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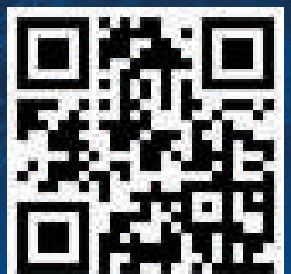
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Govt planning to launch two mega tourism trails in Himalaya, Ganga: G Kishan Reddy

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The government is planning to launch two mega adventure tourism trails in the Himalaya and the Ganga this year, Tourism



Minister G Kishan Reddy said.

Addressing a session at the G-20 tourism working group meeting, Reddy said the trails are expected to be launched this year.

"The Ministry will work with states and industries for development of two adventure mega trails in 2023 — the Ganga trail and northwestern Himalayan trails," he said.

A senior official said the government is starting with these two trails but will be launching other trails in future too.

"There will be Narmada trail from Amarkantank to Arabian sea, Kaveri river trail, West coast trail from Kutch to Kanyakumari, east coast trail from West Bengal to Kanyakumari," the official said.

The government is giving a major push to adventure tourism and promoting it at the second G-20 tourism working group meeting held in Siliguri and Darjeeling. Reddy said India's topography provides for an ideal destination for sustainable adventure tourism.

"We have a 7,000-km coastline, 70 per cent of the Himalayas, about 700 kilometres of rivers, sand desert and cold desert in Ladakh...all of which provide opportunities for a variety of adventure activities for both domestic and foreign tourists," Reddy said. ♦

Vietnam Airlines to launch 7 weekly flights to Mumbai from May 20

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Starting from May 20, national flag carrier of Vietnam, Vietnam Airlines (VNA) will open a new route connecting Mumbai with a frequency of 7

On this occasion, Vietnam Airlines has launched special fares for non-stop service between Vietnam and India. The round-trip ticket including taxes and fees is from 22,972 INR for customers buying tickets at



flights per week.

Specifically, Vietnam Airlines operates 4 flights per week on the Mumbai–Hanoi route, departing on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays, and 3 flights per week on the Mumbai–Ho Chi Minh route, departing on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

Vietnam Airlines' ticket offices and agents. Offer applies to tickets purchased and departing until the end of May 28, 2023. (Terms & conditions apply).

The new route of VNA will contribute significantly to strengthening trade, cultural, social, and tourism connections between the two countries. ♦

EL AL to resume non-stop services from Delhi and Mumbai in October

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Israel's national carrier EL AL announced that it is all set to resume non-stop flight services from Delhi and Mumbai to Israel from late October 2023, after a break of three years. The overfly agreement with Saudi Arabia and Oman for Israeli airlines was recently finalized, allowing for a shorter flight duration of 5.5 hours for Mumbai and 6.5 hours for Delhi. The flight ticket sales starting in April 2023, starting at \$399 for Lite tickets. EL AL will operate four non-stop weekly flights from Mumbai to Israel on the Boeing 737 with Economy and Business service classes, and two non-stop weekly flights

to Delhi on either the Boeing 787 or 777, both wide-bodied aircraft.

Commenting on this, Shlomi Zafrani, VP, Commerce and International Affairs, EL AL, said, "We are excited to launch these new flight routes from India to Israel, which were made possible thanks to the overfly agreement with Oman. We anticipate there will be high demand for these flights due to vast business activity between the two countries, as well as constant growth in Indian tourism to Israel. Israel is a beloved vacation destination to the Indian people, whether it is a family-oriented trip or an organised group vacation."

Air India is scheduled to increase their

frequencies from existing 3 daily flights per week to 5 daily flights per week from 26th March 2023. In addition, they will be starting to operate direct flights on the sectors from Mumbai and Bengaluru by June and Oct respectively with competitive prices.

According to Sammy Yahia, Director of tourism India and Philippines, "The new announcements from El Al and Air India will boost tourism from and to Israel. The new air corridor over Saudi Arabia and Oman is likely to stimulate growth in the aviation sector.



The airlines from India will be able to offer more competitive prices and reduce the flying time to five hours direct flight making it easier for passengers to travel. The statistics speaks for themselves, Jan and Feb 2023 is 24% better than 2019". Yahia also said that Israel is a country with a rich cultural, historical, and religious heritage, and is home to a variety of attractions that offer something for everyone. "Whether you are interested in history, culture, nature, or just looking for a unique experience, Israel is a destination that is sure to deliver," he said. ♦



‘India is the second largest source market for student travel’

During the first ever two-city Brand USA Sales Mission in India post the pandemic, **Jackie Ennis, Vice President, Global Markets, Brand USA** spoke to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about the growth statistics from India, key segments of focus and visas.

Q India is an important source market for Brand USA. What kind of growth have you seen in 2022, and your forecast for 2023?

During 2018-19, India arrived into the top 10 international source markets for the USA, and what was interesting is that they were one of the highest spenders. We also saw that during the pandemic and in 2021, Indians have consistently travelled to the USA.

We saw 1.25 million Indian arrivals in 2022, very close to our peak year of 2019 which saw 1.47 million arrivals from India. Besides, during 2022, India ranked 4th among our top 10 source markets, excluding Canada and Mexico. India is a

very important source market for us and has consistently climbed in ranking. Moreover, during the first two months of 2023, we have already seen 200,000 arrivals from India.

Q Tell us about the new and additional flight connections to the USA?

The purchase of Air India by the Tatas has created huge advantage for people travelling to the USA, because the airline has made it clear that the US is going to be a major area of focus. Currently, AI operates 47 non-stop flights to USA, with 16 direct connections to San Francisco. With the

purchase of new aircraft, they should announce flights to new gateways in the USA. In the past 4 months, AI started 3 flights each from Bengaluru and Mumbai, and in February launched 7 flights from Mumbai to JFK Airport.

Alongside, IndiGo with its codeshare with Turkish Airlines, services Tier-II and III markets in India via the Istanbul hub. Air travel is recording strong growth and 80 percent of all Indian visitors to the US, opt for gateways in Europe, Japan, Singapore and the Middle East, and they do not mind one-stop flights.

We also have United Airlines and American Airlines offering one-stop connections. We

believe, that there will be a big push soon for more flights to India from these homegrown US carriers, once the Ukraine war situation eases.

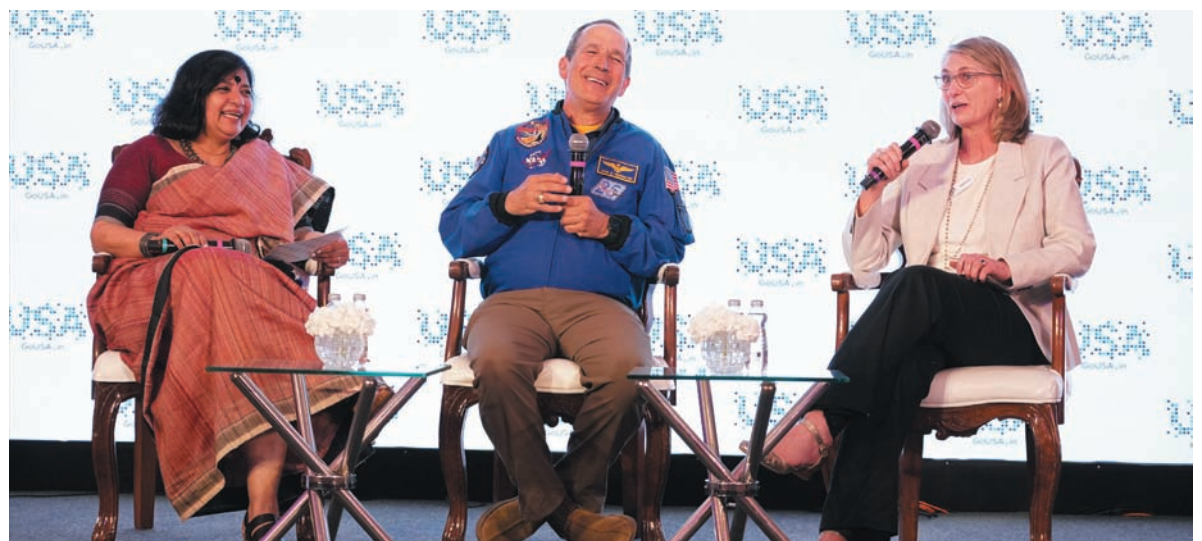
Q The VFR segment is a big source market for Brand USA from India. How are you tapping this market?

VFR is a really important segment due to its emotional ties and affinity with the Indian diaspora in the USA. An Indian VFR traveller is now less likely to spend time with only family, but also wants to go around and explore the USA. The travel hook is VFR, but it's really leisure to experience the diversity of USA that interests this segment. They are certainly a part of our promotional campaigns.

There are more students visiting the USA from India, and every student gets family and extended relatives for their admissions and graduation ceremonies. Last year, the highest number of students from India went to study in the USA, and that's one of the things to emphasise that they study in different parts of the country, not only in the major cities. These student visitors serve as ambassadors of travel to the USA. The Indian market is the second largest source of student travel, and last year India emerged as being the number one.

Q The delay in issuance of US visas is a big hurdle for travel. How do you expect to reach your target in this situation?

Visa has been challenge of late for sure, but there are a lot of people



Sheema Vohra, MD, Sartha Global Marketing with John Herrington, former NASA Astronaut and Jackie Ennis



in India who have a valid 10-year US visa. This year, 200,000 visas have been issued to Indians, with the US Consular Service doing a commendable job, and has set a target of over 1 million visas for Indians by this year's end.

The US Missions have opened Saturday services, and called in retired staff to assist with the load. Moreover, Indians are allowed to travel to other markets to apply for quicker processing. For back-end processing, they are trying to rope in overseas Missions where the visa load is comparatively

low. This should cut down the wait time, which is a computer generated estimation that fluctuates based on the demand at any given point.

It is also noteworthy that 3 million Indians have a valid US visa at any point of time, and many of these repeat visitors were the ones who travelled to the USA last year.

Q What kind of marketing activities have you planned for India?

This two-city Sales Mission in

Mumbai and New Delhi is our first physical engagement in three years, post-September 2019. In Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, and Bengaluru we are now screening our film "Into Nature's Wild" for the travel trade and media. Additionally, we also held trade networking events in Chandigarh and Ahmedabad. We are increasing our presence in the travel trade, including the Tier-II and III markets in India.

During the pandemic, we ran a robust education program on our globe-learning programme 'USA Discovery Programme'. India has one of the highest engagements for this e-learning programme globally, with 10,000 badges issued to agents over the last 3 years. We conducted 18 webinars and 100 trainings for small and mid-sized agencies across India. As the market in India is evolving, we are meeting new players and engaging with them. It is not about doing something radically different since we are still in the recovery phase. As competition is stiff in international markets,

we aim to reinforce the range of opportunities and experiences in the USA. We also took 6 agents from India on a FAM trip to Taxes.

Q What is the objective of Brand USA making the movie "Into Nature's Wild"?

We treat the travel trade similarly to consumers in terms of creating aspiration for the USA. An example being shows on OTT platform GoUSA TV showcasing outdoor and other unique activities. The messaging of this movie now resonates with people's sensibilities post Covid. It also inspires via USA's epic landscapes and wide outdoors that are accessible for exploration. The idea is to have visitors get out and explore nature.

The USA is also a hot spot for global cuisine, and we are keen to tap the booming luxury travel market with shopping choices, and variety of farm to food options. Luxury, movie and sports tourism is another key area that we want to showcase in India. ♦

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Oman Air completes three-decade of service

NEWS ROUND UP

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Oman Air is celebrating a major milestone this month with the occasion of its 30th anniversary, a journey which began in March 1993 with a single flight between the cities of Muscat and Salalah. The route, operated by Boeing 737-300, marked the launch of the airline's domestic network, which was followed shortly after with its first international flight between Muscat and Dubai. Over the past three decades, the airline has gone from strength to strength and now flies to over 45 destinations as far as Europe and the Far East, with a strong international presence and a reputation for providing high quality products and outstanding customer service.

"Thirty years as Oman's national airline is a milestone to be proud of," said Eng. Abdulaziz Al Raisi, CEO, Oman Air. "In that time, Oman Air has grown from a small regional carrier connecting Omanis across the country to an award-winning airline connecting visitors from around the world to Oman's diverse natural beauty and rich culture. Despite the challenges of the last few years, our goal continues to be to serve our country by enabling Oman's Vision 2040

ambitions, whether through job creation, supporting the tourism and logistics industries, or increasing inward investment. With three decades of experience and expertise to build on, we're looking to the future with renewed optimism."



A cornerstone of Oman's socio-economic development, since its maiden flight, Oman Air has carried millions of passengers into the country, providing them with an authentic introduction to Omani hospitality and culture. It has laid the foundations for a tourism industry that has increased ten-fold over the last 30 years, contributing to the creation of hundreds of thousands of direct and indirect jobs. It has transformed the local aviation industry, not least by bringing training in-country with its state-of-the-art Flight Training Centre, as well as running a number of successful graduate training programmes. Meanwhile, it has maintained a steady rise in Omanisation, which now

stands at 94% (excluding female cabin crew).

Keeping pace with the rapid development of the aviation industry, the airline continues to operate a fleet of modern, fuel-efficient aircraft, while driving its commitment to operational excellence. In 2022, Oman Air was ranked most punctual in the Middle East and Africa, as per the results of the 2022 On-Time Performance Review by global aviation analytics leader, Cirium. The airline's on-time arrivals stood at 91.38%, making it one of the best performing airlines globally. At the same time, its on-board products have attracted international acclaim, most recently earning the 2023 5-Star Major Airline rating by the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX), as well as the World's Leading Airline - Business Class and World's Leading Airline - Customer Experience at the World Travel Awards 2022.

As it looks to the coming years, Oman Air is working towards joining the oneworld Alliance, which will see it broaden its network's global reach and provide guests with huge benefits and greater travel options, while further strengthening its leading position in the Middle East by focusing on agility, efficiency, and new market opportunities. ♦

Israel Ministry of Tourism, India showcases popular destinations through interactive webinar

TBM Staff | Hyderabad

In continuation of their initiative to educate the travel agents in India and promoting International Destinations especially to the segments MICE, Leisure, the Israel Ministry of Tourism, India organised an interactive webinar on March 21, 2023 on the Land of Creation called Showcase Israel. The agenda of the webinar was to promote Israel tourism and to showcase the various unique things that can be experienced in Israel.

The webinar highlighted the climate, geography, religion, transportation and new destinations of Israel. It also focused on destinations such as Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, the Dead Sea, Eilat, Haifa etc.

Located in the Eastern Mediterranean, Israel is no more than a seven-hour flight from India. From India, the national carrier Air India offers direct flights to Tel Aviv. The country offers a sunny climate, and a wide variety of historical, archaeological, and religious sites. Israel also houses several UNESCO World Heritage sites across the country, displaying an intriguing contrast between the ancient and modern periods. Opting for an Israeli visa is very easy, as the processing time takes only 3 to 4 days. One can apply through Israel Visa Process Centres in Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi and Kolkata.

Sammy Yahia, Director of Tourism, India & Philippines – Israel Ministry of Tourism and Amruta Bangera, Director of Marketing – Israel Ministry of Tourism, India, during the webinar updated attendees on diverse facets of various regions, cities, and sights of the Holy Land – Israel to enable travel agents to curate itineraries incorporating new things to do and see.

The country is a melting pot of different cultures, in between the 9,000,000 population 74.2%

of people are Jewish, 20.9% are Arab, and other religious people consist of 4.8%. The official languages of the country are Hebrew and Arabic. However, the people of Israel are well-versed in English and Russian.

The diverse country has so much to offer from unparalleled hospitality to lip-smacking street foods. The webinar guided on the unmatched gastronomical delicacies that the country offers. Street foods such as different kinds of shawarma, falafel, hummus, burrata, and homemade cheese are world-known delicacies that are much liked by food enthusiasts. There is a lot of option for vegetarians as well. Israeli wines are also famous for their top-notch flavour which is



SAMMY YAHIA
Director of Tourism
India & Philippines
Israel Ministry of Tourism

made with locally grown grapes. The country is well connected through railways, buses, sherut taxis, and self-drive.

The webinar showcased various educational videos on destinations such as The Dead Sea, The Negev, The Sea of Galilee, Be'er Sheva, Safed, Mitzpe Ramon, The Carmel, Jaffa, and Hula Lake. Infrastructure wise the country has some great Highways, Bicycle Trails, and Walking Trails.

Jerusalem: Situated on a plateau in the Judean Mountains between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea, Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. It is one of the oldest cities in the world and



is considered to be a holy city for the three major Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv is one of the most vibrant cities in the world. Titled as the 'Mediterranean Capital of Cool' by the New York Times, this is a 24-hour city with

Amruta Bangera, Director of Marketing – Israel Ministry of Tourism, India, informed that to further promote Israel as a popular destination among Indian tourists the tourism board has planned a few marketing activities by focusing on four points, such as –

- **Email marketing:** Send a follow-up email to the webinar attendees with a recap of the webinar content and a call-to-action to visit Israel. Include links to relevant resources, such as travel guides, booking websites, and testimonials from previous travellers.
- **Travel trade partnerships:** Collaborate with travel trade partners, such as travel agencies, tour operators, and travel trade publications, to promote the webinar content and the Israel destination to their networks. Offer exclusive discounts, packages, or incentives to incentivize bookings.
- **Webinar replay:** Upload the webinar recording to YouTube channel and share the link on social media, email newsletters, and other relevant platforms. Encourage viewers to share the replay with their networks to further promote the destination.
- **Workshop:** Contemplate on conducting workshops such as for VISA application, DMC selection, ease of working with the Israelis, Itinerary building etc. ♦



AMRUTA BANGERA
Director of Marketing
Israel Ministry of Tourism
India

a unique pulse, combining sandy Mediterranean beaches with world-class nightlife, a buzzing cultural scene, incredible food, and UNESCO - recognized architecture.

At the end of the webinar, the organisers conducted a quiz show on the destination presented, which generated a lot of interest among the participants.

While speaking on the responses received from the Indian travel trade, Sammy Yahia, Director of Tourism, India & Philippines – Israel Ministry of Tourism said, "The response has been good. People really liked the informative webinar."

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THE ENDURING RELEVANCE OF TRAVEL JOURNALISM

Any fears about travel media being swamped by robots armed with AI is as ridiculous as it can get.

At a recent informal online forum of mediapersons I encountered some nervous sniggers. The tenor of the discussions was sufficient to call for a frank tabling of fears that many in the media deftly brush under the carpet.

In the late nineties legacy newspapers that strutted around like the last word on media were being upstaged by niche publications. Later as the new century dawned, the printed word was startled by online media. It's been just a few years and now technology has created a new dimension with AI.

With ChatGPT and its latest cousin GPT4, anyone with a computer and some grey cells can seemingly write any article, make a film and do any research and communicate on any subject.

Travel journalism is turning as cutting edge and challenging as it can get. These AI tools, 'fed' with data, can now seek info on their own and even analyse and suggest solutions. Those in its favour hail it as a valuable tool to use with adequate and cross-checked caution. Using critical thinking, travel media can effectively use ChatGPT to support their work.

The relevance of travel media to travel business and industry, always a vital supportive catalyst, is well accepted. The journo keeps ears to the ground and notices shifts in trends in real time. Hence those feeling threatened by AI must realise the doubts are only due to incomplete understanding of a new tech.

Though outside of erstwhile traditional systems, 'social media' has not blurred the value attached to the original term. On the contrary, it has underlined it.

Travel journalism isn't going anywhere. It's just expanding exponentially in the digital age with social media mores.

Those sceptical of AI swallowing the relevance of traditional media only betray an unwillingness to keep pace. In fact, the thrill of nimble footed journalistic expertise is out there for the taking.

However it's clearly not meant for the types of the one who snarkily remarked - 'You mean just like travel agents who can still book airline tickets?'

So should we actually worry that future travellers could simply be content enjoying travelling, plonked on their sofas, popcorn in hand?

Anurag Yadav
Industry Expert

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

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

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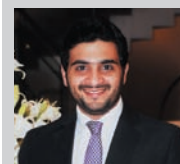
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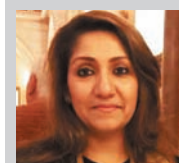
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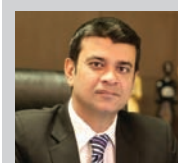
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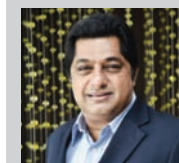
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Q Paris has been the most popular destination for travellers to Europe as well as France. How do you plan to maintain this position?

In September 2023, we will be hosting the Rugby World Cup, and most of the games will happen in the Paris Region and Stade de France. The destination is ready to welcome all travellers and visitors. We are offering visitors landing at our airports and inquiring at the information desk a digital route map on their phones of sites and ways to explore the destinations of their choice. With our monuments, historical sites and customer experiences, the Paris Region is positioned to remain on top of the mind recall for visitors.

We are hosting the Olympics in the summer of 2024, and therefore have positioned sports as the centerpiece of our activities to showcase the surroundings

keen to visit monuments and sites showcasing the French civilization and history. Indians have a great civilization with lot of rich history, and they are keen to discover our historical past. We are developing the Indian market; and are really keen on making Indians return to the destination, and let them know of different destinations to visit.

Q How important is B2B market post Covid?

Rendezvous en France is the biggest international tourism show that we have in France, and this year it was hosted in Paris. Our international partners like tour operators and travel



‘Our target is to make India rank among the Top 10 inbound source markets’

“By end of 2023 or early 2024, we are coming to India with different suppliers to propose new dedicated offers and experiences to the market.”

of the stadiums hosting the tournaments. It is important for spectators coming for the Games to experience our destination like never before.

Q In terms of accommodation, are there any new openings in the pipeline?

The Paris Region has 160,000 rooms, so there is no problem in terms of accommodation options. Our Region has more rooms than in Europe, and there is also a choice of vacation rentals and Airbnb stays available.

Q Where does India rank in the pecking order of priority markets for Paris Region Tourist Board?

Our target is to make India rank among the Top 10 inbound source markets. By end of 2023 or early 2024, we are coming to India with different suppliers to propose new dedicated offers and experiences to the market.

The Indian travellers are really

agents are our first ambassadors in proposing and communicating with customers on different offers that we offer as a destination. For us they are a key to develop the clientele; we do talk to B2C to create an inspiration to travel to France and Paris; but we need support of our B2B partners to execute our plans.

Q How are you tapping the MICE segment from India?

Paris sees a good traffic from leisure travellers. However, we can see that the MICE is not bouncing back as fast as we wish post Covid as there are less meetings coming into the destination. We want to attract premium leisure customers and seminars, congresses, conferences and corporate incentives. For that we have different proposals and partners that help us in securing those trips. The Gulf carriers are getting people from South East Asia to Europe with a stopover at their hubs where travellers

indulge in airport shopping. We want visitors come directly to Europe and Paris, and start their trip spending in our airports and destinations.

Q Over the next five years, are you making any significant investments in terms of revising marketing budget for India?

We don't have a plan yet, because we are looking at the way every market is responding. Because 2022 is going to be the first complete year of travel post pandemic. Therefore, we are seeing how the different markets are stabilizing considering the air capacity. Destinations are suffering in different regions of the world due to the curtailed air capacity. Because of pandemic, a lot of legacy airlines have put away their fuel consumable airplanes to replace them by neo engines. Airbus and Boeing are facing a delay of two years in delivering airplane orders. Therefore, a lot of air traffic is still at curtailed capacity.

We are now opening new routes in Sao Paulo, Brazil and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and different airports from India will be connected to Paris with Air France and other airlines gradually improving their capacity. We invest in countries where there is a direct connection. ♦

With the Paris Region set to host the Rugby World Cup and Olympics 2024, **Christophe Decloux, Managing Director, Visit Paris Region** talks to **TravelBiz Monitor** about recovery post Covid, preparedness of the destination to host these large scale sporting events, and direct air access.

Group travel continues to remain a popular product for tour operating companies, and the profile of travellers has only expanded with the need to experience and explore domestic as well as international destinations, with like-minded individuals.

Disha Shah Ghosh takes a closer look at the changing demand and growth of the segment in India, with the rise of special interest tours in the past decade.



Group Travel Evolving at a Rapid Pace

A couple of years ago, a senior executive of now defunct tour operating company while addressing an industry gathering stated that the travel season in India begins with group departures. Thinking of it now in 2023, when the world has evolved, the traveller has changed and technology has become an enabler, one wonders if group tours are even relevant?

It may sound difficult to digest, but group travel remains one of the most preferred options for Indians. Whether it is the sheer comfort of travelling with likeminded individuals, to all variables of travel being taken care of before the departure, the kind of ease it provides remains non-negotiable.

It is important to note here that the very scope of group travel has evolved from a fixed departure tour with a standard itinerary for all age groups with select attractions to be explored, to indulging in local experiences, exploring the destination at one's own pace while discovering new facets hitherto unheard of.

Disposable incomes have made travel a

necessity from being a luxury, and technology has brought destination information at the fingertip of a consumer. Travellers now have an overload of destination information available through social media platforms and influencer marketing. While a select set of traveller still prefers fixed departure tours,

customised travel has gained traction where one wants to experience a destination with like-minded individuals.

Talking about it, Sunila Patil, Director, Veena World, said, "The scope of group travel is definitely much more than ever before. Even though the world has opened up for



Sunila Patil
Director
Veena World



Daniel D'Souza
President & Country Head -
Holidays, SOTC Travel



Rajeev Kale
President & Country Head, Holidays,
MICE, Visa - Thomas Cook (India) Ltd



Monika Walter
Director
Eurocursions

travel, uncertainty still lingers when it comes to travel and the conditions attached with it. People need hand-holding and are looking for safety and security, as well as someone to rely on in case of emergencies. Travelling in groups is certainly quite reassuring for them."

Echoing similar views, Daniel D'Souza, President & Country Head - Holidays, SOTC Travel, stated, "Today, travellers across segments seek fresh and offbeat experiences, this is demand is prevalent in our GIT and FIT tours. We have also witnessed a trend of customers opting for longer GIT tours. Keeping this in mind, we have carefully tailored a wide range of across destinations – domestic and international – this includes vegetarian tours, active holidays, women's only tours, spiritual holidays, etc."

Changing Demand

With the change in world situation post Covid, and the desire to engage in new experiences, varied segment of travellers are seeking group travel, and special interest tours have only accelerated the demand. The very realisation that one can experience a destination with a special purpose has accelerated the need to travel. This is because one gets to engage with people with similar interests, and also in turn the tour package turns out to be cost-effective. The evolution of women traveller and the need to host weddings in exotic locations have given a shot in the arm to group travel with a purpose.

"Guests of all ages are travelling on group tours. Girls aged between 8 and 80 are travelling on Veena World's Women's Special tours. Families top the demographics on our tours followed by senior citizens and women travellers. While our honeymoon tours are super popular with newlyweds, Veena World's YOLO adventure tours cater to travellers aged 18 to 35... Nowadays, we also see younger age groups given the safety and security offered by group tours," Patil said.

Rajeev Kale - President & Country Head, Holidays, MICE, Visa - Thomas Cook (India) Limited, says what is noteworthy is the growing demand from young India (Gen Z and Millennials) with young working professionals driving desire for our outdoor-adventure products. "While we have witnessed 70:30 split in favour of FIT post travel restart, currently it is 60:40 and we are expecting it to become equal by this year. There has been a significant drop of approx. 10 years in the average age of our holiday customers with 55-60% of the travellers being women."

Segments like multigenerational families and couples continue to opt for both ready to book and customised holidays while there is a shift in demand for group tours among millennials and Gen Z, also women and solo travellers. "We have seen an upward trend from multi-generational families and ad hoc group of friends travelling together to celebrate special occasions, festivals and holidays," Kale said.

While safety & security tops the list while travelling, for multi-destination travel, connecting flights, land transport, accommodation booking, and meal arrangements can be a cumbersome exercise while planning it all alone, that's when a traveller seeks assistance, especially if travelling with the entire family across age groups.

"On group travel we have noticed that

guests are choosing to take their time in discovering a destination over a period of time. They are curious and inquisitive about the local culture and experiences and enjoy local cultural shows and are open to trying local food as well. They also like to witness natural phenomenon and appreciate nature as well as monuments and historical places. The demand for Northern Lights tours in Scandinavia and Iceland is an excellent example," Patil said.

Monika Walter, Director, Eurocursions, believes that travellers these days want to explore destinations at their own pace, selecting locations and restaurants of their choice, rather than just rush from one place to another. "I believe that fixed departures are on their way of fading out since travellers have realised that would like to spend more time in exploring a location than just being bound by time. With regards to customised tour, a group prefers on exploring the destination at their will, adding in components like a chauffeur-driven vehicle or indulging in meal at a Michelin star restaurant, and sharing the cost with like-minded individuals."

Depending on the budget, and the availability of time, additional components are added to the tour package. Walter believes travellers prefer the freedom to pick and choose options for their trip, and therefore a curated tour is their best bet.

With the passage of time, new destinations have gained prominence, new modes of connectivity have been established, and traveller interests have developed.

From one-size-fits all trip to a specially curated tour, travellers are seeking new options to travel. This has led to competition among travel companies to satiate the needs of travellers. What remains unchanged is travelling in a group, enjoying the beauty of travel with individuals having similar interests. ♦

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37% of affluent Indians intend to travel in groups during coming 12 months

TBM Staff | Mumbai

According to a latest research by New YouGov the pandemic has fuelled the appetite for travel across the globe, and nearly three in five urban Indians state that travel has become more important to them since the pandemic (57%) compared to one in eight who disagree with the statement (12%). Agreement is higher among affluent* in India, with three-quarters of them saying so.

YouGov's Global travel & tourism whitepaper 2023 covering 18 international markets, gets under the skin of high-end travel, to understand what luxury travel looks like post-pandemic. It focuses on the attitudes and behaviours of affluent consumers, particularly the affluent under 35s – the audience that will shape the luxury travel industry of the future.

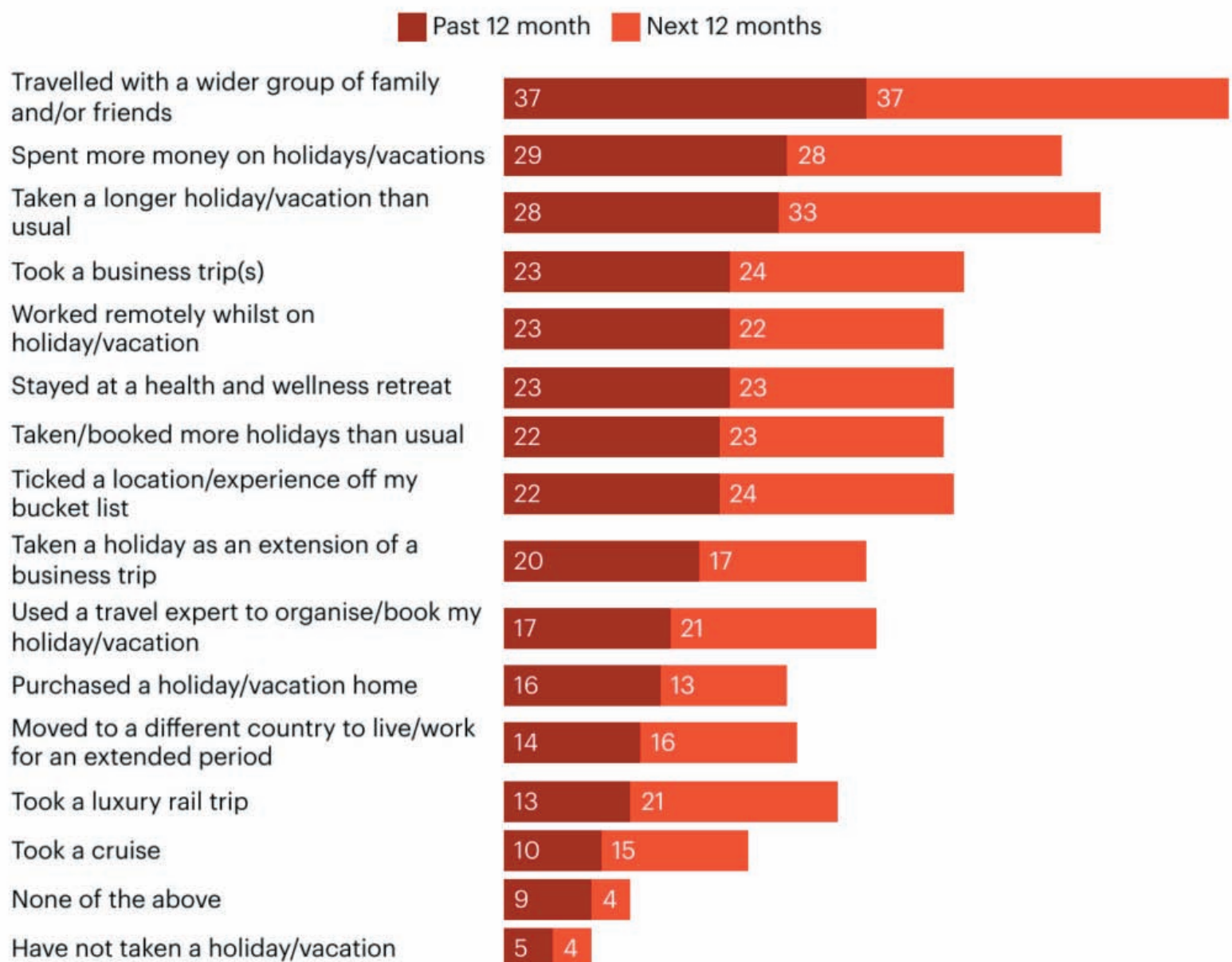
Looking specifically among the affluent travellers in India, it has been observed that travelling with a wider group of family or friends continues to be the top travel activity

year on year. Almost two in five (37%) have travelled with a wider group in the past 12 months, and the same proportion intend to do so in the forthcoming 12 months. Even though this is the top activity, taking a luxury rail trip sees the largest increase (of +8% points) from the previous year. Another travel activity that affluent Indians are planning on undertaking to a greater extent in the next 12 months is taking a longer holiday than usual or taking a cruise (+5%pts each).

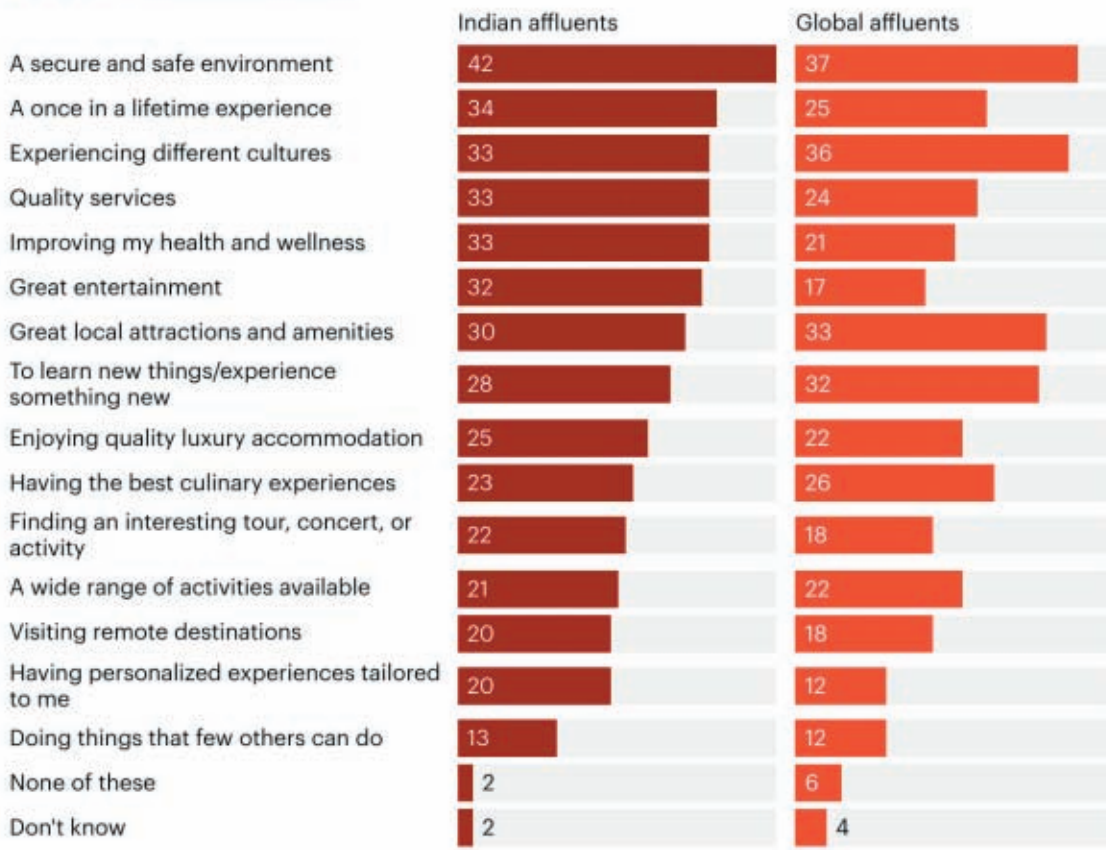
Additionally, YouGov research reveals the

Travel behaviour of Indian affluents- Past/ Future

Which of the following travel related activities have you done/ will do in the last 12 months/ next 12 months?



Factors affluent travellers are looking for in their next travel destination



affluent) and having a personalised experience (20% vs 12%), and less likely to focus on learning something new (32% vs. 28%).

Enjoying luxury accommodations, having the best culinary experiences, visiting remote destinations, and doing things few others can do resonate with affluent consumers and luxury travellers who will be looking for brands, experiences and travel companies that understand their individual needs and unique requirements.

Methodology

The insights in this report are drawn from a recent global YouGov Custom survey to understand what luxury travel looks like post pandemic, explore luxury travel experiences, what affluent consumers are seeking and their future travel aspirations. Covering 18 global markets of more than 19,000 respondents, this survey results were further bolstered by connecting respondent level data to YouGov's proprietary syndicated data solution, Global Travel Profiles, allowing us to merge our respondents and their answers to the 100,000s consumer attributes that we collect on an ongoing basis for audience segmentation and profiling.

priorities of global affluent travellers for their next travel destinations. Safety is the primary travel priority among global affluent travellers (at 37%), followed by a desire to experience diverse cultures (36%) and great local attractions and amenities (33%).

Among the affluent in India, most of the parameters rank higher, but safety is the top priority (at 42%).

For a third, having a once in a lifetime experience (34%), quality services (33%), improving their health and wellness (33%) and experiencing different cultures (33%) are important when choosing their next travel destination.

Compared to global affluent, they are more likely to prioritise a once in a lifetime experience (34% Indian affluent vs. 25% global

Our survey was fielded the week of 9th to 23rd November 2022. Data for India is based on a national online sample (of 18+) of 1007 respondents. The YouGov panel provides a naturally accurate and representative view of the population. Data is adjusted with mild weighting using interlocking demographic characteristics. ♦



Rendez-vous en France 2023

A Showcase of France's Touristic Offering to Global Audiences



©Atout France / Cédric Heisly

✍.....TBM Staff | Mumbai



Sheetal Munshaw, Director Atout France India

"India was formidably represented at the Rendezvous en France showcase this year through a delegation of 28 trade partners pan India and 4 B2B journalists. Through 2 full days of fruitful interactions with our French suppliers, our Indian partners were able to update their product knowledge on France, learn about new products and fortify existing relationships. Our delegation, including the media, were able to experience the diverse touristic offering of France through pre and post tours that took place in different French regions such as Auvergne Rhône Alpes, Grand Est, Occitanie and Paris. With outbound travel

back in full flow, we are confident that France will continue to stay on top of the Indian visitor wish list and the demand for France will further increase thanks to major sporting events that will take place in France in 2023 and 2024 – notably the Rugby World Cup in 2023 and the Paris Olympics and Paralympic Games in 2024. As part of a press conference focused exclusively on the subject of major events 2023-2024 our CEO, Ms Caroline Leboucher alongside Mr Thierry Rey – Paris 2024 Special Advisor and Mr Fabrice Favetto-Bon – Paris 2024 General Manager for On Location shared the road map of how France is gearing up for the Olympic Games and the varied hospitality offerings that visitors can look forward to as they witness this historic moment in France.

In addition, our global strategy will also integrate sustainable travel and its importance in the tourism landscape. France has been at the forefront in adapting sustainable practises in the domain of tourism and will continue to reinforce its positioning and strategy in this domain. This was showcased through a second press conference whereby 13 hallmark destinations in France unveiled their top most and unique travel experiences through a sustainable lens."

The 16th edition of Rendez-vous en France, the French tourism industry's top international B2B trade show, took place in Paris, in the Île-de-France Region, on March 21 and 22, 2023.

Record international tourism revenues (€58 billion in 2022) prove that travellers are returning to France in droves, particularly Europeans and Americans. This is a testament to the vibrancy and attractiveness of the French tourism sector.

To boost the French destination and support tourism professionals in a context that remains unstable (energy costs, climate events, inflation, and so on), Atout France invited nearly 1,850 tourism professionals to Paris for this major global tourism event.

With the support of longstanding partners, especially Air France and SNCF, the Paris Region Tourist Board, and the Paris Convention and Visitors Bureau in 2023, the goal this year was to present international distributors with high-quality and sustainable tourism products that are constantly being updated. This is even more important as France prepares to host the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic games, which are taking pride of place at the show this year.

This 2023 edition aimed to help the 660 French exhibitors bolster their business contacts with tour operators from around the world to improve their international reach. To make the best use of their time, exhibitors also set up pre-scheduled meetings with the 786 international tour operators invited by Atout France. With the return of many tour operators from India, Japan, South Korea, and the Middle East after lower numbers last year, this event played a key part in promoting the tourism sector's transformation and adaptation to today's challenges, as evidenced by the 26,000 business meetings that were undertaken.

For this 16th edition, Atout France organised 26 familiarisation trips to allow international buyers to explore 13 partner regions. These trips took decision-makers on unique journeys to explore the tourism potential of French destinations by discovering products and services in situ. A special post tour in Paris was also organised for the Indian



Courtesy: The Digital Travellers



Courtesy: The Digital Travellers

delegation by the Paris Region Tourist Board, the Paris Convention and Visitors Bureau and their local partners. The post tour made for an insightful discovery of Paris and its attractions.

The various trips were designed to showcase the destination and its products, particularly the latest attractions (Michelin-starred restaurants and bistros, well-known or lesser-known sites, accommodations, tourist sites, events, and so on). They also provided an opportunity to promote certain themes (wine tourism, gastronomy, savoir-faire, urban tourism, golf, cycling, culture, etc.) to international clients. These educational trips are a powerful tool to encourage buyers to schedule visits to these destinations in the short or long term.

As the world's top tourist destination, Paris and its region are constantly innovating to keep attracting visitors, with new sites and activities each year, unique events and exhibits on the programme, and some of the best accommodation options in Europe.

Paris will host the Olympic and Paralympic games in 2024, which provide an exciting opportunity to develop and update the tourism offering to welcome the entire world, while the Rugby World Cup will give the city the chance to highlight its best attributes.

Paris Region is the top destination in Europe for business tourism and a global platform for business clientele, with the expected

Reactions from Indian Travel Trade



Anoop Kanuga, Director, Bathija Travels Pvt. Ltd

I had interesting meetings with B2B suppliers, and got to learn about different regions in France which would appeal to repeat travellers. The show was very well organised, and so was the post FAM of Paris. Sheetal Munshaw and her team at Atout France India went out of their way to make this event truly rewarding.



Neelu Samant, Owner / Director, Quantum Travels Pvt Ltd

This was the first time I attended Rendezvous en France. It was an amazing opportunity for networking and great learning. It was a superb execution by Atout France India team, and great team effort by Sheetal, Shriya, Pusha and Asmita. Each of the region in France has tremendous potential; and a unique charm, which floored me!



Karan Vakharia, Director - Business Development, Pathfinders Holidays Pvt Ltd.

Attending Rendezvous en France 2023 has been an exciting experience even though we have been promoting and selling France since a long time. Although the Atout France roadshow in India does educate us about some of the top travel regions and products of France, it was a great experience to discover and explore lesser-known regions and destinations through this annual event. We have come back richer with knowledge of France, which will help in creating newer and impressive travel itineraries for the destination.

return of 10.5 million business visitors in 2023 thanks to the sector's recovery. Paris Region is preparing itself by constantly expanding its offering with the opening of new sites and event spaces to host big events.

The Paris Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Paris Île-de-France Regional Tourist Board are actively working to make the destination accessible, sustainable, and remarkable. The 2023 Rendez-vous en France served as a perfect moment to display this progress to the entire world. ♦



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Getting tourism back to the bottom of the pyramid!

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

Modern tourism is somewhat elitist. It is believed that those with sufficient disposable incomes are more likely to undertake tourism-related travel, with certain high-end products like wellness and destination weddings often associated with exclusive experiences that can be expensive. However, the other way of looking at tourism is as a leveller. It creates a lot of jobs and facilitates the distribution of tourism receipts. In a post-COVID scenario, it is all the more critical that contemporary tourism contributes by distributing the benefits as it keeps the circulation of the economy going- more people spending on tourism and tourism recharging incomes and benefits.

In a recent webinar, the prime minister pointed out that we in India have had a long and deep-rooted tradition of travel even when travel was challenging and amenities were almost non-existent. He pointed out that we must build on that long-standing tradition of tourism- *Deshatan* and *Paryatan* as we refer to it. COVID also taught us a lesson that the Indian economy could survive because of our sizeable domestic market. Post-COVID, we are seeing maddening domestic traffic at most of our popular tourist destinations- suggesting that we can probably add a good number of destinations to our offer basket where domestic and inbound visitors may spill over.

Today, to reap the benefits of tourism, it must be broad-based, like the bottom of the pyramid. The bottom of the pyramid has two important interrelated characteristics- one, it is at the bottom, and two, it is broad-based. It means the costs must go down, and therefore it will be within reach of the masses. C.K. Prahalad's theory of the "bottom of the pyramid" (BOP) refers to the idea that the world's middle and lower-income people represent an enormous untapped market for businesses.

The time is ripe to make high-end and luxury tourism products accessible to a broader customer base. One of the indicators of an evolving society is that rare goods and services, which were once beyond the means of commoners, are now available to the community at large. As India aspires

to evolve as an advanced society, among other things, tourism experiences should be within reach of the general public.

For example, as the Indian economy grows, there are increasing numbers of individuals with higher disposable incomes and mentally draining jobs. Modern lifestyle is tiring and emotionally demanding. Especially post-COVID, travel for wellness recuperation is in demand. Wellness tourism typically involves travel to destinations that offer health and wellness-related activities, such as yoga retreats, spa treatments, and fitness programs. Unfortunately, these experiences can be costly, often requiring specialised facilities and services.

Similarly, a wedding is a once-in-a-lifetime experience and a culturally formed occasion in the oriental cultures, making it exotic also for the west. Therefore, many people these days look forward to exclusive wedding experiences at a chosen destination. However, destination weddings are expensive, as they involve travel to a specific location to get married. In addition, destination weddings often involve renting out a venue or resort, hiring vendors, and organising transportation and accommodations for guests.

To get tourism to the bottom of the pyramid, costs must come down. And for lowering costs, the supply side should come with an offering of a wide variety of experiences in both quantity and quality. As the prime minister gave an example- if a family from north India has to solemnise two marriages, they may choose to go to the east for one and to the south for the second. For more customers to demand these experiences and for more entrepreneurs to choose to take up this challenge, we need to create better infrastructure as a common-pool facility. For example, a ghost (abandoned) village in Uttarakhand can be refurbished and presented as a destination for a wedding with a natural Himalayan backdrop. Locals who have returned back from metros during COVID may be trained for event jobs skills- chefs, decorators, F&B servers, transporters, suppliers, etc.

Budget travel, low-cost accommodations, and wellness retreat discounts and promotions make tourism more reasonable. In addition, the Ministry of AYUSH and the



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.

Ministry of Tourism can also train wellness service providers at all levels. This will lower industry training costs and increase the supply of trained staff, making our wellness industry more competitive in a recessionary world.

To ensure the growth and sustainability of the tourism industry, it is crucial to make it accessible and affordable to people at the bottom of the economic pyramid. By creating products and services tailored to this segment's needs and financial constraints, tourism businesses must tap into an enormous untapped market while generating profits and creating new economic opportunities. ♦

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



HP plans to develop Kangra as tourism capital: CM

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The Himachal Pradesh (HP) government has devised blueprints for various projects in Kangra district that will improve the tourists' experience besides providing them modern

facilities, said Chief Minister Thakur Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu.

Apart from opening HP for the "All season" tourism activities, the

government is working towards developing Kangra as the "Tourism Capital of the State", said the CM.

He said Kangra district has immense tourism potential as it has Dhauladhar mountain, a historical temple and scope for adventure activities. The government with an aim to promote tourism in this district is working on to strengthening infrastructure for which INR 390 crores will be spent by the Asian Development Bank.

He said the government has already devised blueprints for various projects in the district that will improve the tourists' experience besides providing them modern facilities. The government has proposed the construction of an international standard golf course at Heritage Village Pragpur. He added that under the Nai Manzilen Nai Rahein scheme, works worth INR 20.59 crore are being carried out in Kangra, while INR 46 lakh has been released for the renovation of



the historical temple. The government has also made efforts for the construction of the Chamunda ropeway from Adi Himani Temple. ♦



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Kolkata - Yangon



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Mayfair-On-Sea, Morjim Goa

A fillip to hospitality landscape

✍️.....Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

TravelBiz Monitor organised familiarisation trips to the newly-opened Mayfair-On-Sea, Morjim Goa recently. The familiarisation trips were undertaken in three phases, and around 70 select travel agents from Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Pune, and Nagpur participated in seeing the property.

The trip assumed significance against the backdrop of tourism recovery post-pandemic. Besides this, Goa has always been very close to the heart of the tourism industry. Naturally, the participants during their trip took keen interest in the property.

After the trip, TravelBiz Monitor spoke to people from across the cities to ascertain their views and they are unanimous in saying that they stayed in well-furnished accommodations that come with modern interiors, contemporary furniture, and suites with bath tubs, among other category specific amenities.

Describing the Mayfair-On-Sea as a good property for buyouts and celebrations, Subhash Motwani, Founder Director, Namste Tourism, said, "Located on white sandy Morjim Beach with good amenities



and many options for various activities makes the property perfect for small incentive groups or even families who wish to stay in North Goa, far from the madding crowd." He also said that it was a well organised trip.

Besides amenities, location gives the property a very advantageous position when compared with other hotels and resorts in similar categories in Goa. Margaret Rasquinha, OwnerDreamscape Tours





Pvt Ltd, opined that the USP of the Mayfair-On-Sea is its location. "The property is well suited for middle and high-end customers and families. It is also good for small corporate conferences and events," said Rasquinha.

Narrating his experience, Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI, said, "I had the pleasure of spending 2 nights at Mayfair- On- Sea a few weeks ago. I was going back to Morjim after many years and I was afraid that Morjim, too, like many other beaches would have been ruined by over-commercialisation. But the resort was a delightful surprise. It's set right on the beach which is pristine, the water is crystal clear and we witnessed a school of dolphins a short boat ride from shore." He also said that the Mayfair touch is evident in the warm hospitality - the ever smiling staff is always ready to attend to every guest's smallest need. "The pool is lovely and the three-bedroom villa attached to the resort is perfect for a group of friends or a large family. This is Mayfair's first property in Goa and it's a hit," said Prakash.

According to Jyot Jhaveri, Director, Sunday Pure Holidays, it was a well organised familiarisation trip right from arrival to departure. "The property of Mayfair is superb and they blended Mayfair culture and experience with Goan style. Since the property is right on the Morjim beach makes us feel that we are in our own private beach." Jhaveri also said that green cover in the resort and spacious rooms, bathrooms and sit-out balconies further reinforces the feeling of a

private beach. "Truly said, Space is Luxury," he said.

Apart from the location and amenities, the food and beverage of the resort has also impressed the participants of the familiarisation trip. "Food and Beverages are good," said Valmiki Hari Kishan, Director, Valimiki Travels. However, Kishan exhorted that the management of the property need to sort out the issue of cabs and coaches as they are exorbitantly charging the guests. "There are very few flights to North Goa which compel guests to touch South Goa hence paying more for flight tickets," he pointed out.

Ajay Kumar Vishwakarma, MD, Yatra Vacation, said that the property is perfect for any get together comprising 50-60 people. "It is suitable for all segments of travel," he said.

Mayfair on Sea is a lifestyle resort set on the white sands of Morjim Beach, in North Goa. It's nestled amid a tropical seaside garden with native fauna, highlighted by a shrine. Shaded sunbeds, statues, and ornamental plants dot the outdoor swimming pool.

Elegantly designed accommodations are positioned along the property, ending with the sea-facing villa. A beach club called Coy Koi overlooks lawns and the Arabian Sea beyond.

If things go in the right direction Mayfair-On-Sea, Morjim Goa, will soon emerge as one of the most preferred properties in the hospitality landscape of Goa. ♦

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Enchanting Istanbul

Asmita Mukherjee | Turkiye

Spanning between the two continents of Asia and Europe, Istanbul, Turkiye is the magical meeting place of East and West. Istanbul has been the centre of numerous empires over the centuries, the most significant of which were the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. A potpourri and melting pot of different cultures, the architectural marvels of Istanbul still reflect the history of the Roman-era and Ottoman-era. The unmatched gastronomy, hospitality, and architecture amalgamates the past and the future beautifully in the ancient city of Istanbul which is indeed an enthralling experience for a traveller.

Our 3-and-a-half-day Istanbul trip started on February 20. Our flight from Antalya Airport took 90 minutes to reach Istanbul Airport. The business class flight offered us various local food offerings along with soft drinks and Ayraan. Our first encounter with Istanbul Airport was quite impressive with its unique architecture, strong substructure, and superior technology. After collecting our luggage we headed for hotel CVK Park Bosphorus, which was to be our address in Istanbul over the next three days.

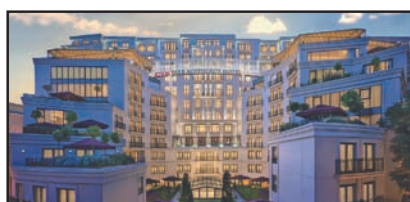
Our Istanbul itinerary not only included inspections of the top hotels but also enjoying the mesmerising sights and sounds of renowned historical sites such as Hagia Sofia (known as Ayasofya Camii in Turkish), Grand Bazaar, Galata Tower and activities such as luxury yacht joy rides on the mighty Bosphorus.

Hotels

CVK Park Bosphorus

This is located 45 kilometres away from new Istanbul International Airport. As we reached the hotel, the huge and aesthetically designed lobby grabbed our attention.

The hotel boasts 382 spacious rooms, luxury suites, and 68 well-established suites ranging from studio to four-bedroom alternatives. It also offers ample dining options such as Izaka Terrace, Stella



Lounge & Bar, Hezarfen S Lounge, Gümüşsuyu Restaurant, and Park Patisserie and Lounge.

Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at Sultanahmet

The 65 keys boutique yet beautiful heritage hotel is situated a stone's throw away from the Hagia Sofia Mosque at Sultanahmet. The unique elements of this property starting from the yellow burst of the façade to the Turkish textiles and motifs in each guest room attracts the patrons and connects them with the rich layers of Istanbul.



Hilton Istanbul Bosphorus

Hilton Istanbul Bosphorus holds a special place in history as the first Hilton hotel built outside the Americas and was the first modern hotel built in Europe after the Second World War. The hotel offers stunning views over the Bosphorus Strait. The 500 keys hotel boasts 36 meeting rooms which can hold approx 4,392 people.



The Peninsula Istanbul

Occupying four adjacent buildings along the Bosphorus, The Peninsula Istanbul offers guests a diverse array of accommodation choices. Many of the hotel's 177 rooms include 138 guest rooms and 39 lavish suites providing beautiful views over the water from floor-to-ceiling windows, balconies, and private terraces. The hotel is set to open a few of its meeting venues which are Yali Ballroom, Liman Room & Deniz Room, Yakamoz Garden, The Herb Garden, and The Rooftop Garden Suite Terrace.



Çırağan Palace Kempinski

This palatial luxury is the only Ottoman imperial palace and hotel on the Bosphorus. The 310 rooms offer a resort atmosphere in the city. There are 29 meeting rooms accommodating from 10 to 1000 people. Each venue offers true luxury and the hotel boasts fine dining restaurants such as Tuğra or Bellini Pasta & More.

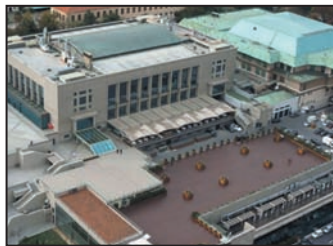


Istanbul Lutfi Kırdar International Convention and Exhibition Centre – ICEC

ICEC, the very first and leading convention and exhibition centre in Istanbul has been the driving force of the Turkish meeting industry for almost a quarter of a century.

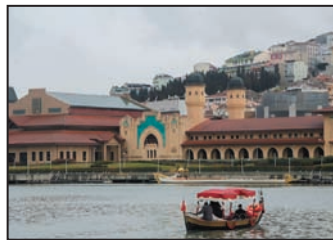
Located at the heart of the city, with its wide halls and inspiring meeting rooms has the capacity to host many events simultaneously.

The main building and the Rumeli Hall with its stunning view of the Bosphorus, technological structure, and innovative services are capable of hosting many events from congresses to meetings, fairs to exhibitions, cocktails to gala dinners, film premieres to cultural events at the national and the international level.



Halic Congress Center

The 102,000-square meter Halic Congress Center boasts 16,000 square meters of outdoor area, a seating capacity ranging from 219 to 3,004 people, five state-of-the-art auditoriums, connecting foyer and gallery areas totalling 9,172 square meters. It also has 23 multi-purpose halls with seating capacities ranging from 50 to 850.



Sightseeing



Hagia Sophia

The Hagia Sophia is an enormous sixth-century architectural marvel that was originally built as a Christian basilica in 537 AD under the Greek Orthodox Christian Church. It was later converted into a mosque, then a museum, and then reconverted to a working mosque. Byzantine influences can be seen in the gold mosaics that cover the walls of the interior of the building. After the conquest of Istanbul, Hagia Sophia became the most important place in Ottoman Empire for the top-ranked families to worship.

Grand Bazaar

Similar to a massive maze, the Grand Bazaar aesthetic relays archaism and grandiose in certain aspects. The labyrinth, like a covered market of more than 60 streets and 4,000 shops, attracts visitors from across the world due to its architectural and historical value. From delicious

Baklava to Turkish Delight, Gold Ornaments to Chik jewellery, Carpet to Turkish lights, Mosaic art to Pottery, everything is available at the Grand Bazaar at a very affordable rate.

Yacht Ride

A lavish yacht ride was scheduled at the Bosphorus on the second day of our Istanbul visit. The round-trip for around 2 hours on the luxury yacht down the Bosphorus was nothing less than a dream. The group tour for 90-120 minutes is usually designed to help travellers spend some time away from the hustle and bustle is truly mesmerising. The view of the Bosphorus had us awe-struck with its blue beauty.

Galata Tower

Galata Tower, one of the most important structures that make up the silhouette of Istanbul, was used as a long-term fire watchtower and was named Galata Fire Tower. Galata Tower was first built by the Byzantine Emperor Justinianos in 507-508 AD. The tower provides 360 degree panoramic view of Istanbul, which is indeed worth visiting.

Food



Izaya Terrece Restaurant

We reached this fantastic place to attend a gala dinner hosted by the hotel team. The enthralling evening view from the restaurant with the gorgeous location by the Bosphorus along with the immaculate service perfectly welcomed us into the city of Istanbul. We had Lamb Shish Kebab along with bread which is very similar our naan.

Avlu Restaurant

Next day we had our lunch at the Avlu Restaurant located at the Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at Sultanahmet. We started with freshly baked bread along with homemade herbed butter. Then along the way, we had Turkish Muhammara, Hummus, Dolma, fritters, and Turkish Cacik. The main course had a lot of options with fish and meat. The delicious meal concluded with a dessert.

Dubb Indian Restaurant

Located on the ninth floor of Hilton Bosphorus the restaurant offers a beautiful view and excellent food choices for Indians. We ordered and gorged on almost all of our favourite dishes such as Paneer Tikka, Fish Tikka, Butter Chicken, Jeera Rice, Dal, Roti. We ended the soulful meal with a hot cup of milk tea made just the way like at home.

Tuğra Restaurant

Located on the first floor of the historical Çırağan Palace with a breath-taking view of the Bosphorus, Tuğra offers a luxury fine-dining experience. We had different kinds of Ottoman Sherbet made with fruits and freshly baked bread served piping hot. Along with the bread, humus and the different kinds of dips served to us were truly amazing. In our main course, lamb preparation was served and the meal ended with flavourful Baklava.

Madera Istanbul

Located at the side of ICEC Madera, we had Cheese Pide (turkish-style Pizza), Veg Pizza, Tzatziki, Hummus, Muhammara and many mouth-watering dishes along with sweet lemon soda. ♦

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Start-Up Forum

Bringing Innovations to the Forefront

Explurger Private Limited

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>

Startup Name: Explurger Private Limited

Core Team: 27 People

Founding year: 2021

Company Website: www.explurger.com

Description : Co-founded by Jitin Bhatia and Bollywood Actor Sonu Sood, Explurger is a cutting-edge AI-powered one & only social media app for travellers, proudly Made in India, for the World. Sharing 'Experiences, takes center stage in the app. Explurger offers several first-of-their-kind features such as an Automatic Travelogue, a Bucket List, and Rewards for being socially active and much more. It's the first social media app which uses the principles of Gamification encouraging users to stay longer on the app. It is being used by 4 million people of which 3.6 million joined in the last seven months and 66 per cent of users are in the age group of 18-34 years. There are 90,000 posts a day which means one post in every second. Google recognised Explurger as one of 10 most innovative apps making mark in India and beyond.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTgGnaMafvc>



Q The travel tech space has seen an influx of new players in the past five years. How is Tourwiz different from other players in the space?

TourWiz is a unique SAAS-based subscription platform which helps travel professionals to manage their pre-booking and post-booking tasks. It is their virtual office on the go. They can access and manage the complete lifecycle of their customers at their fingertips, right from inquiries to itineraries and bookings, to invoicing and reconciliations.

The solution is mobile-friendly and can be accessed anywhere. Also, our tool allows creating unlimited users under one agency so that each of the agency staff can interact and share their work flows between each other.

We have a complete bouquet of features starting from CRM, Itinerary, Package and Quotation builder, Invoicing, Payments,

through which the agents can create their customer Log Ins and allow them to access their deals and offers, and also send queries directly to them.

Q How do your solutions benefit brick and mortar agents for whom cost is a huge factor while investing on their own website?

We at TourWiz have created a solution to offer agents a templatised query based marketable website on their own domain at a very nominal cost along with complete white-label back office through which the agents can create their customer Log Ins and allow them to access their deals, and offers and also



‘The white-label space in terms of providing booking platforms has almost doubled’

“ TourWiz is a unique SAAS-based subscription platform which helps travel professionals to manage their pre-booking and post-booking tasks. It is their virtual office on the go. ”

Supplier and Customer Management and much more all under one tool.

Q What kind of scope do you see for the white label travel tech space in India?

The white-label space in terms of providing booking platforms has almost doubled as very agent wants to go online and compete with the OTA who are trying to attract the customers through deals and offers.

We at TourWiz have created a complete white-label back office

send queries directly to them. The agents can also share their customers' invoices and collect payments from them.

This solution supports the agents to share and market their website to their customers, and also helps to compete with leading OTAs.

Recently we have launched AI Based itinerates builder which will help agents to search and create and share itinerates in minutes.

We also have created a B2B Market place where agents meet

suppliers directly and can share their requirements to each other. This will enable the agents to get the best of deals and offers directly from the suppliers, and will in turn help to grow their business.

Q How many agents have subscribed to your offering?

We have 2,000++ agents who have subscribed to our offering.

Q What are some of your API solutions available for agents?

As we are a SAAS based platform we do not offer any API to agents. It is a complete white-label back office which is cloud based and completely secured and hosted on Amazon AWS Cloud servers.

Q What is your business model like?

Our major revenues come from subscriptions from travel agents and suppliers. It is a community building activity where agents can showcase their own products and also procure their requirements from leading suppliers.

We are also coming out with best deals and offers to our subscribers through our niche products booking option, soon. ♦

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Swapnil Shaha, CEO, TourWiz in a conversation with **Disha Shah Ghosh** talks about their SAAS-based subscription platform for travel agents to create their virtual office.

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