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Pune: + 91 20 4002 6960

Bengaluru: +91 80 4165 6324

Hyderabad: +91 40 4020 0301

Kolkata: +91 98301 19561

Nasik: +91 253 231 0044

Chennai: +91 44 4555 8582

Indore: +91 731 4911 374

New Delhi: +91 11 4151 5885

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Team Sampan

Editor & Publisher	:	Ravi Sharma
Consulting Editor	:	Gurjit Singh
Assistant Editor	:	Prashant Nayak
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Asst. Admin	:	Satish Kumar
Accountant	:	Amar Gupta
Circulation Manager	:	Sahil Nadeem
Marketing Executive	:	Eklavya Ujainwal
Email: info@sampanmedia.com		

Editorial and Marketing Office :
Sampan Media Pvt. Ltd. B-20, First Floor, Nangal Dewat, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi, 110070
Ph: 9560264443, ravisharma@sampanmedia.com

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Dear Friends,

The Travel and Tourism business gained full momentum in May and the same is expected in June. Even though costs are rising globally, travellers are keen on taking that holiday. Travel has become the way of life and people are not hesitating to direct their expenditure towards experiencing new adventures and exploring destinations.

In India, a large number of tourists are visiting states like Kashmir, Himachal, Uttarakhand, and the Northeast to enjoy the heady mix of snow-clad mountains and stay away from the summer heat in the other parts of the country. While the going is great for domestic tourism, the slow processing of visa applications, high airfares, and an expected increase in TCS keeps the spirit a bit low for outbound travel.

To keep you occupied, the TTJ June 2023 issue carries some interesting reading material on outbound travel and the Indian hospitality industry. So, while we wait for the upcoming rainy season, to capture different dimensions of travel,

Happy Reading!

Ravi Sharma

Ravi Sharma
ravisharma@sampanmedia.com



Editor's Desk


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Rail Europe enables travel agents to sell seat reservations to its customers holding Eurail or Interrail passes



Travel professionals and the whole industry willing to buy seat reservations for their customers holding a Eurail or Interrail pass are now able to do so via Rail Europe's API and B2B website.

The seat reservation that goes

with a pass is a valuable asset to its range of products and functionalities, as it offers travel professionals the necessary information to book tickets for their customers holding train passes with ease. With this feature, agencies can quickly determine whether an additional seat reservation purchase is

book seats with Trenitalia or SNCF for their customers using Interrail or Eurail passes can now do it with more flexibility and convenience so that their customers can enjoy an even more seamless journey experience and greater savings on their travel expenses.

required for specific routes (such as TGV, Lyria, Eurostar, Frecciarossa, among others), and if so, the associated cost. This new offer further enhances Rail Europe's commitment to providing the best possible travel experience and options for its customers.

The seat reservation in addition to a pass holder fare is available for a range of train services across Rail Europe's network. API partners and agencies willing to

Australia and Worldwide Travel appoints Global Destinations as its India Representative

Australia and Worldwide Travel, an Inbound Tour Operator and Destination Management company in Australia, with an intent to set foot and leverage growth potential in India, assigns Global Destinations the mandate to build sales and develop brand awareness in India.

The Australia and Worldwide Travel management team has years of experience and knowledge in inbound tourism. The company specializes in Australia and the South Pacific regions and was formed in April 2022 under the experienced Managing Partners, Leon Ellas and Ian D'Nazareth.

Sumaira Kabir, Country Manager India, based in Mumbai, heads up the operational team. She has an in-depth knowledge of Australia, having worked with Tourism Australia, India office.

Australia and Worldwide Travel specialize in tailor-made FIT itineraries, leisure groups, large group series, incentive travel and have a dedicated team in Sydney. Their highly experienced team design and operate itineraries that are guaranteed to deliver unique and memorable travel experiences for all travellers.

Sterling Holiday Resorts records revenue of INR 37,720 Lakhs, its best-ever annual performance

Sterling Holiday Resorts, a leisure hospitality brand, recorded its best-ever Annual Performance, during the financial year FY23. Sterling registered its highest EBITDA and PBT since inception on the back of its 9th consecutive profitable quarter.

Sterling recorded an EBITDA of INR 11,713 Lakhs for FY23 which is a 6x multiple over the pre-pandemic year of FY20 and a growth of 23 per cent Year-on-Year (YOY) over the previous year FY22. The EBITDA per cent stood at 31 per cent as against 7 per cent in FY20.

The company recorded a Turnover of INR 37,720 Lakhs for the financial year FY23. This represents a recovery of 37 per cent over the pre-pandemic levels and a growth of 39 per cent YOY.

Sterling's PBT for FY23 stood at INR 6,593 Lakhs, which was a growth of 51 per cent YOY and a swing of INR 11,252 Lakhs over the pre-pandemic year of FY20.

During FY23, Sterling added a total of 6 resorts: Madurai and Tiruvannamalai (in Tamilnadu), Kalimpong (West Bengal), Pench (Madhya Pradesh), Haridwar (Uttarakhand) and Chail (Himachal Pradesh) taking its portfolio to 40 resorts across 38 destinations. The company has a healthy pipeline and plans to open more resorts in the first quarter of FY24. The portfolio expansion shall primarily be on an asset-light model.



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San Francisco Travel Association launches \$6 million tourism campaign, Always San Francisco

The San Francisco Travel Association has launched its largest-ever global marketing and advertising campaign, “Always San Francisco,” to promote tourism to the city. The multi-million-dollar campaign targets leisure travellers and meeting planners in major domestic markets and key international markets. It is the destination marketing organization’s first campaign to include television advertising.

Celebrating the city’s bold, inviting, and playful ethos, the “Always San Francisco” campaign features iconic locations visitors already connect to San Francisco—the Golden Gate Bridge, cable cars, and Lombard Street—and ones that showcase the city’s vibrant neighborhoods and the diversity of visitor experiences. The campaign also includes cameos by San Franciscans, such as Lady Camden of RuPaul’s Drag Race fame, artist Sirron Norris, dancers from the acclaimed AXIS Dance Company, musicians Mae Powell and Michael O’Konis, Chinatown lion dancers, and chefs from Michelin-starred Angler, to represent the talent and inclusivity the city champions.



The Lanesborough partners with Netflix and Shondaland to launch London’s exclusive Queen Charlotte-themed afternoon tea



The Lanesborough, London has announced the latest in its innovative series of seasonal afternoon teas, inspired by Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story, created in partnership with Netflix and Shondaland. Available now, this limited-edition tea pays homage to the Regency era; a time of great revelling and high style, of elegant parties, balls, and grand dinners, with a contemporary twist.

Setting the scene, the Queen Charlotte Afternoon Tea takes place in The Lanesborough’s richly decorated dining room, naturally illuminated during the day by a domed glass roof while seductively aglow under softly lit chandeliers

in the evening. A Regency icon in the capital, beneath the original sky dome there is bas-relief artwork meticulously cast from 250 different mouldings, and Wedgwood china mounted on the walls, evoking a sense of Regency neo-classical grandeur.

Carefully crafted by The Lanesborough’s Head Pastry Chef, Salvatore Mungiovino, the menu pays tribute to the key characters in Queen Charlotte, in addition to ‘Lanesborough House’ as we now know it, remodelled in 1825 in the fashionable classical style by William Wilkins at the highpoint of Regency era and today, London’s quintessential Regency building.

TAAI announces Convention in Colombo from July 6 – 9, 2023, to host 500 delegates



Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) on the invitation from the Sri Lankan Tourism Promotion Board (SLTPB) will be holding its

67th Convention and Exhibition in Colombo, Sri Lanka from July 6 – 9, 2023 in association with the Sri Lanka Association of Inbound Tour Operators (SLAITO).

TAAI, which was supposed to host its Convention in Sri Lanka last year, is sticking to its commitment and taking a good-size delegation to the Island Country, which is recovering well from the economic crisis experienced last year. The Convention is themed ‘Transcending Borders – Transforming Lives’ and will have post tours, offering people a good chance to experience all that Sri Lanka has to offer.

It is mandatory for all delegates to register online for this Convention. TAAI will be handling the airline’s bookings and have negotiated the pricing with four partner airlines – Sri Lankan Airlines, Air India, IndiGo, and Air Vistara.

TAAI has made a request to the Hon. President of Sri Lanka for free visa for all Convention delegates. And further going for all Indian Tourists.

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Tamil Nadu

to leverage its **Tourism Strengths** to achieve more footfalls

According to the India Tourism Statistics 2022 report, Tamil Nadu ranked first in domestic tourist arrivals in 2021 and also reflected good numbers in international arrivals, albeit, there was a slump in inbound travel. With a great mix of ancient civilization, heritage, rich history and culture, grand temples, colorful festivals, vibrant art forms, urban disposition, and natural beauty, Tamil Nadu has carved a unique position for itself as one of India's most-visited destinations. The Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC) is optimistic about more tourist footfalls into the state as they are giving impetus to many tourism initiatives and laying special focus on improving infrastructures and amenities. In this exclusive interview with TTJ, Sandeep Nanduri, IAS, Director of Tourism and Managing Director, TTDC, shares how they are promoting Tamil Nadu in the domestic and international arena and the initiatives taken to strengthen the state to become a much more fascinating travel destination than it is.

Prashant Nayak

What kind of domestic and international footfalls has Tamil Nadu witnessed in the year 2022 until now? Has your State been able to take advantage of the potential of trends like revenge travel and staycations?

Tamil Nadu has experienced significant domestic and international footfalls in 2022, demonstrating the state's appeal as a tourist destination. The emergence of new trends like 'revenge travel' and 'staycations' has been leveraged effectively, alongside the rise in domestic tourism. To revive the travel industry and meet the evolving consumer behaviour, the Department of Tourism has redesigned the official website to enhance user-friendliness and responsiveness. The department has also actively promoted its offerings on

social media platforms through influencer marketing campaigns like Discover Tamil Nadu, staying ahead of the trend curve and creating awareness.

In 2021, Tamil Nadu contributed 17.02 per cent to India's domestic tourism, attracting over 115 million visitors and maintaining its top position in domestic tourism for six out of the past

seven years. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, domestic tourism in Tamil Nadu has shown a steady recovery, with visitor numbers reaching around 45 per cent of pre-pandemic levels in 2022.

In terms of international tourism, Tamil Nadu ranked second in Foreign Tourist Visits in 2021, with 1.23 million foreign visitors. The state's UNESCO World Heritage Sites, particularly the Group of Monuments at Mamallapuram, were popular among foreign tourists.

The Department of Tourism has focused on segmenting the target audience on digital platforms and organising engaging activities like WoW Tamil Nadu and MyTNMyHeritage. Additionally, the state has been proactive in uncovering hidden attractions and launching diverse tour packages to promote tourism.

What are the new experiences and initiatives your state has developed to leverage tourism in the state?

The Department of Tourism in Tamil Nadu has implemented various new experiences and initiatives to enhance tourism in the state. The objective of these initiatives is to provide standardised tourism services to visitors. Schemes have been launched to register operators in categories such as Bed and Breakfast Establishments, Caravan Tours, Adventure Tours, and Camping operators, ensuring high-quality services. Additionally, plans are underway to register travel agents and tour operators in the future.

The department is currently developing a comprehensive tourism policy, with a focus on launching services like Caravan tourism, Heli tourism, Ecotourism, and Plantation tourism. The department organises various events and festivals to showcase the state's culture and heritage, including the Indian Dance Festival, International Kite Festival, International Balloon Festival, and more.

To promote niche tourism, Tamil Nadu offers Medical and Wellness Tourism, Coastal tourism, Eco and Wildlife tourism, Heritage and Pilgrimage tourism, Caravan Tourism, and Culinary Tourism. Moreover, adventure and eco-camping sites are being established in off-beat destinations like Kolli Hills,



Jawadhu Hills, Yelagiri, Vathalmalai, Muthukuda, and Muthupettai.

What are your thoughts on the current inbound tourism? How is Tamil Nadu working to attract foreign tourists?

Tamil Nadu's tourism sector is focused on three key objectives: increasing international and domestic footfall, generating foreign exchange earnings, and providing world-class services for tourists. To achieve these goals and to showcase the state's tourism potential, Tamil Nadu Tourism participated in major events like ITB Berlin 2023, World Travel Mart London, International Balloon Festival in Mexico, and World Expo 2020 Dubai.

The Tourism Department showcases Tamil Nadu's cultural heritage and tourist attractions at international travel marts, where hoteliers, tour operators, and travel agents from the state actively participate. Roadshows and promotional events have also been organised to boost tourism globally. Furthermore, Tamil Nadu has great potential for medical tourism, with Chennai being the "Health capital of India". The state conducted a Medical Tourism Summit to connect key stakeholders in the industry across the globe.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Tamil Nadu ranked second in foreign tourist visits in 2021, with the Group of Monuments at Mamallapuram being the most visited heritage site among foreign tourists. The state continues to attract visitors from countries like the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada, and China.

Tamil Nadu Tourism participated in ITB Berlin this time. How was the response?

The response at ITB Berlin was positive, with the department holding B2B meetings with various stakeholders and receiving two awards at the PATWA

International Travel Awards. Following the event, a meeting was held with a delegation from the Czech Republic to explore collaboration opportunities, including B2B partnerships, tailor-made tour packages, cultural exchanges, and workshops on heritage monument management. Collaboration with the Czech Republic's Ministry of Culture and Tourism has further strengthened its global presence. These efforts aim to strengthen the collaboration between Tamil Nadu and the Czech Republic and increase tourism flow between the regions.

What are your marketing and communication strategies to promote tourism in Tamil Nadu in the forthcoming years?

To stay ahead of the trends and spread awareness of its services, the Tamil Nadu Tourism Department actively promotes its offerings on social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram through influencer marketing campaigns such as Discover Tamil Nadu. Meticulous segmentation is done to target specific audiences on the digital platform, and campaigns like WoW Tamil Nadu and MyTNMyHeritage are curated as engagement activities for the target audiences. Also, the Department has launched diverse and distinctive tour packages and user-interactive features as a part of promoting tourism from the marketing and communication strategies perspective.

How is your state working on responsible and sustainable tourism, which is now the focus of all kinds of tourism initiatives?

The Department of Tourism actively endeavours to develop sustainable tourism destinations in Tamil Nadu. For this, the department launched a "Tourism Destination Development Scheme" to facilitate the integrated and holistic development of the destinations. The Tourism Policy envisaging tourism development at destinations focusing

on economic, social, and environmental sustainability has been drafted. The Department of Tourism has taken a few effective measures in destinations like the Blue Flag Beach in Kovalam where the beach management committee has established facilities to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience, while efforts to maintain water quality and promote environmental education have been diligently carried out. The department has also taken a few measures in places like Mannavanur in Kodaikanal, and Kurusadai Island in the Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park.

To attract investment in the State, what are the tourism initiatives taken by your department?

Since the pandemic, travellers who have been largely confined to their homes for months have shifted their travel patterns to emphasise sustainability, health and wellness, and community-based tourism. Thus, to recover the tourism sector, the Department of Tourism has taken various initiatives by driving collaboration with various private networks. The state organised and participated in numerous travel marts, trade fairs, and exhibitions regionally and globally. The notable ones are the 2nd virtual edition of Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality E- Conclave, International Tourism Conclave and Travel Awards (ITCTA), Travel and Tourism Fair (TTF) Kolkata and Ahmedabad, World Travel Mart London, SATTE, India International Travel Mart Chennai and Indian International Trade Mart New Delhi.

Also, Tamil Nadu Tourism has developed a comprehensive draft tourism policy that offers several subsidies and incentives to projects in focus sectors as a measure to attract investments. These initiatives helped achieve the objective of boosting the developmental activities of the tourism department, which in turn, will reflect on the sector's economy with trade exchanges, new brand collaborations, and expanding the travel trade network.



Champagne Towers and Immersive Experiences to Woo Younger Cruisers

The cruise industry had its fair share of hardships during the tough times of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this was a time of great learning and self-introspection, resulting in a critical evaluation of trends, habits, and consumption patterns. The cruise lines are now back with a bang and the party has just begun.

Nishith Saxena

Champagne-fueled sail-away parties on deck may lack the usual glamour if you're sporting a facemask, but now you could do away with the mask and get a nice family photo clicked on that special day. Cruising is back and wow, what a way to re-establish that life on oceans is different, safe and most enjoyable on a luxury cruise ship.

Some people ask me, "What has changed onboard the ships post-pandemic?" My response is, "Cruise ships now have become "sanitary bubbles" with as much attention to preventing any infection from getting on board as to maintaining ultra-strict safety and health regimes onboard. Fundamentally, the cruise industry is the one product that can control its environment better than any other travel product in the world. Now, add to this the fun, multifarious activities, endless gourmet options, entertainment and spa, and you have a fantastic floating resort at sea."

Globally, the cruise industry is buoyant and excited as we see phenomenal growth in the next 10 years, with new cruise lines joining the business. The cruise industry still represents a very small percentage of holiday goers internationally, with about 31 million ocean-going cruise passengers estimated to sail in 2023. I believe that from here on the annual growth of ocean-going passengers is going to surpass all other forms of holiday goers for at least another decade.

Globally, many emerging trends spell a great future for the global cruise industry.

Immersive Experiences - Gone are the days when having a rock-climbing wall and a go-carting facility or a robotic waiter in the bar would impress travellers. Most cruise lines have gone beyond and have designed immersive experiences which could remain lingering in the memory for a longer period. Spending a night under the Antarctic sky, a 360 dining experience where the local food tingles the taste

buds and all four senses soak in the farm-to-the-fork story, experiencing the ocean life in a small submarine making the sublime distance between you and the under-water universe disappear.

Expedition Cruises – Expedition cruising has emerged as the most sought-after bucket-list travel experience. The trend is evident across all age groups as the number of passengers sailing on expedition cruises more than doubled from 2016 to 2022. Online search results for expedition cruise travel to Antarctica increased by 51 per cent in 2022 compared to 2019. In addition, in 2022, 137,000 cruise travellers sailed on expedition ships. Though this number is lower than in 2019 when 187,000 cruise travellers chose an expedition cruise, the 2022 expedition passenger volume was nearly 70 per cent higher than it was in 2016. The 2023-24 and 24-25 Antarctica season is expected to be the best ever in the last decade as there is more capacity and different types of ships offering expedition experiences in Antarctica. Add to this the expeditions to the Arctic, Svalbard, and Amazon and you have a year-round expedition market ready to boom.

Young Cruisers – Younger generations are the future of the cruise industry. 88 per cent of the millennials and 86 per cent of the Gen-X travellers who have cruised before with their family are expected to cruise again. Further, for those who are cruise virgins in Millennials and Gen-X, almost 73 per cent indicated in a CLIA survey report that they would like to take a cruise vacation. Not only globally but also in India, we're noticing the changing face of our cruise guests. Earlier, the longer the cruise, the higher would be the age of the guest, but now, we notice many guests between the age of 35-45 years are seeking longer itineraries and far-out destinations.

Cruise Capacity - The Global cruise capacity is estimated to grow 19 per cent to more than 7,46,000 lower berths from 2022 to 2028 which provides a great opportunity for traditional as well as newer source markets to focus on cruising and enjoy the benefits of a fantastic range of the safest, most engaging and value for money product line where service delivery remains the top priority for all stakeholder.

As a seller of travel products, if today any travel agency does not have a cruise on their menu, then they are ignoring one of the most consistent and promising segments and ingredients of their business mix.



About the Author: Nishith Saxena is the Founder and Director of Cruise Professionals LLP, which represents several premium and experiential cruise lines in India.

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ITC Hotels delivering superlative experiences backed by technology and workforce

ITC Hotels has always been the trendsetter in the market and has taken some incredible initiatives to keep up with the trends like sustainability, global perspective, and finding balance with the new consumer habits. Benita Sharma, Area Manager North, Luxury Hotels and General Manager – ITC Maurya, shares a few aspects of the brand that prides itself on moving with the times and serving its customers in the most modern, convenient, innovative, and efficient way possible.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Benita Sharma

At ITC Hotels, they understand that curated experiences are essential for guests across all generations. To cater to the unique preferences and travel habits of each guest, they employ a range of strategies that focus on customisation and personalisation. Importantly, they leverage technology to provide a more tailor-made experience for tier guests. They also have an app that guests can download to access hotel services and make reservations among other services. All the hotels also have active and dedicated social media handles for active engagement and all their social media posts are geo-tagged which helps them in tapping the right audience.

“All these factors enable our guests to effectively share any specific requirements directly both pre and post their stay with us and make requests as per their convenience. We monitor our social media platforms effectively to

track guest feedback and preferences, enabling us to quickly address any concerns or requests in real-time. We also have a loyalty program that provides benefits and rewards based on guest usage patterns, encouraging guests to return and providing us with valuable insights to further personalise their association with us,” says Benita.

With every new generation, hotels have the chance to adjust and tailor their services. At ITC Hotels, they have all the amenities and services tailored for families who travel together. They

ensure that the preferences of their guests are logged with them and include details such as dietary restrictions, room type preferences, preferred spa treatments and more. In addition to this, their teams are trained to recognise and respond to individual guest needs, ensuring that each guest has a curated journey with ITC Hotels. This includes everything from personalised greetings and welcome amenities to customising the in-room amenities as well.

Hotels are now battling to restore their staff complement to pre-pandemic levels. Short-staffed hotels are struggling to serve an influx of guests. “Like hardware isn’t quite complete without software, in the hospitality business, people are the backbone. While the hardware may be excellent, if this is not backed up by strong software (which includes people), it is a recipe for failure. We at ITC Hotels take pride in our people. We have retained talent during the pandemic.

With an upswing in business, we are well-prepped to handle the surge,” says Benita.

With over 115 hotels in 80 destinations across six distinct brands, ITC’s hotel group integrates India’s renowned tradition of hospitality and warmth, with globally benchmarked facilities and services. They have a well-crafted Learning and development team at each unit which focuses on training employees. These are specially curated need-based training. Employees are empowered with knowledge, skills, and ability. These skills collectively enable any employee to drive guest experience.

The hotel distribution landscape is anyway a bit complex. And over the past decade, there has been a lot of transformation on this front. Analysing their current business through different channels such as OTAs, Travel Agents, and Direct bookings, Benita says, “The industry has to be collaborative. All stakeholders, be it hotels, destination experts, OTAs, ground handlers, transport, and ticketing agents along with all other service providers, will need to work together to make the industry sustainable. The rise of the online tour operator has certainly disrupted the market to some extent, however, the importance of tour operators who are the destination experts can never be replaced by an OTA. While the inbound business, which is service/personalisation intensive as it requires language experts, guides, surface transfers, etc. is dependent on Tour operators, Domestic and corporate guests are preferring to book via OTAs. There is a share shift from Travel Agents to OTA. Airlines and hotels are both investing their time and effort on acquiring and retaining members which form a healthy part of direct guests.”

The company’s ethos of ‘Responsible Luxury’ is mirrored in all its properties. For ITC Hotels, Responsible Luxury is the ability to create authentic, indigenous experiences true to the soil the hotel stands on while protecting the environment and staying in harmony with the broader society.

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Holiday Moods Adventures launches portal for bespoke Polar itineraries

Holiday Moods Adventures (HMA), a Delhi-based, 26 years old experiential and adventure tour operating company, launched its B2B portal on April 28, 2023. Earlier, this year, Havila Kystruten Operations AS (Norway) appointed HMA as its cruise distributor in India. Tejbir Singh Anand, Managing Director, Holiday Moods Adventures, shares insights on the latest developments in the company.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Tejbir Singh Anand

Destination Management Companies are riding a new wave of business opportunities that have been created post the pandemic. Holiday Moods Adventures, one of India's pioneering DMCs, has generated some positive numbers this season and the coming quarters also look equally responsive. They take pride in offering unique immersive adventure tours, showcasing travel chronicles and inspiring journeys. They are actively curating journeys in the polar countries of Norway, Iceland, Greenland and Arctic Canada in the North Pole region and New Zealand and Antarctica in the South Pole region.

Holiday Moods Adventures believes in designing meaningful travel experiences in the travel supply chain. "Our trips are led by knowledgeable guides who are local experts on activities, food, history and culture. The philosophy revolves

around showcasing our destinations by stimulating your senses through exotic smells, delectable tastes and soulful sounds patronising slow travel, which will retain amazing memories. From expedition cruises to the Arctic and polar regions to the luxurious ships across seas. From the snow-clad peaks to big jungle cats on scenic wildlife safaris, taking blood-pumping treks high in the mountains, or simply inhaling pine-scented air on meditative forest walks, a bounty of outdoor travel itineraries is on offer. Holiday Moods Adventures stays committed to promoting personally curated handcrafted experiences staying loyal to the ethos of sustainability and eco-friendly tourism," shares

Tejbir.

An incomparable benefit of working with a DMC in any destination is its ability to navigate unexpected challenges. So, the travel agents/operators in India must understand this aspect. "There is no doubt that when you work with a DMC, the company helps you overcome challenges which can be overwhelming in the middle of the operations, particularly in a newer destination," points out Tejbir.

Holiday Moods Adventures uses multiple ways to reach out to the travel community in the country for promotions and partnerships. Tejbir says, "Our best ways to reach out to the travel community is through travel roadshows which are conducted throughout the year in the upcoming source markets like that of TTJ TRAVMART. For all outbound travel agents in India, we have launched a B2B portal on Polar countries where all travel

agents can register free on the specially curated portal, which will give access to their exclusive detailed itineraries and free download of unbranded flyers and brochures. Agents will have the ability to White Label with their branding and contact details, which means that they can directly send the quotation to their clients."

Giving more information on the portal, Tejbir adds, "The HMA portal is very user friendly and all an agent needs to do is register with their GST and PAN number details which, after due approval from HMA backend, will get access to the entire inventory."

The portal offers fixed departures packages, car Rentals for self-drive, bus tickets within Norway and Finland, a lot of options for activities in the Arctic region such as chasing Northern lights while dog sledding, reindeer sledding, snowmobiling as well as cruise sailings to Norway, Svalbard, Greenland, Iceland and Antarctica. Their offerings also include very exciting products such as an Air Cruise Expedition to Antarctica, the World's first Arctic Train in Norway, MV Quest Arctic Cruise Expedition which showcases polar bears, whales and a lot of other winter activities, a Luxury expedition cruise to Iceland and Greenland, etc.

The second half of 2023 will also be very exciting for HMA as they are building up on the South American countries, which again is a challenge for most of the travel agents and operators. "Being a far-flung destination with less awareness, I felt myself struggling to promote the same destinations. Very soon we will be launching best sellers of Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Peru to be followed by Colombia, Bolivia and Ecuador. We are also bringing in a boutique luxury cruise liner for Arctic and Antarctic journeys with all-inclusive services for the discerning traveller. So, we will have three luxury cruise liners with us, distributing their inventory in the Indian travel trade namely Havila Voyages Norway's coastal cruise, Antarctic 21 air cruise and the third name will be revealed very shortly as a pleasant surprise," informs Tejbir.

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Relationships and new connections, recipe for success

Auxilia Networks is a boutique tourism consultancy firm set up to provide value to agencies and organisations in overseas markets that want to enter the India market or expand their presence here, and to foster engagement between foreign and Indian trade entities. Over the years, Paramjit S. Bawa, Founder and Principal, Auxilia Networks, has built and grown a wide network of tourism contacts all across India and many other parts of the world, which he is now leveraging to make his business work.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Paramjit S. Bawa

Auxilia Networks has several verticals such as E-Learning, Representation, and Training along with Physical and Online workshops on making overseas professionals India-ready. They instruct on how to engage with Indian customers and businesses. They also have a Sports Consultancy division. Under the Representation vertical, they work with DMC partners in East and West Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. Auxilia also represents a prominent London-based e-learning platform, LVG Learning, and Networking, as well as Australian Attractions which is one of Australia's biggest tourism representation companies, with a portfolio of over 20 key Australian products and attractions, all of which they are promoting in India market.

In terms of DMC business last year vis-à-vis this year, Paramjit said that Auxilia did not conduct significant DMC business last year as they were still establishing their contracts with

partners and solidifying their networks and infrastructure. "This year's summer peak season has seen very healthy movements to our offered destinations like Hungary, Czechia, Austria, Croatia as well as Australia (both for groups and FIT). MICE and corporate groups have been particularly strong for us across all destinations. Forward bookings from July up to Diwali are also strong. I feel India outbound is spreading its wings to increasingly newer destinations (too many to name) that weren't that popular pre-COVID, and the outbound segment has never been busier," shares Paramjit.

After the pandemic, the travel landscape has changed considerably, and with it also the marketing and selling environment.

Today, often the customer has more knowledge than the agent about the destination they're looking at. On digital platforms where once travellers could book just flights and hotels, one can now curate entire multi-point itineraries. "AI is the next big challenge where one can generate a detailed itinerary within seconds. So, what will be the relevance of a conventional tour operator or a DMC? I believe today, we are more of trouble-shooters and fire-fighters rather than curators. This is because the dashmydash.coms of this world are great for arranging vouchers and even chalking out an itinerary at a great price. All is hunky dory - until something goes wrong. That's when travellers need someone to pick up their call and solve their crisis at 3 am. Or arrange some funds within minutes because their money was stolen. When you club these kinds of exclusive services with product knowledge and solid customer relationship skills, then you will always be in the game and be competitive viz-a-

viz online platforms and the like," opines Paramjit.

When asked what it takes for a DMC to stand out from others? "Reputation," responds Paramjit. DMCs who have been consistently present in a market with a generally good track record will always have an edge. In today's scenario where business has become so cut-throated and competitive, the DMC that offers the best price and some credit will also have an edge. Credit is the best or the worst thing depending on which side of the transaction fence one is sitting but what I am seeing is that it is becoming less prevalent than it used to be because no one knows for sure how financially sound anyone is after three years of COVID-induced devastation."

DMC work was not originally a priority for Auxilia Networks when they set up the business. E-learning and training were key focus areas and will continue to be. Paramjit explains, "We decided we could perhaps offer DMC services in destinations where there was a bit of a gap in the India market (like some of the East European ones) or in markets that I have personally been engaged and am familiar with since a long time (like Australia). The key was to pick our partners well, which happily we have been able to do. Now it's more of a consolidation mindset - not necessarily working in more markets, but getting better at what we are doing in terms of quality and new ideas. We are working on organic growth and in a phased manner, for example expanding the Auxilia team to other Indian cities."

On their marketing and promotion front, Paramjit says, "The real value is in the relationships and network that I have built over the years. This is what's helping Auxilia and its clients/partners to close business. B2B events and shows are another good way out. Currently, everyone is realising the cost-effectiveness and more importantly, the reach of social media and social network platforms. Also, a good smartphone with a long battery backup is critical."



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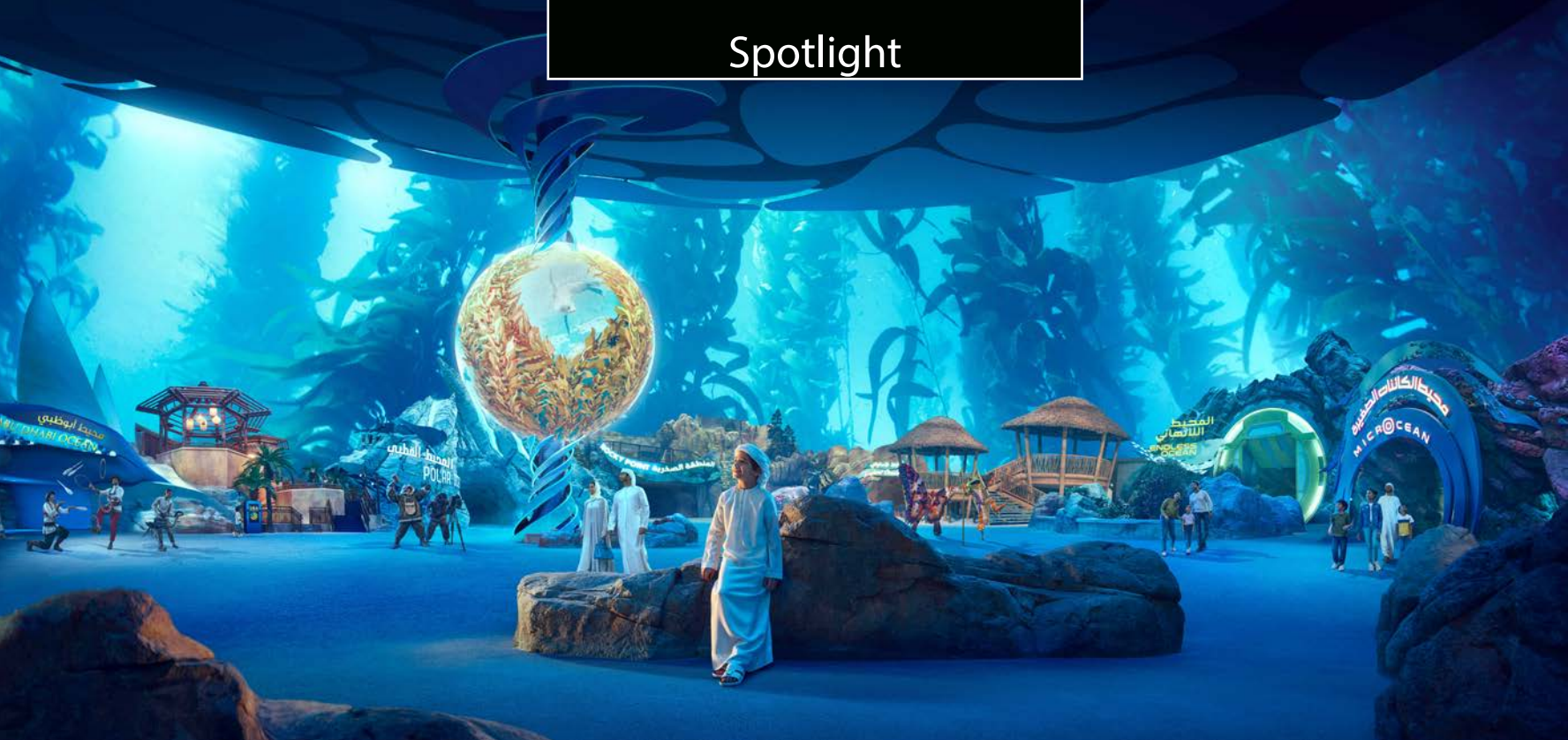
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SeaWorld Abu Dhabi

Unveiling the Exquisite Realms of Marine Marvels

Miral Group welcomes a remarkable addition to its collection of iconic attractions at Yas Island, introducing a marvel, unlike anything the world has witnessed before. In a comprehensive exploration, Travel Trade Journal delves into the mesmerising realms of the ‘epic ocean’ and highlights a compelling story of why a visit to Seaworld Abu Dhabi is an absolute imperative this summer.

Vartik Sethi

SeaWorld Abu Dhabi, the eagerly awaited marine life theme park situated on Yas Island, commenced its operations to the public on May 23, 2023. Following the park’s grand opening, Travel Trade Journal had the honour of embarking on a tour that unveiled the expansive 183,000-square-meter facility.

The Abu Dhabi rendition represents a significant milestone as the inaugural SeaWorld Park beyond the borders of the United States and the first new addition to the SeaWorld Parks and Entertainment family in thirty years. This extraordinary achievement is the result of a joint venture between Miral Group and SeaWorld Parks and Entertainment.

With meticulous attention to detail, the park presents a total of eight artfully constructed realms, each thoughtfully curated to deliver an unrivalled and enchanting interaction with the wonders of marine life.

Endlessly Mesmerising Immerse in the Splendours of Endless Ocean

Endless Ocean, the exquisite centerpiece of SeaWorld Abu Dhabi, stands as a testament to grandeur with its distinction as the world’s largest multi-species marine life aquarium. Spanning an astonishing expanse of 25 million litres of water, this extraordinary realm becomes the cherished abode of over 68,000 fascinating thalassic creatures. From its awe-inspiring “observation deck,” visitors are treated to a panoramic vista of the vibrant marine habitat, granting them an intimate encounter with the beauty and diversity that thrives beneath the surface. Furthermore, a captivating sea-base entices exploration, offering

enthraling encounters with an array of aquatic inhabitants, including sharks, rays, crabs, lobsters, octopuses, and an assortment of exquisite fish species. A mesmerising photo opportunity awaits within a remarkable glass tunnel, where a 360-degree view of the aquarium allows visitors to capture enchanting moments of gracefully gliding sharks, perpetuating memories of wonder and awe.

Gulf-tastic Odyssey Dive into the Aquatic Wonders of Ocean Realm

The expedition commences as the visitors are welcomed into the Abu Dhabi Ocean realm, a captivating gateway that imparts valuable knowledge about the marine ecosystem dwelling within the Arabian Gulf and the rich heritage of Bedouin pearl divers. Interactive touch pools beckon guests to engage with graceful rays, awe-inspiring sharks, and fascinating invertebrates, while local species of fish, majestic sea turtles, and gentle dugongs grace the realm with their presence. In addition to these remarkable encounters, the realm offers a plethora of enriching experiences, including lively entertainment shows, a vibrant souk brimming with cultural delights, and an array of dining options to ensure a truly satisfying visit.

Rescue, Research, and Care Discover the Vitality of Animal Care Center

At the heart of the park lies the focal point of immersive encounters, the One Ocean realm. Showcasing a plethora of captivating experiences, the centerpiece of this realm is the awe-inspiring One Epic Ocean Spectacular. This enthralling spectacle unfolds on a grand scale, with a mesmerising narrative brought to life on



a colossal 218-meter circular screen standing at an impressive height of 15 meters. The high-resolution 360-degree footage immerses visitors in a truly captivating visual journey.

Adding to the realm's allure, the Animal Care Center stands as a beacon of world-class animal welfare practices. Here, visitors are granted exclusive access to witness first-hand the exceptional care provided to the park's inhabitants. Accompanied by a team of esteemed experts, educators, and dedicated veterinarians, guests can gain valuable insights into the meticulous medical treatment and holistic well-being of the park's cherished animal residents. This invaluable opportunity allows for an engaging and educational experience, as any queries or concerns regarding animal welfare are expertly addressed by knowledgeable staff.

Unleash Your Inner Plankton

Journey into the MicroOcean Realm for an Enthralling Underwater Experience

Step into the shoes of plankton, a tiny creature, and be transported into the vast expanse of the ocean. As you traverse this realm, you will witness the awe-inspiring scale and diversity of marine life, as perceived through the lens of a humble plankton. This imaginative and immersive journey offers an extraordinary opportunity for young explorers to develop a profound appreciation for the vastness and interconnectedness of the world's oceans.

Within this realm, an assortment of exhilarating rides and educational experiments await, promising an enriching experience that resonates long after the visit to SeaWorld Abu Dhabi has concluded.

Interact with Sea Lions at Rocky Point

At Rocky Point, visitors are treated to a tranquil coastal experience reminiscent of the Pacific Northwest. The sight of sea lions lounging on rocky outcrops and playfully frolicking in the water mirrors their natural behavior, creating a serene ambiance. To further enhance the connection with these charismatic marine mammals, guests have the opportunity to participate in feeding sessions alongside California sea lions and harbor seals, fostering cherished memories that will endure.

In the Realm of Ice and Wonder

Explore the Dynamic Arctic Ecosystem at Polar Ocean

For a respite from sun-drenched adventures, the Polar Ocean realm invites visitors to immerse themselves in a cool and refreshing environment that faithfully replicates the dynamic Arctic ecosystem. Within this realm, an enchanting world unfolds, inhabited by playful sea otters that frolic in their natural habitat, captivating spectators with their joyful antics. The occasional appearances of walruses and seals further enhance the allure, providing delightful moments of interaction and observation.

Flamingos, Dolphins, and Thrills

Plunge into the Magestic Tropical Ocean Realm

In the Tropical Ocean realm, an immersive journey awaits as visitors are transported to a sun-soaked paradise beneath the gentle glow of natural sunlight. The allure of the realm is amplified by a captivating flamingo point, where the flamboyant avian residents captivate onlookers with their vibrant presence. A leisurely stroll leads guests to a grand 2,000-seat amphitheater, setting the stage for a truly exhilarating dolphin show. Here, 24 dolphins showcase their incredible agility and grace above and below the water's surface, leaving spectators in awe. Complementing this awe-inspiring spectacle is an underwater dining area, allowing guests to enjoy delectable cuisine while immersed in the captivating marine environment.

Notably, the Tropical Ocean realm also boasts the remarkable Manta Coaster, a thrilling attraction that pushes the boundaries of excitement. With the world's first zero-gravity flip-out and twisting double-down dive, this coaster offers an adrenaline-fueled adventure with an impressive 17 airtime moments. Undoubtedly the region's most thrilling attraction of its kind, the Manta Coaster ensures an unforgettable experience for thrill-seeking guests, adding an extra layer of excitement to the Tropical Ocean realm.

Countdown to Antarctica

Fascinating World of Penguins, Newest Realm to be Operational Soon

Anticipation builds as SeaWorld Abu Dhabi prepares to introduce the upcoming Antarctica realm, promising an extraordinary encounter with the beloved and charismatic penguins. This highly anticipated addition will offer a unique opportunity to come face-to-face with these adorable flightless birds, gaining insights into their fascinating lives and the challenges they overcome in their icy habitat. Immerse yourself in the wonder of Antarctica and embark on a remarkable educational journey that celebrates the resilience and beauty of these remarkable creatures.

Dubai

A Futuristic City
Embracing Sustainability
and Attracting Global
Investors

At a media roundtable held during the Arabian Travel Market 2023 in Dubai, Bader Ali Habib, Head of South Asia, Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET), shares how Dubai, 'City of the Future,' has established itself as a hub of innovation, investment opportunities, and smart living. Beyond its iconic skyline and luxurious amenities, Dubai's government has taken significant strides to create a comfortable and forward-thinking environment, encompassing both social and physical infrastructure.

Sonika Bohra



▲ Bader Ali Habib

Well known as the 'City of the Future,' Dubai is rightfully considered to be one of the most innovative, investor-friendly, and smartest destinations worldwide. It's not just sky-high buildings and luxurious amenities that attract investors to Dubai. The city's government has made strides to make a living in the city comfortable and forward-thinking, from social to physical infrastructure. Still, Dubai is striving to transform itself into a futuristic city with elements that come out of dreams and science fiction.

It is also the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE, and Ruler of Dubai to transform the destination into one of the world's leading metropolises and build it as a prominent international business, investment and tourism destination. On this futuristic vision envisioned by the royal family, Bader Ali Habib reiterates H.H. Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al

Maktoum's words, "We want to be the number one in the world, and we will continue to be the number one."

On these visionary thoughts for Dubai, Bader further adds, "I think that resonates in the way we operate our day-to-day lives. And I feel like that's the vision that we all have. We will continue pushing that, especially with the Dubai Economic Agenda D33 that was announced recently. We want to double the size of the economy. And from a tourism perspective, we want to be one of the top three cities in the world. And

I believe we have the roadmap for that. We have all the opportunities, all the right tools, the right people and the right vision to make that happen." Dubai Economic Agenda D33's goal of consolidating Dubai's status as one of the world's top three cities for travel and business and to double the size of the emirate's economy by 2033.

Moving forward, Dubai is sure to attract a greater number of people for work and leisure. It already is a regional connecting hub for millions of tourists and passengers. More than tourism, it is also about how the city is systematically improving its ways of attracting more people towards living a good life. For instance, a lot of Indians who have been to Dubai several times, now aspire for a golden visa to live there. They are ready to invest, move in with families and look forward to sending their children for further studies. Adding to this, Bader says, "I know so many people in my close circles, celebrities and business communities who want to shift to live here

while operating their businesses in India. And they have been very happy."

Dubai welcomed 4.67 million international overnight visitors in the first quarter of 2023, compared to 3.97 million tourists during the same period in 2022. In January - March 2022, 376,000 Indians visited Dubai, and in the same period in 2023, with 6,12,000 Indian visitors, Dubai surpassed the 565,000 visitor milestone set in January - March 2019.

"India has been the number one source market so far. We would like to continue with this trend as we see there are a lot more opportunities from the stopover segment. There are capacity constraints, but we have always been wired to think around opportunities rather than challenges. With stopovers, there are a lot more seat capacities that we can still bring into Dubai, be it one or two nights. Moving forward, this will eventually grow," shares Bader.

Dubai 2040 Urban Master Plan, which was recently announced, is the seventh development plan for the emirate since 1960. As Dubai shifts towards a more advanced, inclusive, long-term approach towards tourism, sustainability is becoming increasingly important as an opportunity and driving force for growth, as more and more travellers seek out sustainable destinations.

"The 2040 Urban Master Plan is to ensure that we have enough sustainable measures taken in Dubai. We want to make sure that there is enough green land in Dubai along with the beaches. For any destination to grow, one needs to build infrastructure, but there will always be questions asked about sustainability. Today, we do not promote single-plastic use. We don't have papers printed at our end. Government entities are encouraged to have digital signatures. Our key sustainable initiative is the Dubai Can campaign, which encourages the use of reusable bottles. So, with the Urban Plan, we are trying to become more sustainable right now. And the fact that we are hosting the COP28 reiterates the fact that by winning the bid, the global committee has faith in Dubai to make the difference," states Bader.

Bader emphasises the significance of sustainability as a critical challenge for the global tourism industry. With 2023 being UAE's Year of Sustainability and Dubai hosting COP28 from November 30 to December 12, 2023, sustainability lies at the heart of Dubai's strategy. Aligned with the vision of Dubai's visionary leadership to make the city the best place to visit, live, and work, Dubai has achieved significant milestones through the Dubai Sustainable Tourism (DST) initiative. The aim is to reduce the carbon footprint and foster a more responsible and inclusive tourism industry.

DST, a Cornerstone of Dubai's Strategy: Dubai's commitment to sustainability is embedded in its strategic vision. The DST initiative has played a crucial role in driving sustainable practices and positioning Dubai as a global leader in this area. DST aligns with the Dubai Economic Agenda 2033, which seeks to further consolidate Dubai's status as one of the top three global cities. Additionally, DST is aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals 2030, demonstrating Dubai's dedication to international sustainability targets.

Under the DST initiative, Dubai has launched several key initiatives that are transforming the tourism sector and promoting sustainable practices:

Carbon Calculator: The DST initiative incorporates a real-time carbon emission tracking mechanism, empowering hotels to monitor and effectively manage their energy consumption. This tool enables hotels to make data-driven decisions to reduce their carbon footprint and enhance energy efficiency.

19 Sustainability Requirements: To ensure the implementation of effective green practices, all hotels in Dubai are mandated to adhere to the 19 Sustainability Requirements. These requirements provide a comprehensive framework for sustainable operations, promoting environmental stewardship across the hospitality industry.

Dubai Can: Dubai Can, a citywide initiative, encourages both residents and visitors to utilise reusable bottles and refill them at designated water stations. Within a year, Dubai Can has made a significant impact by reducing the consumption of over 7 million 500 ml single-use plastic water bottles. Nearly 1,000 city stakeholders have become official partners of this movement, showcasing a collective commitment to sustainability.

Bader emphasises the critical importance of promoting sustainable tourism practices for the overall success of the industry. Travelers are increasingly conscious of their environmental impact and are actively seeking destinations that align with their values. To meet the evolving expectations of travellers, Dubai welcomes a more evolved, collaborative, inclusive, and long-term approach to sustainable growth. By embracing sustainable practices, we can cater to travellers who prioritise responsible and ethical tourism choices.

The hotel sector in Dubai saw a surge in performance during the first quarter of

2023. The hotel sector outperformed pre-pandemic levels across all other hospitality metrics. Dubai will further enhance its Gastronomy Always on Campaign as Dubai drives growth in the hospitality and F&B sector, focusing on the four pillars of diversity, value for money, authenticity, and experience.

The Dubai government, aligned with its goal, is expanding the number of attractions in the city and has opened many places recently that have helped enhance Dubai's appeal as one of the world's top leisure and business destinations. It is also banking on India, its biggest source market, to lap up its renewed tourism products and come back for more. India continues to prove crucial to Dubai's long-term tourism growth, with the Asian powerhouse consistently ranking among Dubai's leading business and leisure tourism source markets. Where India is concerned, Dubai will continue to showcase its offerings in various segments, including ecotourism, food tourism, wellness tourism, cruise tourism, golf tourism, sports tourism, and MICE and destination weddings.

"India is a huge country with 1.4 billion people and it is certainly a very big market to say that you have championed it. Besides, Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Kolkata, the tier 2 and tier 3 cities also have immense potential for us and there is an increased demand for family, honeymoon, sports and MICE travel. All these segments have emerged as massive feeder markets for Dubai. Now the destination is also connected with 22 cities in India, the latest being Bhubaneswar, which marks remarkable connectivity. Today, Dubai is just not a friendly destination but also an affordable and pocket-friendly destination for Indians," assures Bader.



New Zealand uniquely positioned to deliver a new generation of tourism

TRENZ, New Zealand's biggest international tourism business event returned to Ōtautahi Christchurch after 17 years. TRENZ 2023 ensured that New Zealand is ready and well-positioned on the world stage for tourism business. Rebecca Ingram, Chief Executive, Tourism Industry Aotearoa, in conversation with TTJ, provides insights into some thought-provoking perspectives on the New Zealand Tourism industry.

Sonika Bohra



▲ Rebecca Ingram

Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA) is the peak body for the tourism industry in Aotearoa New Zealand and has held this position for 70 years. TIA is presently deeply involved in discussions on recovery and what the future of tourism in New Zealand will look like.

Rebecca Ingram was appointed the Chief Executive at TIA in March 2022. Prior to this, she was with Tourism New Zealand (TNZ) for seven years, where she held various roles, including General Manager of New Zealand and Government Relations. About her current position, Rebecca says, "I feel an immense amount of privilege in being in this position, representing 1200 member organisations, from the very smallest tourism businesses to some of the largest listed companies, like Air New Zealand and Auckland Airport. 2022 has been extraordinary. When I took over the role, our borders were closed, then we rapidly opened them, and by August we were pretty much fully open."

She adds, "The return of international visitors has made a difference to many New Zealanders. Tourism is connected to so many parts of New Zealand's economy and communities. It has breathed life into their cities and regions

and enables tourism businesses to step back on the front foot. However, the level of tourism recovery varies by region and business."

Rebecca also reflected on the current state of play for tourism in New Zealand, and how things have changed since the pandemic. International visitor arrivals over the past few months in New Zealand are sitting at around 66 per cent of pre-COVID levels. The very strong initial recovery has plateaued, which is not unexpected. The key high-value holiday market has recovered more slowly, particularly the VFR and family group. Currently, there's been a lot of emphasis on attracting high-value visitors. The initial revenge travel surge has probably subsided and so now they are competing for the high-quality visitors that so many destinations also want. "Hence, in this context, keeping New Zealand on top of mind globally is critical," opines Rebecca.

While the overall recovery was encouraging, the recovery of tourism in New Zealand has not been similar in every region. "27 per cent of tourism respondents in our most recent survey say that their summer capacity was operating at more than 100 per cent of 2019 levels, with 22 per cent sitting at 76 to 90 per cent. Along with that, the

Workforce recovery has been a challenge as our most recent survey reveals that 56 per cent of tourism business are still recruiting, but also signals that many businesses are altering their offering to fit their new workforce levels," informs Rebecca.

Adding on, Rebecca mentions, "The future of tourism in New Zealand will not look like the past. The DNA of the industry is forever changed because of COVID, and it's my view that New Zealand is uniquely well-positioned to deliver a new generation of tourism. Tourism for good, tourism with net positive impact."

To foster regenerative tourism due to the changing traveller's preferences, 30 new Destination Management Plans (DMP) have come up and have been implemented across New Zealand to cater to region-specific wishes and needs.

TIA also leads the implementation of the industry's Tourism Sustainability Commitment, which aims to see every tourism business in New Zealand contributing positively to its people, environment, and economy. Rebecca also spoke about the 'Share the Aroha of Tourism' campaign, which aims to highlight a few sustainable stories to reignite pride in the tourism industry and celebrate what can easily go by completely unnoticed. "TIA's work partnering with over 100 tourism businesses to take their sustainability commitments into action further reinforces my belief that we're an industry embarking on transformation from the ground up," reiterates Rebecca.

TIA delivers a comprehensive and diverse range of industry events, including TRENZ, New Zealand Tourism Awards, regional tourism events and the Tourism Summit Aotearoa. TRENZ came to Christchurch after 17 years and it has truly reclaimed its position on the global map as a must-visit, play, and stay destination. Christchurch now has really come back as a city with a wonderful spirit and energy, 11 years on from the devastating earthquakes. With its rich cultural heritage, stunning landscapes, and world-class hospitality,

the city has reclaimed its place globally, beckoning travellers from far and wide to experience its many wonders.

Speaking about the importance and impact of TRENZ 2023, Rebecca says, "Tourism is a people's business. The ability to come together and have conversations about what is different, what New Zealand offers, and how we can meet the needs of our buyers, clients and customers is really at the heart of what makes TRENZ important. Then there is the business that gets done

at TRENZ and in the weeks following, which is material for the individual businesses, but also the communities in which they serve. And then there is the economic impact of the event itself for the host city that we are part of. Christchurch is estimating \$2.5 million worth of economic impact for the city as a result of hosting TRENZ. So there are many layers of impact from an event like TRENZ, and so we are delighted to be hosting it here. It's an important milestone for the industry and it will be momentum-building for tourism in New

Zealand."

TIA has the ambition, resources, and willingness to assist a greater number of visitors in exploring New Zealand. "New Zealand is an exceptionally unique destination. If you wish to embark on new and captivating experiences and indulge in scrumptious food, then this is the place to be. If you seek a vacation where you will stumble upon unexpected wonders, be awestruck by breathtaking views, then New Zealand is the perfect choice," concludes Rebecca.



New Zealand's **Hawke Bay** crowned **12th Great Wine Capital of the World**

Hawke's Bay joins global heavyweights such as Bordeaux, Bilbao and Napa Valley, as the newest Great Wine Capital of the world.

Team TTJ

Hawke's Bay has been named a Great Wine Capital of the world, setting it alongside eleven other prestigious wine regions such as Bordeaux (France), Napa Valley (USA), Bilbao (Spain) and Adelaide (Australia).

The bid was led by Hawke's Bay Tourism, on behalf of a working group that also included Hawke's Bay Wine Growers, Hastings District Council, Napier City Council, Hawke's Bay Airport and EIT/Te Pūkenga.

Admission to the Great Wine Capitals programme, as the 12th Capital worldwide, comes after a stringent selection process that looks at a region's wine-growing industry, its history, its wine tourism, educational opportunities, business, and travel, as well as the cities and region itself.

This new achievement gives Hawke's Bay a unique positioning in New Zealand and the world. The climate, unique soils and the innovation of so many talented individuals have come together to deliver an accolade the region wholeheartedly deserves. It is a true legacy for the region and will continue to deliver benefits to industry, education, business and tourism for the years to come. Becoming a Great Wine Capital will also give a significant boost to the region's post-cyclone recovery, particularly with the wine industry already generating an estimated \$300 million in



direct revenue to the Hawke's Bay economy and contributing \$156m to GDP.

Hawke's Bay produces top-quality wines that can stand tall with the greatest wine regions in the world, producing more than 40,000 tonnes of grapes and with more than 200 vineyards, 125 wine producers and more than 30 cellar doors.

The region also offers a wonderful tourism experience for those with a passion for the grape. Whether it's the allure of long vineyard lunches, bike tours between cellar doors or a chance to stock up your wine collection, Hawke's Bay has become a go-to destination for domestic and international visitors alike.

From Passion to Prominence Pranav Kapadia's

Entrepreneurial Journey in the Travel Industry



With a deep-rooted passion for travel inherited from his family, Pranav Kapadia, Founder, Global Destinations, embarked on a remarkable journey that led to the establishment of Global Destinations in 2008. Over the years, the company has grown to represent over 20 international clients and has built a reputation as a trustworthy and reliable partner in the travel sector. In this article, we delve into Kapadia's entrepreneurial journey, his approach to managing personal and professional life, and his perspectives on the importance of technology in the industry.

Vartik Sethi

AN INHERITED PASSION

In a recent interview, Pranav Kapadia, Founder, Global Destinations, shared his insights and experiences in the travel industry. Kapadia's love for travel can be traced back to his family's involvement in the industry. With his father and ancestors having worked in the travel trade, Kapadia's passion for exploration and his desire to create a career in the field were ignited from an early age. Starting his career with Lufthansa German Airline in 1989, Kapadia gained valuable experience in various airline roles until he founded Global Destinations in 2008. This marked the beginning of an extraordinary journey that has seen the company thrive and expand its clientele.

OVERCOMING FINANCIAL HURDLES

How Global Destinations Thrived as a Self-Funded Venture

Managing a successful travel organisation like Global Destinations comes with its challenges, particularly in maintaining a work-life balance. Kapadia considers his company as more than just a business venture; it is akin to a family member. The dedication and commitment he has towards the company have enabled its growth and reputation over the years. Kapadia's unwavering focus on professionalism and trustworthiness has positioned Global Destinations as a reliable partner for travel agents and clients alike.

The founder candidly discusses the financial hardships experienced in the early stages of building Global Destinations. Unlike the security of receiving a monthly salary, the unpredictable nature of entrepreneurship required Kapadia to carefully manage expenses and rely on the remaining funds for personal sustenance. Despite the challenges, he takes pride in establishing Global Destinations as a bootstrap company, built entirely on self-funded resources. He firmly asserts that professionalism has always been a core principle guiding his team and the overall operation of the company.

PIONEERING REPRESENTATION SERVICES

Kapadia's career in the travel industry commenced in 1989 with Lufthansa, marking the beginning of his professional endeavors in India. Prior to his foray into Global Destinations, he honed his skills through various roles in the airline sector until 2007. Drawing from this diverse background, he embarked on his entrepreneurial venture, laying the foundation for what would soon become a prominent representation company.

In the early years, Global Destinations faced the challenge of introducing the concept of representation to the travel industry, as it was a relatively novel idea at the time. Kapadia and his team strived to educate travel stakeholders about the value and significance of representation, distinct from traditional wholesalers and intermediaries. Through perseverance and a commitment to sales and marketing education, Global Destinations pioneered the concept of representation in India, eventually paving the way for other companies to follow suit.

Reminiscing the early days at Global Destinations, Kapadia shared, "We started really with two or three international partners, a very small office, less than 200 square feet, and a team of not more than four team members." However, through their dedication and strategic focus on destination management companies (DMCs), Global Destinations carved a niche in the market. They ventured into offbeat destinations, such as Latin America, New Zealand, and even Spain, which were relatively unexplored by Indian travellers at the time. This bold approach allowed Global Destinations to create unique travel itineraries, capitalising on emerging trends and changing traveller preferences.

Kapadia acknowledges the instrumental support he received from his friends and trade partners, emphasising the value of strong relationships. He attributes a significant portion of his success to the guidance and mentorship he received from seasoned professionals during his tenure at Lufthansa and Interglobe. Kapadia said, "I've been very, very fortunate to have partners in the trade who've given me guidance at every point in time." Their insights on running a business helped shape his entrepreneurial journey.

NOTEWORTHY MILESTONES

Throughout Global Destinations' journey, there have been several significant milestones that have shaped the company's growth. Kapadia highlights the initial focus on offbeat destinations like Latin America, New Zealand, and Spain, which were relatively unknown to Indian travellers at the time. By offering unique itineraries and promoting these destinations, Global Destinations successfully captured the interest of adventurous travellers. Additionally, securing partnerships with prominent accounts such as Tourism Fiji and Air New Zealand further elevated the company's profile and contributed to its success.

In 2011, the company's representation of a prominent and niche Destination Fiji, marked a significant achievement, solidifying its presence in this sector. Another notable milestone was securing the position of Air New Zealand's General Sales Agent (GSA) in India in 2016. This achievement further enhanced Global Destinations' portfolio, as they expanded beyond their initial focus on destination management companies.

To diversify its offerings, Global Destinations ventured

into the hospitality sector. Their strategic partnerships with renowned luxury hotel chains, including the Palladium Hotel Group in 2019, enabled them to explore new avenues and broaden their presence in the industry.

THRIVING AMIDST COMPETITION

Differentiation and Focus

Despite facing competition, Kapadia emphasises that the trustworthiness of Global Destinations sets them apart. "What I would honestly add to it also, while of course, there's a lot of competition and a lot of representation companies, I think what we've managed to build is really a trustworthy company," Kapadia added. With a focus on long-term partnerships and a commitment to ethical business practices, they have established a solid reputation within the industry. While experiencing inevitable changes in partnerships along the way, Kapadia recognises that such shifts are inherent to business dynamics and believes in embracing them as part of the journey.

Kapadia provides insights into the intensely competitive B2B trade market and shares his approach to standing out in the crowd. Instead of indulging in negative competition, he believes in highlighting the unique value propositions of each company and maintaining a focused strategy. Global Destinations successfully adopted a distinctive approach by appointing one product manager per represented company. Although this approach incurred additional expenses, it ensured a dedicated and specialised approach when engaging with trade partners. Additionally, Kapadia emphasizes that Global Destinations remains committed to being a B2B representation company, leveraging his expertise in the trade to deliver exceptional services.

Furthermore, Kapadia emphasises the significance of staying true to the core business model. Global Destinations remains focused on B2B representation services, refusing to dilute its expertise by venturing into B2C operations. He shared, "We are still 100 per cent B2B representation company. I think it's important to stick to your core business." This steadfast approach has allowed the company to maintain its professionalism and deliver exceptional services to trade partners.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Recognising the transformative role of technology, Kapadia underscores the importance of automation and online platforms in streamlining processes within the travel industry. Kapadia on his initial challenges with technology shared, "We've initially struggled to get the right CRM system in place, but now it allows us to understand our business and support key partners". While some trade partners have developed their own proprietary systems, Global Destinations invested significant efforts into implementing a tailored Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. This customised CRM allows for real-time data analysis, empowering the company to make informed decisions and provide prompt responses to trade partners. Furthermore, it enables the team to prioritise and nurture key relationships critical to the long-term success of the company.

TRUST, INTEGRITY, AND LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS

Key Principles of Pranav Kapadia's Leadership

Pranav Kapadia's entrepreneurial journey, as the Founder of Global Destinations, serves as a beacon of inspiration for aspiring entrepreneurs in the B2B trade market. By emphasising the value of relationships, maintaining professionalism, focusing on core competencies, and embracing technology, Kapadia has successfully navigated the challenges of entrepreneurship. Through his unwavering commitment to B2B representation and the delivery of professional services, he continues to lead Global Destinations towards a prosperous future in the dynamic and ever-evolving travel industry. Kapadia's insights provide a comprehensive roadmap for entrepreneurs seeking to thrive in the competitive B2B trade landscape.

Koh Tao

Thailand's Best-Kept Secret



Gurjit Singh Ahuja

Every year, lakhs of Indians throng Thailand, from the never-sleeping megapolis of Bangkok to the beaches of Pattaya, Hua Hin, Krabi, Phuket, and Koh Samui or the cool environs of Chiang Mai. The average Indian visitor to Thailand is comfortable with the sun, sea, sand, shopping, entertainment, and cultural glimpses and values that these cities offer.

So, when the name Koh Tao popped up, I had to look it up on Google to find out where I was headed and what did it have in store for me. Koh Tao or "Turtle Island" is a 21 sq km island on the western shore of the Gulf of Thailand and is a part of the Surat Thani Province, with a very small native population that survives primarily on fishing and tourism.

Koh Tao is not an average tourist destination. Just to get here, an international traveller has to change at least two to three flights and then catch a ferry with all their luggage in tow. Visitors come to Koh Tao with a purpose and a focus, and at the epicentre of it all lies, "Scuba Diving." Yes! Koh Tao is the scuba

diving capital of Thailand and in 2019, before the pandemic, Koh Tao received 6,00,000 visitors.

Tourism in Koh Tao primarily revolves around scuba diving. So, whether you want to learn the basics, be PADI certified, upgrade your skills for open waters, learn 'Free Diving', or perhaps train and qualify to become a Certified Instructor, you can choose from almost 64 certified scuba diving schools on the island.

As soon as you disembark from your ferry at the cruise terminal in Koh Tao, you see and feel the essence of this island. It's not fancy, it's not loud, and yes, definitely not gimmicky. In April, it was hot and humid but bearable. Thanks to the windy conditions, the sweat got wicked away fast to cool the body temperatures simultaneously. The sky was blue and the sea water was aquamarine.

My home base on the island was Ban's Diving Resort, a labour of love and dedication of Virat Asavachin, popularly called Mister Ban, and his enterprising wife Khun Rumleuk. The couple is credited jointly as the Thai pioneers who



Located a two-hour ride by a jet ferry from Koh Samui, lies the island of Koh Tao. Not much is known about this island by the average tourist, nor does it feature prominently on any tour operator's itinerary. However, this island is venerated to almost cultish proportions as the Scuba Diving capital of Thailand. I experienced first-hand the delights and wonders of this island paradise when I was recently invited by the Tourism Authority of Thailand to be a part of the "Spotlight Koh Tao 2023" festivities.

established scuba diving in Koh Tao and founded their business here 30 years ago. Today, 'Ban's Diving Resort' is the largest Thai-owned diving establishment on the island and is run like clockwork, by Khun Rumleuk after the passing of Mister Ban.

Throughout the island, you see a balance between man and nature. The emphasis is on striking an ecological balance without any overindulgence. The rooms at Bans Diving Resort are modern, functional, comfortable, and air-conditioned, with attached toilets and bathrooms. Emphasis on conservation can be seen; water conservation is encouraged, LED lights and Sensor switches save electricity, the use of solar energy panels adds to the energy needs, the locally available building material is used wherever possible and yes, the resort harvests its supply of rainwater.

The resort's many pools act as training grounds for initial diving lessons before the divers head to sea. It is a well-stocked dive shop that has world-class diving equipment and brands available for rent and purchase. The resort's two-storied restaurant is located bang on the

Sairee Beach and offers panoramic sea views, the daily breakfast served at the terrace dining hall is a perfect way to start your day in Koh Tao, not to mention the delicious and lavish spread of both local and international options.

The Sairee Beach is the longest and liveliest, almost two kilometres long. It is the most popular beach in Koh Tao as the sea here is shallow and that makes it popular among families. The Walking Street runs parallel to Sairee Beach, lined with massage parlours, accommodation options, diving schools, scuba gear shops, restaurants, bars, and souvenir shops, and this is where the action is.

An evening with friends at Charcoal Bay on the walking street was a great choice. I loved their cocktails and grilled delicacies. Also, the terrace dining experience in 'Baracudda' at Ban's is highly recommended. Great food, great ambiance, and great service and 'huge servings.'

Koh Tao has a great European visitor base and many love Indian food. The cuisine is now making inroads into the world of gastronomy given its spicy



complexity of flavours, combined with its richness of textures. We were happy to find Butter Chicken, Dal Makhani, Masala Chole, Naan, and Masala Chai at "High on Chai," an Indian restaurant at Koh Tao. So, all aspiring scuba divers from India have no problem finding vegetarian or non-vegetarian Indian food in Koh Tao.

COVID-19 was a below-the-belt hit for the travel industry, and Koh Tao was no exception. China was the biggest inbound market pre-COVID for Koh Tao and the impact of the absence of this market

was felt throughout the entirety of Koh Tao. So, in 2022 to kick off travel revival and promote Responsible Tourism and conservation efforts in Koh Tao, the first 'Spotlight Koh Tao' initiative was launched in 2022 under the stewardship of Khun Rumleuk who is also the President of the Koh Tao Tourism Association. Almost 100 local entrepreneurs and stakeholders are a part of this non-profit association.

2023 was the second year of this initiative. This year, the 'Spotlight Koh Tao-2023' was held in co-operation with the Tourism Authority of Thailand from April 07-09, 2023 in line with its 'Reborn the Nature' project and to drive forward its promotion of Responsible Tourism and Meaningful Travel experiences. The inaugural parade of almost 400 strong was led by Tanes Petsuwan, TAT Deputy Governor for International Marketing, Asia and the South Pacific, Khun Rumleuk, the senior officials of local administration, and eminent community members of Koh Tao.

In the first three months of 2023, Koh Tao received 1,29,000 visitors. It's time now for young and adventurous Indian travellers seeking the unusual and exciting to pack their bags for Koh Tao.



“ This year, we added two more activities, the Koh Tao Greenmarket, and a mini adventure and dive expo, showcasing environmentally friendly products and activities offered by diving operators, tour boats and diving equipment shops. Koh Tao Tourism Association is committed to promoting environmentally and socially responsible tourism towards sustainability on the island. Initiatives like fish aggregation were aimed at reducing the conflict between fishermen and divers. Tree plantation on the island is encouraged and also the importance of water harvesting and conservation initiatives is highlighted within the island community".



Rumleuk Assavachin
President, Koh Tao Tourism Association

“ 'Spotlight Koh Tao-2023' this year was held in co-operation with the Tourism Authority of Thailand in line with its 'Reborn the Nature' initiative and is a pilot project. Spotlight Koh Tao is a local initiative and TAT just acts as a consultant and advisor. The message to be sent out is that the island does not change for the visitors. Visitors need to adapt, honour, and respect the eco-sensitivity of the island. Today, out of the 64 certified diving schools on the island, 80 per cent are Thai owned and operate with expert British and German instructors. Koh Tao is a niche destination; it is not a mass market and not suitable for a big MICE event or a destination wedding. The resources and infrastructure do not permit that".



Tanes Petsuwan
Deputy Governor for International Marketing Communications
Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)

AAMAGHATI – An Oasis of Rustic Elegance and Understated Luxury

Ranthambore, the tiger haven of Rajasthan, is not only known for its famed striped resident, flora, fauna, and unique topography but also for the luxurious resorts that lie just outside the park limits. These unique, chain-owned, and standalone properties cater to the top echelons of wildlife enthusiasts and vacationers. Aamaghati is the latest addition to this exclusive club.



Gurjit Singh Ahuja

The newest entrant to the elite circle of luxury resorts serving Ranthambore, Aamaghati Wildlife Resort, welcomed its first guests in December 2022. The resort is situated just 5 minutes away from the main entry gates of the Ranthambore National Park. Aamaghati is a 52-key luxury property, spread over a sprawling eight acres of landscaped environs, offering unobstructed views of the Aravalli and the national park.

It took six years of conceptualisation, planning, designing, and construction to bring Aamaghati to its present form. The promoters were very clear about creating an unparalleled experience for their guests that spelled comfort, class, and service with an unobtrusive functional design that was distinct in its identity yet blended with the surroundings.

Eco-sensitivity was a key concern, and the promoters roped in New Delhi-based architects, Revathi and Vasant Kamath, who specialised in mud architecture and sustainability to work on their project. The result today speaks for itself. The resort's

walls are made of unbaked mud bricks that remain cool and have helped drastically reduce the carbon footprint. The walls are also plastered using a special clay and hay plaster and are then further adorned with hand-painted tribal motifs. Locally polished sandstone is used for flooring, as is the Bidsar Brown Marble used in the bathrooms, again sourced within Rajasthan. The roofs are all tiled using clay tiles from Gujarat and the ceilings are clad in bamboo matt sheeting sourced

from Meghalaya.

All the rooms have individual air-conditioning units instead of a central air-conditioning plant to cut down on electricity wastage and energy-efficient LED and sensor-based lights are used throughout the resort. Rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharging are integral to the resort's ecological efforts. A state-of-the-art sewage treatment plant has been established within the resort and treated





used water is used to recharge the groundwater.

The resort offers a variety of comfortable and spacious accommodation options ranging from 250 Sq. Ft - Evoke rooms, 650 sq. ft - Elegant rooms, 950 sq. ft - Legacy rooms and the two, 1900 Sq. Ft rooms, each of which is a signature suite- 'Jogi Mahal' and 'Hammir Mahal.'

"There's something for everyone at our resort," says Abhishek Hissaria, Owner, Aamaghati Resorts. He further adds, "Our guest rooms are designed with the tribal surroundings in mind, featuring unique jungle-themed design. Everything in the resort has significance to what's inside the Ranthambore National Park. Step outside your room and you will be immersed in the beauty of Ranthambore's Aravalli ranges. The entire resort is surrounded by a Fifteen feet high wall to keep any unwelcome wild guests away."

In addition to comfortable accommodations, the resort offers a range of activities for its guests to enjoy. Guests can tune in to traditional folk performances at the giant mango tree



amphitheatre, while sipping their evening tea or during their interaction at the delicious live kitchens. One cannot forget the ever-mandatory morning and evening safaris into the Ranthambore national park, of-course these need to be booked much in advance to avoid disappointment as safari slots fill up fast.

The resort's multi-cuisine restaurant 'Baradari' offers a diverse menu with something for everyone. This is where the daily breakfast and meals are served and is a perfect place to unwind and enjoy your sumptuous meal in the company of family and friends. The food quality is top, and the staff is ever-attentive and always smiling, eager to serve you.

Special mention to the Chefs at the resort for their culinary skills that amaze your palate, enjoy excellent- Papad-Mangodi ki Subzi, Kair-Sangri-Ki-Subzi, Ghatte-Ki-Subzi, Peeli-Daal-Tadka, and ultimate Laal-Maas at the buffet spread.

The Sri Sri Wellbeing Centre at Aamaghati Resort has a complete range

of exclusive relaxation therapies which will rejuvenate you, making you feel like a whole new person. The therapies are designed to relax your muscles and stimulate your senses, especially after the bumpy jungle safari. Please book your therapy slot in advance to avoid any last-moment disappointments.

It has been five months now since the resort went operational to welcome guests. "We have had a great response, and it is heartening to see our guests enjoy the resort and appreciate our efforts. We went into great detailing while putting everything together and it's rewarding to see the results," says Abhishek. He further informed, "Currently, we have been receiving guests from Delhi-NCR, Punjab, and Mumbai. We would love to welcome guests from other parts of our country too, as the word spreads and also anticipate international guests in the coming winter season. We aspire to be recognised among the top five resorts in the Ranthambore region and every year rise a notch higher in that tally."



Cordelia Cruises' Big Sea Bash

A celebration of success

Having completed 208 sailings, carrying 1,75,000 plus cruise guests, sailing to six different ports of call, and staging 600 live shows on-board its cruise liner in 2022-23, Cordelia Cruises has indeed come a long way and positioned itself as India's premium cruise line.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

Cordelia Cruises has been promoting and driving the cruise culture in India through experiences that are stylish, luxurious, and very Indian. Specifically designed to cater to its majority Indian clientele, today Cordelia Cruises stands out with its Indian pedigree.

The 'Big Sea Bash' and the 'High Sea Honors' on-board the Cordelia Empress, was a three-night celebration cruise from May 5-8, 2023, sailing from Mumbai to Goa and back to Mumbai. It was a gesture by the management of Cordelia Cruises to appreciate and acknowledge the support and hard work of its business partners, staff, influencers, and media in establishing it as India's premier cruise line. The 'Big Sea Bash' on-board the Cordelia flagship 'Empress' was an endeavour to celebrate this success and share the joy of its accomplishment with its trade partners, influencers and media.

After checking in at the Mumbai Port Passenger Cruise Terminal, guests were welcomed on-board to the rhythmic beat of the Punjabi Dhol, combined with the energetic moves of the Bhangra and chilled welcome drinks. The welcome kits in the room spelled out in detail all the activities and schedules for the

duration of the cruise.

The entertainment, showcased for the two nights at the two-tiered Marquee Theatre, had everyone's pulse racing with Bollywood-style musicals like 'Balle Balle', 'CineMagic,' 'Burlesque' and the mesmerising antics and illusions by Tejas. The meals at the enthralling 'Starlight Dining Hall' with its floor-to-ceiling windows and panoramic sea views are a delight, not to forget the great spread of Indian vegetarian and non-vegetarian options and desserts. Yes! there were also international favourites like the Thai Papaya Salad, Russian Salad, Chinese Cuisine, Pasta, Tiramisu, and more. If food is a point of worry, worry not!

The Central Atrium of the ship, with its bubble lifts, dream lighting, and grand staircase, makes for a great photo opportunity. The ship's many bars and specialty dining restaurants offer guests an option to try out a new venue every time. The pool deck on level 10 is a great place to cool off and spend quality time with family and friends. The kids will love the water and the panoramic views of the expansive sea. For the adventurous, the rock-climbing wall offers its own challenges. Also, located on level 10, is the All-Day-Dining, a great casual alternative to the sophisticated ambiance

of the Starlight. In the evening, the pool deck comes alive to the beats of the DJ, as the waiters go full swing mixing great cocktails for you to party the night.

'The High Sea Honors' Award Ceremony was held on May 07, at the 'Marquee.' Present at the ceremony were Jurgen Bailom, President and CEO of Waterways Leisure, Cordelia Cruises, Oneel Verma, COO, Cordelia Cruises and Captain Vitaliy Brylko, the Ship's Captain. Awards were given to agents and industry partners from various regions of India for their productivity and growth of the business. Also awarded were the staff and team members of Cordelia Cruises who worked tirelessly and contributed to the growth and product quality of the cruise line.

After a highly successful stint in Chennai last year, The Empress is now all set to sail for its first international cruise destination. 'Empress', returns to Chennai and will sail on its first cruise to Sri Lanka on June 05, 2023.

The cruise to Sri Lanka is sure to be an unforgettable experience, as the beautiful island destination offers the opportunity for the cruise guests to explore, experience, and enjoy its rustic charm, thrilling safaris, water sports, and rich culture.





Speaking on the occasion, Jürgen announced, “We are delighted to offer this memorable experience to our guests at Cordelia Cruises. We are not only the most majestic destination on the sea, but also a cruise of hope, love, and joy. With the launch of our international sailing, we are set to further strengthen bonds between nations and transcend boundaries. For those who say that the sky is the limit, we invite you to come cruise with us and discover a boundless world of possibilities. Sri Lanka, the island of wonder, offers a diverse array of attractions, making it an ideal holiday destination. We are proud to present this unique opportunity to cruise to Sri Lanka as pioneers in this endeavour.”

Talking about future strategies for Cordelia, Jürgen very passionately puts across his thoughts. He said, “I want Indians to cruise all over the world the Indian way! Now what is the Indian way? Great Indian food, great entertainment,



and great Indian hospitality. Indians love their food and wherever in the world they travel, they feel the need for their own Indian flavours. I want to offer that opportunity to the Indian cruise guest anywhere in the world.”

He further adds, “It is my dream to see my ship in the Mediterranean with 1900 Indian guests sailing into Civitavecchia, to explore the delights of Rome, after having enjoyed their traditional Indian breakfast, their dosa, mango chutney, coconut chutney and more. We cater to pan-India food preferences. We have it all! North Indian Food, South Indian Food, Eastern Indian Food, Western India Food, Vegetarian Food, and Jain food. Food is very important to the Indian traveller and we understand that and we offer that.”

The Middle East, with its large Indian diaspora, is next on the radar for Cordelia. In 2024, the Empress will sail



to and from Dubai and also call on many other ports in the GCC region.

Jürgen concludes, “We want to encourage year-round cruising; we want to offer the Indian cruise guest options that are longer than the currently popular 2-night 3-night 4-night options. I feel India has great potential, Indians love to travel. We have a long-term view of the market and we are committed to the growth of the India Cruise market and creating jobs.”





Ninh Thuan invites Indian travellers and investors, Vietnam's next lucrative destination

In early May, the Indian Embassy in Vietnam, in association with Global Tourism Council Trust, invited representatives of Indian travel companies and selected media for a FAM trip to Ninh Thuan, the south-central coastal province in Vietnam to seek tourism cooperation opportunities. The trip offered a good chance for the Indian delegation to know about the people, unique culture, landscapes, and some of the typical and unique tourism products. Likewise, it offered Ninh Thuan Tourism the opportunity to promote the image of the province and share information about setting up business cooperation with Indian tourism firms.

Ravi Sharma

After landing in Ho Chi Minh City, the Indian delegation had a meeting with the Provincial People's Committee and Madan Mohan Sethi, Consul General of India, in HCM City. He spoke highly of the potential, advantages, as well as tourism development orientation of Ninh Thuan, saying that Vietnam is becoming a favorite destination with Indian tourists, and in such circumstances, this is a golden opportunity for Indian tourism businesses to invest in developing tourism services in the province. He also assured to act as a bridge to provide relevant information for Indian tourism businesses.

Nguyen Long Bien, Vice Chairman, Provincial People's Committee said the province hopes that the Consulate General will continue to support and create conditions for Indian investors and businesses to invest in tourism and other fields in Ninh Thuan.

Further on, the Ninh Thuan Province's Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism took a delegation to know and understand tourist destinations in the province. This activity was also

focused on bringing Indian tourists to visit Ninh Thuan. Addressing the delegates, Pham Thi Thanh, Huong Vice Director, Provincial Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism briefed on the province's potential and strengths, as well as orientations for tourism development of Ninh Thuan, saying that the province always strives to turn tourism into a spearhead economic sector in the coming years. "Ninh Thuan's tourism industry has recorded new and breakthrough development steps in recent years, with many types of attractive products and services, and tourist accommodation establishments being developed and invested," she added.

The delegation visited Po Klong Garai tower and enjoyed the unique folk music and dance of the Cham people. Then they travelled to Bau Truc Village and learned pottery making, an art of the Cham people which was inscribed by UNESCO on the list of intangible cultural heritage in need of urgent protection. They also experienced the brocade weaving craft of Cham people in My Nghiep Village. They also showcased Cham Cultural Research Centre, Vinh Hy Bay, Rai Cave, and the Thai An

Grape Village.

The Indian delegation was impressed and appreciated the potential and advantages of Ninh Thuan Province, which reflected great tourism potential as a cultural, natural, and friendly destination. The delegation was especially inspired by the cultural activities of the Cham community, which they said are similar to Indian culture.

The province has the potential for Indian investors and tourism businesses seeking investment opportunities and or organising tours to explore tourist attractions that also feature beautiful bays and beaches. Ninh Thuan has received seven projects in official development assistance (ODA) from the Indian Government, with a total value of US\$2.1 million.

Speaking about the collaboration, M Iqbal Mulla, President, Global Tourism Council Trust said, "While most in-demand destinations by Indians include Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Phu Quoc, Dalat, and Halong, Ninh Thuan is a versatile location, rich in history and culture, pristine beaches, lush rainforests, friendly people, warm hospitality and luxury resorts making it



a perfect off-beat destination for Indians. In the past couple of years, improvement in air connectivity between Vietnam and India has developed strongly with over 17 direct flights running between the two countries. I am certain that the number of Indian travellers will soar this year like never before. Kudos to the Indian Embassy in Vietnam and Counsel General, Madan Mohan Sethi for being a catalyst in promoting events and FAM trips for Indians. Initiatives like these provide an excellent platform to deepen engagement and expand tourism and trade opportunities for Indian and Vietnamese partners.”

Madan Mohan Sethi, Counsel General, Indian Embassy in Vietnam also shared his thoughts, “The purpose of having the Global Tourism Council

join the Ninh Thuan tourism promotion event is to foster unity and maximise the impact of the event. By consolidating the efforts of various tourism entities under their Trust, there is a stronger collective voice and a clearer message that can be conveyed to potential visitors. This unity allows for better coordination, resource sharing, and strategic planning, ultimately leading to more effective promotion and increased tourism opportunities. Moreover, under the leadership of M Iqbal Mulla and Gangadhar Chilka, the Trust can facilitate networking among members, encourage collaboration, and provide a platform for knowledge exchange and best practices. Ultimately, the goal is to enhance the visibility and attractiveness of Vietnam to more Indian tourists,

driving tourism growth and economic benefits.”

Ninh Thuan province lies in the middle of Central Vietnam and has a small plain created by the Dinh River originating from Lam Vien Plateau and possesses an inherent wild beauty to this day. Located about 350 km from Ho Chi Minh City, Ninh Thuan has the full potential for being a hot destination with a dreamy blue sea, magical white dunes, majestic mountains, vast steppes, and diverse ecosystems. Ninh Thuan is the ideal destination to escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life and enjoy yourself on the most beautiful coastal roads in Vietnam, immerse yourself in the stunning beaches, and save amazing photos of the sun, sea, and sand.

Mekong Vacations going steady with premium service

Mekong Vacations specialises in South-East Asian destinations. Sourav Sinha, Director (Operations), Mekong Vacations, shares useful information about the group.

Swaati Chaudhury



Destination Management Companies (DMC) are far and few between in the tourism industry of West Bengal. One such DMC based in Kolkata emphasising on South-East Asian destinations of Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia has been Mekong Vacations. Set up way back in 2017, the destination management group has spread its wings in Pattaya and Hanoi.

Sourav Sinha shared, “We cater to all segments of travellers and specialise in MICE and Group Inclusive Tours (GIT), a special tour that provides a break for a group of more than five travellers at special fares. We are expanding our operations to Indonesia with our Indian team.”

Aimed to deliver quality services, retain customers and in keeping with the orderly expansion of business, the DMC has to its credit bagged a number of MICE travel and GITs along with regular free individual

travellers from across the length and breadth of the country. Sinha shared, “We are stressing on specific destinations in order to support quality services. The travel market will expand for all destinations next year. Vietnam is an emerging destination that has tremendous potential and will boost tourism in the upcoming period.”

The DMC prides itself in having a high number of successful tour operations. Sinha further said, “It is our mission to educate travel partners in terms of destinations. Our team is quite proactive in working together with travel partners in terms of selecting new-found destinations and creating one-of-a-kind itineraries in an attempt to provide memorable travel experiences to our customers. We work on error-free tour operations and our team co-ordinates with travel partners during tour operations. We are in constant touch with our travel partners in case of any changes or upgradations to be made. Although

we do not churn out large volumes of businesses but we make no compromise on the quality of service. Travel partners in the country favour our approach in terms of providing quality service.”

Mekong Vacations has its presence with sales offices in Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata. Sinha added, “Our organisation has its ongoing cost-effective promotions on destinations like Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia for our travel partners. DMCs play a crucial role in providing information to travel partners. A robust support system forms the key to boost the travel ecosystem and bring a parallel growth to the market shareholders.”

The travel organisation is on an expansion binge and is looking to set up its footprints in other emerging destinations across the globe. “We will come up with more interesting developments in the later part of this year,” further added Sinha.

Bingo Holidays

brings all 'Island Travel Solutions' under one umbrella

Having spent over a decade and a half in the travel industry, Sandeep Bhasin, Founder, Bingo Holidays started his company in 2022, making it a relatively new company in the travel arena. Having co-founded and worked with one of the leading Island booking portals in the past, his core forte is 'Islands'. Sandeep, today aims at building a lasting relationship with clients and making their travel experience as exciting, cost-effective, and joyous as possible by keeping in mind their client's requirements and requests.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Sandeep Bhasin

Bingo Holidays' core concentration began with the Maldives and it continues to be. Their natural progression was a step forward into the Beach destinations by conquering one island at a time. They have added Mauritius, Seychelles, and Bali to their portfolio and currently doing some great numbers. Their service areas include Resorts, Hotels, Complete Tour Packages, and Destination Weddings. They have handpicked resorts to suit every traveller's profile. Their in-depth know-how of resorts and activities is backed by exclusive unmatched hotel deals, and this is where their expertise lies.

"2022 was our first year of operations and we operated a little over 2000 files in the first financial year. 2023 for destinations such as Maldives has been

slow. However, other Asian destinations such as Bali, Singapore, Vietnam, and Mauritius have started picking up," shares Sandeep.

At Bingo Holidays they are always on the lookout for newer and unique experiences, which they can curate and offer to their agents which in turn they can offer to their clients earning their brownie points. "Curating and offering experiences which are unique and leave everlasting memories in the end travellers mind is what we aim for. To design meaningful travel experiences, we have to do constant hotel recce ensuring they are in optimal condition and recommending as per the travellers' specifications," says

Sandeep.

Destination Management Companies (DMCs) are strategic third-party partners with expert knowledge of a specific destination. They are invaluable resources for travel planners, providing support for tours or events of all types and sizes throughout the trip's lifecycle. Speaking about the advantage of DMCs for travel agents, Sandeep says, "There is no denying that a ground handler and DMCs are always better than rather booking online to save a few bucks. The advantages of going via a DMC are way more than booking thru OTA. 24x7 local ground handling, language barriers, better negotiations for hotels, and any last-minute changes or services to be added is always more convenient via a DMC."

A lot of attractions, restaurants, and

travel companies had to shut shop post-COVID, hence there was a little uncertainty amongst travel designers to plan travel itineraries, which helped DMCs get more business. Sandeep says, "However, post-COVID, all booking segments, whether online or offline, have grown. There is no denying all of us in the travel industry have had a brilliant run in terms of work across the globe. Travel rebound continues, even as prices soar and the availability of inventories is a challenge. Airfares have been hiked up, but there is no stopping for the traveller who is addicted to seeking out new places, one country at a time."

When asked about other promising destinations this year, Sandeep feels that Europe is the flavour of 2023 despite visa delays and appointment slots not being available, as many Indians planned for European countries. Pricing across hotels and other peripheral services in European as well as other Asian countries rose and the average booking value grew over 2022 as compared to 2022.

Q3 brings challenging times ahead for outbound players since the government of India has implemented 20 per cent TCS on all overseas tour packages from July 2023. "This seems beneficial for overseas OTAs like Expedia, Booking.com, etc. Likewise, payments made through international credit and debit cards shall not be subject to TCS and also not form part of LRS with a threshold limit of INR 700,000. This exception made by the government of India will help OTAs and may encourage direct hotel bookings. Challenging times do lay ahead for all of us in the Indian Travel Fraternity, we have to find ways to overcome them. With our out-of-the-box thinking and technology, we are working on solutions to offer our clients a way out and save on TCS applicability."

Bingo Holidays intends to expand its presence in more Asian countries and open offices in Singapore, Bali, and Dubai.

Korea Tourism Organization launches K-incentive Scheme for Indian Travel Agents

As part of the ongoing marketing plans for 2023, Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) India office launched a special K-incentive Scheme to boost sales of Korea travel packages in the market. The new initiative, which is aimed at travel agencies across India, was introduced at an event in Mumbai that was held especially for the occasion and in collaboration with OTOAI.

Team TTJ

With the launch of the K-incentive Scheme, KTO India hopes to get travel agents in India in the spirit for this being a special year as 2023 commemorates the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Korea. The incentive scheme's main benefits include providing travel agents with prizes of USD 30 per passenger and support for quick, simple, and hassle-free tour visas for visitors to Korea between June and December 2023.

In addition to Seoul, KTO is keen to promote regional destinations in Korea including Busan, Gangwon province and Jeollanam-do province. Including any of these regional destinations in the itinerary would be a necessary condition to be eligible for the benefits of the K-incentive Scheme.

Speaking at the launch event in Mumbai, Myongkil Yun, Director, KTO India said, "This is the first time any NTO is launching an incentive scheme for leisure travel packages in India and this initiative comes at a very opportune time when we are in the year of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between our two nations."



To be eligible to be a part of the K-incentive Scheme, interested travel agencies should share their marketing plan to kto@gmail.com on or before June 14, 2023. Myongkil Yun further added, "This year, South Korea is seeing a surge in visitors from India, and we are keen to further boost that many-fold with the launch of the K-incentive scheme."

Europamundo Vacations

Tours with flexibility and support

Europamundo Vacations is incidentally the only global travel organisation with its base in Kolkata. Aparna Chaturvedi, Commercial Head, India Sub-Continent and United Arab Emirates, Europamundo Vacations stresses on the factors that make the group highly popular among outbound travellers in the country.



Swaati Chaudhury

Arenowned overseas travel group based in Kolkata that has been striving to offer seamless travel experiences to both travel agents and tourists can be none other than Europamundo Vacations. Owned by JTB group, the DMC has on offer the largest selection of brochured tours and concentrates on European destinations.

Aparna Chaturvedi explained, "We are the largest coach tour operators of Europe across the globe and we work only through our distributors. Once the pandemic winded up, it was a trying time for the global tourism industry. There has been a surge in bookings in the outbound travel market this year. The global destinations like South Africa, Turkey and Vietnam that are into issuing e-visas had a commendable

run. While Europe is in high demand but owing to the difficulty in procuring visas on time, it was quite difficult to make it to the destination during this summer season. Besides, e-visas are issued in global destinations like Australia, New Zealand, Egypt, Singapore and Jordan."

The global travel group has over 500 programmes of escorted tours. The tours are on offer in major languages, including English, Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic. Chaturvedi said, "We are a business-to-business online group for booking reservations and our apps offer real-time updates for tourists. Our organisation offers independent options for leisure family travellers. They can prefer to travel by van exclusively for themselves rather than travelling by bus with a group of tourists. Once a tour gets booked, both travel agents

and customers get access to customer support along with an emergency number that will enable them to seek help after office hours. This kind of support restores confidence among travellers."

The travel organisation has forayed into all major metros in India. Chaturvedi averred, "It is the reliability factor that makes a DMC stand off from other travel groups. Our global travel outfit is constantly imparting training to travel agents with our distributors. We are confident that the visa situation in Europe will change for the better in the second half of the current year. The additional tax collection at source (TCS) will commence in July, this year. The travel agents have to work to clarify the issue to travellers that the amount will be adjusted in their income tax."

'Guest experience is driven across all levels at our hotel'

Ramandeep Marwah, General Manager, Hyatt Regency Pune and Residences joined the hotel in February 2023. With his extensive experience in the hospitality industry, Ramandeep looks forward to leading the hotel to new heights of excellence.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Ramandeep Marwah

Hyatt Regency Pune and Residences is located in the urbane locality of Viman Nagar in Pune, where the hotel recapitulates luxury with plush rooms, pet-friendly apartments, a temperature-controlled indoor swimming pool, and a multitude of dining venues. With 222 spacious guest rooms, world-class dining options, and state-of-the-art meeting and event spaces and being in proximity to Lohegaon International Airport, the city's prime entertainment areas like Koregaon Park and IT hubs like Business Bay makes the hotel the ideal choice for both business and leisure travellers.

Social media marketing for hotels is key to increasing visibility, boosting direct bookings, and improving brand awareness. With more and more guests interacting with social media regularly and getting inspiration for their next trip, it has become an integral part of any marketing strategy. The effective use of social media marketing in the hotel industry can elevate your brand profile, increase website traffic and boost reservations. Engaging with hotel guests via social media is a great way to gain valuable feedback and encourage customer loyalty.

"Social media feeds are part of everyday life for most people. Consumers use social media to get in touch with friends and family, to learn more about business, and to find information and recommendations before they make purchase decisions. That's why social media marketing for hotels is more important than ever. We at the Hyatt Regency Pune Hotel and Residences focus on offering personalised experiences. Guests and Travellers across need offerings

as per need, rooms, leisure stays, restaurants, events, and spas are just a few needs we address. We have very clearly identified our guests as per need and send our offerings in a very customised manner. Along with the same, our broader focus is on three key points when we talk about anything about our property, i.e., showcasing our brand, creating relationships and reaching out to new customers," shares Ramandeep.

During and after the pandemic, hotels have been struggling to balance their business needs with the increasing and dynamic nature of travel technology, and the changed attitudes of travellers. However, optimising the guest experience and ensuring guest expectations are met is a constantly evolving challenge for hoteliers. With a veritable banquet of options at their fingertips, travellers are demanding more than ever before. It makes life harder for hotels but also gives them a greater opportunity to deliver an experience to guests that they will never forget. Ramandeep says, "We have over time understood that constant innovation is key to keeping customers engaged with our hotel. Whether it's our new restaurants in the launch phase or our regular promotions – each has to be unique. We can leverage each guest experience by using and building guest profiles, sending pre- and post-stay e-mails, creating tailor-made packages and add-ons., welcoming guests with paperless check-in, using guests' names and leaving handwritten notes."

Hotels are now battling to restore their staff complement to pre-pandemic levels and short-staffed hotels are struggling to serve an influx of guests. As hotel occupancy continues to recover, hotels have the opportunity to think innovatively about staffing. "We at the hotel have always looked at skilled associates. We are well-staffed. On the other front, I and my Leadership team along with the Learning and Development team continuously motivate associates to engage with guests across multiple touch points. Guest experience is driven across all levels at our hotel," says Ramandeep.

Simplifying digital marketing for hotels is key to focusing on what's important – the guests. Yet many hoteliers continue to struggle with establishing the right mix of booking channels that not only meet the growing demand for accommodations but can also maximise profits. Travellers often gravitate towards OTAs for the ease of comparison shopping, as well as a relatively smooth booking experience.

While the channel mix continues to evolve and as demand continues to emerge globally, hotels now have the opportunity to optimise the number of bookings and potentially grow their percentage of the overall channel mix. "We monitor performance with our revenue management experts week on week. We understand the trends and look at how to drive each channel based on market trends," informs Ramandeep.

Hyatt Regency Pune and Residences have 79 service apartments available for long-term guests with a choice of studio, one, and two residences. The modern facilities combined with contemporary design offer guests total comfort and exclusive services.

Empowering employees to deliver unforgettable experiences to every guest

Taj Hotels has been the forerunner and custodian of authentic Indian hospitality. The brand believes in providing a unique luxury hospitality experience known as 'Tajness.' Their philosophy is built on the principles of warmth, kindness, and above all, exceptional service to their guests. Rahul Joshi, General Manager, Taj Hotel and Convention Centre, Agra, tells that Tajness is ingrained into every facet of their business, which ultimately leads to a strong relationship with their guests and employees.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Rahul Joshi

Taj Hotel and Convention Centre, Agra is spread over 4.5 acres and is located within walking distance from the Taj Mahal. The hotel features 239 modern rooms, including 12 lavish suites and one presidential suite that opens out onto an expansive private lawn. While some rooms frame views of the Taj Mahal, others look out onto the town of Agra or have refreshing views of the pool.

At the hotel, their focus is on providing personalised hospitality experiences that cater to the guests' preferences. As recent reports suggest, 'Experiential Offerings' are the future of the hospitality industry, and thus they strive to provide bespoke experiences such as a two-day pampering staycation that includes spa sessions, dining under the stars with a view of the Taj Mahal, breakfast in bed, and more.

"Our team utilises advanced technology and analytics to gather insights into our guests' behaviour, enabling us to create tailored experiences

that are unique to each guest. As a result, we take immense pride in offering unforgettable experiences that our guests will cherish for a lifetime," asserts Rahul.

Increasing visibility, boosting direct bookings, and increasing brand awareness through social media is the latest trending marketing tool for hotels. "The first and foremost aspect is that we strive to make our social media marketing as targeted as possible by creating comprehensive customer personas and tailoring our content to resonate with our ideal guests across all marketing channels. We also leverage data and analytics to gain insights into our guests' preferences, behaviour and booking patterns, enabling us to create personalised offers, promotions, and experiences," informs Rahul.

Furthermore, he says, "We keep a close watch on the feedback we receive on social media, as this provides us with valuable insights into how we can improve our services and better serve our guests. Social media has opened up a new avenue for two-way communication, and we make it a priority to engage with our guests and respond to their feedback promptly."

The fundamental cornerstone of the hotel industry remains its people, both guests and staff. To ensure that their guests receive the best service that they are known for, at Taj Hotel and Convention Centre Agra, they never compromise on staffing levels, especially during this surge in demand, primarily from leisure travellers. "We are pleased to see a surge in inbound travel as foreign markets open again. This is a positive sign for the hospitality sector and will continue to strengthen the industry in the coming years. It makes our industry an attractive prospect for staff

recruitment, and we are delighted to see people from other industries migrating to ours. Although the hospitality sector has experienced high attrition rates in the past, we are confident that this trend will change. We are committed to creating a positive work culture and providing growth opportunities for our employees. As the hospitality sector continues to thrive, we look forward to welcoming more talented individuals to our team," assures Rahul.

Employees are the cornerstone of Tajness, and the hotel empowers them to deliver unforgettable experiences to every guest. Through extensive training and development programs, they instill the Tajness philosophy in their employees, ensuring they have the skills and knowledge needed to exceed guest expectations. This helps them to build lasting connections with guests, fostering loyalty and creating memories that last a lifetime. "Our employees believe that Tajness is what sets us apart, and we strive to ensure that it is woven into every aspect of our operations," states Rahul.

Being recognised as World's strongest hospitality brand, IHCL's Taj Hotels have always had a significant impact when it comes to direct bookings. However, Rahul says that the growing preference for online travel agencies (OTA) in recent times cannot be ignored, particularly in the domestic circuit. OTAs have established their reputation through the ease and security of their offerings.

In the hospitality industry, recent reports reveal that OTAs account for a significant proportion of hotel bookings worldwide. And partnering with reputable OTAs can help them to connect with a wider audience, driving more business to our hotel. "We remain committed to providing our guests with the best possible booking experience and by keeping a close watch on industry trends, we aim to continuously adapt and evolve to meet the changing demands of our customers in the hospitality industry," says Rahul.

Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel and Convention Center leads the way in customer satisfaction

Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel and Convention Center from the house of Marriott International has emerged as one of the most cherished destinations owing to key factors like attentiveness, personalised service and appreciation that go a long way in creating a memorable stay for travellers. Sanjay Gupta, General Manager, Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel and Convention Center shares his views on customer satisfaction, retaining employees and the significance of social media to target travellers.

Swaati Chaudhury

Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel and Convention Centre, located near Information Technology Park, is approximately 23.61 km from Kempegowda International Airport. The hotel boasts a huge convention centre sprawling over an area of 65,000 sq. ft. and forms one of the largest convention centres in the city. Replete with 360 luxury rooms, Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel figures as one of the largest five-star hotels in the city.

In today's hashtag generation, it is highly essential for luxury hospitality groups to have a conspicuous presence on social media. Sanjay Gupta explained, "Social media serves as a powerful tool for our hospitality set-up to reach our target audience, build relationships, increase brand awareness and bring a surge in direct bookings from our website. It not only aids in boosting our business but also creates a robust online presence for our brand. The tools that facilitate our social media presence include video logs, widgets, instant messaging, tags, location-based services, local influencer collaborations and micro-blogging sites."

Hospitality players post live videos of food and beverage, events and tour of rooms offering genuine picture to visitors that enable them to take a concrete decision. Gupta stated, "We communicate with our visitors on social media with a downtime of around 4 hours. Besides, we send constant messages to our guests. Our endeavor is not only to promote our hotel products and services but emphasise on after-sales reinforcement that is quite significant when a new guest arrives on the floor. The reviews and recommendations generated on food and beverage outlets on social media give our consumers the power to disseminate info to millions of social media users. Social media caters to a wide range of requirements right from opening hours of food outlets, menu updates, special offers, food

festivals, promotions et al. and helps to reach our target audience."

The hospitality group believes in maintaining a robust guest profile and it goes on to believe that a customised guest experience begins with collecting guest data. Gupta said, "We adhere to a strict regime of feedback mail of pre and post-stay of visitors and formally address the visitors that help in building personal rapport and have a better idea about their preferences. We curate bespoke packages based on the individual preferences of the guests. Our team takes a look into the historical background of visitors, their preferences and their loyalty programme affiliations. Some of our gestures to win over visitors include flaunting handwritten notes bearing a welcome amenity based on the visitor's choice of food or customising with a souvenir for kids or a snack basket with local flavours or spa discount voucher that will provide an amazing and delightful experience for visitors and tempt them to visit multiple times."

The hospitality industry was hit hard during the pandemic. After two years of unprecedented circumstances, tourism has opened up and there has been a significant rise in tourist flow in tier-II and tier-III cities. Consequently, the hospitality sector is now witnessing a much-needed revamp. It is anticipated that employees will cater to the growing demands of the visitors and pull on for extra hours. There can be no denying the fact that the industry is facing a shortage of talent since hospitality staff are opting for other professions in the service sector. Gupta further said, "Our hospitality group has been largely successful in coping with the talent crunch since we always focus on the well-being, health and safety of our employees. We provide flexible

working hours, adequate compensation for additional work hours and impart cross-departmental training to our employees."

In an effort to empower employees to drive the guest experiences, the hotel group rewards quality work and sound decisions taken by its associates to upgrade guest experience. Gupta added, "We identify our team strengths and drawbacks and impart training in their areas of interest. We provide opportunities for the development and growth of our employees by deputing them to other cities on task force learning. We do encourage teamwork and empower our employees to create the right kind of environment and experience."



DoubleTree by Hilton Jaipur Amer

An amalgamation of historic charm and modern comfort

With two properties in the pink city, Hilton Group is well established in Jaipur. The DoubleTree by Hilton Jaipur Amer is a striking property equipped with all attributes to provide exceptional experiences for its guests. Neeraj Maharshi, General Manager, DoubleTree by Hilton Jaipur Amer, shares with TTJ about his hotel promotions, personalisation, and workforce empowerment, all of which are aimed at delighting the guest in the best way possible.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Neeraj Maharshi

Overlooking the Aravalli range and nestled in the Kukas area, DoubleTree by Hilton Jaipur Amer offers breathtaking views to guests looking to enjoy and relax amidst the serene landscape surrounding the property. The hotel is well-equipped to cater curated in-house experiences for guests to enjoy and relax as well as visit world-famous monuments, sights and places in and around the city and the hotel is conveniently located to reach them.

At DoubleTree by Hilton Jaipur Amer, they recognise the importance of social media in connecting with potential guests, building the brand, and improving guest engagement. Indeed, hotels need to offer a strong, personalised value proposition - one that connects with the traveller consistently across all marketing channels.

Neeraj shares, "We utilise social media channels like TripAdvisor, Booking.com, and other OTAs to manage guest reviews and engage with our audience. We promote direct reservations through our website to enhance our brand and gain greater visibility in the market. We use storytelling as a tool to differentiate our brand and engage with our target audience. We also register the hotel in OTAs that our target audience prefers to enhance visibility and improve booking rates."

Customisation and personalisation are also essential components of the guest experience at DoubleTree by Hilton Jaipur Amer. They recognise that every guest is unique and has different preferences and requirements. Neeraj says, "To meet these individual needs, we offer customers alternative choices to customise their stay based on their preferences. Personalisation involves serving customers based on their needs, which is better suited for repeat customers, whereas customisation empowers customers and works better for new customers. We gather data on our guests' spending patterns, motivations, inspirations, and preferred travel channels to create an offer that aligns with their expectations."

Staffing shortages have been an issue within the hospitality industry for years, however after the pandemic, several issues have cropped up to be obstacles to fully staffed operations. On staff matters, Neeraj elucidates, "At DoubleTree by Hilton Jaipur Amer, we prioritise guest satisfaction and brand image. We understand that a well-staffed

hotel is a critical factor in achieving these goals. We adopt a flexible and agile staffing model that aligns with dynamic demands, which helps us manage our staffing requirements better. We also regularly check employee feedback and encourage one-on-one meetings with managers to maintain a satisfied and engaged staff. This approach helps us think creatively about roles and staffing and allows us to retain our staff."

Neeraj further adds, "We believe that empowering employees to drive the guest experience is essential to the success of our hotel. We start by meeting our employees' foundational needs and understanding their requirements to determine what level of empowerment they need. We listen to our employees and conduct regular development communications between employees and managers to ensure that they feel confident and can deliver the best guest experience. By giving our employees the tools and resources they need to succeed, we create a positive work environment that allows them to thrive."

In the hospitality industry, more is better. When the ultimate goal of a hotelier is to impart the best guest experience, one cannot deny the fact that the experience starts right from when they make the booking. In terms of OTA vs. Travel Agent vs direct bookings at DoubleTree by Hilton Jaipur Amer, Neeraj says, "OTAs have become an essential part of the hotel industry. We leverage OTAs to increase our hotel's visibility and use their rich tools, analytics, and insights to target the right travellers. However, we also focus on driving direct reservations as it helps us achieve sustainable revenue and build our brand. We analyse our business in all the three booking channels to make informed decisions about our marketing strategies and optimise our revenue streams. By having a clear understanding of our business performance, we can identify areas for improvement and take action to enhance our overall performance."

Empowering employees

essential to driving guest experience

Most hotels nowadays are beginning to understand the smallest needs of modern travellers, who are on the lookout for a comfortable and personalised stay, regardless of their generation. Abhishek Pani, General Manager, Novotel Vijayawada Varun, shares with TTJ the inner workings of the hotel which help in improving the guest experience.

Prashant Nayak

With all the generations of people travelling regularly, being aware of what Gen Z, millennials, Gen X, and baby boomers want from their travels is key to making a strong impression. To achieve this, the Novotel Vijayawada Varun team uses a digital platform called ACDC, which stands for "Accor Customer Digital Card". This platform helps them capture guests' preferences and

requirements, such as their room preferences, food preferences, special requests, and more. Once the hotel has captured this information, it is available to all Accor properties worldwide, so guests can enjoy the same personalised experience regardless of where they stay within the Accor network. "Our goal is to exceed our guests' expectations and create a memorable experience that will make them want to come back to Novotel Vijayawada Varun and stay with us again in the future," says Abhishek.

The use of digital marketing has become an essential part of any hotel's brand strategy. At Novotel Vijayawada Varun, they have a dedicated digital marketing team, both at the corporate and unit levels, to ensure they are promoting themselves effectively and monitoring their performance on digital platforms. Abhishek adds, "We regularly post good quality content about the hotel's attractions, offers, activities, dining, and nightlife on social media to engage with potential guests. We also encourage guests to share their real-time feedback on social media. To improve our rankings on review sites, we focus on creating unique experiences for our guests."

While many hotels have been facing challenges with staff shortages, Novotel Vijayawada Varun has been able to retain its employees by investing in their safety, well-being, and professional development. They have engaged their employees in various online platforms and provided them with training and education to develop new skills and enhance their existing ones. "We have been fortunate to have a well-staffed hotel as the business has started to pick up. Our employees are motivated, engaged, and committed to delivering exceptional service to our guests. We believe that

investing in our employees' well-being is critical to our success and is essential to providing our guests with a memorable and enjoyable stay. Overall, we are proud of the efforts we have made to retain and support our employees during these challenging times, and we remain committed to providing a safe and enjoyable experience for our guests," elaborates Abhishek.

At Novotel Vijayawada Varun, they also believe that empowering their employees is essential to driving the guest experience. "Our Heartists, as we call our employees, are the front line of our hotel and are responsible for delivering exceptional service to our guests. We empower our Heartists in several ways like encouraging them to take ownership, providing the right tools and training, recognising and rewarding exceptional performance and encouraging feedback and ideas," mentions Abhishek.

Vijayawada, being a two-tier city, has limited air connectivity to most cities, which results in more last-minute booking requests. At Novotel Vijayawada Varun, web-direct bookings constitute up to 25 per cent of the booking requests we receive at the hotel. This high percentage is due to Accor Group's leading loyalty program, ALL, which drives web direct bookings very aggressively. Bookings from OTAs such as MakeMyTrip, Booking.com, Agoda, etc., constitute around 15 to 20 per cent of the booking requests they receive. Travel agent bookings constitute around 5 to 10 per cent of the requests they receive. These bookings typically come in the form of MICE bookings. They also maintain rate parity across all distribution channels to ensure that guests can book their preferred rooms at competitive rates.

"All embracing, we keep a close eye on our business mix to ensure that we are optimising our distribution channels and maximising revenue. We regularly review our pricing and promotional strategies to ensure that we are competitive in the market and attractive to potential guests. Our goal is to provide our guests with the best possible experience and ensure that they keep coming back to Novotel Vijayawada Varun for their future stays," concludes Abhishek.



Mayfair Lagoon to focus on experiential opportunities

One of the most happening destinations for today's luxury travellers, Mayfair Lagoon, needs no introduction in the hospitality sector of the country. Right from connecting travellers across social media to curating the individual preferences of all generations of travellers and empowering employees, the group has clocked many milestones. Sanjeeb K Pattnaik, Assistant Vice President (Operations), Mayfair Lagoon takes time out to highlight the factors that make the group popular.

Swaati Chaudhury



▲ Sanjeeb K Pattnaik

According to Sanjeeb K Pattnaik, "With an aim to generate an increase in tourist footfalls in the hotel and develop interests in the minds of customers, our hospitality group focuses on providing special offers for guests across all marketing channels to keep the urge in the minds of the guests in a consistent manner to avail the offers. It is the personalised service of our hospitality group that brings our guests back to our hotel. Hospitality groups should have a prominent presence in social media space by updating their events and activities."

These days, the concept of family vacation is passé. Pattnaik said, "We devise packages depending upon the needs of different generations of travellers. Leisure family travellers look

have a wide gamut of properties to cater to the needs of various generations of travellers." The hospitality set-up is replete with a prominent spa that has wellness options, a Scottish Bar and a discotheque. "There are nine food and beverage outlets in our hotel that sets us apart from other luxury hotel groups," further said Pattnaik.

In the post-pandemic world, a shortage of qualified manpower has affected the smooth running of hospitality groups. Sanjeeb Pattnaik added, "Mayfair Group of Hotels has never faced the issue of staff shortages and has been successful in retaining its manpower. We have not laid off our staff in times of crisis. Empowerment of employees has a crucial role in enhancing guest experience since new-age travellers look for personalised service and prompt responses to address their concerns. Our hotel employees are well empowered to come up with instant solutions without seeking permissions."

In today's times, more number of travellers depend upon online travel agencies for tailor-made packages. Online travel agents form one of the key distribution channels to promote the hotel. Sanjeeb Pattnaik further added, "For those on business trips and leisure travellers looking for budget and organized travel, the most convenient option is to approach the online travel agency. The major advantage is that travellers get to select from an array of options based on their demand and budget. While travel agents are still trusted a lot for providing value-based tour packages that draw travellers since it provides a one-stop shop for all travel-related info and arrangements. Having said this, direct bookings reflect the awareness of the brand and market reputation. For new-generation travellers, the comfort lies in technology than human interaction. The brand website has a significant role to materialize bookings if promoted well with value additions. Online travel agents contribute in a major way to the flow of leisure and free individual travellers."



A well-known luxury hospitality property curating tour itineraries based on the demand of each generation of travellers in the Eastern belt of India is obviously Mayfair Lagoon, Bhubaneswar. For high-end travellers looking for a rejuvenation break with a dose of therapeutic activities or for those with an impetus on wellness and if health is on your mind, head to Mayfair Lagoon.

for tours, inclusive of all meals along with recreational activities for the entire family in our hotel. On the contrary, Gen Y prefers therapeutic vacations to rejuvenate their mind from the hectic pace of work that includes therapies like customised menus and soothing music. Gen Z is catapulted toward the overall décor, locations and hygiene. They have a mind to explore global cuisine, themed pubs and socialise in clubs. We

Rubystone Hospitality

eyeing opportunities to expand its presence

As a boutique hotel management company, Rubystone Hospitality believes in giving guests the best of services, which translates into great memories. Their concept is to let hotels restore themselves after calibrating their infrastructure to the needs of their guests and further making it a relevant brand in the destination. The company aims to create a strong and healthy position in the market, along with being well-recognised in business alliances. Sandeep Singh, Founder, Rubystone Hospitality, in conversation with TTJ, talks about the company's expansion plans.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Sandeep Singh

Rubystone Hospitality has been in the hospitality business for quite many years and it has successfully established its benchmark hotels in Udaipur (Goldnest Rubystone Heritage), Amritsar (Rubystone Amritsar), Naukuchiatal (Allure Villa Rubystone), and in other places like Shimla, Chandigarh, Dalhousie, and Bharatpur. The group also provides luxurious stays in Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi-NCR, and Karnataka.

"Rubystone Hospitality Hotels and Resorts are distinctive lodging alternatives, reasonably priced and with efficient services. Our motive is to provide our best facilities to our visitors and contribute to our country's economy through infrastructure development, employment growth, boost the tourism of

our states and provide a comfortable stay to our travellers and make them feel at home in our hotels," mentions Singh.

The hospitality group is now expanding its portfolio in key destinations and seeking global opportunities for ground-up developments, redevelopment of existing assets, repositioning of underperforming properties, and re-flagging currently operational hotels. They also plan to work with existing hotels with high market demand and also eyeing opportunities to expand beyond their homeland, all set to launch properties in Thailand and Maldives.

They vet all decisions of opening and operating the hotel depending on key factors like infrastructure, accessibility, local regulation, market competition, cost of infrastructure, and operations and amenities with places of interest.

Rubystone aims and aspires to provide its best hospitality services to its guests. Singh says, "Our basic motive in building our chain of hotels is to cater to every segment of travellers and ensure that we give them the warmest treatment and personalised attention and make sure that their travel is a memory for life. In the end, the smile and satisfaction of our guests is the best motivation for us. However, the basic essence of creating Rubystone is to contribute to the travel industry and contribute to our country's economy through infrastructure development, employment growth, and boosting tourism in the states we

operate."

The hotel group is also working on improving the need for the guests' ever-rising expectations and experiences and, for that, they empower employees to drive the guest experience. On this factor, Singh emphasises, "India is known for its hospitality and rituals, which people find very interesting as we treat our guests like family members. We want our guests to feel like their home and provide them with the best hospitality. In that aspect, our employees are our assets. The right training for our employees and cultivating a sense of possessiveness among them results in personalised and friendly service to our guests. The essence of understanding the guest's needs and fulfilling them to the best possible extent for overall guest satisfaction is our key to success with our customers."

Responsible and sustainable tourism has become essential for the future of the travel and hospitality industry. A certain culture of professionalism is necessary for reducing waste, conserving natural resources, supporting local communities and economies, shelling out real-time cultural experiences and knowledge, and providing good accommodations and smooth travel arrangements. Likewise, Rubystone Hospitality establishments also promote sustainable tourism practices and they are keen to preserve heritage sites for future generations.

"Overall, we at Rubystone Hospitality also contribute towards helping to raise awareness about the importance of cultural heritage sites and supporting efforts to preserve and protect them. Our hotels at various destinations of the country, including destinations like Udaipur, Amritsar, and Mussoorie, reflect the goodness of heritage preservation and our custom-designed packages highlight the heritage value. We are being appreciated for the awareness that we cultivate among the mass through our hotels and practices," informs Singh.

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Clarks Safari offers unique wildlife experiences keeping the local flavour in mind

The Clarks Safari brand was conceptualised to cater to wildlife aficionados, nature enthusiasts, and experiential-seeking travellers. Elevating guest experience is crucial in the hospitality industry and with this belief, Clarks Safari curates personalised itineraries for their guests. Prakash Bedi, Vice President, Clarks Safari shares more about the brand's recent developments.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Prakash Bedi

Clarks Safari, under the aegis of the Clarks Hotels and Resorts, has three signature properties in Rajasthan, viz, Ranthambore, Pushkar, and Jawai. The brand is in expansion mode and planning to launch more properties soon.

Clarks Safari designs itineraries based on individual interests, keeping the local flavour in mind. Generation - X, Y, Z, and millennials are much more methodical, and demanding at the same time are seeking different kinds of travel experiences. "There are young guests who are very keen on understanding wildlife and natural habitation. We ensure that they are accompanied by the best of guides, who not only help them with wildlife sightings but also provide them with crucial information about the wildlife. Our individualised itineraries are a huge hit among Generation- X, Y, and Z," emphasises Prakash.

Clarks Safari has a dedicated social media agency that works in close coordination with its corporate communications and research team. The team helps in providing the ground data and they also get constant feedback from their trade partners. Their campaigns are designed based on those inputs. Prakash says, "Finding the right buyer is key to the whole marketing campaign, and our team places a special emphasis on creating the right buyer persona. We are running location-based campaigns and taking many other unique initiatives to reach out to a wider audience. Also, we have a PR team on board. They ensure that a uniform message reaches all our stakeholders."

Hiring and retaining talent has become a major pain area for hotels and resorts. To address the problem, Clarks Safari gives preference to local hiring. "The basic advantage is that a local knows the culture and tradition of the place like no one else. They are more loyal and dedicated, which also leads to the growth in the local economy of the place. According to us, it is a win-win situation for all the stakeholders. Thankfully, we haven't faced any staff shortages. Being a brand also helps, as many professionals are keen to associate with us. Then, we have a progressive work culture accompanied by employee-friendly HR policies. All this has made us a hot prospective employer," assures Prakash.

Prakash continues, "Apart from the regular guidance, and mentoring from the senior staff, we ensure that the employees are free to take decisions,

depending on the situation. The only caveat is, they should not hurt or disrespect the guest, and shouldn't malign the brand name. We have ensured that all our employees stick to the basic philosophy of 'Atithi Devo Bhavo,' and all their actions should be governed by this basic philosophy. We also organise many competitions in-house to nurture the thinking mind of the employees. The best ideas get generously rewarded. The employees often come up with unique solutions to ensure customers stay delighted."

At Clarks Safari, they are evenly spread out across all three structures in terms of OTA, Travel Agent, and Direct bookings. "Our current business from OTA is close to 30 per cent, whereas 35 per cent of business comes through travel agents and the rest comes from direct bookings. We ensure investing in marketing, communications, digital platform, upgrading amenities, and training the staff to increase our footfalls," points out Prakash.

While the attraction for wildlife tourism is growing in India, the number of people who choose to bring their pets on holiday is increasing every year, and traveling with pets is one of the fastest-growing trends in the travel industry. Speaking of pet-friendly hotels, Prakash mentions, "There has been a shift where guests want to travel with their pets. Time is changing and India will definitely see an increase in pet-friendly hotels and properties. However, we have put certain regulations in place, but as most of our properties are located in national park reserves, we suggest our guests not travel with pets, as it might be unsafe for them."

As a national hospitality player, Clark Safari has policies in place for responsible tourism. Appropriate measures are taken to ensure the wildlife is left undisturbed in its natural habitat. They want to play a significant role in spreading awareness about India's diverse wildlife to the world. The brand is also eyeing getting certified by TOFT Tiger and various other international wildlife conservation bodies.

Karma Lakelands

an abode to sundry generations

Karma Lakelands, an eco-sustainable golf resort, is a sprawling 300-acre campus of lush green landscapes, water bodies, meadows, and lawns that exudes grandeur and welcomes people to experience an extraordinary life. Damandeep Singh, General Manager, Karma Lakelands ensures that all the needs and requirements of their guests are taken care of as they curate highly personalised experiences to make sure that guests walk through their doors more than often.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Damandeep Singh

Karma Lakelands is spread over an expansive 235 acres to offer a larger-than-life experience to their guests who visit the place to unwind themselves from a busy life. Dotted with trees, water bodies, meadows, and lawns, this resort in Gurgaon is an oasis of serenity and greenery, a haven for guest and their family.

To make their visit memorable, the property offers a wide range of indoor and outdoor activities and five restaurants to serve them delightful meals. They have a diverse set of guests ranging from GenZ to senior citizens. “For the children to enjoy their weekends, we have built a devoted play area for the children to swim and take part in adventure sports. Our third-agers enjoy walking in the long lawns amidst nature and rippling lakes while everyone else loves to befriend and play with their farm animals. The

working professionals can hold meetings and interact with like-minded people at the conference halls. We have assigned a devoted team of professionals to curate thoughtful myriad experiences for each of our guests. There are cottages for solo and couple stays and villas for families and friend groups. Our diverse offerings of activities and restaurants make it easy for us to cater to all,” assures Damandeep.

With social media marketing becoming a powerful tool for businesses of all sizes, hotels, and resorts need to offer a strong, personalised value proposition — one that connects with the traveller consistently

across all marketing channels. The Karma Lakelands social media team keeps itself abreast with the latest social media algorithm updates and follows the ongoing trends to devise the content strategy and increase its reach. Divulging more, Damandeep says, “We have been investing a lot in producing user-generated content as it connects our followers with us and they feel themselves a part of it. To increase engagement on our pages, we ensure that our videos are of high quality and speak directly to our audience. We make sure that we are using relevant keywords, hashtags, and tools to target potential customers. We have identified the cohort and our performance marketing is strong. With these practices, we are receiving an influx of followers and a lot of our wedding and staycation queries come from social media pages, Instagram in particular.”

Hospitality is entirely a human-resource-driven industry and the management team has to ensure that they are constantly hiring smart and diligent staff. At this moment, the hospitality business is thriving, but there are also challenges, like staff shortages. “We are fortunate to be adequately staffed with self-motivated team members and employees and constantly expanding our team to serve different roles of the hospitality ladder. We also host regular training sessions with our team members to align them with the brand SOPs and ensure the smooth functioning of the business. We run several training programs for our team members to pace up with the fast-growing industry and ensure that they are following a standardised structure to offer a class-apart experience to our guests,” shares Damandeep.

At Karma Lakelands, experienced hospitality leaders are invited regularly to cheer and educate the staff about the current trends in the industry. They also laud and honor their star performers to keep all teams motivated and encourage them to deliver extraordinary guest experiences. Their housekeepers and F&B professionals are skilled under various management programs that educate them about soft skills like Guest Etiquette and Interaction. Here each team member religiously follows and practices the principle of Atithi Devo Bhava. “We often get positive feedback from our guests that our team members go out of their way to fulfill guest wishes,” apprises Damandeep.

Karma Lakelands also boasts an award-winning boutique 9-hole golf course. It offers an 18-hole experience against the backdrop of breathtaking green spaces. It is also acclaimed for dining out gratification as it offers three of the best places to eat in Gurgaon with an option to choose a preferred location for private dining. Along with that, Karma Lakelands has always been an all-out pet-friendly resort ensuring a ‘pawsome’ experience for them.

Lords Hotels and Resorts maintains a healthy balance of hotel booking channels

Since various hotels are constantly pouring in attractive offers, guests tend not to be limited to a single brand. Rather, they're open to options; especially if you fail to connect and engage with them and deliver a memorable guest experience. According to Shiladitya Mukherjee, General Manager, Lords Plaza Surat, it takes a mix of excellent communication, innovativeness, technology, an outstanding team, and strong guest and external relationship to increase the loyal customer base.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Shiladitya Mukherjee

With a wide range of services catered to both business and leisure travellers, the Lords Plaza brand ensures the best of the stay, with promises of impeccable hospitality. Located strategically at Delhi Gate in Surat, Lords Plaza Surat is preferred by many travellers due to its proximity to the Railway Station.

Nowadays, establishing a presence on social media is crucial for hotels that want to remain relevant and attract younger customer demographics, especially those in locations where competition is fierce. By tracking user behaviour, hotels can determine which posts and content perform best and what type of messaging resonates most with their audience.

Talking about the advantages of social media in their scope of work, Shiladitya says, "Hotels can use social media analytics to gather information on the target audience and tailor their social media content to the guest's preferences. They can create buyer personas based on the demographics and psychographics of the target audience. This can help them understand the specific needs, preferences, and challenges of the potential guests, and create content and promotions that speak to the guests directly. Hotels can use targeted advertising on social media platforms to reach potential guests who fit their buyer personas. By setting specific criteria such as age, location, interests, and behaviour patterns, hotels can ensure that their advertising is being showcased to the most relevant audience. By combining these strategies, hotels can create a targeted social media marketing approach that effectively reaches their ideal guests and encourages them to book and stay at their property."

Researching travel trends of old and new generations is

the first step for tourism providers in modifying their offers to match the target markets' needs. Shiladitya suggests, "With Generation X, Y, and Z all traveling regularly, to customise their preferences individually, hotels can start by understanding the unique characteristics and preferences of each generation. For example, Generation X may prefer personalised services and amenities that cater to their individual needs, while Generation Y may prefer social experiences and technology integration. We use data analytics to gather information on each guest's preferences, such as their preferred room type, dining preferences, and activities they enjoy during their stay. This can be done through surveys, feedback forms, and loyalty programs."

Lords Hotels and Resorts use technology to personalise the guest experience, such as using mobile apps to offer personalised recommendations, providing voice assistants in rooms to control lighting and temperature, and offering mobile check-in and keyless room access.

Post-pandemic, when the hotels opened up, almost all of them faced staff shortages. Lords Hotels and Resorts addressed these staffing challenges with their staff connect program. "We also took steps to improve employee retention by offering flexible schedules, career development opportunities, and a positive work environment," expressed Shiladitya.

Currently, the hotel group, through its Learning and Development Program, provides its employees with adequate training and resources to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge needed to deliver exceptional guest experiences. This can include training in communication skills, problem-solving, and customer service. Shiladitya adds, "Hotels can give their employees the authority to make decisions that can enhance the guest experience. This can include empowering front-line employees to make decisions on room upgrades, offering complimentary services, and resolving guest complaints. We create a positive work environment that fosters employee engagement and motivation. This includes recognising and rewarding employees for outstanding performance, providing opportunities for career development, and offering a competitive compensation and benefits package."

Analysing business in terms of OTA vs Travel Agent vs Direct bookings is a tricky one because it all depends on the type of hotel, the market, and the clientele that books that property. There is no one-size-fits-all to this, but a healthy balance is necessary. While OTAs reduce manual work by driving more business, at the same time, hoteliers will still look for prospects to increase direct bookings and also are open to travel agents to enhance occupancy.

"OTA is a good platform as it widens the hotel's reach and is very convenient from a guest's point of view. Travel agents still play a big role when it comes to group booking corporate travel or booking for events or inbound travellers. We lay a lot of emphasis on direct booking from our guests, either through our brand website or through our call center, and direct reservation at the hotel," shares Shiladitya.



MADHYA PRADESH A SWIFT AND SUBTLE ADVENTURE TOURISM DESTINATION !

Bored with those regular trips and eager to try out some new adventure activities? If so, the heart of the country, Madhya Pradesh, has a lot in store for you. The state offers many thrilling and soft adventure activities to tourists. From skydiving, scuba diving, rafting, trekking, jungle safaris, camping, and heritage walks to food walks, there is something for everyone.

Camping and adventure activities like trekking, group games, safaris, etc are enjoyed by adventure lovers. Tourists experience stargazing, bonfire, and dusk drive, swimming, riverside jungle trail with bird watching, and tribal cuisine with a barbeque in the jungles of Satpura. Apart from this, the travel bugs also enjoy various water sports activities in the heart of Incredible India.

Tiger Safari in Madhya Pradesh

Encounter tigers and other animals on a wildlife safari tour in six tiger sanctuaries in Madhya Pradesh, namely Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Satpura, Pench, Panna and Sanjay Duburi. The only place you could find Cheetah in India is at Kuno National Park in Sheopur district.

Skydiving in Ujjain

Every year in January, a skydiving festival is organised in Ujjain where visitors can skydive from over 10,000 feet and enjoy the auspicious view of the 'religious capital' of Madhya Pradesh.

River Rafting in Orchha

River rafting is another exciting sport that can be enjoyed by adventure seekers in Orchha's Betwa River. This activity not only gives you a thrill but also offers a beautiful view of the royal Orchha-chhatris on the exotic shores of the river. The best time to go rafting in Orchha is from August to February.

Zip lining at Kerwa Dam in Bhopal

The Kerwa Dam in Bhopal is known for its diverse activities. The most popular is the flying fox zip lining. The zip line here is one of the longest double zip lines in India. So why wait? Experience the thrill.

Cable Car Ride in Bhedaghat

Viewing Marble Rocks and Dhuandhar Waterfall via Cable Ride from Bhedaghat is the most rewarding experience for any tourist. In addition to riding the cable car, you can also sail among the marble rocks for a closer look. The full moon makes sailing even more memorable as you witness the towering rocks naturally twinkle at night.

Bicycle Safari in Van Vihar

Van Vihar National Park, in the capital of Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal, is blessed with the densest forests and abundant wildlife. A bicycle safari in Bhopal's Van Vihar National Park gives you the chance to experience the state's rich biodiversity.

Boating and Kayaking in Bhopal

The best way to relax is on a boat surrounded by nature. Explore boating and cruising opportunities at Bhopal's Boat Club. Kayaking is another exciting water sport that requires a lot of skill to perform.

Parasailing, Paragliding and Climbing on Pachmarhi Hills

Situated at the mounting height, Madhya Pradesh's most verdant charm, Pachmarhi, also known as 'Satpura ki Rani', rules the range of Satpura. Nestled in the hills and filled with scenic beauty all around, Pachmarhi not only has spiritual spots and gushing waterfalls but also have a lot of adventure.

Parasailing and paragliding are exciting and adrenaline-pumping sports. Other activities that fit into the landscape of Pachmarhi are rock climbing and trekking.

Trekking Trails in the Woods

There are numerous treks developed for the tourists to enjoy camping in nature, including the Forsyth Trek and Jatashankar trek of Pachmarhi, the Chidikho trek in Narsingharh and the Janapav Trek in Indore. Other than these famous treks, camping sites are also developed at Orchha, Panna, Pachmarhi, Kanha and Indore.

Adventurous Mega Festivals

MP Tourism conducts annual mega festivals at Hanuwantiya (Jal Mahotsav), Gandhi Sagar (Gandhi Sagar Floating Festival) and Mandu (Mandu Utsav) where various adventure activities and recreational activities are organised including Hot Air ballooning, paramotoring, paragliding, parasailing, jet skiing, kayaking, etc. for the visitors at the festivals. After the enormous success of these events, MP Tourism is set to develop Orchha Kuno, Tamia, Ater, Bargi Dam and Chanderi for the conduction of these mega festivals in 2023-2024.

Get ready to discover some truly exciting and serene adventures to satiate your thirst in Madhya Pradesh!



Hotelzify raises seed funding led by TBO and All In Capital

Hotelzify, a self-serve website development and booking management platform for hotels, raised its seed investment. The funding round was led by TBO, which made its second investment in 2023 after it acquired a 100 per cent stake in Bookabed earlier this year, along with All In Capital, which is a community-driven VC fund, identifying the next generation of founders using a strong community of successful founders.

"These funds will equip Hotelzify with necessary capital to scale up its technology and accelerate its GTM," said Anirudh Ganesh, Co-founder and CEO of Hotelzify.

Hotelzify helps hotels, homestays, and resorts to make their own website and accept guest bookings and payments. Hotelzify aims to empower short-term rental accommodations and hotels to get more direct bookings to increase margins and gain visibility via Google Hotel Ads. It has established partnerships with over 700+ hotels and resort properties in India, delivering significant value to their businesses in a short span of time and want to grow its reach significantly in coming years.

"TBO, in its pursuit to keep strengthening the travel distribution ecosystem shall look forward to making more such investments in the exciting and rapidly evolving travel-tech space," said Ankush Nijhawan, Co-founder TBO.com.

Further, sharing his growth plans Anirudh mentioned, "The funds will primarily be used to build our product, including a Google Hotel Ad engine with AI-based pricing, a customizable marketplace module for hoteliers, and expanding our engineering team. Additionally, we will run sales experiments in emerging tourist destinations in Southeast Asia and the Middle East."

Hotelzify aims to be the go-to technology platform for independent hotels and vacation rentals, providing advanced tools for direct bookings, increased fill rates, and higher profits. The company's vision for the next five years is to collaborate with a vast number of properties worldwide, providing support for multiple currencies and incorporating vernacular capabilities from the outset.

OUTRIGGER Hospitality Group to acquire Kā'anapali Beach Hotel on Maui

Premier beach resort company OUTRIGGER Hospitality Group plans to acquire Kā'anapali Beach Hotel, a beachfront resort on the Island of Maui, renowned as "Hawaii's Most Hawaiian Hotel." It is located on the golden sands of world-famous Kā'anapali Beach, which was recently ranked as the No. 1 Beach in the U.S. and No. 10 Beach in the World by TripAdvisor. The property spans 11-acres with 432 rooms.

This transaction is expected to close on July 26, 2023, at which time the property will be rebranded as OUTRIGGER Kā'anapali Beach Resort. The purchase price is not being disclosed. Additionally, as part of this transaction, OUTRIGGER will also take ownership of The Plantation Inn – a charming, 18-room bed and breakfast in historic Lahaina Town, located steps from Maui's famous Front Street, which has consistently been voted the #1 B&B on Maui. At this time, no changes are planned for this quaint, adults-only accommodation.

OUTRIGGER Kā'anapali Beach Resort will retain the Lei Aloha platform and also be added to the OUTRIGGER DISCOVERY loyalty programme, which rewards guests with exclusive

member rates and DISCOVERY Dollars for staying at OUTRIGGER, as well as more than 800 hotels in the GHA DISCOVERY portfolio.



GReaT Trails by GRT Hotels now open to furry guests too

GRT Hotels and Resorts has opened up its nature-inspired GReaT Trails properties at Yercaud, Kodaikanal, Wayanad and Thanjavur to pets. Several amenities are in place to keep both you and your fur baby comfortable and safe.

Cozy pet beds, bowls, mats, tasty treats and collars with tags to identify the owner's name and room number are just some of the measures being taken. There's also plenty on the menu card to suit your pet's every desire - chicken curry with boiled rice, fish with rice, mixed vegetables with rice and mutton

with rice are just some of the options to keep your pet drooling and healthy while on vacation. Dry and wet food options by some top brands are also on the menu.

To ensure that pets and guests alike have the safest experience possible, be sure to carry your pet's vaccination records, de-tick records and other important details before checking in. The GRT Hotels and Resorts group has also gone over and beyond with their safety standards, making sure all guests have a pleasant stay. The designated pet rooms and Pet Park will be deep



cleaned thoroughly and regularly to keep with the highest hygiene standards that the GRT group is known for.



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NOV

03

AHMEDABAD

DEC

16

NAGPUR



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Walkers Tours receives Travelife Partner award for sustainability and CSR efforts



Walkers Tours, one of the leading tour operators in Sri Lanka, has been awarded the Travelife Partner award for its long-term efforts and front-runner position regarding sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility.

The Travelife standard covers the ISO 26000 Corporate Social Responsibility themes, including environment, biodiversity, rights and labor relations, and is formally recognized in full compliance with the UN-supported Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria. Walkers Tours complies with more than 100 criteria related to its office management, product range, international business partners, and customer information.

"We are thrilled to receive the Travelife Partner award," said Nalaka Amaratunga, CEO of Walkers Tours. "This award recognises our commitment to sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility, which are at the core of our business philosophy."

Walkers Tours is among 12 companies in Sri Lanka to have reached the Travelife Partner award.

Amit Mehta appointed as Malaysia Airlines' Regional Manager for South Asia, Middle East, and Africa

Amit Mehta has been appointed as Malaysia Airlines' Regional Manager for South Asia, Middle East, and Africa effective immediately where he is responsible for augmenting the airline's operation in the three key markets. Previously, he was the Country Manager for South Asia.



Amit has been working with Malaysia Airlines since 2007 and brings over 20+ years of extensive managerial and commercial experience in the aviation industry. He has successfully managed diverse portfolios, including profit centre operations, sales, marketing, and revenue management, equipping him to excel in this new role.

Amit will continue providing leadership and mentoring team members in these crucial regions, ensuring the successful implementation of both commercial and operational action plans, while enhancing the airline's brand presence in the key regions by providing memorable experiences onboard Malaysian Hospitality.

TTAUP new Office Bearers elected unopposed for 2023-2026



The Travel Trade Association of Uttar Pradesh (TTAUP) organised its 7th AGM at Hilton Garden Inn, Lucknow on May 27, 2023.

A new team of office bearers was elected unopposed for the term 2023-2026. The new team is led by Mohd Azam, President. Rajiv Arora has been elected as Vice President, Sandeep Srivastava as General Secretary, Arshad Zaidi as Joint Secretary and Gayatri Khanna as Treasurer.

The newly elected team expressed their thanks to all members for sparing their valuable time to be present at the event and for their dedicated support. They further resolved

to follow the association's sole objective, "Work Together and Grow Together".

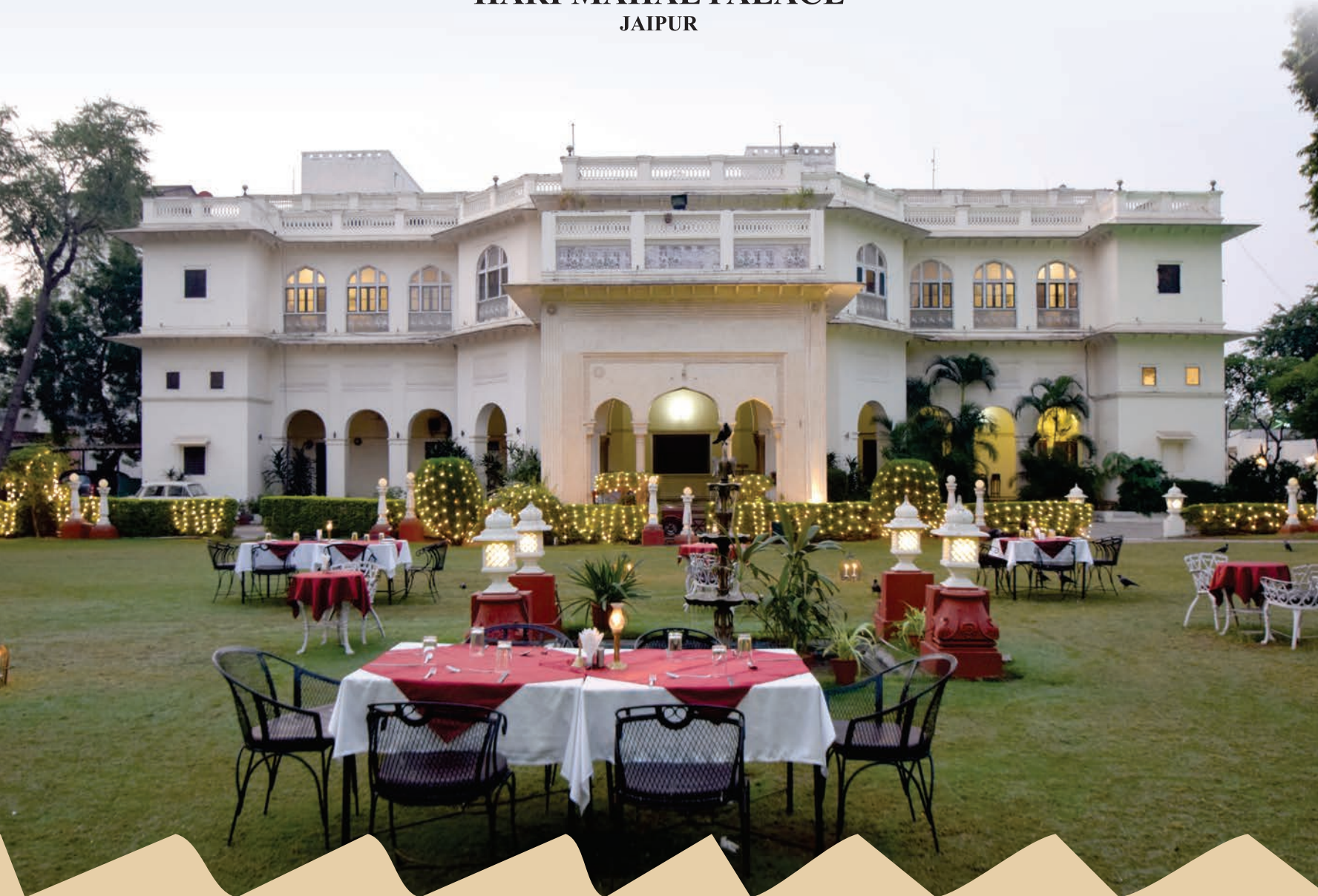
TTAUP was formed to fulfill the void and the necessity of an association of travel agents in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Their objective is to work for the betterment of the travel fraternity through various programs, trainings, trade shows and other developmental activities.

The management and control is entrusted to the Managing Committee with a three-year term which is duly elected by the general body of members.

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IndiGo to commence flights to six destinations in Africa and Central Asia

IndiGo is taking a massive step in its international expansion strategy with the addition of six new destinations across Asia, and Africa. It will connect Nairobi, Kenya and Jakarta, Indonesia, with direct flights from Mumbai in late July/early August. Delhi will get connected in August to Tbilisi, Georgia (3x) and Baku, Azerbaijan (4x) and in September to Tashkent, Uzbekistan (4x), and Almaty, Kazakhstan (3x). IndiGo is therefore adding an impressive 174 new weekly international flights between June and September 2023, including new destinations, routes, and frequencies, catering to the rising demand for international travel from, to and via India.

Along with this expansive launch of new routes, IndiGo will also be resuming operations daily services from Delhi to Hong Kong in August, further enhancing travel options for passengers. This flight was suspended 3 years ago when Covid-19 hit and will now be reinstated. These new flights will unlock remarkable opportunities for both business and leisure travellers seeking seamless connectivity.

Skal International Lucknow celebrates its 1st Anniversary



The 1st Anniversary of the Skal International Lucknow Chapter was celebrated as Skål Lucknow Foundation Day on May 23, 2023, at The Centrum, Lucknow.

Joining the celebration were Sarvesh Goel, Managing Partner, The Centrum, many of the Airlines Sales teams and Airport Managers, the General Managers of almost all leading hotels around, Office Bearers and Members of Skål Lucknow and their spouses.

SKAL International Lucknow is Skal International's 16th Chapter in India and was launched on May 23, 2022.

The idea of bringing Skål International to Lucknow came to Sunil B Satyawakta, President, Skal Lucknow in March 2020 when he initiated correspondence with his friends, the Skålleagues Sunil Kumar R and Vijay Mohan Raj at Skål International Hyderabad. However, the process was put on hold until 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Virgin Atlantic expands India network with daily Heathrow-Bengaluru service

Expanding its network in India, Virgin Atlantic is offering customers more options to the region than ever before with new daily flying from London Heathrow to Bengaluru (Bangalore). Since 2019, Virgin Atlantic has increased capacity to India by 250 per cent, the airlines' largest area of growth outside the US. With the launch of Bengaluru in summer 2024, the airline will offer almost 500,000 seats each year between the UK and India, signalling its commitment to the country.

The new service will boost the airline's international network and will be the airline's fourth daily service to

India. As Virgin Atlantic returns to growth post pandemic, Bengaluru will complement its long-established double daily services between London Heathrow and Delhi, daily flying to Mumbai as well as its growing codeshare with IndiGo, India's leading airline, which covers 34 destinations across India.

The Bengaluru flights will operate on Virgin Atlantic's Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft boasting 31 Upper Class, 35 Premium and 192 Economy Delight, Classic and Light seats as well as the airline's signature Upper Class social space.

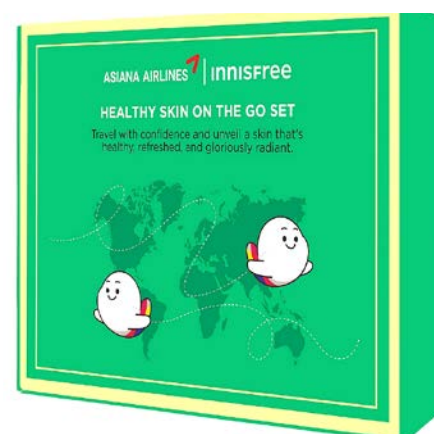
Asiana Airlines and Innisfree to offer special gift box onboard

Asiana Airlines, a 5-star carrier and member of Star Alliance has collaborated with Innisfree, a premium cosmetic brand of Korea, to offer a unique in-flight experience. Experience true Korean hospitality and cherish the Innisfree hydration.

Innisfree, a world-renowned beauty product company, with an emphasis on health, offers innovative beauty solutions powered by the finest natural ingredients responsibly sourced from Korea's pristine Jeju Island. The company's products range from makeup to skin care products for women and men.

The travel kit will be offered to those buying tickets on the Asiana network from India and their first outbound sector is Delhi to Seoul. The offer is valid from June 12 to July 16, 2023, and the travel period till October 27, 2023.

Jung Sub Song, Regional Manager, Asiana Airlines said, "Asiana Airlines is very delighted to have this promotion with Innisfree the No. 1 K. Beauty brand and hope that customer will experience 5 Star Skytrax service with a premium cosmetic product. We will try to bring more unique and special promotions to make customers happy."





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Qatar Tourism hosts Maruti Suzuki Dealer Conference 2023, largest India MICE Group

Qatar Tourism hosted the Maruti Suzuki Dealer Conference 2023 in Doha, a three-day spectacle that celebrated the success and accomplishments of automobile dealers from around India. The Maruti Suzuki India Limited (MSIL) Group's extensive operational tenure of 40 years in the industry significantly contributed to the importance of the event, transforming it into a momentous milestone celebration. The sprawling event saw 1200 dealers, alongside their families, celebrate at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Center (DECC), located in the heart of Doha's business district, from May 3 – 6, 2023.

Qatar Tourism provided financial and cultural subvention support while Qatar Airways, the national carrier, offered QMICE program assistance. Chairman of Qatar Tourism and Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive, His Excellency Mr. Akbar Al Baker, graced the conference with a welcome speech, extending the country's warm hospitality to all the guests.

The Maruti Suzuki India Limited team highlighted the strategic significance of choosing Qatar, emphasising its exceptional value to visitors. This decision was based on several key factors, including the convenient proximity to India, with an average flying time of four hours, streamlined visa process, the abundance of captivating attractions and experiences offered by Qatar, and the state-of-the-art facilities available at the renowned DECC.

Lufthansa Group to acquire 41 per cent stake in ITA Airways

Deutsche Lufthansa AG has reached an agreement with the Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance to acquire a minority stake in the Italian national carrier ITA Airways. Lufthansa will obtain a 41 percent stake in ITA for EUR 325m through a capital increase.

The capital contribution thus directly benefits the company. As part of the agreement, the MEF has also committed to a capital increase of EUR 250m into ITA. In addition, the MEF and Lufthansa agreed on options to enable a potential acquisition of the remaining shares by Lufthansa at a later date. The purchase price for the remaining shares will be based on the business development of ITA Airways.

The contractual finalisation of the agreement is expected to be completed shortly. The acquisition of the minority stake is subject to approval by the relevant authorities. Upon closing of this transaction, ITA Airways and Lufthansa Group are expected to immediately start their cooperation at a commercial and operational level. As a network airline, ITA will closely cooperate with Lufthansa Group to benefit from group synergies.

ITA Airways will become the fifth network carrier in Lufthansa Group's multi-brand and multi-hub system. ITA will remain a standalone airline with its own management and strong brand identity – in line with Lufthansa Group's successful multi-hub, multi-brand and multi-AOC strategy.

STB launches one-of-a-kind interactive game, Singapore Wanderland on Roblox

Singapore Tourism Board (STB) has launched Singapore Wanderland on Roblox, marking its first foray into one of the world's most popular online game platforms. The new game is a whimsical take on Singapore, drawing over two million visits since the beta version launched on May 11, 2023. As part of STB's efforts to reach new audiences, Singapore Wanderland aims to offer an elevated and immersive gaming experience to Indians, allowing them to engage with the destination virtually, as they accomplish various tasks in a virtual world.

To reimagine Singapore in the metaverse, STB worked with established gaming specialist Publicis Play and Roblox developer Wonder Works Studio to develop the immersive experience over five months. Singapore Wanderland puts a playful spin on real-life attractions in three mini-games, where players earn magic orchids to transform a garden with STB's destination mascot Merli.

Gardens by the Bay, Mandai Wildlife Group and Marina Bay Sands are featured in the mini-games, alongside iconic attractions such as the Merlion Park, Singapore Flyer, Adventure Cove Waterpark and The Fullerton Hotel Singapore.





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