

FOR THE TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL

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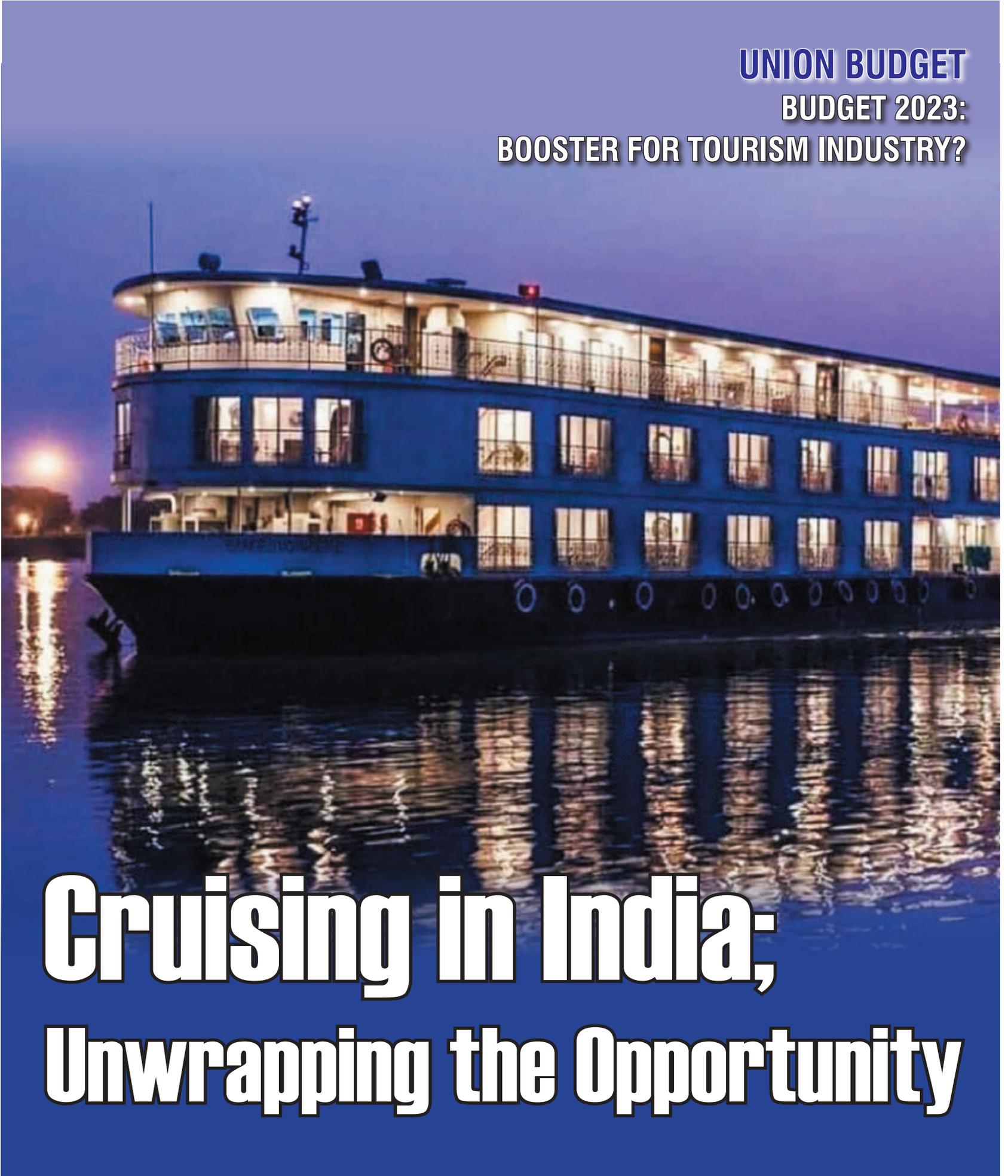
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MoT to host 'SCO Travel Mart' at SATTE 2023

World's largest regional organisation, the SCO members include China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

Shayan Mallick | New Delhi

In a first-of-its-kind initiative, the Union Ministry of Tourism (MoT) will organise SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) Travel Mart on the sidelines of SATTE 2023, scheduled from February 9 to 11 at Delhi NCR's Greater Noida Expo Mart. This was informed by Arvind Singh, Secretary – Tourism, Government of India, at a PATA meeting organised in New Delhi recently. The event coincides with India taking over as the Chairperson of the SCO for 2023.

According to Singh, the event is expected to be attended by all the key members of the group. The SCO Mart will pave way for the SCO member states to explore opportunities in India's outbound travel space. However, Singh also said, "This year the SCO meeting will be held in Delhi. The SCO Ministerial meeting will be held in India at Varanasi in March and the Ministers from those country will be in attendance. So naturally, some of those SCO countries are very important (source markets) and we will be doing campaigns in those countries also. We also want to focus on inbound tourism from the SCO countries. These countries have traditionally been good inbound markets for us."

According to Pallavi Mehra, Group Director, Informa Markets in India, "The 30th edition of SATTE has received overwhelming response from the Indian and global travel and tourism market. The show expects to see the participation of over 1200+ exhibitors, 600+ hosted international and domestic buyers, and agents/operators/professionals from over 120 Indian cities and towns. With a legacy of 30 years, SATTE has been the definitive leader in the travel expo space consistently delivering unparalleled business and networking opportunities. And one of the salient features of SATTE 2023 is the



ARVIND SINGH
SECRETARY – TOURISM,
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA



PALLAVI MEHRA
GROUP DIRECTOR – INFORMA
MARKETS IN INDIA

SCO Travel Mart. The SCO Mart, a co-located travel mart at SATTE 2023, is being organised by Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, to celebrate India's ongoing Presidency of the SCO. So we are proud to be the platform to host MoT's SCO Mart for such an important international grouping. We will do everything in our capacity to make the SCO members' participation at the mart a grand success."

Straddling Eurasia, SCO is world's largest regional organisation in its geographical spread and population, covering 60 per cent of Eurasia, over 40 per cent of the world's population and more than 30 per cent of the world GDP. Headquartered in Beijing, the SCO members include China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. ♦

Utah Tourism to tap VFR & leisure segments from India

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

Continuing its activities in the Indian market after having appointed Aviareps as its Representative here just over a year ago, the Utah Office of Tourism is keen on tapping the VFR segment, and leisure travellers while creating destination awareness nationwide.

Talking to **TravelBiz Monitor**, Zach Fyne, Global Markets Specialist, Utah Office of Tourism, said, "Utah is a relatively new entrant in the Indian market, and our first big initiative was to partner with Aviareps as our India Representative a year and half ago. We are still in the awareness phase across different states, and showcasing the destination first hand."

Leading a larger part of their messaging is the Mighty Five National Parks, and close connectivity via Las Vegas International Airport, and the newly built Salt Lake City International Airport. "We are



ZACH FYNE
GLOBAL MARKETS SPECIALIST,
UTAH OFFICE OF TOURISM

surrounded by incredible beauty on all sides, and one of the best ways to explore Utah is through a road trip. The Mighty Five National Parks are a big highlight of visiting Utah."

Due to the huge visa issue crisis currently, Utah Tourism is focusing on travellers with valid US visas or repeat visitors. "For years, we have been focused on China as our top Asian market. However, we had foresight of not putting all eggs in one basket, and it took us 5-7 years to get marketing budget approved for India from the State Legislature. Prior to that, India ranked on no 7 of top 10 international source markets without any marketing activity here."

Moreover, Utah Tourism will be launching an online training programme 'Utah Specialist Academy'. "After 18 months of planning and development, Utah Specialist Academy will debut in a month. It is very image and video focused learning, direct to the point." ♦

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Nexus DMC & STA conduct roadshow in Bengaluru for 170 agents

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The Nexus DMC & Saudi Tourism Authority (STA) recently held a roadshow at The Chancery Pavilion, Bengaluru to update the agents on the The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The event was attended by more than 170 travel agents from Karnataka. Other noticeable participants at the event included Saudia Airlines, Jazeera Airlines, The Royal Commission of AIUla & VFS Global who showcased their products and services exclusively to the travel agents.

This event was a part of the joint marketing promotion plan between Nexus DMC and STA for this year.

Vartika Chaturvedi from Saudi Tourism Authority offered a comprehensive overview on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including the wide variety of destinations & experiences, infrastructure and the rich culture that the country has to offer well as the recent developments and initiatives to support the leisure tourism sector.

Airline partners Saudia Airlines & Jazeera Airways threw the spotlight about their services, offerings, departures for Saudi and how they can be leveraged by the travel agents



to provide a seamless air travel experience for their customers. VFS Global discussed the various locations where they facilitate visas for Saudi Arabia documentation requirements and visa fees.

Destination Partner like AIUla did a presentation about this hidden gem in the northwestern region of the country, and how it is rising as a popular destination in Saudi Arabia along with the important landmarks, diverse experiences and luxury accommodations that it has to offer.

In the final leg of the event, Nexus DMC spoke about their path breaking platform

'Nexus' which is revolutionising the way travel industry operates. Nexus is enabling travel agents to sell holidays globally across 100+ destinations with the best rates and support services at the click of a finger.

This was followed by a lucky draw for the travel agents and networking lunch. Participants and exhibitors were happy with the outcome of the event. By bringing together all stakeholders in the travel industry through their networking events and numerous other initiatives in the upcoming years, Nexus DMC hopes to redefine travel experiences for everyone. ♦

India is slowly becoming a mature adventure tourism destination: Ajeet Bajaj

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

As a refreshing change to a mundane destination presentation, Brand USA along with TAFI (Travel Agents Federation of India) hosted a luncheon in Mumbai bringing on board seasoned adventure traveller Ajeet Bajaj to share stories of his expeditions. Bajaj is also the President of Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI).

He spoke about the varied, niche and extreme adventure activities undertaken by him in the USA, alongside trekking the Mighty Mount Everest from the treacherous Tibet route with his daughter.

Padma Shri awardee Bajaj

shared some interesting anecdotes of undertaking such adventures in the remotest parts of the world, his physical preparedness for such expeditions, and the logistics involved, during a candid chat with Sheema Vohra, MD, Sartha Global Marketing, India Representative of Brand USA, and Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI. He shared some of the relatively unknown adventure activities native to the USA and how participating in them gave him a new perspective about nature and life.

Shedding light on the situation in India, Bajaj said that India is home to the huge expanse of Himalayas, and the best bet would be to indulge in



soft adventure activities. He suggested fellow agents in the audience to showcase the soft adventure options to their clients keen for experiencing the offbeat options. Despite the hiccups in

the sector in India, he said the situation is improving and efforts are on to make India a mature adventure tourism destination like the USA. ♦

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Q India & Malaysia share close ties due to longstanding cultural and historical connections. How does the Indian market play an important role for Malaysia tourism?

Malaysia is looking at India as a top market for outbound tourism as Indians constituted the fourth largest travellers during the pre-pandemic times.

An Indian tourist spends approximately \$2,000 for shopping and entertainment in Malaysia. India is an important source in the tourism sector for us and that's why we are looking at increase in air connectivity too to meet the expected footfalls

Q After reopening of borders, Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) organised their annual convention in Malaysia.

“As it is rightly said, MALAYSIA, TRULY ASIA, we do have many new upcoming attractions in Malaysia. We will be promoting Malaysia beyond Kuala Lumpur, which means we will be highlighting unknown and hidden gems of Malaysia i.e Perlis, Kelantan, Sabah & Sarawak”

How the convention benefited you taking time and pandemic into consideration?

Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) held its annual travel convention in the city of Kuching in Sarawak region of Malaysia in September 2022. The theme of the convention was 'Build Back Better'.

The convention aimed to add value to India's membership in terms of content as well as the destination. The "Build Back Better" theme served as the foundation, which delivered on its promise to foster insightful discussions with some thought-provoking material about the future of travel, tourism, and sustainability.

The TAFI convention 2022 turned out to be a successful event as nearly 500 travel delegation participated. The message sent across by the participants that travel to Malaysia is safe and experiential had helped us to boost the Indian footfalls.

Q How has tourism evolved in Malaysia in the last three years?

Around 7,35,309 Lakhs Indians travelled to Malaysia in 2019.

Globally, every country was badly affected by COVID, which includes Malaysia too. We opened our international borders from April 2022 and amended our travel guidelines with no RT-PCR for children with age 0 to 17 and for those who were double vaccinated.

Since April 2022, we observed an increase in the footfalls. Many attractions opened their doors to welcome the Indian tourists including Resorts World Genting and others. The GenZ explored the bag-packed and solo traveller segments. MICE

'Post Covid, every Indian is our target'



Q Malaysia has always been a preferred destination for the Indian travellers. Can you tell us about the new features and attractions that they can look for?

As it is rightly said, MALAYSIA, TRULY ASIA, we do have many new upcoming attractions in Malaysia. We will be promoting Malaysia beyond Kuala Lumpur, which means we will be highlighting unknown and hidden gems of Malaysia i.e Perlis, Kelantan, Sabah & Sarawak aggressively.

Q What are the steps have you taken to promote sustainable tourism in the country?

Influential marketing to meet the GenZ expectations and highlighting the hidden gems of Malaysia would be our primary focus. To promote and encourage this segment, we will be aggressive on our social media platforms as well as via various joint promotion.

Q What message would you like to give to the travel trade of India?

With no covid restrictions and many more untapped attractive destinations, Malaysia is fully geared to welcome each and every Indian tourist catering to their taste and requirement. ♦

Besides families and MICE, Tourism Malaysia is also looking to tap the wedding, golf and bollywood segments aggressively and not forgetting the upcoming GenZ expectations, says **T.Ediwanto T.Eddie, Deputy Director, Tourism Malaysia, Mumbai, while speaking to TravelBiz Monitor.**

Q Which traveller segments are your focus areas in India?

Post Covid, every Indian is our target. Apart from families and MICE, we are looking to tap the wedding, golf and bollywood segment aggressively and not forgetting the upcoming GenZ expectations.

Q What kind of promotion have you adopted to boost the arrival of foreign tourists?

To begin the year, we have our 5-city roadshows i.e Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai & Ahmedabad followed by SATTE in New Delhi. We will be also organising many FAM trips for various verticals like media, travel agents, Bollywood production houses, wedding planners, influencers etc.



Being a B2B company Tripjack focuses a lot on its partners. Patel informed, "We have recently announced our partnership with Resorts World Cruises. The partnership aims to give a boost to the international cruise category in the B2B space by improving awareness and discovery, providing a seamless booking experience and personalised support. As a leading travel platform, Tripjack will tap its strong B2B presence across India and offer these unique travel experiences," he added.

As technology plays a big role in today's travel & tourism segment it is imperative to offer the latest technologies to Indian travel agents to enable them to be

convenient, and efficient for them to manage their business."

While speaking about their success mantra, Patel said that in a segment where competition is mushrooming day-by-day, offering customised solutions is the key. Demand for solutions encompassing voice search, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning is increasing in the travel trade. "Every customer wants things to be personalised be it in the B2C or B2B space. Personalisation creates stickiness. We need to deep dive to make our systems more agile and personalized for our travel partners. We can already see practical implications of voice search, AI and Machine Learning so that needs to be the focus in the B2B space as well," he added.

Being one of the market leaders in their segment Tripjack is aiming to strengthen its supply chain, and partnerships, however, the brand is also contemplating on focusing in the hospitality/hotel market, said Patel. "Our goal is to enhance our supply network across all categories by leveraging partnerships and contracting to increase content supply. With two cruise liners on board, we will focus on expanding business for them and also explore opportunities to add select liners to our portfolio. In addition, we are committed to driving growth in the hotel sector through increased partnerships and contracting."

While fulfilling the demands of the market is paramount for it, the brand is also focusing on enhancing agent experience. "To meet the growing demand, we are continuously expanding our team. With regards to flights, we have strong domestic and international outbound content and plan to further enhance it through NDC in 2023, while simplifying post-booking processes such as cancellations, reissues, and ancillaries. We are also dedicated to enhancing the user experience by improving the agent experience, thereby enabling them to offer superior value-added services to their clients," he concluded. ♦

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'Our goal is to empower partners with state-of-the-art technology to efficiently manage businesses'

B2B travel portal, Tripjack offers flight ticketing, hotel booking, and visa services. The brand is constantly evolving and adding value to the business by giving its distributors and agents the best technology, deals and a user-friendly platform to transact and achieve financial freedom. Asmita Mukherjee spoke with Hussain Patel, Director, Tripjack to understand the disrupting growth that the brand is witnessing.

Describing their offerings, Patel said that they offer a comprehensive B2B travel platform which encompasses all travel products and services such as flights, hotels, holidays, cruises, rail, and visas.

While explaining the crux of his business, Patel explained, "We prioritise the needs of our travel agent partners by providing them with a user-friendly B2B platform that allows for instant bookings and seamless access to a wide range of travel options. The goal is to empower the partners with state-of-the-art

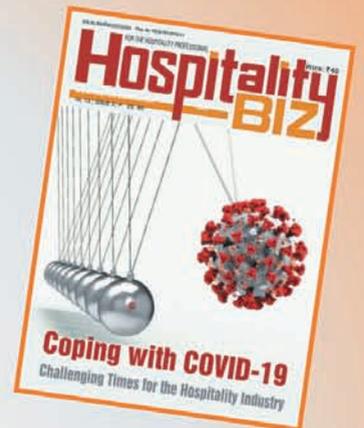
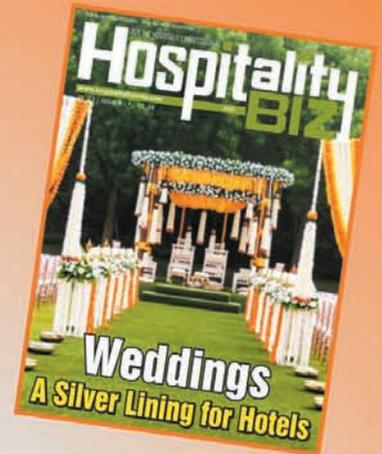
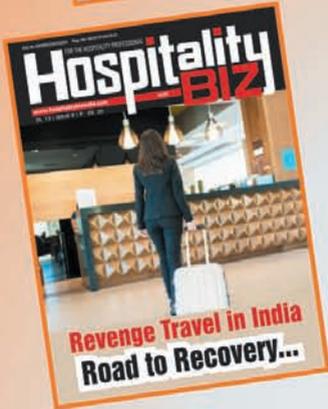
technology that enables them to efficiently manage their business with minimal assistance."

As this service requires a lot of monitoring the brand is providing good support as well. "The platform is available 24/7 and provides easy access to both domestic and international destinations," he added.

the top choice in this competitive market. Explaining his thoughts Patel said, "We are a tech-first company with a strong focus on technology combined with our supply network, and competitive pricing. We are servicing our travel partners with a multi-product platform as a one-stop solution that is reliable,

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FROM WORDS TO IMAGES TO FEELINGS

The evolving modes of tourism promotion

Some experts have a bunch of lofty words to say about ways to promote tourism. 'The tourist experience is both corporeal and multisensory therefore more attention needs to be accorded to the sensual content of promotional messages to provide incentives for travelers seeking enriched experiences of any destination'.

In simpler words this means that merely singing paeans for great culture, sites, food and history to attract tourism is passe. Perhaps it is the reactive buzz generated on those topics on social media that actually serves to help frame visitors' expectations and influence their travel decisions.

Marketing tourism internationally can not be left solely to governments, faceless ministries and bureaucrats in sundry departments. Industry businesspersons and professionals have to be more directly involved in tourism promotion affairs.

That tourism marketing clearly is not about printing brochures was established more than a decade back. The promo videos played at tourism conferences and press meets, though still effective, need more personalised messaging. The present trend is firmly enmeshed in social media networks.

The B2B links, forged during brick-and-mortar travel events, definitely chart the future, but the increasing influence of new media over travel marketing events is gaining traction still faster.

The demographic and attitudinal mix of tourists is evolving rapidly. There is a crying need for research to understand the preferences of visitors and travelers from the markets in Europe and USA to the new emerging markets in other continents.

Political personalities and celebrities of all kinds have been quick to realise and adapt their strategies on social media to influence their careers. World over, there are teams working steadily to graph the trends, opinions and impressions. How travelers respond to Twitter is not just a concern about a young net-savvy market alone. Tourism managers have to now institutionalize this part of the oddly worded 'media management' policy.

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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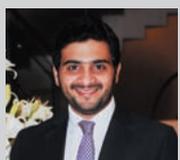
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Q Enlighten us about the progress of the development of The Red Sea. When are the first guests expected? Your plans for tourist numbers in the first year?

The Red Sea is on track to welcome first guests this year with leading hotel brands due to open their doors in 2023:

Six Senses Southern Dunes, the 76 guest rooms will be made up of open-plan bedrooms with outdoor terraces and villas ranging from one to four bedrooms boasting incredible views. The centre of the resort will be the Oasis, which is inspired by a desert flower, blurring the lines between the interior architecture and outdoor nature. In the Oasis there will be restaurants, bars and boutique meeting spaces. The state of the art spa will feature deep cold pools to contrast the warm climate, a Holistic Anti-Aging Centre, sensory suite outdoor treatment and both male and female grooming centres.

Marriott International is extending their growth in the Middle East with St. Regis Red Sea Resort, a destination of ultimate luxury, set on a private island so guests can enjoy the beautiful surroundings with privacy and serenity. The resort will feature two signature restaurants, 90 villas, an outdoor pool, spa, fitness centre and a Children's Club. The exclusive St. Regis Red Sea will offer Marriott's visionary spirit, bespoke service and avant-garde style but from a new and very exciting location.

The Red Sea's Ummahat Island will soon be home to one of the destinations most exclusive resorts, Nujuma, A Ritz-Carlton Reserve. The resort will feature 63 one-to-four-bedroom water and beach villas surrounded by flourishing coral reefs in crystal-clear waters. Nujuma will offer a highly personalised leisure experience, offering a heartfelt and intuitive service to all guests for unrivalled luxury. The resort will boast a state-of-the-art diving centre with a diverse range of undersea activities available to explore the world of one of the most untouched and protected archipelagoes in the world including deep-sea heritage diving excursions. Environmental practice is the backbone of every decision Red Sea Global makes, and as such visitor numbers will

be capped to ensure our targeted 30% net conservation benefit to the destination can be met long term. Once the hub island opens in 2024, we will be working to visitor numbers of around 300,000 per year. Our sustainability commitments are also evident in other assets close to completion at the destination, which include solar farms that will enable the entire destination to run on clean renewable energy.

Q How do you plan to showcase your destination in the Indian market since Saudi Arabia itself is a new entrant here?

The Indian market is an affluent

'The Indian market is an affluent and valuable audience for Red Sea Global'

and valuable audience for Red Sea Global, with the benefit of being geographically close to both of our destinations. Visionary travellers who want to explore a previously unknown region will be able to experience luxury, adventure, sports and relaxation delivered at the highest sustainable standards. Working with our partners and in-market experts, we'll be looking to showcase our destinations to captivate this audience and entice their curiosity.

Q Tell us about your other sustainable luxury tourism project, Amaala.

Amaala is an ultra-luxury destination due to welcome guests in 2024. Set in the Prince Mohammad bin Salman Natural Reserve along Saudi Arabia's northwestern coast, Amaala will be the first global integrated family wellness destination, set to curate transformative personal journeys inspired by arts, wellness, and the purity of the Red Sea. State of the art facilities and an attractive year-long events calendar will ensure Amaala is a distinctive wellness destination worldwide. Featuring diverse natural ecosystems and a unique landscape, Amaala will initially feature eight resorts, 200 residential units, a marina and yacht club within 4,155 sq km.

Q What kind of investment is being made to bring the



ambitious plans to reality?

Activity for the first phase of development on both Amaala and The Red Sea is well underway, and is fully funded by the Public Investment Fund. The Red Sea phase one will welcome first guests this year and is on track to be completed in 2024, while Amaala will open to first guests in 2024.

To date, across the two live projects, the company has awarded more than 1300 contracts worth nearly SAR 32 billion (USD 8.5 bn), with some 70 per cent of the total value awarded to Saudi companies, reflective of the organisation's ambition to positively impact the local economy. The company has also seen interest from the investment community, most recently announcing a Joint Venture with Al Mutlaq Group for the delivery of the Jumeirah hotel on Shura Island.

Q Once completely operational, what is your forecast in terms of tourist numbers for both the projects?

With sustainability at the heart of Red Sea Global's development plans, we are capping visitor numbers to ensure the highest environmental practices are sustained. Once completed, The Red Sea will not exceed more than one million tourists per year, with Amaala capped at 500,000. ♦

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Saudi Arabia's sustainable project Red Sea Global is set to welcome first guests this year. **Loredana Pettinati, Senior Director – Travel Trade, Red Sea Global, talks to Disha Shah Ghosh** about their sustainability goals, and capping the number of tourists to protect the environment.

Budget 2023: Booster for Tourism Industry?

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Nirmala Sitharaman, Finance Minister, while presenting the Union Budget 2023 said that the country offers an immense attraction for domestic as well as international tourists. “There is a large potential to be tapped in tourism,” she said. The Union Budget 2023, will have a key focus on the



travel and tourism sector, with 50 tourist destinations to be selected with the active participation of the state governments. These destinations will be developed for domestic and international tourism as a whole package. State governments will participate actively under “Mission Mode” and there will be a convergence of government programs and encouragement of public-private partnerships.

Besides this, strong infrastructural focus in the announcement of 50 new airports, heliports, water aerodromes and revival of advanced landing grounds will enhance regional access and connectivity.

Financial support via loans to be provided to states for developing enhanced road and rail connectivity will help uplift the domestic tourism sector.

No doubt, the Union budget has a few positives in the form of infrastructure development, increased last mile connectivity, the new Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs, the promise to develop tourism destinations in a holistic manner and the establishment of Unity Malls – all of which are good in the medium to long term. But what is missing is direct immediate support or relief to a sector that has suffered the worst and is only now beginning to revive after the pandemic.

The industry had hoped for a rationalisation of GST and a reduction in TCS, but instead have been presented with a steep increase in TCS which has jumped from 5% to 20% for outbound tour packages. The question is when the government realised that the tourism sector has immense potential, what made them raise TCS from 5 to 20%? This is detrimental and will give an unfair advantage to foreign-based online travel booking platforms over India-based travel agents and tour operators. So, a steep hike in TCS means the government is helping the business of overseas travel booking platforms. Naturally, the industry is unhappy!

Here are the reactions from the Industry



Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI

"We are shocked that instead of abolishing it, the government has raised the TCS from five to 20%. This is going to be detrimental for our business. Nothing has been done for our request on ease of doing business be it on TCS abolishment or ITC for Tour Operators on interstate GST credit which is one of the main concerns requiring urgent redressal. However, we applaud the FM's idea of promoting travel on a mission mode"



Madhavan Menon, CMD, Thomas Cook (India) Limited

"The proposal in the Union Budget 2023, to increase the rate of TCS from 5 to 20 per cent for purchase of overseas tours & overseas remittances other than education will significantly increase the upfront cash outflow for end customers. It will drive more of these customers to use alternate channels that are outside the domestic tax net. We urge the Government to reconsider this"



Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI

"The Finance Minister's reference to tourism in her opening remarks raised hopes that perhaps, finally, the industry would get due recognition and direct, tangible support. But the grim reality is just the opposite. The entire outbound travel industry has been dealt a lethal body blow with the announcement of a huge increase in TCS to a whopping 20%. This effectively sounds the death knell for many of our members who will be forced to shut shop"



Nishant Pitti, CEO and Co-Founder, EaseMyTrip

"The positive outlook for the industry displayed by FM Nirmala Sitharaman early on in her speech is highly commendable, taking up the agenda for promoting tourism in the country on "mission mode," and will play a vital role in reviving the landscape of tourism in India"



Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO

"For the first time the Hon'ble Finance Minister has in start of the budget addressed the important of tourism in India and recognised its potential for growth in employment generation and it needs to be tapped,"



Jurgen Bailom, President and CEO of Waterways Leisure pvt ltd, Cordelia Cruises

"As mentioned in the budget, that the states and government will actively participate in promotions for tourism in India, I think it's a great initiative to elevate the sector and travel culture. It is a huge step that for the first time in the Union Budget, tourism is the key focus policy area. Tourism and Hospitality sectors have a huge potential to cater to the diverse nature and culture of the country and we Cordelia Cruises are happy to be catering to just that. We do have big plans for the year, starting with the Sri Lanka sails from June 2023"



Ashish Gupta, Consulting CEO, FAITH

"Indian tourism, travel & hospitality industry was keenly looking forward to getting the vital infrastructure status, to be treated at par with merchandise exports, to have gotten enhanced support to tourism for global marketing, to have had a directional positive guidance on GST issues for tourism and was looking forward to enhanced tax / financial support



Subhash Goyal, Chairman, STIC Travel Group

"We are greatly disappointed that the TCS (Tax Collected at Source) has been increased from 5% to 20% on outbound luxury package tours. This will affect the people who travel abroad for holidays very badly as the cost will become very high, almost prohibitive, as it is the airfare have become very expensive and this tax will make their budget go array. This may perhaps force people to request their friends and relatives abroad to book hotels & packages for them overseas directly, thus depriving an Indian Tour Operators and Travel Agents of their earnings"

mechanisms to tourism MSMEs which are more than 95% of industry entrepreneurs are travel agents, hotels, tour operators, restaurants, tourist transporters and guides among others. The proposed increased in TCS will impact negatively Indian travel agents and tour operators by reducing their competitiveness"



Gaurav Bhatia, Executive Director, Bird Group

"The Union Budget announcement of 50 additional airports will augment the need for enhanced air connectivity. It will also have a tremendous rub-off effect on the allied sectors such as catering, ground handling and MRO, among others and in effect generating more employment both directly and indirectly. It has long been India's dream to become a global aviation hub.

We can see that dream taking shape, thanks to continuous growth in domestic aviation and such measures taken by the government to aid the sector post-Covid"



Rajesh Magow, Co-Founder and Group CEO, MakeMyTrip

"It is noteworthy that the Honorable FM has highlighted tourism as a focus area. The union budget entails multiple welcome initiatives like the revival of 50 airports, the building of 50 new destinations, and high budgetary outlays on railways, roads, and highways, which will help long-term growth for the domestic travel and tourism industry.

However, one budget proposal that will negatively impact the industry is the move to increase the TCS mandate from 5% to 20% on overseas tour packages. This will not only increase the upfront cash outflow for customers but will also give an unfair advantage to foreign-based online travel booking platforms over India-based travel agents and tour operators"



Vishal Suri, Managing Director, SOTC Travel Limited

"The Union Budget provides a positive focus on infrastructural development/investment, digital enhancements, sustainability, agriculture, domestic tourism. However, this Budget did not provide the travel & tourism industry the respite we anticipated with respect to rationalisation of taxes. Instead the proposals increased TCS on outbound travel and other LRS transactions from

5% to 20% without any threshold exemption. In our view, such high rates of taxation are an added liability to outbound travelers and negatively impacts tour operators recovering from the pandemic"



Kush Kapoor, CEO, Roseate Hotels & Resorts

"Honourable FMs push for the tourism sector is a great booster for the Indian hospitality industry. While post pandemic there has been a significant increase in domestic tourism's contribution to luxury hotels, 'Dekho Apna Desh' campaign will further add to the momentum. The government's focus on tourism promotion is evident in their opening up opportunities for joint participation of

the states and private players in Government programs via the PPP mode. This will be a major driver for growth to tourism across India. Further, the development of 50 new airports and 50 destinations through challenge mode to develop a consolidated package for both domestic and international tourism also augurs well for India's hospitality industry that has long grappled with infrastructure bottlenecks". ♦



Q Since the entire world is focusing on the Indian market, what is your strategy for this market?

India remains a key market for us and we have witnessed a strong surge in travel bookings, especially with the reopening of borders and around the festival periods. Since March 2022, Malaysia Airlines has reinstated its scheduled commercial services from India with 52 weekly flights from six major cities, namely New Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Kochi.

We are continuously reviewing the opportunities in the Indian market and will gradually add new routes, increase frequencies or upgrade aircraft wherever needed to meet these demands especially during peak travel periods.

Q How has Malaysia Airlines' performance been post reopening of the international borders?

Since the relaxation of travel restrictions, Malaysia Airlines' passenger traffic is up 85% year to date compared to pre-COVID levels, with most of the routes we operate in recording a steady increase in load factor performance and strong forward booking. This is especially prominent during the festive season, where domestic Malaysian destinations (particularly Peninsular Malaysia to Sabah/Sarawak) and international destinations such as Bali, Phuket, Bangkok, and Jakarta and long-haul destinations such as London, Australia and India, recorded a healthy load factor.

We hope to regain the remaining capacity for Malaysia Airlines' entire network serving China and North Asia by the end of 1H23, now that China has reopened its border, which will help spur economic growth between Malaysia and China boosting the overall supply chain involving business and trade.

We have been deploying our fleet and network expansion opportunistically during peak periods to service high demand/capacity sectors and continue to closely monitor the level of capacity coming into the market

as all airlines rush to ramp-up operations. The challenge is to work towards the right level of supply of seats vs the level of demand that is expected to exist in the market. Too much supply, and we are likely to see a price war which is unhealthy and unsustainable.

Q In terms of trends, what are your predictions for 2023?

A key emerging trend is a spontaneous travel, which means travellers will be looking for last-minute deals. At the same time, given the optimistic consumer sentiment on travel, travellers might lock in their trips ahead

'We are continuously reviewing the opportunities in the Indian market and will gradually add new routes'

of time, especially to secure the best ticket prices. This will ensure players across the tourism industry, including airlines, will continue to launch campaigns, experiences, and deals that excite and encourage customers to choose their business.

Another phenomenon that has gathered momentum in the aftermath of the pandemic is experiential travel. Many travellers are now willing to splurge on offbeat locations, as opposed to popular tourist destinations, so that they can experience a location like a local rather than a tourist. We expect this trend to continue throughout 2023.

Technology and digitisation have also assumed greater significance post-pandemic. Airlines and travel operators, which are agile in their operations and responding to customer feedback, will continue to prioritise digital transformation to ensure seamless experiences for customers.

Q On the sustainability front, what are the some of the initiatives you have taken in the recent past?

As an airline subsidiary under the Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG), we are committed to promoting socio-economic development and achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050 holistically, in line with the MAG Sustainability Blueprint launched in 2021. MAG seeks to



integrate sustainability through minimising environmental impacts, positively enhancing the communities it operates in, ensuring safety excellence, ensuring compliance within the organisation and driving profitability at the benefit of both our stakeholders and employees.

As a Group, we will focus on four key pathways towards achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, including aircraft operational efficiency, technological enhancements to new aircraft, adoption of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) and, after taking into account best-effort in-sector initiatives, the group will pursue out-of-sector solutions which could include tapping carbon markets.

For us, Sustainability is also beyond just a mere net-zero. It is also about levelling up, increasing women participation in technical roles and also reducing income inequality. We have signed our commitment to IATA's 25by2025 initiative to strengthen and improve female representation within our organisation and the wider aviation industry.

Ultimately, partnerships and collaboration will continue to be core moving forward as airlines search for ways to manage recovery volatility and expansion risks whilst providing its customers with more choices and market coverage. ♦

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Many travellers are now willing to splurge on offbeat locations, as opposed to popular tourist destinations says **Amit Mehta, Country Manager-South Asia, Malaysia Airlines,** while speaking with **Prasenjit Chakraborty.**

Fintech adoption & luggage lite trips to top traveller agenda in 2023

Bengaluru, India, January 27, 2023: Talk of the tech revolution in travel is no longer hypothetical. Over the next 12 months and beyond we will witness continual change in the way we take trips. New tools, solutions and expertise, plus easier transitions through airports and the opportunity to travel with less luggage are all creating headlines.

With global travel increasing, expectations among both companies and individual travelers are higher than ever when it comes to having a smooth travel experience. Our industry is evolving rapidly to meet ever-changing demands. The Amadeus 2023 Travel Trends identify five new developments which the company believes will play a part in shaping travel over the coming year.

- Meet a new kind of travel agent: Exploring the metaverse will allow travelers to explore a destination before they arrive or relive their memories once they leave
- Smile for your seat: Biometrics will help create a smooth travel payment experience
- Travel without baggage: Hotels will offer travelers more amenities so they can travel lighter
- Working from roam: Remote workers will adopt an increasingly nomadic lifestyle, migrating to different locations as 'work from anywhere' policies become

normalized

- Welcome to bonding business breaks: A new category of business travel, focused on connecting teams, building relationships and unlocking creativity away from the office, will emerge

The annual travel trends were identified by the expertise of Amadeus' team of travel tech experts. They have identified that, while technology is a major driver of change, and

the customer experience. Now that the future has arrived, new and emerging technologies are enabling us to achieve these objectives in a new reality where people can better control their travel experiences while prioritizing aspects important to them, such as their impact on the environment, cultural nuances, interpersonal relationships, etc. With the emergence of newer technologies, the travel ecosystem is going through a fascinating and

AMADEUS

Web3 and biometrics will have a big part to play, human relationships are equally important. The trends are all connected to personal and societal concerns, from the desire to travel with a lighter ecological footprint to the desire for more people to be free to work from anywhere.

Mani Ganeshan, Global Head of Engineering, Travel Sellers Unit and Center Head, Amadeus Labs Bengaluru said, "Travellers worldwide expect seamless travel experiences driven by comfort, security, and personalization. The growing sophistication of technology underpins travel providers' ability to deliver on these expectations and transform

progressive phase. As technologies evolve to meet travelers' expectations, they will rapidly shape the future of travel for the better."

It's travel, but not as we know it

In the coming years, the metaverse will take traveller engagement to the next level. Travelers will be able to enjoy deeper cultural experiences in an online world, exploring virtual concerts and exhibitions. The technology also offers enormous potential for pre-trip assistance and the opportunity to "try before you buy," creating further wanderlust and excitement. This will become increasingly popular as a way to trial higher-priced items





such as luxury cruise holidays.

Walt Disney Co. has plans to create a real-world theme park ride which incorporates a parallel 3D virtual world experience, while Seoul is blazing a trail with its plans to go “meta” by 2023, with a platform titled “Metaverse Seoul”. Qatar Airways, meanwhile, recently announced Qverse with a MetaHuman cabin crew, providing an immersive experience to tour, navigate and check-in at Hamad International Airport.

Smile for a smooth travel payment experience

Biometric payments – via the likes of ApplePay and GooglePay – are now mainstream for both retail and travel payments. But over the coming years, travel is likely to take biometric payments to the next level. Airports already use biometrics for travel document identification, so the logical next step is to leverage this identity check for any payments travelers make during their trip.

No more rooting around in a handbag for your wallet so you can upgrade to business class. If a traveler is using biometrics to check-in, drop off luggage, and board the plane, then these identity checks could double-up to cover payments they could make while traveling, like adding an in-flight meal, delivering a smooth payment experience. Airports and travel operators will offer a completely contactless and convenient payment experience for passengers with the use of biometrics, at all points of the journey.

From paying for train tickets to seat upgrades, in-flight meals or late checkout at the hotel, with biometrics, travelers worldwide will use convenient, more secure, biometric payment solutions.

Small trials have already begun with travel retailer Hudson. They employed the Amazon One biometric payment solution at their store at Nashville International Airport, allowing customers to “just walk out” and pay with the palm of their hand.

Taking the words “traveling light” to the next level

A combination of customers becoming more conscious of their carbon footprint and cost of checked-in luggage is slimming down suitcases. Multiple trolley-loads of designer luggage are no longer a status symbol – quite the opposite.

Hotels and resorts are increasingly offering the hire of bulky items, such sports equipment and workout clothes. Those who do are also seeking to do so from hyper local suppliers in order to be all the more popular with tourists. Alongside this, travelers are looking to buy essentials from the local destination, supporting and engaging with the community in the process and further ensuring they have meaningful travel experiences.

Global brands such as Hilton are offering exercise gear and equipment, helping travelers get closer to a “suitcase free stay”. We expect this trend to grow and evolve.

Working from roam

Remote workers will settle into an increasingly nomadic lifestyle, migrating to different locations. We will see workforces spend less time at their homes due to the widespread corporate formalisation of “work from anywhere” policies.

Workers will opt to spend time with friends and family in their domestic market or might spend a month working abroad. From a

governmental perspective, we will see the continued rise of countries encouraging digital nomads through visa schemes and incentives.

Countries including Georgia, Croatia, Iceland and Germany have already created official schemes to attract digital nomads. Nomadlist is a platform connecting a global community of remote workers living and traveling around the world, helping them find competitively priced locations to work from. The platform lists Bangkok and Lisbon in its top five cities for digital working. Amadeus has seen a search increase of 165% from Sydney to Bangkok during the month of September 2022 as compared to 2019. There was also an increase of 74% in searches for flights from Sao Paulo to Lisbon during the same respective months.

Welcome to bonding business breaks

Business travel is back, with a difference. Over the past few years, many companies have introduced work from anywhere policies. With this has come the challenge of team bonding and collaboration. As a result, we are witnessing an uptick in “internal travel” plans, where teams are brought together for the express purpose of strengthening relationships.

American Express Global Business Travel even published a paper titled ‘Why Business Travel Is At The Center Of The New Company Culture’. With employee experience being more important now than ever, team travel programs will increase exponentially as they are a good way to motivate teams, improve employee satisfaction, strengthen company loyalty, and unlock creativity. ♦



Cruising in India; Unwrapping the Opportunity

The launch of the world's longest river cruise in India is just the right push the tourism industry needed to set the 2023 ball rolling. While the hype created by this will soon fade away, the message is loud and clear that India is ready to create a larger footprint on the global cruise tourism map by offering a world-class experience, writes **Disha Shah Ghosh.**

A lot has been said till now about exploring India's long coastline for last mile connectivity. Using the varied water bodies for alternate means of transportation as well as discovering the many facets of Incredible India on water have been a long cherished dream of the tourism industry. However, despite the best ideas, the very intent was missing and infrastructure development at hinterland jetties and ports continued to be dismal.

What set the ball rolling for cruise tourism in general was the interest shown by various international cruise liners with selective port of calls in the past couple of years at sea ports of

Mumbai, Goa and Vizag; and the value seen by the various successive governments after multiple calls from the industry stakeholders. With Indians flocking to Singapore and Malaysia in large numbers to undertake a cruise holiday, only added to the interest of cruise companies to allocate dedicated marketing dollars for India.

River Cruising in India

Although inland river tourism on a small scale has been operational in the rivers of Ganga and Brahmaputra for some time now; the launch a major vessel like the MV Ganga Vilas with multi-country itinerary was required to create the much needed hype. A lot



“ The initiative of developing better infrastructure for cruise had been taken as early as 2014, when the Union government decided that Ministries of Shipping and Tourism would jointly identify the routes for carrying out cruise tours on waterways, and also the measures to develop necessary infrastructure, including all weather navigable channels with proper berthing facilities. ”



Vinod Zutshi
IAS (Retd), former Secretary
Tourism, Government of India

Secretary Tourism, Government of India, said, “The initiative of developing better infrastructure for cruise had been taken as early as 2014, when the Union government decided that Ministries of Shipping and Tourism would jointly identify the routes for carrying out cruise

and foundation stone for community jetties in Bihar was laid. Thus, it goes without saying that the launch of MV Ganga Vilas will pave the way for speedier development of inland river ports, jetties and cruise terminals.”

Talking about developing a home grown cruise brand, Jurgen Bailom, CEO, Waterways Leisure Pvt Ltd., said, “It is welcoming for us to now see the river cruise come to life. We wish them all the best and hope that this is just the beginning and the tip of the iceberg of opportunities that cruise tourism brings with it for the nation as a whole.”

Ganga Vilas is the first cruise service of its kind, having received support from the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways and Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI).

Naresh Rawal, VP – Sales & Marketing, Resorts World Cruises (India) believes that these are exciting times for the cruise sector in general for India as the river cruise will be an unprecedented experience of its kind globally. As our Prime Minister Narendra Modi had stated “it will be a reflection of the growing cruise tourism (industry) in India” and that is a positive sign of the future of the cruise sector. “With the local and global spotlight on the river cruise, it will create more positive awareness on cruises and will have a spill-over effect on the potential growth of oceanic cruises, be it on a domestic level or for the fly-cruise segment,” he said.



Jurgen Bailom
CEO,
Waterways Leisure Pvt Ltd.

depends on the success of this experiment to attract private investors, port developers, and cruise liners alike to make this

“ It is welcoming for us to now see the river cruise come to life. We wish them all the best and hope that this is just the beginning and the tip of the iceberg of opportunities that cruise tourism brings with it for the nation as a whole. ”

niche industry a mainstream one. What was largely missing till now was government support in terms of investment, infrastructure development, single-window clearance and lack of uniformity in state laws.

Throwing light on the government's stance, Vinod Zutshi, IAS (Retd), former

tours on waterways, and also the measures to develop necessary infrastructure, including all weather navigable channels with proper berthing facilities.

In that context, you may recall that on the day when MV Ganga Vilas was flagged off, community jetties in Uttar Pradesh were also inaugurated,

“ With the local and global spotlight on the river cruise, it will create more positive awareness on cruises and will have a spill-over effect on the potential growth of oceanic cruises, be it on a domestic level or for the fly-cruise segment ”



Naresh Rawal
VP – Sales & Marketing,
Resorts World Cruises (India)

The existing river cruises offer travel to native landscapes of India albeit in smaller vessels. However, Zutshi says that the launch of Ganga Vilas is significant, as it is not only the longest river cruise in India, but is also the world's largest. "The cruise ship covers 3,200 kms across 5 states, and 2 countries takes the visitors on 5 days journey to more than 50 major tourist sites, crossing 27 rivers, a package which no other river cruise in India is offering today. Ganga Vilas, having 18 luxury suites and equipped with modern facilities is a river cruise matching international standards, and therefore would attract international visitors, in addition to the domestic tourists."

Tourism Revival

What gains significance about the government backing river cruising is the very timing of the launch. At a time when borders have reopened globally, and the government is set to close down foreign tourism offices, a direct promotion of India's capability in offering a world-class river cruise sends a message loud and clear.

"The announcement of the river cruises in India is timely in re-igniting the travel trade due to the global pandemic. As travel restrictions are gradually relaxed across the region, this new one-of-a-kind attraction will definitely be a source of growth for inbound tourism, which is important in boosting the overall cruise sector for

India and globally. Also most importantly, the launch of this unique river cruise will create the necessary hype in boosting the tourism industry, especially for the overall cruise sector," said Rawal.

Any development is a way forward. It brings with it hope and a host of opportunities. "We are confident that this new ray will further light up the rainbow of tourism in India and eventually contribute in a wholesome manner to the overall development of the nation's economy," Bailom stated.

While India has a long, impressive coastline of 7,500 kms with a large number of rivers, the benefits of river cruising will spill over to ocean cruising as well. The support from the government this time around is also a refreshing change. Financial assistance for construction of double hull boats, construction of world-class cruise terminals and large-scale investment in port development are steps in the right direction. "The new draft National Tourism Policy document, having cruise tourism-friendly policies, the efforts of the Task Force set up on cruise tourism, and the government's plan to open as many as 111 waterways in the country augurs well for rapid development of cruise tourism in India," said Zutshi.

For making the cruise experience a seamless one, government initiatives like issuance of e-visa at land and sea ports, training of tourist guides and SOPs for domestic and international cruise passengers, are just the steps in the right direction. ♦

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Boarding a flight from India without anxiety and stress- A long way to go

By Biji Eapen, CMD, Speedwings Aviation Group

Boarding a flight from Delhi T3 airport evoked a national debate. Even entering to passenger terminal was a difficult task. Old-aged and wheelchair passengers with Reduced Mobility waited more than one hour to pass through the Security check. Intervention by Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia helped install five more X-ray machines.

Airline passenger baggage may contain hazardous materials like lithium batteries, perfumes, dry ice, drain cleaners, etc. which may seem harmless, but can pose a hazard to health, Safety, property, or the environment when transported by Air.

Identifying and preventing hazardous materials from passenger baggage is a real challenge for security and screening personnel. They must check passenger and personal belongings, which may have dangerous items such as weapons, chemicals, and liquids that are not allowed as carry-on items or toiletry items that exceed 100 ml per bottle. On many occasions, the security personnel end up checking the items physically, in addition to the real-time scanned image, due to the varied items carried by passengers.

India is a vast country with multiple religions, traditions, and cast. Religious devotees commonly carry camphor tablets, Copra, dhoop sticks, cones, or Holy water, for pujas or pilgrimage; at many airports, passengers always quarrel with the Check-in staff or Security for not being allowed. During festival time, many passengers try to carry crackers in their baggage.

In the Indian scenario, most air passengers are ignorant of baggage restrictions or not briefed on what they can carry in their baggage. Online ticketing is impulse purchasing; it decreases the cognitive capacity of the passenger to know the regulatory requirements.

Lack of briefing at ticketing or reservation points leads passengers to be ignorant of the prohibited items or the risks involved with the carriage of metallic and non-metallic objects or organic and inorganic materials in their checked or carry-on baggage.

Identifying hidden dangerous goods is the first step to reducing the risks. Passengers must be appropriately briefed on the regulations during ticketing or reservation, what they can carry in personal belongings, and what items

may require additional approvals to ensure regulatory compliance.

The government targets operationalising 1000 routes under UDAN and expect to reach 1,100 aircraft by 2027. The industry is solely privatised, and in addition to the present eight, another 25 more airports are earmarked for long-term leasing.

Realities.

- With privatisation and the rise in competition within the aviation sector, the airlines in India are compromising passenger safety.
- BCAS took four years to initialize 3T scanners (Tomography Technology) installations in Delhi; how long may it take for 117 airports?
- It is a big task to meet the challenges for a country like India to handle 4.17 lakhs of passengers traveling daily.

To meet future challenges, India requires a paradigm change to a new Safety culture of the Competency-Based Training and Assessment (CBTA) Approach developed by ICAO. It has shifted the traditional category-based Dangerous Goods learning to CBTA, intensified and broadened training to all persons involved in air transportation, from passenger reservations to aircraft engineering, whose functions may directly or indirectly impact the movement of passengers' baggage or cargo, and directed the Member Countries to opt their requirements as per national prerequisites.

AVSEC training is on security aspects to ensure overall aviation safety. DG safety training provides essential knowledge of recognising and identifying hazardous materials based on chemical properties (flammability, toxicity, chemical stability, and heat of combustion) and its potential risks in the personal items carried in the passenger baggage or cargo. Only DG training will help the aviation employees to be competent in detecting and identifying hazardous material, its properties, degree of hazards, and potential risks, including emergency responses to these risks.

Another primary concern with India is the delay in adopting the Globally Harmonized System (GHS) of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals, implemented by the United Nations in 2003 for the most commonly carried



items by passengers globally in their checked-in or carry-on baggage.

For passenger safety, the MOCA must establish a Hazard Communication Standard (HCS) program aligned with GHS under the CBTA approach. In turn, airline operators must implement a hazard communication (HAZCOM) program, including labels on containers of hazardous chemicals, safety data sheets (SDSs) for hazardous chemicals, and training for all employees involved in air transportation.

Non-reporting of incidents is a stumbling block for Safety in India. The incident that a laptop sparked and flamed on board aircraft in 2017, flights that had smoke in baggage compartments in 2018, or incident in a cargo hold that pilots called "Mayday" never found any place in case studies or references.

Lithium-ion batteries are susceptible to high temperatures and inherently flammable. Personnel responsible for check-in or Security must be competent to verify Watt-hours or lithium metal content (grams) in electronic devices carried in baggage. It is alarming that many personnel involved in airline operations or flight handling, including CISF, are yet to train in dangerous goods.

MoCA must formulate a new safety culture and enforcing it through airline operators will only provide passengers with a stress-free, seamless security screening process that enhances their experience. ♦

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

Biji Eapen is National President of IATA Agents Association of India (IAAI), Airline Users Rights & Grievances Redressal Forum. CMD of Speedwings Aviation Group with four decades of expertise in the airline, airport, and flight handling. And an IATA and DGCA-approved CBTA Chief Instructor for Dangerous Goods training.



'Providing infrastructure status to the Indian hospitality sector can go a long way in attracting fresh investment'

With an aim to showcase India's global stature as a hospitality industry powerhouse, HVS ANAROCK is presenting HOPE (Hospitality Overview Presentation & Exchange) to bring together Indian and International hospitality players for knowledge exchange amidst networking. The event will take place on March 2 – 3 at Goa. Ahead of the power-packed event, **Mandeep S Lamba, President (South Asia), HVS ANAROCK** spoke with **Asmita Mukherjee** about the challenges that are slowing the Indian hospitality sector and measures to tackle them.

Q What was the reason behind organising HOPE (Hospitality Overview Presentation & Exchange)? How will the event bring India's global stature in front of the worldwide hospitality industry?

HVS ANAROCK HOPE (Hospitality Overview Presentation & Exchange) is the result of years of discussion and brainstorming on developing a platform that goes beyond the typical content for hospitality conferences, which limits deliberations and often makes them repetitive. HOPE 2023 will bring together not only the top hospitality leaders for differentiated out-of-the-box discussions, but also highly eminent and coveted keynote speakers and presenters from

outside the hospitality fraternity who will discuss the latest global technology trends, and India's rise as an economic powerhouse, including what makes India compelling for the world and engaging facts that will give the conference attendees much broader and more interesting insights into the India story.

Q Kindly throw some lights on the profile of eminent speakers who have been invited to HOPE.

HVS ANAROCK HOPE 2023 will feature over 80 eminent speakers from the who's who of the global and Indian hospitality, travel, and food & beverage industries to economists, private equity & banking leaders, architects,

technology leaders, start-up gurus, change makers, and renowned travel writers and authors. We can't wait to have candid and thoughtful discussions with this distinguished group about recent trends and the industry's future.

Q According to you, what does the Indian Hospitality Industry lack and how can it be overcome?

The cost of capital for the hospitality industry in India continues to be amongst the highest in the world, which along with the short tenure for repayment of debt causes severe stress on hotel owners and operators. Given the cyclical nature of the business, if the hotel enters the market in a down cycle phase, it is almost certain to head towards becoming an NPA as

situation and found ways to keep moving forward. In the absence of inbound travel, hotel companies finally recognized the enormous potential of domestic tourism and the need to grow their presence in Indian leisure destinations. Focusing on cost efficiency, being more agile, thinking outside the box and accepting new ideas quickly are a few other changes that have strengthened the sector. Hoteliers are proactively focusing on alternative customer segments and diversifying into non-room ancillary revenue streams. Moreover, technology adoption has accelerated, and operations have become leaner.

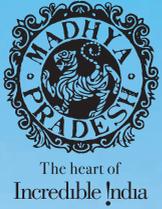
The last two years have seen a significant change in traveller behaviour, with privacy, hygiene, and cleanliness taking precedence over all other considerations. Many travellers are now looking for greater flexibility and convenience, especially when travelling in small groups or with families and pets. The popularity of alternate accommodation products such as homestays and villa rentals has increased exponentially in India as a result of these changing preferences.

Q The Covid-battered hospitality is slowly recovering. As the demand has been pretty constant over the last few months, do you think the industry will manage to gain its lost glory within this year with this trend continuing?

The Indian hospitality industry has recovered strongly in the last year, mainly driven by increased domestic travel and closed the year 2022 with a nationwide occupancy rate of 59-61%, which is 15-17 percentage points (pp) higher than the same period in 2021 and just 5-7 pp lower than in 2019.

The average rate, meanwhile, has improved significantly and was almost 1-3% higher than pre-pandemic levels. Despite a variety of headwinds such as inflationary pressures, recession risk in the US and Europe, and manpower shortage, the Indian hospitality industry's performance outlook remains positive, driven by continued growth in domestic demand, the revival of inbound travel and slower supply growth. ♦

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SUMMON YOURSELF IN SECRET CITY OF JOY & RIDE THE WAVES IN ASIA'S FIRST FLOATING FESTIVAL



**Fourth Edition of Mandu Fest Organised by the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board till March 2023
Gandhisagar Floating Festival to be inaugurated on 1st Feb 2023 at Gandhisagar, Dist. Mandsaur, Madhya Pradesh**

Madhya Pradesh has emerged as one of the most sought-after tourist locations of the country. The state has reinstated its identity as the hub of adventure tourism and the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board has made unparalleled efforts to develop the tourism industry and paint the picture of Madhya Pradesh in front of the eyes of the world. It was a very long-term vision of the Tourism Board to establish Madhya Pradesh as a

state of Adventure and Cultural Tourism which is now coming into execution. MP Tourism thrives to provide a 360 degree adventure experience for the thrill seekers by facilitating Air, Water and Land adventure activities.

After 3 glorious editions of the Mandu Festival, the season 4 is on course and adventure lovers from India and abroad are participating in it with undying enthusiasm. Meanwhile, a very recent

addition, the Gandhisagar Floating Festival is set to commence from February which is Asia's one and only floating festival. During this tourism season, Madhya Pradesh Tourism thrives to connect all the exclusive festivals of Madhya Pradesh in such a way where the tourists can enjoy all these unique experiences one after another. The festivals have been chronologically lined up to quench the thirst of all adventure seekers.

Mandu Festival

The Gandhisagar Floating Festival will be a unique glamping experience at the Mandsaur district, Madhya Pradesh, articulating its offerings with the line, 'Gateway to the heart of Incredible India'. The festival will be a 4-hour drive from Indore which is very well connected by the road and railways.

The key highlight of Gandhisagar Floating Festival is its five-day Festival, which is Asia's first Floating Festival, replete with live music performances on a floating stage, floating market, boat spa, boat safari, silent forest tour, and much more. The

tourists will be facilitated with super luxury tenting facilities until the end of April 23 and the adventure activities will continue until the end of July 23.

What makes Gandhisagar Floating Festival special is the Adventure Sports in the middle of the jungle which includes a plethora of adventure sports and activities that spans across Air, Water, and Land. The Air Adventure activities would include Parasailing, Hot Air Balloon and Paramotoring. The Water Adventure activities would include Kayaking, Parasailing, Jet Ski, Speed Boating, Zorbing, Dragon Boat, and Banana Boat Ride. The Land Adventure activities would include Duo

cycling, Cycling, Trekking, Stargazing, Rope course, Jungle safari, Night Jungle walk, ATV, Zipline, Paintball, Gun shooting, Kidzone, Indoor gaming, Bullock cart ride, Horse riding, Camel ride, and Yoga.



Gandhisagar Floating Festival

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Sustainability is the Sustainable Competitive Advantage for a destination!

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

In a competitive environment, sustainable competitive advantage is the desired outcome of any organisation's business strategy. Therefore, they look for a competitive advantage that will help them outperform rivals in the same industry or field today and in the future.

A sustainable competitive advantage is a collection of resources, characteristics, or abilities that enables an organisation to outperform its competitors in meeting the needs of its customers. In the eyes of the consumer, the company outperforms rival companies in providing certain qualities, characteristics, or abilities. These distinct sources of competitive advantage are fiercely guarded against the competition by the organisation.



Dr Nimit Chowdhary is a Professor at the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Jamia Millia Islamia. He has more than 29 years of academic experience, of which he has been a full professor for 16 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 20 books and more than 200 academic papers and chapters. He has travelled extensively to around 40 countries and almost all states within the country.

Competitive advantages that are challenging to imitate or recreate sustain.

A sustained competitive advantage for tourism is something customers value, something they think is unique and unavailable elsewhere and difficult for rivals to replicate. The simplest things to replicate are tangibles, followed by services that may be partially imitated by researching the service process protocols and creating SOPs. The visitor's experiences at a place present the most significant challenge in imitation. Any experience results from the visitor's interaction with the place's multiple realities, a unique combination of material possessions and barely perceptible socio-cultural-economic factors. Furthermore, what is present today results from the place's physical surroundings and socio-cultural past.

The landscape reflects how inhabitants have interacted with the destination's geophysical features over time, adding a cultural layer on top of both the human presence and these inanimate objects. As a result, visitors frequently witness a distinct geophysical environment, how people have lived there, and what they have created- a completely different justification for their existence. They adore experiencing this life briefly and selectively.

This unique experience built on the place's unique personality is its Unique Selling Proposition (USP). A destination will remain in business if it can maintain its distinctiveness which is naturally, socioculturally and aesthetically unique. There will be more guests. They anticipate better maintenance, presentation, and enabling services for the physical space. Destinations can benchmark other destinations for the presentation of the built environment and better service quality to add to their experience- which is very local and unique. In conclusion, a location should maintain originality while offering better goods and services.

An area with a slowly evolving pace frequently has a fair balance. Please be aware that a place will develop at an appropriate rate, just like any other phenomenon. Outside factors like contemporary management and technological advancements can accelerate this growth. However, the inhabitants and the area must be content with this pace and capable of coping with this developmental

disequilibrium- unease results when so-called development outpaces this equilibrium. Residents grow weary. The space that belongs to them starts appearing out of their control. However, when executed well, technology and management give individuals the impression that they are in charge of their environment. The hosts and visitors are pleased with the development, which takes the entire establishment to the next stage of development. This is what sustainable development is all about- development that the place and its people can sustain.

Academically, the Product Life Cycle (PLC) serves as a model for the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC). A product's life cycle, which typically goes through the four stages of introduction, growth, maturity, and decline, depicts the business a product does at each step from the time it is introduced to the market until it is withdrawn from the shelves. The product faces competition as it gets past the maturity stage when there is a flood of upgraded products in the same market. While the primary product remains the same in PLC, in the case of TALC, the tourist destination undergoes significant changes as the nature of business evolves along with different stages. It feels like a different place for hosts and so also visitors. The host community feels alienated when they cannot relate to the place's rapid expansion and development. The organic relationship between the elements of the place- the ecology, the society, its culture, the employment patterns, and consumption, among others- all falls apart, with hosts losing the locus of control.

The goal of sustainable tourism is to minimise the adverse effects it has on the environment and the local way of life while also giving locals a chance to work. Only when a place's development is sustainable, with all stakeholders acting to foster the distinctive experience typical of the place, does it preserve its feel and individuality. Everyone can relate to it, and everything seems natural.

So, if a place sustains its originality with a better presentation of tangibles and superior quality of services as it develops, it sustains the competition! ♦

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

Q India has emerged an important source market for Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts. How are you geared to welcome guests from India across your various hotels & resorts post the unfortunate political events in Sri Lanka last year?

India has contributed with 17% of the total tourist arrivals in YTD, being the largest producing source market to Sri Lanka. There have been several initiatives, both from the state and private sectors to revive this market, including joint collaborations by hospitality operators within the industry. The cultural, geopolitical and trade ties between our two countries remain strong, enabling a conducive environment for Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts to welcome Indian travellers once again to our properties including the Colombo hotels. Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts properties located across Sri Lanka caters to the palette of the Indian traveller with some properties having dedicated Indian restaurants and Indian Chefs. Cinnamon Grand Colombo takes pride in its flagship Indian restaurant 'Chutneys' which serves authentic Indian cuisine and the latest opening of 'Nija' a luxury wellness center with internationally trained therapists guarantees to provide a holistic wellness experience.

Q Tapping the MICE segment has been one of your key focus areas, what is your campaign for 2023 to further amplify your outreach?

MICE movements from India are now gaining traction and we are quite hopeful of reaching pre-pandemic levels soon. To amplify our outreach for MICE, a number of MICE agent familiarization trips have already been conducted by Sri Lanka as a destination and Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts collaborating as a hospitality partner. The demand has been encouraging. It is important to note that the Destination Wedding segment is gaining momentum in Sri Lanka from India. Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts is geared in both Colombo and Resorts with venues that can accommodate up to 600 guests, with experiential indoor and outdoor options and state of the art AV facilities. These are complemented by thematic Indian

food, entertainment options and the customary Cinnamon service.

Q Which cities in India are your target markets for your key properties?

Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts is concentrating on Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities, including the market leaders such as Mumbai, New Delhi, Bangalore and Kolkata. The targeted market segments are Leisure and MICE movements, with destination weddings being a focused segment as well.

Q What consumer and trade activities have been chalked out for 2023?

There are many activities that

'We are confident that Indian travellers have restored their trust in Sri Lanka'

are being deployed by us, with a great deal of emphasis on travel trade partnerships, key customer engagements, interactive meetings and facilitating FAMs for trade partners. With our commitment being strong in India, Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts has established its Global Sales Organization in India, covering Mumbai, New Delhi and Bangalore. This also emphasizes our commitment and focus on India, as a key strategic source market. Our active representation at SATTE, OTM and are on the heels of completing a large-scale activation in Mumbai and New Delhi. To complement the above, several media and customer engagements are planned for the year.

Q How are you engaging with the travel trade online and offline?

Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts response: Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts has a robust sales network in Sri Lanka and India, that services the DMCs locally and the travel trade at the source of origin in India. This is serviced by our well-established Global Sales Offices (Mumbai, New Delhi and Bangalore). As an established and strong brand, we have forged strong partnerships with the travel trade in India. The engagements range from in-person meetings, virtual calls, sales mission activations and customised familiarization trips to



our properties. Our industry leading Revenue and Distribution systems are well equipped to handle online trade partners and have secured a number of online partnerships. Our investment in tools that are attuned to industry demands and needs, both on an online and offline front, support us in staying attractive and relevant with the Indian traveller.

Q Besides India which nations in Asia are your markets in terms of pecking order?

Apart from India, other Asian destinations include China, Malaysia, Singapore and Japan which are key contributing Asian nations in terms of tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka.

Q In terms of digital media, how is that medium being utilized for your promotional activities?

Similar to many other industries, post covid accelerated the need to adopt digital media, across all consumer segments. Digital media also gave birth to newer traveller segments especially among millennials. In addition, it has paved ways for marketing to be more effective and reduce go-to-market lead times. But most of all, the use of digital media has made it possible for varied segments to consume experiential content, that is relevant and personal. ♦

disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in

Kamal Munasinghe, Area Vice President, Colombo Hotels and General Manager, Cinnamon Grand Colombo talks to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about tapping the leisure and MICE segments in India, at their priority markets in Asia.



Start-Up Forum

Bringing Innovations to the Forefront

Yellow Plate

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.vgmtechsolutions.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.vgmtechsolutions.com/form.html>

Startup Name: Yellow Plate

Core Team: Vinit Tulsyan, Founder & CEO,
Aman Dubey – Co-Founder & CTO

Founding year: 2021

Company Website: www.yellowplate.in

Description: The transport industry across passenger and goods segments has witnessed several technology start-ups over the past decade. The technology start-ups on the back of an aggregation model wanted to become super vendors in a market filled with millions of vendors and intermediaries. Despite this, the Industry remains unorganized and offline. Surprisingly over 90% of Indian cities have no online platforms/vendors. The aggregation model today is riddled with 1) broken supply chains, operational issues, and trust deficits, etc.

The solution lies in digitally enabling offline vendors.

Yellow Plate is on a mission to digitize and digitally enable millions of vendors and intermediaries in mobility and transport segment in India. The company's free partner & driver app can be used by the vendors to, create a business profile, add vehicles/drivers, network with other vendors, set rates and send/receive bookings to/from other vendors or partner's marketplace, live track vehicles, complete bookings on the driver app, and get digital invoice and accounts, etc.

In addition, customers can directly create bookings from the vendor company's website or play store app or WhatsApp app (launching soon). Yellow Plate provides vendors with their website or apps at nominal cost of Rs. 1,000/month.

To summarize, Yellow Plate's digital platforms and networked digital ecosystem is giving the power of technology to vendors, which they can use to create a business similar to Ola/Uber, Savaari, Rapido, Porter, etc. The company launched commercial cars in Jan 2021. Their approach has resulted in Yellow Plate's partner network growing to 4,859 partners across 449 cities in 30 states within just 1 year of its launch. Their approach has allowed them to create a city-level distribution approach integrated nationally with partners in their respective cities bringing and managing their businesses & operations digitally.

<https://youtube.com/shorts/0ZaEcSkZSII?feature=share>



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‘Indians are taking up to holidays that offer once in a lifetime experience’

An early mover in the technology space, **Meha Vashi, Director, Nivalink Holidays Pvt. Ltd.**, talks to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about the changing preference of the Indian traveller, growing demand for experiential holidays and the concerns of the market.

Q What made you select travel as an area of your business interest?

My husband, Niraj started Nivalink in year 2000, and therefore it was in the family and only after my maternity break that I started off in 2006/2007 with a view to develop the international travel vertical.

Q India has been a potential market for many overseas destinations and products. How has the Indian traveller evolved over the years?

Indians in 2000-2010 period preferred a group tour, were Indian meal focussed and travelled with tourist mind set. That has now changed with a clear FIT segment emerging that wants to do it their unique way. Shorter travel, Luxury travel, Wildlife and a lot of other different niches emerged thereafter as travellers evolved, and their income levels and sophistication rose in tandem.

Q You forayed into the travel industry when the world was going through a dot com boom, and two decades later technology has emerged as an enabler. How have you evolved your business offerings in the course of time?

While the entire industry used

web as a transaction platform, we used web to showcase our knowhow. Our focus has always been to keep travelling, use that knowhow to drive good content and offer a consultative approach towards acquiring and keeping good quality travellers.

Our tech journey can be summarised into phases:

1. Initially we were first ones online to showcase many hotels and destinations, so we got early mover advantage.

2. Thereafter we added travel planning services for India and International Destinations, offering customers acquired online a total solution

3. We added specialised verticals of Wellness, Wildlife and Pilgrimages in addition to India,

especially post pandemic?

Need to create lifetime memories while on travel on has become more pronounced post-Covid. Social media especially Instagram is driving customers away from typical touristy itinerary towards experiences that create life time memories especially ones that can be shared over Instagram.

Q According to you, which are the two important challenges in the travel industry now that need to be addressed on priority basis?

Complexity of choice for travellers is increasing by the day for connectivity, accommodation and experiences available at destinations etc. Need a tech solution that wades through that to give unique solution for every traveller. Right now a lot of time is spent in getting information and preparing quotes, and solution offered is still sub-optimal.

Currently a lot of experiential

“ Indians in 2000-2010 period preferred a group tour, were Indian meal focussed and travelled with tourist mind set. That has now changed with a clear FIT segment emerging that wants to do it their unique way. ”

Inbound and Outbound travel.

4. Having acquired a large number of customers across India and all over the world, we are now totally focussed around growing with this customer base.

Q What kind of scope do you see for experiential holidays from Indian travellers?

Indians are taking up to holidays that offer once in a lifetime experience. So it could be an opera, a bungee jump, Northern lights experience, a festival, Grand Slam tennis final and list is endless. As more Indians get more discerning and sophisticated, many more experiences will be sought.

Q What are some of the changes observed in the experiential holidays space,

travel is sold by passionate entrepreneurs who travel and experience first before recommending to their customers. To mainstream experiential travel, a lot of training and visual content is needed to be imparted across industry.

Q Which are some of the niche products and experiences gaining momentum among the affluent Indian travellers?

Northern Lights, Wildlife Travel, Exotic Islands (e.g. Maldives Water Villa, Floating Breakfast), Adventure (Bungee Jumping, Paragliding, Shark Cage Diving, ATV Rides), Self drive on a holiday (in visually attractive cars like a Mini Cooper), Exotic Dining (e.g. Undersea restaurant, Ice Cafes, Sky dining). ♦

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