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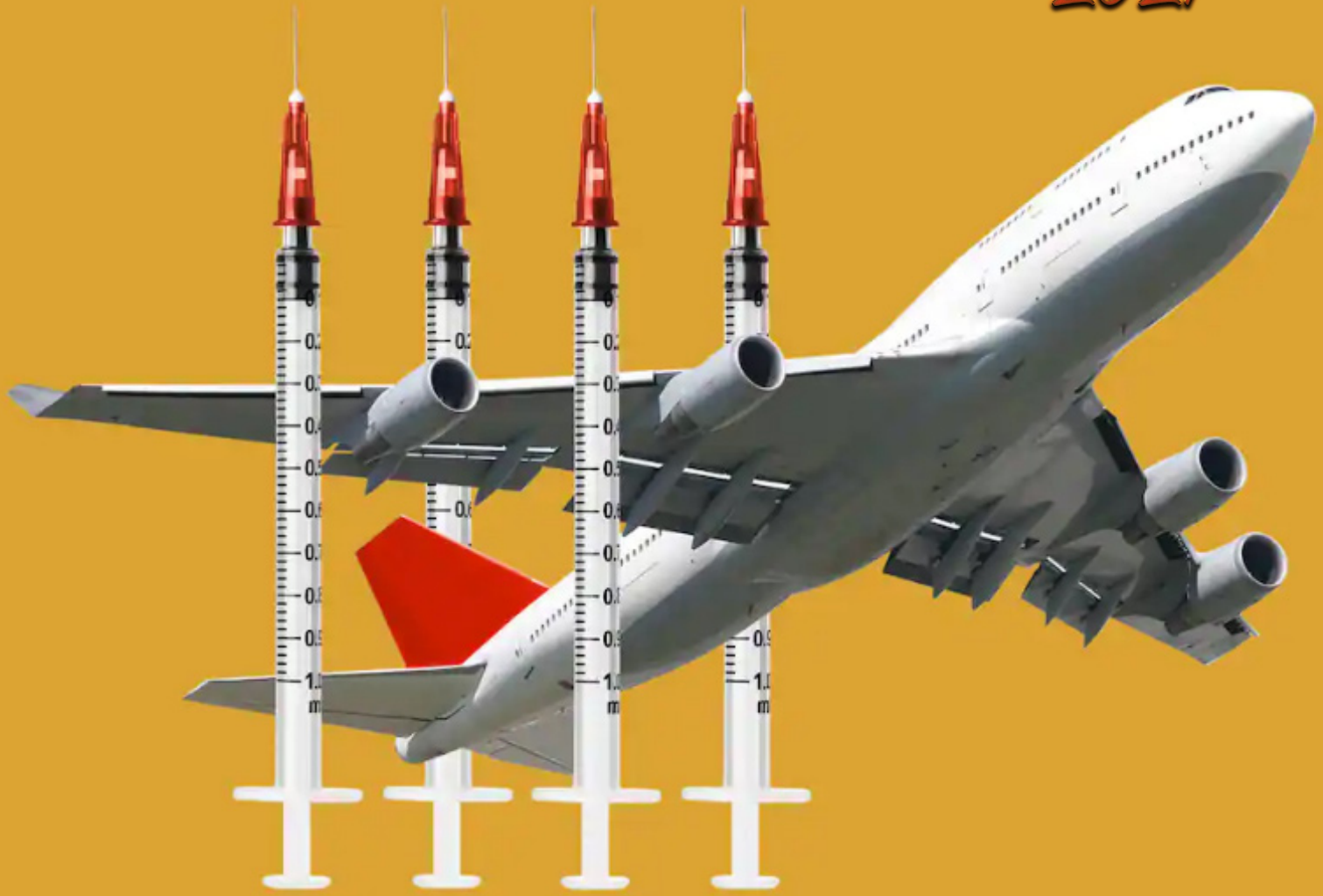
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2021*



Cautious Optimism



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Tourism Australia to explore partnerships with banks to focus on 'high-value travellers' from India

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

Tourism Australia will continue to focus on high-value travellers from India in the post-Covid era. While India continues to remain a rising star for the nation Down Under, emerging as the sixth largest market for spend and seventh largest for arrivals in 2019, the board will seek partnerships with banks and financial institutions to gain access to individuals in the high-net worth bracket.

Responding to a question from **TravelBiz Monitor** at a virtual media briefing, Nishant Kashikar, Country Manager (India & Gulf), Tourism Australia, said, "Our overarching focus is on yield-based and spend-based segmentation. Outbound travel constitutes just 1.2% of the population in India, and our focus continues to remain on high-value travellers. These travellers, per capita spend

on an average 5,000 dollars in Australia, and they remain our focus post-Covid as well. Since Australia isn't a mass destination, it is a planned move to shift focus from demographic to psychographic segmentation. Therefore, in India, we will explore partnerships with banks and financial institutions that have access to high-value customers with substantial savings."

According to the India Economic Strategy, the number of Indian tourists to Australia is expected to triple to nearly 1.2 million by 2035. Therefore, Tourism Australia has identified India as a rising star market that has the potential to deliver up to one million



visitors over the next decade. While Australia will take a gradual and cautious approach to reopening its borders, the importance of India in 2021 cannot be ignored, Kashikar stated.

Commenting on Australia's focus on China at a time when relationship between the two nations are strained and drawing comparison with India, Kashikar shared, "China will continue to be a

key market, and its importance cannot be neglected; it the biggest market for spend and arrivals. India is almost 14 years behind China in terms of arrivals and spend, and therefore the entire focus is to capitalise on the India opportunity." ♦

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TAAI partners with LVG Learning to offer online destination learning programmes for members

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) has signed a partnership agreement with LVG Learning, a UK-based online education company providing unique solutions and innovative support for tourism worldwide.

This initiative has been undertaken to empower TAAI members through the updated destination knowledge and open new business networks with the local expertise worldwide and to get ready for the future. These programmes will also help for reskilling team members and improving business abilities.

Through this platform there will be an exchange of accurate and credible information among business partners. Learning and networking is a new and unique combination, which members are encouraged to undertake to be future ready.

Jyoti Mayal, President of TAAI, targets to empower members through the updated destination knowledge. "We need to recover and get ready for the future. We have to

use the time for reskilling our team and improving our business abilities. We are happy to innovate on education, and we call every leader to support education with us," said Mayal, after signing the agreement

adapt to trends. Knowledge is the king. We are happy to welcome TAAI members to support their business growth through education and local expertise."

Since the tourism industry has a significant contribution to world GDP, it requires a highly skilled workforce. "This means that hospitality and tourism professionals require continuous training to recover and improve themselves," asserts Mayal. She added, "Learning is a continuous process. Through developments in the ed-tech sector, we are experiencing new features and new developments rapidly. Educational materials reach everyone, everywhere, at any time today, and we anticipate the future to increase this potential."

Mayal also pointed out that the industry is experiencing the highest level of shortage of skills and staff rotations in any industry. "But online learning and dynamic networking within the industry can change that by developing the soft and business skills and knowledge of the employees and thus increasing business growth," she opined. ♦



JYOTI MAYAL
President of TAAI



SEDA CAYLAK
CEO, LVG Learning

with LVG Learning.

Seda Caylak, CEO, LVG Learning, said, "We build this platform to exchange accurate and credible information among business partners. Learning & Networking is a new and unique combination. The future will come with the technology and tourism, as being a core bridge among cultures, should

Singapore pilots framework to test bed-safe itineraries

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

With a halt on international leisure travel, Singapore Tourism Board is piloting a programme to test bed-safe itineraries for the MICE segment. "For a start, we are piloting a framework to test bed-safe itineraries, starting with delegates arriving in Singapore for MICE events," said GB Srithar, Regional Director (India, Middle East, South Asia), Singapore Tourism Board.

The pilots allow tourism businesses to develop and test bed-safe, bespoke and personalised visitor experiences for MICE travellers, while building up the capabilities of travel agents, tourist guides and other experience-providers in delivering these experiences. "Through these efforts, MICE visitors and future leisure visitors will be assured that they can enjoy Singapore's authentic destination offerings with peace of mind," Srithar stated.

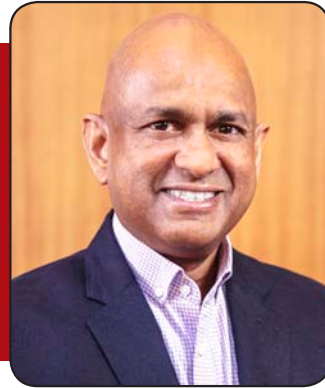
Last month Singapore announced the Connect@Singapore initiative as part of its efforts to re-open borders in a controlled and safe manner, with necessary public health safeguards in place. According to Srithar, "The new segregated travel lane complements other existing travel lanes that have been established such as the Reciprocal Green Lane

and will facilitate essential global business exchanges and support the revival of Singapore's air hub status and hospitality sector. Connect@Singapore is a safe, controlled step towards facilitating Singapore's gradual reopening as an international business hub."

The lane will be open to a limited number of travellers under stringent public health guidelines and will be monitored closely to ensure that public health considerations are necessarily addressed.

India is one of the key sources of business traffic to Singapore, particularly for Meeting & Incentive travel segment. Singapore offers subvention schemes to customise needs of corporates, event planners and delegates of varied group sizes. "These schemes are catered specifically to help them to plan better and pitch more confidently should Singapore be a destination of choice. These schemes are being reviewed regularly. In fact, we have just made enhancements to the schemes in light of the Covid-19 situation to ensure that they are able to meet the changing needs of the corporates, MICE agents and event planners and to keep Singapore competitive

as a top-of-mind MICE destination for the India market," Srithar shared. ♦



GB SRITHAR

Regional Director (India, Middle East, South Asia), Singapore Tourism Board

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Cape Town Helicopters appoints Outbound Konnections as GSA in India

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Cape Town Helicopters, the helicopter operator in Cape Town, has announced a strategic partnership with Outbound Konnections as its Global Sales Agent (GSA) in India.

The appointment of Outbound Konnections is part of Cape Town Helicopters' strategic direction in ensuring they have footprints across all major markets globally. The group has already signed up global sales agents in Germany, France, Russia, United States of America (USA) and China.

Speaking after the announcement Herman Geldenhuis, General Manager, Cape Town Helicopters, noted that the growth in international arrivals from South Africa's key source markets since the government embarked on a tourism revival programme in 2019, informed the company's targeted campaign in these markets.

"International arrivals have been on a steady growth since 2010 with the Soccer World Cup Finals being South Africa, and

the Indian market has been one of the fastest growing source markets. Our partnership with Outbound Konnections gives us a better standing in the industry in tapping into this market."



ANJUM LOKHANDWALA
Founder & Director, Outbound
Konnections Tourism Board



HERMAN GELDENHUIS
General Manager
Cape Town Helicopters

According to figures released by the Ministry of Tourism on the state of South African tourism in 2019, international arrivals hit 1.2 million in 2018/2019, up 1.5% from the previous year. The Indian market contributed to 8% of these arrivals, as the third largest source market; behind the United States of

America, United Kingdom.

Anjum Lokhandwala, Founder & Director, Outbound Konnections, stated, "We are happy to be appointed as the India office for Cape Town Helicopters. Cape Town Helicopters has been a well-known brand in terms of luxury, innovation and the quality of services it has to offer for all travel segments be it leisure, MICE or incentive groups, and we are very keen to develop and multiply their market share in India."

Neil Warren, Owner, Cape Town Helicopters, expressed his gratitude towards all Indians that visit Cape Town annually and said that he loves the adventurous spirit of all Indians to explore, young and old. "Our product is perfectly suited to provide memorable and exhilarating experiences to our Indian visitors. Our local hotels and restaurants also have keen understanding of social and cultural nuances that allow us to offer regional Indian cuisines and services tailored for guests from the Indian subcontinent. We invite every Indian with open arms to come and visit us." ♦



**BEST
WISHES
FOR
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Representation,
Destination
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and Public
Relations.**



**from Sartha
Global
Marketing**

Yas Island Concludes 2020 with 35 industry accolades and two new attractions at Ferrari World Abu Dhabi

Attractions and theme parks receive top global traveller's choice awards

Yas Island Abu Dhabi, the UAE's premier leisure and entertainment destination, has closed off 2020 on a high note achieving 35 awards and accolades for its attractions, infrastructure projects and developments, as part of its ongoing global recognition for its outstanding and unique experiences.

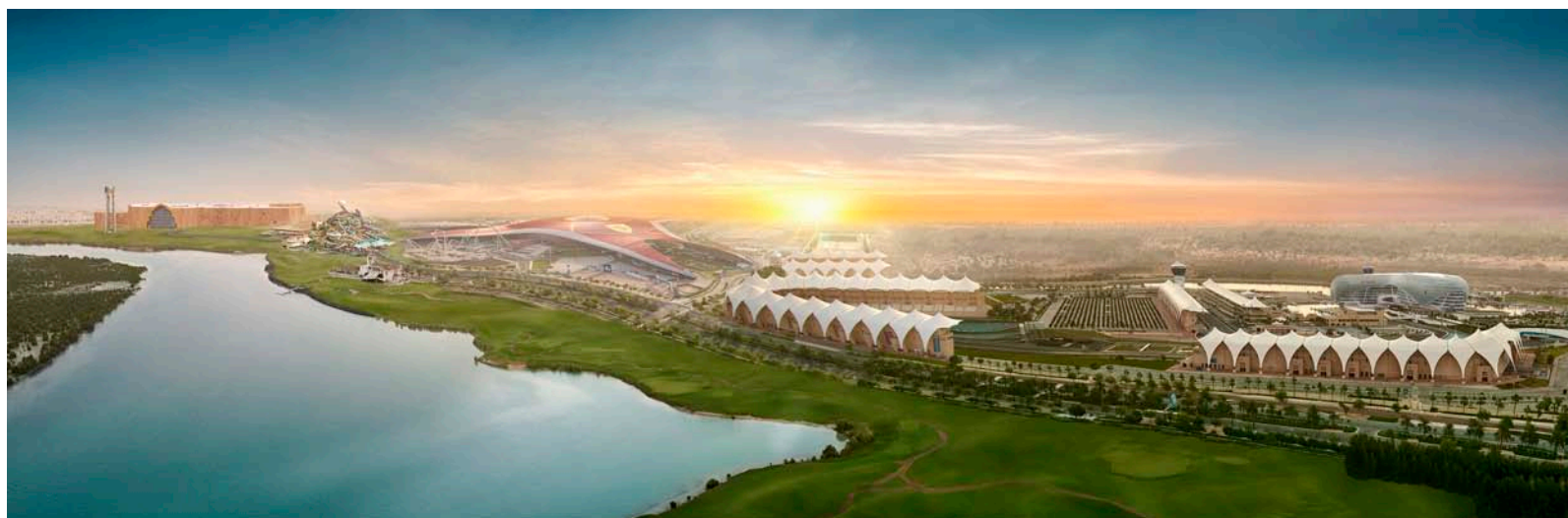
H.E. Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of Miral, said, "We are honoured and delighted to witness yet another year of international recognition from leading industry bodies, which reflects our ongoing commitment to excellence, and is testament to Yas Island's steadily growing position as a top global destination for leisure, entertainment and business. Home to award-winning



World Abu Dhabi recently launched two new thrilling experiences, the Roof Walk and Zip Line. With the Ferrari World Abu Dhabi Roof Walk experience, guests can scale the Park's signature red roof and take in spectacular vista views of Yas Island. On the other hand, the Ferrari World Abu Dhabi Zip Line allows guests to conquer a first-of-its-kind challenge on Yas Island as they zip from the heart of Ferrari World Abu Dhabi through the Flying Aces roller coaster loop. Guests seeking to

Dhabi received an incredible eight awards in total, including three MENALAC Awards for 'Best Day Out', 'Best Theme Park', and 'Best New Leisure/Entertainment Concept' for its Teen Titans Training Academy, in addition to winning the award for the 'Middle East's Leading Tourist Attraction' at the World Travel Awards. The park was also named Middle East's Best Theme Park by the International Travel Awards, won 'Favorite Entertainment Event on Batman 80th Anniversary Event' at the Pride of Abu Dhabi Awards, was recognised as 'Best Family Attraction' by Global Brands Magazine, and as 'Travelers Choice' by Tripadvisor.

In just one year since opening, CLYMB Abu Dhabi has been named 'Middle East's



attractions and experiences, Yas Island is an integral part of our efforts in supporting the overall growth of Abu Dhabi's tourism sector, and we look forward to building on its success story as we gear up to 2021 and beyond."

Encompassing theme parks, motorsports and golf venues, a versatile hospitality offering, as well as an impressive portfolio of projects in the pipeline, Yas Island was recognised as the 'Middle East's Leading Tourism Development Project 2020' at the World Travel Awards.

Home to the world's fastest rollercoaster, Ferrari World Abu Dhabi, popular with Indian travellers, received not one, but two accolades from the World Travel Awards – first being named 'Middle East's Leading Theme Park 2020' and crowned as the 'World's Leading Theme Park 2020'. The park also took home the 'Best CSR Campaign on Speedy Recovery Program' at the MENA Leisure & Attractions Council (MENALAC) and was awarded 'Travelers Choice' by Tripadvisor.

In honour of its 10th anniversary, Ferrari

bring along family and friends can even gear up for the dual racing challenge for an added thrill to the unparalleled adventure.

The two first-of-their-kind experiences on Yas Island will bring Ferrari World Abu Dhabi, the World's Leading Theme Park's exciting offerings to include over 43 Ferrari-inspired attractions for both adults and younger guests, in line with its efforts to provide world-class, family-friendly experiences for guests of all ages.

Yas Waterworld, Yas Island's popular Emirati-themed waterpark, took home the 'World's Leading Waterpark' award for the third year running, in addition to being recognised as the 'Middle East's Leading Waterpark' in 2020 by the prestigious World Travel Awards. MENALAC Awards 2020 and Global Brands Magazine both recognised Yas Waterworld as 'Best Water Park'. The waterpark was also awarded Middle East's Best Water Theme Park by the International Travel Awards and 'Travelers Choice' by Tripadvisor.

Throughout 2020, Warner Bros. World Abu

Leading Adventure Tourist Attraction 2020' at the World Travel Awards and was recognised by Global Brands Magazine as the 'Best New Adventure/Sports Attraction'. It also won the title of 'Best Family Entertainment Center' at the 2020 Park World Excellence Awards. This year, CLYMB™ Abu Dhabi, was also awarded two GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS titles for the world's largest indoor skydiving wind tunnel and the world's tallest indoor artificial climbing wall.

As part of the 49th UAE National Day celebrations, Yas Mall broke the Guinness World Records for the 'Largest Sand Art Structure', after artists created an eye-catching sand visual in a giant sand art bottle, illustrating the National Day of the UAE.

Yas Links Abu Dhabi was awarded the 'United Arab Emirates' Best Golf Course 2020' and 'Abu Dhabi's Best Golf Course 2020' during the World Golf Awards.

Hotels at Yas Plaza received two accolades in 2020 – Radisson Blu Hotel Abu Dhabi

Yas Island received the 'Travellers Choice Award 2020' by Trip Advisor, while Amerigos Yas Island at Park Inn Abu Dhabi Yas Island recently won 'Favorite Latin American' restaurant during the Fact Awards 2020.

W Abu Dhabi – Yas Island won a wide range of awards, including the 'World's Leading Marina Resort', 'Middle East's Leading Marina Resort', and 'Abu Dhabi's Leading Lifestyle Hotel' at the World Travel Awards 2020. W Abu Dhabi – Yas Island also received two Time Out Abu Dhabi Special Recognition 2020 awards, with its W Lounge and the Wet Deck both winning the 'Best New Nightlife Venue'. The hotel also received 'Favorite Newcomer' during the FACT Dining Awards Abu Dhabi for its trendy restaurant, Garage, known from its Brunch in Garage (B.I.G.), featuring five culinary hubs.

Yas Island's parks operator, Farah Experiences, won two MENALAC Awards in 2020 for 'Best Sales and Marketing campaign' for its Summer Says Yas Campaign, and 'Best Employee Engagement Initiative' for its WOW Awards Program.

Attracting tourists from across the globe, Yas Island's immersive hospitality and leisure attractions help reinforce its position as a world-class tourism destination, offering memorable experiences unlike anywhere else in the region.

The destination like no other, also includes attractions such as Yas Marina Circuit, which hosts the Formula 1 Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, an award-winning golf course, world-class shopping with globally renowned brands, and over 160 dining outlets, of which many offer Indian cuisine.

Every year the Island has Diwali holidays celebrations also, where varied activities, dining offers and occur across the Island attractions. With multiple concert arenas, Yas Island also hosts entertainment from Bollywood throughout the annual events calendar.

Yas Island also has a total of 2,000 rooms and suites across seven hotels for Indian visitors to choose from, surrounded by a 25sqkm island that caters to their leisure and entertainment.

Proudly and responsibly open for fun Yas Island has been awarded World Travel and Tourism Council 'Safe Travels' stamp, marking the first destination in Abu Dhabi to receive the international honour.

For trade queries and to learn more about Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, visit; www.experiencehub.com ♦

NEWS ROUND UP

SKAL International Mumbai South-732 sends message of hope & optimism with its Christmas celebration

TBM Staff | Mumbai

SKAL International Mumbai South-732 organised its Christmas party at a hotel in Mumbai last month. Dignitaries from tourism and travel trade graced the event, signalling a message of hope, optimism and positivity to the industry.

Foot tapping music, intriguing games, melodious songs, lively compering and recognition awards were some of the highlights of the event. Members were delighted meeting associates and colleagues; in true Skal tradition as the baton of friendship and bonding was passed around. Delectable finger food, yummy main course, good choice of spirits, thoughtful give-away gift, rounded up a fine evening. ♦



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Sitting on the Fence

With 2020 finally behind us, we can focus our energy on rebuilding what was lost. But it's not a cake walk. News of roll out of vaccines generated hope and jubilation, but the mood has transformed from confident euphoria with that of despondent realism with the spread of the new mutant virus. But we are not overly worried as we learnt to live through all the difficulties in the past nine months or so. Despite all the ups and downs we dealt with last year, our spirits never fade away. And we have never given up either. The roll out of the vaccine is a good news, and hopefully it will abet the crisis, but we have to keep in mind that it is not panacea. The news of new variant of virus and the situation in Britain may decelerate the progress of tourism revival. But one should be prepared to hear more such news in the future as well. This will go on for a few more months until we get a permanent solution to contain the virus.

Coming to the domestic tourism sector, it has shown some sorts of revival but mostly on intra-state and some select locations. People are still sitting on the fence and monitoring the situation. As far as outbound is concerned, its revival seems very difficult to predict. My guess is as good as yours that long-haul destinations will take much longer to revive compared with short-haul ones. It will be gradual short to long-haul recovery depending on efficacy of vaccines.

In the changed circumstances or the new normal as it has been termed, it is imperative for destinations and nations to create a robust structure in conjunction with airlines, hotels and car rental companies to offer a Covid-free environment. This will infuse confidence among travellers to embark on travel.

What does 2021 have in store for us? Read our Industry Perspective section where we asked experts from across segments to do some crystal ball-gazing.

Wish you all a very Happy New Year 2021!

Prasenjit Chakraborty
 Assistant Editor

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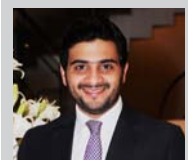
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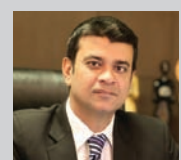
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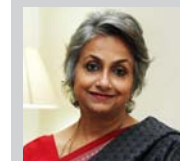
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MICE will Roar, Again

By **Rajeev Kohli**, Joint Managing Director, Creative Travel & President, EUROMIC

I often get asked – what is next? What is the future of tourism? Will MICE ever come back?

My first response is 'Chill'. Close your eyes and breath. Our businesses have collapsed. Temporarily or permanently, the situation will differ for each one of us. Take some little solace in the fact that you did nothing wrong to fall into this situation. You did not make bad business decisions. You did not do anyone any wrong. We simply found ourselves hit by circumstances that apparently, even God hasn't been able to control. However, please take some learning from this crisis on how our industry-wide poor pricing and low margin tactics have made all of us vulnerable. Learn that depressed margins meant that most of the industry entered this crisis with very sparse coffers. If healthy margins were allowed for, the situation would perhaps be quite different. Anyway, hindsight is a beautiful tool.

My observations from my actions & travels during the pandemic, and all I have been reading and seeing in the news, gives me clarity. Humans need

to interact, socialise and to be free. This will be far too strong for any laws to bind us down. No matter where you look in the world, whichever city has allowed its people some freedom, they have quickly gone back to old habits. Governments are battling fire after fire of civil disobedience. This is a testament to the human spirit to be free.

So where does that leave MICE?

Short term, there is some hesitation in bringing people together. Not so much for the safety of attendees, as there are solutions for that. It is more of a liability issue. Managers are risk-averse to taking it upon themselves the decision to hold a physical meeting. The bold who do, are setting paths for new models of meeting management. There have already been a few conferences and exhibitions that have taken place in different parts of the world. There were strict safety protocols and processes put in place that was able to protect delegates but also give the confidence needed. So, there is a way to make it happen.

What Covid has brought out is a short-term hard focus on the digital delivery of events. We have seen companies all over the world rush to provide solutions to deliver digital events. The technology itself is not new, and no one has reinvented the wheel. There is just a lot of repositioning of tools that were already available. So, for all the hip-hip-hurrah that is being done for delivering digital events, it is actually old wine in an average bottle.

Today, conversations are of a realisation that doing digital events can be much more expensive than live projects. Digital requires more skilled and expensive manpower; greater degree of management across speakers and attendees; more design and graphic work; and far more overall manhours are put in. The ability to charge fees is also pressed as clients are not yet resolved to the fact that they need to pay equal or more for taking a thousand people online than going to a banquet room.

Keeping interactivity up online has also been a considerable challenge. Work from Home as sexy as it sounded at one point, has today led to high levels of social stress in households. Balancing kids, school, chores, small confined spaces and more have led to many a domestic fight.

Any corporation that discounts the value and efficacy of MICE is an organisation that will go down the slippery path of degrowth. Incentive Travel is a proven tool for motivation and success and can never be replaced digitally. Companies will find pressure mounting from their incentive winners, who may still get incentive by cash or merchandise, to go back to organising trips with better checks & balances. Companies will also realise that productivity is crashing in the digital meetings world. I think companies will in the short-term struggle between the optics of looking correct and the needs to grow business.

Many experts feel that Digital will stay, but not as a replacement but as a supplement to live events. As live events return, we will see digital tools being used to complement those by allowing greater participation from people who can not attend the live portion for reasons of time or money. So, it will be a win-win for all.

The overwhelming desire today is for people to get out and get on with their lives. The screen is fine for Netflix and the occasional team meeting. But to get real business done, to debate progress in sciences, to discuss new medical procedures or simply to cheer on the success of an annual report; companies, associations and organisations will have to get people back into a physical meeting space soon. Humans need the sense of touch to navigate life.

MICE will come back. People are fed up. People no longer care. Recovery may be a bit slow for some, but recovery will happen. Life is short, so move on.. ♦

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



Cautious Optimism

The year 2020 was undoubtedly one of the most trying for the travel & tourism industry as the Covid-19 pandemic inflicted a body blow, and brought the sector on the edge of a precipice. However, towards the end of 2020 there was a sigh of relief with travellers embarking on domestic trips. But, concerns of cash flows, stressed bottomlines, job losses, international border restrictions, curtailed air capacity and the new variant of the virus continue to linger on. While news of vaccine distribution is a morale booster, **TravelBiz Monitor** spoke to a cross-section of industry stakeholders to ascertain their views for 2021.



Vinay Malhotra, Regional Group COO – South Asia, Middle East & North Africa and Americas, VFS Global

The news of approved vaccines, and the possibilities of measures such as health passes and vaccine certificates, will increase not only governments' confidence in reopening borders, but also people's faith in safe travels, helping bring the industry back on stronger ground keeping health and safety as a key priority. People are eager to travel again and we will see soon an increasing demand for travel services.



Ankush Nijhawan, MD, Nijhawan Group of Companies & Co-Founder, TBO Group

We are optimistic that 2021 will support the quick recovery of the tourism sector. We are hopeful to a new start, with countries opening up their borders for India, and vaccination coming our way soon. The Covid-19 pandemic has changed our perspective on travel and we are coming back stronger.



Dev Karvat, CEO, Karvat Group

With COVID-19 vaccines being rolled out in various countries, we can be positive that some normalcy will be back soon. Furthermore, the recent rise in domestic tourism indicates that travellers have regained confidence in travel safety and the road ahead for the industry is filled with new opportunities and growth.



Sandeep Shastri, Regional Director, South Asia, Sabre Travel Solutions

As increasing numbers of people have access to a vaccine, it will gradually restore more freedom and confidence to travel. We're seeing our existing and new travel partners innovate and invest in technological solutions to aid recovery and plan for future growth. While market conditions remain volatile, we will gradually start to see travel bring the world together once more.



Sandeep Dwivedi, COO, InterGlobe Technology Quotient

It is like clash of titans where an effective strategy to mitigate the risks of the virus and constant scrutiny of vaccinated individuals will decide the course of travel and tourism in 2021. We believe that by the end of 2021 we will see significant growth; domestic tourism will grow to pre-Covid numbers and international traffic will reach to the level of 65-70 per cent.



Daniel D'souza, President & Country Head, Leisure, SOTC Travel

As destinations ease restrictions and with positive news of the vaccine, there has been renewed consumer confidence to travel in 2021. The upcoming year has many weekends that can be clubbed with other holidays and we are witnessing a rise in inquiries and bookings for these long weekends.



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

Vaccine announcements have ushered in definitive positive sentiment signalling hope and revival for the industry. Our Second Holiday Readiness Report reveals significant increase in consumer confidence in travel, 67% respondents indicating that they are willing to travel in the next 6 months while 33% indicated that they would wait for launch of the vaccine.



Rajiv Duggal, Strategist, Travel Specialist LLP

Tourism is on the threshold of revival, a lot of hope is connected to the vaccine; mankind is in desperate need to travel and discover, our industry will prosper once again and 2021 will see a brighter future. Domestic segment is already doing well, international will follow shortly. We all need to focus and be extremely positive.



Ajay Prakash, Chief Executive, Nomad Travels

Cautious optimism is the feeling among travellers and industry stakeholders. Once the questions about the vaccines' efficacy and safety are answered there will definitely be resurgence in demand. People are itching to travel again so let's keep our fingers crossed, and hope that 2021 will be kinder to all of us!



Sabina Chopra, Co-Founder and COO, Corporate Travel & Head Industry Relations, Yatra.com

2021 comes with hopes and people are excited envisioning vacations which are prompted by the arrival of vaccines. Health and safety will be top priority as responsible travel is a key, especially against the backdrop of new variant. The coming three months will be defining ones for the domestic flight business. International travel is still unpredictable. We are looking forward to a stronger year ahead as the world adapts to the new normal.



Hector Dsouza, President, L'orient Travels

Travel & tourism will definitely recover from the doldrums it currently in, especially international travel to medium and long-haul travel. The efficacy of the vaccine needs to be factored in, as well as the different strains of virus popping that could lead to shutdowns and lockdowns. We need to be cautiously optimistic in 2021.



Aashish Gupta, Consulting CEO, FAITH

While there will be some green shoots of recovery in tourism, it will be extremely narrow based in some locations, across some long weekends in drive down, domestic locations. Segments like inbound, outbound, corporate, MICE, adventure, and leisure will continue to underperform till the next two quarters.



Amaresh Tiwari, Vice Chairman, ICPB

Arrival of vaccines is very good news and specially announcements of Indian vaccines has given us edge, and that will create very positive environment. New variant of Covid is a concern but looks like manageable.



Pronab Sarkar, President, IATO

The positive results of vaccine may allow tourists movements from our source markets to open up tourism activities. We have requested our Government to announce the opening date of tourist E- visas and start international flights, so that tourists from abroad can plan their visit. We are looking forward to a positive beginning of 2021.



Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI

The vaccine is a relief, though the new variant has again made us revive the lockdown and has shattered the little confidence that had generated for the travellers. Health passports will play a very dominant role. Domestic travel will continue to play a prominent role till Q3, 2021. We need to have unilateral policies within the country with mass RTPCR testing along with insurance policies as safeguard.



PP Khanna, President, ADTOI

Revival of domestic tourism is picking up pace. The vaccine certainly has brought cheer and great hope for the humanity for safety and survival. Vaccine should bring positive results in slowing the infection thereby bringing back all the activities at pre-COVID period level. This will definitely create a new normal for travel & tourism industry in 2021.



Pradip Lulla, National President, TAFI

The public sentiment has improved globally, considerably with announcements of vaccine rollout. I am sure the borders will start reopening and from H2, 2021 people will start travelling. Initially airfares and hotel rooms would be considerably expensive due to reduced frequency and limited occupancy and make travel and tours considerably expensive, but definitely it is a green shoot to normalcy.



Biji Eapen, National President, IAAI

Air travel is slowly picking up again worldwide after a challenging period. We are almost certain that there will be travel recovery early this year as we faced and survived similar challenges earlier. We believe that from our past learning, stakeholders will try to understand the value, virtue, and goodwill of unity and work together for a speedy recovery.



Jagdeep Bhagat, National Coordinator, NIMA

Each new day brings a fresh ray of hope for the tourism industry and with the Covid-19 vaccine now available it seems we are nearing the end of the tunnel. Now the onus remains with countries to set up a common travel protocol and open their borders as quickly as possible. That is when the tourism industry will begin to revive.



Dharmesh Advani, Treasurer, ETAA

We finally have some good news from all over the world. Countries like US, Europe have started vaccination drive and India has also joining the race. We have reached a stage where we can only expect the travel and tourism industry to bounce back in a big way. We are hoping for more borders to open up in light of the covid vaccine.



Sheetal Munshaw, Director - Atout France India

A vaccine in the offing will certainly instil a sense of confidence and lead to the resurgence of international travel. However, a large part of the population in most countries may not vaccinate themselves readily. The protocols laid out by various governments on making vaccination mandatory for travel will thus play a critical role in setting the tone for international travel.



Vishal Bhatia, Country Manager - India, VisitBritain

The introduction of the vaccine is a welcome development for the industry, and will be a catalyst in driving domestic and international demand for VFR as well as MICE. It will facilitate easier travel with fewer restrictions for travel to destinations far and wide, thereby bringing the long-awaited relief to the industry and the consumers.



Elisa Robles Fraga, Director - Tourism Office of Spain in India (Mumbai)

The Spanish Government is constantly working on keeping international tourism flows open in accordance with health and protection measures while reviewing additional measures to ensure safe corridors. Several initiatives have been launched to advance and transform our model towards sustainable, digital, accessible, inclusive and safe tourism so as to boost the Spanish tourism sector from a comprehensive perspective.



Romit Theophilus, Director Sales & Marketing, GNT0, India

There is some glimmer of hope for the important summer season of 2021, following the latest vaccine announcements. Inbound tourism for coming year depends not just on the situation in Germany but also on what is happening in its source markets. The revival of travel will be gradual despite probable vaccines and presumably the recovery trajectory back to pre-pandemic level will take up to three years. Due to vaccinations to begin we are optimistic to welcome back travellers in 2021.



Steven Dixon, Regional Trade Marketing Manager - Asia, Tourism New Zealand

In these difficult times it can be hard to see the light, but it is there and it's not far away. For now, be safe and stay connected to the things that matter most.



Nishant Kashikar, Country Manager, India & Gulf, Tourism Australia

The vaccine will offer an opportunity to revive by building consumer confidence, which will provide an impetus to local businesses and economies globally. Through immunisations, destinations will be able to rank high in the consideration set, by reassuring travellers on the steps undertaken to ensure safety and security of all travellers.



Paramjit S. Bawa, Country Manager – India, Destination New South Wales

Although things still look uncertain, I feel that once vaccinations are commonplace and airlines and governments streamline their policies and entry rules, people will move big time and global travel will go ballistic. No horizon is in sight for this yet but when it does happen - flights, hotels, convention centres, tourist hotspots, etc. will all be overbooked.



Lim Si Ting, Area Director, India & South Asia – Mumbai, Singapore Tourism Board

The recovery for tourism will take time and mass international travel will not return in any significant way any time soon. However, travel will resume cautiously and in a calibrated manner. The development of the Covid-19 vaccines brings optimism and hope to the restart of travel and tourism. We remain confident in the long-term prospects of Singapore's tourism sectors – both for leisure and MICE & business travel.



Cholada Siddhivarn, Director - Tourism Authority of Thailand, Mumbai Office

The travel and hospitality sectors have been among the hardest hit amid the Covid-19 pandemic, but the vaccine news is a game-changer from the consumer side of travel. I believe things are getting better for the travel industry than they are now. With all signs pointing to an imminent start to the recovery phase, the moment is now for everybody to take action, plan a trip.



Mohd Hafiz Hashim, Director, Tourism Malaysia Mumbai

The industry can explore various options like dateless departures (book now – travel anytime), increase online engagements, offer visa-free facility, hotel discounts, travel bubble option for small private group trips that allows a set of family/friends to share a tour while maintaining a safer distance from people they're unacquainted with.



Arzan Khambatta, India Head – Macao Government Tourism Office

I truly believe Year 2021 has started on a positive note with the approval of the COVID-19 vaccines across the globe. This news has fuelled the travel industry with the much needed hope and enthusiasm to bounce-back strongly this year. I am very optimistic that the path to recovery for travel industry will be much shorter and faster than anticipated.



Priyanka Nijhawan-Director, Dubai Tourism India Representation Office

The Emirate has showcased the highest levels of safety and hygiene to curb the spread of the virus. Although the pandemic disrupted the flow of steady growth in 2020, Dubai has emerged as the most popular international destination for Indian

tourists despite the global scenario. We hope to continue to spearhead this position in 2021 with Ramadan, Summer and the much-awaited Expo2020.



Neliswa Nkani, Hub Head – Middle East, India and South East Asia, South African Tourism

With vaccines on the horizon, 2021 will be the year of recovery and revival for the travel and tourism sector, as there is a pent-up demand for domestic and international travel. We are already seeing plenty of interest and queries for destination South Africa, especially from Indian business and leisure travellers.



Jilesh Babla, Director, Zanzibar Tourism Promotion Center - India

People are raring to travel and it's got nothing to do with the vaccine. In my discussions with travellers, I observe they've accepted the virus is here to stay and they've got to be careful. Destinations and service providers need to be extra careful and follow safety protocols and keep medical aid available. It's sure to be an exciting phase for the industry and we need to stand up to the requirement.



Sunil Mathapati, Country Manager, Bahrain Tourism & Exhibition Authority – India

Effective vaccine promises a productive future for travel but the threats such as new variant of the virus negates the progress of tourism revival. These developments will vary on a regular basis until we find global cure for the virus. We are certain that the tourism industry will regain its normalcy once we together establish a safer mode of travelling.



Sheema Vohra, Managing Director, Sartha Global Marketing

The vaccines will be a game-changer and as more people get vaccinated, travel will restart. However, there are other factors which will impact this recovery. The travel, tourism and hospitality industry was the most severely impacted by Covid 19 - including airlines, hotels, attractions, cruise lines, etc., we will have to see how quickly this infrastructure gets back to the pre-Covid levels. Other factors are visa issuance and governmental protocols, which will also impact international arrivals.



Vasudha Sondhi, Director Market Strategy & Research, OM Tourism

It's not without reason that India is seen to be a resilient market. With the opening of Dubai and Maldives and the numbers of Indian travelling there, enough said. Already domestic travel or staycations within India has seen a huge upswing, and will continue to be the mainstay in 2021 with international travel taking off as and when borders open. Pre Covid levels expected back by end 2022 or 2023.



Beena Menon, Partner, Beautiful Planet Destination Marketing

The new Covid variant has forced some countries to impose a lockdown and travel ban for the present. However, the coronavirus vaccine will be a game-changer and will definitely boost demand for outbound travel once the borders open and flights resume. Leisure and business travellers will once again feel safe to travel.



Rajeev Nangia, COO, TRAC Representations (India) Pvt. Ltd.

The vaccine is a ray of hope, but we need to be prepared for new normal practices. Optimistically, initial signs indicate a positive way forward. We should prepare for gradual recovery to reach the levels of Year 2019 and each stakeholder should be ready to put in all efforts.



Pranav Kapadia, Founder & Director, Global Destinations

The past few months have given us opportunities to recalibrate strategies, re-invent, re-energise and re-coup to ensure we are well placed to adapt to the ever-evolving environment. With the roll out of the vaccines it surely has lifted hopes and brought back a lot of certainty, positivity and optimism. Having survived 2020, I am confident the future of the travel industry is bright.



Lubaina Sheerazi, Director, BRANDit

In post Covid-19 world, travellers will be much more cognizant of the need to travel to destinations that make it easy to maintain social distancing practices. Tour operators will need to get creative by designing itineraries that avoid public transportation and crowded tourist areas, as their customers will expect this more considered approach to travel design.



Komal Seth, Director, Linkin Reps Pvt Ltd

With a year gone by in understanding the pandemic, the industry is now equipped to handle this situation. Many destinations have strict guidelines and checks in place and give a great experience to travellers. Now with vaccine also being available, 2021 will be a better year for our industry. People have understood the protocols and the fears have become a little less. More countries are hoping to open up in January, and Sri Lanka is opening its airport soon too.



Yamini Singh, VP - PR & Media Communications, Think Strawberries

People in the low-risk category have already begun their travels in spite of the news of the new Covid variant making rounds. And, this trend will continue in 2021 too albeit proper health and safety measures will remain top priority. On the other hand, the senior population will stay low-key till mid-2021 or even after that since distribution of vaccines and mass-population protection will take time.



B.A Rahim, Director, One Above

The positive news is that most countries which went into lockdown due to the new variant have started vaccination drive which indicates that it's not going to take much time to open their borders for tourism. 2021 won't be as good as 2019, but we are confident as an industry to achieve at least 75 per cent of our business back on track. Both inbound and outbound have shown rapid recovery.



Joseph Fernandes, CEO, IndiJo Consulting

Now that the vaccine is here, the recovery of the industry will depend on how soon governments roll out vaccinations and how stakeholders like airlines and destinations etc. implement new vaccine-based health and safety protocols. With major events in 2021 like the Olympics, World Expo etc., governments and the industry. Will work fast, resulting in a bounce back faster than we expect.



Neeti Bhatia, Director, Intrepid Marketing and Communications

The new variant of the virus certainly poses a threat, but the Indian Government and airport authorities are implementing strict guidelines to hinder the spread. Although the process is extensive and time-consuming, we are certain that once borders reopen gradually, we will witness substantial travel movements even to long-haul destinations soon.



Alefiya Singh, Director, Iris Reps

Despite hopes, free flowing international travel will not happen the moment the first round of vaccination rolls out. It is more likely that there will be a staggered re-introduction of travel movements, beginning around July 2021 and slowly ramping up by 2022. While this means more waiting for our already struggling industry, patience is a virtue as all great things take time.



Pradeep Saboo, Managing Partner, Guideline Travels LLP

With the impending vaccine soon to become available and the new strain successfully being contained, 2021 looks like a promising year in Q2 onwards. Destinations have slowly, but surely started opening up with safety measures in place. The vaccine will only add to the customer confidence to be able to travel again.



Kunal Sampat, Country Head - Sales, Visa Lounge

While our industry will only be able to see pre-Covid scenario by 2023, the dynamics of international travel are more dependent on opening of borders. Queries received on a regular basis from partners are extremely heart-warming and definitely gives a positive sign on Indian passengers willing to travel.



Jurgen Bailom, President and CEO, Waterways Leisure Tourism Pvt. Ltd

The delightful and much awaited news about vaccine has given travellers and tourism professionals a hope and a nod to travel resumption. Due to the pandemic, many agents have wound operations, but now is the time for them to shift a gear and ready themselves for an influx of tourists that will arise due to pent up demand.



Naresh Rawal, VP – Sales & Marketing, Genting Cruise Lines

The global pandemic has brought about a sea of change in consumers' mind set and priorities are no longer the same, requirements and expectations have evolved when it comes to leisure and travel with focus very much on safety, health and well-being. Rebuilding confidence in travellers to take a cruise vacation will be key as we gradually restart the cruise industry in a safe manner with highlights on the safety and preventive measures. We are highly optimistic of 2021 and more so after the success that we have had with the restart of our operations in Taiwan in July 2020 with Explorer Dream and Singapore in November 2020 with World Dream.



Manoj Singh – Country Head, India-Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) Holdings

During this temporary pause, we have been exploring opportunities for a safe return to sea. We also convened a council of leading experts in health, infectious diseases, and safety to provide guidance. Leveraging the recommendations provided by this council of experts, we will be introducing even more robust measures into our already existing stringent health and safety protocols.



Kunal Kothari, Founding Train Cognoscente, KKR World

While there is fear of the new mutated strain, it will be overcome with vaccine, makers claim. So, let's train – because over the past nearly 10 months, work refrained. Sooner than later, client queries will start to rain, and tourism will regain. Industry has seen the pain, and now traveller numbers will gain, whether they fly or take the train.



Darshan Maheshwari, Country Manager, The Travel Corporation

These are exciting times as we have the opportunity to rebuild livelihoods and reconnect our guests to the joy of travel. There is pent-up demand and delivering a hassle-free holiday experience that places top priority on our travellers' well-being and the ability to be flexible and quick to pivot will be key to accelerating recovery.



Aparna C Basumallik -Country Head, Europamundo

2021 is certainly going to be positive for travel. The Sensex and GST collection are indicators. Domestic travel has picked up. Once the vaccine distribution is in place, and international borders reopen leisure travel too will start. The health authorities are vigilant and have reacted to the new variant.



Kinjal Shah, Vice President, ICRA Limited

The debt levels will remain high for the aviation industry and are estimated to be range bound at around INR 500 billion (excluding lease liabilities) in FY2021 and FY2022, with the industry requiring an additional funding of INR 350-370 billion over FY2021 to FY2023. Despite an improvement in the credit metrics, they will remain stressed in FY2022. ♦



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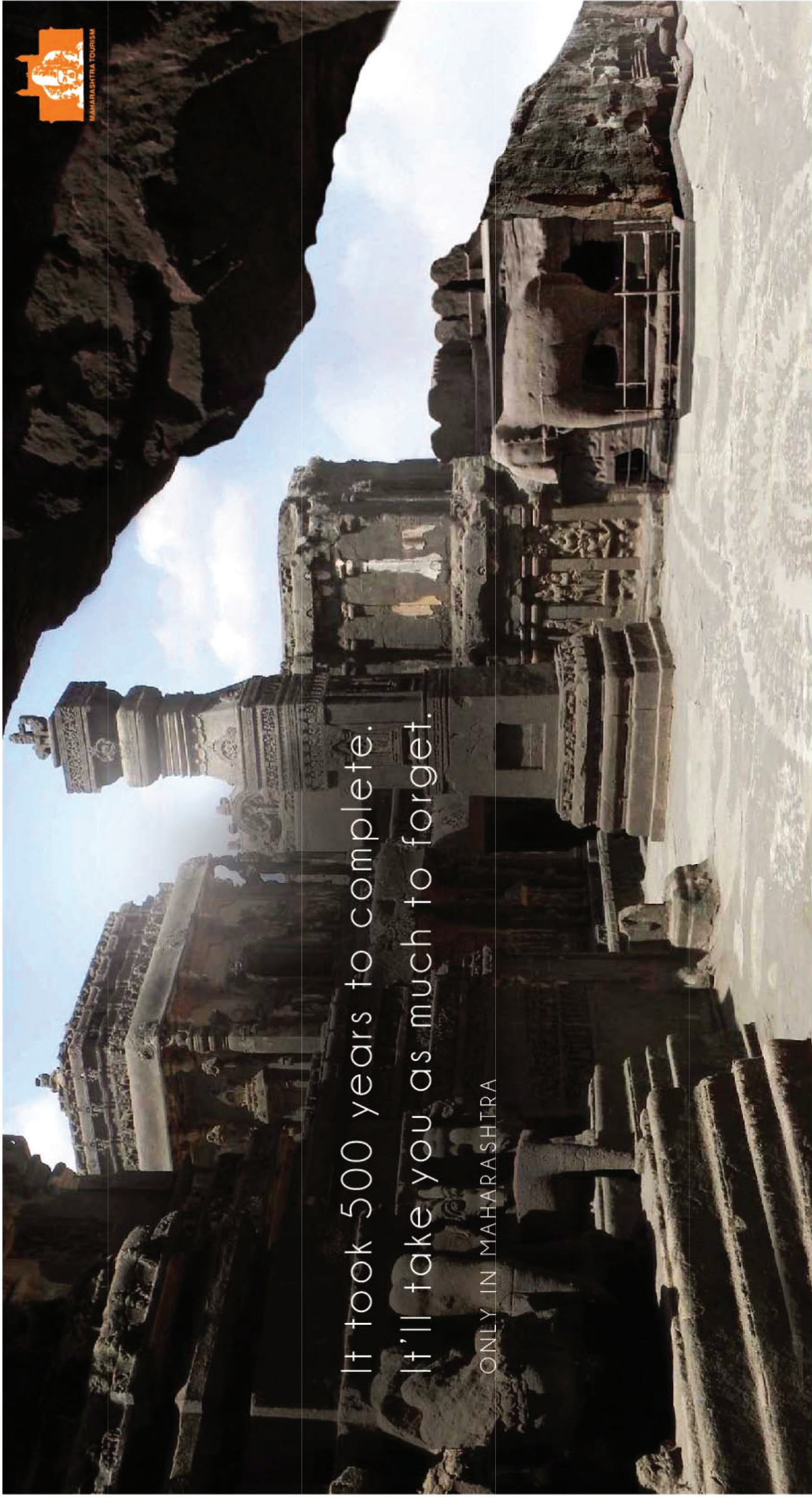


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‘We have had a positive growth story from India’

Cathay Pacific is scheduled to start operations from India in March this year, however, the commencement of services are subject to India relaxing its border restrictions as well as relevant governments approvals, says **Anand Yedery**, Regional Head Marketing and Sales-South Asia, Middle East and Africa, Cathay Pacific in an exclusive interaction with **Prasenjit Chakraborty**.

Q How does Hong Kong SAR Government's commitment to strengthening the Hong Kong's long-term competitiveness as a leading global aviation hub will help airlines in general and Cathay Pacific in particular?

We have welcomed the Hong Kong SAR Government's commitment. As outlined in the 2020 Policy Address, there are developmental plans for Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and also for Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) and Zhuhai Airport to establish a world-class airport cluster.

Additionally, in Hong Kong the three-runway system is planned for 2024. It is also expected that the premium logistics centre will be completed in 2023, and the SKYCITY development projects will be completed in phases between 2021 and 2027.

All these initiatives will support our objective to connect customers and cargo from the region to across the world and also creating 'land-to-air' opportunities. In the Policy Address, the government has also recognised Tourism as one of Hong Kong's four pillar industries.

Q With regards to safety & hygiene, what steps has Cathay Pacific undertaken?

Over the last nine months, we have introduced many measures to ensure our passengers experience a safe and healthy environment during their trip and to reassure them so they can travel with confidence.

We have introduced Cathay Care, a commitment to our passenger's safety and wellbeing which includes enhanced measures across every stage of their journey from check-in to the cabin, and also in our lounges. These measures begin with contactless check-in, temperature screening at various touch points and the installation of HEPA filters across all cabins. To further reassure our customers, we have also introduced the COVID-19

complimentary insurance coverage for all passengers travelling on a Cathay Pacific ticket across the world. They will be covered for medical expenses, hospitalisation and quarantine costs as per the policy for a 30 day overseas trip.

Q Cathay Pacific has remained home carrier of Hong Kong for seven decades. How has been journey so far? At a time when flights are being operated under air bubble, what is the current status of Cathay's operations from India?

We have a strong lineage and history spread over 75 years and we have been operating from India for over 65 of those. In India, we have had a positive growth story. Pre COVID we were operating 49 flights a week from Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Kolkata, offering our customers' a state-of-the-art product across all three cabins, the warmth of Asian hospitality while connecting them to Hong Kong and beyond.

As an airline we are fully committed to continue serving our customers. As for any possible establishment of a travel bubble between India and Hong Kong, it would depend on the related government authorities. Currently

we have operations scheduled to start from India in March 2021, however the commencement of our services are subject to India relaxing its border restrictions as well as relevant government approvals.

Q Recently, Cathay Pacific Group carried out corporate restructuring to create more focused, efficient and competitive business in response to the unprecedented paralysis of the aviation market caused by the global Covid-19 pandemic. Could you tell us the changes that have been brought in?

In 2020, we have scaled back capacity to match demand, deferred new aircraft deliveries, suspended non-essential spend, implemented a recruitment freeze, executive pay cuts and two rounds of Special Leave Schemes. We studied multiple scenarios post which a corporate restructure was also announced in October with an aim to protect as many jobs as possible, and meet our responsibilities to the Hong Kong aviation hub and our customers.

Q The aviation industry is on life support with a number of airlines closing down operations. Did Cathay Pacific receive support from Hong Kong SAR government?

To maintain our competitiveness and operations, we did receive support from the Hong Kong SAR government with capital infusion in the form of investment in preference shares and bridge loan facility.

Q Are there curtailment in flights or routes previously considered important?

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) predicts global passenger traffic will not return to pre-COVID-19 levels until 2024. As a part of our restructuring process, we have reassessed and evaluated our routes across the network.

Hence, we have scaled back our capacity to match demand and we expect to operate well under 25% of 2019 passenger capacity in the first half of 2021, and below 50% for the entire year. Though we face significant challenges, we remain absolutely confident in the long-term future. ♦

prasenjiti.chakraborty@saffronsynergies.in

Navigating the Storm

By Smeeta Gulvady, Head - The School of Excellence

The Covid crisis has led to meltdown of global economies and unprecedented crisis. Travel, Tourism & Aviation industry is going through very turbulent times but as the saying goes, Tough Times do not last forever. So let's prepare for a resurgence.

Covid-19 has led to changes some temporary and some long-term. There are major disruptions in technology with massive changes in almost all spheres including our industry. What is the new normal today will be accepted as the way of the future. According to The World Travel and Tourism Council India Initiative (WTTCII), the Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism and Hospitality and CII, estimates the coronavirus impact rendered approximately 4 crore people jobless, which is around 70% of the total workforce in the tourism and hospitality sector.* There are pan India bankruptcies, closure of businesses and mass unemployment.

To keep households running, many have taken up alternate means of livelihood, waiting eagerly for the industry to revive. As business slowly picks up, work from home, hybrid formats will soon become the reality. We need to be fully equipped and future ready.

Travel and Tourism is a customer service industry with practical, hands-on approach. The differentiator being Customer Service - how we treat our customer? This would emanate from the knowledge, expertise, confidence and attitude of the resource personnel.

The needs of clients are changing, there are changes in consumer behaviour. We need to improve our capability and gain skills for future careers as 60% of the previous era jobs, don't exist today. Service management will continue to be the focus in the future. Let's invest in learning, human relationships, train people in technology and move beyond what we have been doing.

Covid has led us to do a rethink on education of future generations. Adoption of technology ushered new means of conducting the teaching online. Technical

competence is increasingly important. Virtual Reality (VR) in education helps increase knowledge retention. Virtual tours of museums, storytelling sessions, city walks enhance the experiential learning.

Re-skilling, upskilling has gained momentum. A joint study by KPMG & Google predicted online education in India to be USD2 billion industry by 2021 with more than 75 crore population using the internet. Online education is all pervasive today. Universities have to reconfigure to stay relevant. Private, autonomous institutions are offering online assessments, personalised learning. According to Harvard & MIT study (2012-2018) 5.63 million enrolled for MOOC courses, (Massive Open online Courses) and less than 5% completed their course.**

Online programmes, workshops with intensive, comprehensive, research based curriculum that emphasise collaboration, interaction are gaining popularity. Digital education helps hone leadership in today's dynamic environment. Armed with focussed online courses executives are able respond to challenges and transform organisations. Employers would look at skills such as creativity, emotional intelligence, crisis management, critical thinking. Virtual classes provide a rich learning environment. There are sites for free online education. Reskilling, upskilling also give an edge when rehiring starts besides advancement.

Today the average time taken to service clients has increased three times. Customers are looking for reassurance and confidence. Staying updated on the evolving, changing landscape - quarantine restrictions, Covid tests, advisories, Air Bubble and Vande- Bharat Flights, Product knowledge on the Go near Domestic preferences, concepts of sustainability, responsible travel. It's time to take advantage of the free webinars, special training sessions extended by the trade.

An average Indian spent 3.30 hours daily online, which soared to beyond 4 hours during lockdown. Besides social media, news, entertainment, music, gaming, food & recipes are extremely popular. There's an increase of 120% in education category since lockdown. The smart phone is The Device folks are hooked to!!

The worst is behind us. Things are looking up, whilst there is fear about the new strain, there's hope with the vaccines. Make learning a part of your New Year resolution in 2021. Equip yourself and prepare to ride the change Navigate your career, Stay relevant, Stay ahead be a winner.

*WTTCII

**Source: Google and KPMG

'Online education in India: 2021' ♦

'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 at the Forefront

GABBIT

By TBM Staff | Mumbai

Anticipating the impact of technology, 13 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 been showcasing new-age technology products and services every month that have the potential to disrupt the market further as the 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: Gabbit

Core Team: Vipul Jain, Vikal Kulshreshtha & Neeraj Sharma

Founding Year: 2017

Company Websites: www.gabbit.co.in

Product Description: Gabbit – A tourism technology company – solves underlying problems in the tourism sector by using a location-based virtual network of tourism stakeholders, information and intelligence.

It currently addressing 2 major challenges in Domestic tourism:

1. Tourist Safety -

- Tourists are new to the place, not much acquainted with the place & culture.
- Local Administration doesn't have tourist information or location, restricting timely help. Things get more complex in case of disaster

2. Over tourism, Over-Crowd, Long Queues situation, Parking Unavailability, etc.

Gabbit uses technology, collaboration, tourism knowledge and intelligence to solve above issues. The system is successfully piloting in one of most complex tourism circuit - "Char Dham Yatra" (Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri & Yamunotri) in Uttarakhand, in association with Government & tourism industry. The System helps in -

(a) Tourist Safety - System actively monitors entire Yatra route (1,200 km) w.r.t. various parameters such as Landslides, Road blockage, Weather conditions & alerts, Crowd & Queue situations, Medical emergency, accidents etc.

Based on threshold values, system generates warning & alerts to respective departments as per SOPs. Information relevant for public is also sent to tourists, hoteliers, tour operators etc. This works as effective "Public Address System".

The System gets all this information from different sources including various government departments (like Disaster Management, Police), Tourism Industry and tourists.

Tourists interact with system using a "tourism" mobile app.

(b) Enhanced tourist's experience by adding regional experiences such as home-stay, village tour, authentic Garhwali food, visit scenic places, hiking & bicycling, water sports etc.





‘Travel from India is set to take off in a big way’

As health and safety continues to be the top priority of people, they are taking travel decisions based on the Covid history of that particular destination says **Munmunn Marwah**, COO, Think Strawberries in an exclusive interview with **Prasenjit Chakraborty**.

Q What is your outlook of outbound travel (from India) in 2021 when experts are mostly emphasising on domestic travel at least for the next few months.

Although staycations and offbeat locations in India will remain a preference for people, some outbound destinations like Maldives, UAE and Bhutan are already gaining immense traction among Indian travellers. This trend will only increase in the coming months. Additionally, the air bubble pacts that India formed with around 24 countries including US, UK, Kenya, France, among others, will promote international travel to a great extent. Recently, there was a brief hiccup due to the newfound COVID-19 strain but that situation too has been stabilised to a large extent. The sentiment to travel is palpable and all indications are that travel from India is set to take off in a big way.

Q Do you think people will start with domestic travel and eventually graduate to short-haul foreign destinations like Maldives, Dubai, etc. before considering long-haul destinations?

Currently, there is a demand for

both domestic and international (short and long-haul) destinations. There are people who are sceptical to travel before the distribution of the vaccine, and rightly so. However, most surveys suggest that majority respondents are happily willing to travel in the next 6 months. People are taking their travel decisions based on the COVID history of that place as health and safety continues to top their priority list.

Q According to you which are the foreign destinations (both long and short haul) Indians are likely to visit in 2021?

France, Spain, Portugal, Germany and Switzerland are some of

the most preferred long-haul destinations by Indians, followed by short-haul countries like Dubai, Maldives, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. Even Australia, New Zealand and the US are on the radar of foreign destinations that Indians will most likely visit in 2021.

Q What is your opinion about business travel? Do you think the segment will continue to remain low key? If yes, what are the reasons behind this?

In my opinion, yes, business travel might settle into a “new normal” in 2021. This change can be attributed to the virtual interactions most corporations have been undertaking for the last 40 weeks. Having said that, travel might happen but strictly for closing deals or for unstructured work that requires more ideation between parties. Top technology executives surveyed by CNBC think a significant portion of corporate travel will return, though it may take years. And, I concur.

Q Do you think Covid mutant will further delay recovery of outbound travel?

In places where COVID-19

mutants have been found like the UK and South Africa, there will be a further delay in recovery. However, indicators are that Indians will adapt and continue to travel keeping the COVID situation of that place in mind. A well-known public health researcher recently said that immunising about 60% of a population within about a year and keeping the number of cases down while that happens will help minimise the chances of the virus mutating significantly. As a result, we are hopeful that the COVID mutants wouldn't affect travel industry as significantly as we were suspecting it to initially.

Q In the changed circumstances, what are the revisions you brought in to your marketing strategy?

Our priority in 2021 is to ensure our destination partners remain the top choice for Indians when they come to making their travel decisions. We have identified and continue to explore all possible avenues we would need to leverage to strategically position and build recall for our various partners in 2021.

Along with highlighting our clients' services and the safety measures that they are undertaking for travellers' smooth and healthy stay, we are focusing on remodelling our own stance as a responsible business. By streamlining our channels of approach, we now want to selectively target new clients on the basis of their ability to mitigate the risk of the virus. For us, like everyone else, health and hygiene will remain the most important factor in choosing the partners that we would like to collaborate with in future.

Q What will be the role of millennials in infusing growth of leisure travel?

Millennials are the torch-bearers of bringing back motion into the travel segment, including leisure. The recovery of the segment was led by millennials in 2020 and it is them who will build travel momentum in the coming years. It will certainly be the free-spirited new-age explorers who will lead the path to deliverance. ♦

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Take care of your People. They will take care of your Business!

By **Dr Nimit Chowdhary**, Professor of Tourism,
Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Jamia Millia Islamia

J.W. "Bill" Marriot once said if you take care of your employees, they will take care of your customers, and your business will take care of itself. Richard Branson echoed the same sentiment when he said that employees automatically take good care of your business if they feel they feel valued.

The element of 'people' in a business is the only resource that appreciates with time, while all others depreciate. Human capital is a sustainable competitive advantage for most businesses, and organisations must effectively manage this very useful resource, especially during difficult times. It is the skill, knowledge, and experience of the human resource- both individually and collectively that makes or breaks the businesses.

Tourism is a business too. While there are independent firms, a destination itself is a larger business entity. A destination is essentially a collective of people, their legacy, their reality, and as a business, their willingness to share the space with visitors. COVID is an unprecedented crisis that has adversely affected many stakeholders in the tourism sector, especially marginal players and one or two-person firms like tour guides and tour escorts, cab drivers, performers, and small shops. Some of them like tourist guides and tour escorts are niche service providers who rely mostly on tourists. With restrictions on travel, tourist guides, and tour escorts were a significant casualty. Most of them were freelancers with hourly wages and some gratuities from appreciative visitors. There was never a paid sick leave, insurance, pensions, or any other benefits for these cultural ambassadors with whom visitors interact the most. Life has been particularly difficult for them during the pandemic.

Companies that hire these guides have their share of challenges. They were flooded with cancellations. Many have gone out of business. An added concern is that nobody really knows how long the pandemic is going to last. There is no denying that sooner or later, things will change for the better. Tourism is fidgeting to get back. While the infrastructure and the attractions have not been affected much in the process, the visitors will feel the burn without these experienced service providers. The onus is on the tourism community to ensure that these tourism service providers sustain the pandemic. Also, the leadership needs to take definitive steps to see them through to the other end.

It is not that nothing can be done in these situations. Begin with empathy, and you have a hundred ways of survival and revival.

The disruption will lead to a new order and innovative solutions. In Scotland, they have developed a portal to provide placement assistance to displaced tourism workers to other jobs. In some cases, companies and bodies have developed expert tourist guided seminars streamed online, which are a small alternate revenue stream for some guides. The idea of starting a welfare fund for these contractual workers by the destination managers or even the companies that hire them can provide them with the safety that they need.

Some countries like Greece and Gabon offered monetary allowances to tourism workers who have lost livelihood. In Argentina, Kuwait, Morocco, Mongolia, Samoa, and Hungary, the governments have owned up more than 60% of the employers' salary liabilities in the tourism sector. Sweden allowed employers to half the wages with the government paying for a larger part of the wage bill, whereas Japan offers subsidies to protect employment. In India, Kerala government also gave one-time financial support to tour guides. Many countries bore the cost of retraining and upskilling of laid-off tourism workers. Thailand initiated a community capacity building in sustainable tourism. The solutions can be innumerable if only, one has the will.

This crisis is also a test of character and grit of our tourism leadership. Adversity will determine the mettle of our leaders. We must seriously ask ourselves, what have we done to safeguard our people? Nothing could be more apt than what Ratan Tata said, "These are the people that have worked for you. These are the people who have served you all their careers. You send them out to live in the rain. Is that your definition of ethics when you treat your labour force that way?"

Let us take care of our people, and they will take care of our tourism.

The writer has trained thousands of tour guides at different levels across the country. He believes it was incumbent upon him to highlight the plight of tour guides and tour escorts during these difficult times. Governments and corporates must rise to the challenge. ♦

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



Dr Nimit Chowdhary is Professor of Tourism with the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Jamia Millia Islamia. He has more than 27 years of the academic experience of which he has been a full professor for 14 years in India, China, and Mexico. A recipient of many academic awards and recognitions, he has authored 13 books and more than 125 academic papers. He has travelled extensively to around 40 countries and almost all states within the country.

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