, allowing them to host many guests under one roof. Their impressive Lost World-themed waterpark lets everyone unwind in their spare time. Importantly, the resort is perfectly positioned on the beach, yet easily accessible from downtown Bangkok and Suvarnabhumi Airport, so local and international guests can come and go easily.

The Slate Phuket

Proven track record of bringing dream weddings to life

At The Slate Phuket, they always target quality over quantity. They want to create a sense of exclusivity and personalised service, which, for large events, usually requires a buy-out of



the resort. Indian weddings are usually very special events, so they need to work within their capacity and make sure that they do everything they can to create truly unforgettable celebrations.

The Slate's Coliseum Garden is a unique outdoor space where couples can exchange their vows on a lush lawn surrounded by tropical foliage in the shade of a sacred banyan tree. The five-tiered Coliseum Steps are also ideal for wedding celebrations and receptions as they provide excellent views of the stage. The Slate's Ballroom can host glamorous indoor weddings, and of course, brides and grooms can tie the knot on the soft, sandy beach overlooking the sparkling Andaman Sea. Surrounded by Sirinat National Park, this is one of the most tranquil stretches of Phuket's west coast and creates a serene setting for intimate ceremonies.

Slate's dedicated team of highly experienced wedding professionals has a proven track record of bringing dream weddings to life. The resort has successfully hosted Thai, Indian, and Western wedding ceremonies, ranging from intimate occasions with just a handful of guests to large-scale events with up to 400 people. They also have an extensive list of trusted professional partners who can be relied upon to support our weddings. For large-scale destination weddings, as the Indian market tends to be, they can offer a buy-out of the hotel, including all accommodation, function spaces, F&B, and their dedicated staff team. Most Indian weddings bring in their wedding planner, so the hotel team is happy to work alongside them and create a truly bespoke celebration.



yearly, mostly consisting of small groups of 2 to 30 persons and medium-sized ones from 30 to 100 persons. Large gatherings are yet to happen at the resort as most of their wedding events are booked by European couples from countries like Italy, Germany, the UK, and Australia, mostly gathering small to medium groups.

In terms of wedding concepts, couples can always plan the popular beachfront themed weddings and celebrate the most romantic day in their life in a paradisiacal setting, with blue skies, stunning backdrops, with warm, friendly service for a seamless ceremony in Koh Samui. They can exchange vows on the soft sands of Chaweng Noi beach, surrounded by swaying palm trees and stunning views overlooking the Gulf of Siam. Sheraton Samui's dedicated wedding planners will go above and beyond to ensure the big day runs smoothly. They create a seamless experience for friends and family in their comfortable and spacious guest rooms within convenient reach of the island's airport and many popular attractions.

Setup and accommodations

Sheraton Samui Resort is the perfect beachfront accommodation for travellers with a stylish blend of modern and Mediterranean décor. Located in Chaweng Noi beach, the beautiful beach on Samui islands is just 15 minutes away from Samui International Airport and only a short ride to well-known Koh Samui attractions. Comprising 141 rooms, each accommodation Sheraton Samui is designed with a spacious balcony overlooking the tropical Garden Pool and Beachfront Pool.



Setup and accommodations

The Slate Phuket is an all-suite property that offers 178 accommodations and is nestled in its private paradise adjacent to unspoiled Nai Yang Beach and Phuket Airport. A Bill Bensley design masterpiece and a member of Design Hotels, The Slate manifests an avant-garde expression of Phuket's heritage, rich culture, and traditions with bold design and fearless imagination.

Sheraton Samui Resort

Popular for small and medium wedding gatherings

Weddings are one of the important segments for Sheraton Samui Resort. They welcome many destination weddings



Thailand continues to attract the Indian destination wedding segment

When it comes to Indian destination weddings in South East Asia, Thailand clearly tops the list. This stunning country is warm and cosy all year round, making it an ideal wedding playground.

It has the perfect ingredients for a great destination wedding. Whether it is a long multi-day function or an intimate ceremony, Thailand has the venues for all of it. Read on to know what the hotel and resort stakeholders in Thailand say about the anticipated wedding demand from India.

Prashant Nayak

Thai hospitality has always appealed to Indians for a long. Their understanding of Indian culture and traditions is remarkably good. Thus, hosting a wedding in a country with largely similar traditional values is a big bonus. The local Thai culture, music, dance, and cuisine make your celebrations much more special. The big fat Indian wedding thrives on colour, light, love, and laughter – and the Thai culture mingles with it perfectly to create one vibrant celebration to remember.

Thailand makes a good choice for Indian wedding celebrations, including its proximity to India, availability of direct flights, visa-on-arrival for Indian passport holders and groups, overall cost-effectiveness, and the availability of resorts and hotels that can cater to Indian cuisine. Almost all hotel and resort properties are well-experienced in accommodating Indian weddings of all sizes. Thus, meeting the expectation of an Indian wedding has never been a problem.

Just 80 km north of Phuket, Khao Lak is quieter than other coastal destinations, offering secluded beaches, tranquil nights, and one of the popular wedding destinations. Abhimanyu Singh, General Manager, JW Marriott Khao Lak Resort and Spa, says, “Thailand is one of the preferred destinations for weddings with unique hospitality, infrastructure, flexibility, skilled team, and beautiful landscape – Thailand will continue to grow as a preferred wedding destination in the future. The response post-pandemic has been amazing. We are receiving a good number of inquiries and have already hosted some amazing wedding celebrations this year.”

“The destination wedding market has grown quickly here over the years. Every year, we witness greater demand from



▲ Abhimanyu Singh



▲ Lalida Khanthong



▲ Wayne Duberly

international wedding planners; of course, India is the largest market. Thailand has a huge advantage over other countries as it has beautiful natural scenery, world-class facilities, and a culture of hospitality while also being just a short flight from India. Of course, 2020 and 2021 were a big challenge as the global pandemic prevented overseas travel and events, but we have seen strong pent-up demand, which is now being realised. We expect that 2023 will be very busy for the destination wedding sector,” spoke Wayne Duberly, General Manager, Centara Grand Mirage Beach Resort Pattaya.

With a warm, tropical climate year-round, Koh Samui is perfectly suited to a relaxed beach or resort wedding. Koh Samui’s laid-back charm sets the perfect scene for an unforgettable day. Kitpun Jirawatcharadet, Director of Sales and Marketing, Sheraton Samui Resort, opines, “With Thailand opening the country with fewer restrictions and adequate flight connections from India to Bangkok and Phuket, we anticipate more weddings in 2023. Samui as a destination has not yet captured the Indian wedding market because I feel the size of properties in the destination is medium or small compared to Bangkok or Phuket. However, we have been getting an increasing number of Indian Wedding inquiries in Samui post-pandemic, which is a good sign. Since a wedding is a very important event, our

core strategy is putting customer inquiry to the front by hearing their requirements, wishes, dreams, and expectations and then bringing our and our partner’s expertise to ensure that we make their dream wedding come true.”

Before the pandemic, the Indian wedding market was thriving in Phuket, and the hospitality sector has seen business return strongly in 2022, and more is expected in 2023. Lalida Khanthong (Gam), Assistant Director of Sales, The Slate Phuket, shared, “There was significant pent-up demand in 2020 and 2021, which is now being realised. The combination of Phuket’s natural beauty, world-class facilities, and easy accessibility from India make the island hugely popular among Indian couples. The Slate’s designer interiors and outstanding location (on a secluded stretch of beach, yet just 10 minutes from the airport) make us ideal for Indian wedding planners, and we look forward to welcoming back this growing market.”

According to Thai Tourism officials, about 60 per cent of Indian destination weddings in Thailand were those of residents of India, while the remainder were from overseas Indian families. With the vast demand from the wedding segment, Thailand also hopes to boost tourism revenue by targeting high-spending groups like Indian wedding parties and honeymooners.

EgyptAir developing services to fit today's traveller's needs



EgyptAir celebrated its 90th anniversary this year. The flag carrier of Egypt is one of the pioneer airlines and the first airline in the Middle East and Africa, and the seventh in the world to join IATA. TJJ interacts with Rasha Abdelmoneim, Country Manager, India and Sri Lanka, EgyptAir, to know more about the latest developments at the airline, which has the vision to deliver competitive customer service with true Egyptian spirit.

Prashant Nayak

With the decline of the effects of the pandemic on international aviation traffic, EgyptAir has been implementing its plan to re-operate the routes affected by the decreased number of travellers and countries' entry regulations. However, the levels are picking up since the restrictions have been lifted, and they soon plan to achieve similar pre-pandemic numbers.

EgyptAir operates five weekly flights from Mumbai to Cairo, but their codeshare agreements cover seven cities in India, such as Delhi, Kochi, Hyderabad, Goa, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Ahmedabad. "EgyptAir operates AB330-300 aircraft on the Mumbai to Cairo route. This aircraft type accommodates 301 seats, of which 36 Flat Bed seats in business class and 265 seats in economy class, it is also equipped with electricity plugs that enable passengers to charge their devices, personal screens in both Business and Economy classes with a wide selection of entertainment options on our IFE system," informs Rasha.

Adding more, Rasha says, "We connect our travellers to more than 70 destinations worldwide in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and North America and over 50 more destinations through codeshare agreements, and thanks to our membership in Star Alliance, we reach more than 1300 destinations globally."

In terms of new passenger experiences, EgyptAir is always looking to develop its technological and digital services, making the passenger's travel journey more convenient and seamless. The airline provides various digital services like online booking, baggage tracking, online and self-check-in, etc., in addition to offering new ancillary services and developing current services such as onboard



▲ Rasha Abdelmoneim

Wi-Fi service and mobile connectivity on some aircraft types.

Speaking on how the airline connects with Indian trade partners and the new marketing and promotions strategies post-COVID, Rasha says, "India is one of the biggest markets in the world, that's why EgyptAir is always looking for various ways to cooperate with the best travel partners available in the Indian market. EgyptAir is always working on developing its services to fit today's traveller's needs, for instance, increasing the frequencies to accommodate the current demand in addition to offering special sales promotions to encourage travellers to travel the world, so keep an eye on our EgyptAir's social media pages and website to catch the newest offers."

The airline also helps the government in its tourism initiatives. "EgyptAir operates multiple daily flights to Egypt's top leisure destinations connected to its international network with seamless connections to Luxor, Aswan, Sharm el-Sheikh, and Hurghada with a number of daily frequencies to meet the needs of leisure travellers. One of the main events for 2022 was Egypt's hosting of the COP27 in the green city of Sharm el-Sheikh from 6 to 18 November and EgyptAir was the official carrier of this global conference. The COP27 event brought together more than 100 heads of state from around the world to tackle the ongoing climate crisis," shares Rasha.

As with many airlines worldwide, sustainability is a priority for EgyptAir, and in recent years the airline has overhauled its fleet to include modern, fuel-efficient aircraft. Speaking about the airline's fleet expansion and future growth plans, Rasha said, "EgyptAir is implementing its fleet modernisation plan utilising a young fleet of 67 aircraft, including 18 wide-body aircraft; Boeing 777-300ER, Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner, Airbus A330-300, Airbus A330-200 in addition to 49 medium and narrow body aircraft; B737-800, Airbus A320 Neo and Airbus A220-300. Further, the airline is planned to deliver seven Airbus 321 by 2024."

Since 2021, EgyptAir has added Dusseldorf in Germany, Kinshasa in Democratic Congo, Benghazi in Libya, and Dublin in Ireland to its network besides re-operating non-stop flights to Mumbai, in addition to increasing frequencies to several EgyptAir destinations.

"We encourage travellers in India to fly EgyptAir to feel the Egyptian hospitality. We also encourage them to join our Frequent Flyer loyalty program through egyptairplus.com to be one of our members to get more travel benefits," concludes Rasha.



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Jazeera Airways

shifts to high gear on expansion

Jazeera Airways started flight operations in 2005 and grew modestly until 2017, reaching 17 destinations with a fleet of seven aircraft. Since 2017, the airline has grown dramatically. It now flies to 55 destinations with 19 aircraft. Romana Parvi, Regional Manager, South Asia, Jazeera Airways, shares more on the latest developments at the airline.

Prashant Nayak

Like all other airlines of the world, Jazeera Airways was not immune from the effects of the pandemic. At the beginning of the lockdown, the airline took some painful yet necessary steps to control costs. As a result of this and after some very innovative commercial decisions and the dedication of the Jazeera Team, they quickly returned to profitability in the second half of 2021. They recently announced their nine-month 2022 results with a group Net Profit of KD21.76m, carrying 2.6 million passengers at a 76.4 per cent load factor.

“We have restored our business post-pandemic and made strong growth as reflected in our financial performance. This has been stimulated operationally with the launch of 11 new routes since the beginning of the year and bringing of an additional two aircraft into the fleet. We operate a fleet of 8 x Airbus 320 and 11 x 320neo,” shares Romana.

Jazeera also owns and operates its terminal in Kuwait – Jazeera Terminal 5. It gives end-to-end airline control of the passenger experience. The terminal itself contributes to around 20 percent of the overall group profits. With their route expansion, they just finished a major phase of expansion in their terminal, which would up the capacity from 3 million passengers to about 4.5 million passengers.

Completing five years in India, Jazeera has quickly established itself in the India market. Currently, Jazeera Airways serves Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Kochi, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, and Thiruvananthapuram. “Indians constitute the largest ex-pat population in Kuwait, and we would like to fly to at least 15 cities up from the current 8 destinations, including tier 1 and 2 cities in India. Presently, with the Indian travellers starting to travel again, our average load



▲ Romana Parvi

factor ex India is 85 per cent. India is one of our top source markets and also one of the highest projected growth markets,” informs Romana.

Jazeera Airways has a great network connection in the Middle East region for travellers from Europe, Asia, and Africa. Based on this, the India market for Jazeera Airways is important, given that there is a big Indian diaspora and tourist movement from India in the region. Romana says, “The response for our leisure and MICE has been very positive and growing amongst the Indian population. We are seeing Turkey, Egypt and Azerbaijan emerge as high-demand destinations on our network from India. We are continuously reviewing the opportunities in the India market and working upon them to meet these demands.”

On the marketing front in the India region, post-COVID, the airline has been actively participating in various trade shows in Indore, Raipur, Jaipur, Chandigarh, Mumbai, Ahmedabad,

Hyderabad, and Chennai. They also participated in events like the Wedding Travel show in Dehradun to connect with their trade partners, renew their old associations, and make new associations. The airline has also conducted various FAM trips for their partner agents to Baku and Istanbul to showcase these destinations on their network. The airline is also working with leading Indian banks that offer passengers a discount on tickets and are looking at EMI options with some banks for tickets. The Jazeera brand is becoming more familiar to Indian travellers. Their advertising campaign is now seen online and on posters and heard on radio stations in all key cities.

Recently, the airline has been scaling up its services in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). In this aspect, Romana says, “The demand for flights to KSA has grown and we’re pleased to offer more choices to the Kingdom for Kuwaiti travellers. The momentum is expected to continue as events and festivals resume in the Kingdom for the cooler months. There are strong ties between Kuwaiti and Saudi families, and we now offer a flight for them to connect rather than take to the highway. We are also working with the Saudi Tourism Authority to support marketing its events calendar in the Kuwait market to attract travellers. We hope to expand that relationship into the India market.”

Indeed, one of the airline’s biggest areas of expansion has been to the KSA. Jazeera currently flies to eight cities in the KSA, and in the next three months, they plan to fly to three additional cities in the Kingdom. They operate 11 flights for Umrah daily, making the airline probably one of the largest Umrah operators in the KSA.

Also, many of Jazeera’s routes today are to second and third-tier cities in Central Asia that are very profitable,



L-R: Nisha Alexander, Bharathan Ravindran, Romana Parvi, Andrew Ward, Parul Mahajan, Komal Seth

such as Osh in Kyrgyzstan. The airline will soon be launching flights to Turkistan in Kazakhstan, as it has the potential for Umrah traffic. These routes are not high profile but are profitable and benefit that particular country and the KSA. They will also look at new route points next year in Iran: Tehran, Shiraz, and Isfahan. Within the next 12 months, the airline is looking at around 15 new routes from Kuwait.

Jazeera Airways has placed a new fleet order with Airbus for 20 A320neos, 8 A321neos, and five further options. The order will effectively double Jazeera's current fleet size to 35 aircraft, further supporting the airline's expansion plans to boost its contribution to Kuwait's travel sector.

Speaking about the future growth plans in India, Romana says, "We

started our operation to India in the winter of 2017 with flights to Hyderabad. This winter 2022, we complete five years of operations and are connecting to eight cities in India. We would like to increase our flights into India but at the moment we are limited by the bilateral agreements between India and Kuwait. We hope that capacity will be increased in the near future."

Akasa Air continues to expand its network

Akasa Air, India's newest airline, announced its entry into Uttar Pradesh with the addition of Lucknow as the eleventh destination to join the airline's fast-growing network. The airline will continue to grow its network to establish a strong pan-India presence with a focus on the metro to tier 2 and 3 route connectivity, using a fleet expansion plan that adds one new aircraft every 15 days.

Team TTJ

Akasa Air connecting Uttar Pradesh's capital with the key centres of Mumbai and Bengaluru is another extension of the airline's efforts to boost the country's economy by strengthening its important transportation linkages and is in line with their objective to add new flights every 2-3 weeks. The airline will be offering daily flights on the Lucknow-Bengaluru route and Lucknow-Mumbai route, starting from December 25, 2022. Lucknow is renowned for its rich culture, architecture, and cuisine while being an established textile and an emerging automobile hub.

In line with its vision of establishing a strong pan-India presence focusing on the metro to tier 2 and 3 route connectivity, the airline is also enhancing connectivity between Bengaluru and Kochi by adding a third daily frequency on the route

starting December 29, 2022. With this development, the airline will operate 26 daily flight departures from Bengaluru.

The airline, which commenced operations in August, has been progressively scaling up its operations and by December end expects to cross over 500 weekly flights on a total of sixteen routes across eleven cities – Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Kochi, Chennai, Mumbai, Delhi, Guwahati,

Agartala, Pune, Visakhapatnam, and Lucknow. Akasa Air's fleet size will be 18 aircraft by the end of March 2023 and over the next four years, the airline will add 54 additional aircraft, taking its total fleet size to 72 aircraft.



ITA Airways launches India operations

The Italian flagship airline, ITA Airways, launched its India operations by operating its first flight from New Delhi to Rome Fiumicino on December 4, 2022. The new connection marks a step forward in the expansion of the airline's Asia footprint and global route network while highlighting its focus on the Indian market. Currently, it is the only carrier to operate a direct connection between New Delhi and Rome.



Gurjit Singh Ahuja

The new route will be operated using an Airbus A330 aircraft, three times a week, departing from New Delhi, every Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday at 03:50 am and landing in Rome Fiumicino at 08:10 am. Return flights from Rome Fiumicino will depart every Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday at 2:10 pm and will arrive at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport at 02:00 am, local time.

Speaking to the press, Emiliana Limosani, Chief Commercial Officer, ITA Airways and CEO, Volare, said, "We are happy to inaugurate today the ITA Airways' Rome Fiumicino - New Delhi connections, the only direct flights between these two capitals. With the opening of this new route for the transport of passengers and cargo between Italy and India, ITA Airways is further contributing to the cultural integration and development of the economic relationship between the two countries."

India and Italy have developed a solid political and commercial collaboration in recent years, with more than 600 Italian companies present in India and a bilateral interchange that reached a record value of more than 10 billion euros in 2021.

Emiliana further elaborated, "We have thus taken an important step forward in the project of expanding our intercontinental network towards a fascinating destination and a market full of opportunities. In addition, thanks to the flight departing from New Delhi to Rome, our Indian customers will be able to visit not only Italy but all of Europe, thanks to convenient connections offered from our Rome Fiumicino hub."

Indian passengers will not only be able



▲ Emiliana Limosani

to discover Italy's capital, Rome but also connect onwards to 20 domestic Italian cities and other cities in North America, Germany, Spain, and France on the ITA Airways network.

ITA Airways has also entered into an interline agreement with Vistara, enabling customers from Mumbai, Amritsar, Kolkata, Bangalore, Kochi, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune, Chandigarh, and Dabolim in the Indian market and Bangkok, Kathmandu, and Dhaka at international level to seamlessly connect onwards with the ITA Airways network from New Delhi.

ITA Airways continues to expand its intercontinental network. This winter, the airline will serve a total of 51 destinations, of which 9 are intercontinental, 22 are international and 20 are domestic. The focus will continue on its long-haul expansion with several important new

routes in the pipeline.

In-flight meals served on routes from Italy are curated by Michelin-starred Chef Gian Piero Vivalda. The endeavor is to ensure passengers experience top-quality Italian food and wine based on specific themes. Business-class customers will experience new flavours and tastes inspired by excellent Italian-sourced foods prepared by the talent of the Italian chefs, who will be taking turns on board.

The Aircraft interiors are the work of the creative genius of the designer Walter De Silva, who was inspired by the idea of bringing back a pleasant as well as coherent sensation to the interior of the aircraft, one that was consistent with the choice of a 'journey above the clouds. The main colours of the new interiors of ITA Airways aircraft are blue and sand combined with mood and time lighting.

Speaking to TTJ, Fabio Bigotti, Country Manager India, ITA Airways said, "India is a market of great strategic importance for us, Italy is home to the largest Indian diaspora in the European Union. We have fast-tracked our plans for India, launching now as against the summer schedule of 2023."

Currently, they have a frequency of three weekly flights from New Delhi, and this will be increased to five flights a week in 2023. He further added, "Besides an increase in frequency to and from New Delhi, flying into other major gateway cities of India is definitely on the agenda. Our strong relationship with our exclusive all-India GSA, DEX Group, who have an expert understanding of the Indian aviation market and dynamics gives us the perfect partner in India for our expansion and growth."



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Kenya Airways offers more of Africa

Kenya Airways, the Pride of Africa, is committed to offering a delightful experience with a caring African touch. The airline focuses on its unparalleled connectivity by offering flexible options in and out of Africa.

On the side-lines of MKTE 2022 in Nairobi, Kenya, Martin Gitonga, Head of Planning and Alliances, Kenya Airways, gave us a glimpse into the latest development at the airline in the Indian context.

Prashant Nayak

Kenya Airways used to fly to both Delhi and Mumbai from Nairobi before the pandemic. Mumbai, of course, by far had the greatest number of frequencies with double daily frequencies. They flew to Delhi once a day. However, the airline had discontinued Delhi flights before the COVID-19 pandemic. But during the pandemic, when India became the biggest supplier of the COVID-19 vaccine, it was very big for Africa. It was also a very big responsibility for Kenya Airways to continue their cargo operations and supply Africa with the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine.

“Even during the air bubble agreements, we were doing repatriation flights for Kenyans who were going for medical treatment or those stuck in India. It is one of the few countries where we did a lot of repatriation flights,” says Martin. However, many patients from Kenya travel to India every year for specialised medical treatment, especially cancer care, as India has more affordable healthcare.

Presently, Kenya Airways is back in Mumbai with ten flights a week. The services are split between the smaller B737 and the bigger plane, the Dreamliner B787. The resumption of services is a major relief to passengers seeking to travel between the countries.

The airline has also increased its partnerships, specifically with Indigo and Vistara, and they are set to grow that further. Martin mentioned, “We also had a partnership with Air India, but because it was going through its transition and challenges, the partnership has not been doing so well. So, we will focus on Indigo in this specific scenario because it’s the most vibrant airline in India to grow.”

Martin is impressed by India’s UDAN policy, which aims to make air travel affordable and



▲ Martin Gitonga

improve economic development in India. He says, “At the company level also, one of the biggest learning for me from the aviation front in Kenya was the UDAN Scheme. I picked many points from the RCS UDAN in implementing the same in Kenya, which encourages the vibrant aviation industry as this scheme lines up with the country’s vision and also lines up governments to open up smaller airports and develop new networks. So, I think, for me, this one is of the gold standards in terms of opening up aviation in our country.”

Kenya Airways is looking at expanding connectivity in India. However, they are first keen to resume their services in Delhi. They are also exploring the possibilities of venturing into cities like Bangalore and Hyderabad. Once they begin in Delhi, they may look at

Bangalore, which looks more lucrative for the airline.

Another significant segment of passengers that Kenya Airways cater to between Kenya and India is the Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR). Martin shares, “VFR is significant for us because the large Gujarati diaspora residing in Ahmedabad and Gujarat have relatives or business in Kenya. So, the bulk of the traffic we carry on our ten flights a week, especially from Kenya, are those who go to meet family and friends in India, specifically Gujarat,” asserts Martin.

Africa remains the biggest driver of Kenya Airways’ revenue, highlighting the important role that the regional countries play in keeping the carrier afloat. The airline’s network is 83 percent in Africa. Multiple frequencies are very high, and the airline is the main African connector. In Africa, Johannesburg is a really good destination for Kenya Airways. They fly three times a day into Johannesburg and almost daily into Cape Town. They have very good connections with South Africa via Airlink and FlySafair from Johannesburg, specifically to Durban, where much of the Indian population resides. They also have a good regional route to Juba, South Sudan, and Entebbe in Uganda and the island nations of Africa like Seychelles and Mauritius. However, London has always been a flagship destination and profitable for the airline.

Kenya Airways serves 45 destinations, including 35 in Africa, and ten outside the continent. The airline’s passenger fleet comprises Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner widebody airliners, and Boeing 737-800 and smaller Embraer E190 single-aisle airliners. The carrier also has a couple of Boeing 737-300F cargo aircraft.

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Le Meridien Maldives promises indomitable hospitality



Le Meridien Maldives recently partnered with One Above DMC to promote their 141-luxury villa island property amongst the travel trade. In a resort presentation over cocktails and dinner, Nilesh Singh, General Manager, Le Meridien Maldives, apprised about the resort's superior service and endless eating options curated for the Indian traveller.

Vartik Sethi

Le Meridien Maldives Resort and Spa opened its doors to tourists during the pandemic. With very little understanding of the future, the 141 luxury villas island resort braved the uncertainty that COVID-19 came in with. Nilesh Singh shared an anecdote about how their team managed to launch the property in the middle of a global health crisis. He said, "In our case because we launched during the pandemic, everything was happening virtually. Now, having braved the tides of uncertainty, the property seems to have come a long way."

Catering to the Indian taste buds, the luxury resort has left no stone unturned regarding culinary offerings. The resort has hired chefs from various regions of India to satiate not only a vegetarian diet if needed but also Jain and other regional food preferences of the diverse Indian diaspora.

In an attempt to take the sustainable route, Le Meridien Maldives boasts of its hydroponic horticulture practices. Speaking to Travel Trade Journal on the sidelines of the event, Singh shared, "We are one of the very few



▲ Nilesh Singh

resorts to utilise 35 per cent of our energy consumption with solar power. Other than that, we produce all our water, we bottle our still and sparkling water so no plastic bottles on the island at all."

Situated on a 900-meter-long island, the 141 villas are uniquely planned so they never look or feel crowded. The breakup of these 141 villas translates into two sets of 37 sunrise and sunset over water villas, respectively, seven lagoon villas, 25 beach villas, four beach villas with a pool, four

beach villas with a garden pool, 19 overwater villas with pool, ten two-bedroom beach villas with a pool, four two-bedroom water villas with a pool, and an exclusive Thilamaafushi villa with a pool.

In 2021 and 2022, Maldives was one of the few countries open to tourists, making it one of the most sought-after destinations. However, now that the world is opening up, many more destinations are welcoming tourists to their respective countries. As we advance into 2023, Le Meridien Maldives plans to sustain the hype around Maldives. "The difference is, 2021 Maldives was only one of the destinations open for travel. In 2023, things are different as the world has opened up! I think we are all set for similar business as the hospitality industry experienced in 2019, but we want to stabilise the peak we reached in 2021," said Singh.

In preparation for 2023, Le Meridien Maldives executed groundwork via trade interactions in Delhi, Jaipur, and Ahmedabad.

Speaking more on the Maldives as a destination and the Le Meridien Maldives experience, Singh exclaims, "Whatever said and done, Maldives is a unique destination. There is no match in terms of the experience that you have in Maldives. The whole concept of one island, one resort is neither in Thailand nor in Seychelles, Mauritius, or Bali. To top it, Le Meridien Maldives Resort and Spa is a distinctive property in the island country. It is indeed a unique experience as one may not be able to find a similar experience in any other part of the world."



Cordelia

driving the cruise culture in India

Cordelia Cruises, India's premium cruise liner, which was conceptualised for Indians, is exactly catering to how Indians love to holiday through experiences that are stylish, luxurious, and, most importantly, inherently Indian. In an exclusive conversation with Jurgen Bailom, President and CEO, Waterways Leisure Tourism, we come to know that there has been a huge response to their sailings both in western and Eastern shorelines. Also, their Indianised touch at sea has worked out positively for the cruise liner.

Prashant Nayak

Cordelia Cruises by Waterways Leisure commenced operations in India in September 2021. The Cruise liner offers an experience that is beyond traditional travel. It makes every guest feel the epitome of everything premium, luxurious, warm, and fabulous. Delicious cuisine, attractive entertainment options, and all-day activities on board! However, they are also constantly evolving in offering the best to the passengers in terms of innovation and experience.

In September 2022, Cordelia Cruises completed 100 sailings along India's east and west coasts to mark its one-year presence in the country. The Empress from Cordelia covers the western coast, including Mumbai, Goa, Kochi, and Lakshadweep, as well as the eastern coast, which takes guests to Chennai and Visakhapatnam.

When asked about their response to their sailings on the eastern side, Jurgen says, "The response was very good. The reason why we go to the east from the west coast is because of the monsoon. So, we tend to leave around the end of May or the beginning of June from the west coast and move over to the east coast with home porting in Chennai. Our cruises there offered five- and two-night itineraries, which cover Vizag, Pondicherry, and Chennai. We received a very good response this season and the sailings were successful as we had 50000 guests. Our guests came mainly from Tamil Nadu and Kerala from cities like Chennai and Cochin, and we had a lot of families this time. The guests were incredible. We had to tweak our entertainment programmes a bit for the South Indian audience and also, our food menu catered more to the southern taste buds."



▲ Jurgen Bailom

The Empress is a world-class ship with top-of-line facilities. The highlights of the cruise include dishes curated by India's top chefs and entertainment facilities that integrate Indian culture, such as the Bollywood Bash onboard. "Families come in large numbers, weddings and important events are being hosted on board, and guests are making memories of a lifetime through the stellar food, entertainment and destination experiences being offered by Cordelia Cruises," says Bailom.

For Cordelia, it's an all year around operation. They have planned their operations on the east and west Indian coastline exclusively for Indians and their families to enjoy a good Indian cruise product. India has around 7,800 km of coastline, so it also made intuitive sense that India deserved its cruise line. "The whole idea was that India, with the third largest coastline in the world, needed a cruise line of its own. There is no point in them flying out of the country to experience a cruise.

Here at Cordelia, there is no visa requirement, no passport needed and still be able and enjoy a beautiful cruise experience of international standards," asserts Jurgen.

Speaking about some cruise destinations in India, Jurgen feels that Lakshadweep is a magnet for Indians. The island is pristine, untouched, and unexplored. Its inaccessibility was the biggest enchantment for travellers. "Now we are the only big cruise liner that sails to Lakshadweep. Cruising is a good opportunity for Indians to visit their own beautiful islands. The islands are less explored by the vast majority of Indians. In my opinion, Lakshadweep is even more beautiful than the Maldives," implies Jurgen.

The long coastline and 1.4 billion people create immense potential in the cruise segment. There are right now six major airports in India. Over a year, the cruise line called on seven Indian ports and served over 150,000 passengers. For a vast majority of India in North and Central India, the appetite to experience to sea and see the coastline is very big. Jurgen says there has been a very big response from these regions. Cordelia Cruises has clearly seen the demand. The company intends to acquire at least three new cruise ships by 2025, contributing to the expansion of India's cruising economy.

Cordelia works closely with the government, the shipping ministry, and the ports to expand cruising concepts in India. Jurgen is a cruising stalwart, and with his immense experience in the sector, he intends to present a world-class holiday experience to a country filled with exciting travel dreams and aspirations. He closely works with all the shipping authorities to drive the Prime Minister's Vision 2030 to grow tourism, including sea and river cruising.

The magic of Lake Nakuru



Some National Parks make you feel alive on a game drive, just like the Lake Nakuru National Park in Kenya. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Lake Nakuru allows you to relax in one of nature's most inviting yet rustic environs with wide vistas and beautiful sunrise and sunsets.

This is where you see something new and exciting at every bend. Nakuru was, by far, my favourite safari experience among my African wildlife tours.

Prashant Nayak

During the pre-convention tours at the Magical Kenya Tourism Expo (MKTE 2022) in October 2022, our team of five were showcased two destinations, Shaba Game Reserve and The Lake Nakuru National Park. Shaba, for me, was like Kenya's best-kept secret, alive with the beautiful dry-country wildlife. Lake Nakuru National Park, on the other hand, turned out to be a total contrast, a spectral place high on greenery, a combination of forest and grassland, which made up for rewarding wildlife sightings.

From Shaba, we drove for almost nine

hours toward Lake Nakuru in central Kenya. The Nakuru National Park is a short drive from Nakuru town and is one of the most visited parks in Kenya. Situated at the heart of the Rift Valley, the Park is home to one of the most amazing ornithological spectacles in the world - the flight of the flamingos!

At Lake Nakuru, it is said that just a decade ago, tens of thousands, occasionally up to one million Greater and Lesser flamingos turned the shores pink, and it was a spectacle to watch. However, this phenomenon has now been rather unpredictable, and since 2012, the flamingos have been absent in large numbers due to a change in the water

levels. Heavy rains and floods in the Rift Valley since 2012 have swelled it to such an extent that some game-driving tracks and campsites have been submerged. Even the main gate has moved to higher ground. Due to rising water levels, the flamingos who are plankton feeders have fewer food options; hence, they have moved to other Rift Valley lakes, and this might be a permanent situation.

Lake Nakuru is still a special place. Now, due to lower water salinity levels, the birdlife is thriving here, with big flocks of pelicans stealing the show. When we visited, there was a healthy number of lesser flamingos gracing the water, along with crowds of pelicans and other shorebirds.

The Sarova Lion Hill Game Lodge, where we were hosted for two days, is one of Kenya's most sought-after Rift Valley Lodges inside the Park. As the name suggests, you won't be surprised to hear the roaring calls of the lions at night. The lodge fuses nature with contemporary bird feeds, attracting more than 50 bird species into the lodge, among the 400 species that inhabit the Park, making it a bird sanctuary. The hotel's premises are a haven for birders. You can easily encounter Masked Weaver birds, Great Eared Starlings, Flycatchers, Common



Into the Wild



Drongo, Common Bulbuls, Olive Thrush, White-browed Robin-Chat, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Hoopoes, and many more.

Sarova Lion Hill Game Lodge offers the most scenic and spectacular views of the Lake and the National Park. Beyond the stunning views and amazing wildlife, Lion Hill Lodge offers 67 African-style chalet-style rooms, great food, a panoramic bar terrace, organic gardens, a swimming pool, and a spa. Our group enjoyed a curated sundowner session hosted by the hotel while enjoying the spectacular display of the sun going down over the lake while biting into succulent meat delicacies especially prepared for us.

We went on four game drives in two days. While the star attractions were the two lion brothers near the lodge, we also witnessed a fight between one of the lions and a wounded black rhino. The rhino seemed to be trying to deter the lion from a nearby buffalo kill. On one of the drives, we also saw a pride of lions, though they were far off. White Rhinos are common around the lake, and there are also large numbers of waterbuck, buffalo, impala, warthog, and olive baboons. While black and white rhinos thrive in the Park, it also has its fair share of zebra, hyenas, eland, giraffes, gazelles, and other antelope species. We once sighted the Jackals chasing birds and antelopes who were quite alert and cautious of the Jackals' approach.

During the game drives, we had constant sightings of birds and animals, which reflected the strength of the Park for its diverse wildlife. Besides the Flamingo and the Pelicans, African Fish Eagles and the Maribu Storks dominated the Park around the lake. We also sighted the African Spoonbills, Yellow Billed Storks, Egyptian Geese, Pied Kingfishers, Mouse birds, Lilac Breasted Rollers, and plenty of other

small birds. Many little grebes and white-winged black terns are frequently seen, along with Black-Winged Stilts, Cormorants, Avocets, Ducks, and other migrant waders. My best sighting was that of a courting Widow Bird, a Long-Crested Eagle in black morph, a Yellow Bishop and two pairs of Grey Crowned Cranes.

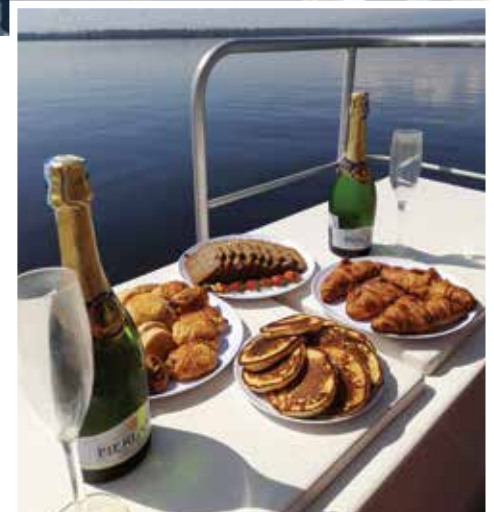
One of our fond memories at Lake Nakuru was the boat ride on the other side of the Park. Boat safaris are provided by an experienced Lake Nakuru resident naturalist, and the boat's capacity range from 6 to 8 people. We did the morning lake safari and were offered an array of breakfast items and sparkling wine. The ride lasts for more than two hours, and it is a thrilling experience. The feeling is incredible and unmatched. It is bound to take wildlife enthusiasts into another dimension as they watch and photograph the lake birds at close quarters. We also had the opportunity to see some Hippos bobbing up on the lake, and as they were wary about us, we were also wary about them.

During our up-and-down journeys, en-route, we also passed the Great Rift Valley Crater region, and we stopped at a point that overlooked the crater in the valley. We also passed an Equator marker on the road. It was surely exciting to stand on the equator line. It's just a stopover for a few minutes to capture the moment. It's a great place to take pictures and remember how far you have traversed Kenya. On the way, we also got glimpses of Mount Kenya, the highest mountain in Kenya and the second-highest in Africa after Kilimanjaro. With its rugged glacier-clad summits and forested middle slopes, Mount Kenya is one of the most impressive landscapes in East Africa.

One more place which got my attention was Nanyuki town in Laikipia County.



Despite being a market town, it is probably the most cosmopolitan place outside of Nairobi, with its share of international tourists who come here to climb Mt Kenya or to visit the safari parks. This place with a relatively cooler climate is turning into a world tourist destination, with most locals converting their properties into holiday homes to offer hospitality services. The British Army soldiers have a training facility



nearby, and for the Kenya Air Force, this is the country's main air force base.

Lake Nakuru's compactness and varied landscapes are instantly likable, and it's ideal for first-time safari-goers and families. The lake is one of the most beautiful lakes that I have ever seen. The fact that it is untouched by people, makes it extra special. It was just a magical place and a truly magical experience. And I am so glad to have witnessed this beautiful spectacle of nature, the magic that is Nakuru.





A turbulent past, a steady present and a promising future for the hospitality industry

We are at the fag end of 2022, and it's time to summarise the year in the hospitality business. TTJ looks back at 2022 and interacts with the prominent hospitality players pan India to learn about their year-round performances, valuable experiences gained during the pandemic and their expectations for the coming New Year.

Prashant Nayak/ Swaati Choudhary

The onset of 2022 was engulfed by the Omicron threat and was a very bitter time for the hospitality industry, which encountered a new set of challenges and uncertainties. In the third quarter of the year, domestic travel picked up momentum, and since then, it has been an uphill task for the hospitality industry to get a COVID-ravaged economy back on track. Limping back

to normalcy has been the greatest challenge for the hospitality industry, post the pandemic. However, with the COVID-19 shadow gradually becoming a thing of the past, there was no stopping for the hospitality sector. Domestic, Revenge and MICE tourism are blessings in disguise for the hospitality sector and all in the industry anticipate the trends to continue well into 2023, revving up the hospitality sector in a big way.



Sharad Upadhyay
General Manager, Crowne Plaza Greater Noida

The year 2022 so far: In 2022, we saw a rapid and gradual shift to pre-pandemic ADR levels. In multiple segments, the occupancy demand is at par or higher than the pre-pandemic. The demand today is from domestic, international, leisure, and

conscious of this rare thing we possess. Second is relationships and truly living this life, focusing on experiences rather than mundane transactions. We also learned to prepare ourselves for situations we never expected to happen. The pandemic has changed the hospitality game big time.

The business expectation in 2023: The occupancy level is back driven by strong MICE, weddings and to some extent, corporate travellers. Our hotel believes in and delivers an environment that guests love. We do this by providing True Hospitality for everyone. True Hospitality is what sets us apart from the crowd. We promise to make every guest feel welcome and cared for, recognised and respected. We create great experiences through the certain actions we take to ensure our guests feel welcome and cared for and to make their experience more personal and memorable. Our hotel teams remain focused on delivering our purpose of providing True Hospitality. We put a "lens" on everything and think about all the little things and how to make every single experience better every single time for the guests. With things in place and strong tailwinds ahead, I expect 2023 to be a very successful year for us.

business. It was a year full of growth, positivity, and success. We did a decent ADR and added a few feathers to our cap.

Learnings from the pandemic: The pandemic came with plenty of lessons for people in the travel and hospitality industry. First, the value of human life and health has never been more



Jaydeep Biswas
General Manager, The Park Visakhapatnam

The year 2022 so far: 2022 has been a year of putting into practice the lessons we learned during the two pandemic years (2020 and 2021). As business started to get back to 'normal,' efficiency lessons learned on cost, energy, guest, and team management

employee engagement and their well-being became crucial like never before. Individuals were constantly explained about multi-skilling and multi-tasking to become more effective and stronger resources. Hygiene took on a whole new dimension. 'Guest Delight' turned into 'Delightful Guest Experiences.' We evolved into a Pet-Friendly hotel with the changing times. We realised that pets were an integral part emotionally for many of our guests, as much as their children. Attention toward kids' needs and entertainment became an added service aspect. Healthy diet options from the Chef's stable helped. Facilitating quick reach to medical assistance was another very important aspect that guests desired in case of the unexpected. And we learned to deal with guest expectations that soared like never before, with 'Anything but Ordinary' deliverables.

were effectively used. As an urban beach resort, we had always catered to a mix of corporates and leisure. We witnessed a transition from only leisure in the past couple of years to Corporate and Residential conferences as travel opened up and more corporates started moving out and away from the 'Work from Home concept.' Hotel occupancy sustained itself close to a full house on most days. Banquets on auspicious wedding dates were fully occupied, with guests coming back to attend weddings in large numbers. 2022 has given us the much-needed assurance that we could see a much more promising 2023.

Learnings from the pandemic: Our team started introspecting at better operational efficiencies. For us, managers,

The business expectation in 2023: The Park Visakhapatnam, blessed with its location, with vast sea-facing landscaped lawns with direct access to the beach, is an ideal destination in itself for both leisure and business travellers. Leisure travel is an important facet of our industry, especially for our hotel. They cover up for the lack of corporate travel during holidays and long weekends. Further, leisure travel also gives rise to Destination Weddings for us. Guests who have earlier visited our hotel on holidays have now started using us for weddings in their family or friend circles. Wedding is a big market for us; this segment will only get stronger and larger in the coming years.



Satish Kumar
General Manager, The St. Regis Goa Resort

The year 2022 so far: The year 2022 overall has been remarkable. We celebrated milestones every month in terms of revenue, and till now has been a great year for the resort. With a sense of revenge tourism, we had many new domestic travellers visiting us for the

first time. Since most international destinations were just about opening up post-pandemic, business from Indian tourists to our property was extremely high. Another milestone this year was the iconic re-branding of our property as the first St. Regis resort in India. The St. Regis Goa Resort offers a place where guests can renew and appreciate what is truly important.

What we learned from the pandemic was what we needed to learn for a long time. While companies traditionally think about needing to build trust in employees over time, the pandemic turned that model upside down. The best companies should have thought about building trust; they started with the full trust bucket. The pandemic has provided a unique opportunity, born out of necessity, for all of us to innovate. We are now looking to bring that creativity into 2023 and beyond. Strong internal communications keep employees informed and engaged, especially in uncertain times. During the pandemic, I spoke more often and openly with staff than they ever had before. That transparency created an employee experience that got people through crisis and provided the basis for regular communication linked to strong employee engagement.

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Learnings from the pandemic: Agility, Innovation, and Resilience have been my key learnings through the pandemic.

The business expectation in 2023: Although the share of inbound has gone down, we are seeing international guests, majorly from the UK, Kazakhstan, and Russia, revisiting us. Yes, there is a difference in revenues due to the lower volume of inbound travellers. Early 2023 looks extremely promising on books for MICE and leisure travellers. Our inbound operators have already reached out to us to get the best rates and packages for the festive season of 2023.





Shrikant Wakharkar
General Manager, Hyatt Regency Delhi

The year 2022 so far: After the Omicron wave in Jan-Feb 2022, we expected the business to revive slowly. However, we were initially taken aback by how promptly the business bounced back to normalcy, and there has been no looking back. Hyatt Regency

stringent restrictions and have institutionalised strict protocols to secure the safety of our guests. The pandemic pushed us to re-strategise our vision and benchmarks. It has prompted us to look at cleanliness and hygiene with a magnifying glass so that we do not leave any stone unturned in creating a memorable and safe experience for our guests.

The business expectation in 2023: The next year looks very promising for us as, due to the relaxed norms post-pandemic, people are back to spending in a big way. International travel is just about beginning to open, and there will be an extensive movement to the capital owing to India's presidency over G20 events for the next year, where the country will host over 200 meetings at 56 locations. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit will commence in New Delhi in 2023. Our industry is on the cusp of a revolution. We are about to embark on our golden period, and the hospitality sector in India is poised for really big things in the future. Various events are being planned or are already being held in numerous destinations across the country, which has resulted in an uptick in occupancy levels comparable to pre-COVID times.

Delhi hosted numerous weddings and conferences in 2022.

Learnings from the pandemic: A key takeaway has been to embrace the new 'normal.' The focus has entirely shifted to ensuring a seamless, safe, and hygienic stay at the hotel. In the past two years, we have learned how to operate with



Frans Westraadt
General Manager, Six Senses Fort Barwara

The year 2022 so far: It was still challenging for us as international travel didn't come back as predicted before; however, domestic tourism has boomed in certain segments, and I believe it will even do better in 2023.

We all had to be creative and think outside the box to get good business, as suddenly, the inbound business disappeared entirely. We were extremely dependable on domestic tourism, which helped many of us during the pandemic. We now realise that domestic tourism is just as important as inbound tourism to sustain India's tourism business.

The business expectation in 2023: We need to drive the domestic business even harder now, as many are traveling out of India for another holiday season. I hope the visa issues we face get resolved soon for the inbound travel to return to pre-pandemic levels. Inbound travellers make a big difference in the revenues of hotel properties like ours, as they usually have more spending power per person due to the strong US and Euro against the Indian Rupee.

Learnings from the pandemic:



Vinod Tripathi
General Manager, Hotel Sayaji Bhopal

The year 2022 so far: The luxury hospitality players in Central India are betting big on the corporate world and destination weddings. The current period has been a great period for restaurants, banquets, and room business

Learnings from the pandemic: The pandemic has taught us to prioritise tasks, solve problems fast, communicate effectively, remain humble, keep calm and maintain a positive attitude during stressful times.

Business expectations in 2023: The hospitality sector's recovery is due to revenge travel and a surge in business trips, including MICE events. We are contemplating focusing on domestic tourism. Our major target is the huge Indian market comprising corporates, weddings, and domestic travellers. With business bouncing back to normalcy, we have great expectations regarding room occupancy and food and beverage next year. The Indian market is faring well, and we hope for better occupancy than in the current period. We are anticipating V-shape recovery for the hospitality sector. Weddings with huge gatherings are in place, and we are quite positive for the next financial year.

since there was a robust growth in table turnover, banquet, and room occupancy as compared to the 2019-2020 fiscal year.



Binay Thakur

Associate VP, Pride Hotels and General Manager, Pride Plaza Hotel, Kolkata

The year 2022 so far: Our hospitality group is going ahead by 20 per cent in terms of revenue in the current period as compared to pre-COVID times. Things have started looking up since November this year. The demand for occupancy has increased, and the

survive in tough times with low occupancy and revenue. During the pandemic, our property formed the staycation ground for COVID patients discharged from the hospital. Today's absence of inbound travellers makes little difference in the revenue of luxury property.

Business expectations in 2023: There has been a surge in domestic travel filling the void created by lack of inbound travellers. We are looking at revenue growth of 20 per cent next year. As of now, the domestic travel movement is at an all-time high. Leisure tourism is yet to pick up in the country in the coming year. Till now, leisure travel is up by 20 per cent. Kolkata prides itself on having two huge, state-of-the-art, state government-owned convention centres, including Vishwa Bangla Mela Prangan and Vishwa Bangla Convention Centre. MICE and domestic travel are the two segments that will go great guns in the future. Medical tourism has picked up steam in Kolkata, with a steady rush of medical tourists from Nepal and Bangladesh.

projects that kicked off during the pandemic period have been successful in the year.

Learnings from the pandemic: We have learned to



Kumar Shobhan

General Manager, Hyatt Regency Kolkata

The year 2022 so far: The current year was replete with a plethora of hope and promises. A lot has happened in the last couple of years. We were optimistic about this year's advent, but the Omicron wave came in. Although the year began on a positive

note, with the outbreak of the COVID variant, the business shifted to the year-end. The variant came at a jet speed and receded quickly. From April onwards, our group witnessed growth in business at all levels. Destination weddings began happening, and fine dining outlets were full, occupancy levels began rising, and happy faces were again in our hotel lobby. Having said this, the hospitality sector was not fully geared up for the business to bounce back since things happened all of a sudden. At the same time, human capital was not at its optimum level. But we were determined to provide our guests with perfect accommodation and a luxury dining experience. Soon, the hiring process began on our property, and we were once again back

on our path with immense customer satisfaction and clocking robust revenue.

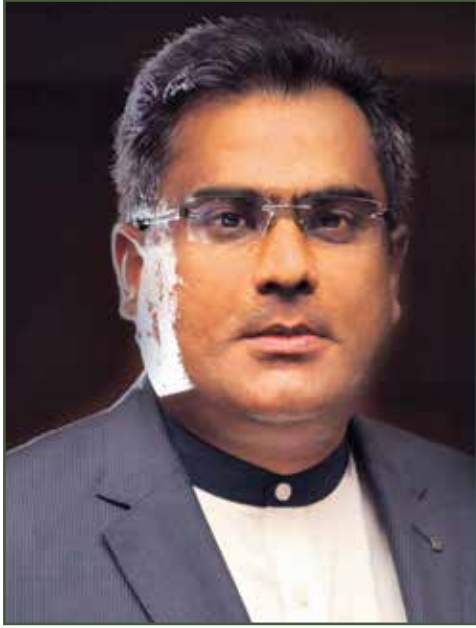
Learnings from the pandemic: The pandemic has been a great lesson for the hospitality world. Be it in the field of customer satisfaction, revenue generation, cost savings, the satisfaction of employees, and keeping with the hygiene level, we have learned a lot, and we do not want to come across this phase again. We have stressed on ways for efficient managing of our business and scouting for new avenues of business. We have looked into areas of cost management without hampering the satisfaction of our guests. A lot of training has been imparted to our teams. We have emerged quick and agile in our approach.

Business expectations in 2023: In the context of domestic inbound tourists, the figures have surpassed 2019. It will take more time for global inbound travel to pick up. The leisure travel business needs to kick off soon since this brings revenue to hotel rooms and the hospitality industry. We have managed to mitigate the losses incurred owing to the absence of inbound travellers through our active approach to enticing domestic tourists. Leisure travel has begun to grow but has yet to cater to our expectations. Kolkata is not a destination for leisure travellers like Dharamshala or Goa. The city has emerged as a hub for MICE travel, and business is generated from MICE agents. It serves as a gateway to the Eastern zone of India and South-East Asian countries at a distance of three hours of flight duration. The trend is commendable, and travel sentiments are back.

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Hyatt Regency Kolkata



Rajib Roy Choudhury

Senior General Manager, Vedic Village Spa Resort

The year 2022 so far: The year 2022 made way for the survival of the fittest with clear-cut strategies of pricing, serviceability, hygiene, adapting and adopting of technology, identifying alternate market segments as compared to laid-down segments, and cost control

strategies to ensure that surviving bottom lines have fared well and are afloat. The management of our resort has incorporated all these strategies that have contributed to a robust turnaround. As a resort, we have witnessed the far-reaching effects of revenge travel. Revenge dining has marked a positive revenue curve in which the overall average room rate (ARR) is up by 8 per cent and average per cover (APC) has risen by 11 per cent based on year-over-year. With the corporate segment opening up for travel in the current year, corporate events like meetings and conferences are surging ahead. Incentives, including corporate picnics, rewards, and recognitions, have resulted in formidable growth. Wedding segments have been an added benefit for a luxury resort like us that has witnessed a pre-COVID growth of 4 per cent annually. Since our resort specialises in wellness, it has recorded around 12 per cent post-pandemic growth in the wellness segment, which indicates the growing interest across the globe.

Learnings from the pandemic: The pandemic has been a learning phase for the hospitality sector. Mobile technology is a powerful tool and not just a perk. Technology helps to keep things clean, like touchless tech applications, while smart technology is smart for business. Reliable internet forms the backbone of all actions. We have realised that family is of prime significance for all individuals. We have learned to develop hobbies, stress on personal health and hygiene, and we need to be multi-skilled. It is essential to be frugal, keeping an eye on cost awareness without

compromising on standards. Customer relationship management is another area that can be looked upon. The pandemic has taught us to keep healthy relations with all our customers from far and near. We have to maintain our bottom line so that if we cannot achieve the desired target; the profit is maintained. Rainy day projects like training, property upgradation, spring cleaning, and staff engagement activities have to be tackled. The lack of inbound travellers is making a difference in the revenue of our property, but the commendable growth in domestic travel has kept the revenue ticking. There is a pent-up wedding demand that has come as a respite for the lack of much-needed inbound traffic.

Business expectations in 2023: The best is yet to come for the hospitality sector, and we are confident of returning to our pre-COVID conditions from the second quarter of 2023. Things will go at a fast pace in the hospitality sector with the demand soaring up in all segments of travel in the next year. The year 2023 will be the best time for the hospitality industry ever since the pandemic has set in. Be it in the realm of leisure, corporate, weddings or MICE travel, the demand will multiply by segments and will touch the glorious era of pre-COVID times. The wedding segment will witness a growth of around 50 per cent and will emerge as one of the major sources of revenue. The demand for weekend travel is here to stay. These days, luxury hotels have emerged as tourist destinations where new-age travellers want to put their legs up, relax and devote quality time with their families sharing memorable moments.

Most countries are lifting their visa restrictions, and flight frequencies have increased. We are looking for more inbound tourist footfalls in Kolkata that would translate into transits, wellness, and travel series. The concept of wellness has caught the imagination of travellers in the post-pandemic era.

We look forward to robust growth in the coming year that will redefine our environment-friendly resort in a new light. There will be a greater number of corporate events, conventions, sporting events, and film events at our resort in times to come. Nearly half-an-hour drive from Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport, our luxury resort is all set to emerge as the leading award-winning Wellness resort that will cater to a wide range of interests and demands.



Manas Banerjee

General Manager, Radisson Blu Hotel Indore

The year 2022 so far: The winds of change started blowing in the hospitality sector in the second quarter of 2022. The current year marked a period of growth for the hospitality sector, and we have observed the growth curve moving upward in the year's second quarter.

Learnings from the pandemic: The pandemic has made us plan well in advance, invest in areas that promise high returns, focus on empathy, training, flexibility, and wellness, and manage delivery with limited resources. The hospitality industry no longer depends on inbound travellers for its revenue growth. There is less dependency on inbound travellers since we have generated new avenues. An alternate source of business has been generated among domestic tourists that have made up for the absence of inbound travellers. Pilgrim and leisure travel have paved the way for a robust recovery. All these travel segments have witnessed strong growth in the last quarter of the current year.

Business expectations in 2023: The New Year looks promising for us, with the Central government laying strong emphasis on tier-II cities of India. Pilgrim and leisure travel will move on its growth path, and the year ahead looks fabulous for us.



Punish B Sharma

Vice President – Operations, Meluha -The Fern, Powai

The year 2022 so far: The start of 2022 was not good for us as corporate travel had not yet started. People were working from home, and corporate travel was minimal. As the situation became normal, business started picking up in the first quarter of

the financial year. The second quarter in Mumbai is normally not so great for the hotel industry as the monsoon steps in. However, if we compare the numbers, it is still better. The business has improved considerably in the last quarter, and we have witnessed good occupancy levels and increased ARR's. Though the beginning was different from our expectations, the last quarter has been reasonably good.

Learnings from the pandemic: Each calamity teaches us something new. I have been in the hospitality industry for around three decades. I have never witnessed such a situation. The

hotels were empty, there were no guests, and it was very hard to survive. Fortunately, we are part of a big national chain, so some businesses kept trickling in. That is how we could survive. One of the biggest lessons of the pandemic was how to cut operational costs without compromising on the guest's experience. Our engineering department, along with housekeeping and other departments, did a stellar job; even the kitchen came up with revised menus to cut costs. The pandemic also taught us the importance of health and hygiene. We elevated our hygiene standards to another level, boosting guests' and the staff's confidence because people were generally wary of working or staying in closed environments.

The business expectation in 2023: As I mentioned earlier, the quarter has been good in terms of occupancy, the ARR's are also climbing up, and we are very optimistic about 2023. Travelling across all sectors has begun, which augurs well for the hospitality industry. The MICE segment is one area that has to pick up for increased bottom lines. The marriage segment is doing well. People are again flocking to banquet halls to organise their marriages. The other areas like exhibitions and conferences should pick up more in the coming year as that is one area still needing improvement. The worst is over for the hospitality industry, and the coming year will bring more cheers for the industry.



Anurag Mathur

General Manager, Sayaji Raipur

The year 2022 so far: Since we can all return to work, 2022 has been wonderful. As things return to normal as they were before, business picks up. And we anticipate the company will grow by a factor of two in the coming year.

Learnings from the pandemic: One of the most important lessons I took away from COVID-19 as a general manager was the value of our guest's health and wellness. Visitors are more concerned with their health and overall well-being in the post-pandemic setting. High hygiene standards are the new standard, but it's

also important to pay attention to psychological health. Our basics included yoga, meditation, spiritual classes, pilates, Tai Chi, and other similar exercises. To be more inclusive, we have now expanded our menu to include more vegetarian options and a vegan menu.

The business expectation in 2023: By incorporating new travel trends into its ecosystem and making them more accessible to the public, the travel and tourism sector is evolving into the future. One of the fastest-expanding industries is MICE. The MICE industry's future appears promising, as shifting patterns show that this sector is steadily returning as the global economy has begun to improve. The demand for exhibits, meetings, and events has increased due to the economy's improvement.

Domestic leisure travel is robust, on the one hand. While numbers have increased since the country's November decision to suspend its restriction on foreign immigration, there is still a long way to go in terms of international leisure and business travel. As people look to maximise their investments in pricey long-distance travel, we will see an increase in the blending of work and leisure travel.

Connecting travel partners with new opportunities

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Getting on the responsible LUXURY hospitality wheel



The pandemic has made all of us aware of our health. Hence, the demand is up for a healthy living. Aimed to propagate wellness therapies across the country, Vedic Village Spa Resort's wellness centre is a one-of-a-kind in the eastern belt of India that promises to cure a wide array of health ailments with its wellness therapies.

Swaati Chaudhury

C OVID-19 has impacted the health of people in a huge way and in the post-pandemic world, health complications are on the rise. For luxury-seekers battling health disorders and interested to take a short break away from the hustle and bustle of city life, the best option is to head to a luxury resort replete with a complete wellness centre based on Ayurveda, Naturopathy and yoga. Vedic Village Spa Resort sprawling over 13 acres of area on the outskirts of Kolkata has transformed its Sanjeeva Wellness Centre into Vedic Wellness Ayurveda and Naturopathy on August 1, this year.

The newly opened wellness centre spreads over a 6,000 sq. ft. area and provides an extensive range of therapies in the realm of Ayurveda, Naturopathy and wellness. Armed with an Ayurvedic physician and yoga specialist, Vedic Wellness focuses on natural ways of healing by treating the major causes of symptoms. According to Rajib Roy Choudhury, Senior General Manager, Vedic Village Spa Resort, "We are a luxury resort with a prominent presence in wellness. The post-COVID world is witnessing a surge in health and psychological disorders among individuals. Based on the works of Charaka Samhita, we thought of coming up with health solutions in the streams of Ayurveda and Naturopathy that will benefit one and all. The resort nestles in the midst of a plethora of medicinal herbs that are essential for Ayurvedic treatment. In an attempt to offer a respite from health problems, the idea of opening Vedic Wellness Ayurveda and Naturopathy came to our mind."

The wellness centre has a steady stream of patients coming from global destinations. Roy Choudhury further said, "We have patients

travelling from faraway Brazil, the United Kingdom, the United States and Bangladesh affected with joint pain, liver ailments, skin disease and post-COVID complications. There are Ayurvedic physicians prescribing medicines and diet charts for patients. We are trying to provide luxury hospitality with a focus on health awareness. We intend to keep the resort in close communication with nature. Our responsibility lies in propagating sound health. We aspire to remain with nature along with all state-of-the-art facilities in the vertical of luxury hospitality." The resort enjoys the distinction of being a well-known MICE, wellness and leisure destination with an array of activities. Plans are on the cards to go for expansion in the future.



The Ayurvedic therapies on offer include Abhyangam (full body massage with herbal oils), Shirodhara (slowly dripping medicated oils on the forehead), Patra Pinda Swedam (body massage with fomentation), Udvartanam (skin massaging with dry herbal

powders) Navarahizhi (massage to rejuvenate the body) and Rasayani. Dr. Chandra Prabha, Naturopath, Vedic Wellness said, "The most popular form of Ayurvedic treatment is Rasayani which forms one of the best ways to get into the effectiveness of Ayurveda and comprises Abhyangam, Patra Pinda Swedam and Shirodhara." A 90-minute session of Rasayani comes for Rs 7899, Shirodhara by a single therapist is pegged at Rs 4999 and Abhyangam is tagged at Rs 3799.

When it comes to Naturopathy, colon hydrotherapy is the most sought-after therapy at the wellness centre. It is a natural way to cleanse the colon, ward off constipation, and step up the bowel movement of the body. The process also helps in better absorption of nutrients and reduces bloating and weight. Dr. Chandra Prabha further said, "For those down with colitis, bloating, constipation and metabolic disorders like asthma and obesity, colon hydrotherapy is the preferred choice since it is hygienic, safe and painless. A 40-minute session of colon hydrotherapy is priced at Rs 2500. Naturopathy day sessions like Shatkriya include nasal cleaning, eye wash and throat cleaning.

Wellness therapies include Swedish massage, aromatherapy massage, Aloe fruit body wrap, Dead Sea mineral mud wrap, et al. Vedic Wellness has spacious rooms for all treatment therapies. The Hydrotherapy room has facilities for arm and foot baths, hip baths and spinal baths. Dr. Chandra Prabha added, "We go for arm and foot baths for those affected with migraine and asthma. While those suffering from urinary incontinence and menstrual disorders, we advise them to take a hip bath. Spinal bath is recommended for paralytic patients and those with mental irritation and depression."



PLAN A TRIP TO MP AND INDULGE IN AN EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME!

Let's have a small tour of the incredible Madhya Pradesh

Some destinations are immutable. They grow on you slowly but their magnetism is eternal. Welcome to Madhya Pradesh, home to the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Bhimbetka, Sanchi, and Khajuraho, the equally famous medieval townships of Mandu and Orchha, which house matchless forts, palaces and temples. The vast plateau of Madhya Pradesh is dotted with the spectacular Satpura and Vindhya mountain ranges, verdant valleys and life-giving rivers like Narmada, Shipra, Betwa, Chambal, Ken and Sone. Situated at the mounting height, the state's most verdant charm, Pachmarhi is the most pristine among the hill resorts in the country.

The state also has many holy cities like Ujjain, Omkareshwar, Maheshwar, Maihar, Chitrakoot and Amarkantak, which attract millions of pilgrims from all over the world. As the heart of incredible India is decked with numerous wildlife hotspots that include 11 national parks and 24 wildlife sanctuaries, the state that is also known as the 'Tiger State of India' also gained the tags of 'Leopard State,' 'Vulture State,' 'Ghadiyal State,' and 'Wolf State.' This is just a small introduction. Madhya Pradesh offers much more than just heritage sites for tourists to explore, including activity-filled tourist destinations, tribal culture, adventure activities, camping, water sports,



natural scenic beauty, wildlife, spiritual, food, rural and wellness destinations. The state is also a hub to experience amazing arts and crafts that give tourists a lifetime memory by taking home some unique keepsakes to cherish.

Madhya Pradesh Tourism (MPT) brought together gram stays, farm stays and homestays as a safe and culturally rich stay option under rural tourism, which was also praised on the international stage. Rural tourism is slowly gaining popularity among travellers and why not? Exploring rural destinations can help to know the traditional roots of a state!

Away from the hustle and bustle of the city, tourists explore the village mud houses, taste simple yet delicious meals and enjoy the splendid natural and unpolluted surroundings to soak in the rural culture. MPTB was also felicitated on an international stage for its rural tourism and safe tourism for women projects. The local community is involved in tourism activities including high-class lodging and boarding facilities, local food, folk music and cultural activities, rural sports, local art and crafts and skill development in the youth. This initiative is not only giving new experiences to tourists but also benefits the local community by generating employment.

Madhya Pradesh has also become the hub of 'film shooting' and a good number of filmmakers are coming to shoot their films. The government is promoting film tourism in a big way by providing subsidies and all permissions and clearances through a single-window online system. Till now, more than 150 projects, including feature films, TV serials/Series, TVCs and Reality Shows, have been shot in Madhya Pradesh.

The state also has a treat in store for solo female travellers who are free-spirited. This vibrant state offers destinations where travelling alone is not just comfortable but one can also get to taste freedom and fun without fear. The heart of the country, Madhya Pradesh,

also has plenty to offer tourists who grow weary of routine holiday itineraries and want to experience some adventure activities. For those who love adventure, the state conducts a variety of thrilling and soft adventure activities. From river rafting, mountaineering, jungle safari, heritage walks to food walks, there is something for everyone. MPTB's adventure department has introduced various adventure activities to attract tourists, including jungle safari, off-road luxury car rally, cycling activity in the tiger reserve, camping, tree camping and gypsy camping at Satpura National Park. Tourists can experience stargazing, bonfire, and dusk drive, swimming, riverside jungle trail with bird watching and tribal cuisine with a barbecue in the jungles of Satpura.



The state offers many activities including windsurfing, water parasailing, water zorbing, jet-skiing, speed boats ride, cruise boats ride, sky diving, paramotoring, banana boat ride, hot-air balloon ride, zip line, yoga camp, wellness and spa, etc.

Madhya Pradesh is a paradise for wildlife enthusiasts and the best way to discover national parks and wildlife sanctuaries is by opting for a safari ride. When you visit the heart of incredible India, try different safari experiences offered at various sites. Balloon safari in Bandhavgarh, elephant safari in Kanha, boat safari in Satpura and Chambal and jeep safari at all national parks of Madhya Pradesh.

This is just a small introduction. If you want to know more about this state, then visit the heart of incredible India, Madhya Pradesh. They are eager to welcome you!

Innovation and Automation with Amadeus Solutions

In their mission to provide cutting-edge solutions to the travel industry, Amadeus' suite of products has introduced a suite of new products and critical features to better enable the travel ecosystem. In a recent press event in New Delhi, officials from Amadeus displayed their latest offerings to the travel sector. The focus of the event was to demonstrate and display the power of automation to optimise productivity and maximise profits.

Vartik Sethi

Rakesh Bansal, CEO, Amadeus Indian Subcontinent, kick-started the event and set the tone of the Delhi Road Show. He shared a brief on how Amadeus products can help improve performance and productivity. The lineup included an interesting range of products and solutions, including productivity suite, market triggers, smart alerts, automatic ticket changers, notifications and various other important offerings. Amadeus has been the leading company that innovates in the travel technology space and continues to build solutions for the travel market.

"Our solutions are built keeping the traveller in mind that help the travel consultants serve the needs of the traveller. Today's traveller is informed, aware in terms of what they want, how and at what price. Our job is to empower you with tools and technology to serve travellers in a comprehensive manner," said Bansal.

The event was designed to interact and engage with travel agencies and keep them up to speed with the latest innovations and facilitating automation with its suite of products and solutions that can help them unlock new revenue opportunities, deliver better value, help optimise performance, maximise productivity, enhance efficiency, reduce costs and access a wide range of dynamic content, all in one place. Swati Bhatia, Head of Products and Solutions, Amadeus India, shared the agenda of the event. The event focused on three core areas:



▲ Rakesh Bansal

World of New Content

Bhatia shared a glimpse of the new and innovative features of Amadeus' existing offering selling platform. The tech-giant is leading innovation into exploring NDC (New distribution Capacity) and revolutionising the travel-tech space. Through live demos and a brilliant showcase of products, Bhatia explained how the products are making it simple for the travel consultant to maximise profits by optimising efficiency.

"Airlines use different IT systems and complex setups that can mean significant delay and accessing data. Our solutions fetch this data in a fraction of time where the consultant gets the content they need faster. NDC requires significant investments and Amadeus is driving the NDC programme with our robust technology, making sure the benefits are delivered across the industry." said Bhatia. Showcasing the stellar suite of products and solutions like, Amadeus Selling Platform Connect, Amadeus E-Tickets & EMDs, Amadeus Ancillary & Merchandising Services, Amadeus Web Services and Amadeus Check My Trip, the event aimed to empower the travel

consultants and offer a world of new content and reap its benefits.

The driving motivation is to offer a variety of filters, gadgets and customisation to make it simple, efficient and easy a task for the travel partners and consultants. With a host of integrations and compatibilities, the products are solely focussed on a critical yet rewarding task - to make travel tech simple. Another brand new feature is the NDC sales report that can further be analysed and downloaded by the consultant.

Automation tools for enhanced customer service

This segment enabled travel consultants to get acquainted with the portfolio of Amadeus Efficiency Enhancers like the Amadeus Productivity Suite: Amadeus Master Pricer, Amadeus Fare Families, Amadeus Dynamic Travel Documents, Amadeus Travel Alerts Notifier and Amadeus Remote Ticketing Solution to increase customer satisfaction, profitability and enhance customer relations. The host of content at one place makes it an excellent tool for customer services. Ranging from vivid seat maps in live mode with characteristics, fare families, and lounge access, the platform makes for premium excellent customer relations.

Cost Optimisation and Profit Maximisation

Under this segment, the agents were introduced to the Amadeus Ticket Changer, Amadeus Offers, Amadeus Robotics (Amadeus Auto HX Cleaner, Remote Ticketing Solution) that help save manual efforts and errors, Amadeus reports to monitor sales, cancellation, refunds and unused tickets, Mid and Back Office System (CashX). Amadeus' non-air content promised a solid integration of hotel properties and other Amadeus enhancers.

Amadeus Road Show aims to, thus, share and empower travel agents to bring a host of content at one place, along with excellent end-to-end servicing and integrations. The content is dynamic and customised, and ensures zero losses, maximum efficiency and seamless services.



A Call to Arms Rethinking Indian ADVENTURE Tourism



India has provisions for varied and diverse forms of adventure tourism opportunities. The segment has been acquiring recognition within the country and is being considered to be one of the highest foreign exchange earners in the future. Here is my account of why Indian adventure tourism must rethink its influence as an industry.

Samir Nicholas Patham

Standing proudly in the north, running along the border covering over 5000 km, lies the Himalayan range, one of the greatest natural wonders with the highest peaks on the planet. In the same breath, surrounded on all fronts, extends a vast coastline measuring over 7,000 km, with incredible geographic and natural biodiversity. From dense lush forests covering more than 300,000 sq km seems to the other extreme of desert habitats, a network of rivers running through the entire country, India is truly blessed with one of the most diverse and varied natural resources in the world. With such a plethora of biodiversity, one would imagine India claiming the status of a world leader in the adventure tourism industry in the global economy. Sadly, this isn't so.

In 2021, the market size of tourism worldwide was estimated at approximately 1.31 trillion US dollars. In comparison, the travel and tourism sector in India contributed around 5.8 per cent to the total GDP of the country. However, with respect to Adventure Tourism, the story is very different, as it makes up a very small subset of this contribution.

The age-old cry pertaining to the lack of government support should and cannot be used as an acceptable excuse any longer. One thing that stands out prominently in top industries is the operational excellence models these companies follow. Interestingly, it's not the 'Price-Point' that drives business, but the quality of the experience and the strict adherence to safety with an aim to ensure zero per cent accidents. Correspondingly, if this comes at a price, then customers are willing to pay it as their safety is assured.

In India, the driver for business appears to be determined more by pricing. The cheaper the Adventure Travel service offered, the better



▲ Samir Nicholas Patham

the chances of scooping up the market. This approach may actually show tangible results in the short run but invariably ends up crippling the stability of the industry by making small little compromises in the operational model, be it salaries, safety or long-term sustainability. This is a call to change the attitude industries usually have towards running the Adventure business from a volume-based 'snatch and grab' approach, to focusing on creating an ecosystem with quality and safety as the metrics.

The thought of doing activities like Paragliding and Sky Diving is immediately

regarded with tremendous skepticism by the people of India. It's sad to see the market perception in our own country, nevertheless what it is in the international market.

Over the last few years, the market is not just restricted to young, budget backpackers who haggle over prices. There is a tangible paradigm shift in the audience aspiring to take up Adventure Travel, especially post-COVID. Now people want to do a lot more with their vacation than just go on a cruise or shop at the Dubai malls. The desire to have a 'Life Altering Experience,' be it diving into the depths of the ocean or climbing to the top of mountains, is driving this change. This is even reflected in the entertainment industry, with outdoor documentaries such as 14 Peaks on Netflix gaining popularity. Recently, even Bollywood jumped on the bandwagon with the release of 'Uunchai', a movie about four senior friends (Amitabh Bachchan, Anupam Kher and Boman Irani) who undertake an epic odyssey to the Everest Base Camp.

In simple words, people's attitudes must change. By focusing on premium services, the need to ensure safety protocols and safeguards are also very important. In a country known for operational excellence in various other manufacturing and service industry verticals, the same must be translated into the Adventure Travel sector. In order to get engaged in adventure tourism, it is vital for the individuals to acquire efficient training in terms of the activities that they plan to get engaged in. This will enable us as a nation to attract a much more mature audience as well as create a long-term sustainable approach to Adventure Tourism.

About the Author: Samir Nicholas Patham is the Director of Adventure Pulse, which specialises in promoting Adventure Sports in the domain of mountaineering.

This winter, head to these Magnificent Hill Stations of Maharashtra

Maharashtra is abundantly blessed with the scenic natural beauty of hilly ranges which spread across the topography. These extensive ranges are home to some of the stunning hill stations, some of which are offbeat hidden beauties, each having a charm of its own. These lesser-known hill stations in Maharashtra offer breathtaking views of splendid valleys and tranquil and refreshing breaks. Plan a trip to these enchanting hill stations to escape the hustle and bustle of your dreary life and unwind in the lap of nature.

Team TTJ

Bhimashankar: A dual destination for pilgrimage and wildlife

Surrounded by lush rainforests in the Sahyadri range near Pune, it is one of the



picturesque and pristine hill stations in the State. Enshrouded with dense forest and thick foliage of trees, it offers breathtaking views of the green valleys and the two serene lakes of Devi and Hanuman. The hill station is home to one of the 12 Jyotirlinga shrines in India, making it a prominent pilgrimage centre. It is said that Lord Shiva resided here in the

form of Bhima to kill the demon Tripurasura. Hence, the site surrounding the Jyotirlinga is called Bhimshankar.

Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary here is known for its abundance of flora and fauna.

It is a heaven for nature lovers as it provides many trekking, hiking, and rock-climbing opportunities since a plethora of forts and ruins bounds it. Places like Padargad, Shivneri, Kothaligad, and Siddhagad are perfect trekking points here.

Best time to visit:

The best months to visit are October, November, December, January, February, and March. Bhimashankar is well connected to all the major cities. It is located about 100 km from Pune and

223 km from Mumbai. MTDC Bhimashankar Resort offers a comfortable stay at affordable rates.

Tapola: For that back to nature experience

A quaint hamlet near Mahabaleshwar, Tapola, is known for its mesmerising scenic beauty. With its magnificent lake, lush greenery, and seasonal waterfalls, it is known as the 'mini-Kashmir' of West India. The main attraction here is the Shiv Sagar Lake, which serves as a reservoir for the Koyana dam, which is one of the biggest dams in the State.



Adventure enthusiasts can enjoy water sports like swimming, boating, and kayaking. One can climb or trek up forts like Vasota, Pratapgad, or Valour Fort. Nature lovers can enter the jungle and observe native wildlife, birds, and insects. Koyna Wildlife Sanctuary, a World Heritage site, is closely located. During the monsoon, it is covered in a blanket of lush greenery peppered with pretty wildflowers, giving a surreal experience. It is also known for its Gerbera farms and strawberry fields.

Best time to visit: The best time to visit is from June to March. From Mahabaleshwar, one can take public transport buses or jeeps to Tapola. MTDC Holiday Resort Mahabaleshwar and Tapola Agro Tourism are good-to-stay options.

Amboli: One of the top Eco Spots of Maharashtra

Titled the 'Mahabaleshwar of the Konkan,' this tranquil and exquisite hill station extends



a bird's-eye view of the Konkan coast. This paradise is home to beautiful waterfalls such as Bada Dabdaba, the big waterfall, Amboli Falls, Shirgaonkar Falls, Mahadev Falls, and Nagata Falls. Besides enjoying bathing in waterfalls, one can participate in various water sports activities.

Other attractions include Maruti Mandir, DurgDhakoba Kavlesh Point, Mahedevgad Point, and Shirgaonkar Point. These points offer panoramic views of the confluence of the Arabian Sea and the Konkan Coast. The local cuisine here is Malvani, which comprises spicy curries and fries. One can savour delectable Konkani-styled fish and Kokum juice as well.

Best time to visit: The best season to visit Amboli is during the monsoon between June and August. The Sawantwadi Railway Station is the closest station to Amboli, about 30 km away. One can stay at Whistling Woods, Green Valley Resort, near Amboli Check post.

Toranmal: Packed with a bounty of nature's best elements

One of the hidden gems of Maharashtra, Toranmal, is tucked away in the marvellous range of Satpura and is located in the Nandurbar district. It is enveloped with a perfect blend of the incredible nature's beauty, pristine setting, tinsel lake, and magnificent mountains. Some key attractions include the



splendid Yashwant Lake, which spans about 1.59 km, great Machhindranath caves, and stunning vantage points. The Coffee Garden, the Aawashbari Point, the Sunset Point, and Check Dam are must-visit attractions too.

Toranmal is ideal for adventure enthusiasts as it offers a wide range of adventure activities, such as trekking, camping, and kayaking. It is quite famous for sugarcane and its products. It predominantly serves delicious and spicy Maharashtrian cuisine. Delicacies made out of tur, maize, wheat, and jowar are quite famous here.

Best time to be here: The best time to visit Toranmal is from October to May. It is well connected to nearby places like Pune, Nasik, and Ahmednagar. Toranmal Hill resort is one of the best accommodation options available here.

Gaganbawda: The Cherrapunji of Maharashtra

Nestled in the Sahyadri range, it is one of Maharashtra's most pristine hill stations near Kolhapur. Nature lovers can revel in the abundant waterfalls, lush greenery, and exotic surroundings; this stunning place offers. It is known to receive the highest rainfall in all of Maharashtra. Hence, it is nicknamed the Cherrapunji of Maharashtra. Endowed with distinctive biodiversity, it is a haven for a wide variety of flora and fauna, including more than 120 species of birds, 50 species of butterflies, and 21 species of mammals. Each season presents a different and breathtaking view of the landscape.

This hill station is 55 km near Kolhapur and has a rich historical and mythological background. Among the nearby attractions is The Gagangad Fort, the headquarters of the Gaganbawda tehsil during the British era. Other interesting places to visit are the two



gorgeous Ghats, Kaul Ghat and Bhuibawada Ghat, which are ideal for hiking and scenic views.

Best time to visit: Monsoons and winters from July to March are the best time to visit this intriguing place. Gaganbavda is easily accessible, and state transport buses are available from Kolhapur. It is 288 km away from Pune and 450 km away from Mumbai. The nearest railway station is at Kolhapur, which is 55 km away. MTDC Resort Gaganbawada and Kolhatkar House are some of the best available accommodation options.

Panhala: Closely linked with the history of the Maratha Empire

Backed by the history of the Maratha Kingdom, Panhala is one of the charming



hill stations in the State. Only 18 km from Kolhapur, this hill station presents a kaleidoscopic view of the surrounding scenic hills. In the history of Panhala, Chhatrapati Shivaji is said to have spent more than 500 days here. The Panhala Fort, considered the largest of all Deccan forts, is a major tourist attraction. The Sajja Kothi (Punishment Cell) is the most interesting part of the fort, from where Chhatrapati Shivaji was known to make the heroic escape.

With its red soil and wholesome climate, the place has several ancient ruins and monuments, temples, forts, and caves, including Ambarkhana Fort or granary, which used to contain 25,000 khandis of corn. Given the abundant forts, the hill station is an ideal spot to indulge in trekking. One can join the trek that follows Shivaji's escape route to Vishalgad. The place provides an exquisite view of the grand valley for nature enthusiasts.

Best time to visit: One can visit this hill station any time as the climate is pleasant year-round. It is easily accessible via all modes of transport, be it air, rail, or road, owing to its proximity to Kolhapur. MTDC's Mahalaxmi Resort and Hotel Hill Top are good options to stay in.

TAAI and Kazakh Tourism cementing Tourism Bonds

The ninth largest country by area and the largest landlocked country in the world, Kazakhstan, is just a three and half hour flight from New Delhi to Almaty by Air Astana. The former Soviet Republic with a rapidly developing infrastructure combined with its proximity to India and a 14-day free visa-on-arrival policy for Indian citizens makes it a great option for the Indian traveller. TAAI, as the oldest and largest body of Indian travel professionals, sensed the mutual opportunity and entered into a series of initiatives with the Kazakh Tourism authorities to promote tourism between the two countries.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

Almaty is the city that comes first to mind when you think about Kazakhstan. Almaty is Kazakhstan's largest metropolis and served as the country's capital till 1997. Almaty is the country's cultural and trading hub set on the foothills of the Alatau mountains. The city boasts of modern infrastructure, hotels, sightseeing attractions, restaurants, and a vibrant nightlife, and is just an hour's drive from some of the most beautiful ski resorts.

Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) in association with Kazakh Tourism, hosted a two-night three-day destination workshop and orientation trip to Almaty for the TAAI leadership team comprising the Managing Committee, and office bearers of 20 TAAI Regional Chapters across India, along with members of the travel media.

The 75-strong delegation, which included many top names of the Indian travel agent community, was headed by Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI, and was hosted at the Swissôtel Wellness Resort Alatau Almaty.

A full day was dedicated to discussions and deliberations by the TAAI Managing Committee and Regional Chapter office bearers. Interactive sessions like 'Leaders in Making,' 'Meeting Members' Expectations,' 'Synergy with Stakeholders,' and 'Revenue and Resource Development,' were organised to seek and suggest new ideas, address concerns and chalk out the roadmap for future activities.

A tabletop networking session was organised by Kazakh Tourism and Visit Almaty at the Tourist Hub - Almaty, where the TAAI delegates had the opportunity to interact one-on-one with Kazakh DMCs, hoteliers, attractions, and tour operators. It was a great opportunity to understand the Kazakh tourism offerings and also sensitise the Kazakh business counterparts to the specific requirements and expectations of Indian clients, FIT, groups, or MICE.

A joint press conference was also organised at the Tourist Hub-Almaty by TAAI and Kazakh Tourism for the local Kazakh press and Indian Travel Media addressed by Daniel Serzhanuly, Director Kazakh Tourism, Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI, Jay Bhatia, Vice President, TAAI and Shreeram Patel, Hon. Treasurer, TAAI.

Speaking at the press conference, Daniel explained, "We have a real-time system integration with hotels throughout Kazakhstan and can clearly monitor the tourist arrivals. In 2019 we had 33,000 Indians visiting Kazakhstan. This year first half ending June, we received 7500 Indians and things are already looking up in the second half with our twice daily flights from New Delhi and our free VISA on arrival for

Indians. He further added, "He further added, "Currently, Kazakhstan has a very large inflow of tourists from Russia. However, we want to hedge our dependence on a single market and are now targeting business from multiple markets in Europe, GCC, and



Asia. Focus on the India market is a big step forward and their ongoing initiatives with TAAI over the last three years have given them a greater understanding of the Indian market."

Jyoti Mayal also elaborated on TAAI, "We are the mother association of all associations in India, established in 1951, with a membership base of 3000. 'Deal with Someone you can Trust' is our motto, and the message I bring to the travel industry of Kazakhstan is that you can deal with any TAAI member agent with full confidence." She further added that currently 5900 Indian students were studying in Kazakhstan and the potential existed for a lot more verticals to be explored.

Two MOUs were signed by TAAI with Kazakh Tourism and Visit Almaty, aimed at a free flow of information on the latest products, services, and developments and thus increasing tourist inflows for both countries.

The TAAI delegation also experienced Indian cuisine, as available in Almaty at the Silver Spoon Restaurant, Maharaja Indian Restaurant, and Spice Mantra. Delegates also had a taste of local Kazakh food and delicacies at Bahchesarai, Nash Dvor, and 'Auy!' the largest Yurt restaurant located at the Oi-Qaragai Mountain Resort. They also visited the Shymbulak Mountain Resort and the city landmarks of Almaty.





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Los Angeles Tourism India celebrates its third anniversary

During the Thanksgiving weekend, Los Angeles Tourism celebrated its third anniversary in India, along with a Thanksgiving dinner.

They had a specially curated sundowner session at the Soho House in Mumbai to acknowledge and express gratitude to their trade partners for their patience, resilience and supporting the city of Angels. Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Board is optimistic that the New year holds many positives toward travel recovery to the US and wishes everyone the very best for the holiday season.



New team takes over OTOAI

A new team has taken over the reins at the Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI). For the term 2022–2024, Riaz Munshi (N Chirag Travels) has been re-elected as the President, and Shravan Bhalla (Highflyer) is now the Vice-President. The General Secretary is Sidharth Khanna (Khanna Enterprises), while Monia Kapoor (Travel O Holidays) is the Joint Secretary. Gurdeep Singh Gujral (Gujral Tours and Travels) has been elected Treasurer.

The EC has retained its previous five members, which include Himanshu Patil (Kesari Tours), Ankush Nijhawan (Travel Boutique Online, a Unit of Lap Travels), Adl Abdul Karim (Creative Tours and Travels India), Arshdeep Anand (Hma Spectrum) and Mahendra Vakharia, (Pathfinders Holidays). Rohit Shorey (Destination Travel Service) has also been elected to the EC to complete the team for 2022-2024.

The nominated EC members include Romit Theophilus (GNTO) and Rohit Chopra / Randhir Gupta (Accor Hotels). Sanjay Datta (Airborne Holiday) was the Election Officer for the OTOAI Elections.

ETAA announces the new North India Chapter Team

Enterprising Travel Agents Association (ETAA) announced its new team for the North India chapter.

Taking on the baton from Sangeeta Manocha, Saurabh Tuteja is appointed as the new Chairman of the Enterprising Travel Agents Association (ETAA), North India Chapter. He gets elevated from the post of General Secretary. Sangeeta Manocha who will now serve as an advisor to ETAA. Saurabh shared that ETAA will be creating more opportunities for members to learn, network and empower. He added he will continue to contribute to the success and growth of the association.

To add more energy to ETAA, Punit Bhasin will now be Senior Vice Chairman, elevated from Vice Chairman and Dinesh Kumar will be the Vice Chairman, elevated from the post of the treasurer for North India chapter. Deepika Khanna is the new General Secretary also elevated from the post of membership head. Gaurav Arora and Praveen Ghai will continue their stint as Joint Secretaries. Manmeet Arora is a new entry to the committee and shall be heading memberships and events making the ETAA North India committee a formidable team.

ETAA North India chapter has been actively creating opportunities to bring members on one platform of knowledge sharing and supporting each other. They have aggressive plans in the coming months to arrange knowledge sessions, networking opportunities and Educational Trips to empower members.



Saurabh Tuteja
Chairman



Punit Bhasin
Senior Vice Chairman



Dinesh Kumar
Vice Chairman



Deepika Khanna
General Secretary



Gaurav Arora
Joint Secretary



Praveen Ghai
Joint Secretary



Manmeet Singh Arora
Committee Head-Membership
& Events



Sangeeta Manocha
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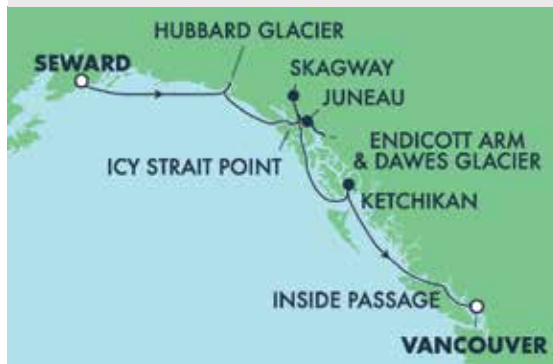
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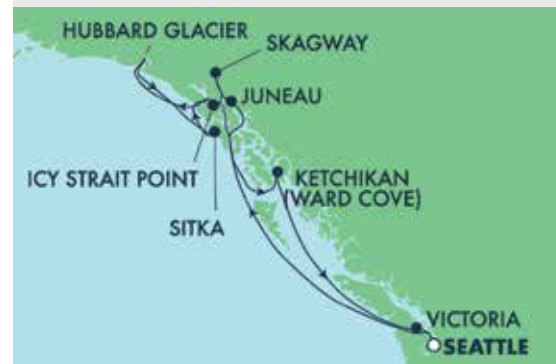
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