

Maharashtra Tourism Minister keen on development; assures support to industry stakeholders

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

On the occasion of World Tourism Day, the Indian Merchants Chamber (IMC) organised a panel discussion on 'Rethinking Tourism'. At the discussion, Mangal Prabhat Lodha, Minister for Tourism, Government of Maharashtra, assured complete support to the travel, tourism and hospitality industry stakeholders for positioning the state as a preferred choice for domestic and international tourists alike, by using newer techniques and changing methods for development.

Sharing his views, he said, "The responsibility of the government is to create basic infrastructure whereas the job of tourism development lies with the industry stakeholders. The government will be the guiding light behind the initiatives taken by experts on tourism. We have created a calendar of events for 2 years, and will soon be releasing it for review. Tourism in Maharashtra will grow if we focus on developing areas around Mumbai while focusing on capital as the entry point."

Enumerating on the theme, Gurbaxish Singh Kohli, VP, FHRAI (Federation of Hotels &



Restaurant Association of India), "States should compete among each other instead of overseas destinations. We have suggested incentivising domestic tourism for revival. If we can convince tourists to spend an extra night in the city of Mumbai, it can add an additional INR 108 crore to the state revenue."

Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI (Travel Agents Federation of India), pointed out, "There are no facilities for women on our highways and even in the cities. If basic infrastructure is created, it will be enough to boost travel sentiment. We can save INR 4 crore alone on advertising our destinations. Moreover, with the changing trend, we should focus on activity-based tourism for generating interest."

Carl Vaz, President, SKAL International India and Chairman & CEO, Charson Advisory Services Pvt Ltd, urged for government support to avert attrition rate in the industry "There is a gap between study and work. Internship and mentorship is missing. Entry-level salaries are low, and we need to secure support from the government to ensure the workforce remains enticed to the segment."

Vivek Braganza, Assistant VP, Shangri-La Group spoke about using newer techniques to make the industry.

Also present on the occasion was Rajiv Duggal, MD, Travel Specialists. He said that it was out of sheer necessity that Indians started taking domestic holidays during the pandemic ♦

Moscow City Tourism Committee debuts in India; to tap Weddings segment

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

The capital city of Russia, Moscow has identified India among its important priority markets, and has set its eyes on tapping the wedding and event segments here. In this direction, Moscow City Tourism Committee (MCTC) hosted the first-ever roadshow in India in Bengaluru, Delhi and Mumbai.

During her recent visit to Mumbai, Anastasia Popova, Head of the Directorate of Congress, Exhibition and Industry Projects, Moscow City Tourism Committee, spoke to **TravelBiz Monitor** about their action plan. "India is among our key priority markets, and we are here to promote Moscow as a wedding destination. We want to showcase there are many locations and quality hotels available

for hosting Indian weddings. We have noticed that the Indian tourists know about old Moscow, but haven't been updated about new-age changes in the city."

In order to educate the travel trade and wedding planners in India about the infrastructure available for hosting weddings in Moscow, MCTC will curate promotional material and brochures. "We do not have enough material for Indian wedding planners; and we will draft material for ready use. We are going to launch a B2B portal that will offer all the information at the click of a button."

Currently, there are direct flights from New Delhi to Moscow, and one-stop services from Mumbai. "We want to increase the tourist flow and for that air access is among the key aspect." She also spoke about reaching out to



airlines for better connections.

Commenting on the current tensions, Popova said that "Tourism is not about politics, it's about people and exchange of cultures. We will be participating in roadshows, exhibitions and undertake FAM trips to show that Moscow is safe; and the city continues to live life normally."

Popova share that MCTC has set-up a division in June to offer subsidies for entities hosting business events in Moscow. "Indian corporates can benefit from this from next year onwards. We are offering subsidy of up to 10 million ruble for hosting two-days of incentive programme." ♦



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Travel Specialists forays into Travel Representation space; partners with 2 DMCs

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

New Delhi-based Travel Specialists LLP, a B2B company established in 2017, is the latest to foray into the Travel Marketing and Representation space. This development comes at a time when outbound travel has started picking up pace with border restrictions being lifted gradually.

As a first step, Travel Specialists has been signed on to represent and promote Orama Travels of Greece and Fun Travelz of London, both destination management companies (DMCs), in the Indian market.

Commenting on this diversification of business, Rajiv Duggal, Director, Travel Specialists, LLP, said, "Travel Specialists is a marketing and representation company that shall introduce quality services and products from across the world to its Indian travel counterparts, and the aim is to bring 4-5 quality experiences in the year ahead."



Duggal went on to say, "Greece which is on every traveller's bucket list is what we are going to offer the trade, but focusing on unique experiences beyond the usual itinerary, and Orama Travels Greece is just that partner we shall represent."

"With my years of experience managing international travel, what I have realised is that the pain is ground logistics all over Europe, that coach confirmation, last minute airport transfer, local sightseeing, meet and

greet services or quality car hire is what the agent needs to trust a service provider for. We shall endeavour

to service that very need via our UK partner Fun Travelz, based out of London city."

Duggal is of the opinion that India is going to emerge as one of the largest outbound business generators in the next five years; the market is large enough to consume any service and product that shall be introduced, and if it is of quality it will definitely be supported by the trade. "It's a humble beginning, and I have full confidence in what Travel Specialists will offer, and how the travel trade will support it, after all the relationships with the trade is that of friends." ♦



RAJIV DUGGAL
DIRECTOR, TRAVEL SPECIALISTS LLP

Outletcity Metzingen appoints Outbound Marketing as India Representative

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Outletcity Metzingen, Europe's luxury retail outlet has appointed Outbound Marketing as its sales, PR, and marketing representative in India. The group will focus on designing sales and marketing strategies to position Outletcity

As Outletcity's representative, the Outbound Marketing team will identify and work with high potential travel agents and tour operators to ensure Outletcity Metzingen is incorporated into the itineraries arranged by these agents," said Cornelia Koebele, Head of Destination Marketing and Partnership Management.



Metzingen in India as the leading shopping outlet in Germany. The sales and marketing activities will include travel trade focused initiatives to ensure achievement of revenue goals by tapping into relevant market segments

"Our collaboration with Outbound Marketing to establish our Indian representation is a breakthrough for Outletcity Metzingen and implies the importance we place in this market.

With our expertise and experience, we will strategize and plan out to reach the right target audience and increase the visits"

Sondhi added, Renu Kundaliya, Assistant Director Sales, Outbound Marketing, will handle the sales for Outletcity Metzingen in addition to her previous responsibility towards Naad Wellness and Visit Indonesia. ♦

Commenting on this, Vasudha Sondhi, MD – Outbound Marketing, said, "We are delighted to be partnering with Outletcity Metzingen. Indians are the biggest shopaholics of the world and It's seen that many Indians are travelling overseas to shop for luxury goods because its simpler and more convenient. This makes India a key market to be captured by Outletcity.

Jaishankar raises visa backlog issue with Australia

TBM Staff | Mumbai

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has informed that the Australian authorities had assured him of the redressal of the visa backlog issue, especially of Indian students, by the year end. The visa backlog issue is a prime concern of students who are trying to return to educational institutions in the country following the pandemic. "I want to tell you that it was something that I took up with different ministers when I was in Canberra. We have a particular problem that students are facing," he said while addressing the Indian Community during his recent visit. The Minister said that he was assured that the situation has improved and about 77,000 Indian students are back in Australia. He said the numbers of visas from India should and could be much more. That's why the government will work with Australian authorities to sort out the issue by the end of the year. ♦



‘IATA should be the face of entire aviation industry, not just the airlines only’

On being elected for the second term that is too unopposed, **Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI,** spells out her plans on several tricky issues ranging from IATA & Airlines to women in travel and tourism while speaking exclusively to **Disha Shah Ghosh.**

Q You have been elected unopposed as President along with your office bearers. What does this indicate about your previous two terms?

The last three years were a catastrophe. The challenges were different & bigger than life itself. Businesses, savings, investments, marketing & the meaning of existence itself was challenged. The worst ever phase for the travel, tourism & hospitality industry, in particular the travel agents. Our business partners include airlines, hospitality, tour operators, transporters etc, and unfortunately, none of them was in business. And, despite all such challenges, we kept the association evolving & delivering. We worked on ways and means to stay in touch with the airlines, government, departments, authorities, connected stakeholders, and above all TAAI members. We not only looked minutely into their challenges, skilling, and educational programmes, but also kept them motivated. And, I feel that, out of many reasons, keeping the channel of communication open at every level is one reason, out of many, that the team has been elected unopposed.

I would like to clarify my tenure of the last three years that it is not two terms but one term, which

is for two years, extended on the mutual decision of the members, taken at the AGM of 2021 for another year; the one year was an extension & unanimous showing the members confidence in this team. The extension & no opposition once again for the term 2022-2024 translates to the outcome of all the hard work that has been put in at both national, regional, and state levels. Yes, it is the joint effort of the entire team, including the Managing Committee, Regional/ State Chairmen, and Office Bearers. It basically indicates that the National team ensured that the toughest time for trade should never let the team fall apart. I

mean regular interactions, MC meetings, and events (offline – Online) must be organised and presented on such platforms. Luckily and by God’s grace, our hard work yielded fruitful results and we are back to serve the trade, our members and above all our great nation.

Q How will your third term be different from the previous two editions?

The travel trade has been transformed in the last three years. People are more exposed to technology and travellers have become demanding in terms of safety, security, hygiene, and cleanliness, in addition to the best packages at a reasonable cost. Efforts made by TAAI in the last three years need to be implemented now. For instance, dissemination of information related to visas, travel advisory, health conditions etc must be circulated/ shared well in advance with the travellers. Our many training programmes organised will certainly help members in strategizing their business and marketing strategies. I wish to ensure, in my second term, that members’ businesses flourish, balance sheets move to the positive side, new opportunities must be brought forward, ease of business is established & TAAI

is represented at all national and international forums, and above all trade generates jobs for millions of people who lost their livelihood due to the pandemic.

Q Which are some of the issues that you plan to take up at the next APJC meeting?

IATA & Airlines are challenging our business in more than one way. In a simple language, the relevance of IATA & its deliverables need to be redefined. IATA cannot remain the face of airlines, it needs to be the face of the entire aviation industry & its stakeholders. That was the reason we at TAAI & the agency level deliberated & pushed to take the Chair of the APJC on a rotation basis. TAAI was able to bring in the new thought process. We need to make neutral capping effective along with the use of credit card acceptance by all airlines. We need to look into many more aspects minutely, especially in the protection of our finances from airlines & bring in ease of day to day working. Only if this happens will the aviation industry mature into creating a sustainable environment to progress positively creating a healthier revenue-generating model.

Q What new ideas are in the offering for the education of your members?

We at TAAI and I on a personal level are working on enhancing strategic collaborations with various councils, government bodies like NSDC, state-level institutions etc. As I am also the Chairperson at Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council (THSC), I have floated various options involving THSC to organise training, and workshops, on both technical and non-technical aspects of the trade which include Ticketing, Ground Handling, Housekeeping, Kitchen, Soft Skills, Corporate Communications to name a few. TAAI believes very strongly in educating & skilling its membership not only for the management, but also counter staff & workers. We will continue to sign MoUs with countries & Indian states to bring in educational programmes to be

able to sell destinations & create experiences for the traveller. In the changed world post covid, correct information with experiential deliverables is the most vital aspect of the traveller.

Q Tell us about the work of your Women's Wing.

Women in Travel and Tourism (WITT) is something that is very close to me. Yes, an initiative taken to highlight women's contribution to the trade, which is already a little above 50% going by the statistics is a need of the hour. WITT did a few events in the last year, wherein people from all walks of life were present, be they students, housewives, working women, or entrepreneurs. I am now looking at - with the support of Ministry of Tourism, our trade partners like VFS, Interglobe Technologies, and a few airlines; developing a robust training mechanism to specifically train women to address and handle bigger roles, including the managerial ones & also at the root level to make them

“ We will continue to sign MoUs with countries & Indian states to bring in educational programs to be able to sell destinations & create experiences for the traveller. In the changed world post covid, correct information with experiential deliverables is the most vital aspect of the traveller. ”

entrepreneurs. I am delighted to share that the move has been welcomed by everyone, and we have major events lined up, mostly at state levels, post-festival season, to support women across the country.

Q What is the status of your pending Sri Lanka Convention now that you are beginning your third term at a time when Sri Lanka is also

picking up pieces to bring back tourism business?

Sri Lanka recently successfully concluded their Roadshows in India in Delhi, Mumbai, and Hyderabad. A campaign to share the latest developments and offerings for travellers. I am glad to share that we were not only a part of the events, but we ensured that TAAI members attend the same in large numbers. With wide press coverage and going

by the interviews and inputs from the Hon'ble Tourism Minister of Sri Lanka, SLTPB, SLAITO, THASL, we are quite positive that businesses and bilateral tourism will soon flourish.

Yes, we are keen to organise our convention there and our counterparts there are equally eager to host us. It's a matter of time now, that as and when the economy further improves, although it's in a far better stage today as compared to the last 3-4 months, we shall discuss with them and announce the dates accordingly. TAAI works towards building destinations & promoting tourism not only in & for India, but in other countries too. Sri Lanka, I feel Sri Lanka deserves to be supported as it is a country worth visiting & not only value for money but a country that relates to our Indian culture, history, religion & most wonderful forms of entertainment. Every crisis brings multiple opportunities & surely Sri Lanka with TAAI's support will revive quickly & more effectively. ♦

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NEWS ROUND UP

Palladium Hotel Group bullish on Indian market

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

Palladium Hotel Group is bullish about prospects in the India and expects a good business from here in 2023, said Sandra Polo Canudas, Asia & MEA Commercial Director, Palladium Hotel Group, while interacting with **TravelBiz Monitor**. "India is one of the top 10 markets for the Palladium Group and I know this market very well as I have been travelling to this country since 2014," said Canudas.

One of the dreams of the group is to bring paradise closer to travellers. When asked to comment how far the group achieved in fulfilling this? Canudas replied, "We are constantly evolving with the needs of our guests and in that sense bringing paradise closer to our customers. The way we evolved in the last few years attracted customers across the globe including India," she said.

According to Canudas, the group has 41 properties across the world and among them Ushuaia Ibiza Beach Hotel in Spain ranks no one. "This property is also quite popular among Indian people," she said.

Talking about the Indian market, she said

that both Tier-I & II cities give them good business. "We get travellers from the cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad," said Canudas. She also said that they have plans to penetrate into new markets of India and probably would do so in the next year. "We have plans to target Chandigarh and Kolkata," she said.

Canudas sounded very optimistic about India and said 2023 will yield good results from this market. "Having been in contact with the trade fraternity in India, I am sure the year 2023 will be a good year in terms of business for us. Currently, we have some issues with visas but I am sure it will ease soon. I am sure next year a lot of people from India will visit Spain and will stay in our hotel," she said.

Talking about their target segment, Canudas said that their focus is more on the FIT segment. "People want to travel on their own way and not under the direction of any



Sandra Polo Canudas
Asia & MEA Commercial
Director, Palladium Hotel Group

one. Our properties can offer best solutions for the segment," she said. Besides FIT, they also target destination weddings and MICE. "For destination weddings, our property in Cancun in Mexico is very popular among Indians. We have organised many such weddings for the Indian guests," she said. It is important to mention here that the group has opened two new properties TRS Ibiza and Hard

Rock Marbella in this year in Spain.

Canudas is also happy with the kind of response they are getting from this market and said that the people here in India are quite aware of every Palladium hotel located in different parts of the world. "This is a huge thing and shows their interest to visit our properties. We have appointed Global Destinations as our partner for this market, and they have been working hard. I am sure our business will grow further from India," said an optimistic Canudas. ♦

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Sri Lanka to tap Indian film industry; mulls another 3 city roadshow in November

Asmita Mukherjee | Hyderabad

In an endeavour to re-introduce Sri Lanka as a tourist destination and its products to the Indian consumer, Sri Lankan Tourism Board organised three city roadshows which started in New Delhi, travelled to Mumbai and then ended in Hyderabad.

Speaking at the Hyderabad roadshow, Harin Fernando, Minister for Tourism & Lands, Sri Lanka said that the country is planning to attract Indian filmmakers by creating a single window approach. This will be much more convenient for those who want to shoot commercials

and movies in Sri Lanka. "We would make sure that every approval is given to them within 7 days. The South Indian film industry, especially in Kerala, is very close to Sri Lanka. Recently superstar Mammootty shot his movie in our country, and there are a lot more other movies in the pipeline which are scheduled for shooting in our country. We received immense interest from Telangana producers for shooting their upcoming films in Sri Lanka. We are

positive that the Indian film industry will give impetus to the tourism sector of our country."

Film shootings in Sri Lanka had given a boost to the tourism sector in earlier years as well. When the famous movie, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom by Director Steven Spielberg was shot in 1983 in Kandy in Sri Lanka, it gave a massive spur to the country



HARIN FERNANDO
Minister for Tourism & Lands, Sri Lanka



CHALAKA GAJABAHU
Chairman, Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau



THISUM JAYASURYA
Chairman (MICE), Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau

as a destination.

Emphasizing the untouched natural beauty that Sri Lanka offers as a country, Fernando said, "We as a country have so many beautiful and picturesque spots that it's not less than a studio. From National Wildlife Parks and Bird Park to surfing, our country has diverse options to offer." The minister invited Indian filmmakers to come and explore Sri Lanka and shoot their films uninterrupted.

Chalaka Gajabahu, Chairman, Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau said that the roadshow will not end in Hyderabad due to the immense love and enquiries that they had received from all over the country. They are planning to continue the journey of the roadshows in the month of November across Bengaluru, Chennai and Cochin markets.

As a part of their promotional strategy, the country is also going to promote religious tourism. Gajabahu informed, "We are going to absolutely concentrate quite a bit on the Ramayana trail. For targeting South Indian tourists we are planning to promote Sri Dalada, Nallur and Jaffna. And to promote these destinations we are coming up with a new

airport, which will soon be introduced in the Sri Lanka North. We believe that the airport is going to play a big role to tap the potential market."

The country's tourism board is making an effort to increase direct flights from India. In order to accomplish an increment in the number of flights from India, the tourism boards have already discussed with carriers such as Indigo, Spice Jet, Vistara, and Alliance Air. A team of Sri Lankan delegations has already met the officials of the above airlines to secure flights to their country.

Thisum Jayasurya, Chairman (MICE), Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau added that as a short-term plan they are in talks with MakeMyTrip for dedicated advertising of Sri Lanka as a preferred destination. He added that they also had a discussion with Thomas Cook as a part of their short-term plan. As a long-term plan, they are in talks with MasterCard to tap prospective customers for different segments. An optimistic Gajabahu believes that Mastercard will play a huge role in targeting corporate travellers.

Gajabahu informed about the tourist target that the board is trying to achieve by saying, "2018 was the biggest year for us as the country received more than 2.3 million tourists and if the pandemic had not come then there would have been tremendous growth. Now we are targeting 2.5 million tourists. It is a positive mountain to climb. We have offerings for every category - lower middle, upper middle, and premium. As our country and its people are resilient, we are looking ahead towards a positive future." ♦

Visit Brussels conducts two-city roadshow in India

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

Reconnecting with its counterparts in India, Visit Brussels organised roadshows in Mumbai and New Delhi for select members of the travel trade.

At the Mumbai leg of the roadshow, Pieter Callebaut, Business Development Leisure, Visit Brussels, said, "India is an important market for us displaying a lot of growth potential, and that is why we have a presence in this market since 4 years. We continue to remain positive about tourism prospects now that we are gradually retuning to normalcy."



PIETER CALLEBAUT
Business Development Leisure, Visit Brussels

Currently, Brussels welcomes 2% visitors from India that combine Belgium or Brussels with other European destinations. "India is the third long-haul market for us along with Brazil and Japan. The ambition that we have is to make tourists stay longer in our country, and we are here to give a glimpse of that. Our focus is on the leisure traveller and quality tourists. We do get a fair share of corporate travellers as well. We are hoping that in the coming months the situation will be more conducive and settled with regards to the visa issues as well." ♦

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NUDGES, NOT CRUTCHES

Tour operators and agents seeking clarity from the government are looking for support, not charity.

The last two years in the industry drew a blank for obvious reasons but now since activity on that front has restarted, every business in India is keen to hit the road running. Yet at a recent informal conclave one gleaned murmurs of discontent, if not protest, from a few quarters. It was connected to an impression that many were getting short shrift or the cold shoulder. Now this is not new. Those who aren't able to slip in, do get grumpy. However it will be in the fitness of things if the powers that be get much more explicit and transparent about the norms or criteria of obtaining government support. It is not a 'largesse' as some seemed to convey but prudence demands a much more open and neutral playing field.

Since March this year, a new approved and revised guidelines for marketing development assistance has kicked in. This should be advertised prominently to clear confusions if any.

The causes of the brewing consternation is evidently due to the intense competition within the industry. This especially so in the wake of signs of recovery after a painfully long period of time.

It is known to all that the continuously increasing operating cost has reduced the profit margin, especially for tour operators. While this does call for some new strategies to be implemented it requires a more level playing field for the haves and have-not-enough of even the upper crust.

For the travel industry to compete for the market, providing simple travel-related services is no longer enough. The need for personal interactions of the flesh and blood kind had all but disappeared along with business in the last two years. Now that it seems to revive, the Darwinian competition is rubbing in its fierce aspects.

The basic thrust here is that clarity to the industry is essential in at least what the ministry will do. The life of tour operators and agents must be made easier. They need to pick up the threads once again - and not only those who already wield the silken ones.

Anurag Yadav
Industry Expert

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

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

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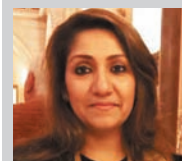
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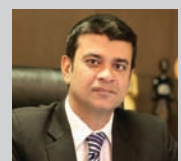
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Start-Up Forum

Bringing Innovations to the Forefront

TripXOXO.com

By TBM Staff | Mumbai

Anticipating 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.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>

Start up Name: TripXOXO.com

Core Team: Heena Javed Akhtar - Co-founder
Javed Akhtar - Co-founder
Deepak Chalke - Relationship Manager
Asish Kumar, Alok Jha - Advisor

Founding year: 2017

Company Website: www.tripXOXO.com

Description: tripXOXO operates as a website/app for travellers to book everything they need for their trips besides air tickets and hotels. With the growing millennial travellers choosing to design their own trips and pursuing their interests, tripXOXO fills the gap and provides the day activities, tickets & other tours across 300 categories. It is available in multiple currencies, with payment facility from all formats & local as well as global help desk.

tripXOXO caters to travellers needs for city, weekend & long haul vacations thereby having a good high value life time customer. Website was awarded Best Online Company in 2017 by prestigious SATTE and is nominated for Asia's leading Online Travel Agency & Middle East's leading Online Travel Agency in 2017 by World Travel Awards.

Parent Company TravelPort has done landmark work in travel franchise space and is 5 times winner under travel category by the Franchising World Awards.

Years of experience & goodwill is behind tripXOXO.com, coupled with competitive pricing and excellent services, the company boasts 200,000+ activities, across 240 categories, 140 countries, 900 cities and 2000 airports.





TAFI Convention 2022

Time to Rebuild Tourism; Sustainably

With renewed focus on Sustainability, the TAFI Convention 2022 in Sarawak brought together members and industry stakeholders to delve on ways for reorienting tourism strategy after the biggest setback of Covid-19. **TravelBiz Monitor** presents highlights of this overseas Convention.

After a gap of four years, the TAFI (Travel Agents Federation of India) held its international Convention at Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia from September 20 to 23 at Borneo Convention Centre Kuching. The theme of the Convention was "Build Back Better," a direct reference to the need to rethink and reorient tourism business strategy post-Covid.

Close to 500 Indian delegates and media attended the Convention which was hosted by Tourism Malaysia, Sarawak Tourism Board, Business Events Sarawak and MyCEB.

Commenting on the theme and outcome of the Convention, Ajay

Prakash, President, TAFI, said, "We're holding a Convention after 4 years in a world that has undergone a radical change. The consumer has changed, the expectations have changed and it's critical that stakeholders in the industry change to keep pace with the new travellers. Responsible Tourism is no longer

an optional luxury; it's a dire necessity if we are to remain relevant. I'm very happy at the response from our members and I hope that everyone who attended will go back with some new ideas and a new attitude to the business."

Eminent industry leaders from India and across the world



participated in the 3 Knowledge Sessions:

- 1. Build Back Better** which focused on the responsibility upon the travel and tourism industry to learn from past mistakes and to restructure tourism with sensitivity towards the Planet and in line with the changed consumer behaviour and expectations. This session moderated by TAFI President Ajay Pradesh had Elena Primikiri, Head ESG, VFS Global; Sharzede Datu Hj Salleh Askor, CEO, Sarawak Tourism Board; Lars Thykier, Chairman, WTAAA; Sunil Joseph, Head APAC Partner Markets, Amadeus and Rupinder Brar, former ADG Tourism, Govt of India as panellists.
- 2. Change the Tune** which focused on the need to travel agents and tour operators

to look beyond airline commissions, which have all but disappeared, and to creatively devise new avenues for revenue.

This session moderated by Sheldon Santwan, Editor-in-Chief & CEO, TravelBiz Monitor had Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI; Anurag Jain; COO, DreamFolks; Datuk Tan Kok Liang, President, MATTA; Rodney D'cruz, Assistant Director, Passenger & Cargo Services, India, Nepal & Bhutan, IATA and Hussain Patel, CEO & Founder, TripJack.com, as panellists.

- 3. The Big M in Tourism** addressed the issue of, magnifying and resurrecting brands in the post-Covid world with a view to stay relevant to



the younger generation. This session moderated by Ashish Gupta, Consulting CEO, FAITH had Zakaria Mohd Nani, Director of Corporate Communications, Tourism Malaysia; Yin May Lau, Group Chief Marketing and Customer Experience Officer, Malaysia Airlines; Amelia Roziman, CEO, Business Events Sarawak and Dev Karvat, CEO, Asego, as panellists.



have shown that it actually leads to better bottom lines. We hope that our members will adopt the pledge and work towards implementing it," said Prakash

Yin May Lau, Group Chief Marketing & Customer Experience Officer, Malaysia Airlines, said, "Since its inception, TAFI has shown true commitment towards creating a more evolved and stable environment for the travel industry. We are delighted to be

the official carrier for TAFI Convention 2022. Our travel agents play a key role in supporting the recovery of the sector, and we truly appreciate the great lengths they have taken especially as travel demands continue to soar. We look



Yin May Lau
Group Chief Marketing & Customer Experience Officer, Malaysia Airlines

forward to continue offering our support and strengthening these partnerships for many more years to come.

We look forward to flying travel agents across India to our home country, Malaysia, for the TAFI Convention and experience a safe and seamless journey underpinned by inimitable Malaysian Hospitality. India has always been an important market for Malaysia Airlines and we are hopeful that through this association and convention, our agent partners would be encouraged to promote Malaysia Airlines to their customers and help create more leisure demand for Kuching, Sarawak, and other Malaysia destinations in the near future." ♦

dignitaries and TAFI MC members.

Elena Primikiri, Head of ESG at VFS Global, introduced the TAFI-TravelBizMonitor Women Achievers' awards which were presented by VFS Global.

Speaking at the gala farewell dinner hosted by Tourism Malaysia and Business Events Sarawak Nancy Shukri, Federal Minister of Tourism for Malaysia recounted the traditional ties between India and Malaysia, and hoped that the TAFI Convention would bring more Indian travellers to discover the pristine beauty of Sarawak.

In keeping with the Convention theme - "Build Back Better" TAFI initiated two CSR activities at the Convention in order to encourage members to contribute towards creating a more equitable society.

The first was to support the "Books Build Legacy" project spearheaded by Amelia Roziman, CEO of Business

Events Sarawak, who is creating free libraries in the interior areas of Sarawak for young people. In response to an appeal sent out before the Convention, a number of TAFI delegates had carried books which were donated for the project.

The second initiative is aimed at accelerating gender parity in the travel and tourism industry in India. According to reports by the WTTC and UNWTO, while women constitute over 60% of the workforce in our industry, a scant 12 to 13% are in managerial positions. TAFI, in association with VFS Global, has launched a pledge to be signed by all members to promote gender equality in our own workplace. "The empowerment of women and gender parity is not just a politically correct idea. Studies



TAFI-TravelBiz Monitor Awards

Recognising Excellence in Tourism, Globally

✍️.....TBM Staff | Sarawak

The 2022 edition of the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) Convention saw the return of the TAFI-TravelBiz Monitor Awards after almost a decade.

These awards have been instituted by **TAFI-TravelBiz Monitor Awards** to recognise excellence in tourism and outstanding role of individuals in the global travel industry. Also recognising the role of women as equal representatives in the industry, these awards have been conferred on women leaders in travel who have been first-movers in their space, and have been working consistently towards a sustainable future.

These awards assume significance, more so after business leaders have successfully sustained the pandemic.

The awards are validated by the International Institute of Peace through Tourism India (IIPT India). TravelBiz Monitor and IIPT India have a long standing partnership having recognised the Women Achievers in Tourism in the past at WTM London and ITB Berlin.

The **TAFI-TravelBiz Monitor Awards** were presented by VFS Global & TAFI Convention 2022, with Malaysia Airlines as Official Airline Partner.

The awards brought down the curtains to the TAFI Tribute for Sterling Support to the Indian travel industry which was presented by Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI, on behalf of the travel fraternity to the Late Ankur Bhatia of the Bird Group. A short video wherein industry leaders recounted their association with Bhatia was played. A visibly emotional Rajiv Bhatia of Bird Group came up to accept the commemorative plaque. ♦

Award Categories & Winners

Global Ambassador for Sustainable Tourism

YB Dato' Sri Hajah Nancy Shukri – (Minister for Tourism, Govt of Malaysia) - for Visionary Leadership

Superwomen of Tourism

1. **Sharzede Datu Hj Salleh Askor** – (CEO Sarawak Tourism Board) - for Conservation & Environment
2. **Amelia Roziman** – (CEO Business Events Sarawak) - for Innovation & Marketing Leadership
3. **Liberatha Kallat** – (Founder & MD DreamFolks) - for Business Leadership
4. **Jyoti Mayal** – (President TAAI) - for Tourism Advocacy
5. **Natalia Bayona** – (Head of Education & Digital Transformation UNWTO) - for Education & Digital Transformation

Special Appreciation Category

- **Datuk Tan Kok Liang** – President, Malaysian Association of Tour & Travel Agents (MATTA)
- **Lars Thykier** – Chairman, World Travel Agents Associations Alliance (WTAAA)

Torch Bearers of Tourism

- **YB Dato' Sri Abdul Karim Rahman Hamzah** - (Minister for Tourism, Sarawak) - Torch Bearer of Sarawak Tourism
- **Dato Zainuddin Abdul Wahab** - (Director General, Tourism Malaysia) - Torch Bearer of Malaysian Tourism

Torch Bearers of Tourism Innovation

- **Ankush Nijhawan** - (Co-Founder TBO.com & MD Nijhawan Group) - for Tech and Travel Innovation
- **Dev Karvat** - (CEO Asego) - for Travel Services Innovation



YB Dato' Sri Hajah Nancy Shukri receiving the Global Ambassador for Sustainable Tourism award..



Sharzede Datu Hj Salleh Askor – (CEO Sarawak Tourism Board) receiving the award for Conservation & Environment



Zubin Karkaria receiving the Global Business Leader Award

Global Business Leader Award

Zubin Karkaria - CEO & President VFS Global

Special Recognition for Exceptional Contribution to Tourism

- **Hii Chang Kee** – (Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism Sarawak) - for Championing the Cause of Sarawak Tourism
- **Manoharan Periasamy** (Senior Director, International Promotion, Tourism Malaysia) – for being the Face of Tourism Malaysia in India



Dev Karvat receiving the award for Travel Services Innovation



Manoharan Periasamy being recognised as the Face of Tourism Malaysia in India



Ankush Nijhawan being recognised for Tech and Travel Innovation



Deblina Dasgupta from DreamFolks receiving the award on behalf of Liberatha Kallat



Dato Zainuddin Abdul Wahab being recognised as Torch Bearer of Malaysian Tourism



Special Appreciation for Datuk Tan Kok Liang, President, MATTA in the presence of H.E. B.N. Reddy, High Commissioner of India to Malaysia (in grey)



Rajiv Bhatia accepting the plaque for Late Ankur Bhatia



Jyoti Mayal being recognised for Tourism Advocacy



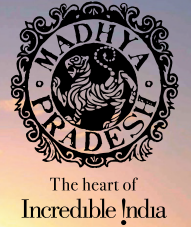
Hii Chang Kee – (Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism Sarawak) - for Championing the Cause of Sarawak Tourism

YB Dato' Sri Abdul Karim Rahman Hamzah - (Minister for Tourism, Sarawak) receiving the award for Torch Bearer of Sarawak Tourism

Experience

Jal Mahotsav

Give yourself an adrenaline rush in MP



One of the largest water carnivals in India 'JalMahotsav' is all set to host you to experience adventure activities and beautiful tent city of Hanuwantiya in Madhya Pradesh

If you are planning an adventure-packed vacation with full of fun then Hanuwantiya Island in Khandwa District of Madhya Pradesh is the place that you should add in your bucket list this time. One of India's longest Water cation presented by Madhya Pradesh Tourism, 'JalMahotsav' is a combination of food, art, nature, culture and adventure where you can experience clear skies, sparkling blue water and the thrill of scuba diving, bumper boats and much more.

This picturesque destination awaits your presence for 'Jal Mahotsav', the festival which will commence in the last week of November 2022 and will go on till the last week of January 2023. A water cation to Jal Mahotsav has all the elements to give a boost to your body, mind, and spirit.

It offers an array of adventure activities organised at nature's paradise Hanu-wantiya. Located on the banks of Indira Sagar Dam (India's largest reservoir), this is a perfect holiday destination for spending an exciting vacation with your loved ones.

At 'JalMahotsav', you can start your day with the golden rays of the rising sun lighting up the tent city, followed by a delicious breakfast and beautiful Mediterranean blue water views to admire.

What to see and do

At 'JalMahotsav', visitors can enjoy adventure activities based on land, air, or water.



Air and water activities- The major attraction of this festival are air and water activities which include wind surfing, water parasailing, water zorbing, jet-skiing, speed boats ride, cruise boats ride, paramotoring, banana boat ride, hot air balloon ride, zip line and more.

Land-based activities: Yoga camp, wellness and spa, cycling, volleyball, archery, tug of war, climbing, kite flying, bull carting and other activities in adventure zone. One can also go for nature walks, cycle around the island, and visit the local villages. Food zone, craft bazaar, stargazing, island camping and experiencing melody of folk, classical and pop music and dance will keep you going throughout the festival.

Other Attractions

Apart from these amazing activities, Khandwa District has several other tourist attractions as well that include Nagchun dam, Ghantagar, Omkare-shwar Jyotirlinga, Tulija

Bhavani temple, Indira Sagar Dam and Sailanil Island. Also, it is a must-visit place for nature enthusiasts as they can indulge in bird watching, trekking, and night camping.



Way to Hanuwantiya

If you are already making plans and wondering how to get here, the nearest airport is Indore, around 3 hours away from the Madhya Dweep islands where Hanuwantiya is located. If you are travelling by rail, you need to get off at Khandwa, 50 km away. And if you prefer the road, then Hanuwantiya is well connected to Indore, Bhopal and Khandwa.

For booking visit: www.jalmahotsav.com





“Explore France” witnesses a record turnout by French tourism partners

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Atout France – France Tourism Development Agency's recently concluded B2B showcase (25-29 September) in Udaipur witnessed a record participation of 42 tourism companies from France and more than 80 travel professionals pan-India. This first offline workshop since 2019 witnessed over 2000 meetings taking place over 2 days of productive one-to-one meetings between buyers and suppliers.

In addition to meetings between French and Indian tourism stakeholders, this year's edition had two thematic panels on weddings and cinema – two segments that have seen a strong rebound in terms of travel to France – for interested French partners. These panels saw a lively interaction

After a gap of two years, Atout France India organised its first in-person activity in Udaipur with the B2B Showcase that registered a record turnout by French tourism partners, keen to capitalise on the flourishing outbound tourism from India.

between experts of these domains and our French suppliers.

The workshop, which also marked 15 years of Atout France's direct presence in India, began with a welcome evening for partners on the 25th at the Jagmandir Palace in the presence of His Excellency, the Ambassador of France to India, Emmanuel Lenain. Each evening a thematic soiree was organised to encourage informal interactions between the partners and the trade representatives. A gala night - was organised on the 27th in association with La Vallée Village – member of the Bicester Collection. Aptly titled, “Bling it On”, the soiree was a celebration of all things luxury and took place at the stately Taj Fateh Prakash.

Sheetal Munshaw, Director Atout France India shared her thoughts; “This edition of the workshop was much awaited as our last



Highlights

- Participation of 42 France tourism companies
- 2000 meetings over 2 days
- Focussed on weddings and cinema
- 80 travel professionals pan- India participated
- Marked 15 years of Atout France's presence in India

two editions took place virtually. The response from both our partners and agents has been overwhelming and we are grateful for all the support that we have received through the years in our endeavour in showcasing France in the Indian tourism landscape. A formidable representation of France's touristic offering indicates the strong interest in the Indian market and on the other hand, the presence of our trade partners only reinforces France's strong appeal for the Indian traveler. We were extremely honoured by the presence of His Excellency, the Ambassador who despite his busy agenda took the time out to support our workshop. A sincere thank you is also due to La Vallée Village, our partner for the Gala dinner, our wedding and cinema panelists and of course the French Institute in India who helped us organise the cinema panel". ♦



The Biophilia!

(Travel) for the love of living (beings)

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

In our last discussion we pointed out that while humans were created to be part of nature, we have increasingly gotten away from it. Human brains evolved in a biocentric environment not in machine centric environment. This diversion from biocentric to machine centric is captured as nature deficiency disorder and is manifest in stress and anxiety leading to heightened stress levels, high blood pressure and increased risk of cardiovascular disease among others. Innately, humans tend to get closer to nature or in many cases of contemporary living, bring elements of nature into their surroundings. Many research reports that an overwhelming proportion of people imagine themselves in a natural setting when asked to think of a place where they felt relaxed and calm.

Some of our research also has pointed at spiritual connotations of natural environments where our subjects have reported positive impact of nature on their physical and mental wellbeing and an overall feel-good. This is the essence of **biophilia hypothesis**, which suggests a distinctive human tendency to seek connections with nature and other forms of life. The term biophilia was coined by renowned psychologist, Erich Fromm in 1964.

Thus, especially, post-COVID 19, a good number of people are rushing to natural areas to destress and recuperate. Tourism service providers have reinvented their offering to align with this trend. Many are experimenting creatively to curate biophilic experiences for their patrons. They are bundling natural therapies like ecotherapy, forest therapy, forest bathing, grounding, earthing, Shinrin-Yoku or Sami Lok with tourism offers.

For example, Shinrin-yoku, which was popular in far east Asia and north western Europe has found takers in India also. Entrepreneurs organise Shinrin-yoku walks in Delhi and Noida. Shinrin-yoku, or "Forest Bathing", is a Japanese relaxation method and restorative healing therapy, where one immerses oneself in nature by mindfully using all five senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. People are expected to switch off their phones and leave behind their work and worries to spend a couple of hours immersing

to appreciate the natural surroundings. Listen to the sounds of chirping birds, rustling bush, and trickling rivulets. Walk randomly and deep breathe in clean sweet-smelling air. They steep in the sights of the fuzzy uncertainty of nature- the coarse ground, soil and rocks and the shapes of the leaves hanging from trees. Feel free to touch the soft, green moss covering the gravels, or the coarse tree-barks. People may also pause to pick up and admire leaves of different shades, spot butterflies and other insects, inhale the scent of wet earth or simply lay on the cool grass.

This stillness around a person during the forest bathing influences their state of mind and psychologically, though momentarily, takes them away from the hustle and bustle of the city life. It allows one's five sense to connect with indeterminate nature around them. This is a sensory experience that counteracts our dumbness due to constantly being guided by apps and devices.

Paradoxically, yet interestingly, more technology is creatively used to stage biophilia. Service providers are using VR to stage biophilic experiences whereby, the guests are transported to a virtual forest surrounded by flora and fauna- trees, plants, grass; realistic and interactive insects, and animals, immersive sounds, aroma and even the breeze and moisture. One can even trigger the day/night cycle. These immersive environments also allow these virtual itinerants to use tools at their disposal, sticks and lanterns, to interact with the virtual natural world around them. This is **virtual biophilia**.

So, besides people travelling to natural areas, they love being in a servicescape which has as many biophilic elements. Thus, many, service providers are increasingly using biophilic design which incorporates, elements of nature, like views of nature, natural materials, and natural features such as indoor planting and water features and maximizing daylight among others. Post COVID, a good number of entrepreneurs have come up with biophilic accommodations and staycations like treehouse, farm stay etc for guests who have had an extended confinement working from home. The idea is



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.

stretched to incorporate biophilic elements in workplace like every workstation may have a small planter or everyone in the office should be able to see a plant.

By 2050, 65% of the world's population would be living in cities spending more than 90% of their time indoors. This indoor generation will crave for outdoors- immediate and distant. While biophilia is an emerging trend, it has significant hints for the tourism industry as well. The underlying message in this discussion is to recognise "the urge to affiliate with other forms of life" which can be creatively monetised by tourism and hospitality industry. ♦

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

Tawang –The Avenue For Growth Potentials Of Arunachal Pradesh's Hospitality Industry

By Gargi Sarma, Assistant Professor in the Department of M.Com,
K C Das Commerce College, Guwahati

Arunachal Pradesh-Land of the rising Sun proudly welcomes its travellers to experience the splendour of its enthralling destinations. The growing leisure travel scores have unlocked its doors to this paradise on earth. Tawang stands as one of the most favoured travel destinations of the state. It is dubbed as a site to witness the captivating view of Snowfall. A special mention has to be made of the efforts of Border Roads Organisation (BRO) which has made the journey comfy for its travellers. This beguiling journey offers travellers with some conspicuous stopovers. Sela Pass being the first amongst them excites the travellers with its historically striking mountain pass at an altitude of 13,700ft above sea level, view of Sela Lake flanking the mountain pass and the snow canopied mountains picturesque. Both Sela Pass and Tawang records the highest snowfall of the season. Secondly, it's the Jaswant Garh War Memorial (21kms from Sela Pass) that allows visitors to pay homage to the warrior, Late Jaswant Singh Rawat and enjoy free refreshments

at the army canteen. Thirdly, it's the Jung Falls (Nuranang Falls) and its mighty grace which brings back the vigour of the travellers as it announces **'We are about to reach Tawang'**

The windy roads keep jogging people's mind 'Tawang is about the journey and not just about the destination'. It is indeed an adventure of a lifetime. The sharp turns of the roads calls for exhaustion towards the end of the day. And this brings in the need of a comfort stay to wake up next morning for a pious aura at Asia's 2nd biggest & oldest Buddhist Monastery.

There is a hike in travellers' inflow during the winters. The improved roads connectivity and reduced travel risks levels has contributed in crowning Tawang as a traveller's choice. Conversely, this recent progress of the roads doesn't tally with that of the hospitality sector of the town. This brings down the number of accommodation facilities for visitors. The contemporary status pilots investors about the growth potential of the Hospitality segment.

Offers enormous scope for hospitality sector

A remarkable perk about the road journey to Tawang is the prerequisite of halting at one of the connecting destinations. As Tawang is located at a high altitude (10,000 ft above sea level), it is advisory to halt for a night stay. These connecting destinations are equally captivating. The prime choices here are- Bomdila and Dirang.

Bomdila is blessed with a good number of Buddhist Monasteries and View Points. In winters this place records low temperature and also experiences Snowfall. Dirang is a land of Hot Water springs, green meadows and the most admired-Sangti Valley. Mostly it



has a pleasing weather except the winters when it records low temperatures. It also gives its travellers a glimpse of Arunachal's cash crop -Mandarin orange and Apple & Kiwi cultivations. Sangti Valley is an accepted backpacker's choice. Beauty of the greens all across the valley succeeds in attracting travellers looking for leisure amidst nature.

Though both the places continue to be the traveller's preferences for a halt, there are very limited accommodation facilities available. Sangti Valley invites opportunities for Zostels and Camp stays as it is mostly a backpacker's destination. Leisure travellers look for comfort stays which triggers a growth potential for City hotels and boutique hotels at both Bomdila and Dirang.

Hospitality Industry of India is growing and has been serving as one of the leading growth drivers. Hike in the interest level of travellers (both Leisure & business) have backed this impressive growth. Further, India expects CAGR of 13% during 2018-2023(Source-MarketResearch.com). It has developed as a magnificent opportunity for the travel destinations to contribute towards the growth of state's Hospitality Sector. Following the tourists inflow score, the growth potential of the industry can be calculated for Arunachal Pradesh as well. People's interest can be tapped for nature based luxury as well as comfort stays for both economical and extravagant travellers. Further, the ongoing construction of the Arunachal's first ever airport at Hollongi (source-The Economic Times) will bring in business travellers which will open opportunity windows for Location Hotels like Airport Motels/Hotels and service based luxury hotels. Also, the leading hotel brands of the country can grab this as an avenue for expanding their chain. Tawang will continue to be an avenue for boasting the hospitality industry of Arunachal. ♦

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

Gargi Sarma is working as Assistant Professor in the Department of M.Com at K C Das Commerce College, Guwahati. Her academic and professional interests lie in Management and Marketing. She is an avid academic having completed her Masters in Commerce, Masters in Arts (Economics), M.Phil program and pursuing her Doctoral work in advertising. Sarma has presented over 20 research papers in National & International seminars and published 10 research papers in reputed journals.



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