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High-profile Indian delegation meets President of Zanzibar

Four Goodwill Ambassadors appointed for Tourism, Sports & Entertainment sectors

TBM Staff | Zanzibar

In the first week of June, a high-profile delegation from India led by Tanzania-born Jilesh Himat Babla met the President of Zanzibar to discuss issues related to further developing Zanzibar as a tourism, sports & entertainment destination.

As a result, a mega integrated project which includes sports, tourism, hospitality and entertainment-related facilities has been flagged off on a 37-acre plot of land in the prime location of Fumba in Zanzibar. This visionary venture, the largest of its kind in East Africa, was conceptualised by and will be executed by JHIL Enterprises, which is also founded by Jilesh Babla.

The President of Zanzibar, His Excellency Dr. Hussein Ali Mwinyi, welcomed the suggestions of the Indian delegation, and promised to cooperate and extend his full support to this project by JHIL Enterprises. Speaking about the execution of the project, the President said, "This is a landmark day for Zanzibar as we lay the foundation stone for the first integrated sports and tourism complex in East Africa."

Talking about this project, Babla said, "We have today embarked on a journey to work



towards creating world-class Sports, Tourism & Theatre Infrastructure in Zanzibar. It's a project aimed at making Zanzibar a hub for Sports, Culture & Entertainment thereby creating jobs & opportunities to further enhance tourism. I'm thankful for the unconditional support provided by His Excellency President Mwinyi and his Government. We will make all efforts to bring our plans to fruition."

"This project will not only help in increasing the tourism numbers to Zanzibar, but also open new avenues for sports, entertainment, culture and investment in our unique destination," Babla added.

While laying the foundation stone of this visionary project, the President also appointed four Goodwill Ambassadors for Zanzibar across

various verticals.

Speaking on the occasion, Sunil Gavaskar who was appointed as a Goodwill Ambassador for Sports Infrastructure said, "I'm delighted to be appointed as the Goodwill Ambassador for Zanzibar. It's a huge honour. With a country as beautiful as this and some of the most interesting and affectionate people, it will be a pleasure to promote Zanzibar wherever I can."

On being appointed as one of the brand ambassadors, the entertainment baron – Kunal Kapoor said, "It's an honour. From the entertainment perspective, I believe Zanzibar can be developed as an East African Hub for culture & entertainment for the whole of the African continent."

Contd PG. 6 ►

Saudi Tourism Authority makes grand debut in India; envisions 100mn global visits by 2030

Shayan Mallick | New Delhi

Driven by a transformative economic and social plan, Saudi Vision 2030, and backed by some of the world's most ambitious and audacious projects, Saudi Tourism made a big splash destination launch in the Indian market. Saudi Tourism not only occupied a sprawling vantage booth at SATTE last month, but it was also the premier partner country to the Show, thereby showing a strong intent and commitment towards developing the Indian market. Saudi Tourism also inked several MoUs with industry associations, OTAs and such players during the event aimed at growing Indian tourist arrivals to the Kingdom.

In an conversation with **TravelBiz Monitor** on the sidelines of the event, a forceful Alhassan Ali Aldabbagh, Chief Markets Officer (CMO) – Asia Pacific, Saudi Tourism Authority (STA), while welcoming the South Asian travellers to the "Authentic Home of Arabia" insisted that

a hitherto unexplored and pristine Saudi Arabia is a culture Indian travellers have never explored, and that it extends a welcome travellers will never forget.

Tourism is on the verge of big boom in Saudi. As Aldabbagh informs, not only is Saudi making massive investment in ramping up the country's state-of-the-art and modern tourism infrastructure in line with international trends and demands, but is also already home to a great many existing cultural heritage sites and attractions, unique destinations and so much more.

For the uninitiated, Tourism is at the core of the Saudi Vision 2030. The country is investing USD 800 billion over the next eight years, until 2030. It has set a target of 100 million tourism visits by that year, and a GDP share growth from 3 per cent to 10 per cent by 2030.

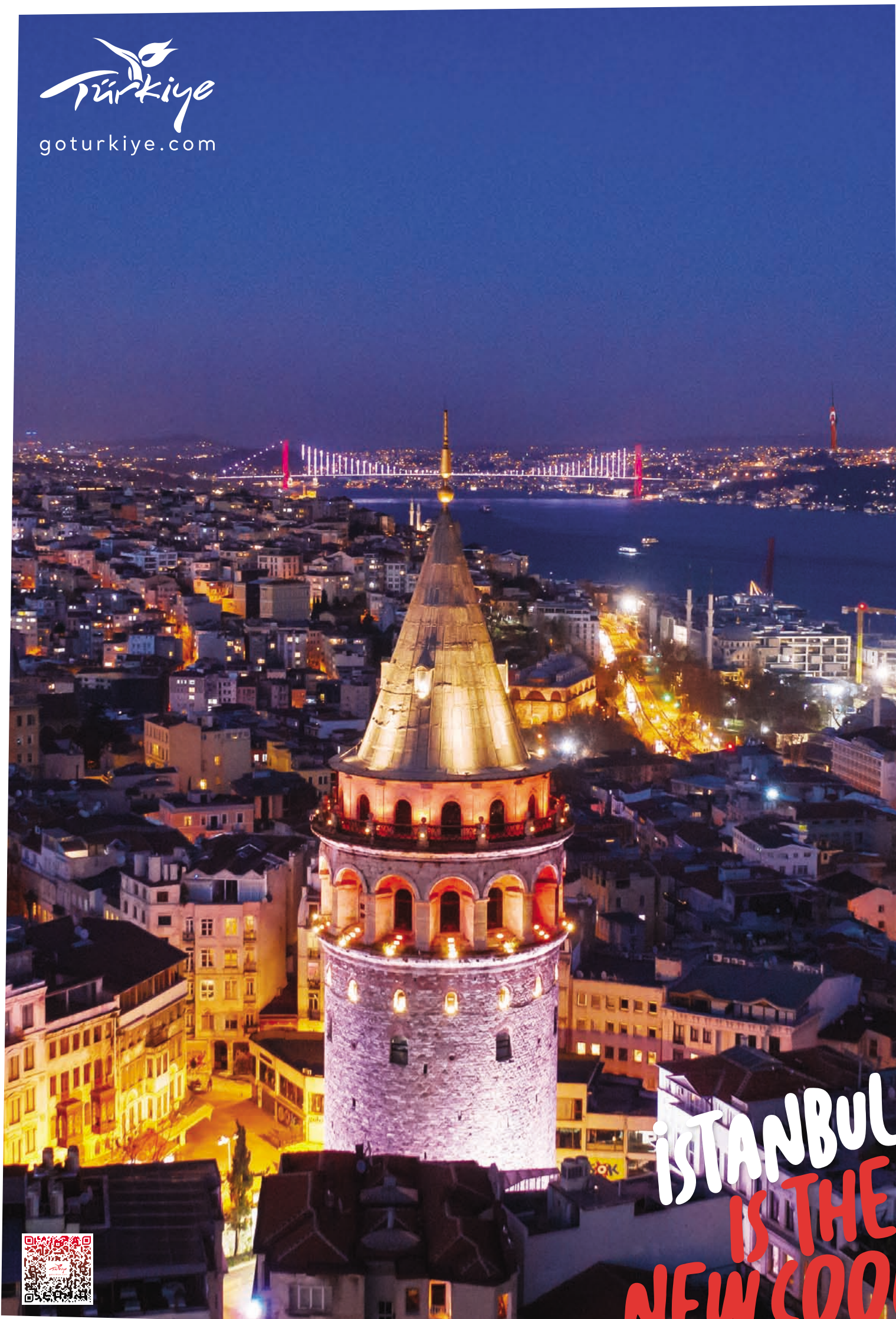
"Tourism is the core of Vision 2030. And as part of this vision by the year 2030 we want to achieve 100 million visits in Saudi Arabia. This is very ambitious."

Contd PG. 6 ►



Alhassan Ali Aldabbagh
Chief Markets Officer (CMO)
– Asia Pacific, Saudi Tourism
Authority (STA)


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Genting Dream to sail to Malaysia & Indonesia from Singapore effective July 1

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Resorts World Cruises announced that its flagship, the Genting Dream, will sail from Singapore to international destinations, starting from July 1, 2022 onwards. These include sailings to the Bintan and Batam islands in Indonesia, as well as to Kuala Lumpur and Malacca (via Port Dickson) and Penang in Malaysia. The launch of destination cruises is timely as the Genting Dream undergoes final preparations for her inaugural cruise from her homeport in Singapore on June 15, 2022.

"Resorts World Cruises will be the first cruise line from Singapore to resume cruising to Indonesia with the 2-Night Bintan and Batam Weekend Getaway Cruise starting July 1, 2022. On July 3, 2022, we will also sail from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur and Malacca (via Port Dickson) and Penang in Malaysia. We will continue to include more popular destinations to Phuket and Krabi in Thailand and North Bali in Indonesia from October 2022 onwards to provide our vacationers with more destination options", said Michael Goh, President of Resorts World Cruises. "We would also like to thank the

Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand governments for their ongoing support in launching destination cruises with Resorts World Cruises", he added.

"We are delighted that Resorts World Cruises has added destinations to their cruises as more ports in the region reopen. This strengthens Singapore's cruise offerings, giving even more options for domestic and international cruisers. STB will continue to work closely with our regional counterparts to reopen more ports and reinvigorate the cruise industry in Southeast Asia," said Annie Chang, Director, Cruise, Singapore Tourism Board.

"We are looking forward to welcoming Resorts World Cruises and the Genting Dream to the Bintan and Batam islands in Indonesia early July this year. With Resorts World Cruises taking-on a pioneering role to restart destination cruises in Indonesia, we are confident that together, we will rejuvenate the regional cruise tourism industry", said His Excellency Dr. Sandianga Salahuddin



Uno, Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia.

Beyond Indonesia, guests can visit multiple destinations in Malaysia from Singapore with the 3-Night Kuala Lumpur and Malacca (via Port Dickson)-Penang Cruise departing on Sundays from 3 July 2022 onwards and subsequently the 2-Night Kuala Lumpur and Malacca (via Port Dickson) Cruise departing on Wednesdays.

At Port Dickson, guests can explore the town's hidden gems, including its famous beaches buzzing with fun-filled activities, local tourist spots and more. Alternatively, from Port Dickson, guests can join the shore excursions to the historic state and UNESCO city of Malacca, famous for its unique Baba and Nyonya heritage and delicious delicacies; or visit the vibrant and colourful city of Kuala Lumpur for the ultimate shopping spree at iconic landmarks with more great food. ♦

Great interest for Azerbaijan from India: ATB Deputy CEO

Shayan Mallick | New Delhi

A new entrant to the competitive Indian outbound travel market, Azerbaijan has witnessed some incredible growth in Indian visitor arrivals the last few years, sans the pandemic disrupted 2020 and 2021. The NTO entered the Indian market riding on a staggering almost 180 per cent growth in 2018 recording close to 40,000 Indian arrivals that year. And now with the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing travel restrictions on the wane, the tourism board is keen to rebuild its Indian numbers and further grow from there.

The country was in full force at the recently concluded South Asia's biggest travel exhibition SATTE, showcasing its destinations and offerings to Indian buyers at the event. The NTO was particularly upbeat about the direct flight connectivity on Baku-Delhi route that is likely to go operational on June 28, and filling a key gap in the NTO's source market development efforts in India.

Speaking with **TravelBiz Monitor** on the sidelines of SATTE, Bahruz Asgarov, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Azerbaijan Tourism Board (ATB), said, "We continue seeing great



interest for Azerbaijan and we do believe that there is a great potential that we still need to tap. And for this reason, starting from end of June Azerbaijani flag carrier, Azerbaijan Airlines (Azal) will be flying to India, Baku - Delhi route. For now we are starting with twice weekly. But I do believe that very soon it can even become a daily flight. There is tremendous potential on the route."

Azal has recently appointed STIC GSA Services Pvt. Ltd. as its exclusive sales representative for India. The Azeri national carrier, based in Baku, operates to over 40 destinations in 25 countries across Asia, the CIS, Europe and the USA. Its Baku-Delhi service is likely to begin from June 28.

Furthermore, highlighting India's growing profile as a source market for Azerbaijan,

Asgarov informed, "As a tourism board we launched Azerbaijan as a destination in India in 2019 with SATTE. Since then we have received amazing feedback and numbers. Within a year we have had more than 60 per cent increase in number of arrivals (from India) to Azerbaijan. We finished the year (2019) with 65,000 travellers from India."

Azerbaijan received 3.2 million international visitors in 2019 with India featuring not only as one of Azerbaijan's fastest growing source markets, but also amongst its top markets. Pre-pandemic, Indian arrivals to Azerbaijan grew by about a robust 67 per cent in 2019.

Commenting on the ease of travel in the post-pandemic normal, the ATB Deputy CEO said, "Since February this year, we have the borders open and it's very easy to travel to Azerbaijan. You only need your Visa which is fairly easy to get. From e-Visa portal you get your visa either within three days or within three hours depending on option you choose. And apart from that you only need your vaccination certificate or certificate of recovery, and you are good to come to Baku. Once you enter the country there are no restrictions and you are free to enjoy and experience the destination." ♦

STB ups its Indian promotion, pitches for longer itineraries

Shayan Mallick | New Delhi

With China, Indonesia and India being its top three markets, and Chinese outbound travel still reeling under the highly restrictive zero-Covid state policy, Singapore is keen to rebuild its traffic from other markets, India being key amongst them. The NTO, Singapore Tourism Board (STB), led by its CEO, Keith Tan, was in India in strength attending SATTE. The aim was to send out the message that Singapore is open, ready, without any travel restrictions and even more attractive than before, and reignite the destination spark amongst Indian tourism trade and travellers. Importantly, he also strongly argued for at least a week-long itineraries in view of Singapore's diverse tourism offerings.

Pitching the city-state, spread a little over 700 sq kms, as an exciting amalgamation of attractions, experiences and services in a way that makes Singapore unique as a destination of choice for visitors across ages and segments, Tan stressed, "Singapore has been an attractive destination to Indian travellers, for example, families and children, young

professionals who are looking for exciting and safe destination to visit. It has many attributes, many attractions and many experiences to cater to different sectors."

The NTO chief particularly pointed one of Singapore's recent addition 'Museum of Ice Cream' to its diverse array of attractions and experiences. The museum opened during the pandemic. "The first Museum of Ice Cream opened in the US and it was wildly popular among the millennial, younger people, teenagers. And now we, in Singapore, are the first destination in the world outside of the US to host a Museum of Ice Cream," he said, while adding the museum has become very popular with a lot of Indian families and children as well as young professionals and millennials.

"And this is just one example. There is a range of different attractions in Sentosa. The key thing is this that there is nowhere else in the world you can get these attractions and personalised sense. Nowhere else in the world you would be able to see a rainforest in



Keith Tan
Chief Executive Officer
Singapore Tourism Board

an airport. These are attractions and experiences that are unique to Singapore."

Tan also stressed that the industry needs to consider Singapore for longer itineraries, from a week to nine-ten days. "In the past, a lot of travellers thought of Singapore as a short-haul destination, at the most three days. We have been working hard, even before Covid, to change that

perception. We need to show how there are many more things to do in Singapore. For example, Sentosa deserves more than just two hours of visit. Sentosa deserves three or four days. Another four days for mainland Singapore. That's one week or nine-ten days itinerary," he insisted.

"First of all we need to work with our marketing team to showcase more of these attractions and experiences that are worth the time and money of the travellers. And secondly, of course then we need to work with our travel trade partners so that they can build those itineraries," he further added. ♦

Krgyzstan organises two-city roadshow in India

TBM Staff | Mumbai

In another major development in Central Asian nation Kyrgyzstan, officially known as Kyrgyz Republic, The Department of Tourism of the Kyrgyz Republic has signed an agreement with Salvia Promoters Pvt Ltd and opened its office in India for the promotion of Tourism. Both parties organised roadshows in India in New Delhi and Mumbai recently.

In another major development in Central Asian nation Kyrgyzstan, officially known as the Kyrgyz Republic, The Department of Tourism of the Kyrgyz Republic has signed an agreement with Salvia Promoters Pvt Ltd and opened its office in India for the promotion of Tourism.

Commenting on the latest development, Ambassador of the Kyrgyz Republic in India, Asein Isaev said, "Kyrgyzstan and India have shared history, culture and friendship spanning over a thousand years. Promotion of Tourism would facilitate more and more Indian travellers to visit our beautiful country and further strengthen our people-to-people relations that is centuries old."

Elena Kalashnikova, President, Tourism

Development Support Fund of the Kyrgyz Republic, said, "I am sure this is the starting point for us to develop friendships between the Kyrgyz and Indian nations that will withstand a long time. And tourism is a gate for win-



win collaboration and multiple effects on the sustainable development of other many sectors of the economy. You are cordially welcome to visit us and share our values of being happy".

While elaborating on the agenda of the event, Sameer Karnani, Chairman, TAAI Western Region & Director of Arunodaya Travels, stated that the event was organised exclusively for the TAAI members. Along with the members' government officials who would provide assistance for investment opportunities, were also present at the event. "The event which was organised by Salvia Travels in association with TAAI was to

showcase Kyrgyz as a preferred destination for tourism and also to inform that the destination offers many opportunities to invest in the travel and tourism industries." He also informed that 50 TAAI members attended the event.

Karnani added that Kyrgyz is an untapped and beautiful destination which has a lot of scope in the tourism segment. "To educate the Indian visitors about Kyrgyz as a destination, a promotion of its tourism products was essential," he said.

Speaking on the occasion, Prashant Chaudhary, MD, Salvia Promoters Pvt Ltd said, "Kyrgyzstan has untapped potential and provides

to be a fantastic short-haul destination in the Indian market. Our motive behind organising these Roadshows is to reach the Indian travel fraternity and through media reach travellers and make them more and more aware of the vast potential this destination has to offer with its culture, nature, silk route history, most importantly its hassle-free 7 day visa processing time and direct two and a half hour flight duration from New Delhi. We have been promoting tourism to Kyrgyzstan in India for decades and with the support of our new partnership, we plan to double the number of travellers to Kyrgyzstan by next year." ♦



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Indonesia's The Legian Hotels appoints One Rep Global as India Representative

TBM Staff | Mumbai

One Rep Global, a luxury representation company led by Hemant Mediratta, has been appointed the India representative for The Legian Hotels in Bali – Indonesia. One Rep Global will exclusively drive the sales and marketing efforts for these luxury properties in India.

Speaking on this, Hans Joerg Meier, Managing Director and Partner, Legian Hotel Management, said, "LHM is very proud to enter into cooperation with One Rep Global with its very experienced visionary leadership team within the industry. We are convinced that discerning luxury travellers from India will truly enjoy the culture and heritage of LHM hotels in Bali and Lombok, coupled with genuinely personalised and warm hospitality creating authentic

experiences and memories to treasure."

The Legian Seminyak, Bali is one of the most renowned hotels in Indonesia. Opened in 1996 it has stood the test of time and is still the favourite choice for luxury travellers in Bali.

Hemant Mediratta, Founder – One Rep Global, said, "We take pride in representing



some of the finest properties from across the globe, and it is an absolute pleasure to add The Legian Seminyak and soon-to-open The Legian Lombok to our portfolio. With eased

restrictions, luxury outbound travel from India is picking pace and it is the perfect time to tap the undisputed potential of this market. At One Rep Global, we are excited to extend support and share our expertise to drive the desired sales and marketing results for LHM hotels."

The Legian Seminyak, Bali is a suite and villa only boutique resort and home to some of the most sought after accommodation on the island. Every suite has unparalleled, sea-facing views and guests can choose from a variety of options – whether it's a beachfront sanctuary for two or a multi-bedroom suite for groups of friends or families. There is also The Beach House – a three-bedroom villa with pool and one of only two villas in Bali with direct beach access. The Beach House can accommodate spectacular weddings and special events. ♦

CONTD from PG 01 ▶

Saudi Tourism Authority makes...

We want to make Saudi one of the top five destinations in the world. We are already set out on a road map to achieve this target going forward, and also to increase our tourism GDP to 10 per cent by 2030," informed Aldabbagh. In 2021, Saudi clocked 62 million visits, predominantly including domestic tourists and about three million inbound visits.

"We are investing over USD 800 billion in the next eight years, and this money is earmarked for investment in the tourism eco-system, including infrastructure. This includes the giga-projects like AlUla, Red Sea, Neom, Amaala, Qiddiya. Each one of these projects is offering a different value proposition to attract different traveller segments. There is no other destination in the world today that is investing in tourism today as much as we are. It shows



the level of commitment that we are putting forward to achieve our ambition," the CMO informed, while elaborating on the tourism projects being developed under Saudi Vision 2030 plan.

AIUla is already operational. There is a pipeline of hotels that are coming up online soon. Top of the line Banyan Tree is opening in October this year. The Red Sea also is coming online soon. Neom will be a bit down the road. Then there is Qiddiya, the entertainment city South of Riyadh. All of these projects are among the flagship projects under Saudi Vision 2030 currently under various stages of development, with some, like AlUla, are already attracting visitors.

"In addition to that we already have existing destinations within Saudi that is ready today. We have Jeddah where we offer variety of experiences as well as cultural heritage experiences in the old town. We have Riyadh, a very pulsating city, where there are a lot of activities and events taking place. In the Asir region, South of Saudi Arabia, we have beautiful mountains, and the temperature is cool throughout the year. There are a lot of high mountains and if you go up these mountains you will see clouds around you," Aldabbagh informed while drawing attention to some of the existing sites and attractions that are already attracting tourists.

"We also have beautiful historical sites in the South. I would like to mention one of them. It's called Rijal Almaa, a colourful village and a beautiful place to visit. Saudi has 13 different regions and each of the regions has a different topography. We are not all deserts. We have deserts, we have mountains, we have sea, and so much more," he added. ♦

CONTD from PG 01 ▶

High-profile Indian delegation...

I also believe that it can become a great destination for the Indian Film industry for both shootings as well as recreational purposes."

Zubin Karkaria – CEO, VFS Global, on being appointed as the brand ambassador from the Travel & Tourism vertical, added, "It is of course a great honour and privilege to be appointed as Goodwill Ambassador by the President of Zanzibar. From the tourism perspective, I think I can personally & professionally add value to this outstanding destination, and I am sure in the years ahead, Zanzibar will make its mark in the tourism spectrum of East Africa."

On his appointment as a Goodwill Ambassador for the Media and Travel Trade vertical, Sheldon Santwan, Editor-in-Chief & CEO – TravelBiz Monitor, said, "It's a pleasure and an honour to be appointed as the Goodwill Ambassador for Zanzibar, especially so since I have been associated with this destination for over a decade and have been consistently promoting and writing about this destination in my professional capacity."

This iconic project will include world-class sports infrastructure in Zanzibar's most elite neighbourhood. It will also encompass the first sports museum in Africa with the first cricket stadium in Zanzibar, including a 100-room hotel. Also, it entails the first 'Centre for Sports Excellence' which includes five sporting activities: cricket, tennis, football, swimming and athletics. This integrated complex will also include the first global hospitality institute in East Africa. ♦

Turkey Tourism announces the names of fifteen winners who participated in e-learning programme

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Straddling the continents of Europe and Asia, Turkey's strategically important location and geographical landscape have put the country in the spotlight of global tourism. It comes as no surprise that the country witnessed 14.1% growth in foreign tourist arrivals in 2019 with more than 51 million visitors. When it comes to Indian tourist arrivals, Turkey recorded an encouraging growth of 57% with more than 230,000 Indian tourists. In addition to FITs, MICE and destination weddings are the two segments that hold immense potential for Turkey from India.

Taking everything into consideration,

Turkish Tourism had devised an e-learning programme in association with TravelBiz Monitor to showcase the distinct identity of the country. Through this learning exercise, agents are being assisted with information which is helping engaging trips to Turkey.

There were fifteen lucky draw winners who won a FAM trip to Turkey. These fifteen lucky draw winners were among the people who had completed this E-learning programme.

Commenting on this, an official from Turkey Tourism, said, "The e-learning programme helped us reach the right travel agents in India allowing us to guide them on our Turkey's tourist destinations and tourism wonders to sell them effectively to their clients. Turkey's largest city Istanbul is a global heritage hub,

and the natural strait of Bosphorus that flows solemnly holds the distinction of separating the city into two continents. Furthermore, Cappadocia, Antalya, Bodrum and Izmir have already become well-known tourist destinations worldwide. Taking everything into consideration, Turkish Tourism devised this e-learning programme to showcase the distinct identity of the country. Through this exclusively launched learning exercise for Indian travel agents, they were assisted with the latest information and tools to create engaging trips to Turkey. We are happy that winners of the contest displayed interest in learning about Turkey, and were proactive in their approach." ♦

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Tel: 91-22-6101 1700 / 701 Fax: 91-22-6712 1854DIAMOND OR PLATINUM-
IT WORKS ANYWHERE

Whether it's celebrating monarchy or freedom; tourism must be the final beneficiary anywhere in the world.

The WTTC president had recently remarked rather pithily, that in the short term, international visitor spend is so low it is hampering the tourism industry's economic recovery. While her comment was about UK tourism possibly losing out to other European destinations in international business, it has its lessons for India as well.

At this moment, out there they are gung-ho about this month's Queen's Platinum jubilee celebrations. Most of the excitement is focused on milking, (actualising, if you please) the domestic market. The prospect of more than 5 million Britons planning a break during the Platinum Jubilee bank holiday is music to the industry's ears. They are estimating a £1.2bn boost to the economy with that kind of holiday spent by the locals.

The virus, for all practical purposes, doesn't scare determined holidayers anymore. The platinum jubilee event of the queen is a good reason to go splurge and the government is outright encouraging it.

In India, we have been singing about the 75 years celebration since last year. August 15 is also creeping up close. Where is the big ticket push for jump in domestic tourism events to encash that fervour?

Just take a look at the events unfolding in the UK. The tourism ministry has launched a 'Platinum Jubilee Weekend Trip Tracker' survey that shows 19 million have planned to take part in activities to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee. The tracker is a platform where almost all major events and localised businesses can post their celebrations so participation numbers and businesses can be tracked online.

Street parties, pageants, shows, concerts and special promos by restaurants and local municipalities and schools are geared to draw out the domestic holidayers to step out and spend.

Seventy five years of independence is as good an occasion as any. Consumption and spend doesn't have to be reliant on Diwali alone. As it is, tourism and hospitality is so dependent on public sentiment of joy, safety and hope- in any order. Indeed there are events but the excitement definitely needs a bigger nudge.

Are we to still roll out the celebrations or it's a state secret for now? The clock is ticking.

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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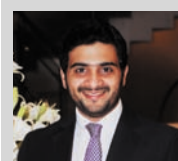
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VFS Global Group



Dev Karvat
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Trail Blazer Tours India Pvt Ltd



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CAPA



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ATE Group of Companies



Ankush Nijhawan
MD, Nijhawan Group &
Co-Founder, TBO Group



Ajay Prakash
Chief Executive, Normad
Travels & President - IIPT India



Sriram Rajmohan
CEO & MD
Club7 Holidays Ltd.



Naresh Rawal
Vice President - Sales & Marketing,
Resorts World Cruises



Dhananjay Saliankar
Head - Sales & Marketing,
Fortune Hotels



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Chairman, Le Passage to India
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Start-Up Forum

Bringing Innovations to the Forefront

LivingStone Stays

By TBM Staff | Mumbai

Anticipating 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: LivingStone Stays

Core Team: Chirag Bansal, Ashish Thakur
Pooja Goel , Pavithra Nair

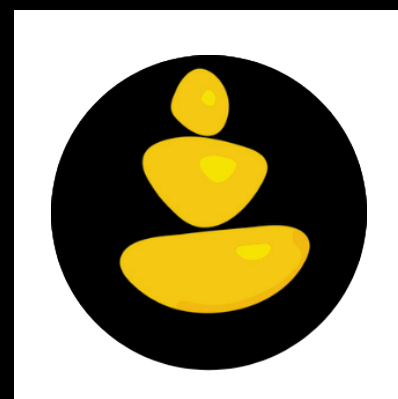
Founding year: 2019

Company Website: www.livingstonestays.com

Description: LivingStone Stays is revolutionising the way people spend their leisure time - making holidays a way of life. They make holidays memorable by curating experiences and bringing boutique properties together. Their platform is a one-stop solution for discovering, planning and booking an experiential holiday.

They have simplified the discovery and planning of holidays by linking them with the purpose. Holidays are categorised as (1) Relaxing, (2) Romantic, (3) Thrilling, (4) Celebrations and (5) Workations. Destinations, Stays and Things-to-do are tagged with the respective purposes. Experiential packages are curated at the properties by bundling an activity, relevant to the purpose of the holiday, with the stay.

Video Link: <https://youtu.be/Y2-eg9tgUy4>



Q Spain Tourism has had an active presence in the Indian market for some years now. Where does India rank in pecking order of important international source markets for Spain Tourism?

Historically speaking, countries like the UK, France, Germany, among others, have registered high number of tourists to Spain, and not just because of their geographical vicinity, but also because of Spain's pleasant weather, gastronomy, lovely beaches and extraordinary cultural heritage. However, considering its economic performance over the past decade and its positive outlook towards the post-pandemic future, India indeed is a very important outbound market for Spain too. We hope to recover the number of visitors we had in 2019 and go beyond that number in next few years, considering that India held a comparatively lower rank compared to the popularity of Spain at the global level.

Q Pre-Covid what was the number of Indian tourists to Spain? Realistically speaking what time frame do you think is required to achieve those numbers again?

Pre-Covid till the year 2019, Spain was enjoying a tremendous growth of Indian tourists year after year, especially with more than 210,000 tourists per year during the years 2018 and 2019.

However, as we all know, the current post-Covid era is quite dynamic and challenging, with many travel regulations and vaccination policies coming into effect regularly. Having said that, with increasing vaccination levels in both the countries, currently the visitor numbers are indeed gaining momentum. So, we are hopeful that we will recover in the Indian market soon.

Q With border restrictions being lifted, what marketing and trade activities have been chalked out for the India?

We are indeed very excited about our upcoming promotional activities. We have already carried out online promotional

campaigns that have helped to maintain Spain's position as one of the preferred European destinations. Besides, we have a few familiarisation trips for media and travel trade planned for the year, a Spain Specialist Program being carried out for travel trade, as well as some more physical promotional events in the pipeline for the coming months, just to give you a brief idea.

Q Any plans to introduce new destinations, routes in India?

The Indian international travellers are already well aware of the globally popular Spanish cities like Madrid, Barcelona, Granada, among others. However, we would also like to encourage them to experience so many other tourism products that Spain can offer too.

'We are hopeful that we will recover in the Indian market soon'

Various exciting activities planned around St. James Way pilgrimage route, scenic drive routes in the north of Spain, relaxing oneself on the Canary or Balearic Islands, visiting the UNESCO-recognised World Heritage Sites all over Spain... well, the list goes on!

Q How do you plan to continue engaging with the film fraternity in India for shooting in Spain?

Spain is a favourite filming destination for many directors and producers, with recent international examples like Game of Thrones. In fact, one of our immensely successful projects – Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara – still happens to be quite relevant and popular to this day among the Indian film audience.

Spain indeed has several programmes in place that engage the film fraternity and provide financial support, among other things, in collaboration with different film commissions. There are, in fact, a couple of multi-starrer film projects in the pipeline which we are all excited about. Stay tuned for more updates on that!



Q Besides leisure tourists, which other segments of travellers are you looking at tapping from India?

Besides leisure tourists, MICE is also an important segment for us in the Indian market. After the recent relaxations in international travel restrictions, we are seeing increasing interest from this segment and we are hopeful that this trend continues in the future too.

Q Are you considering joint marketing activities with any other European destinations for twin-country tourism promotion?

We could explore the possibility of joint promotional activities in the future, especially considering that the Indian traveller does like to visit more than one country while travelling to Europe. However, as currently all the European destinations are recovering from the pandemic in terms of tourist numbers, multiple factors need to be discussed before any agreement is reached with another European destination. ♦

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With travel restrictions being eased, Spain is witnessing an increased interest from leisure and MICE segments in India. **Elisa Robles Fraga, Director, National Tourism Office of Spain, Mumbai & Tourism Counsellor, Embassy of Spain, India, talks to Disha Shah Ghosh about their trade activities in India and the steady interest for film shooting in Spain.**



Has the Pandemic made Travel Agents more Relevant?

There is no doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic has slowed down the travel and tourism sector in India, but a report 'Travel Market in India' by RedCore, research firm RedSeer's arm, says that it expects the industry to bounce back and cross USD

after the pandemic.

This is certainly good news for the travel agent fraternity in India.

What makes travel agents' role significantly increased? Replied Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI (Travel Agents Association of India),

& advisor is responsible for the entire beautiful experience with safety." In an emergency the travel agent also has to resolve critical issues and offer appropriate help. "Post Covid and with the changed demographic of the traveller and the destination do you think any traveller would not need the services? Surely, these are reasons enough though the list of deliverables is endless. I strongly believe travel agents are helping the traveller to create dreams and deliver," pointed out Mayal.

Travel agents fulfill a very real need, providing professional guidance and personalised service to their customers. "The pandemic simply reinforced the fact that as a travel agent you're on your own! When things go wrong, as they often did with sudden disruptions and cancellations, travellers who booked with travel agents, had someone to reach out to," pointed out Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI. (Travel Agents Federation of India)

Echoing the same, Dharmesh Advani, National General Secretary, ETAA (Enterprising Travel Agents Association), said that this is because after the pandemic many countries have come up with a variety of rules and regulations to be followed by tourists. "There are a lot of protocols to be followed while applying for a visa and at the

Several uncertainties like frequent change in protocols, testing norms, alteration of travel dates, etc. prompted travellers to take the agent route for making ticket bookings. It also indicates that travellers were more confident with travel agents than OTAs. Can the agents sustain this? Or it's a temporary phenomenon? **Prasenjit Chakraborty** finds out.

125 billion by 2026-27. This is taking into account both domestic travel, and inbound and outbound travel by Indians.

According to the report, India's travel market is dominated by about 300,000 travel agents who represent the largest volumes of business in bookings at about 52%, and the role of these agents significantly increased

"Travel agent is too small a word for the stakeholder who gives advice on destination, looks after the entire logistics of seamless travel, experiential tours, comfortable stay, gives add on services of visa, forex, travel insurance, facilitation of greet & meet at airports, follows the itinerary as a hawk so the traveller has an enjoyable trip. This facilitator



Jyoti Mayal
President
TAAI



Ajay Prakash
President
TAFI



Dharmesh Advani
National General Secretary
ETAA

time of travel. Hence, the role of a travel agent has become more important to ensure the client has a smooth and hassle-free travel," said Advani.

Is it a Temporary Trend?

Now the question is can the travel agents live up to the expectations of travellers so that they (travellers) continue to rely on the agent fraternity in the post Covid? Or is it a temporary phenomenon? This depends on how travel agents equip themselves in terms of knowledge, acquiring new skills, gathering information on offbeat destinations, etc. And it has to be an ongoing process.

Booking through online was there before the pandemic set in and continues even now. "However the transparency and the comfort a travel agent can provide cannot be matched by an online booking engine. A client who is willing to pay a little extra for the right advice, comfort of getting all booking done from one point of contact will always choose a travel agent to book their holidays," opined Advani.

Mayal is forthright to say that she would like to remove this apprehension of both online and offline agents as often referred to. She believes in today's evolving environment everyone is working via both formats.. "Technology is an enabler. Each one of us must adopt it. No technology company can work without a customer service centre or human connect and no agent can work without the support of technology. Yes, the markets and clients they cater to are different so the effectiveness and outreach of technology will need to be adopted as per requirements of individual business models. Both of which I strongly believe are here to stay permanently," she said.

However, Prakash thinks differently and said, "Those, who've suffered and held on for an hour or more listening to a recording 'Your call is important to us, please stay on the line' and finally disconnected in disgust will, I believe, eschew online bookings for anything other than a simple domestic trip."

Way Forward

As the Redcore report states that travellers had shown confidence in travel agents in the difficult time, it means that going forward the travel agents have to be more efficient from what they are now to keep their customer base intact. Because the travel industry is constantly evolving, so is the demand of their clients. Here, trade associations have to play an important role to keep their members abreast about the latest happenings around the world.

Said Mayal, "We will very soon be investing on behalf of our members to offer them a technology platform. The pandemic had thrown up many challenges and thus our vision of this deliverable could not be completed. We have witnessed a change in our lives during the Covid time."

The travel industry after the pandemic has seen a new phase or what one may call a new beginning, with having no business at all to now travel booming. The phenomenon of witnessing the worst will keep them on toes and do everything to keep their customers intact, and at the same time keep augmenting knowledge. "At ETAA we try to update our members as much as possible with new rules

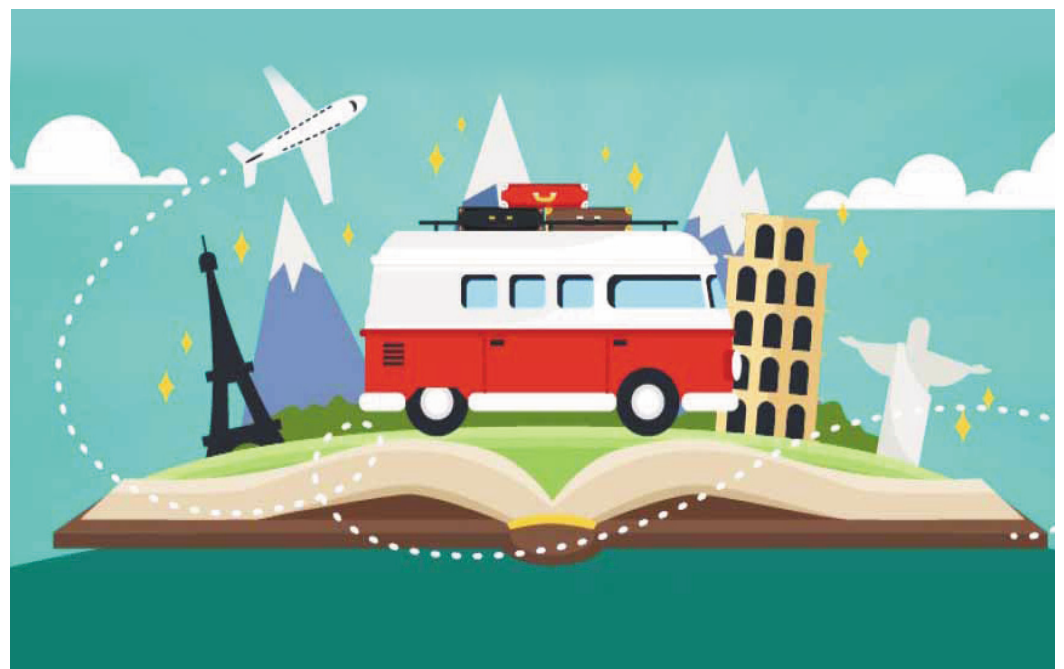
and regulations of various countries. We are engaging with tourism boards, hotel chains, and airlines for regular updates. Our regional Whatsapp group has been a great success where members just post their queries which are answered by members who have past experience or know the travel protocol," said Advani.

Prakash feels that the key is professionalism and a keen awareness of the new reality. He said that TAFI, in order to update their members, constantly organises workshops and webinars. "This helps our members to upgrade their product knowledge, acquire new skills and above all inculcate a greater commitment to sustainable tourism practices since the traveller of tomorrow is going to be questioning the environmental impact. If there's one thing the pandemic has taught us it's that we cannot abuse the Planet indefinitely. If we do not nurture it, nature will strike back!," categorically stated Prakash.

In the 21st century it is all about setting one's business apart from others and being aware of the strong competition. The strongest point for OTAs is their reach. "Travel agents should think futuristically and explore opportunities to become better deliverers of services. Every service provider needs to be ahead of time, knowledge and equipment then only it will be a win-win situation," said Mayal.

Prakash agrees that OTAs have mastered the science of mass outreach while finessing the art of price negotiation. But this is based on volume. "Not every agent has the capability to emulate that but they can use technology to source the best deals across diverse platforms and create value for their customers who are often swamped with the sheer information overload on the net. A professional sifting of information and data is the agent's forte and that is what will keep them relevant," said a confident Prakash. ♦

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Africa's Travel Indaba 2022 Reigniting Hope

On a pleasant and sunny 3rd of May at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre (ICC), Africa's Travel Indaba 2022 officially unfolded, where over 634 exhibitors and 625 buyers took their place at the continent's premier travel trade show. **Asmita Mukherjee** witnessed Africa's biggest travel tradeshow Travel Indaba amidst an environment of vibrant African culture.

Indaba, which means conference, is a marketing drive to promote tourism. The show opened its doors after a three-year hiatus, at beautiful Durban, whose Zulu name is eThekweni, situated in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal.

South African Minister of Tourism, Lindiwe Sisulu opened the trade floor by ringing the bell and effectively putting into motion 22,000 scheduled meetings between exhibitors and buyers.

"Africa's Travel Indaba is back with renewed energy and focus. This is the continent's leading travel trade show and foremost business platform, geared at reconnecting the tourism sector in person while networking and doing business which will contribute to the recovery of our sector on the continent," stated Sisulu while explaining the essence of the event.

Indaba counts itself amongst the biggest travel trade shows of the world, but while most of the other large travel trade shows emphasise on the entire world, Indaba focuses its lens only on Africa.

According to South African Tourism's Acting CEO, Themba Khumalo, the theme of the 2022 event - "Africa's stories, your success", asks all Africans to own the continent's narrative by telling their stories to the world. "There is one very simple way to grab opportunities - by telling our unique stories. Every single African is a storyteller. From the griots of West

Africa to South Africa's very own Grammy Award-winning DJ, Black Coffee, the world is waiting in awe to gobble up our stories, arts, and numerous cultures," he added.

Similar to the ravages impacting Africa's tourism industry due to the pandemic, Travel Indaba also had a slew of challenges to overcome to organise a successful event. Besides the pandemic, Durban - the host city, experienced devastating, and unprecedented floods shortly before the conference. On April 11-13, the province of KwaZulu-Natal was hit with heavy rainfall and landslides. More than 400 people were killed and 40,000 were missing in the wake of the floods. 4,000 homes were destroyed and more than 8,000 were damaged. With Indaba less than a month away, it presented a huge challenge for the success of the conference.

Nkosenhle Madlala, Councillor, eThekweni Municipality said that the return of Africa's Travel Indaba to the Durban ICC will bring much-needed relief to the local tourism sector. "Africa's Travel Indaba plays a significant role in boosting the city's tourism economy. It will contribute approximately RAND 72.5 million to the city's GDP while creating about 150 employment opportunities," he informed.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), Africa welcomed some 18.5-million foreign travellers in 2021, up from 16.2 million in 2020. Of that

figure, 6.1 million made their way to North Africa and 12.3 million went to sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, the UNWTO showed that January 2022 experienced a 51% improvement in international tourist arrivals compared to January 2021.

"I have had several engagements with my fellow cabinet members in related departments, in a bid to partner and address these challenges as we together work towards our sector's recovery. We have already seen positive developments around the roll-out of the e-visa regime for some of our key source markets. This is not only important for South Africa's tourism sector recovery, but also for the greater continent's intra-trade activities," Sisulu said.

Stating that tourism plays a hugely important role in assisting the country to make its mark on the map of Africa and the globe, KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, Ravi Pillay said, "I am confident that tourism is ready to bounce back with a bang and to reclaim its coveted position as a worthy contributor to employment. The province is ready to revitalise the tourism value and supply chains and look forward to the economic benefits of the various upstream and downstream activities which tourism supports."

"In these past two years, the world has learned new ways of doing tourism safely. Many product owners have used the downtime to refresh and revitalize their offerings. Some operators have used the time to develop entirely new facilities in anticipation of resumption in tourism," he stated.

Fish Mahlalela, Deputy Minister of Tourism of South Africa said that the Ministry has helped small-scale businesses by providing them with loan schemes. "After two years of stunted tourism performance owing to COVID-19 containment measures globally, we began the year 2022 with positive signs of tourism activities opening up globally. Through Indaba we want to show the world that we are now open and ready to serve. Africa's Travel Indaba is a trade show that brings together all the products and offers of African tourism under one roof," he added.

Although Africa's Travel Indaba 2022's attendance was lower at roughly 60% of what it



had been at the last Indaba in 2019, considering the pandemic, it still reflected the readiness and willingness of Africa's tourism sector to serve guests in a new normal.

Phindile Makwakwa, the acting CEO of Tourism KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), explained that while the province is on the road to recovery, the organisation needs to go back to its source markets.

"The priority for the organisation is to reignite those source markets into KZN and work very closely with key hub heads to make the province a top tourism destination. Tourism KZN has a full 360-degree marketing and promotion plan for the province which includes several interventions both in the domestic markets and on various international platforms. The organisation is focusing on the international market as it's critical for tourism business owners to create networks, showcase their tourism products and clinch business deals that will begin to stimulate more travel back to KZN," she said.

While emphasising the fact that Durban is home to the largest Indian population outside of India, Winile Mntungwa, Deputy Head, Business Support, Tourism & Markets Unit Durban Tourism said, "We are looking for Indian visitors coming to Durban as we believe that Durban is their second home."

Winile also informed that Indian visitors consist 6% - 7% YoY of Durban's international visitors. Due to the pandemic, it slowed down.

As the international borders are opening, Durban is actively promoting its attractions in the Indian market. "We are promoting the beach and activities around the beach, in addition to an 8-kilometer-long promenade and restaurant. We also have Durban's traditional rickshaw pullers, sand sculptures, and shopping centers such as Gateway, Galleria Mall, Pavilion, and Victoria Street Market." Another popular attraction of Durban being promoted is the uShaka Marine World, which is a 16-hectare theme park with a total capacity of 4.6 million gallons containing 10,000 animal species. "We have got shark diving inside the aquarium and also a restaurant where you can see sharks while eating."

"We are now targeting the Indian MICE market. We also have vast experience in hosting Indian conventions like the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) convention. With the buyers, we are promoting the destination in terms of adventure tourism. We also get a lot of film shoots happening in Durban. Movie mogul Anant Singh is in the process of constructing Durban's first film studio complex. Once it's completed, we might see a lot of producers and filmmakers coming and shooting here," Winile informed.

Amanda Kotze-Nhlapo, Chief Convention Officer of South Africa National Convention Bureau (SANCB) brought forward the importance of MICE in the current African

tourism landscape by saying, "The MICE industry is a forward-looking sector. It is really looking good now. We were also running a campaign called 'Postpone, Don't Cancel.'" She concluded by adding that collaboration remains critical to reigniting the business and meetings industry.

Winile expressed optimism about the number of Indian visitors increasing by 1% this year since all the borders have opened with the pandemic slowdown. She also informed that to increase visitor footfalls, they are tirelessly initiating talks with the ministry and airlines to enable direct flights from India.

However, expressing a different angle, Simon Newton Smith, Chief Commercial Officer, South African Airways (SAA) said that they are taking a watch and wait approach to committing fully to running direct flights from India. "At this stage in the SAA restart, we're 100% focused on rebuilding the Regional Africa and South Africa domestic network. Because of this, we have no immediate plans to serve international destinations (including India) until we have seen a sustained recovery in post-Covid demand to/from Africa," stated Smith.

While speaking about the rolling out of the much-awaited e-visa and direct flights to India, Mahalela said, "The Government has been testing the South African e-visa since November 2019. Facilities with smart technology have also been set up at major South African airports to facilitate electronic document checks. In 2019 we piloted the e-visa, and subsequently, we were about to roll out the e-visa for other countries as well. India is one of our priority markets."

Elaborating on the international markets of interest for Africa, Nigel Vere Nicoll, President & Group Managing Director, African Travel & Tourism Association (ATTA) informed that Africa's biggest source markets are the USA, UK, and India. "India is a very big market for Africa and we get a lot of Indian visitors in Eastern Africa." Apart from India, Germany and Europe are also considered big markets for Africa, he added.

Tshediso Lerumo, Communications Manager (PR & Social Media Manager) at Free State Tourism Authority added by saying that even though the USA was a top source market they also want to explore the Indian market as well. "Our top markets are the US, Germany, and the Netherlands, and we want to explore China and the Indian market. We want to offer our unique experiential tourism to the world," shared a proud Lerumo dressed in traditional Basotho blankets.

On the other hand, Mauritius wants to grow its tourism foothold in the South African market. The country witnessed 1.3 million foreign tourist arrivals in pre-Covid times, expecting the present numbers to soon shoot up as there is a sense of revenge travel demand

bottling up among travellers of South Africa. According to Janet de Kretser, South Africa representative of the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, South African travellers trust Mauritius as a product.

Expressing the importance of domestic tourism in the pandemic times, Lerumo said that the destination was hard hit by the pandemic; and the destination has seen the closure of key businesses thus shedding jobs. "We then decided to focus our attention mostly on domestic tourism. Our source markets were Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Northern Cape, our primary focus was to provide a message that we are a safe destination and compliance with the covid-19 instructions,"

Sharing the activities of ATTA, Nicoll said that as an association that has more than 600 members, it takes part in a lot of exhibitions across the globe. But due to the pandemic for the last three years, they haven't been able to take part in any international events. Commending the resilience of the African tourism industry, he opined that Africa has shown the courage to organise such a big event to show the world that they are ready to serve, which will of course give the African market brownie points in the competitive international tourism landscape.

He further shared his thoughts on the current market climate by saying, "It has been three years since any such events. Things at the moment look pretty good. But I think in 2023 we are going to see a big revival in tourism. Globally the tourism industry is doing better now since people are getting back their confidence. That's a great indicator of the pent-up demand to travel and will certainly 'get the drums beating' across Africa. Indaba is the first to regain the confidence of travellers."

Commenting on the help extended by ATTA and tourism boards during the pandemic, Nicoll said, "As an association, ATTA helped its members during the pandemic by putting out a lot of information for the members, to help them understand how the other countries are battling the pandemic. He also informed that the country's tourism boards are helping the industry instead of having only a little money in their hands to support livelihoods during the COVID-19 crisis.

The in-person highly attended travel Indaba concluded on May 5 displaying a highly charged focus on African tourism in an environment of colourful African culture. The travel trade show was more than just a business conference. After undergoing a two-year period of isolation with few face-to-face contacts, the place was reverberating with the passion and infectious energy of like-minded individuals and colleagues engaging in joyful reunions. Travel Indaba 2022 was a clear indicator of the positive and bright future of the African Travel Industry driven by the passion of the attendees. ♦

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Try before you fly!

By **Dr. Nimit Chowdhary**, Professor of Tourism,
Faculty of Management Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia

We need to understand the challenge while purchasing a tourism experience. In the case of a mobile phone, it is produced in the factory and brought to a virtual or real sales space where the potential customer has the opportunity to evaluate it before purchasing it, including comparing it with other makes and models. Finally, post-purchase, the customer uses the purchased phone- that is, consumes it. In the case of tourism experiences, it is just the other way. A potential customer first purchases it. Then it is produced by providers and consumed by the visitor simultaneously, and finally, the visitor evaluates the purchase post-consumption. Thus, visitors have limited opportunity to evaluate the product/ offer before purchasing it. Here lies the challenge - the downside risk associated with the purchase of a tourism experience is higher than other products. To overcome the challenge, experience providers use their creative ingenuity to lower the associated risk by building in clues in their sales pitch.

The next question is how can customers evaluate a possible experience before purchasing it? While answering this question, technology comes in handy. With the expansion of 5G technology with low latency and high throughputs, we are excited about the possibilities of multisensory experiences. Of late, tourism circles are toying with the promises of using immersive media AR "augmented reality" and VR "virtual reality". Galleries and museums, for example, can offer immersive virtual tours; destinations can encourage visitors to explore the place with VR games like Cities VR, Jurassic World: Aftermath, Subnautica, or Star Trek. Similarly, patrons from across the world can nearly taste novelty cuisines on the offer.

On a technological note, scientists started playing with the idea of the immersive presence of the subject giving birth to the idea of VR in the 1980s. In VR, the subject finds himself immersed in a digitally simulated environment. By the 1990s, virtual content was used to augment subject experience in the real world, and so the concept of AR evolved. The logical next step was to facilitate interaction through virtual content in a natural and immersive manner, paving the way for 3D movies and simulations. In some cases,

scientists and technologists experimented with projecting data and images into a user's view of the real world. This technology is referred to as HUDs or "Heads-up displays."

As providers began to use AR and VR in sync, they developed appropriate hardware to support augmented and virtual reality. Nowadays, combination of AR and VR is referred to as extended reality or XR. Another term, mixed reality (MR), is more-or-less a synonym for augmented reality- so let us not get confused. These days, the use of smart glasses or VR headsets is more visible. Smartglasses are wearable computer glasses



which introduce flat data and images into the user's line of sight through an optical head-mounted display (OHMD) glasses with a transparent heads-up display (HUD) or augmented reality (AR) overlay.

All this while, the subject was a loner in the simulated reality. However, the world is now talking of Metaverse, which has captured everybody's attention as Facebook changed its name to Meta. Interestingly, the term metaverse was first used by Neal Stephenson in his 1992 novel Snow Crash. Today, a metaverse is a tenacious immersive simulated space experienced in the first person simultaneously by many subjects as a virtual person - an avatar - inhabiting the virtual space, who share a strong sense of mutual presence in that virtual space. Some futurists believe that all virtual worlds will eventually be connected into a single interoperable metaverse experience with shared animate and inanimate resources. While today's interface with Metaverse is primarily through smartglasses

or VR headsets, it could be through other body sensors in time to come. Unsurprisingly, the Metaverse is going to be the next level of experiential dominion, where technology will facilitate the convergence of digital and physical realms. AR and VR facilitated by Metaverse will allow guests to explore and interact beforehand with the destination they would like to visit, thereby offsetting their purchase-related risks.

Tourism guys are excited as they have many ideas to experiment with. The pandemic has sped up the rate at which the world is now embracing virtual travel. The big question is how virtual travel substitutes the sense of being there? While it may not, on the one hand, technology is working on the other senses- the smell, the taste and the feel; on the other hand, it permits the visitor to sample the experience, thereby reducing the gap between their expectations and the reality of the place and services- 'try before you fly'. Metaverse will thereby empower visitors where they go, how they get there, and what they choose to do.

An other academic cohort is working to figure out if these augmented worlds can supplement the experiences of the limited mobility visitors.

"The metaverse is here, and it's not only transforming how we see the world but how we participate in it."

Satya Nadella ♦

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

Dr Nimit Chowdhary is a Professor with the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Jamia Millia Islamia. He has more than 28 years of the academic experience of which he has been a full professor for 15 years in India, China, and Mexico. In addition, he was a visiting faculty at Gotland University (Sweden), the University of Girona (Spain), IIM Sirmaur, IIQM, and EDII. He is a recipient of many academic awards and recognitions. He has authored 15 books and more than 155 academic papers and chapters. He has travelled extensively to around 40 countries and almost all states within the country.

Q Post pandemic, how is Dubai geared to tap the Indian market?

The Indian has always firmly stood behind us. A good number of Indian tourists visited Dubai even during the pandemic. The only unfortunate part is that India has fallen to number 2 position in terms of overseas tourist ranking. I can't wait for India to regain its position as the number 1 destination. While Covid-19 norms have eased, we have seen Indians flooding the Dubai market; they have always been supporters of Dubai's tourism market, and will always be. We don't see that as an issue. As far as our strategy is concerned, we are putting more efforts into introducing new products to ensure that people come here more as friends or a VFR destination as also a family vacation destination. We have mapped that a lot of Indians transit through Dubai airport annually. Currently, only 5% of that number stays in Dubai, so our strategy is to gradually increase that to 10% in the coming years to ensure all our hotels have adequate business.

Q Dubai has a lot of tourist attractions. How are you working to spread out tourist traffic across these hot spots?

A lot of people have been to Dubai once or twice or even more. What we are now trying to do is to push the new attractions in Dubai. We had various media and other FAMs undertaken during ATM and also during the Dubai Expo. All of this was geared to showcase Dubai as a favourite destination, and I am sure this will catch on in due course.

Q How has been the response to the Dubai Expo and its impact on Dubai's tourism business?

The Dubai Expo unfortunately coincided with one of the peak times of Covid. But I must say that during the first 7-8 months of the Expo, the footfalls didn't match our expectations. However, the last 3-4 months made up for most of the lost time, and while we are looking at Dubai Expo figures, we have come very close to our forecast done 4-5 years ago, and have exceeded on

our revised forecast which was done during Covid. We ended with 24 million visitors to Dubai Expo. The first three months of this year actually more made up for the entire Expo period.

Q Other destinations in the UAE and the larger Middle East market are now actively promoting their tourism opportunities. How do you view this?

The entire Middle East and the GCC market is going to benefit with neighbours in the region having stepped up their marketing activities not only in India, but worldwide. I see a lot of scope for regional tourism, and the more tourists that come in the region, the better it is for Dubai.

The 2022 World Cup is being

'The Indian market has never let us down, not even pandemic time'

hosted by Qatar in Doha, and we are extremely bullish about the market. We have seen a meteoric rise in hotel bookings for excursions pre World Cup or post the tournament. These kind of sporting events will benefit the entire region as a whole.

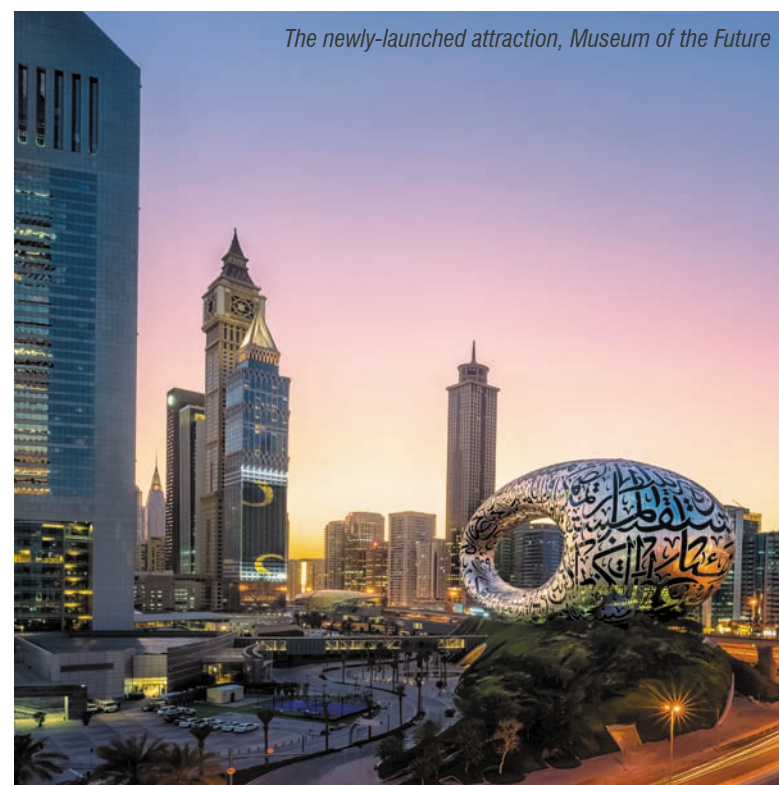
Q In terms of trade outreach, what can we expect from

Dubai Tourism?

In the immediate future, we will definitely step up our marketing efforts with the trade. The travel trade has always been active partners. We are going to encourage a lot more weddings and MICE movement, through the trade who have always stood by us through all these years. ♦

Dubai Tourism continues to remain upbeat about the potential of the Indian market.

Issam Kazim, CEO, Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing in an conversation with **TravelBiz Monitor** spoke about the tourism strategy post Covid for the Indian market, and regional tourism opportunities in the Middle East region.



Trends in outbound tourism

By **Madhavan Menon**, Managing Director, Thomas Cook (India) Limited.

The pandemic has seen a significant shift in customer priorities and behaviours and our internal data reveals that this is visible in travel patterns too. While some of the pandemic induced changes may see short to mid-term impact, a few of these trends will remain for the foreseeable future.

Mental & Emotional Wellbeing: Digital Detox Getaways... Wellness Tourism

Taking time off to relax, rejuvenate and de-stress has become a priority, and this extends across the spectrum from corporate CXOs to India's young working millennials alike. Digital detox vacations are seeing strong uptick Vs. the workations that were in vogue over the last 2 years. Getting away from crowded touristy locations is a growing demand with preference for off-the-radar locations amidst the serenity of nature. Interest in wellness holidays is expected to grow further as

consumers are looking for mindfulness, meditation and spirituality.

Travel Freedom: Restriction-Free Destinations

A borderless world is still a dream, despite increasing announcements on relaxation of entry requirements and health protocols. So understandably, travellers are seeking destinations that offer the least amount of restrictions, easy access and better connectivity. Barriers to travel create unwarranted challenges/

stress and most global stakeholders are waking up to this reality as they strategize towards accelerated revival for the Travel & Tourism sector.

Luxury Travel and Deeper Spends

Travel has been much awaited and longed for over two years of being confined to home with extended lockdowns and restrictions. In a sense, travel itself has become a luxury! Also having unspent travel budgets, both leisure and our corporate MICE customers are displaying strong appetite for deeper spends and longer stays - for that once in a lifetime experience. What is noteworthy is that with travellers planning to spend big on travel, they are looking to travel advisors to help them co-curate their dream luxury vacations. And this augurs well for our travel trade.

Acceleration of Digital Transformation

With the imperative of safe and contactless travel, the pandemic has fast-tracked digital transformation across the travel ecosystem. And customers have adapted well to cutting edge tech advancements that ensure contactless/reduced physical contact. We are witnessing

a tech revolution and with it the increased adoption of Virtual and Augmented Reality, contactless check-in/check-out, digital-keys, room service via QR codes, e-menus, etc.

Slow Travel & Sustainability

Sustainable, responsible and regenerative travel is emerging on the traveler radar. And with it desire to travel slow and truly appreciate the nuances of a destination and its unique local flavours. So indepth exploration rather than rushed tours, staying at a village, learning a local art/craft and giving back to the community – is seeing increasing interest. With the alarming heat waves bringing the dangers of global warming right to our doorstep, Indians are concerned about the environment which has led to booking of sustainable travel options, waste-reduction and an environmentally conscious approach.

Unique Experiences and Hidden Gems

Travellers are keen to explore unique experiences, hidden gems and traveller secrets. Eclectic/unique accommodation is in demand - a plantation villa in a tea/coffee estate, tree tops, heritage stays, palaces, forts or in the heart of a desert or bamboo grove. The trend of Bucket List travel is emerging strongly, be it white-water rafting in Chamonix or climbing Europe's largest sand dune - The Pilat in France; gorilla trekking in Uganda or horseback or canoeing safaris...

Safety and Hygiene

In the new normal, health and safety will remain a priority for travellers, and this will continue to result in sanitation and safety measures along with contactless services across their journey. Travellers will be careful while selecting their options and we have seen families preferring to book villas or the entire floor of boutique properties for multi-generational family groups; private transportation with charters for flights and yachts .

With pent up demand and considerable easing of restrictions, the new age traveller is hungry to explore the world – with a new found mindfulness and true appreciation for travel. ♦

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

Madhavan Menon joined Thomas Cook India in 2000 as the Executive Director responsible for the Foreign Exchange business and stepped up to the position of Managing Director in January 2006; Chairman & Managing Director in January 2016.

He has a varied background, having commenced his career in banking at Grindlays Bank, Citibank and Emirates Bank and in Birla Sun Life Asset Management Company.

Madhavan is a member on the Board of Thomas Cook (India) Ltd. and holds directorship in various subsidiaries of the company including Sterling Holiday Resorts Limited and CSB Bank Limited (member of Fairfax India Ltd.) He is also the Chairman of the Fairfax India Charitable Foundation that focuses on bringing down the cost of treating kidney related ailments in India.

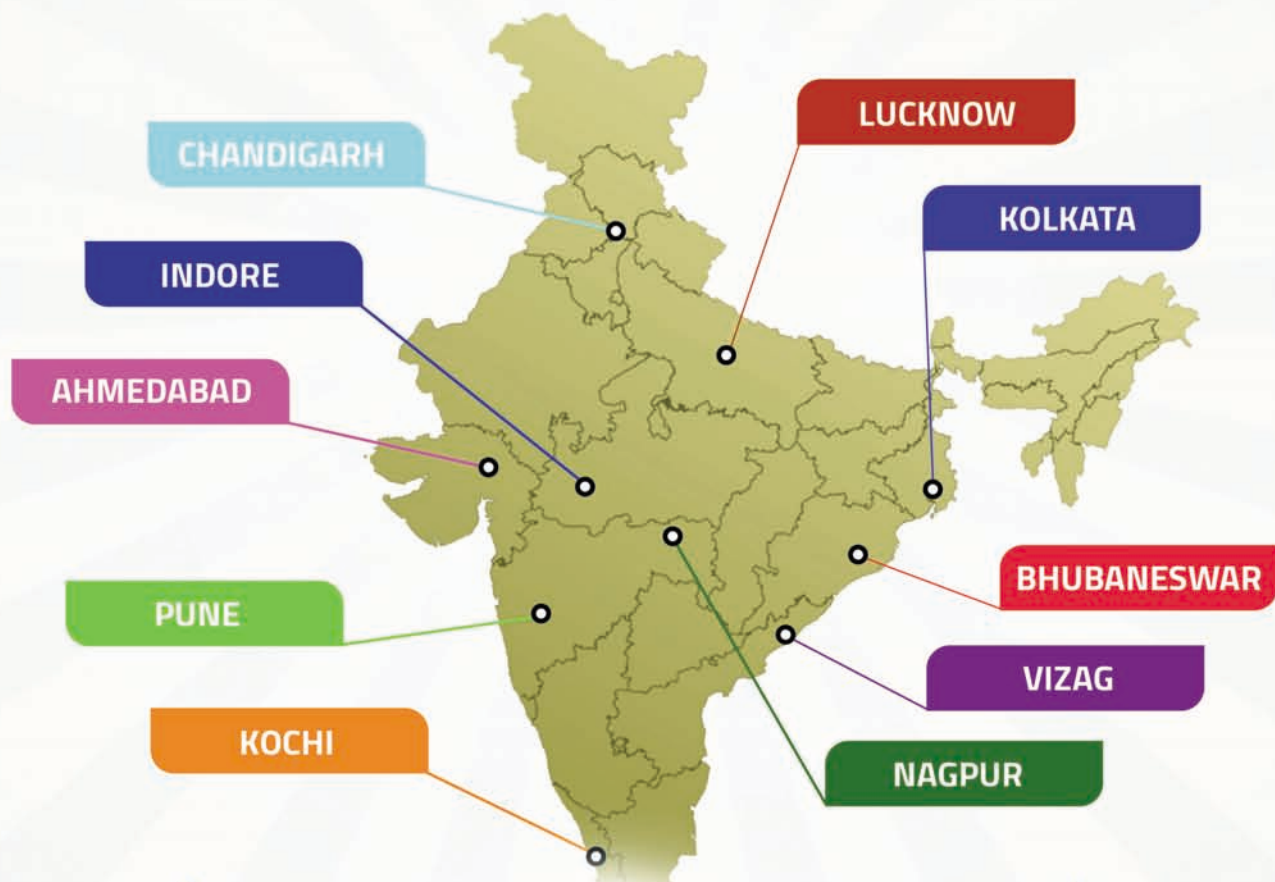
During his tenure, Thomas Cook India has made several acquisitions, noteworthy being Kuoni's Destination Management Specialists across 17 countries, a strategic investment in TravelJunkie Solutions (a new age interactive holiday planning- booking solutions provider), and the acquisition of DEI (one of the world's leading imaging solutions and services providers).



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us. Over the years, the outbound from India has grown and we are according a larger focus on the Indian market, especially with the upcoming developments. Unfortunately, the current situation in Sri Lanka is not conducive to tourism. However, we are confident that things will get back to normal soon. A lot of countries pre and post Covid have gone through their troubles, and Sri Lanka is no exception. Prior to pandemic we have dealt with wars, and now the economic crisis. We are optimistic that we will tide over this crisis in due course. As far as Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts is concerned, we are absolutely ready once the market opens.

and Marketing. We are looking at growing the businesses in India substantially along with trade connect, and are considering doing roadshows in India later this year when the Sri Lankan market opens. We are looking at strategic partnerships with existing as well as new Indian carriers, while we enjoy a robust partnership with SriLankan Airlines.

Q Which segments in India are your key focus areas?

At Cinnamon we focus on all kinds of travellers. However, our focus has grown on family vacationers, MICE travellers and more recently weddings. Just before the pandemic, we hosted a Cinnamon Weddings Showcase where we hosted wedding planners and event managers from the Indian market. While vacationers are important, MICE has been our major focus.

Q What is your strategy for the Indian market?

Currently, our focus is very much on the Indian market. After a long time, we are establishing presence in the Indian market. We are opening sales offices in Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru. It will be a full-fledged Cinnamon Sales team servicing the Indian market from the trade and consumer perspective. Our Indian office will be headed by Ms Shaista Khan, an experienced hospitality professional, especially in Sales

Q How do you see your marquee project Cinnamon Life being a game changer?

Cinnamon Life will be a mixed used development project in Colombo with residential homes, F&B outlets and a large hotel of 800 rooms. This would be the largest hotel inventory in Sri Lanka. This project is very exciting for us, and the hotel is scheduled to open in Q2 2023. Its launch will be a game changer for Sri Lanka and India both. We are excited about bringing this new proposition to Indian travellers. ♦

‘We are looking at growing the businesses in India substantially’

Despite the current economic situation in Sri Lanka, Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts is upbeat about ensuing stability. **Christian Pertl, Chief Commercial Officer, Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts** in an interaction with **TravelBiz Monitor** spoke about the importance of the Indian market for the hotel group, and their marquee project, Cinnamon Life Integrated Resort.

Q Given the current situation in Sri Lanka, how does Cinnamon view the opportunity in present and future?

Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts is the largest hotel group in Sri Lanka; we currently have 15 hotels amongst our various hotel brands. 11 of those hotels are in Sri Lanka and 4 are in Maldives. We have a strong footprint in the Indian Ocean area, and therefore the Indian market is important to



Explorer's Log : Earth Hour, Day Zero, Sustainability District

By Ansoo Gupta, Founder, OneShoe Trust

I write this piece in a dim light. Most of the lights have been turned off to mark Earth Hour 2022 (26 March). And while I am happy to hear that all international flights will be resumed in India from 27th March after a gap of two long, dreadful years, I still can't ignore the fact that even with the imminent danger of an overheated planet looming large on humanity, we still haven't moved beyond taking 1 hour out of 8766 hours to mark as Earth Hour and turn lights off (if at all!). And that in the middle of a planet-wide climate crisis, we still find ways to wage wars and cause destruction. It's the time to stand together as one, instead the world is more divided than ever before. We have brought the world to the brink of a World War 3, as if the widespread annihilation brought about by a microscopic virus was not enough. We are driving people out of their homes, to leave their countries, as if the natural disasters were not already displacing millions of people worldwide. No, in this dim light, it can get hard to see what the future holds, with nary a beacon.

Then as the Earth Hour passed over India, and the lights start coming on, the World Expo 2022 plunged into darkness. In the Sustainability District, Expo celebrated the occasion with a Switch Off Parade by the Dubai Police Marching Band, which went through Ghaf Avenue. Bagpipes could be heard, as a panda mascot tailed in the back, highlighting the creature's endangered status, and pavilions turned out their lights one by one as the parade went from Peru to UK between 8.30pm and 9.30pm. The Sustainability Pavilion and other pavilions in the district turned off their lights for one minute, to "highlight the importance of preserving energy and the world's natural resources," reads a press release.

Sixty of Expo's pavilions joined in. For all the symbolism that this 1 hour out of 8766 hours every year displays, this was still a pretty big symbol of concern and collaboration. Just what the world needs. And with this one-minute switch off, the Sustainability District at the World Expo became a momentary symbol of what our



world needs and can achieve if we set our collective mind to it. As we join forces, small actions grow into positive global movements that will help communities protect and preserve the world around us.

Sustainability district has been waving the flag of a better future for all at the Expo.



As one walks through the Sustainability District, one can explore some of the world's most advanced technology in action, what countries are doing to champion sustainability, and experience how the human race can enjoy living in harmony with nature in a high-tech future. Named 'Terra', this pavilion is where the sustainability efforts have been concentrated to be displayed to the public. One explores humankind's relationship with nature, our obsession with excessive

consumerism, and how we can change our everyday choices to reduce our carbon footprint and environmental impact. The pavilion towers over the rest of the site, as a 130-meter-wide canopy harnesses solar energy from 2,752 panels to generate electricity during the day. The site was also "planted" with 18 energy trees featuring 2,160 solar panels that rotate to follow the course of the Sun through the sky every day. These Energy Trees can help generate 4GWh of alternative energy per year, enough electricity to charge more than 900,000 mobile phones.

"Although Expo 2020 is coming to an end, the legacy of what has been built — the ideas, the co-operation, and the symbolism of the world in one place looking towards a prosperous future where people and planet collaboratively thrive — illuminates how we must move forward." said Laila

Mostafa Abdullatif, director-general of Emirates Nature-WWF, ahead of Earth Hour.

Let us all be inspired by the Earth Hour, by the enormous World Expo. Let us all be inspired to fight climate change. Be inspired to change our future. Take it as Day Zero from where a new future starts as international travel restarts in India.

I will be happy to help in any sustainability efforts taken up in the travel and tourism ecosystem. Let's talk. I can be reached on LinkedIn or on Twitter at my handle @ansoogupta. ♦

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

Ansoo Gupta is founder of OneShoe Trust which is a global advocacy platform for Responsible & Mindful Travels. Gupta a Science graduate in Physics and Mathematics with a post graduate in business management and a certification in Data Science & Machine Learning from HarvardX.



‘Conceiving a luxury space and service in the high security zone of an airport is a challenge’

The lounge which is coming up at T3 International airport in Delhi will be in tune with Encalm’s vision of providing international lounge experiences in the country. The 30,000 sq ft lounge area is going to offer a fully functional gym for the fitness enthusiasts, says **Vikas Sharma, CEO, Encalm Hospitality Pvt Ltd.** in an interaction with **Prasenjit Chakraborty.**

Q How has the airport lounge experience business changed over the years? What innovation Encalm Hospitality wants to bring in this arena?

The airline-lounge experience has changed drastically over the years. Initially, lounges were mere waiting rooms. Today, lounges resonate with comfort, luxury and indulgence. People can enjoy gourmet food, ultra-comfortable seating zones and various other add-on amenities like plug-in points, high speed internet access, live food counters etc. With the vision to take lounge experiences to international levels, Encalm is offering premium bar, buffet meals, cigar rooms, spa, massage services, fitness centers, and showers among several other luxuries. Going an extra mile to serve the travellers, Encalm has collaborated with renowned chefs who curate specialized menus catering to the palates of travellers across geographies. It’s still a long way to go as travellers’ choices are ever-changing and as service provider, we are always on our toes to bring-in new dimensions catering to our consumers’ dynamic demands.

Q Could you tell us more about your signature lounge which you are planning to open at T3 International airport in Delhi?

The lounge at T3 International airport at Delhi will be in tune

with Encalm’s vision of providing international lounge experiences in the country. The 30,000 sq ft lounge area is going to offer a fully functional gym for the fitness enthusiasts who don’t want to compromise with their health even if they are on a tight schedule. The spa area at the T3 lounge has been curated with the thought of giving some relaxation time to travellers to overcome exhaustion during layovers. The concept of the lounge is to provide comfort and wellness to the travellers at airports; thus, we are curating services keeping in mind the overall well-being of our guests. The lounge will have defined seating spaces for all the

travellers. Our lounge at T3 will also host a gaming zone for kids and adolescents to keep them entertained during those long and strenuous lay-overs in international flights. Apart from all these, the lounge will also have a business center as no matter what, the work should never stop. Last but not the least, the lounge at T3 will also serve scrumptious gourmet food prepared by celebrated chefs.

Q In one of your interviews, you said that the company is making a real impact with Atithya (airport meet and assist services). What impact are you talking about?

Atithya is the airport meet and greet service being provided by Encalm which is on the path to change the airport service dimensions. With Atithya, guests can just handover all their worries about airport formalities to us and can enjoy a seamless airport experience. With trained professionals greeting the guests at the entrance to taking them through all the procedures until they board the flight, Atithya is there to serve guests at each step. Guests with heavy luggage can opt for ‘Buggy Services’ where porters are assigned to carry their baggage till boarding. We have also come up with an exciting new ‘Buddy Service’ that has been thoughtfully curated for the elders and single parents. The service provides a trained

Encalm executive who picks the guests from his/her doorstep, and guides them throughout the airport procedures. The executive will accompany the guests on the travel and finally will make sure that he/she reaches the destination safely. Apart from all these services, we also provide lounge access to guests who would like to relax for few hours inside the airport premises. Thus, with Atithya, we are taking away all the worries associated with air travel and assuring a pleasurable airport experience.

Q According to you, what are the biggest challenges in the airport lounge experience business? How are you addressing the challenges?

Conceiving a luxury space and service in the high security zone of an airport is a challenge in itself. Airport lounges doesn’t only consist of one single service but we witness an amalgamation of different services inside the lounge area. These varied services require multiple associations and getting them on-board becomes critical. To create an atmosphere that reflects luxury and comfort requires a lot of research on current customer preference, which is an ever-changing affair. Our lounge, being at the construction level demands huge amount of investments which is a challenge that we are facing these days. However, having like-minded people in the team who possess the same vision as yours can regulate those challenges. A team holds the power to make or break a company and at Encalm, we are blessed to have wonderful people with us.

Q Do you have any plan to tie up with OTAs and travel agents in future?

Yes, we work with multiple travel agents and corporate aggregators who avail our services on regular basis. B2B plays a key role for us with their requirements of special assistance and exclusivity for high net individuals (HNIs) and senior management travellers. We are also working with the major OTA’s to make sure we reach the right audience who will value these offerings. ♦

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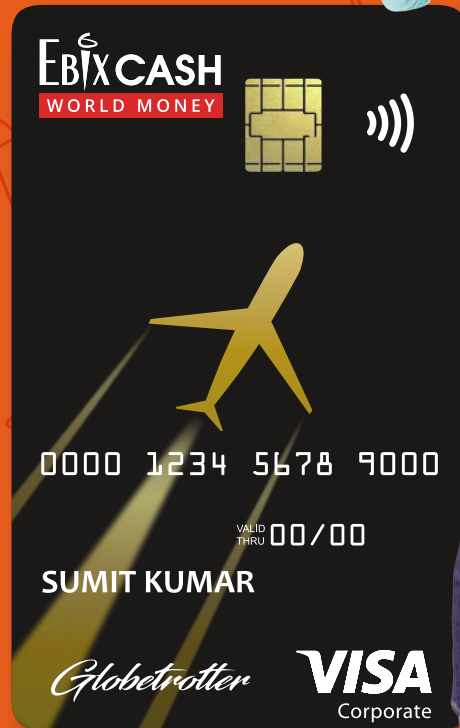
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