

FOR THE TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL

# TravelBizMonitor

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# FOR THE TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL

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## Dubai Tourism shifts gears to tap Luxury travellers & HNIs from India

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

For over a decade of enjoying its position in the Indian market as a popular tourist destination for family travel, Dubai Tourism has now set its focus on Luxury travellers and HNIs. In this direction, the destination will be undertaking in-market activation to drive traffic from India.

Talking about this, Bader Ali Habib, Head of Region - South Asia, International Operations, Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism, said, "India is our number one source market. We now see a growing demand from HNI and Ultra HNIs with different means of staying in Dubai. Therefore, we are starting to focus on the Luxury segment. For years, Dubai has received mass volumes and that was important for us because we wanted to position Dubai as a family destination, and an affordable one."

"However, we realised there are other niches that we need to tap into. Apart from mass tourism, we are keen to champion in luxury, golfing

and lifestyle experiences. Dubai is a one-stop shop across gastronomy, leisure, experiences and hotels for any affluent Indian to come and enjoy. We are looking at positioning Dubai in a year as a destination for HNIs with partners who have access to these set of travellers."

With regards to tapping this niche segment, Habib stated that in market activations are a key area of focus. "We realised if we have to tap the niche segment, we need to reach out to them directly. We want to engage with HNI audience either through gala dinners, retreats, gastronomy, golfing and show them that Dubai has a continuity factor."

He spoke about banking on the liveability factor of Dubai to serve as a catalyst for tourism, especially repeat travellers. "Indians have been the biggest beneficiaries of the Dubai Golden Visa. There has been a huge appetite among HNIs from India to come and settle in Dubai, where they can continue to operate their businesses and use the remote work experience to stay in Dubai and explore business opportunities here. Since we are

a mature destination in India, we are looking at shifting the needle."

Ali Habib was speaking to **TravelBiz Monitor** at Mumbai leg

of their three-city roadshow that was held in Delhi and Ahmedabad as well. "Historically, Dubai has been a household name in the metro cities of India. However, the real potential of India lies in the Tier-II and III cities," he said. 23 stakeholders, including hotels, attractions, DMCs, airline and cruise partners exhibited at the roadshow.

Commenting on the Dubai Expo 2020, Ali Habib said that it served as a catalyst for tourism since it created an impression that despite the pandemic, Dubai can host a global event offering safety for family travel. "We welcomed 24 million visitors with the Expo. The impression created with the Expo has put Dubai on a pedestal for the coming years and especially for the liveability factor." ♦

disha.shah@safronsynergies.in



**Bader Ali Habib**  
Head of Region - South Asia,  
International Operations,  
Dubai's Department of  
Economy and Tourism

## South Africa: Building its post-pandemic market recovery from India

Targeting 30,000 Indian visitors for 2022, over 7000 visas already issued in the first three month of the year

Shayan Mallick | New Delhi

South Africa Tourism is eyeing at least 30,000 Indian tourist by the end of the year, a number Neliswa Nkani, Hub Head - India, Middle East and South East Asia, South Africa Tourism, is confident the NTO can deliver for the destination. According to Nkani, South Africa has already issued over 7000 Visas to Indian travellers between January and March this year. And with aggressive market activation programmes, the 360-degree direct-to-consumer 'More & More' marketing campaign, initiatives like e-Visa, and above all, country's diverse bouquet of tourism products and attraction as well as value-for-money tourism proposition, South Africa Tourism is, insists Nkani, well on way to recover its market share from India sooner than later.

As early as March the NTO was eyeing SATTE

2022 to start a high impact connect with the Indian market. However as SATTE 2022 got rescheduled to the second half of May, South Africa Tourism embarked on a four-city road show in March, becoming the first NTO in India to conduct its



annual India road show, a move aimed at accelerating the tourism board's market recovery effort in India. Around 20 South African suppliers participated in the road show followed by some 35 suppliers

who were attending SATTE last month in Delhi.

Tourism is not only about visiting and exploring places but also interacting and meeting people face to face and there came a time when, according to Neliswa, her colleagues pointed that people have had enough of online presentations and webinars. And that's when, backed by her confidence in the Indian market and the way it had responded by continuing to keep South Africa in its holiday itineraries even

during the pandemic, SAT decided to visit India for face to face meeting and road shows, post pandemic their first major physical event outside of the country that was aimed at source market development efforts.

"My colleagues were saying that if we do one more zoom call, one more webinar, etc. people are just going to switch off and so we decided to come to India. I said to theme in March, while the country was closed, that we are going to India with or without restrictions. Because India has been the only country that has been coming consistently in our country during Covid, literally. In fact if you think about it, last year we had just under 18,000 arrivals from India. Of course we had better number planned, nevertheless, Indians came."

Nkani also pointed that the NTO is even receiving enquiries for some very large MICE groups from India, some as large as up to 4000 pax's. ♦

Read the full interview on Page 10

# Rail Europe celebrates 90 years of promoting train travel

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Commemorating its 90 year of business operations this year, Rail Europe, founded in 1932 has extended its network from a niche brand promoting French rail routes to North American travellers, to becoming the largest one-stop-shop for planning and booking European train travel.

To celebrate this milestone, Rail Europe has launched a B2B booking platform, Easy Rail Access – ERA that offers the largest catalog of 60+ European train operators (including SNCF, SBB, Eurostar, Thalys, Lyria, Trenitalia, Italo, DB, Renfe, OUIGO Spain and NATIONAL RAIL) and rail passes, such as the Swiss Travel Pass and the Eurail Pass.

This brand new B2B platform offers a unique & seamless experience to plan & book rail travel to the travel professionals. It allows them to access new features including the full range of fares, multiple payment options & currencies, and after-sales processing.

"Into our 90th year of operation in 2022, we are glad to say that we are the business and technology partner of more than 20,000 travel professionals in 70 countries. As a part of the 90th anniversary, at the start of the year, we had many promotional offers which included up to 50% off on some journeys in partnership with top European rail operators," Srijit Nair, General Manager, India, Middle East, Africa & Russia, Rail Europe.

Currently, there are offers going on for

Eurostar and Eurail. Travel professionals can avail 20% discount on Standard Premier Class bookings on Eurostar till July 17, and 15% off on all Eurail Global Mobile Passes till the end of July 2022. More such offers will be rolled out in the coming months of the year.

As the business is growing and markets are opening for travel, 2022 is the year of opportunities and growth. "Our focus this year is to make our B2B booking portal **ERA – Easy Rail Access**, more convenient for our GSAs and partners who are booking with our GSAs as well as those booking directly on



**SRIJIT NAIR**  
General Manager, India,  
Middle East, Africa &  
Russia, Rail Europe

innovations and determined to make it available for our partners by the start of the year 2023," he said.

Rail Europe conducts series of webinars and trainings for our partners on a time-to-time basis. "We also have our e-learning programme The Rail Agent Course (TRAC) which is comprehensive rail training programme which includes Europe's major train operators, that is also

available on a dedicated app. Travel agents and partners can register and complete the assigned modules, complete the contests and win prizes. After completing the course agents can earn **The Rail Expert certificate**. We are also updating this programme with more rail carriers' modules. It is a fully equipped Rail Certification programme that travel agents can participate in to increase their knowledge about European trains and passes. The e-learning program is available at: [www.trac-raileurope.com](http://www.trac-raileurope.com)," he stated.

In the Indian market, Rail Europe is seeing a pent-up demand for leisure and family trips for Europe and Indians love travelling to Switzerland and France. Therefore, there is an increase in demand for Swiss passes along with French train SNCF and Swiss France connecting train – TGV Lyria. Italian train – Trenitalia as well as trains in UK are also seeing rise in demand. ♦



our B2B platform agent [raileurope.com](http://raileurope.com). So, on the technology front, we are continuously adding lot of new rail sectors and products and want to bring passholder fares, seat reservations for scenic trains in Switzerland and more sectors on point-to-point tickets on our B2B portal soon. We are in the process of updating our portals with such technological

# Tourism Fiji hoping to reach pre-pandemic tourist traffic from India by 2024

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

After two long years of halt in tourism and having reopened its borders recently, Fiji Tourism is hoping for a smooth uptick in travel from India, and strategically reaching pre-pandemic (2019) levels of tourist traffic by 2024. In 2019, Fiji welcomed 6,000-7,000 tourists from India.

Sharing views with **TravelBiz Monitor** during her recent visit to Mumbai, Kathy Koyamaibole, Regional Director Asia & Pacific, Tourism Fiji, said, "Since borders have opened up, we are seeing a relief from travellers wanting to explore new destinations. While it is too soon to forecast the travel demand, we

are hoping to reach pre-pandemic numbers from India in 2024. Fiji offers visa-free entry to Indian passport holders, and this will aid travel from India." Currently, Fiji requires Indian tourists to be completely vaccinated, and undertake an RAT test within 72 hours upon arrival in the country.

Till now, Fiji has largely welcomed honeymooners and couples from India, and slowly the destination is keen to tap weddings and MICE groups, especially corporate incentives. "We have a large Indian diaspora in Fiji, and therefore we can meet the dietary requirements of Indian



**KATHY KOYAMAIBOLE**  
Regional Director Asia &  
Pacific, Tourism Fiji

travellers very easily. We are talking to tour operators in India for incentive group movement, alongside offering Fiji as an add-on during their visit to Australia and New Zealand."

Tourism Fiji has recently re-launched its Matai 2.0 specialist programme, and is looking at encouraging the travel trade in India to undertake the online training.

"We are reaching out to the agents in metros and Tier-II cities to complete their training," she said. ♦

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# Utah's Unique Offering for Indian Traveller

TBM Staff | Mumbai

From national parks to state parks and national monuments, the Beehive State of Utah offers nature, adventure and majestic landscapes to Indian travellers.

## Northern Utah

Northern Utah combines mountains, lakes and reservoirs, pioneer and Native American heritage with Utah's biggest cities. There are mountainous parks and forests where one can ski, hike, stargaze or camp.

It's also the heart of Utah's urban experiences, boasting vibrant main streets and downtown centers with nightlife, festivals, historic Temple Square and performing arts.

In some areas, you'll also experience a distinct Americana feel in the quaint towns of Utah.

## Salt Lake City

Salt Lake City makes a great gateway for travellers making a trip to Utah's ski resorts or southward to Utah's renowned red rock country. Frequently referred to as the "Crossroads of the West," its location is also ideal for longer road trips northward to Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks. Though as those who attempt to pass through often find, you'll frequently talk yourself into staying longer than you expected.

Antelope Island State Park is 25 miles north of Salt Lake City. Accessed by a causeway, the island sits in Great Salt Lake and features free-roaming bison and antelope herds. It's a Utah state park that was once considered for national park designation. To understand why, you'll have to see it for yourself.

## Park City

Park City could certainly stake a rightful claim of being the "perfect mountain town." Combining its silver mining town heritage, an artistic vibe and a deep appreciation for the outdoors, Park City strikes a balance between luxury and comfort, all the while showing a deep appreciation for athletics, arts and community. Whatever your daily activity may be, you'll work up an appetite

## Antelope Island State Park Highlights

- ◆ 36 miles of hiking and mountain bike trails
- ◆ Kayak and paddleboard rentals at the Great Salt Lake marina
- ◆ Sunsets from Frary Peak
- ◆ Wildlife sightings include bison, mule deer, pronghorn antelope, coyote and some of the best birding in the world
- ◆ Gentle cycling on rolling paved roads
- ◆ An internationally-certified dark sky park, ideal for stargazing outside of the city

for the diversity of fine restaurants that line Park City's Historic Main Street and beyond, and you'll want to wind down after a long day with the craft whiskeys and vodkas at the High West Distillery and Saloon. And the offerings for outdoor recreation are immense. The winter slopes were once featured in the Olympics, and in summer the mountains and nearby state parks and reservoirs transform into a hiking, mountain biking, fishing and camping mecca.

## Winter Sports

If skiing powder is your thing, Park City



has you covered. Between their two world-class ski resorts, Deer Valley and Park City Mountain, there are limitless possibilities with their 426 downhill trails across 9,326 acres and numerous spots to Nordic ski. These numbers partially explain why the U.S. Ski and Snowboard team is headquartered in Park City. Other reasons include unbeatable proximity to Salt Lake City International Airport, excellent recreational opportunities and quality of life.

Park City Mountain is the largest ski resort in the United States, while Deer Valley is one of the country's most popular luxury mountain resorts. The nearby Soldier Hollow Nordic Center in Midway, once featured in the Olympic games, offers great cross-country skiing.

## Heber Valley

Take in a view of "Utah's Alps" from the Heber Valley. Between the destination towns of Heber and Midway, Heber Valley astonishes with its alpine splendour and access to endless outdoor recreation. Exclusive resorts, authentic dining and world-class golf round out the valley's extensive list of incredible accommodations and vast trail network, which means your Heber Valley sanctuary can be built on luxury, outdoor recreation, or a combination of both.

## Logan

A high mountain valley known for outdoor adventures, strong heritage and performing arts. Logan is a great stopover on trips to Bear Lake State Park, Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons (Read: The Yellowstone Loop itinerary), but you'll want to linger to sample the city's excellent art galleries, specialty shops, Mormon pioneer architecture, community festivals, local food and live performances.

Culturally, the Logan area hosted the Shoshone tribe's ancestral hunting for thousands of years and is still home to great examples of early pioneer architecture, built by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, including the Temple and Tabernacle, historic courthouse and Old Main building on the campus of Utah State University. ◆



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## BETWEEN VAN GOGH AND AJANTA CAVES

**Promoting a historical art scene for tourism calls for a sharp eye for creativity and a sensitive commitment to the visitor.**

Van Gogh's life in the 1880s at Provence in France where he produced most of his life's finest works, is a pivot on which the region hangs a chunk of its tourism market. In the same state abandoned limestone quarries in the village of Les Baux de Provence have been turned into a magnificent canvas to display projected art images set to music in an immersive show 'Carrieres de Lumieres' by the company that manages French museums and art centres.

While promoting tourism, one has to watch out for both the purist and the 'so-called' plebeian tastes. Tourism has to be varied, topical, reflective of heritage and imbued with an appeal to modern tastes, of 'the general public as well' (and that being the operative expression).

The thin line between 'exploiting' culture and 'marketing' will always be debated. There will always be diverse opinions on any strategy whether it is 'selling' culture or 'promoting' it. In Provence, the many museums, art centres besides popular sites where the artists from Van Gogh to Cezanne based their art, serve as tourism hotspots.

While on this, a look at the worlds' possibly first art gallery in the Ajanta and Ellora caves in India should be in order. The rare finesse of the cave paintings there is unique in the history of art. Painted in 60 or 70 BC the bold brushstrokes, use of perspective, play of light on the faces and other technical aspects like choice of pigments and use of lime mortar makes those UNESCO world heritage paintings truly exceptional.

Yet as one hears, if the Public Works Department is still repairing the link road from the caves to the closest city before the coming monsoon season, it is cause for concern. While a light and sound show inside the caves is a purists' no-no, building anything close to an amusement park in the vicinity as is rumoured, could well be sacrilege.

Between a dull indifference to art and history and an extreme gung-ho carnival spirit at Ajanta, a balance should be eased sooner than later.

There is barely a fraction of that focus at Ajanta. This should seriously concern the mandarins of Indian tourism.

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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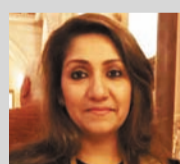
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# 'Zanzibar is a right fit for the affluent and well-travelled Indian tourist'

The newly-appointed Minister of Tourism and Heritage for Zanzibar, **Simai Mohammed Said**, talks to **TravelBiz Monitor** about creating a brand image about the island nation among the high-end well-travelled Indians, and collaborating with the travel trade and private sector to drive awareness.

## Q How are you looking at positioning Zanzibar in the Indian market?

Zanzibar is beautiful destination with its own vibrant vibe, largely unexplored by Indians. Besides the turquoise blue waters, shallow sandbars and small deserted islands virtually unexplored, Zanzibar is known for its variety of spices and handicrafts. We also have tourists coming to Zanzibar for visiting our coconut and spice plantations. Moreover, we are considering encouraging high-end tourists undertaking safari tours in our neighbouring countries and mainland Tanzania to explore the pristine waters of Zanzibar and its offerings, while turning them into a captive audience. Zanzibar is a right

fit for the affluent and well-travelled Indian tourist looking for a relaxed and immersive holiday experience and barefoot luxury. Visitors can explore the World Heritage site of Stone Town, Zanzibar City's old quarter. With a large settlement of the Indian diaspora in Zanzibar, there is a sense of familiarity in the culture and cuisine.

## Q In terms of air connectivity, is there anything on the cards?

The new Zanzibar airport is being commissioned in July. The world-class infrastructure of the airport will allow Indians to fly directly into Zanzibar via Dubai with all major international airlines



offering connections to the island nation. Air connectivity will benefit the business community as well tourists alike.

## Q How are you looking at reaching out to the Indian travellers?

Going forward, we will consider collaborating with the travel trade and private sector. Moreover, we will explore tourism markets and promotion of attractions through the diplomatic route as well. ♦

## NEWS ROUND UP

# Europamundo introduces new schemes and concepts for the Indian market

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

Europamundo Vacations (EMV), one of the world's leading tourism corporations during the pandemic focused on developing technology which aimed at providing more comfort to their partners and guests. In fact, the pandemic offered EMV an opportunity to revise its operating and booking systems which have now become stronger and more advanced, enabling the agents and operators to work in a seamless manner. "Our entire focus during the pandemic was to develop technology and we understand that going forward technology will play a crucial role," said Alejandro de La Osa, Director, Commercial, EMV, while speaking to TravelBiz Monitor during his recent visit to Mumbai.

When asked to comment, whether the company launched any new product during the pandemic? Alejandro replied that they had launched a host of new products in France, Japan and the Middle East just before the pandemic started. "Since people didn't embark on travel for last two years, such products remain new to travellers,"

he said.

Talking about the Indian market, he said that it remains one of the top source markets for them. And to provide further boost to the market the company has introduced a few new schemes and concepts to enhance customer satisfaction. Private touring in minivans called 'PRIVATIZABLE TOURS' and 'TRIP STYLES', taking care of special dietary requirements, and 'Indian Meals' are some of the items on the list. Special departures during the Indian festive seasons, small or big groups have also been overhauled with more organised execution plans. According to Alejandro, the people of India still prefer to travel as a large extended family. "Taking due cognisance, we offer exclusive coaches for a smaller group of 15-20 people. These will be run by the agents online and we are empowering them to quote instantly," he said.

As far as training of agents is concerned, Alejandro believes that physical training is



**ALEJANDRO DE LA OSA**  
Director, Commercial, EMV

also important. "It can't be only online training, rather it has to be a mix and match. Before the pandemic how many online training programmes were conducted?," he asked?

Speaking on Flexibility, which is one of the hallmarks of EVM, Alejandro said that this is one of the crucial parts of our policy. Citing an example he said, "If someone is on a seven-day tour to Spain and wants to break, say at

Seville after 3-4 days, we allow it. And the person can join the tour later within a fixed itinerary."

Meanwhile, EVM has crossed the one million international passenger bookings, globally. Aparna C Basumallik, Commercial Head – India sub-continent, UAE and Africa of Europamundo Vacations said, "Together we have hit the magic number of a million bookings in 2022. It was a proud moment for agents from 57 countries that made this happen in just 6 months." ♦

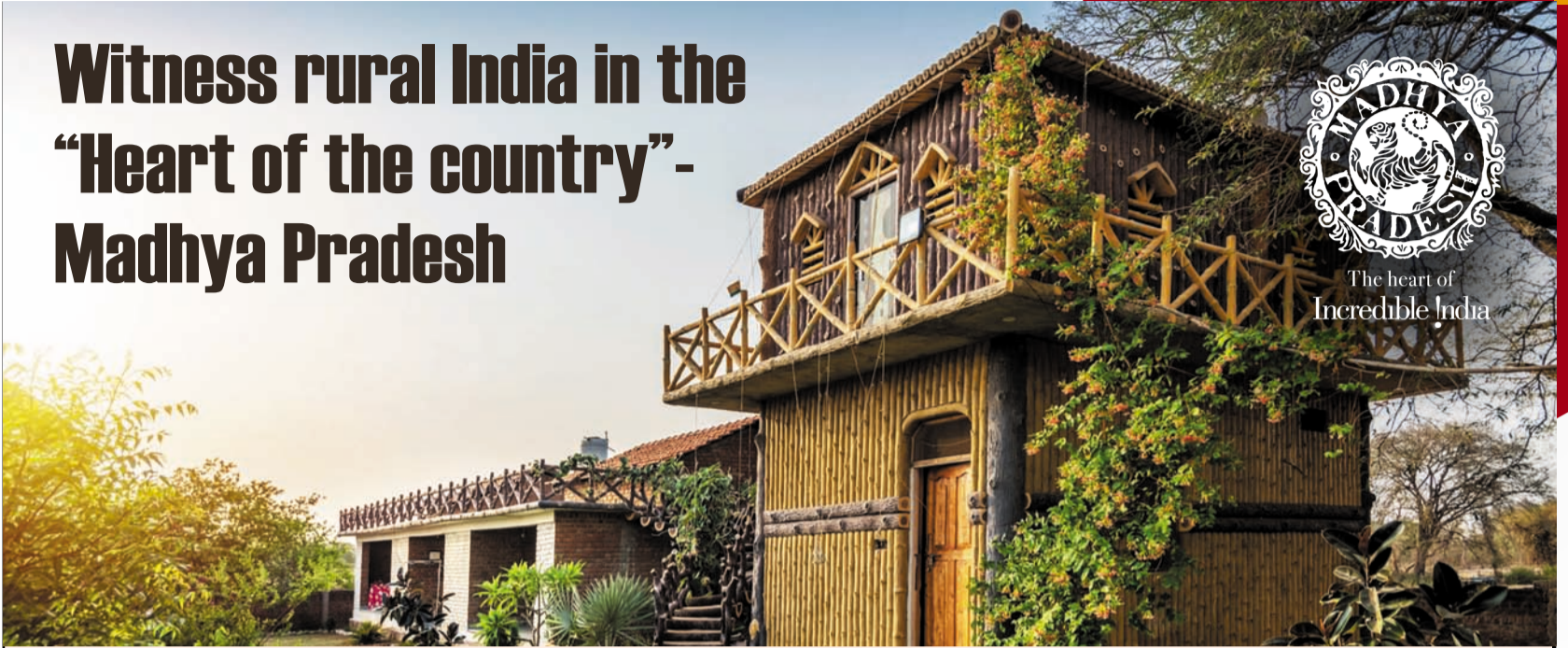
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# Witness rural India in the “Heart of the country” - Madhya Pradesh



The heart of  
Incredible India



## Rural tourism is slowly gaining popularity among travellers and why not? Exploring rural destinations can help to know the traditional roots of a state!

If you are planning to spend some time away from the hustle and bustle of the city life and explore the village houses, taste simple yet delicious meal, experience tribal culture and enjoy the splendid natural and unpolluted surroundings to soak in the rural culture, Madhya Pradesh has it all for you.

The local communities are involved in tourism activities including high-class lodging and boarding facilities, local food, folk music and cultural activities, rural sports, local art and crafts. The homestay in the villages are made of using local material which helps to keep rooms protected from the heat.

Madhya Pradesh Tourism (MPT) has introduced Rural Tourism in a big way to provide safe and sustainable tourism experience. The state tourism board was felicitated with two international awards for its rural tourism project at the World Travel Market (WTM) Responsible Tourism Awards 2021 held in London between November 1 and 3, 2021.

Here we are suggesting a few villages to experience rich Indian culture ...

### Ladhpura Khas: Niwari District

Situated just 6 km from Orchha (also known as Ayodhya of Bundelkhand), Ladhpura Khas village in Niwari district of Madhya Pradesh was nominated in the 'Best Tourism Village' category for the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Award in September 2021. Full of natural scenic beauty with hills, forest and river within the vicinity make this village the perfect destination to relax and enjoy nature.

A visit to this village would let you experience the histories and the architecture while being in the tranquillity of countryside. You'll experience and get an insight into village life.

Tourists can get involved in various farming activities (including milking of cows), go on a tractor ride, walk around the village and meet the villagers, or simple relax and enjoy the serenity.

One can enjoy water sports activities like river rafting and kayaking in Betwa River, which is just 11 km from this village. Tourists experience folk songs, folk dances, bhajans and other cultural activities apart from having delicious food cooked on clay stove.

### How to book:

Contact: Org- Haritika: 9926353281

Nearest Railway Station: Jhansi (25 KM)

### Dhamna, Basata: Chhatarpur District

If you are the one who loves to buy and find some unique handmade keepsakes, Dhamna, Basata and Madla villages could be the perfect destinations. Apart from enjoying the scenic beauty all around and a typical rural life, you would experience amazing arts and crafts that would give you a lifetime memory to cherish.

**Dhamna-** Dhamna Village is just 25 km from UNESCO World Heritage Site Khajuraho and 6 km from Panna



National park. Pandav waterfall is 13 km, while Raneh waterfall is 18 km from this village. If you want to enjoy boating in Ken River then you will have to travel just 6 km from Dhamna. You can also buy some keepsakes such as terracotta, beautiful fridge magnets, car hangings, garden stakes, diffusers, board pin and paper match etc. prepared by villagers in Dhamna.

**Basata:** The village is 31 km far from Khajuraho and 11 km far from Panna National Park. Pandav Waterfall and Raneh Waterfalls are 18km and 16 km far, respectively, from Basata. For boating in Ken River, you will have to travel just 11 km.

### How to book

Org: Dharshna: 7747007502, 9179875638 (For Dhamna and Basata)

Nearest Railway Station: Chhatarpur

Nearest Airport: Khajuraho

### Madla: Panna District

The village is situated at the gate of Panna National Park. Khajuraho is 25 km from Madla while Ken River is just at walking distance (2km). Pandav Waterfall is 7 km and Raneh waterfall is 24 km from this village. Here you will also be able to buy some beautiful souvenirs like tote bag, lunch bag, cushion cover, folder, travel wallet, wall hanging, key chains, key covers etc.

How to book: Org: Bundeli Culture: 9669666939

Nearest Railway Station: Chhatarpur

Nearest Airport: Khajuraho

### Khokhara and Thadipathar villages: Sidhi District

If you are eager to know the tribal people's way of living and experience tribal cuisine, dance, music, art and craft along with enjoying riverside stay then these villages are for you. You will be mesmerised by soothing music of tambura or tanpura, dancing, interesting legends, cave, waterfall and will also get to know about herbs.

**Khokhara** is 30 km from Sanjay Dubri National Park, while Barchar Waterfall is just 1 km from this place.

**Thadipathar** is 28 km from Sanjay Dubri National Park, it is a confluence site of Gopad and Mahan River, which is just 1.5 km from this village while Charakapani waterfall is just 2km from the village. One can also enjoy a long sand river beach.

How to Book: Org: GSS: 6266229565

Nearest Railway Station: Khajuraho

Nearest Airport: Khajuraho







## 'For 2022, we are projecting a 64% increase in footfall from India'

As international travel gains momentum, South African Tourism has embarked on a strategy to multiplying travellers, especially the millennials with its various Adventure tourism products. In a free-wheeling conversation with **Asmita Mukherjee** at Africa's Travel Indaba 2022, the passionate **Neliswa Nkani, Hub Head, MEISEA of South African Tourism (SAT)** explained about African tourism in a post Covid world, and plans to attract Indian travellers .

### Q How soon can we expect South Africa to roll out the E visa for Indian tourists?

It has been piloted and is on trial. Hopefully within the next 6 to 10 months we can expect the e-visa to be operational. We are awaiting confirmation from the Department of Home Affairs for the e-visa and once it rolls out, it will minimise the TAT of getting a visa for South Africa.

### Q Recently SAT conducted road shows in India. How has the response been from the Indian Travel Trade?

The response that we received was phenomenal. We have done the roadshows in Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad and Bengaluru. We are receiving ample leads from the roadshows. In terms of travel enquiries, I think it is the highest since pre-COVID. We have seen quite a bite of traffic coming into South Africa, particularly for the new destinations and new regions. I think the campaign had successfully managed to gain traction and interest from the Indian traveller. Also in my opinion, more and more campaigns will give impetus to create demand for South Africa in India.

### Q Which are your key focus areas for this year?

Our focus would be Adventure tourism. We are presenting Adventure Tourism as the centre

of attraction. We are making sure that adventure drives our travel, in terms of theme in a thematic perspective. We are also seeing a very big increase in terms of MICE, particularly in the incentives. We realised that since COVID slowed down a bit and offices are also opening up and working on a full swing, they have got budgets for their incentives. They want to motivate their staff by using the incentive budget. So according to me, incentive travel is surely coming up and we want to target that.

In terms of composition, we receive 53% leisure travellers,

while 28% consists of meetings and incentives. Therefore, these two are our focus areas. The rest of the 19% consists of business travellers.

Leisure is the biggest segment for us. We are aware that Covid has badly hit travel agents and consumers. So we are keeping the prices low as we have a responsibility to make sure that we inspire the consumer, and the prices will motivate travel agents to convert the lead.

### Q What is the year on year number of Indian visitors in South Africa?

We received about 17,660 Indian visitors in 2021 despite the havoc caused by the pandemic. We saw quite a good interest about visiting South Africa among the travellers.

We also have seen a lot of Indian film-makers coming into South Africa in 2021. As they are coming in packs of maybe 100 or 200 people, it really boosts the segment.

For 2022 we are projecting a 64% increase in the footfall of Indian travellers, which counts 29,000 arrivals from India this year and I think we might be able to exceed that number. The uptake right now is incredible. Also, the tour operators are getting huge positive responses after the roadshows. So this year is looking great for us.

It also mesmerised me that Indian travellers are never scared of travelling to South Africa

even during the pandemic so my aim is to introduce brand new destinations and products to attract Indian travellers.

### Q What are your expectations from FY 2022-2023?

In my opinion, this year is going to be the year for fillers. This is the year of revenge travel as people were suffering from a pent-up demand to travel again and break free. We are focusing on introducing sustainable products, cultural offerings, and authentic products which will add value to the customer experience.

### Q Are you planning any seminars or knowledge sessions specifically aimed at Indian travel agents to help them know more about South Africa and design itineraries better?

We are planning to launch new products. To introduce those products we are going to organise webinars. The goal is to introduce massive destination activation. These webinars will be focusing on South Africa's uniqueness so that the travel trade can sell the products to the Indian buyers, and will also show them that we offer something new to be relevant in the highly competitive market. We are focusing big on adventure as the Indian buyers, especially millennials are looking for new things and we want to be able to satiate their wish.

### Q What efforts are being made to bridge the gap of direct air access to India?

We recently had a very interesting call with one of our partners, as they want to introduce a direct flight route from India to Durban. But we are going to keep it under wraps at the moment until we finalise it. Also, I want to mention here that if any airline from India wants to partner with us for the direct flight we would be more than happy to escalate the conversation to the decision-makers such as the High Commissioner to the Ministry of Transport and Minister of Tourism.

We were in talks with some airlines but due to COVID that didn't go through. If all goes well we hope that we will see a direct flight launching soon. ♦

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## South Africa's Thanda Game Reserve aiming for a share of Indian outbound pie

Thanda Safari is a private game reserve situated at the heart of the Elephant Coast in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province of South Africa. Thanda, which means love in the isiZulu language is a five-star safari lodge, a member of The Leading Hotels of the World and has made it to the top as The World's Leading Luxury Lodge. Thanda comprises a total of 14,000 hectares of land offering world-class hospitality to its hotel guests and safaris to see the Big Five. **Asmita Mukherjee** met with **Sumayyah Sha, Sales Manager, Thanda Safari** at Africa's Travel Indaba 2022 event, who revealed Thanda's plans to target Indian guests by tapping into the extensive knowledge of the Indian travel trade.

**T**he Thanda Safari is steeped in Zulu history with the Mduna Royal Reserve being part of the greater Thanda Safari Reserve linking conservation and the Zulu culture. Thanda Safari is actively involved in conservation and wildlife research, and is working to uplift the local communities through 'Star for Life' and other projects. Three different accommodation types, each with its own style, atmosphere, and appeal are on offer: Thanda Safari Lodge, Villa iZulu and Thanda Tented Camp. Thanda Safari offers guests an authentic South African wildlife experience matched with a sincere commitment to the Zulu culture and passionate conservation of the environment,



Sumayyah Sha

While speaking about the USP of the property location, Sha said, "Among South Africa's most popular holiday destinations, KZN has one of the country's most enviable subtropical climates, with the area being known - locally and globally - as an incredibly diverse and exciting region to visit. The best time to travel to Zululand is in the cooler months; May to October is optimal."

Thanda Safari offers Big Five game viewing with private tracking in 14,000 hectares of the nature reserve. With excellent game viewing all year round, no other vehicles (besides the Thanda game viewers) are allowed to traverse the reserve. Thanda Safari is known for meaningful safari experiences and exclusive close-up encounters with Africa's

magnificent Big Five. Unfortunately, due to the rise in poaching of animals throughout the country, Sha couldn't disclose the number of animals on the reserve.

While speaking about the target customer of Thanda, Sha added that predominantly the brand's customers are international leisure guests and tour series. "We currently have representation in the UK and Germany with much interest from Sweden and other European countries," Sha informed.

While revealing that the brand is exploring a new market - India, Sha said, "India is a new market segment for Thanda Safari, and that which we have only recently started exploring - mid-2019. Since the start of Covid-19 the following year, much of the work was done virtually through trade shows and other online platforms, merely educating travel agents and tour operators across India on the location and product offerings of Thanda Safari. Being a new market segment and having worked with some of the trade, I am confident that we at Thanda, understand the needs of the Indian traveller and will be able to create memorable experiences for these guests. However, it is the trade that we heavily rely on to sell our destinations. Having said that, when the first opportunity presented itself to us via this year's Travel Indaba 2022, we were delighted when we were approached by South African Tourism & Tourism Kwa-Zulu



Natal to host Indian Media & Trade groups at Thanda."

Sha added that they are keen to work in tandem with the Indian travel trade. "Being the experts in their field, we are open to any suggestions/ideas around packages/promotions etc. that only they have the knowledge of and what has or would work for a mutually beneficial partnership with Thanda Safari," she said. ♦

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Vijay Francis



Ajay Sampige

## ‘This year will be a recovery and realignment, this should set the base for next year for a stronger business’

Despite the fact that foreign travel restrictions have had an impact, domestic travel is driving the recovery, say **Vijay Francis, Director, Sales & Marketing and Ajay Sampige, Assistant Vice President of the Royal Orchid Group** in a conversation with **TravelBiz Monitor**.

### Q How is the business health showing this year as compared to last year?

The hospitality industry is slowly reviving back the lost revenue from the past two years. Travellers and our industry, on the other hand, continued to adapt to the changing scenario and find new methods to move forward. Driven by a strong recovery in demand, average room rates began to improve after the second wave. Despite the fact that foreign travel restrictions have had an impact, domestic travel is driving the recovery. Over the last couple of months, travel and tourism has seen a huge influx of traffic, moving back to normalcy. This was visible with an increase in room bookings and events at all our hotels. Food and Beverage has also played a key revenue opportunity, apart from bar and restaurants going busy, social events, corporate conferences, MICE, exhibition and large entertainment events are back in full thump. Revenues largely have been 25% higher than 2019 revenues in some of our hotels and we see similar trends moving forward.

### Q With many corporates returning to office, what are your plans regarding MICE and hosting business events at your hotels?

Amidst Covid - 19, there was a decline in the number of MICE happening on the property. With a large population being vaccinated, companies are confident to come out and do their events, which has been long due. But now with the corporates adopting Hybrid modes, the hotel is witnessing a hike in the number of corporate events happening, more over corporates are choosing residential events. Our hotels offer lush green open lawns which are an ideal spot for the corporates to conduct their team-building activities, exhibitions and

networking dinners . A variety of special packages are curated by the hotel for the events to keep it more fascinating and stand out from other properties. Being in Bangalore, in the last three months we have hosted many large networking events, SAAS, Bangalore Tie, Edutech events, Fintech networking dinners, large international artist DJ's etc.

### Q Considering that last year has been a dampener for the overall hospitality industry, how important is this year for The Royal Orchid Group?

Business is gradually getting better for the hospitality industry compared to last year. The beginning of February saw strong growth in business post-pandemic. Slowly things are going back to the way they were. Since corporates are starting physical events, the demand for MICE has also risen. With people starting to travel again, a promising and strong recovery is visible in hotel occupancy and ADR's. Weddings and events are also being held with no restrictions on footfalls, which also has helped predominantly for the hotel to recover. Whilst this year will be

“ Slowly things are going back to the way they were. Since corporates are starting physical events, the demand for MICE has also risen. With people starting to travel again, a promising and strong recovery is visible in hotel occupancy and ADR's ”

a recovery and realignment, this should set the base for next year for a stronger business, especially through growing rates.

### Q What kind of revenue growth are you foreseeing this year?

With an increase in the rate of MICE, weddings, food, beverage and room bookings, the hotel is expecting at least 25% growth this year over 2019. MICE sector for our hotels is a promising revenue generator with over 50% profit rate. ♦



**Q** Qatar is set to host the Football World Cup, the biggest sporting event, this year. How are you trying to gain enough traction from the Indian market?

In recent years, Qatar Tourism has taken a proactive approach to the Indian market. Following the restrictions being lifted and the World Cup, we are going to implement a comprehensive strategy. The work we did prior to the pandemic has helped set the ground running, resulting in positive traction from the Indian market. We are seeing increased interest from Indian tourists, and the business travel segment, particularly MICE has picked up in a big way.

We are anticipating a large global audience for the Football World Cup and India will contribute to these numbers. We are extremely excited about this event. While we do not expect many Indians travelling to the World Cup, we do foresee millions of tourists from the large football community. We are building a lot of hotel inventory, and our hotels have already received 80% bookings for

specialist certification. Besides MICE, the focus is to entice tourists to spend one or two nights in Doha, as the airport has evolved into a transit hub encouraged by Qatar Airways connections. All the stadiums built for the FIFA World Cup, are also in and around Doha.

**Q** How are you going to sustain the momentum generated from the World Cup?

All our energies are focused on the World Cup right now. We are planning a series of activities for our key source markets immediately following the World Cup. India currently is among our top 10 source markets; we would like to see it move up to the top five. There will be a lot of tourism

## ‘We would like to see India move up to the top five source markets’

activities after the World Cup, including media and corporate FAMs, etc., from India and rest of the region. We also expect a significant increase in regional



“ The work we did prior to the pandemic has helped set the ground running, resulting in positive traction from the Indian market. We are seeing increased interest from Indian tourists, and the business travel segment, particularly MICE has picked up in a big way. ”

the World Cup. Right now, all of our efforts are focused on ensuring that everyone visiting Qatar for the World Cup has a seamless and positive experience.

**Q** In terms of trade and digital outreach, Qatar Tourism has been proactive. What are some of the plans for the year?

Qatar is now completely open for tourism. We have full-fledged dedicated teams that engage with the trade and media for our digital marketing activities. We are also considering expanding our trade engagement with training programmes and destination

travel between Qatar and the GCC countries.

**Q** Qatar opened up its borders for tourism with visa on arrival for 90 countries couple of years ago. How has been the response to the initiative?

Qatar now offers visa-free access for more than 95 countries, and we have seen the benefits of this process with a significant number of tourist arrivals over the years. The country is constantly evolving to ensure visitors have a seamless and memorable trip from the time they plan their visit until they bid adieu. As

previously stated, we are working to establish Qatar as a world-class destination and welcoming more than six million visitors a year by 2030. To accomplish this, we are diversifying and broadening our appeal, putting guests at the centre of everything we do.

**Q** What were the number of Indian tourists to Qatar in 2019? What is your vision for growth by end of 2023?

We identified six demand spaces based on our 2030 vision: Sun, Sea, and Sand; Active Holidays; Relax & Rejuvenate; and Cultural Enthusiasts. Based on this approach, we are optimistic about leveraging our tourism assets. We want to highlight the various aspects that Qatar has to offer not only in the run-up to the FIFA World Cup, but also beyond. In India, we are attempting to appeal to a diverse range of audiences, including leisure, MICE, and weddings and celebrations. Furthermore, with new infrastructure being constructed, we hope to attract corporate travellers as well. We have seen a significant increase in arrivals from India prior to the pandemic, and we look forward to accelerating our efforts to maintain momentum and fully unlock the potential of travellers. ♦

Qatar is gearing up to host the Football World Cup this year.

**Philip Dickinson, Vice President International Markets, Qatar Tourism,** in an interaction with **TravelBiz Monitor,** talks about the upcoming global spectacle, and the preparedness of the destination to grab eyeballs.





# Start-Up Forum

## Bringing Innovations to the Forefront

### BookMyJet

By TBM Staff | Mumbai

**A**nticipating the impact of technology, 16 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.vgmrsolutions.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.vgmrsolutions.com/form.html>**

**Startup Name:** BookMyJet

**Core Team:** Santosh Sharma, Founder  
Ajuka Mahajan, - Cofounder

**Founding year:** 2018

**Company Website:** [www.bookmyjet.co.in](http://www.bookmyjet.co.in)

**Description:** BookMyJet, India's first of its kind technology app platform for transparent & seamless private aircrat and helicopter booking. Founded by two senior general aviation professionals, this platform is a result of research and analysis of the private jet market, which is witnessing a huge surge in demand especially during the pandemic times.

India has seen a rise in the induction of large numbers of private jets in the last 7-8 years especially in cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Bengaluru, Chennai & Kolkata. What has been missing in the general aviation market is an element of transparency pertaining to availability and pricing of the aircrat. As a result, the clients either land up flying a wrong aircrat or paying more. Also, due to unavailability of any reliable informaton about the private jet or helicopter in Tier-2 & Tier-3 cities like Bhopal, Indore, Raipur, Chandigarh, Ludhiana, Rajkot, Baroda, Madurai, Bhubaneswar, Ranchi, etc., the flyers opt for alternate mode of transportation, though they have the capacity of hiring a chartered plane. BookMyJet provides answers to all the above points. Some of the features of

this technology app are-Real time availability of aircrat and helicopters across India, provides technical information including seating capacity, no. of engines, crew, etc of the aircrat, availability of option like "Get Quote" & "Call Back" buttons, empty Legs notifications, 24 x 7 customer care, saving time and money etc.





**Q What kind of opportunity has the post Covid world brought in for airport lounges?**

We have recently conducted an independent survey among 5,400 frequent travellers across the Asia Pacific region, and 20% (the largest number) from those is from India. What came out from the survey was really interesting insights. The first one being that airport lounge access remains number one the most desirable travel benefit. It was also clear that health concerns still remain despite lifting of travel restrictions. Although 70% of respondents have already booked one leisure trip for 2022, almost 50% of them have anxiety attacks of contracting the virus at the airport. What they said to us, almost 29% of them, that they feel safe if they have access to the lounge at the airport. Moreover, with travel resuming, we are seeing that travellers are attaching great value to travel

that's demonstrated with our recent launch of our Priority Pass Access India that now offers access to over 50 premium lounges and airport experiences across all major cities in India. That supplements the 1,300 airport lounges and airport experiences that we offer across the world, making Priority Pass the largest and most successful loyalty programme in the world that covers 95% of flights from top 100 airports globally. So continuing to invest in India is important, and with international flights increasing, and already the month of May reaching pre-Covid levels, we are continuing to see those statistics growing daily. Among the respondents we surveyed, travellers with an average of six

## 'Our ability to enhance customer's journeys through Priority Pass is really unmatched'

“ India has always been an important market for us. We consider it as a critical area for growth in the future. All the industry statistics show that over the next 10 years, we will see a lot of growth in the Indian market. We continue to invest in the Indian market today, and will continue to so in the future that's demonstrated with our recent launch of our Priority Pass Access India that now offers access to over 50 premium lounges and airport experiences across all major cities in India. ”

benefits that they get from their credit card providers. 55% of them felt rewarded by their credit card providers, while 52% customers valued lounge access. We are also seeing a call for brands to identify new and enhanced ways for rewarding loyalty. Through those statistics, lounge access and flight delay benefits, such as Collinson Smart Delay Product are some of the ways brands can activate that.

**Q How are you aligning your investment options in India with the current travel trends?**

India has always been an important market for us. We consider it as a critical area for growth in the future. All the industry statistics show that over the next 10 years, we will see a lot of growth in the Indian market. We continue to invest in the Indian market today, and will continue to so in the future

international trips pre-Covid, are now undertaking at least three overseas trips in 2022. Our ability through Priority Pass enhances the customer's domestic and international journeys, all through one provider, is really unmatched; that's what we are seeing through Priority Pass Access India in India. It is not just domestic travel, but combined with international travel, and that's why we need to continue to invest in India.

**Q What has your domestic partners in India brought to the table?**

In addition to our partners that we have in 50 airports across India, we partnered with 2 new entities that extend the large and comprehensive network we have across Priority Pass.

The first one being Pine Labs which is a leading Indian



merchant commerce platform that allows our customers access to the lounges with the tap of a card. The second is an India based loyalty programme that provides Priority Pass India customers with access to retail, shopping, dining, meet and greet, and also spa experience for those want to enjoy a relaxing time. These kinds of partnerships that we have in India extend the ecosystem of our offerings for Priority Pass. With travel returning, it is the perfect time to bring in these partnerships to enhance the programme. We see that we are able to reward the customers as well as delight them with experiences such as Smart Delay and Travel Delay where people turn flight delay into lounge rest.

**Q How has been your experience in India vis-à-vis the rest of the world?**

India is a very exciting and a dynamic market. It is one of the fastest growing travel markets in the world. Generally, we have seen a fastest rebound from India post Covid. Indian travellers are excited about travelling domestic as well internationally. We are seeing our partners also being upbeat about Indian travellers getting on the planes again. ♦

disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in

Collinson, a global provider of customer loyalty and benefits, and pioneer of the Priority Pass loyalty programme is upbeat about opportunities in India with rebound of travel. **Todd Handcock, President, Asia Pacific, Collinson** speaks to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about their new partnerships and investment in India.



# A hodophile: Call it by any other name

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

The beauty of this world is its diversity- not just the diversity of tangibles- the vivid gaze of a place, but the multiple worldviews that people hold. Cultural conditioning of individuals results in feelings and emotions that people try to express in their language- the nuances that English might not capture accurately. Over time, people have created idioms to express feelings which have little or no parallel in other languages. While travelling, observing the range of feelings and their expression is also enjoyable. Sentiments related to travel are understood and expressed differently. We try to share some exciting terms that have gained currency in a post-COVID digital world as travellers from around

the world crisscross more frequently than ever.

**Flâneur**  
**Gadabout**  
**Gallivanter**  
**Hodophile**  
**Nemophilist**  
**Peregrinate**  
**Peripatetic**  
**Photophile**  
**Solivagant**  
**Wayfarer**

This 19th-century word is an English expression derived from gad. A worry-free globetrotter who travels a lot visits many different places, and does not worry about things one should do is a **Gallivanter**. The phrase is often associated with a visitor with the style and know-a-bouts of urban locales and is commonly used as **Urban Gallivanter**.

The French **Flâneur** is almost a loafer who strolls aimlessly but enjoyably, observing life and society. The term is derived from the old verb 'flana', which roughly means to wander with no purpose. By the 19th century, it referred to a modern urban affluent detached wanderer who roamed around observing contemporary industrialised inner-city life.

A travel lover who travels from one place to another unable to sit idle or settle down is a **Peripatetic**. Derived from the Greek word 'peri' meaning 'around', this phrase



is often associated with teachers because of Aristotle's practice of walking to and fro while teaching. Aristotle is believed to have lectured in a covered walk called *peripatos*. Thus, Peripatetics travel around a lot, living or working in places for short periods, for example, a peripatetic preacher. While a peripatetic's underlying characteristic is that of an itinerant, a person who travels from place to place, generally from one country to another, especially on foot, is called a **Peregrinate**. It is an old-fashioned word from the 16th century derived from the Latin '*peregrinatus*', which means 'travelled abroad' or metaphorically 'wandered or roamed'. The root '*peregrinus*' refers to 'foreign'. A more common reference to the person who travels on foot is **Wayfarer**. One may occasionally run into a wayfarer on a trek. Derived from the old English root, '*fær*', which denotes to journey, road, passage, or an expedition, the term in common parlance refers to a restless journeying character.

An emerging trend is of people wandering alone in nature which has therapeutic benefits. May researches have suggested that spending time outside alone allows one to self-reflect, relieve stress, and restore attention. Such a solo wanderer is a **Solivagant**. The word is derived from the Latin words '*solus*', meaning

alone, and '*vagans*', meaning wander.

On the other hand, love or fondness for woods and forests is age-old. Some people often visit these timberlands. **Nemophilist** is an obscure phrase that has been out of use for over a century, but post-COVID craving for jungles facilitates a comeback for this term. Derived from the Greek '*nemos*', which means grove or glade and '*Philos*', meaning affection, the nemophilist is not a mere haunter of the forests but one who is delighted by the artistic appreciation for forests when visited.

The biological term for organisms that thrive on light is a **Photophile**. This Greek origin term is derived from 'photo' and '*phile*', which means to love. Today, when travel is getting increasingly instagrammable, the term photophile is increasingly used for those who enjoy taking photos and posting them on the internet- generally social media.

Finally, a **Hodophile** is a lover of roads and journeys. This lesser-used phrase figuratively refers to a person who loves being on trips. *Hodophile* is derived from the Greek *hodophilia*, where '*hodos*' means journey, and '*philia*' means love or affection.

**"I'm in love with cities I've never been to and people I've never met"**

—Melody Truong ♦

*'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.





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## 'India is second home to me and will work with renewed vigour in this market'

Hungary-headquartered LVG Group is upbeat about establishing its presence globally and in India. **Seda Seylak, CEO, LVG Group**, speaks to **TravelBiz Monitor** about their strategy.

**Q Lotus Voyager is one of the prominent DMCs operating in East Europe. Tell us a little bit about your company and its operations?**

Lotus Voyager is a two-year-old brand that we established at the very beginning of the pandemic. This global problem we have been experiencing has given us the opportunity to understand and adapt our 35 years of tourism knowledge to the needs of the new world. Our headquarter is in the wonderful city of Budapest, we work throughout Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean regions with our remote teams in Zagreb, Istanbul and London.

We have a successful 14 years of experience in the Indian market, we are quite assertive in both MICE and leisure groups, ground handling services for film crews, as well as FIT business. After a 2-year pause, we hosted 150 delegates of the ICICI group in Budapest and Vienna in May and made a grand opening.

**Q How is the post-Covid rebound in the inbound tourism sector of the key East**

**European countries coming along? What trends are you seeing and by when do you see the recovery reaching pre-Covid levels?**

As we all know, nothing will be the same as before, and it shouldn't be anyway, because in the tourism industry we have seen very clearly all the mistakes made and where we failed as a whole sector.

In our region, hotel occupancy rates are rising rapidly, MICE groups are making moves, but there is not enough revival in the leisure group segment yet. There is a serious shortage of personnel and service delivery in hotels, restaurants and DMCs in the regions, and attention should be paid to the quality of operations. I recommend not leaving sales and reservations to the last minute. With the market revival, there is fierce competition for prices, but costs have increased due to rising oil prices in Europe. Therefore, price-service quality indicators will not be the same as before. Tour operators and agencies need to act carefully in this regard for customer satisfaction and their business sustainability.

The Indian market is a very

dynamic and strong market - with the Diwali period momentum, 2023 should be a good season.

**Q Many European countries are experiencing delays in visa processing in India due to massive rush of visa applications from Indians hungry to travel again. What is the visa situation in your key markets of operation, and what other obstacles do you see to the recovery of inbound tourism to these markets?**

I think the visa problem is just one of several and not the most important of the visible and invisible problems in our industry. The primary problems are the cooperation we have established in the market and the mutual trust-support structures.

India is one of Lotus' most important markets, and those who know me well know that I see India as my second home, I will travel to see my old friends again soon.

In the new period, we will continue our work with India more widely and strongly. In the first 45 days, when we restarted operations, we firmed up our contracts with major tour operators, and our teams have already started to work successfully with a good number of MICE groups till the end of 2022. We will launch our new Guaranteed Departure and Tour Programs very soon. In addition to our current strong friendships and years of collaboration, we now also work with **Auxilia Networks**, run by Indian travel trade veteran **Paramjit Bawa**. He represents both brands we own, Lotus Voyager DMC and LVG Learning & Networking in India.

**Q You also have an e-learning and networking portal called LVG Learning. Can you tell us something about it and how you are rolling it out in India?**

LVG Learning & Networking is headquartered in London and our board partners are industry veterans Keith Beecham, Patrick Richards and e-learning expert Bige Cetinoglu. We established the first and only corporate learning system in the tourism sector with our software partner in Turkey. Although destination learning courses are not new and several companies are offering these in the market, we offer a completely different, innovative and unique curation, using state-of-the-art software to develop our clients' programs and modules.

Our main concept is "tourism people", and we help destinations, and suppliers of attractions, experiences, etc. promote their services and products by developing unique B2B content. In our model, destination marketing and business networks are on the axis of investing in and empowering people. We don't waste time on solutions to save the day, we plant seeds for the future, and we believe every business that puts people at the center of their business is successful.

Change is inevitable and so also in the tourism industry, tourism people deserve the best. ♦



The visa problem will be solved easily because there is a huge pressure and responsibility on the DMOs to increase the number of inbound visitors. The economy of many European cities is largely supported by tourism revenues, so visa processes will be easier soon and destinations will happily welcome Indian travellers. But for this, mutual support is very important, because everyone's business and living depend only on other people. Lack of good staff means the hotel or other service provider cannot maintain the expected service level, we cannot operate well, your customer returns home unhappy and we don't work again. We are in a circle that revolves around "people". But with the right effort and intent, I firmly believe the Indian market will recover much more quickly and efficiently than some other markets.

**Q What are Lotus Voyager's plans for the India outbound market in the short and long-term? How will you engage with the Indian travel trade?**



# POLAND—The Hidden Gem of Central Europe

By Subhash Motwani, Founder and Director, Namaste Tourism

Poland is truly a hidden GEM of Central Europe which many refer to as Eastern Europe as it was one of the many countries that formed part of the Eastern Bloc and got freedom from the Communist regime in 1989.

Poland is surrounded by 8 countries with Germany to its East, The Czech Republic and Slovakia to its south, Ukraine and Belarus to the east and Lithuania along with Kaliningrad (a Russian Territory) to its north East. Hence, there are several countries that can be combined with Poland. Further north across the Baltic sea, one can also combine countries of

Scandinavia which is Sweden and Denmark. However, very few know that Poland has so much to offer that even a 2 weeks trip may not be sufficient to explore this extremely safe country which has played a major role in assisting its neighbours by accepting over 3 million refugees from Ukraine during the current Russia-Ukraine conflict.

With LOT Polish expanding its reach to West of India, starting twice weekly flights to/from Warsaw in Mumbai, it creates the shortest route to the European Union as the flight from Mumbai to Warsaw can be covered in less than 8 hours 25 minutes.

Warsaw—the capital was destroyed during WWII and 85% of its historic city centre was completely rebuilt and they very well know what conflicts and war can do to a nation. Poland was the first country to extend a helping hand to Ukraine when the conflict began.

Poland is the ninth largest country and only smaller than Germany and offers a lot in terms of exploring for travellers that too with great value for money as the currency in use is Zloty and not Euros and in the price of an 8 day trip of Western Europe you could easily spend 10 to 12 days in Poland. In terms of safety, it is a super safe country well connected by trains and buses across the expanse of the nation. From the tri-city in the north—Gdansk, Gdynia and Sopot to the largest brick castle in the world – The 13th Century Malbork Castle of the Teutonic Order, to the Masurian Lakes Region which boasts of over 2000 lakes in the North East, Poland is definitely a country that offers plenty of surprises. The 3 capitals of Poland include Warsaw – the national capital, Krakow – the cultural capital and Zakopane – the winter capital of Poland. Krakow located on the banks of the Vistula river is known for its Wawel Castle, the Jagellonian University – one of the oldest Universities of Europe where the famous astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus was a student in the 15th Century amongst other dignatories, to the largest concentration camp of the Nazi regime in Auschwitz and the Wieliczka Salt mine which is less than 20 minutes drive from Krakow, the city and surrounds are worth a visit. From Jewish quarters to Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory now turned a museum, there are

several hidden treasures that Krakow has to offer. In less than 3 hours you can reach the winter capital of Poland– Zakopane and the famous Tatra Mountain range which is a great destination all year round. A river raft across the Dunajec river can take you between the mountain range where you find Slovakia on one side and Poland on the other side. Not too far, there are amazing spa experiences to unwind after the trekking and hiking you intend to do in the Tatra mountain range in the summer or ski in winter in Zakopane as much know for the ski jumps as well as for its highlander cuisine and hospitality which is a wonderful cultural experience. No wonder, it was shortlisted as a destination for a famous Bollywood movie just as Warsaw and Krakow which have been interesting movie locations for several Bollywood and Hollywood movies in the past.

For the lovers of classical Music– there are the concerts of Frederic Chopin to enthrall you and to visit the underground bars and restaurants which are hosts to vodka and Polka parties is something which will definitely be on the bucket list of the Gen Z travellers. If you are looking for wildlife, there is the Bialowieza National Park in the East, designated a UNESCO site and home to the world's largest free living population of the bison, a natural paradise.

Closer to the borders of the Czech Republic and Germany you will find the towns of Wroclaw, formerly known as Breslau where you will find a Harivanshrai Bachchan Square and the former capital city Poznan which is closer to Berlin than to Warsaw are worth visiting. For those who believe in spirituality, a trip to Poland is incomplete without a visit to the Jasna Gora Monastery in Czestochowa to see the miraculous painting of the Black Madonna. The famous gingerbread comes from the Copernician town of Torun, also known for its Gothic Architecture.

A visit to Poland is truly a pulsating experience and if you want to do the different this holiday season, Poland is waiting to be discovered– are you game for it? ♦

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



*Subhash Motwani, Founder and Director of Namaste Tourism is the first Visegrad 4 specialist in India with over 34 experience in the travel industry. His specialization is to curate luxury and experiential holidays and is founder of various destination specific websites including [www.namastepoland.com](http://www.namastepoland.com) and [www.namastehungary.com](http://www.namastehungary.com). Subhash has helped several travel professionals to offer unique holiday ideas to their clients which are unique, out of the box and imbibe the elements of sustainability and responsibility as key elements of their travel experiences.*



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