

## Malaysia Tourism hoping to welcome 1mn Indian tourists by 2024

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

Malaysia Tourism is hoping to welcome 1 million tourists from India by 2024, having resumed its marketing activities here with multi-city roadshow after reopening of borders. Prior to Covid in 2019, Malaysia recorded 706,000 Indian tourists.

Addressing the press at the Mumbai leg of the roadshow, Manoharan Periasamy, Senior Director, International Promotion Division, Asia/Africa, said, "We are hoping to welcome 1 million tourists from India. This will be supplemented by improved air connectivity from various destinations from India as airlines have expressed interest in opening new routes and frequencies between the two countries." Currently, IndiGo, Malaysia Airlines, AirAsia, Malindo Air, SpiceJet are some of the carriers that operate flights to Malaysia from India.

Talking about the roadshow, he said, "We have more than 22 suppliers representing travel agents, hoteliers, and DMCs here to



**Manoharan Periasamy**

Senior Director, International Promotion Division, Asia/Africa

meet the Indian trade fraternity. We are back in the business and are looking at cultivating relationships with the trade in India after a gap."

Ninety per cent of Malaysian population is fully vaccinated, and the country has reached more than 70% of booster shots. "Malaysia is the

first country in the region to completely reopen borders. The two main areas we are looking at, especially from Mumbai, is Bollywood shoots and weddings & incentives movement. We believe for big fat Indian weddings Malaysian hotels of four and five-star category is a suitable choice."

Under the Film National Development Authority, Malaysia is offering 20% tax rebate for film shoots with minimum USD 1 million spend. "We are also offering 5% extra rebate if Malaysian costumes are used in film shoots."

For weddings and film shoots, Malaysia has developed Desaru coast, alongside positioning Langkawi and Penang as favourable choices.

Replying to a question from **TravelBiz Monitor** on cruise tourism, Periasamy said that they be closely working with Royal Caribbean International for making port of calls in the country since the fall of Genting Group has brought home porting of ships in Malaysia to a complete halt. ♦

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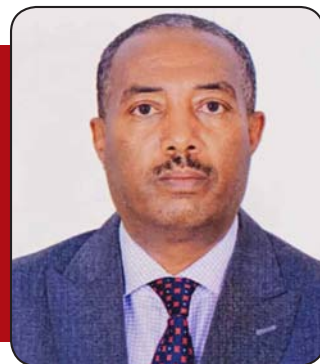
## Ethiopian Airlines considering adding 3 more destinations in India

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Ethiopian Airlines, the flag carrier of Ethiopia, is considering connecting three more destinations in the Indian market, after announcing three weekly flights to Chennai.

Talking to **TravelBiz Monitor**, Lemma Yadecha Gudeta, Chief Commercial Officer, Ethiopian Airlines, said, "We have 3 more cities under consideration to add to our route network in India. These are in discussion stage at the business level. The Air Services Agreement needs a review, and we will speak to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation in India in this regard."

Talking about code-share partnerships, Gudeta



**LEMMA YADECHA GUDETA**

Chief Commercial Officer, Ethiopian Airlines

said, "India is a sub-continent, and we need partners to service such a huge market. We are open to code-share agreements primarily with legacy carriers, and depending on the business model, LCCs as well. Earlier, we used to work with Air India and Jet Airways." In terms of interline agreement, he said that they offer more accessibility and it will be an advantage for Ethiopian to offer last mile connectivity with such partners.

Shedding light on their load factor on the existing routes in India (capacity has been curtailed due to the pandemic), he said, "Currently, we are recording an average of 69-70% of load factor." Prior to Covid, the carrier witnessed 82-83% load factor on its India routes.

## Brand USA's Part 2 of the Discover USA – Knowledge Series highlighted U.S. Gateway Cities & Self-Drive Holidays

TBM Staff | Mumbai

On April 27, 2022, as a continuation of Brand USA's initiative to educate and update the travel trade in India about new and niche tourism products in the USA, Brand USA organized their second webinar of the Discover USA – Knowledge Series.

The second webinar in the three-part series focused on U.S. Gateway Cities and self-drive holidays. The webinar highlighted what's new in Los Angeles, Arizona state, New Orleans and Philadelphia. These cities and beyond also offer some of the most popular routes for self-drive holidays in the USA.

Bhavika Jariwala, Account Director, India - Brand USA; Seema Kadam, Regional Director for Los Angeles Tourism; Jessica Mitchell Remington, Director of Travel Industry Marketing, Arizona Office of Tourism; Maria Manzella, Director of Tourism, New Orleans Company and Hrishikesh Kulkarni, India Representative, The Countryside of Philadelphia, educated the travel trade attendees on diverse facets of these destinations, enabling them to curate itineraries with new and unique places to visit and things to do. The USA is now open for fully vaccinated travellers.

The webinar highlighted the fact that Los Angeles is home to seven regions, full of vibrant neighborhoods, offering a range of activities.

Downtown LA has undergone a complete revitalization in the past few years with new restaurants, hotels and museums. The valley has amazing outdoor spaces, and is close to major attractions like Universal Studios and Warner Bros Studio Tour. One of LA's most culturally rich and diverse region is South LA, including major attractions like Banc of California Stadium and California African American Museum.

The webinar shared that Grand Canyon National Park, in Arizona, is home to Grand Canyon, with its layered bands of red rock revealing millions of years of geological history. A World Heritage Site, the Grand Canyon lies on the Colorado Plateau in North Western Arizona. Also, the iconic US Route 66 in Arizona crosses the northern part of the state, from east to west, through the mountains near Flagstaff, the Little Colorado River and, in its western part, the Black Mountains and the Colorado River, to enter California. Located in beautiful Northern Arizona between Flagstaff and Kingman, Seligman is now internationally known as an iconic Route 66 town, and sits at the beginning of the scenic drive, that is now the longest remaining stretch of Route 66 in the United States.

New Orleans was named the #3 Top Destination for City Lovers in the United

States in 2022 by TripAdvisor, Travelers' Choice - Best of the Best, 2022. The city offers convenient, easy access, along with variety of hotels, attractions and meeting locations and a bustling nightlife at the French Quarter. The city hosts festivals and cultural events throughout the year.

The city has seen a host of new branded hotels with a large inventory for leisure guests as well as large conventions. The Vue Orleans, located at the 34th floor of Four Seasons, is an observatory with interactive exhibitions. The Zip Nola, offers 5 zipline and other adventure activities, at a drive of 30 minutes from the downtown area.

The Countryside of Philadelphia is conveniently located on the East Coast. High-speed rail lines connect area towns and provide direct access to Philadelphia. Home to 30 gardens, the Countryside of Philadelphia has ample outdoor space for one to indulge and enjoy the nature. The Longwood Gardens is the largest display garden and a sight to behold. The Arch at Valle Forge National Historic Park is a popular monument that was erected to commemorate the arrival of General George Washington and the Continental Army into Valley Forge. All in all this is a marvelous destination to add on for visitors to Philadelphia and the East Coast of USA. ♦



## Ark Travel Group unveils its new brand identity

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

Mumbai-based ARK Travel Group (ATG), one of the leading B2B cruise and luxury resort consolidators in India, has launched its new corporate brand identity. This change comes at a time when the company is evolving its service offerings and has set ambitious global expansion plans. Based on ATG's five pillars – Compassion, Competence, Commitment, Cooperation and Celebration, the identity along with the design system was created to unfold and adapt itself as the brand continues to expand.

Speaking to TravelBiz Monitor, Kishan Biyani, Managing Director, ATG, said, "Nine years after cruising, I decided to take a product and it was Club Med. The product is all inclusive (food, stay, etc.) and we are quite successful. This boosted my confidence and thought I have to try something else as well, coincidentally pandemic sets in and during this time we acquired Outbound

Konnection, and from January this year we have a lot of representation business."

Biyani anticipated that future lies in technology and keeping this in mind he had created a booking platform for cruising in 2019. "We wanted to further revamp this platform but unfortunately the pandemic came in. But we



haven't wasted time during the pandemic and constantly looked for new avenues," he pointed out.

Now, Ark Travel Group has four verticals- Ark Cruises, Ark Rep, Ark Tech, Ark Journeys. When asked to comment which vertical will

give maximum business in the next three months? Biyani replied, "The cruise segment has always given us maximum business and we don't see any slack in that. As far as trend (cruise market) for the last three months is concerned, there is huge demand for Europe and American markets (people who have visas with them) and I can say it is at par with pre-pandemic demand. We also expect good business from South East Asia as well."

Talking about a lesson he learnt from the pandemic, Biyani said that it is not appropriate to put all eggs in one basket.

Anju Tandon, CEO, Ark Journeys, said that the journey (from Ark Travel to Ark Travel Group) has been quite satisfying and she hopes that the travel fraternity would extend their support for other verticals the way they did for cruise business. "And I see this is happening. When we started selling Maldives, we received tremendous support from the travel fraternity," she said." ♦

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# 80% Companies to surpass or Match 2019 Fintech investment levels in 2022: Research

TBM Staff | Mumbai

As the world begins to rediscover travel with COVID-19 restrictions lifting around the world, the travel industry has an opportunity to rebuild and renew by harnessing advances in fintech to improve the traveller experience. That's why Amadeus has created the 'Travel fintech investment trends' report, based on research with over 70 senior leaders from large airlines and travel sellers.

According to the study, Fintech and payments were viewed as a high priority by 9 out of 10 respondents. 80% of travel businesses stated that in 2022, they plan to match or go beyond 2019 investment. A third of firms plan to match 2019 levels while a significant 50% plan to increase investment. When questioned more broadly on company-wide investment, 70% of participants plan on investing through 2022 to capture an expected rebound in travel, with only 30% opting for a more conservative strategy.

When asked what is driving fintech investment the top objective was 'improve

the traveller experience', closely followed by 'increase revenue through payments'. Respondents were asked to rank their fintech investment priorities for 2022 from a list of 15 options, revealing two groups of priorities – 'existing' and 'emerging'.

More travel companies expect to invest



in 'existing' capabilities during 2022 with Alternative Payment Methods (61%); Strong Customer Authentication (46%) and Fraud (44%) ranked as the three top priorities.

However, a second group of 'emerging' priorities also scored highly, with Payments in NDC (47%); Buy Now Pay Later (36%); Multi-Currency Pricing (34%) and Chargeback

Management (31%) completing the top half of the priority list.

Notably, accepting crypto payments was a priority for the fewest number of firms, although 14% do plan to invest in the capability during 2022.

David Doctor, Executive Vice President of Payments, Amadeus, said, "Fintech stands out as an area of the travel business where you can provide new value-added services that bring revenue, whilst also improving the traveller experience. That's why businesses are channelling scarce resources in this direction and Amadeus is investing heavily too. We expect to double the people in our payments team by the end of next year compared to 2021."

Doctor added, "We see our customers rethinking today's challenges, like how to manage elevated levels of chargebacks. Whilst also looking to the future, travel brands are embracing innovations like Buy Now Pay Later and Multi-Currency Pricing to deliver a more flexible and transparent digital experience." ♦

## Saudi Arabia bans citizens from travelling to 16 countries, including India over Covid outbreak

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Following the re-outbreak of Covid-19 and the rapid surge in the number of daily Covid infections over the past few weeks, Saudi Arabia has banned its citizens from travelling to 16 countries, including India.

The 16 countries where the citizens of Saudi Arabia are banned to travel apart from India include Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Indonesia, Vietnam, Armenia, Belarus, and Venezuela, reported Gulf News.

Further, the Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia has assured the public that zero monkeypox cases have been detected in the country. Abdullah Asiri, Deputy Minister of Health for preventive health

has said that the Kingdom has the capability to monitor and discover any suspected monkeypox cases and also to fight against the infection if any new case emerges.

"Until now, cases of transmission between humans are very limited, and therefore the possibility of any outbreaks occurring from it, even in countries that have detected cases, are very low," he added.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) has confirmed 80 cases of monkeypox in 11 countries and said they are working to better understand the extent and cause of the outbreak.

In a statement issued on Friday, the WHO said the virus is endemic in some animal populations in a number of countries, leading to occasional outbreaks among local people and travellers. ♦

## Jet Airways gets DGCA approval to start commercial flights

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The DGCA (Directorate General of Civil Aviation) granted air operator's permit to Jet Airways. This will allow the airline to restart commercial flight operations after remaining grounded for more than three years.

The approval comes after the airline conducted proving flights for the safety regulator between May 15 and May 17.

With the grant of the permit, Jet Airways has fulfilled all the pre-conditions laid down by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) as part of the insolvency process for the transfer of the ownership of the airline to the successful resolution applicant- the consortium of UAE-based NRI Murari Lal Jalan and U.K.-based Kalrock Capital

Management in London.

Last June, the NCLT approved the Jalan-Kalrock consortium's resolution plan for revival of Jet Airways. They



had proposed a cash infusion of INR 1,375 crore into the airline, which included INR 475 crore for payment to creditors and INR 900 crore for capex and working capital requirements.

The airline aims to start operations in the second quarter, i.e. between July and September. It will be a full service carrier with a business and economy classes. ♦

# Paving an inclusive road for women in tourism: WITT 2022

Instituted for the protection, upliftment, and with a long-term mission to create synergy between rural and urban women to work in conjunction – TAAI touched upon several sensitive issues experienced by women at WITT 2022.

Vartik Sethi | New Delhi

In its second edition of Women In TAAI and Tourism, the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) chanted the mantra of involving and empowering women to become proactive, self-dependent, and commanding in every facet of their lives. Bettiah Lokesh, Secretary-General of TAAI, in his welcome address, enunciated a three-step process to aid women empowerment in tourism – promote women in entrepreneurship, encourage their participation, and generate accurate evidence-based gender policies.

The second woman president in 75 years of TAAI's inception, Jyoti Mayal, highlighted the dearth of women leaders in the tourism and hospitality industry. Quoting a study by World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), Mayal shared the female share of employment in the tourism industry to be only 12.1%, and their earnings to be 14.7% less than their male counterparts. She underlined the need for coexistence and interdependency between men and women to actively work and ensure a level playing field for both sexes.

G Kamala Vardhana Rao, Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, shared some gripping stories from ancient Indian texts touching upon the suffering women have had to face across millennia. Rao urged everyone to uptake responsibility and stem the conspicuous injustice against women. He reminded the audience of how India is the only country to address its nation as 'Mother India'. Underlining the need for education as a catalyst to eradicate discrimination against women, Rao spoke highly of PM Modi's initiative – Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao. "This is not an ordinary slogan, it is a very big slogan that

society has to take very seriously going forward" he added. He explained further the steps being taken by the government for the skill development of women, "We are coming up with a new tourism policy in which we have a chapter on skill development through our ministries."

Commencing the panel discussion, Mayal vouched for the importance of 'Weaving Tales' in tourism, "You have to be a storyteller to sell any dream, and that is what we as travel



agents need to deliver." Rupinder Brar, ADG Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, encouraged women to become independent and lead the movement to bring a paradigm shift. "It's not always that you need to wait for a man to open the door for you to walk into a room. Why would you not open the door yourself as a woman?" Brar asked rhetorically.

The session also addressed the problems of women residing in rural areas. Cultural Activist Navina Jafa highlighted how women in rural areas are unable to express their stories being confined to their homes, "The women in their ecologies inside their homes – one of the biggest factors is the lack of content and communication." She insisted on helping rural women develop a sense of expression and embracing womanhood.

Talking about the joint initiative with the Ministry of Minority Affairs of India, Brar underscored

the 500 Vishwakarma villages overflowing with skilled artisans. These villages have been identified by the government for promoting rural craftsmanship, capacity building, and women empowerment.

Praveen Kumar, Former Secretary, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), shared the introduction of flexible training models for lower-middle-class women who manage household activities and may not have enough time to learn new skills.

Kumar exclaimed the importance of inculcating a sense of security within. He said, "Gender sensitization committee has a proactive role and gives confidence to women that they have someone to go to immediately in case of any problems."

The second panel discussion, 'Creating Your Sunshine' hovered around skilling and encouraging women to take leadership roles. "I feel we women hold ourselves back," said Nandita Kanchan, Commissioner of Income Tax, Delhi. Talking about women's general mindset of 'family first' and turning down important roles and opportunities, Kanchan added "You have to seize every opportunity that comes your way. Women generally think in terms of family first and as mothers we consider ourselves more responsible than the fathers". As important as talent is to a woman's success, it's equally important to nurture the talent.

Sonia Bharwani, GM – Learning & OD, VFS Global, shared her desire to do away with the one shoe fit all approach. "In today's world everyone is differently talented and has their innate abilities, therefore, education has to move away from the cookie-cutter approach and look at nurturing the talent by relooking at the system of education."

Speaking to TravelBiz Monitor about WITT and her long-term vision for women in rural and urban areas working in conjunction, Mayal said, "We need to come up with creative concepts such as maybe a TAAI hawker street or TAAI crafts in all the cities we get the opportunity to and where we can work together with Incredible India to say how different avenues can be created in tourism going further. It's not only about working in offices, but it is about working beyond offices."

When asked to talk about the core idea behind the inception of Women In TAAI and Tourism, Jay Bhatia, Vice President, TAAI said, "WITT came into existence as we wanted empowerment for rural and urban women force especially in tourism, and we have a lot of women in the field today who are our members, who are not coming out into the focus and limelight." Discussing the idea to empower women not limited only to the members of TAAI, he added "Our first initiation was with FICCI FLO, and with the Government of India. We signed an MOU to take things forward, and to do various activities not only for our members but for women at large, for lower strata, to skill them train them, and take things forward to and to develop our industry." Nudging women to come out of their guilt he said, "Women should not just think about their families, they should come out and think about their perceptions to take things forward for their future." ♦





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## IT'S TIME FOR SOME LOUDSPEAK

**For a conducive, tourism-friendly environment it is imperative to raise one's voice against noise pollution.**

It is neither this journal's brief nor this writer's intent to opine on politics. However in a cacophonous public life as ours, at times it becomes imperative to wade into streams that might sully the cuffs. It's a bold and brash new generation out there which is not afraid to speak its mind. Hence it is an opportune moment to convey some bitter truths to it.

A study reveals that the acoustic scenery, either in the form of 'sound', in which case it has to be protected, or in the form of 'noise', in which case it is a pollution parameter, is not taken into account during the process of urban planning. It's common knowledge that the decibel level on Indian streets is much above the red mark. It is also a cause of accidents.

Road rage is also triggered by constant sound pollution and it's an affliction that cuts across social boundaries and class divides. This is something that needs to be controlled as soon as possible.

There is an adjudication on an appeal on regulated use of sound enhancing contraptions in the country. Driven by their persuasion, some authorities might focus on only certain instances of the breach of law. Hence positive minded activists and concerned professionals must step forward to grab the silver lining and frame it. A positive fallout of this debate must be a larger effort to muzzle the entire propensity to raise the decibel levels in traffic and other aspects of cities.

To sidle away from confronting the rampaging bull of noise pollution just because some politicians seem to appropriate the issue to their ends will be to miss the wood for the trees.

Tourism grows in convivial surroundings. By clamping down on noise on the street, it creates the right frame of mind for travel and leisure. There is absolutely no need to confuse energy or enthusiasm with higher decibels. Mistaking warmth with either loud sounds or behaviour can be totally erroneous. While implementing the latter involves upbringing and training over an extended period of time, ensuring the former is achieved with simply a strict implementation of the law.

So go ahead and do it.

Anurag Yadav  
Industry Expert

Anurag Yadav is a travel author and columnist, writing on hospitality and design. An avid traveller, he has published five books and divides his time equally between Delhi and London.

The views expressed in the column are of the author, and may or may not be endorsed by the publication.

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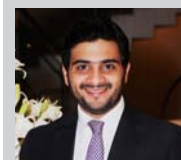
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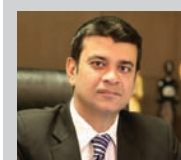
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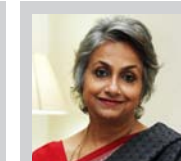
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# The Proof in Trust!

## A Case for Social Proof

By Dr Nimit Chowdhary, Professor of Tourism,  
Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Jamia Millia Islamia

**I** remember the time I was kidnapped and they sent a piece of my finger to my father. He said he wanted more proof.

-Rodney Dangerfield

Recently, I wanted to place an order for my phone's charger. A search on Amazon returned several options. Not sure which one to buy, I looked for ratings and reviews. One of the options had a four-plus rating based on reviews of more than fifty thousand verified purchases. This made my decision far easier.

In his 1984 book *Influence*, famous psychologist Robert Cialdini suggests that when people do not know what to do in a particular situation, they look at what others are doing as a guide to their conduct. We have long called it a herd mentality or herd behaviour. Social scientists refer to this normative influence leading to behaviour modification as social proof. For example, you must have noticed that international guests, when participating in a marriage or a social/ religious event, exercise extra caution. They continually observe how others are conducting themselves, and try to imitate them. Besides immersing themselves 'the correct way' in the experience 'like a local', they want to be socially correct.

Social proof is a kind of conformity when in a dilemma. The underlying belief is that others' understanding of an ambiguous situation is better than ours, leading to appropriate behaviour, including travel purchase and consumption behaviour. Wanderlust in us is ignited by seeing amazing pics of someone we know on Instagram or Facebook, visiting an exotic place. The good news is that this phenomenon can help market tourism products and services.

Several pieces of research now suggest that while planning travel, tourists are increasingly seeking social proof for inspiration and validation. This basic principle of psychology that humans are driven by what others have done applies to today's digital consumers. According to various researches, around eighty to ninety per cent of travellers report that they have gotten interested in a particular destination and activities based on what their friends, family or peers say, show, and share on



social media. Thus, user-generated content is considered trustworthy and is hence the most influential. On the other hand, it is startling to note that consumers' faith in social and celebrity influencers has withered away over the years.

The social proof used right can lead to high conversion rates in the tourism business throughout the purchasing process. Today's digital space can leverage social proof in many ways. Customer testimonials are one of the most persuasive forms of social proof. Similarly, customer recommendations, reviews, and ratings go a long way in shaping customer choices. Tripadvisor is a glaring example. Simple engagement tools like likes and shares on social media serve as robust evidence of public endorsement.

A more traditional form of social proof is conventional media mentions in newspapers and magazines, unpaid reviews, TV spots and podcasts. Tourism businesses may also publish snippets of these mentions on their website. On a different tangent, social proof is also manifest in certifications from trustworthy agencies and government bodies, badges, and other trust symbols- for example, a Halal or Kosher certificate or a green hotel certification.

Cues like 'Best Seller', 'Most Popular', 'Customers also bought...' as used on Amazon also go a long way in influencing

consumer buying preferences because they suggest what other customers have felt. Similarly, Airbnb's 'super host' tag is an endorsement. To capitalise on the fear of missing out (FOMO) and bring in the sense of urgency, it is often a good idea to share real-time stats- how many people are currently viewing a particular product or page or how many people are purchasing that product?

Finally, earned media, also referred to as user-generated content, is a powerful tool to promote tourism business. It endorses that satisfied guests are promoting the business of their free will. Selfies, photos, imagery, videos, infographics, comments, blogs, and reviews positively influence the potential customer. It is an e-WoM.

The well-known marketing expert Angie Schottmuller suggests a **C-R-A-V-E-N-S** model for persuading consumers where the social proof is- **credible, relevant, attractive (emotionally), visual, enumerated, nearby and specific**. Marketers may look at such social proof to drive traffic to their destinations and products.

*For those who believe, no proof is necessary. For those who don't believe, no proof is possible.*

-Stuart Chase ♦

*'The views expressed in the column are of the author, and may or may not be endorsed by the publication.'*

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## ‘India has always been a priority market for Palladium Hotel Group’

With resumption in travel and new hotel openings lined up for 2022, Palladium Hotel Group is gearing to welcome diverse travellers from India. **Sandra Polo Canudas, Asia & ME Commercial Director Palladium Hotel Group**, in an conversation with **Disha Shah Ghosh** talks about their presence in India, and range of trade activities.

**Q After a gap of two long years, what is your sentiment from the Indian market?**

India has always been a priority market for Palladium Hotel Group. We have been extremely active in the Indian market even during the pandemic via our representatives Global Destinations. We continually kept the travel trade updated on the safety and hygiene measures implemented at our hotels, new procedures, changed policies and requirements, etc. through newsletters and multiple agent engagement activities. One of our main focus areas all this time has been, and it will continue to be to protect, keep safe and imbibe a sense of brand confidence in our clients. Spain now is in the process of recovery, adapting to live with COVID in the safest way possible, implementing all workable procedures. With travel starting to resume, we already see a huge surge in demand for Spain as a destination and our hotels as well. We are looking forward to a great season ahead of us from the Indian market.

**Q Are you looking at unveiling any online training programme for travel agents?**

We have a booking system in place on our website wherein the travel agents can register and make reservations online. This platform also enables them access to an

image gallery hosting innumerable high resolution images & videos, hotel factsheets as well as our brochures. Currently, we do not have an online training programme for our agents; however this is something we would consider developing in the near future.

**Q There is a growing sentiment about uptick in travel behaviour with resumption of international flights. To begin the recovery process, which hotels are you expecting to see greater footfall from the Indian market?**

We see India as a perfect source market as it offers opportunities

that cater to the diverse product range under the Palladium Hotel Group portfolio. The group currently operates 44 hotels and over 13,500 rooms, distributed amongst six countries: Spain, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Italy and Brazil and manages nine brands: TRS Hotels, Grand Palladium Hotels & Resorts, Palladium Hotels, Palladium Boutique Hotels, Fiesta Hotels & Resorts, Ushuaia Unexpected Hotels, Only YOU Hotels, BLESS Collection Hotels and the Hard Rock Hotels Brand under licence with three hotels in Ibiza Tenerife and Marbella. We are expecting a great footfall at all of our hotels, especially the ones in Spain and Mexico like Ushuaia, Hard Rock hotel Ibiza and the Grand Palladium Palace Ibiza Resort & Spa.

**Q Enlist some hotel openings that are in the pipeline.**

With our expansion plans well in place, in 2022 we are to welcome our first TRS Ibiza in the Balearic Islands, which is due to open soon this month. This is our luxury resort brand tailor-made exclusively for adults with a wide range of premium services. It is a brand landing in Europe after our successful result in Latin America (Mexico & Dominican Republic). Another hotel that we wait in much anticipation for is our Hard

rock hotel Marbella which is opening in July'22.

**Q Which traveller segments are you targeting currently?**

Palladium Hotel Group is a name that is synonymous with hospitality, originality, amazing destinations, entertainment beyond expectations, innovative F&B with Michelin Star Chefs cuisine concepts and exclusive options. We have different brands experiences that would be dedicated to a different segment of clients who are searching for premium and luxury properties. These would gather the like of: adults only, families, honeymooners, groups of friends, and even weddings. In India we see diverse demographics of travellers, and above listed are all the segments we are looking to target from this Market.

**Q Are you considering new hotel acquisitions or openings in India in the near future?**

At the moment we do not have plans of any new hotel acquisitions or openings in India.

**Q In terms of trade engagement, which activities have been chalked out?**

Thanks to the collaboration with our Representative in India, Global Destinations, we have continuously strived to maintain our visibility and communication with the India market since the pandemic started in 2020, as we considered it important to maintain and keep the trade informed about what was happening in Palladium Hotel Group, especially in terms of health and security measures. Now with travel beginning to resume, we aim to focus our energies on regular engagement activities with the trade through sales calls, product updates, educational training/ webinars, different contests or reward programmes for the year 2022-2023, keeping the trade abreast with latest information and protocols. In addition to this we are looking to organise trade and media famil trips to our hotels to build confidence and exposure for our brands in India. ♦

*disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in*





# Start-Up Forum

## Bringing Innovations to the Forefront

### Bookingjini Labs Private Limited

By TBM Staff | Mumbai

**A**nticipating the impact of technology, 15 years ago, **TravelBiz Monitor** introduced an industry-first live news portal, with hourly online reporting on travel, tourism, aviation and hospitality industries. Since then, we have created a niche for ourselves by providing analytical stories and statistical information to the travel trade on a regular basis. To keep this momentum going, the Editorial team has decided to showcase new-age technology products and services every month that have the potential to disrupt the market further. Moreover, the time now is also appropriate as the on-going pandemic has further widened the scope of using technology.

For this unique initiative, TravelBiz Monitor has partnered with 'Start-up Mentor Board', a visionary platform with credentials in business, technology, e-commerce, digital market place, payment solutions and IT infrastructure, to highlight the stories of new-age technology ideas. Start-up Mentor Board has been set-up as an initiative to mentor and guide the travel technology driven start-ups and facilitate collaboration in the larger travel ecosystem.

**Website – <https://startupmentorboard.vgmrtechsolutions.com>**

The Board is spearheaded by well-known thought leader Ashish Kumar, who is also the Co-Chairman of FICCI Travel Technology Committee. It comprises Bharti Maan, who has led start-ups to scale rapidly; Patrick Richards, an experienced travel industry leader in the UK; Chetan Kapoor, an analyst with deep understanding of the travel and tourism business and trends; Kartik Sharma, an artificial intelligence practitioner; Karthik Venkataraman, a digital transformation & an e-commerce visionary; Jure Bratkic, who led innovative solutions in the USA and Kyasha Bhoola, with expertise and advanced insight into the travel industry across Africa.

**\*One can register for the SMB Program at**

**<https://startupmentorboard.vgmrtechsolutions.com/form.html>**

**Startup Name:** Bookingjini Labs Private Limited

**Core Team:** Sibasish Mishra  
Manoj Pandia  
Gourab Nandy  
Deepak Dash

**Founding year:** 2018

**Company Website:** [www.bookingjini.com](http://www.bookingjini.com)

**Description:** Bookingjini founded in 2018 helps hotels to maximise online revenue and reduce the cost of acquisition of guest through its marketing engine, analytics and Guest Experience management system. To add to this, they also use a product suite to help hotels in increasing their top line and bottom line. The product includes Booking Engine, Channel Manager, CRM, Chatbot, Central Reservation System, Marketing engine, Website builder, Rate-shopper, Analytics and other services. They have been recognised by CNBC Young Turk, in 2018. Since inception they have raised USD 3 Million in Seed fund to develop their products.

**<https://youtu.be/Voeh9BNy4xI>**



# Transforming Tourism Digitally

## FICCI's Digital Travel, Hospitality & Innovation Summit 2022

✍️.....Vartik Sethi | New Delhi

Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) founded The Travel Technology and Digital Committee in 2016 to corporatize digital technology across the travel industry, aiming to open up the world of travel to the endless possibilities of digital technology.

Ashish Kumar, Co-Chairman, FICCI Travel-Technology and Digital Committee, drew a distinctive light on Covid-19 by calling it the Chief Transformation Officer. Kumar said that COVID-19, though seen in a negative context, was a driving force that enabled the government and the states to realize the acute need for digitalization.

One of FICCI's chief objectives is to position itself as a knowledge partner to the micro start-ups and the travel industry, revealed Kumar. As the travel industry works in silos, FICCI sees itself as the harbinger of collaboration and synergy, he added.

Enumerating where India stands globally, Jyotsna Suri, Past President FICCI, MD The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group, believes India to be on the threshold of becoming digitally achieved. She observed that the industry has realized that online is where the new age consumer is. Encouraging a conducive environment for consistent growth, Suri implored industry leaders to channel positivity out of an unprecedented pandemic that the industry had to encounter.

The inclusion of Covid-19 friendly protocols has been antithetic to the hospitality

As the Indian tourism industry finds itself on the cusp of recovery, FICCI's 4th Digital Travel, Hospitality & Innovation Summit 2022, glanced at how an enhanced digital ecosystem can give the industry a much-needed spur.

industry. Travel experiences with no physical touch, such as the inclusion of e-menus, e-check-ins, and contactless travel have been the norm in the last two years, said Suri.

Dhruv Shringi, Co-Chairman, FICCI Travel, Tourism & Hospitality Committee & Chairman, shared his observation of how consumer interaction with business owners changes meaningfully with time. Recalling the horrors of Covid-19, he shared his past concerns, "We were wondering if passengers would ever board cruise ships again after hearing stories of thousands of people being trapped at sea". Fast forward to 2022,

Shringi's concerns have been defenestrated as India crossed the Pre-Covid volume in terms of domestic passengers traveling per day.

Across demographics and geographies, Covid-19 has forced everyone to become tech-savvy. "Over the last two years, people who have been trapped indoors have done pretty much everything online. From ordering grocery to ordering food, to e-commerce – everything is being done online", said Shringi. Underscoring internet penetration to have grown leaps and bounds in tier 2 and 3 cities, Shringi credited the cost of data, and the slashed price of devices to have driven this growth. He exclaimed, "It's very important for the travel industry to understand where the consumer is today. The consumer is consuming pretty much everything online".

Large corporations are now waking up to the reality of work-from-home models and hybrid working environments, said Shringi. With technology replacing humans on the mechanical side of things, Shringi urged travel agents to evolve, he said, "This is truly the time for people to evolve from transactional agents into advisors and counselors for their consumers."

Worldwide pent-up demand and burgeoning disposable incomes are to bring an anticipated windfall into the tourism industry. He vocalized people's vengeance for having to sit back at home for the whole pandemic. Shringi seeking ways to promote the hidden gems of India called for avenues for private players to partner with the government less traveled places worthy of notice.







In his presentation, India Tourism Unleashed, Rajesh Magow, Co-founder and Group CEO, Make My Trip, endowed hope and confidence into the otherwise lackluster tourism operators. "International confined us, domestic united us", while international travel was in a downward spiral, domestic traveling proved to be the ray of hope for the tourism industry.

When the majority of the population was restricted to the four walls of their homes, a lot of initiative was taken by the government for infrastructural development. "We tend to ignore the pace of development that has been taking place". Highway construction and road connectivity have doubled and phenomenal work has been carried out in digitalization, added Magow.

"Shorter duration travel or weekend trips will stay and trends suggest a pick-up. Believe it or not, people are willing to do more than three to five holidays a year", he said.

According to a consumer insight survey by MakeMyTrip, Magow shared seemingly outrageous statistics underpinning the rise of tier 2 and tier 3 cities. He shared that 50% of the e-commerce orders were made from tier 2 cities, 34% of the tier 2 internet users ordered groceries online, and 18% used the pay later option. With the Fintech revolution spearheading convenience for consumers, payment modes like UPI, soft loans, and pay later options have eased access to credit, he added.

Despite the rising flight and transport prices, the pent-up demand has had its effect on the rising demand to travel, "Consumer sentiment right now is at an all-time high globally" shared Magow.

G Kamala Vardhan Rao, Director General, Ministry of Tourism, the Government of India, shared his take on the future of the tourism and hospitality industry saying that he foresees a boom in the MICE industry by the end of 2022. Rao mentioned that the Indian tourism ministry is hosting multiple international conferences, and constantly

collaborating with other government ministries. He exclaimed, "We are taking over the presidency of G20 from Indonesia in December" which would add to the growth of Indian tourism and economy. Rao discussed the drafting of the National Digital Tourism Mission aims to bridge the existing information gap among different tourism industry silos through a digital highway. "This digitalization is also mentioned in the upcoming national tourism policy which should be finalized very soon", he added.

The opening panel discussion underlined India's tremendous resilience and grit against the challenging times, Covid-19 brought with it but showed awareness of the ground still left to cover. Shringi said consumer convenience has seen an exponential rise in the past two years due to digitalization calling non-tech-enabled businesses almost redundant in today's times. As it has become imperative for every travel agent to provide digital services, Ashish added,

"We need to do away with the nomenclature of an Online Travel Agent (OTA)", Ankush Nijhawan, Chairman, FICCI Travel Technology & Digital Committee, opined his top three drivers of the digital revolution to be artificial intelligence, big data, and tactical target deals. The representative of the millennial mind, Suraj Nangia, Managing Partner, Nangia Andersen LLP shared how there is a stark behavioral contrast between the 80's generation, millennials, and GenZ.

Sharing his ideas on virtual reality technology, Dhruv Shringi shared with **TravelBiz Monitor** how this technology might help but never be able to replace real human experiences. "I don't think we are getting to a stage where human beings will stop traveling and just experience destinations in the metaverse, you might get a taste of it, but the experience will still happen in the destination", he added.

In a conversation with **TravelBiz Monitor** on the sidelines of the event, Nangia shared how technologies like blockchain

and metaverse have been taking the digital industry by storm and will even have an impact on the future of tourism. He said, "Metaverse is the technology of the future, it depends on how the hospitality industry will accommodate it if they can evolve in a world of metaverse".

Shedding light on the government's perspective on the growth of tourism and digitalizing the industry Rupinder Brar, ADG, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, shared key insights. Banking on the belief that a robust highway infrastructure is paramount to a country's tourism growth, Brar said digital penetration and technology advancements will be backed by India's world-class infrastructure. She called for greater synergy between varied segments of the tourism sector. One of the major challenges delineated by Brar revolved around creating awareness of the quality highways, airports, diverse cultures, and hospitable demeanor, India has to offer to domestic as well as inbound tourists. She concurred the subsequent challenge could be well taken care of riding the digital wave, harnessing the power of social and digital mediums. "India is an unending story. No one, two, or three trips are enough to understand India", exclaimed Brar highlighting the diversity the country has to offer.

The panel discussion which marked the culmination of FICCI's event, Monisha Dewan, Senior Area Director, South Asia-Marriott International, opined that the consumer dictates what changes are to be made in a particular industry. "One of the things that we have noticed is that the consumer demand is what fuels what technology will be developed". Talking of the new age traveller, Dewan also touched upon how the hospitality industry is receptive to its consumer's needs. She mentioned how Marriott has been taking steps towards sustainability, and how their mission to cut down on the use of plastic across all their properties is actively being worked on. ♦





Philippines Department of Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat addressed the delegates during the opening of the 21st World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) Global Summit.



WTTC CEO and President Julia Simpson

# Discovering the Philippines through WTTC's Global Summit for 'Rediscovering Travel'

✍️.....TBM Staff | Manila

The Philippines had once again put itself on the global map as a safe and ideal tourist destination in the new normal after successfully hosting the 21st World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) Global Summit from April 20-22, 2022, at the Marriott Hotel in Pasay City.

With the country's first-ever hosting of what is touted as the most influential annual travel and tourism event, the Philippines has shown that it is capable of holding an event of such prestige, attended not only by international government delegations in the tourism sector, but also by top executives of hotels, airlines, travel agencies, tour operators, transportation, global distribution system, advertising and entertainment companies, destinations, and industry organisations.

The event was spearheaded by the Philippines Department of Tourism (DOT) led



WTTC Chair Arnold Donald

by Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat who has expressed optimism for the local tourism industry, as the Philippines has ramped up its efforts in making the country a safe and ideal place to travel amid the pandemic. "In the nearly two years where international

travel was put on hold, the Philippines has been busy preparing for the day when our country would be open to the world. We have put in place guidelines that will ensure the safety of our guests, our tourism workforce, and our community," she emphasised during the summit opening press conference.

As early as September 2020, the Philippines was granted the use of the WTTC Safe Travels Stamp, the world's first safety and hygiene stamp for travellers to recognise governments and businesses that have adopted global health standardised protocols. With this, the tourism sector in the Philippines is projecting a rosy outlook as the world navigates within the next normal, welcoming new trends and preferences of local and international travellers alike. As restrictions ease on border entry, tourists will get to enjoy Philippine attractions which fit the new traveller preferences during and post-pandemic: open spaces, outdoor destinations, and nature reserves. With 98% of tourism workers fully-

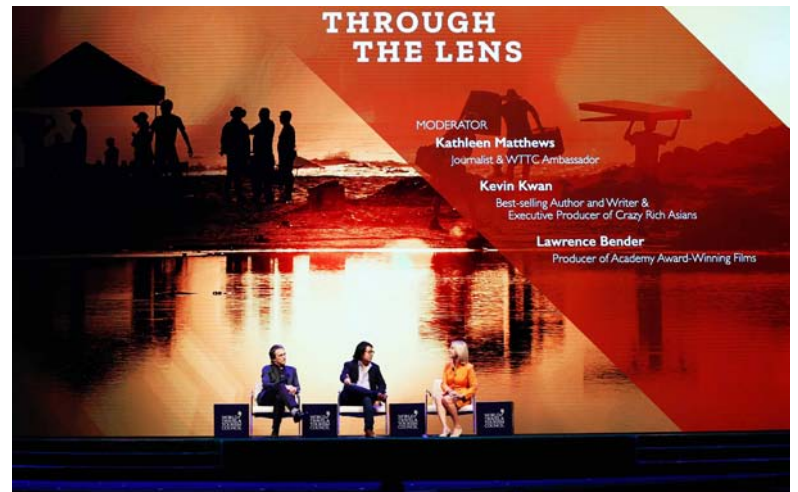


Philippines DOT Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat (middle) shares the stage with (L-R) Dan Richards, CEO of Global Rescue; Paul Griffiths, CEO of Dubai Airports International; Craig Smith, Group President of Marriott International, and Kathleen Matthews, journalist and WTTC ambassador



(L-R) Dan Richards, CEO of Global Rescue; Paul Griffiths, CEO of Dubai Airports International; Philippines DOT Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat; Craig Smith, Group President of Marriott International; and Kathleen Matthews, journalist and WTTC ambassador





(L-R) Tim Hentschel, CEO of HotelPlanner & Meetings.com; Gaurav Bhatnagar, Managing Director of TBO Holidays; Eva Stewart, Global Sector Head of Travel & Tourism of YouGov; Jeffrey C. Rutledge, CEO of AIG Travel; Tomohiro Kaneko, Vice Commissioner of Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, Japan; and Arnie Weissmann, Editor-in-Chief of Travel Weekly

(L-R) Lawrence Bender, Academy award-winning producer; Kevin Kwan, best-selling author and writer-producer of Crazy Rich Asians; and Kathleen Matthews, journalist and WTTC ambassador

vaccinated, the country is further solidifying its promise to provide tourists a safe and enjoyable stay in the country.

Julia Simpson, CEO and President of WTTC, also presented the result of the organisation's latest Economic Impact Report (EIR) on travel and tourism in the Philippines. Results showed how the local tourism industry is integral to the economy—in fact, it is projected to have an annual growth rate of 6.7% in the next 10 years, more than the overall economy average growth rate of 5.6%. The sector is also forecasted to generate 2.9 million new jobs, accounting for 21.5% of all jobs in the country. "Our expert analysis shows that the travel and tourism economy has turned a corner and is firmly on the road to recovery," Simpson shared. Showcasing the country's cultural richness in arts, music, and food, a gala dinner on the second day of the summit was prepared for all delegates at the Philippine International Convention Center. Select delegates were also able to enjoy pre- and post-summit tours spearheaded by the Department of Tourism in various Philippine attractions, such as cultural and heritage sites in Manila and the



Aradhana Khawala, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Aptamind Partners

provinces of Bataan and Ilocos; culinary, arts and eco-friendly sites in Quezon Province and Rizal; pristine beaches in Palawan and Boracay; nature and adventure sites in the Davao region; and potential investment sites in Pampanga and Tarlac.

Attended by over 1,000 delegates coming from more than 50 countries, a number

double than expected, around 30 government delegations, 200 representatives from the media, and 10,000 virtual participants, the summit sessions touched on varying topics under the umbrella theme, "Rediscovering Travel."

The first panel focused on the future of the sector as the world continues to navigate the pandemic and effectively co-exist with COVID-19. Travel and tourism industry leaders shared key learnings and insights on sustained changes that the sector needs to continue providing incredible experiences while maintaining the health and safety of travellers. In this session, Puyat stressed the importance of sustainability, synergy among other government agencies, and collaboration with the private sector to build a better tourism industry as these factors would essentially characterize and define the future of travel and tourism.

### Travel with Confidence

With the population's pent-up demand for travel making a comeback, the global travel and tourism sector rally behind instrumental initiatives to rebuild traveller confidence.



(L - R) Randy Durband, CEO of Global Sustainable Tourism Council; Billie Dumaliang, Advocacy Officer & Trustee of Masungi Georeserve; Ann Dumaliang, Managing Trustee of Masungi Georeserve, Flavia Santoro, CEO of ProColumbia; and Sharanjit Lyl, International News Journalist



(L-R) Ann Dumaliang, Managing Trustee of Masungi Georeserve; Flavia Santoro, CEO of ProColumbia; and Sharanjit Lyl, International News Journalist





Jeremy Jauncey, Founder and CEO of Beautiful Destinations



Melati Wijsen, Founder of YOUTHTOPIA and Bye Bye Plastic Bags with WTTTC Chair Arnold Donald

The session was moderated by Aradhana Khowala, CEO and Founder of Aptamind Partners.

With borders and travel search demand volume going up, the eagerness to travel is complemented by changed mindsets, destinations, and travellers alike. To improve travel confidence, protect staff, and enable movement, the sector implemented rigorous health and hygiene protocols, together with required proof of vaccination or negative COVID test results.

### New Trends on the Block

This session revealed several new trends for the year and how they may impact travelers, businesses, and destinations. Eva Stewart, Global Sector Head of Travel & Tourism at YouGov, shared data on big shifts in how travelers think and feel, stressing that these changes in consumer behavior must be well-noted by the industry.

For instance, 70% of travellers are more inclined to visit lesser-known destinations, while 55% are interested in carbon-negative travel. Stewart estimated that there are around 300 million sustainability-minded travelers around the world. She noted: "As an industry, if we help consumers find those options for less touristy places—perhaps more

eco-friendly, more responsible lodging, that's definitely going to help resonate with those responsible travellers."

### Through the Lens

To wrap up the first day of the summit proper, "Crazy Rich Asians" best-selling author Kevin Kwan candidly shared that he wanted to make his next movie in the Philippines. Academy Award-winning film producer Lawrence Bender joined the author in the panel, echoing his sentiments. Bender teased further details on Kwan's upcoming creative project, as well as more reasons why they visited the Philippines, on top of the summit. The idea of a Kwan-led creative project based on the Philippines proves to be an exciting prospect, given the author's principles on storytelling and its possible effects on local tourism. More than showcasing destinations and driving travel to new locations, Bender emphasised that when film crews come to certain destinations to create their movies, the local economy also benefits from it, from hiring local people to renting accommodations and local props, noting that it's a "net positive" for the economy.

### Cultivating a Sustainable Future

The last session of the summit featured Melati

Wijsen, founder of the youth-driven Bye Bye Plastic Bags campaign that led to the banning of all single-use plastic bags in Bali in 2018. Now 21, Wijsen heads YOUTHTOPIA, a platform that helps the youth answer the question of how they can help make a change. It supports young people through masterclasses, mentorships, and workshops. Wijsen emphasized how private sectors move faster than the public sectors, and how it's still equally crucial to engage with both to make an impact. "I think [the] private sector has a really incredible position to push further, to demand more, and lead by example for governments. [However,] it has to happen hand in hand," the environmental activist supplied. Wijsen also stressed the need for companies to have sustainability initiatives be integrated in how they do business and be more than just one-off projects or marketing campaigns for corporate social responsibility (CSR) departments.

### WTTTC Summit travels to Saudi Arabia

The global summit was capped off with the announcement of the 22nd WTTTC Global Summit, happening in Riyadh, capital city of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, from November 29 to December 2 this year. ♦



(L-R) WTTTC CEO and President Julia Simpson, Philippines Department of Tourism Sec. Berna Romulo-Puyat and WTTTC Chair Arnold Donald



Melati Wijsen, Founder of YOUTHTOPIA and Bye Bye Plastic Bags with Arnold Donald, WTTTC Chair





## ‘India is one of Atlantis’ top five source markets’

Our goal during the pandemic and key learning was to continue and always ensure new product enhancements. One of our key strategies is to keep building and creating, says **Neil Shah, Account Director, Sales, Atlantis Dubai**, in a conversation with **Prasenjit Chakraborty**.

### Q What sets Atlantis, The Palm, Dubai apart from other luxury hotels in Dubai?

Atlantis, the Palm is a resort like no other, a fully integrated entertainment destination with the best of restaurants and multiple facilities to cater to all audiences. From families with children, to couples across age groups, to adventure enthusiasts and single travellers. Atlantis was the first resort to open on the Palm Island and offers the best views of Dubai’s skyline and the ocean, a theme which runs through the resort

### Q How soon do you think the occupancy for MICE & Corporate booking matches the pace of pre-Covid levels?

We notice a solid recovery with strong leads and confirmed group movements, India being a key market, one of Atlantis’ top five source markets. With an inventory of 1,548 rooms and suites, we consider each segment to be a significant contributor. We rely on all of business segments – leisure, MICE and weddings, and the team specialises in all of them.

Destination weddings are

crucial for Atlantis, with over 40% of all wedding business coming from India; a share we are actually looking to increase in 2022 and beyond. To support this, we have recently completed a US\$3.1M refurbishment of our ballroom, giving the space a brand-new neutral and fresh look and feel, suitable for all styles of weddings and events. A host of new experiences and activities are being extended, to add to the wedding experience, including the most important waterpark expansion in history, making Atlantis’ Aquaventure the largest waterpark in the world.

### Q How are you using digital channels to gain traction from the travel agents? Any

for every night booked.

### Q What is your plan to target the millennials?

Millennials are a rapidly growing market in India. We have a wide range of activities right from the largest waterpark in the world, Aquaventure waterpark, to an array of other experiences like the Dolphin Bay and adventure activities like Snorkelling and Aquatrek. Atlantis’ is a product that excites millennials! Another interesting new addition is Nailology, the regions only super sophisticated licensed nail salon. And of course our award winning spa and amazing restaurants offering the world’s best cuisines.

And not to miss Wavehouse, which is an entertainment option that combines live music, gaming, bowling with popular cuisines from across the globe.

### Q What are the lessons you learnt from the pandemic?

One of Atlantis’ key strategies is

“Destination weddings are crucial for Atlantis, with over 40% of all wedding business coming from India; a share we are actually looking to increase in 2022 and beyond. To support this, we have recently completed a US\$3.1M refurbishment of our ballroom, giving the space a brand-new neutral and fresh look and feel, suitable for all styles of weddings and events. A host of new experiences and activities are being extended, to add to the wedding experience.”

### Q specific strategy for the India market?

We invite our valued Indian travel trade fraternity to join our Global Booking Rewards Programme [atlantisresortsincentives.com](http://atlantisresortsincentives.com) in 2022, which is designed to enable us to recognise and thank our trusted, handpicked partners for their continued loyalty in choosing Atlantis as their preferred resort destination. The platform essentially allows us to reward Agents making reservations for Atlantis, The Palm with a host of special incentives

to keep building and creating. Our goal during the pandemic and key learning was to continue and always ensure new product enhancements and appealing options for things to do and to see, for returning guests who visit season after season and year after year and new guests to explore.

Despite the pandemic and its impact, we held true to this core value and continued to work on various projects throughout the resort to enhance its positioning, for today and for the future. ♦

[prasenjit.chakraborty@saffronsynergies.in](mailto:prasenjit.chakraborty@saffronsynergies.in)





## ‘We intend to get new infrastructures at heritage sites to encourage corporate activities (MICE)’

After the implementation of Madhya Pradesh Film Tourism Policy-2020, the government is promoting film tourism in a big way by providing subsidies and all permissions and clearances through single window online system, says **Shilpa Gupta, Additional Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board**, in a conversation with **Prasenjit Chakraborty**.

**Q Madhya Pradesh Tourism is keen to offer new tourism products that are aimed at families travelling together. What are the new products you launched in the recent past?**

In order to deliver sustainable and delightful tourism experience, Madhya Pradesh Tourism (MPT) has relentlessly been working on shaping the tourism sector by not only providing all the essential services to their tourists but also introducing various thrilling and mesmerising activities in the state for all age groups. From river rafting, mountaineering, tree and gypsy camping, jungle safari,

cycling events, heritage walk to food walk, there is something for everyone. Recently, MPT brought together gram stays, farm stays and homestays as safe and culturally rich stay options under rural tourism which was also applauded on the international stage. The rural tourism is slowly gaining popularity among travellers as exploring rural destinations can help to know the traditional roots of the state and it is also ideal for a family trip. We are also working on wellness and mindful tourism at various nature centric tourist destinations.

**Q The state has emerged as one of the best destinations in India. Keeping this in mind, what is your plan to improve**

**rankings in the state?**

We have launched so many products to boost tourism in our state including rural tourism, wellness tourism, adventure activities etc. The state has a treat in store for a solo woman traveller too, as it offers destinations where travelling alone is comfortable and safe. To promote our culture, tourist destinations and MPT hotels etc., we are constantly working on different segments that include organising roadshows, workshops, conferences, cultural events, campaigns etc. The Board conducts webinars with Indian embassies in different countries

for the promotion of MP Tourism and get foreign footfall. Madhya Pradesh tourism emphasises on getting new infrastructures with an aim to encourage corporate activities (MICE) at heritage sites.

**Q What is the prospect for Madhya Pradesh to become a hub for film shooting? What does the state offer to filmmakers to shoot their films there?**

Madhya Pradesh is a perfect combination of natural settings, ancient heritage, huge water bodies, existing hub for theatre and helpful administration, which makes it a preferred destination for film shooting for several years. More than 200 projects including feature films, TV Serial/Series, TVCs and Reality shows have been shot in Madhya Pradesh, so far. The major cities of MP- Indore, Bhopal, Gwalior and Jabalpur have good air connectivity. After the implementation of Madhya Pradesh Film Tourism Policy-2020, the government is promoting film tourism in a big way by providing subsidies and all permissions and clearances through a single window online system. The vision of this policy is to make Madhya Pradesh a major Film making hub and generate a number of employment opportunities in the state. The availability of line producers, production facilities, local artists and crew etc. makes it much more economical to shoot on diverse, rich and beautiful shooting locations of Madhya Pradesh.





To encourage film tourism in the state, Madhya Pradesh Government is offering financial subsidy/incentive for film makers on shooting Feature Film, TV Serial, Web series and documentaries etc. Apart from the direct financial subsidy, the state offers Land Banks for the development of Film City, Film Studio, Skill Development Centres, Post Production centres, Incubation Centres etc. for the development of Film Industry in the state.

### Q Could you tell us more about Tree and Gypsy camping in Satpura National Park, Pachmarhi?

Madhya Pradesh Tourism is promoting the newest and most thrilling way to camp out - 'Tree Camping' and 'Gypsy Camping' at Satpura National Park (Pachmarhi and Madhai). Tourists experience stargazing, bonfire, and dusk drive, swimming, riverside jungle trail

“MPTB is working strategically towards getting more domestic and international tourists, promoting new travel circuits in different segments. The Board focuses on public-private partnerships, skill development, publicity, promotion of tourism sites internationally, identification and development of tourism infrastructure, investor facilitation and many more to get acclamation on the international stage.”

with bird watching and tribal cuisine with barbeque in the jungles of Satpura. Away from the hustle and bustle of the city, these camps offer a balanced blend of adventures and calmness. The locations for camps are thrilling and safe at the same time. This is your choice, whether you want to go for riverside or a valley view or want to explore Satpura's tribal culture & jungle. The highest point in the Satpura

range, Dhoopgarh hilltop is a beautiful spot to see spectacular sunsets and sunrises.

### Q What is your strategy to attract more foreign tourists in the state from what it is now?

MPTB is working strategically towards getting more domestic and international tourists, promoting new travel circuits in different segments. The Board focuses on public-private partnerships, skill

development, publicity, promotion of tourism sites internationally, identification and development of tourism infrastructure, investor facilitation and many more to get acclamation on the international stage. Also there has been an enormous change in the way tourists travel in the post COVID era. Tourists want to escape to the hills, wildlife, rural and nature centric tourist destinations to get rid of anxiety and stress. Keeping all these things in mind we are promoting wellness and rural tourism. A good number of tourists visit nature centric pollution free destinations and get themselves rejuvenated and relaxed.

### Q Where do you see MP Tourism three years down the lane?

In the coming three years, we see Madhya Pradesh as one of the best tourist destinations for domestic and international tourists. ♦

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Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

The Western Region Chapter of Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) organised an educative session on TCS (Tax Collected at Source) in Mumbai recently. The aim was to dispel doubts about the new law for outbound travel. Rajesh P. Shah, Partner, Jayantilal Thakkar & Co, who was one of the speakers at the event told TravelBiz Monitor that through TCS, the government wants to collect information about the people who travel abroad. "The government wants the travel agents who sell outbound tour packages to be part of the information gathering process. And 5% TCS of what is being collected will be credited to those people and they can claim the credit like normal advanced tax of TDS," pointed out Shah.

Citing an example, he said that there was hue and cry when the government introduced TCS in the car segment but people accepted it when they realised the purpose of introduction. "The same is the case with tour packages. People are initially reluctant, but they will accept it after some time," he said.

## TAFI WR's session on TCS dispels doubts; members looking at further dialogue with government

Shah also said that the government is not targeting the travel industry or travel agents. "The government is targeting people who are not paying proper income tax but travelling abroad and leading a luxurious life. The statistics (pre-Covid) show that the number of people travelling abroad have gone up substantially, but the same is not reflected in the income tax return. So, the government intends to capture that data. We are complicating the law through multiple interpretations," explained Shah.

Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI, said that the TCS has impacted the tourism business as it increased their compliance burden. "It is important to know what the law says and what would be the consequences of not complying with the law," he said.

Are you opposing the government's move? Replied Prakash, "All associations have opposed it earlier, so has TAFI. Because, we have become tax collectors and reporters for the government. That too at a time when all our margins are under pressure due to Covid. This is an unjustified burden on us."



Prakash suggested two things to the government if the purpose of the introduction of TCS is to collect information only. First, there has to be a level-playing field which means portals registered overseas should also be mandated to collect TCS. Second, to reduce it to 1% from 5%. "What is the point of keeping it 5% if the intention is

to collect information only," asked Prakash.

Jitul Mehta, Chairman, Western Region, TAFI, said that there is absolutely no clarity on TCS among the members. "I am worried about TCS as it is related to outward remittance of foreign exchanges. Hence, it is imperative to know details about the law," said Mehta. He also said that many such educational sessions are in the pipeline but didn't divulge detail.

The event witnessed a good number of members who asked a barrage of questions, hence making it truly interactive. "The issues which have been raised and we do not have answers, will take up with the Ministry and seek clarification for the same," said Prakash.

Tags: TAFI, TCS, Session. ♦

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## NEWS ROUND UP

# Improving the Travel Experience Post-pandemic

## Providing a positive customer travel experience is crucial to restoring traveller confidence

By Todd Handcock, President, Asia Pacific, Collinson

**W**ith the onset of Omicron, the world braced itself to learn of the impact of a new variant. Though COVID-19 continues to pose a serious threat to health, as time passed we found Omicron to be more easily transmissible but less severe symptom-wise, at least in the majority of vaccinated cases.

As a result of this, many countries globally have moved towards a partial or full re-opening of their borders, typically with the caveat that travellers must be vaccinated or have proof of a negative COVID-19 test taken within 72 or 48-hours pre-departure.

Though it's well-known that the Asia Pacific region remains behind the rest of the world from a travel recovery standpoint, recent announcements from markets including Bali, Vietnam, Cambodia, Australia and Hong Kong – regarding a relaxing of travel restrictions (to various degrees) – has signalled that the growth region won't be behind for too much longer.

This is good news for global travel. However, the toll on travellers who were grounded for almost two years should not be overlooked; with fluid travel regulations and the ever-present virus contributing to a subtle undercurrent of post-pandemic travel anxiety.

### The stress of travelling in the new normal

According to the latest Asia Pacific Travel Recovery Report by Collinson, created in partnership with CAPA and featuring responses from more than 400 C-Suite and senior managerial level travel industry experts from leading global travel brands, 79% believe travel will feel 'more stressful' than before the pandemic, largely as a result of the increased COVID-safety protocols, as well as COVID itself. So, what can airports and those within the travel ecosystem do to help alleviate stress and anxiety in the 'new normal'?

### Seamless access to 'safe havens'

Rebuilding traveller confidence means focusing on mental as well as physical health, and addressing the factors that may exacerbate travel stress.

The Collinson x CAPA survey revealed an increased desire from travellers to be 'away from the madding crowds', with fast-track access and lounge experiences preferred at airports for enhanced peace of mind. This is in line with Priority Pass's global drive to enhance lounge experiences for travellers; with the introduction of Be Relax Spas for the ultimate pre-flight relaxation, and contactless food and beverage offerings such as Ready2Order set to double across Priority Pass lounges for a socially-distanced dining experience.

Recognising the importance and strength of the India market, Priority Pass also recently launched 'Priority Pass™ Access India' to enable brands to better support their customers' return to travel, timed to the

recovery. Owned and operated by Collinson, and created in partnership with Pine Labs, it provides discerning frequent travellers access to over 50 premium lounges across India, simply by tapping or swiping their payment card.

When broadened to include all 1,300 lounges and lounge experiences within the Priority Pass global network, travellers' anxiety is further eased through access to at least one experience covering 95% of all international flights from the top 100 airports.\*

### Domestic market to see a sharp spike

After two years of off-and-on travel restrictions, and the rise and fall of three COVID waves, Indians are firming up their travel plans for the summer holidays. Online travel agency EaseMyTrip witnessed a 30% jump in travel bookings on a month-on-month basis ahead of the summer holiday season. Current flight booking trends on Goibibo also indicate that holiday destinations, including Ladakh, Kashmir, Goa, Kochi and Dehradun, are seeing a 100% recovery in domestic bookings for the summer season. The noticeable uptick can be credited to a significant drop in active coronavirus cases in the country, pent-up desire to travel, increased vaccination rates, and an easing of COVID-19 restrictions.

The pandemic has been a catalyst for the travel industry to evolve. From artificial intelligence tools that speed up the check-in process, to digital solutions like Ready2Order, the entire airport journey has been reimaged to make the experience more seamless and hassle-free for travellers. The last two years have also reinforced the power of contactless payments in increasing safety and efficiency; another key enhancement that's helping to rebuild traveller confidence.

In 2022, it's clear that as an industry we will need to continue to innovate, and better communicate advances to travellers. Tools and solutions that help travellers to navigate their way safely but efficiently, causing as little stress as possible, is a core focus. The road to recovery won't be immediate but with these innovations, it's looking likely to be better than ever before. ♦

*'The views expressed in the column are of the author, and may or may not be endorsed by the publication.'*



*Todd Handcock is President, Asia Pacific at Collinson. Todd has over 25 years of experience in the region, with leadership roles across sales, marketing and operations. He has supported clients in diverse industries including banking, insurance, consumer, retail, travel and hospitality, and has a deep understanding and appreciation for the complex challenges faced by businesses in today's rapidly evolving landscape.*



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