

Yas' latest attraction, SeaWorld Abu Dhabi to open doors this month

Shayan Mallick | New Delhi

Amidst its growing destination popularity and bucking the post-Covid international visitors' arrival trends, Yas Island, Middle East's foremost entertainment destination, is now readying to launch its much-awaited marine life theme park SeaWorld Abu Dhabi on May 23, 2023 that will join its consortium of exciting theme parks, entertainment and other offering on the island. Yas has already given a sneak peek through the launch of Yas SeaWorld Research & Rescue, the region's first dedicated marine research, rescue and rehabilitation center located next to SeaWorld Abu Dhabi, that was launched in February earlier this year.

Talking about the latest addition to the portfolio of theme parks at Yas Island, Liam Findlay, CEO of Miral Destinations, said, "SeaWorld

is going to be a phenomenal product. We are opening on 23rd of May. In February, we opened the rescue and research center of the SeaWorld which is really an important part of the eco-system. It is emphasizing on rehabilitation, research and rescue of marine life within the eco-system of Abu Dhabi and beyond. And when it comes to the marine life theme park SeaWorld Abu Dhabi, it's really about 'education.' It's going to have 150 species of marine animals, over 100,000 animals on five floors. It's about educating the generations to come and inspire them to look after our oceans for the future generations. We have spared no expense to make it world class. It's sea world 2.0."

Built on five indoor levels, SeaWorld Abu Dhabi will be spread over a total area of 183,000 square meters, will contain more



Liam Findlay
CEO, Miral Destinations

than 58 million liters of water, 150 species of marine animals and will be home to the world's largest and most expansive multi-species marine-life aquarium. The next generation marine-life theme park will also boasts of world-class

rides and experiences along with some unique dining and shopping experiences.

Other experiences will include the SeaWorld Abu Dhabi telling the guests a unified One Ocean story based on the interconnectivity of all life on earth and in our ocean. It will also have interesting features like being home to eight different realms in a unique design offering immersive experiences.

Speaking about the Indian market that has become Yas Island's number one visitor market today, Findlay said, "We have been very impressed with the Indian market. Our recovery came back a lot quicker than we budgeted for. India was the one that rolled back the quickest." He however also pointed that the recovery has come riding on the back of an effective marketing strategy and investment. ♦

'Qatar keen on attracting larger MICE & Wedding groups from India'

TBM Staff | Dubai

India has emerged as the second important tourism source market for Qatar, and the Kingdom is keen to tap MICE and wedding groups from this market. Talking to **TravelBiz Monitor** at the recently concluded ATM in Dubai, Philip Dickinson, Global Travel Trade Market Development, MICE, Sport and ESport, Qatar Tourism said they continue to reach out to prospective clients through their India Representative, Brandit.

"We are keen on attracting larger MICE and wedding groups from India. India is still the second largest source market for us followed by Saudi Arabia. We are also seeing strong numbers from the likes of US, UK, Europe and the GCC region. For large MICE groups coming to Qatar from India,

we are awaiting clarity for Hayya cardholders and bookings made directly through hotels. Relaxation has also been announced on visa on arrival for valid US, UK, Canada, Australia and Schengen visa holders, and we will have more clarity in the coming days."



Philip Dickinson
Global Travel Trade Market Development, MICE, Sport and ESport, Qatar Tourism

Talking about their strategy in India, he said depending on the size of the group Qatar Tourism is offering attractive incentive payments per passenger to trade partners. "Besides we conduct FAM trips, introduce the travel trade to our hotels, local DMCs and event organisers. We hosted 5-6 high-profile Indian weddings

last year, and also the Destination Wedding Planners show. We will continue to talk to wedding planners to come and host their events in Qatar."

With a view to attract more travellers, Qatar has also relaxed its norms for consumption of alcohol. "All the five-star hotels and most of our four-star hotels are licensed to offer alcohol. A lot of people want to enjoy a wine with their meal. Designated hotels and areas are also offering alcohol to incoming visitors to Qatar."

Shedding light on visitor numbers from the FIFA World Cup hosted by Qatar last year, he said, "We had record 1.4 million visitors for the World Cup which reached our estimation for the global sporting event. It couldn't have been any better. From a destination stand point, it was an opportunity to create additional awareness with the world watching us. We saw the spin-off of the excitement and experience of seamlessly coming into to Qatar from tourists during January and February as well this year. With larger inventory created for the World Cup, we now have more number of rooms to sell, and greater capacity to host large scale events." ♦

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GRNconnect to add new products in its kitty soon

TBM Staff | Mumbai

GRNconnect, a reputed B2B hotel booking portal wants to expand its distribution to 100 countries from the current 65 by the end of this year. This was stated by Deepak Narula, Managing Director, GRNConnect, while interacting with TravelBiz Monitor at ATM Dubai. "In the last two years, we were focusing a lot on our distribution. Currently, we are distributing in 65 countries and our target is to reach 100 by the end of this year. We worked hard and reached out our partners during the covid induced pandemic so that we work more closely after the crisis is over," said Narula.

He also said that, at present, they have more than 400 API customers and everyday around 4000 agents come on board to make bookings with them. "The idea is to further improve the product as well as distribution," said Narula.

When asked to comment about new product launch, he said that their new API version is already launched. Besides this, "Our new user interface will soon be launched," he said.

The company is also going to add new products in its kitty. "Besides our traditional products, we will soon add Rail Europe, self drive

car, chauffeur driven limousine cars," he said.

GRNconnect registered 100% growth last year and wants to continue the same. "Last year our growth was 100 % and we are confident maintaining the same in this year as well," said a confident Narula. ♦



Deepak Narula
Managing Director, GRNConnect

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TAAI Nagpur Chapter collaborates with VFS Global for knowledge session

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

TAAI Nagpur Chapter organised an interactive session with VFS Global to educate its members on visa related issues. The session discussed mainly on the visa at doorsteps, E-Visa, premium lounge and other services from the VFS Global. Henry Moses from the VFS Global conducted the workshop. "By attending the knowledge session our members gained knowledge of the visa process and services," said Irshad Mehdi, Chairman, TAAI Nagpur Chapter. Around 50 members of the chapter attended the event. "We believe knowledge and networking are key for growth," pointed out Mehdi.

Terming the event very successful, Kawaljeet Singh Vij, Treasurer, TAAI Nagpur Chapter, said that the points which were discussed in the event largely remain unknown to agents belong to tier 2 and 3 cities. "The aim of the event was to educate the members which will



ultimately help them to grow their business," he said. The chapter is organising destination training program on regular intervals. "In the first week of June, we are organising destination training program with Korea Tourism," Vij revealed.

"The event was pretty nice and the knowledge session was very interactive," said Rajan Dua, Managing Director & Co-Founder, Udaan India. He also said that it is imperative

to organise such session in tier2 cities. "Timing of the event is also good as it is the pick summer season," said Dua. It is important to mention here that Udaan India a leading visa facilitation company sponsored the event. "We have just opened our office in Nagpur and plans are afoot to launch offices in Coimbatore, Bhubaneswar, Indore and Guwahati by the end of this year," revealed Dua. ♦

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Dusit International showcases its hotels and resorts at 'Dusit India Roadshow 2023'

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Dusit International, one of Thailand's leading hotel and property development companies, recently showcased its expanding portfolio of Dusit Hotels and Resorts world wide as part of a three-city India Roadshow for leading trade and media partners in Kolkata, New Delhi, and Mumbai.

Hosted by Nicholas Maratos, Vice President – Commercial, Dusit International, Rakesh Bhandari, Director of Global Sales, India, and representatives from seven renowned Dusit Hotels and Resorts across Thailand, Maldives and the UAE – plus upcoming destinations such as Nepal – the special roadshow gave participants a great opportunity to learn more about Dusit's unique brand of Thai-inspired gracious

hospitality and distinctive brand offerings across the lodging spectrum.

Alongside showcasing Dusit's signature services, guest experiences, and MICE offerings, the Dusit team also shared updates on the latest additions to the Dusit family, including Dusit Suites Athens, its first hotel in Europe, which opened in March, and upcoming debuts in Japan and Nepal – including the opening of ASAI Shijo Kyoto and Dusit Thani Kyoto (June and September, respectively), and Dusit Thani Himalayan Resort Dhulikhel Nepal (2Q 2023).

The team also shared how this year will mark the return of Dusit Hotels and Resorts in India, with the opening of Dusit Princess Serviced Suites Kolkata and DusitD2 Fagu, Shimla (both scheduled to open in Q4).

While speaking to TravelBiz Monitor in

Mumbai, Maratos said that India is their top five source markets. "Rising middle class in India will facilitate more Indians travelling and many of them will definitely look for our brands," he said. When asked to comment which are the cities of India they plan to open their properties? "We work with local developers in India and currently discussion is on for several locations (Other than Kolkata and Shimla) and you will come to know everything at appropriate time," he said.

The three-city roadshow was attended by more than 250 partners from various segments including MICE, Leisure, Honeymooners, Wedding Planners, and Event Organisers.

Guests of honour included H.E. Pattarat Hongtong, Ambassador of Thailand to India; H.E. Acharapan Yavaprasas, Consul-General of Thailand in Kolkata; Sirigesanong Trirattanasongpol, Director TAT, New Delhi and Isada Saovaras, Director TAT, Mumbai.

Their discussions centred on India's burgeoning outbound travel patterns to Thailand, India and Thailand's strong ties, and the unique qualities of Dusit's portfolio, which currently comprises more than 300 distinctive hotels, resorts, and luxury villas operating under seven brands across 18 countries worldwide. ♦





‘Limitation of supply & increase in demand will make Ladakh a niche destination’

Amit Kothari, Owner, Goamit Holidays talks to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about protecting Ladakh from overtourism at a time when increased demand is leading to unregulated infrastructure development.

Q Over the years, Ladakh has emerged as a promising destination, especially for group tours. Tell us how do you design a tour for a destination with such different topography compared to other destinations in North India?

Ladakh being high altitude destination, tour planning would need some tactical know-how before setting up the final programme for the client. Hence, we give the client an entire brief about the destination. We always look at the experience of the group that is in-coming to Ladakh, for us to offer them first a brief itinerary. Various elements such as age factor of each client, health condition and the willingness to take on the adrenaline adventures in Ladakh are to be taken into consideration.

Q Tell us about your adventure tourism offerings for Ladakh.

We offer cycling, hiking, trekking, bird watching, snow leopard trips, lake side camping, glamping trips, and moving caravan

trip is our latest innovation. Most popular among our clients is the walking trails and river rafting expeditions.

Q What are some of the complexities of organising a tour in Ladakh?

As Ladakh is rain shadow region over the years, with sudden climate changes, the snow fall in winter has decreased which reduces the water supply in the summer season. In summer time, there are unexpected rain showers which create dampness on road and it creates difficulty to drive on such terrains, making the trip vulnerable to unexpected hindrances.

Ladakh is facing an influx of huge number of tourists leading to unorganised infrastructure development. With the number of flights increasing and the road connectivity getting better, the flow of tourist has increased drastically due to which more accommodation options are required across various categories. There is acute need for more number of hotels, camps and retreats.

Q What measures are needed to protect its natural habitat?

Since there is overconsumption of natural resources due huge infrastructure set-ups in the eco fragile environment, various environmental bodies need to be activated and conserve the region from waste pollution and climate pollution. No plastic should be used in the entire Ladakh region, and a strict fine policy should be enforced.

Q According to you, how can one save Ladakh from losing its niche as a destination instead of becoming a run of the mill choice?

The Ladakh administration needs to increase the entry fee, which will curtail the flow of tourists. New construction should not be permitted and this will reduce the number of hotels and in short reduce the in-flow of tourist travelling per year. Limitation of supply and increase in demand will always create hype, and make the destination a niche. ♦

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NEWS ROUND UP

Saudi Tourism launches promotional packages for India

VFS Tasheer Visa offices to open by month end and shopping & entertainment zone, VIA Riyadh this month

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Saudi Tourism Authority has leveraged its partnership with the TATA Indian Premier League (IPL) to launch bespoke promotional packages with leading travel agencies like Akbar Travels, SOTC, Make My Trip, Cleartrip, and Ease My Trip; promoting Saudi as the leading leisure destination for Indian travellers.

Saudi has also announced the opening of multiple VFS Tasheer Visa offices by the end of May. These offices will serve as the authorised visa partners for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, providing applicants with efficient and secure administrative visa services.

As part of Saudi's tourism strategy, India

represents immense potential as it is expected to be Saudi's largest tourism source market by 2030. Recently, IndiGo announced a new airline route from Ahmedabad to Jeddah, with daily direct flights starting August 11, 2023, which should further boost tourism from India.

With the aim of promoting its leisure and entertainment offerings to the world, Saudi is also excited to announce the opening of VIA Riyadh, scheduled for May 18. This event is set to attract a global audience and will showcase Saudi's latest luxury shopping and entertainment district. The new development will feature the luxurious The St. Regis hotel, 23 international brands, 17 restaurants and seven cinemas. VIA Riyadh will be home to several international award-

winning restaurants including Gymkhana, Ferdi, Bianca, and Les Deux Magots. The new project is part of the initiative to develop Saudi's entertainment sector and help diversify the economy as part of the Saudi Vision 2030.

To attract more visitors, the country had also announced the Stopover Visa, allowing Indian passengers traveling with SAUDIA to spend up to 96 hours in Saudi Arabia and enjoy a complimentary hotel night. This move, along with Saudi Tourism Authority's partnerships with airlines, leading tour operators and IPL to promote Saudi's diverse offerings for Indian travellers demonstrates Saudi's commitment to developing its tourism sector and positioning itself as the new leisure tourism frontier. ♦

Ajman Tourism exhibits its sustainable and secure tourism initiatives at the Arabian Travel Market

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The Ajman Department of Tourism Development (ADTD) along with its partners in the travel, tourism, and hospitality sectors had showcased pioneering and secure tourism projects focused on sustainability at the recently concluded Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2023 edition at Dubai World Trade Center.

These projects align with the sustainable tourism guidelines envisioned in Ajman Tourism Vision 2030 – which will see the emirate emerge as a major international tourist destination in the world with a focus on sustainable and eco-tourism projects.

Numbeo.com, a global research portal, has named Ajman the fourth safest city in the world for 2023, surpassing many of its regional counterparts. This accolade will undoubtedly enhance its appeal as a tourist destination, particularly for international travellers who prioritize safety when selecting their leisure travel destinations.

Speaking about the participation at ATM, His Excellency Mahmood Khaleel Alhashmi, Director General, Ajman Department



Mahmood Khaleel Alhashmi
Director General, Ajman
Department of Tourism
Development

of Tourism Development, said, "Our participation at ATM comes in support of our partners from the travel, tourism, hospitality and government sectors who will collectively promote the destination Ajman – the best-kept secret of the UAE's tourism industry."

He also added, "Our participation at the Arabian Travel Market comes at the backdrop of continuous growth in the tourism industry which is a major contributor to the emirate's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), as well as the recently announced Public-Private Partnership law

that came into effect from January 2023 that will boost investment in tourism projects in the coming years, when we will see the development of new hotel resorts, sustainable tourism development projects."

Ajman's tourism industry has been on a steady growth trajectory, due to the emirate's expanding array of attractions such as natural beaches, mangroves, a rising number of hotels, resorts, eateries, traditional markets, entertainment venues, and newly emerging tourism projects that cater to both domestic and foreign visitors.

The emirate of Ajman, hosts 44 hotel establishments ranging from 1-star to 5-star hotels, resorts and luxury hotel apartments with 3,997 hotel rooms and 250 tourism establishments that serve a growing number of regional and international tourists.

Following a stellar growth in 2022, Ajman hotels and serviced apartments recorded a 3 percent growth in hotel revenues in the first quarter of 2023 compared to the corresponding period in 2022 – mostly due to higher demand that is pushing the Average Daily Room (ADR) Rate, making

investment in hotels and tourism industry more profitable.

Young Adult (19-35) continues to occupy the biggest share of age profile followed by Middle Aged (36-55) both contributing to around 70 percent of the total arrivals. Although business tourism is picking up, leisure remains the main purpose of visit to Ajman representing 70 percent of the total arrivals.

It is also very encouraging that the number of non-UAE residents (international arrivals) increased by 26 percent in 2022 compared to 2021 which shows that Ajman has set itself on the international tourism map and demand on Ajman is increasing.

However, UAE continues to be the main source markets in Ajman – mainly staycations, corporate business and MICE business while Russian Federation, India, UK and Germany are their top 10 international feeder markets.

The number of non-UAE residents (international arrivals) increased by 26 percent in 2022 compared to 2021 which shows that Ajman has set itself on the international tourism map and demand on Ajman is increasing. ♦

Nepal witnesses recovery post covid in tourist numbers

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Nepal witnessed in total 98,773 tourist arrivals by air in April, of which 31,437 were Indians, according to the data released by its Tourism Board.

Nepal's tourism industry is recovering faster in the post-Covid era, with 3,26,528 tourist arrivals by air from January to April this year, of which around 28 per cent were Indians. "Tourist arrivals in the country have increased a lot in the recent period, which is very positive and encouraging," said Nandini Lahe-Thapa, Senior Director of PR and Publicity at Nepal Tourism Board.

The tourism board estimated that around 1.2 million tourist arrivals, an equivalent to the arrivals the Himalayan nation achieved in 2020, were expected this year.

"We are no longer concentrating on the traditional destinations such as Kathmandu, Pokhara, Chitwan, and Lumbini," she pointed

out. "Five-star properties are coming up in eastern and western Nepal as well. New hotels are being constructed, lots of tourism-related activities are coming up, and new cable cars are being operated."

"We are very positive and hopeful about the prospects of the tourism industry in the country in the post-Covid era," said Thapa. "At the end of the year, we are expecting at least 1.2 million tourists by air, which we had received in 2020 — the pre-Covid period," Thapa said.

"The Indian market has been doing very well after the pandemic. Lots of Indian tourists are coming to Nepal for holiday making," she said.

"Wherever you go, like Pokhara, Manakamana or border areas, you can see a lot of Indian number plate vehicles carrying tourists," Thapa said.

Nepal witnessed in total 98,773 tourist arrivals by air in the month of April, of which 31,437 were Indians, according to the data

released by the Nepal Tourism Board.

Last year (2022), a total of 61,589 tourists visited Nepal by air. The tourist arrival in April this year grew by 60 per cent compared to the previous year.

The number of Indian tourist arrivals grew by 39.9 per cent to 31,437 in April this year compared to last April's arrival. In April last year, only 22,476 Indian tourists visited Nepal by air.

The total number of tourist arrivals to Nepal by air in the first four months of 2023 from January to April was 3,26,528, of which 92,185 were Indians, which comes to around 28 per cent.

Nepal earned foreign currency equivalent to Rs. 32.45 billion or USD 247.70 million from tourism in the year 2022-23, which is a whopping 346.5 per cent increase over the previous year, according to the data released by the Nepal Rastra Bank, the central bank of Nepal. ♦

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THERE'S A CHANGE IN THE AIR ?

Hopefully this could soon be a statement and not a question as far as public responsibility towards cleanliness is concerned.

With the G20 mood pervading the country, especially the urban centres, there is a flurry of activity to put forward the country's best foot (and face). The thing is, like most things, a well turned out city is as much the result of government attention as it is about responsibility at the citizen level.

In India, till a decade back, a behavioural change direction was never the pivot in the sanitation policy. Thankfully the Swachh Bharat hype, which drew snarky comments from the doubters, has ushered in a shift in public awareness. Even if it still leaves much to be desired. Only a strong and sustainable implementation with community participation can reflect a visible change.

No pontification can replace direct involvement of the real stakeholders – the people. By taking such deliberations to the people there is a twofold benefit. It expands the involvement area and more significantly, throws up solutions from within the problem areas.

The unedifying image of a Gurgaon resident casually lifting decorative potted plants from the roadside and loading it in the boot of his luxury car was a reminder that much remains to be done to create the responsible attitude which will create a beautiful city. While decorative plants by the roadside are props, the real element is entrenched with responsible public. While that image was a sorry reminder of a casual, even criminal approach, there are examples of better tidings.

If one visits the upgraded India Gate lawns at New Delhi lately, the change in public behaviour cannot be missed. What was littered with ice cream wrappers and plastic waste, is now a tremendously improved ambience. This ambience has not come about from the skies. It is the same people who are suddenly more conscious of not doing anything to spoil the clean spaces. Of course better signage, litter bins, watchful staff and fear of penalties have helped but that alone never deterred those who cluttered the same place earlier.

Instilling pride by improving services and upgrading infrastructure goes a long way in making the public more responsible. And undoubtedly, tourism is one of the first gainers of such a change.

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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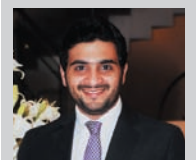
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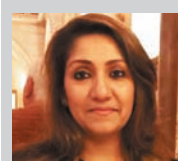
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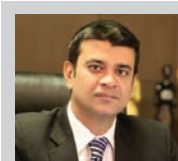
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Q Tourism New Zealand has completed 20 years in the Indian market. How is the journey?

A famous Bollywood film was shot in New Zealand in the year 2000 and this was followed by a couple of other films. This has helped bring New Zealand into the mainstream from a beautiful scenery and landscape point of view. Taking due cognisance, we opened our office in 2003 and the very next year organized a big trade event dubbed as Kiwi Link which was very successful. From here, there is no looking back, we grow exponentially in the Indian market. We also worked with cricketing personalities of both the countries successfully to consolidate our position further in this market.

Q What are the two very important lessons you have learnt about India in the last 20 years and how do you want to take it forward?

During the journey we realised that New Zealand does have a very high appeal among the Indian visitors. And as far as preference for New Zealand as a destination among Indian travellers is concerned, it is one of the highest in all our international markets. Having said that, I feel we still have to work more to educate the trade on activities, experiences and cultural aspects of New Zealand. Besides adventure tourism and beautiful landscapes, there is much more to discover.

Q Post covid where does India stand as your resource market?

India would be in our top 10 markets and we expect more growth from this market. Our top three markets are Australia, China and the US.

We did a fantastic job in this market during the pandemic time. When the entire world was at a standstill at that time our team in India trained more than 10,500 travel agents under our specialist program.

Q Which segments are you focusing more from India MICE, FIT, Family, Luxury?

We are most excited about

independent professionals. But an increasing pool of travellers are interested in travelling to New Zealand in smaller groups. MICE is an important part of our overall strategy followed by luxury and honeymooners. We are also looking for people who want to explore our country a little bit extra and prefer more of a transformative holiday in terms of engaging with our culture and communities.

Q How has New Zealand as a destination changed or transformed after the pandemic?

One of the largest trends we're witnessing is a shift away from mass market attractions to those that are smaller, more in-depth, and offer a richer experience. So,

'We registered exponential growth in the Indian market.'

if you look at famous Hobbiton, they are actually looking to have smaller groups and allowing them to have richer experiences.

Q Sustainable travel is also very much in demand, especially with the younger generation. What has New Zealand done in this direction?

We are seeing an increasing number of attractions that are looking to promote sustainability. For example, all operators who offer Kayak and river trips near Nelson are certified from a sustainability point of view. Additionally, we are planning to bring jet boats which are in operation in Queenstown to e-jets. Apart from this, a lot of work on the sustainability front is in progress. There is an organisation called Qualmark which is part of Tourism New Zealand and helps achieve our sustainable goal. We are also seeing a good number of hotels are also increasing their sustainability footprints.

Q The entire world is looking at the Indian market now. Keeping this in mind, do you have any special strategy for this market?

I don't think there is any fundamental change in this



market and we are leveraging on the points that have worked well for us all these years. We have established an incredibly strong relationship with the travel trade fraternity here in India. They are one of our most engaged trade audiences and we will continue to strengthen the rapport further.

We launched a new campaign in August 2022 titled "If You Seek", which is a call to all visitors who want to seek more through extraordinary travel experiences. The campaign received a very good response from the India market. We observed that a large section of Indian travellers are looking for more of a transformative experience and we are trying to ensure that their expectations are fulfilled.

Q Any measures to improve the air connectivity from what it is now?

We are continuing discussions with our airline partners and also with the airlines within the Asia region. However, at the end of it is a commercial decision which is not at our hand. Our role here is to continue to drive the demand which we are doing. Yes, we want to see a direct flight which will be a huge advantage for all of us. ♦

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New Zealand does have a very high appeal among the Indian visitors. But we still have to work more to educate the trade on activities, experiences and cultural aspects of New Zealand, says **Angela Blair, GM International, Tourism New Zealand**, while speaking to **Prasenjit Chakraborty**.

Madhya Pradesh

“The Heart of Adventure Travel”

By **Sheo Shekhar Shukla**, IAS-Principal Secretary, Department of Tourism, Government of Madhya Pradesh & Managing Director, MP Tourism Board

Adventure tourism has become a popular form of tourism worldwide, and Madhya Pradesh is no exception. With its diverse and stunning natural beauty, the state offers a range of adventure activities for tourists. From water sports to wildlife safaris, camping, skydiving, Parasailing, Trekking, Rock Climbing, River Rafting, Hot Air Ballooning, Bungee Jumping, ATV rides, Wildlife Safaris, Cycle Safaris, etc. Moreover, the state with its 11 national parks & 24 Wildlife sanctuaries,

event”, the prominent trekking trail “ Forsyth Trek Pachmarhi”, TSD Car Rally Indore, Skydiving Festival Ujjain, Riders in The Wild Biking Trail (In 05 national parks) are organized with strict adherence to safety regulations providing tourists with thrilling and memorable adventure experiences.

In collaboration with private companies, 50 camping sites have been introduced to suit the choice of various kinds of travellers. Now visitors can go ‘tree camping’ and ‘gypsy camping’ in the Satpura National Park. In these camps, guests can enjoy bonfires, experience stargazing, bonfire, and dusk drive, swimming, riverside jungle trail with bird watching, and tribal cuisine with barbeque, with due care not to disturb the ecology of the place.

Overall, Adventure Tourism in Madhya Pradesh offers a unique and exciting way to explore the state’s natural beauty and diverse landscapes.

Tiger Safari

Encounter tigers and other animals on a wildlife safari tour in six tiger sanctuaries in Madhya Pradesh namely Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Satpura, Pench, Panna and Sanjay Duburi. The only place you could find Cheetah in India is at Kuno National Park in Sheopur district.

Skydiving in Ujjain

Every year in January, a sky diving festival is organised in Ujjain where visitors can sky dive from over 10,000 feet and enjoy the auspicious view of the ‘religious capital of Madhya Pradesh’.

Orchha River Rafting

River rafting is another exciting sport that can be enjoyed by adventure seekers in Orchha’s Betwa River. This activity not only gives you a thrill, but also offers a beautiful view of the royal Orchha-chatris on the exotic shores of the river. The best time to go rafting in Orchha is from August to February.

Zip lining at Kerwa Dam in Bhopal

The Kerwa Dam in Bhopal is known for its diverse activities. The most popular is the flying fox zip lining. The zip line here is one of the longest double zip lines in India. So

why wait? Experience the thrill.

Ride the cable car in Bhedaghat

Viewing Marble Rocks and Dhuandhar Waterfall via Cable Ride from Bhedaghat is the most rewarding experience for any tourist. In addition to riding the cable car, you can also sail among the marble rocks for a closer look. The full moon makes sailing even more memorable as you witness the towering rocks naturally twinkle at night.

Adventurous Mega Festivals

MP Tourism conducts annual mega festivals at Hanuwantiya (Jal Mahotsav), Gandhi Sagar (Gandhi Sagar Floating Festival) and Mandu (Mandu Utsav) where various adventure activities and recreational activities are organized including Hot Air ballooning, paramotoring, paragliding, parasailing, jet skiing, kayaking etc. for the visitors at the festivals. After the enormous success of these events MP Tourism is set to develop Orchha Kuno, Tamia, Ater, Bargi Dam and Chanderi for the conduction of these mega festivals in 2023-2024.

With temple and wildlife circuits of the state well entrenched in people’s minds, and also to prevent overcrowding of popular destinations, they are concentrating on adventure tourism activity, such as Skydiving in Ujjain, Hot Air Balloon experience in Bandhavgarh National Park, River rafting in Betwa River Orchha & Ken River Panna, mountaineering, jungle safari, heritage walks etc. ♦

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

Sheo Shekhar Shukla is Principal Secretary, Tourism & Culture Department, Govt of M.P. and Managing Director of Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board. He is serving in the Tourism Department since August 2020 and during this period several important international and domestic campaigns have been conceptualized and successfully organized. He has been instrumental in steering the tourism policy in the state towards responsible and eco-tourism with a focus on rural and agri-tourism. The state has also become a major hub for spiritual and wellness tourism.



and 6 Tiger reserves., there is something for everyone in Madhya Pradesh.

The state government has taken several steps to promote adventure tourism and attract private investment in this sector. Policies such as the MP Water Sports Policy 2017 and MP Camping Policy 2018 for the establishment of adventure-based infrastructure. Madhya Pradesh has also been recognized for its efforts in promoting adventure tourism, winning the ‘Best State for Adventure Tourism’ award twice in a row for the years 2016-17 and 2017-18 at the National Tourism Awards.

Adventure festivals such as Jal Mahoutsav, Gandhi Sagar Floating Festival, Pachmarhi Mansoon Marathon, Tawa- Madai cycling (Satpura Tiger Reserve), Tour of Mogliland (Pench), Buffer main Suffer “Kanha cycling

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Unstoppable India: Sabre data indicates strong growth potential with domestic travel already above 100% of pre-pandemic levels, and international quickly catching up, alongside major investments in the Indian travel marketplace. **TravelBiz Monitor** presents highlights of Sabre's India Trends Report.



India Travel Trends, On an Upward Swing

India is a fast-growing country with a population of more than 1.4 billion, and according to the United Nation's (UN) latest report, has recently surpassed China as the world's most populated country.

India has also been predicted to overtake Germany to become the world's third biggest travel and tourism country by the World Travel and Tourism Council's Economic Impact Research. With major aviation developments in the country announced recently, Sabre has sifted through data to examine the potential of India's travel growth, and what we may see in the coming years.

Our key findings include:

- Significant investments in the tourism industry are expected to increase, and support, airline capacity requirements for domestic and international travel.
- As of March 2023, bookings are back to 100% of pre-pandemic levels for domestic trips and are at nearly 100% of pre-pandemic levels for international trips, with domestic travel increasing in popularity and domestic capacity having already exceeded pre-pandemic levels.
- Indian carriers are expected to play a significant role in international travel.
- Passenger numbers are increasing despite significantly higher international fares.
- The growing middle-class segment in India is expected to gain access to travel

as travel becomes more affordable; the middle-class segment is expected to double from one in three to two in three Indians by 2047.

Significant investments in the Indian tourism industry are expected to increase and support capacity requirements for domestic and international travel

Major plane orders by Air India, Akasa Air and IndiGo are expected to result in close to 1,200 more aircraft for Indian carriers over the next 24 months to support the growing demand for travel. The Union Budget of India 2023 presented in February this year, also announced a series of developments to support potential tourism industry growth.

A \$12 billion investment was announced for aviation infrastructure upgrades to support capacity increments, with aims to increase the number of airports in India from 148 to 220 by 2025, alongside more aviation schools to prepare for increased demand for pilots.

India is also refurbishing and developing nearly 100 airports, under the "Revival of Unserved and Under-served Airports" programme, aimed at making air travel more affordable and accessible, while further supporting an increase in capacity, especially for domestic travel.

As of March 2023, bookings are back to 100% of pre-pandemic levels

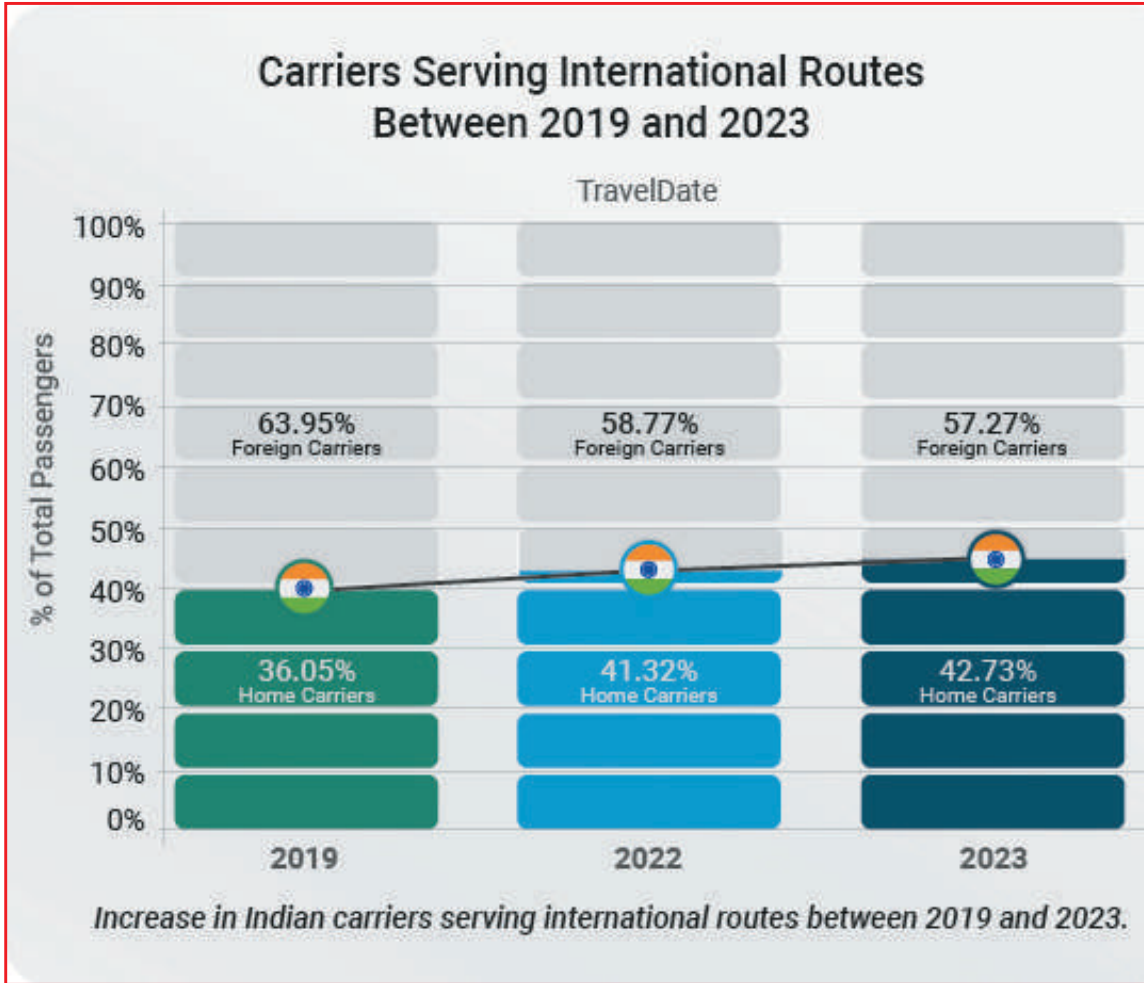
for domestic trips and are at nearly 100% of pre-pandemic levels for international trips, with domestic capacity having already exceeded pre-pandemic levels

Sabre's booking data shows that in January 2023, there were 11 million domestic trips, versus 11.2 million in January 2019, showing a travel recovery of 98.8%. In February, the domestic travel measured at 99.3% and eventually exceeded pre-pandemic levels in March at 107.4%. In fact, domestic capacity has already exceeded 2019 levels since the beginning of this year, signifying that there is potential for domestic travel to grow significantly.

The strong growth for domestic travel and domestic capacity could be attributed to more Indians having turned towards domestic travel during the pandemic when they couldn't travel further afield, and ongoing improvements in connectivity due to government investments.

In addition, India has seen a rise in low-cost carriers (LCCs) recently, with these carriers recording growth in domestic travel. Domestic capacity for LCCs has been recorded at more than 110% of 2019 levels in the first 3 months of 2023. In Q1 of 2019, there were 23.2 million travellers flying on LCCs for domestic routes. The number increased to 26.5 million within the same period in 2023, an increase of 14%.

For international travel, there were 5.7 million trips in January 2023, versus 6 million



more affordable; the middle-class segment is expected to rise from 1 in 3 to 2 in 3 Indians by 2047

As more Indian carriers add domestic and international capacities, alongside aviation infrastructure upgrades, it is expected that travel will become more accessible and affordable for India's middle-class population, encouraging them to travel.

A pan-India survey has reported that currently, one in three Indians is considered middle-class, and the number is expected to increase to two in three by 2047. In that event, the sheer population size of India means that middle-class in India would be expected to almost double from nearly 500 million people to 900 million by 2047, almost 3 times the population of the US. In the US, the middle-class makes up only 50%, around 180 million, and China, 163 million, where they make up 13.7%.

"What is clear is that India is increasingly making its presence felt on the world travel stage," said **Brett Thorstad, Vice President, Sabre Travel Solutions, Agency Sales, Asia Pacific.** "All the indicators, the investment, and the conditions are there for

in January 2019, showing a recovery rate of 95%. The recovery rate increased to 97.5% in February 2023, and is now at 99.5% in March 2023. Capacity for international trips has also been planned to exceed 100% of 2019 levels by Q2.

Indian carriers are expected to continue to play an important role in international travel

Domestic routes are predominantly served by Indian low-cost carriers (LCCs).

Indian carriers now serve 42.7% of all international routes. This is an increase from 36% pre-pandemic.

Indian carriers could further grow in international routes, given a recent request by the aviation minister for domestic carriers (historically Indian) to fly more long-haul routes. It was also reported that India will not be increasing air traffic quotas for carriers from Gulf states, in line with this push for Indian carriers to fly long-haul routes.

International fares have increased post-pandemic

An impressive travel resumption has been achieved even though average international fares are 41.3% more expensive as of February 2023 when compared to pre-pandemic prices. This exemplifies the "revenge travel" phenomenon resulting from the long lockdowns, plus the fact that capacity could not catch up with the pent-up demand.

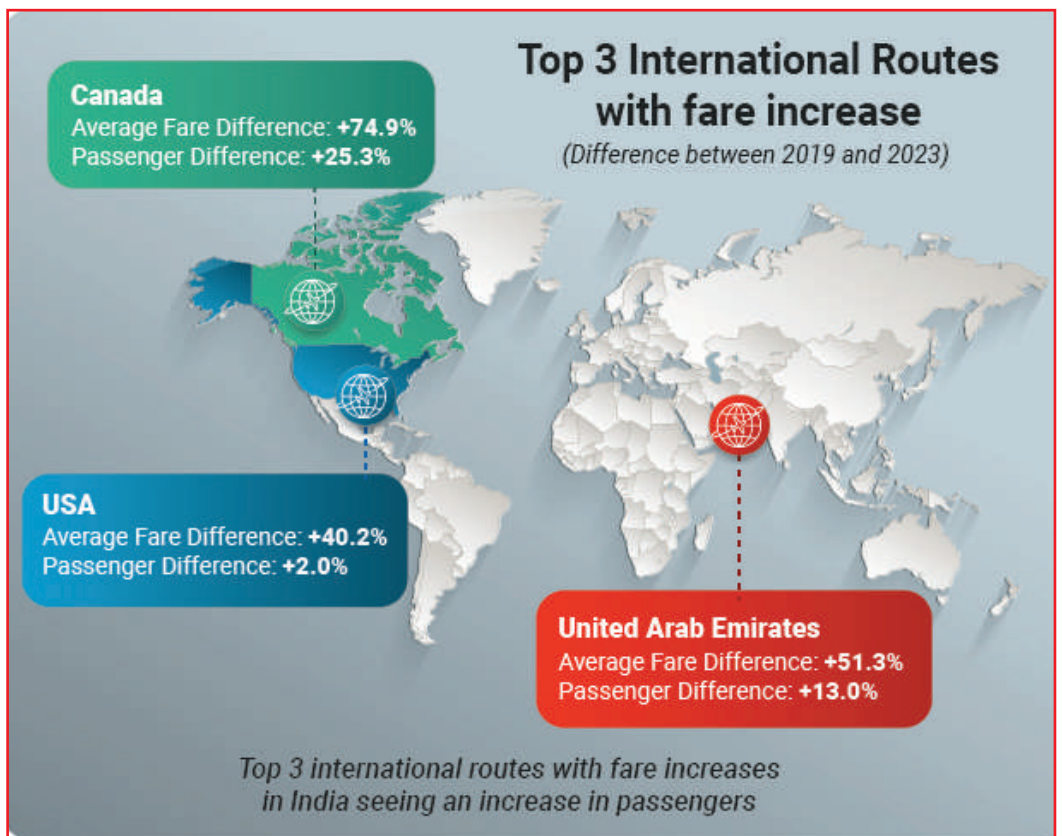
Domestic fares have also increased, with fares at 24.5% more than pre-pandemic prices as of February 2023. Fare prices are expected

to stabilize as capacity grows to meet and potentially exceed demand, coupled with various tourism investments aimed at making travel affordable for the growing middle-class segment in India.

The growing middle-class segment in India is expected to gain increased access to travel as travel becomes

substantial growth over the coming years. What is important now is that all players in the Indian travel ecosystem, and those who want to be players in the marketplace, understand and can harness these opportunities through advanced technology."

- Global air booking data sourced from Sabre Market Intelligence
- Air capacity data sourced from OAG ♦





popular destination lately due to the aggressive promotion and roadshows conducted by the Odisha Government. Speaking on the proactiveness of the Government in promoting tourism and hospitality in the state Mohanty said, "Odisha Government declared tourism as a priority sector and proactively promoting Odisha Tourism globally under the dynamic guidance of Hon'ble Chief Minister and investing huge funds for the development and beautifications of various tourist places in the state. Now we are witnessing speedy development in the field of Sports, Tourism, Medical Tourism, and the enhancement of temple

to Odisha.

Due to these proactive initiatives, not only Swosti Group but all leading hotels in Odisha are witnessing a steady rise in occupancy and ARR post-Covid."

While speaking about their latest projects Mohanty informed that the group has been at the forefront in promoting Odisha Tourism by establishing luxury hotels and resorts across various tourist destinations in the region, since 1984. "Apart from our new ongoing venture 'Swosti Chilika Resort' we intend to create a Jungle Resort at Satkosia Gorge, which is situated within the Tiger Reserve. Furthermore, we plan to establish an Eco Resort at Bhitarkanika and a Lake Resort at Gopalpur-on-Sea. Adequate land patches have been acquired and the projects will start in due course of time."

Notably, destination weddings in Odisha have gained significant popularity, particularly among the Indian millennial generation. Informing that Swosti Group is also eyeing a big share in the destination wedding segment, Mohanty said that Swosti Chilika Resort, situated on the picturesque Chilika Lake has swiftly gained recognition as a sought-after wedding destination in Eastern India. "Over a short period, Swosti Chilika Resort has successfully hosted numerous memorable destination weddings. This year, we have a considerable number of confirmed destination weddings as well," he concluded. ♦

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Swosti group eyeing a big share in the destination wedding segment

Established in 1981, Swosti Group – Odisha's largest hotel chain, includes hotels such as Swosti Grand, Swosti Premium, and luxury resorts namely Gopalpur Palm Resort, Swosti Chilika Resort under its portfolio. The Group is set to launch its new 5-star luxury beach resort 'Swosti Premium Beach Resorts' at Golden Beach in Puri. In a tete-a-tete with **Asmita Mukherjee, JK Mohanty, Chairman & Managing Director, Swosti Group of Hotels** shared his plans and strategies for the upcoming ventures.

Informing about the location and amenities of the Swosti Premium Beach Resorts, Puri, Mohanty said, the property is strategically located in the heart of Puri's prime tourist seashore area. Swosti Premium Beach Resorts boasts 125 luxurious rooms, including three exquisite suites and one opulent Presidential Suite, all providing breathtaking views of the Bay of Bengal. The resort also features spacious banquet and conference halls, perfect for hosting weddings, conferences, and exhibitions. Additionally, the resort offers an infinity swimming pool and a plunge pool on the second floor; water sports activities, open-air party lawns, a rejuvenating spa, a state-of-the-art gym, a game zone, and a sky lounge bar on the rooftop at the 13th floor. While speaking about

the completion of the project he said, "The work is going on in full swing and we are hopeful to make this resort operational in early 2024."

Odisha has become a

surroundings. Additionally, the government is taking proactive measures to promote tourism through roadshows, the Eco Retreat Campaign, and attracting various investment opportunities



Swosti Premium Beach Resorts at Puri



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Le Méridien Etoile: A Mid-Century Modern Hotel in Paris for Business and Leisure Travellers

TBM Staff | Hyderabad

Le Méridien Etoile is a contemporary-styled hotel with 1,025 rooms, offering a one-of-a-kind experience that sparks creativity and inspiration for its guests. The hotel is strategically located in



front of the Palais des Congrès de Paris, a short distance from the Champs-Élysées and the La Défense district, making it an ideal destination for business and leisure travellers.

The hotel's accommodations include 555 Urban rooms, 74 Smart rooms, 92 Family Rooms, and 132 Chic rooms ranging from 21 to 24 square meters. In addition, there are 22 Suites, including 7 Junior

Suites, 13 Senior Suites, and 2 Presidential Suites. These multi-dimensional suites, ranging from 42 to 128 square meters, feature a living room next to the bedroom, providing an ideal space for families to relax and business travellers to organize small-scale meetings.

All rooms at Le Méridien Etoile feature the "Le Méridien Bed", free internet, a 42-inch TV with international channels, USB sockets, a token for Illy Coffee, and free access to a Parisian museum through the Unlock Art program.

Furthermore, the hotel boasts 128 LM Club rooms with exclusive access to the LM Club Lounge on the ground floor, which features a

private terrace.

Design & Interior

The hotel features a mid-century modern style, with interior design elements inspired by the 1940s and 1950s. The Hub - Le Méridien, the traditional lobby, features chic lounge furniture, a circular chandelier, and a warm lighting effect. The hotel's conference facilities and Jazz Club Etoile are elegant, spacious, and create an atmosphere conducive to creativity and inspiration. The bedrooms offer a range of materials, lighting, and colours, with furniture that can be arranged to suit guests' preferences. LM Club bedrooms offer free access to a private lounge with modern equipment, while the Executive and Presidential suites offer a comfortable and spacious setting.

F&B

Le Jazz Club Etoile is renowned for its cocktails and cuisine, offering a menu of classic and contemporary drinks, as well as finger food, cheese plates, and sweet treats for sharing. Live concerts from Tuesday to

Saturday showcase a variety of jazz styles, and the venue can be privatized for up to 150 guests. Meanwhile, Le Patio Etoile doubles up as a secret garden during fine weather and a winter wonderland during colder seasons, offering guests a place to enjoy lunch or drinks. The outdoor terrace is decorated with festive decorations and a chalet for a cosy atmosphere.

Meetings & Conference

Le Méridien Etoile features a contemporary 2,500 sq meter conference centre with 25 modular rooms, hosting up to 1,200 people. The dynamic environment stimulates creativity while ensuring high-quality stays.

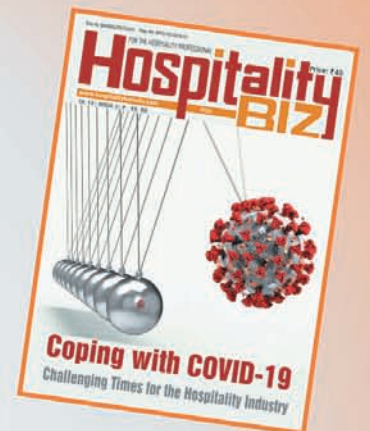
Fitness Centre

The hotel's fitness centre boasts a Cardio health area and a Weight training area, offering guests a stunning view of Parisian rooftops and the iconic Eiffel Tower. The fitness centre is accessible 24/7 by the hotel guests and includes an extensive selection of Technogym machines with touchscreens available in 15 languages. ♦



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Courtyard By Marriott Mumbai International Airport: Confident of strong growth this year

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

At a time when all businesses are looking at ways to expand their customer network, Courtyard by Marriott Mumbai International Airport is no different. The property is keen to increase the length of stay of its guests, along with positioning its large spaces for weddings and multi-function events, while pushing alternate revenue streams.

Talking about this, Victor Chen, GM, Courtyard by Marriott Mumbai International Airport, said, "We have opportunities in other operating departments of the hotel spa, gym and swimming pool membership, laundry revenue, transportation revenue and business center revenue. High-speed internet, and ISD line for meetings and conference is a new revenue stream that we are exploring."

The hotel is largely popular among transit and business travellers, with the former comprising 20% and latter 80% of its clientele, due to its strategic location of proximity to the international airport. "Besides being in close proximity of the airport, our hotel is known for its MICE facilities because we have a large ballroom and smaller breakout rooms for variety of meetings, residential weddings and local weddings."

For 2023, Chen believes it is going to be a strong year for growth. "During Q1 itself, we have surpassed growth compared to 2019 and 2022 having recorded above 15-20% budgeted revenues."

The two years of Covid has given the Courtyard team enough time to revisit its culture, and service standard. "We as a team have revisited our culture and values, and improved on our guest satisfaction score. Currently, we are witnessing 75% occupancy, and are looking to reach 80% by year end."



The Momo Café, a flagship offering at all Courtyard properties has been refurbished and its menu has been revamped at the Mumbai property. "Umrao, our specialty

enjoys repeat clientele. "We have built customer loyalty and service, and the Marriott Bonvoy programme has only enhanced our outreach. We want to position the property as a leisure staycation hotel. We have a lovely pool and offer multiple many activities for kids and family guests."

She went on to say that Marriott as a hotel company has positioned its hotels well in the market. "The teams have done a good job of getting the right pricing from the market, especially now that Covid is behind us."

Talking about the strategy to tap leisure guests and large groups, she said, "For groups, corporate clients and leisure clients we work out favourable packages. We have a long stay offers with additional benefits since our average length of stay is 2.5 nights. We have Marriott Bonvoy exclusive offer for member, and staycation offer for weekends. With an additional spend, customers get access to the Ark Bar where they can have a good time. We are using our different facilities to upsell, and leverage on the demand. Now, we are extending our staycation offer to weekdays to give guests additional value." ♦

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Victor Chen
GM, Courtyard by Marriott
Mumbai International Airport

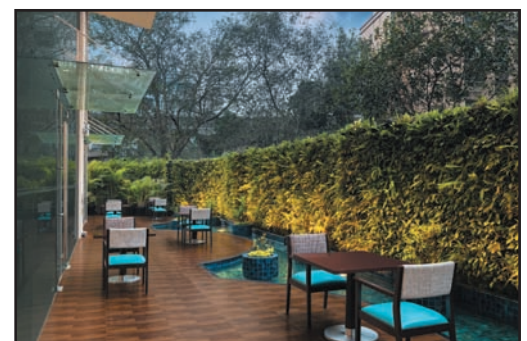
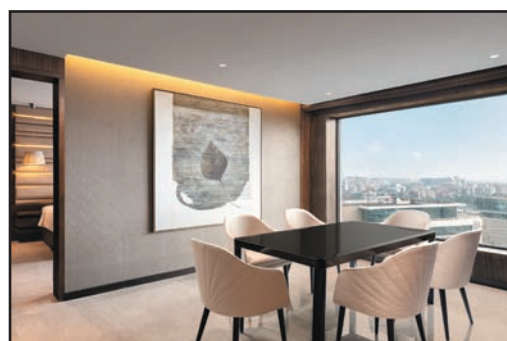


Neha Chowdhury
Director, Sales and Marketing,
Courtyard by Marriott Mumbai
International Airport

restaurant has enhanced its menu, and has seen a surge in footfall due to increased promotional offers."

According to Neha Chowdhury, Director of Sales and Marketing, Courtyard by Marriott Mumbai International Airport, "Courtyard as a brand is a smaller hotel. However the space that we offer and facilities we have are different. We have another specialty restaurant, Ark Bar, and the lobby itself offers large space."

The property is over a decade old, and



Personalizing travel protection through CFAR and dynamic bundling

By Barney Pierce, SVP - Strategic Partnerships, APAC, Cover Genius

India has experienced major upheavals in the airline industry ranging from flight delays to cancellations, and much more. According to industry data, at least one-third of all domestic flights are late and this number doesn't seem to be improving. In January 2023, airlines denied boarding to 594 passengers, and more than 27,000 passengers were affected by flight cancellations. With this, it's no surprise that there has been an increase in demand for travel and refund protection solutions for the third largest aviation market in the world.

Factors including weather conditions, commercial and technical complications, overbooking, unserviceable seats and staffing shortages have resulted in consumers being extremely cautious when booking travel. Online travel companies and airlines need to go beyond offering standard travel protection that leaves travelers unprotected in times of need. To offer customers total peace of mind and protect them in these times of needs, personalized protection solutions like 'Cancel for Any Reason' (CFAR) Refund Protection can help.

Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) protection enables digital companies like Booking Holdings, owner of Priceline, Kayak and Booking.com, redBus, MakeMyTrip to give their customers peace of mind when they book their next big trip. It allows travel companies to build trust and loyalty with their customers with protection embedded directly in the booking path and a seamless refund experience that doesn't require customers to provide a reason for cancellation.

A recent global report found that consumers who are offered 'Cancel for Any Reason' (CFAR) protection, when booking their travel, are highly likely (60%) to purchase the underlying airfare, compared to a more limited refund protection option or no protection at all. In fact, consumers are willing to pay 133% more for CFAR protection than non-CFAR protection when booking airfare, desiring a convenient, hassle-free experience. The same research shows

that despite high consumer demand for CFAR protection, 4 out of 10 respondents were not offered 'Refund Protection' for their most recent airfare purchase. This gap presents an opportunity for travel providers and airlines to grow customer satisfaction and ancillary revenue by offering CFAR Refund Protection for their next booking.

CFAR Refund Protection for comprehensive coverage

CFAR gives travelers added comfort and flexibility when booking airfare by providing them with the option to make their tickets refundable with just a few clicks directly in the customer journey. They can complete their seamless experience with a digital, automated claims process that provides travelers with instant refunds via a range of payment methods. With CFAR, travelers can request refunds without having to provide documentation or fill out paperwork. And unlike standard travel protection that might cover limited reasons like medical or transport interruption only, CFAR protection enables them to submit a refund request for any reason, no questions asked.

Bundled and unbundled protection tailored to each traveler

No two trips are the same. For example, a traveler booking a first-class, long-haul flight with checked luggage has very different needs from somebody that has booked a short, domestic flight for a weekend away — and their protection should reflect that.

By partnering with insurtechs, travel companies can take the guesswork out of protection. To meet the particular needs of each passenger, travel protection can be unbundled and solutions can be built for any number of situations that can be tailored to any customer's itinerary or destination. Travel companies can choose the protection their customers actually need, whether it be Airline Collapse Cover for the wary flier, emergency medical assistance for an extended stay, personal electronics cover for short-haul business travelers,



or rental car excess for a weekend road trip. We have been co-creating similar solutions for our partners.

When SkyScanner reached out to us in the Spring of 2020, travel insurance policies were not fit for the circumstances of a global pandemic, and we had to act quickly to meet customer needs. We worked with SkyScanner to create Covid Cover, a suite of hyper-relevant products which importantly had no exclusions for Covid-19: medical, trip cancellation (including cover in the event of denied boarding due to a failed health check) and airline insolvency cover. Through our partnership, we were able to create a first-of-its kind offering to seamlessly protect Skyscanner's global customers.

Personalized travel protection is no longer an option but a must-have for travel companies and airlines. In order to fulfill the needs of today's travelers, it must be fit-for-purpose, convenient and full-service to truly protect them from all manner of uncertainties and 'what-ifs'. ♦

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

Tracks of Transformation!

How Indian Railways May Revolutionise Tourism

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

We discussed getting tourism back to the bottom of the pyramid last time. Making it more affordable and accessible would be a significant step. Indian Railways is one organisation that can help. The Indian railway system is now one of the most extensive in the world. It has recently become more aggressive, indicating a desire to upscale and modernise. It is high time to reconsider rail-induced tourism in India.

Indian Railways can help on both sides of the supply-demand equation. On the supply side, it can provide opportunities for tourism and hospitality entrepreneurs, while on the demand side, it can provide profound, meaningful experiences for tourists. Indian railways have begun to compete with the dynamic ubiquitous surface transport, which is riding a fast-paced infrastructure development, and civil aviation, which is reaching places at low prices and providing better services-airports and connections. When these three compete, the country and its people gain.

In addition to IRCTC, Indian railways should open up and facilitate small private entrepreneurs to ride the railways' ecosystem and offer creative and innovative rail tourism-induced tourism and hospitality products to bridge gaps, such as last mile connectivity, imaginative detours and packages, catering, and merchandising, to name a few. These entrepreneurs will attract more tourists to Atmnirbhar Bharat by offering them Creative, Comfortable, and Carbon-Neutral travel experiences (3 Cs).

Indian Railways can apply the following tactics to compete with Indian civil aviation and road transport in offering tourism services. High-speed, luxury, and tourist trains are just one of the ways the Indian Railways might improve their products to appeal to tourists and make their trips more enjoyable and convenient. Furthermore, by increasing the number of trains it operates, expanding its network, and connecting remote yet fascinating regions, the Indian Railways can make it easier and affordable for tourists to visit the lesser-known parts of the country.

Some fascinating train journeys in India will blow your mind. These train rides take

you through some of India's most exciting and off-the-beaten stretches, providing an epic and unique adventure. They are thrilling and will take you to some exotic locations. For example, have you ever heard of the Mandapam-Rameswaram Express? This train ride crosses India's second-largest bridge, the Pamban Bridge, which connects the mainland to the Tamil Nadu island of Rameswaram. The train



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ride offers spectacular views of the Bay of Bengal and takes you into uncharted territory in Tamil Nadu. Check out The Dooars Voyage train ride next! It takes you to some of West Bengal's most distant and unknown locations. Around here, you get spectacular views of tea gardens, wildlife, and lush green woodlands. Moreover, have you ever heard of the Neral - Murud Janjira Express? This train excursion takes

you through some of Maharashtra's most beautiful and unknown portions, from Neral to the tranquil coastal hamlet of Murud Janjira. The journey includes some breathtaking vistas of the Arabian Sea and the Konkan coastline.

What if Indian Railways collaborated with the travel sector to create incredible vacation packages that included train journeys, hotel stays, and sightseeing? Isn't that a fantastic idea? This might make train travel even more appealing, encouraging people to see more of the country. Train travel is cheaper any day and has fewer carbon footprints. The prime minister promotes domestic tourism by saying "Dekho Apna Desh" (which translates to "check out your own country"). Who other than Indian Railways can help you do that better?

How about the stuff at the stations? Yeap! Indian Railways is undoubtedly investing in making their restrooms cleaner, waiting areas more relaxing, and food options more appealing to passengers. In addition, to make things easier for international visitors, the Indian Railways can leverage digital technology such as online ticket sales, smartphone tickets, and real-time train tracking. Furthermore, Indian Railways should step up its game by advertising, social media marketing, and attending travel expos. As a result, more individuals will be aware of their services and, ideally, will utilise them more frequently.

Thus, Indian Railways can boost tourism by providing inexpensive and comfortable train rides. So, if Indian Railways improves its infrastructure, services, and cleanliness and adds some high-speed and stylish trains, it may become a key player in the tourism business.

A real-time application can advise onboard passengers on what attractions would be coming their way. They might take a break and re-organise their travel with real-time dynamic booking in railways-supported boarding and lodging- in a colonial-era heritage railway property- and head out for a thrilling new experience! ♦

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



Start-Up Forum

Bringing Innovations to the Forefront

CoRover 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.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: CoRover Private Limited

Core Team: 42 people

Founding year: 2016

Company Website: <https://corover.ai>



Description : Founded by Ankush Sabharwal, CoRover is on a mission to enable users talk to any system the way they talk to an intelligent person. CoRover® is the world's first and the highest ROI delivering human-centric conversational AI platform; which is secure, scalable and reliable; equipped with patent-pending tech (based on AI, ML, NLP, AR & VR); and powers Multi-Format (AI VideoBots, AI VoiceBots, AI ChatBots), Multi-Lingual (112+ Languages) and Multi-Channel/Omni-Channel AI Virtual Assistants. CoRover's Video-Voice Commerce Virtual Assistants facilitates end-to-end transactions, including payment. Also, CoRover now has its own LLM, BharatGPT, a Generative AI (text, voice, video), with an option to use ChatGPT. CoRover has 1 Billion+ Users, 25M+ MAU and even handles 800K concurrent users. It is 10x quicker (TAT) to deploy and delivers 90%+ Accuracy.

<https://youtu.be/1UgDMJdzoYo>



‘We are always looking for opportunities to expand our brands into new territories, which supports our long-term growth plans’

Thailand-headquartered Minor Hotels is now planning an aggressive expansion strategy in India, after growing its European footprint via the acquisition of a 94% stake in Europe-based NH Hotels. The brand has recently announced its first hotel in India, Anantara Jaipur Hotel. In a conversation with **Asmita Mukherjee, Dillip Rajakarier, CEO of Minor Hotels** expressed that the brand is eyeing solid global expansion of its eight hotel brands for which they continue looking at opportunities to grow their portfolio through acquisitions or investments in India as well.

Q Minor Hotels has acquired a 94% stake in NH Hotels. Was it a calculated move to explore the European market?

Minor Hotels acquisition of NH Hotel Group was a calculated opportunistic move! Our growth is both strategic and opportunistic at the same time. We are always looking for opportunities to expand our brands into new territories, which supports our long-term growth plans. NH was perfect in this regard, as it allowed us to achieve an even balance of hotels and resorts; owned, managed and leased, across a more global spread of countries

– without cannibalizing our existing brands. In addition, we balanced a leisure-heavy portfolio and a corporate-heavy portfolio through the acquisition and integration.

Before acquiring NH, 80% of our portfolio was in Asia Pacific and we were keen to pursue a diversification strategy. Countries like Thailand have been prone to political unrest, and ensuring a more balanced portfolio was essential as we grew the portfolio.

Five years on from our acquisition of NH Hotel Group, Minor Hotels is accelerating the exchange of guests and growth

of brands between Asia and Europe, including moving into city hotels. As well as adding Anantara and Avani properties in Europe – a strong strategic focus for us. In addition, we are growing the NH Collection and NH Hotels brands in Asia and the Middle East with a number of exciting launches.

Q Do you have any such plans to acquire stakes in other markets as well, specially for India, in which you have recently opened a property through a management contract?

Minor Hotels continues to eye solid global expansion of our eight hotel brands, with 50 new hotels earmarked to open

Q How important is the Indian market for Minor Hotels?

India has great potential, both from a domestic perspective and also from an outbound perspective. I recently attended HICSA in Bangalore as we firmly believe in the potential of the Indian hospitality sector. Given the recent announcement of our first Anantara in India, I look forward to ramping up our development plans over the course of 2023.

Q As a global brand is Minor Hotels following an asset-light model?

Minor Hotels follows an ‘asset right’ strategy which ensures a sound balance of owned, managed, leased and JV. As a hospitality and lifestyle operator, our vision is not to be the biggest company, it is to be the most profitable while delivering a superior experience to all stakeholders.

Q According to you, is the occupancy and REVPAR in Asia doing better than in Europe?

Europe is doing well, Asia is doing well, Australia is also doing well etc. This is our first-year post-COVID that we have no restrictions in any of the regions that we operate, so there is a clear resurgence in travel. We believe this trend is here to stay for some time, and it is our role to maximise the opportunity and continue to drive our business forward.

Q Which products of Minor Hotels are you planning to promote in the next 3 years?

We will continue expanding our existing 8 brands into new territories and grow our portfolio of hotels to 600 through organic growth and perhaps inorganic acquisition, depending on the opportunity. We will also continue to change the hotel market mix by introducing our Asian-based guests to our European (and elsewhere) hotels and, of course, our Europe-based guests to our Asian portfolio. ♦

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North Guwahati, Assam- A Perfect Blend of Archaeological & Pilgrimage Tourism

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

Guwahati being the Gateway to Northeast welcomes a good traffic of tourists. Before hopping into the prime destination, tourists can plan a quick day tour. North Guwahati can be the tapped destination for the purpose. Considering the road connectivity from Railway Station and Airport, it assures tourists a hassle free day tour. North Guwahati was once the headquarters of the Ahom Kingdom. As such it parks history from the 18th century for tourists who take pleasure in

hill was believed to be a resting point of Mahadeva after the Self-Immolation of Sati followed by the destruction of her body by Vishnu's Sudharshana Chakra. The stone inscriptions on the outer wall remind the folks about its builder- Ahom King Rajeswar Singha and the medieval Artistic glory. Today, the foothill is surrounded by rock boulders and the site is protected by the Directorate of Archaeology, Government of Assam.

To have a puff of the fresh breeze, tourists can proceed to Shri Shri Aswaklanta Temple on the banks of the mighty Brahmaputra. It is said that Sri Krishna was once on a search for Narakasura to kill him. In between this chase Shri Krishna's horses feel tired and stopped here. The name of the temple originated from the two words- Aswa means 'Horse' and 'Klanta' means tired. The temple was built by Shiva Singha and it still boasts its architectural beauty. The temple is believed to have the footprints of Lord Vishnu in his Tortoise avatar. To add to its beauty, there is also an image of Anantasai Vishnu which is a fine art from the 11th century.

Last but not the least; tourists can end the day-long tour at the Dirgheshwari Temple. It is a refreshing long climb of the stairs to Dirgheshwari Hill. A few parts from Sati's lifeless body also fell at this place. Two footprints of the Goddess can be seen engraved in the rocks by the temple. The temple was built by Swargadeo Siva Singha as it was believed to be the 2nd Holiest Place after Kamakhya Temple. The idol of Goddess Durga resides in an underground cave. Later during the reign of Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha he offered Silver Japi which is still used today to cover the Goddess's idol. Also, the temple premises present a beautiful picturesque view of the medieval architecture.

Tourism has proved itself to be a dynamic industry. Tourists all across the globe enjoy finding new interests with every passing day. This has turned the industry into a big challenge. Every state therefore needs to draft their strategy to welcome their tourists keeping in view the dynamism. One Destination can be a choice for tourists of different categories.

Tourism can benefit & look interesting from both tourists' and host's perspective.

History in itself is a fascinating tale for the story lovers. If the places holding pride in historical sites are well preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India or the Directorate of Archaeology, efforts should be initiated to charm tourists towards such places. Also, connectivity plays big here. Considering the historical sites of North Guwahati it can be seen that they are well connected and they have the potential to attract tourists. The contributions of the Ahom Dynasty are widespread in the entire state. North Guwahati can take advantage of its historical background while drawing tourists interested in Archaeological & Pilgrimage Tourism. The wall arts at the Airport and by the roads linking the main city of Guwahati give a glimpse of the tales of the Ahom Rule, its historical chronicles and also a picture of the prevailing culture. Also, government campaigns for Assam should include the varied choices it reserves for tourists of all categories.

'Let tourists relish the aura of History from the old sites' ♦

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

Dr. Gargi Sarma is working as Assistant Professor in the Department of M.Com at K C Das Commerce College, Guwahati. Her academic and professional interests lie in Management and Marketing. Dr. Sarma is an avid academic having completed her Masters in Commerce, Masters in Arts (Economics), M.Phil program and Doctoral work in advertising. She has presented over 20 research papers in National & International seminars and published 10 research papers in reputed journals. Dr.Sarma has been credited with professional achievements and awards in international forums. She has also been pursuing her passion for writing & photography alongside teaching & research. Her articles are published in the regional English Dailies, Leisure & Business Magazines.

Archaeological cum Religious Delights. These places gracefully flaunt the striking contributions by the Ahom Kings and narrate the stories following them.

Tourists can start off with DouL Govindo Temple as their 1st destination at the Chandra Bharati Hill. The temple homes Lord Krishna as its prime deity. It was built by Ahom King Pramatta Singha in the memory of his father. The beautiful complex of the temple allows its visitors to relax and bask in its splendour. Located at a close proximity is the star-shaped temple Manikarneswar Devalaya at the top of the Manikhalya Hill. In a small underground cave resides the Shivlinga which is worshipped by the devotees. The



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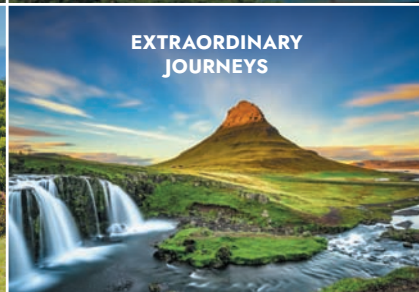
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