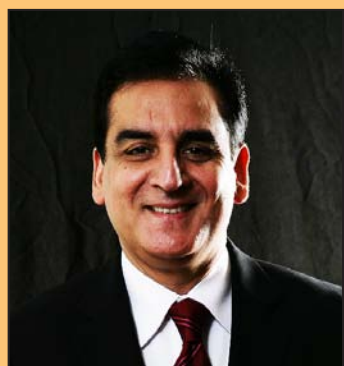


RBI's liquidity window serves as a lifeline to tourism & hospitality sector

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

The RBI's (Reserve Bank of India) announcement of extending INR 15,000 crore liquidity window to support contact intensive businesses has brought a sigh of relief to hotel, restaurants, travel agencies, and aviation ancillary services. There is absolutely no doubt that these sectors of tourism and hospitality have been bearing most of the brunt of the pandemic when compared



KB KACHRU
Vice President, HAI



GURBAXISH SINGH KOHLI
Vice President, FHRAI

to any other business sector. The liquidity window of INR 15,000 crore is being opened till March 31, 2022. This announcement also indicates that the government has finally taken cognisance of the magnitude of loss the pandemic has inflicted on the tourism and hospitality sectors.

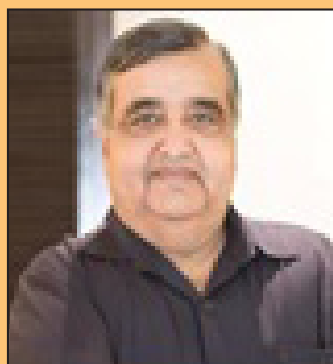
Welcoming the announcement, KB Kachru, Vice President, Hotel Association of India (HAI), said that the liquidity window is a major relief to the hospitality sector which has been reeling under the devastating impact of the ongoing pandemic. "Hotels, recognised as one of the most stressed sectors, have been requesting for such a relief to be provided urgently. This has given an additional lease of life to several hospitality establishments that are on the brink of closure," said Kachru. With this, ailing hotels will be able to save related jobs, lives and livelihoods. Not only that, the liquidity window will help minimise the chances of hotel loans from become NPAs. "The announcement of a separate liquidity window of INR 15,000 crore for contact-intensive sectors will mitigate the adverse impact of the second wave of the pandemic, and will certainly underpin the sector's road to recovery," opined Kachru.

The industry is happy that their rigorous follow up with government has finally paid off; however, they feel that RBI should extend the tenure from 3 years to 5 years. They strongly feel that it is virtually impossible to recover in 3 years considering the amount of loss that they have suffered. Gurbaxish Singh Kohli, Vice President, Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI), said, "We are glad that FHRAI's efforts through various representations to the government, to the RBI, and other authorities have finally borne fruit. We thank the government and RBI for provisioning a separate liquidity window of INR 15,000 crore for the hospitality and tourism industry. This is

the first significant sign indicating that the government has taken note of the severe effect that the pandemic has had on the hospitality industry and the huge economic impact it will have on the sector as well as the nation."

Kohli added that infusing liquidity will provide the much-needed liquidity support to cash-strapped hospitality businesses without which the industry couldn't have survived. "However, we request the RBI to extend the tenure for at least 5 years. Duration of 3 years is just not sufficient to recover from the financial turbulence that the industry is going through. We are also relieved with the RBI's decision to double the maximum aggregate exposure to INR 50 crore, enabling a larger set of borrowers to avail of the benefits under Resolution Framework 2.0. The hospitality sector was at the brink of collapse with revenues dwindling to below 10 per cent of pre-Covid levels. The announcement has offered the industry a lifeline in its efforts to survive," pointed out Kohli.

The Indian Associations of Tour Operators (IATO) said that RBI announcement to offer loans to the tourism and hospitality sector on easy terms and lower rate of interest will help tour operators who have had almost zero income for more than a year now. "We would request the government to announce SEIS (Service Exports from Incentive Scheme) benefits which is now pending for the financial year 2019-20. Besides this, we expect some grant for the revival of the battered tourism sector and rationalisation of GST," said Rajiv Mehra, President IATO.



RAJIV MEHRA
President, IATO



JYOTI MAYAL
President, TAAI

Jyoti Mayal, President, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), stated, "We at TAAI welcome the announcement of RBI on the creation of a special liquidity window of INR 15,000 crore to the tourism industry and for the first time also acknowledging different streams of travel & tourism, agents included. This was long required as the agents certainly need cash support at a very low interest rate. To provide further relief to the businesses hit by COVID 2.0, the newly announced restructuring window has been extended for all entities, with outstanding credit of INR 50 crore." ♦

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In an open letter to Prime Minister, TAAI seeks support from the government

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The TAAI (Travel Agents Association of India) in an open letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi has asked the government to step in to support the tourism industry that has been facing a crisis-like situation over the past 14 months. Through this letter, TAAI asks for protecting jobs and businesses by seeking comprehensive relief measures at policy level. Besides this, TAAI has also urged for a slew of measures including moratorium for at least 2 years from all loan EMIs for staff and members, granting of INR 10,000 per month per employee for the next one year and amalgamation of all employee

benefits like ESIC, professional Tax, PF, Gratuity etc. under one head, industry status for travel and tourism, and rebates on digital payments.

The letter states that TAAI members have not even been able to do business of more than 5 per cent as compared to the pre-pandemic times since the last over 14 months; the letter also said basic survival has become a challenge for the fraternity.

"While our members tried their level best to sustain their staff for a few months, however with the global scenario undergoing



NARENDRA MODI

the second and third wave, we are compelled to reach out to you for guidance, assistance and encouragement so as to take care of the livelihood of the personnel working in the trade," the letter signed by the national office-bearers of TAAI said. "We do not seek grants as alms, but seek support in terms of repayable loans. This shall be repaid back

to the Government post the 5 year period after the crisis ends. The letter also requested the Prime Minister to grant industry status for Travel & Tourism along with Cabinet berth for the Tourism and Culture Ministry. ♦

Ankur Bhatia's untimely demise leaves a void in the industry

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The passing away of Bird Group's dynamic leader Ankur Bhatia at the age of 48 has left a sudden void in the travel, tourism, aviation and hospitality industries. Bhatia succumbed to a cardiac arrest in the morning of June 4, 2021. He is survived by his parents, Radha and Vijay, wife, Smriti and two children, Arnav and Saina.

Bhatia has led the group's strategic thrust to create multiple drivers of growth that made a significant and growing contribution to the company and industry at large. Articulating a vision for Bird Group and direction to the consortia of companies, he is credited with bringing in the Amadeus brand to the Indian sub-continent in 1994, which today is the market leader in providing travel technology for travel agents & airlines.

During the formative years, Bhatia steered the company's entry into new growth areas. While still pursuing his degree from King's College, University of London and capitalising the BPO wave in the travel domain, he piloted Reservation Data Maintenance (India) Pvt. Ltd. (RDM), an IT enabled software development and service support company for managing back-end airline operations and inventory control.

At complete loss of words having lost a friend of over 20 years, Ankush Nijhawan, MD, Nijhawan Group of Companies, shared,

"Ankur was my senior in school by four years, so I have seen him since my formative years. For over 20 years now, we were good friends and were actively involved in the industry activities. He was one of the youngest and



finest leaders of our generation. It's an irreparable loss for me and our entire travel fraternity."

Having known the family personally, Jyoti Mayal, President, Travel Agents Association of India, said, "It is indeed a shock to learn about Ankur's demise. He was truly a stalwart of the travel & hospitality industry. Ankur was truly a dynamic, loving, caring and energetic person. All words fall short of expressing our grief and the loss to the entire industry. My heart goes out to Radha, Vijay, Smriti, Arnav and Saina who are dear family friends. God Bless his soul, and give strength and peace to the family."

Sharing his thoughts, Rajeev Kohli, Jt. MD, Creative Travel, said, "Ankur was someone one met often within industry circles. I think we were close in age, so that hits home even more. His passing away is a shock. I don't know what happened, but I do know that stress is the biggest killer, and we in tourism cannot be under any more stress than we are in now. It is a sad loss for the Bhatia family, and I wish them much strength in this difficult time. Life is not always fair. RIPAnkur."

Marking the Group's IT services and R&D foray with Bird Information Systems (BIS), was another of Bhatia's extremely successful ventures. Also, to his credit is BirdRes, a B2B distribution channel that allows the travel industry players to effectively manage all aspects of their content and payment needs in a flexible and easy to use solution.

For his outstanding contribution to the travel, tourism and hospitality industry, Bhatia and the various business verticals under his patronage have been felicitated with prestigious awards and accolades over the past many years. He was conferred with the title of Honorary Consulate General of the Republic of Liberia in India. In September 2016, He was awarded with an honorary Doctorate of Excellence recognising him for his success in his established field. ♦

TBO Group consolidates its market position for Maldives with acquisition of Gemini Tours & Travels

TBM Staff | Mumbai

TBO Group's Island Hopper has acquired Bengaluru-based Gemini Tours & Travels, a DMC for Maldives. With its first successful buy out in 2019, Island Hopper already enjoys over 21% share of Indian travel market to Maldives. Gemini Tours & Travels shall merge with Island Hopper which will help the latter expand its presence not only in South India, but also consolidate its position as a market leader.

Ankush Nijhawan, Co-Founder, TBO Group, said, "The Gemini merger will help Island Hopper further expand its presence in South India, and consolidate its number one position as an island specialist even further. This acquisition would also help in providing our customers more hotel options, especially in the luxury segment

in Maldives. Subbaram Mani and Raji Subbaram are one of the pioneers promoting Maldives as a destination. They also have a



ANKUSH NIJHAWAN
Co-Founder, TBO Group



SUBBARAM MANI
Founder, Gemini Tours & Travels

great respect amongst the hotel partners in Maldives, which would further help Island Hopper deliver a better customer experience for its clients. They will continue to work with Island Hopper, heading its South India

business and operations for Island Hopper. Post a successful merger of Island Hopper with TBO Group, its business has already grown more than 100% year-on-year for island destinations despite troubled Covid times, and has been top supplier for most resorts across Maldives."

Subbaram Mani, Founder Gemini Tours & Travels, added, "Gemini and Maldives has always been our first love, and to see where Gemini is today after 20 years of love, hard work and sweat is very comforting and gives us a great level of satisfaction. TBO is one of the fastest growing companies not only in India, but worldwide. It gives us immense pleasure to be part of this USD 2 billion multinational company, and we are looking forward to make our contribution towards the growth of TBO Group." ♦

QNTC launches astro-tourism experiences with Gulf Adventures

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The Qatar National Tourism Council (QNTC) has launched exclusive astro-tourism experiences in partnership with tour operator, Gulf Adventures, brightening up stargazers' travel plans when borders re-open. Visitors can enjoy a whole lot of space under the night sky of the desert. With excellent visibility, the Qatari desert provides a truly unique setting to learn about the stars, guided by an astronomer.

The unique 'Arabian Nights' packages are available to book now through Gulf Adventures and are redeemable until April 30, 2022. There are four new experiences to choose from, from camping under the stars, to being escorted from a luxury hotel to a moonlit excursion.

Berthold Trenkel, COO, QNTC, said, "Qatar's desert is a perfect spot for astronomy enthusiasts to observe the dark and starry skies. The packages will make for unforgettable experiences that travel-lovers can look forward to when we welcome them back to the country. This dazzling new addition will add to a multitude of activities visitors can enjoy in our diverse and unique country."

From the peaks of the Qatari dunes, visitors will see the desert like never before. The exclusive tours include a moon-lit camel safari and a traditional Bedouin BBQ



prepared by a chef. Dinner will be followed by a deep exploration into the starry desert skies, in a one-to-one stargazing session with an astronomer.

The experiences cater for guests opting for a 5-star hotel, at the Marsa Malaz Kempinski, and those who prefer to camp outside and be at one with the desert skies. Guests choosing to sleep beneath the stars can select an Arabian style royal tent at Regency Sealine Camp, which offers modern facilities in the heart of the desert landscape. The site overlooks Khor al Adaid,

also known as the Inland Sea, which is a recognised UNESCO Site.

The packages can be accompanied with cultural trips to unique heritage sites such as Al Zubarah Fort or the Souq Waqif, an authentic Middle Eastern marketplace. Alternative dining options include the Torch 360 restaurant, which offers panoramic views of the Doha skyline.

Th packages are in line with the Qatar Clean programme to protect visitors from COVID-19 and measures will be in place to adhere to government guidelines. ♦

Brand USA successfully organises insightful Part Two of the Chalo USA webinar series themed on USA Road-trips

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Brand USA in association with TravelBiz Monitor conducted Part Two of the Chalo USA webinar series on May 20, 2021. The webinar threw light on popular road trips at US tourist destinations such as New Orleans, Lake Tahoe, Mammoth Lakes and Greater Palm Springs.

The webinar also shared an update on the frequency of existing flights between India-USA. The launch of the new flight between San Francisco–Bengaluru by United Airlines has been postponed to August 1, 2021. The session educated the trade on major car rental, RV rental and motorcycle rental companies in the US for these road trips.

In case, you missed out, view the webinar recording here <https://youtu.be/B2bC1fi-3Rc>

New Orleans, Louisiana

New Orleans is a Louisiana city on the Mississippi River. It represents the birthplace of jazz, tax free shopping, world-renowned restaurants, Mardi Gras and a diverse calendar of events. If the traveler's interest is history, the arts or architecture, New Orleans has a diverse list of attractions for everyone. The compact geographic footprint of New Orleans makes it easy to navigate between hotels and meeting facilities. The unique

neighborhoods provide something for every type of traveler. The webinar also updated that currently the state of Louisiana has no



travel restrictions or quarantine requirements for entering. Restaurants, bars, music remain open until 1 am, but reservations in advance are recommended.

Lake Tahoe, California

Lake Tahoe is the largest alpine Lake in North America surrounded by the majestic Sierra Nevada Mountains. South Lake Tahoe combines the distinctive appeal of two worlds: spectacular natural beauty and a modern tourism destination with an array of outdoor recreation, entertainment, nightlife, and gaming. One of the major attractions in Lake Tahoe is Emerald Bay. Travellers can take a boat or cruise tour on Lake Tahoe to soak up the beauty of Emerald Bay. M.S. Dixie II cruise is another attraction of the lake. Tourists can spend two hours or more

enjoying the pristine beauty while cruising. Lake Tahoe is also famous for its nature which is ideal for camping, bicycle rides, mountaineering, and ski biking.

Mammoth Lakes, California

Situated at just two hours of drivable distance from South Lake Tahoe, Mammoth Lakes is a quaint mountain town that is positioned within the heart of the legendary Sierra Nevada Mountains and surrounded by some of the California's largest and most iconic peaks. The destination boasts of 100 lakes. There are plenty of activities celebrating this transitional beauty, such as, gondola ride, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, climbing, and mountaineering, kayaking, a round of golf, fishing, skiing, snowboarding or just sightseeing.

Greater Palm Springs, California

Greater Palm Springs is Southern California's most storied resort oasis, offering an incomparable array of luxury resorts, relaxing spas, championship golf, designer shopping, farm-to-table dining and world-renown cultural attractions amid sunshine and serenity. Situated at just two hours of drivable distance from Los Angeles and San Diego, Greater Palm Springs boasts of natural springs. ♦

TOFT India launches Travelife programme to drive tour operation standards

TBM Staff | Mumbai

TOFT India, the nature based travel trade alliance focusing on driving more sustainable travel in South Asia, has launched the internationally-recognised Travelife programme to help drive up tour operation standards in India's tourism sector.

"India's track record on travel and tourism sustainability is very poor, according to the latest UNWTO report 2019, far behind many of its competitors, including Sri Lanka. So being able to bring a respected international partner to India, together with our own accommodation certification programme, means we are now ready to drive up eco-standards and work with states

and destinations to help them develop better ecotourism and more sustainable formats for tourism," said Julian Matthews, Chairman, TOFT India.

"We are delighted to be working with TOFT in India, helping to drive up standards in tour operation across the country. This pandemic has helped highlighted the need for far greater sustainability in travel and

tourism globally – and our certification for operators and DMC's will help drive the supply chain pressure faster towards more

responsible, eco-friendly and fairer tourism across South Asia," said Naut Kusters, GM of Travelife for Tour operators, based in the Netherlands.

"All TOFT current DMC members will gain

free access to a range of online tools that they can use to start the journey towards greater sustainability in their own operations, in the tours, they market and operate, and help in the destinations their clients visit. It all starts with making this commitment before full certification can be reached," added Ritu Makhija, Manager Sustainability, TOFT India.

Increasingly travellers and the tour operators and OTA's that operate them, are demanding greater levels of environmental and social transparency with regards to the holidays they sell, especially the international market. Increasingly the domestic market is asking these questions too and destinations grow, so we are delighted to finally be able to offer the industry and globally recognised and industry supported system that will allow India's best to continue to compete in the marketplace – post-Covid. ♦





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A JOB BETWEEN THE RIBS

The virus is exposing global fault lines in tourism policies, health infrastructure, political commentary and wishful thinking.

It's no news that travel business worldwide has been crushed like never before with the advent of the pestilence from Wuhan. The global concerted response has, alas, been clearly missing for a long time.

The developed world rallied for its own, the developing states like ours, floundered and yet held steady, while the really poor states were left to fend for themselves.

The travel industry was in for a nasty shock, ill prepared as it was for an event of such magnitude. Lately, it's good to see stirrings of a movement to facilitate travel processes, at least in regions where it is being eased up. IATA has stepped forward with its app for this. The IATA Travel Pass is a mobile app that helps travellers to store and manage their verified certifications for COVID-19 tests or vaccines. The note says it is more secure and efficient than current paper processes used to manage health requirements.

How this process becomes the globally accepted norm is yet to be realised.

While not even distantly the domain of the travel industry, the parameters, scope, testing procedures and rightly certified jobs are relevant to the survival of tourism business.

Now that USA and the other biggies seem to be chipping in with doses for the world, things are supposed to turn rosy. Unfortunately, the promise of revival doesn't seem so easy. The worries of intellectual property and profit margins are still holding back quantum jump in the production of vaccines for the world.

On the other hand, perhaps a special window or process for travellers needs to be opened through which travel, both domestic and international can be secured.

The indigenous Covaxin not being on the WHO list yet keeps out many potential travellers out of the international loop. It's clear the pressures of pharma business and sales have a significant role to play in the supply, availability and distribution of vaccines. No need to brush that fact under the carpet.

The time is to work with what the situation presents and use whatever leverage to build a better business climate.

Governments and politics are the least of the industry's focus of activity but impact tourism the most.

The tourism-beyond-borders and global-village-utopian dreams are good as ideals. It is more mundane subjects that rule the air. Vaccine passports and similar ideas can be discriminating, self-serving for a few and perhaps erratic in implementation. But where are the alternatives?

Anurag Yadav
Industry Expert

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

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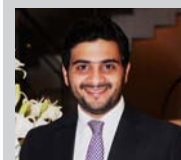
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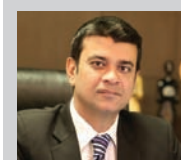
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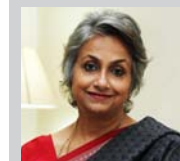
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Q The travel & tourism representation business has undergone a transition in the past 14 months with global restrictions in force due to the pandemic. Elaborate on some of the changes undertaken by Sartha Global Marketing in its mode of communication?

During this pandemic, due to the lockdowns, online media consumption has surged. Many established digital platforms became very important, and several new platforms emerged. Due to this we had to quickly redefine our communication strategy to ensure that to make sure that all our communication was getting across to our target audiences. So, very early last year we put together a very robust digital PR programme for our clients, by analysing and working with media platforms who remained active during the lockdown, and were relevant in keeping our destinations top of mind, both within the travel trade and potential travellers in future. This robust programme has also allowed our team to be in regular contact with our friends in the media, maintain a pulse on the market and build a good understanding on the changing landscape and market dynamics.

The second area we concentrated on was in educating and inspiring our travel trade partners. We were one of the earliest to seize the opportunity offered by the new online meeting platforms, and began conducting multiple webinars and individual travel agency trainings every month since the lockdown began. These activities again lead to a huge increase in destination knowledge; created warmth for destinations we work for, and market knowledge on the rapid changes that took place within most travel companies during this time.

Q What are some of the challenges while representing large, established destinations vis-à-vis smaller nations or products, especially in these times of global crisis?

There are no major challenges - the approach is different. Larger destinations have a more diverse portfolio, tourist attractions, and therefore more content to share. The focus during these times is to

showcase newer local experiences, sustainability initiatives, natural settings, less crowded places, and new travel protocols in place. Hygiene, sanitation and safety have become standard features now for any destination. Most research shows that consumers are keen to start traveling, but they have become more discerning after the pandemic, and we have to cater to the needs of this new traveller.

Q With digital outreach taking a centre-stage, how effective has the medium been in replacing the in-person experience?

Digital and virtual platforms gained the most during these times.

'Digital outreach is great in keeping consumers inspired to travel, when the time is right'

However virtual experiences will never replace the real in-person travel experience. Irrespective of the audio-visual experience of virtual tours, other sensory experiences are missing. People will continue to travel, build on their own experiences and create memories. Secondly, digital outreach has limitations whereas physical travel is limitless, with each individual having their own unique experience and deciding for themselves how long they want to stay at a place and what all they want to do there. Digital outreach is great in keeping consumers inspired to travel, when the time is right.

Q At a time when uncertainty is looming large, what are some of the measures that are imperative to sustain in the representation business?

The representation business is like any other marketing consultancy. As marketers we have to adapt and change with times. We have to be aware of global best practices and remain well informed of the usage of latest technologies and methodologies, and constantly keep abreast of changes in customer behaviour. As an organisation we have always believed in customised strategies for each individual client we represent. We continue to find innovative ways to engage with potential travellers and address their evolving requirements and expectations. In today's scenario,

representation companies have to embrace technology, cultivate new partnerships, and, most importantly, have great market knowledge and relations, to have a dynamic approach to all plans and strategies.

Q In the changed circumstances how important is curating an innovative itinerary to infuse confidence among travellers? What is your plan in this direction?

Innovative itineraries have always been important for destinations, travel companies and finally travellers. Now more than ever, this is of importance. As tourism marketing organisations we do not directly sell any travel products and depend on our trade partners to produce novel itineraries, and for the media to provide inspiration and information to our target audiences. For the creation of innovative products, we will continue to work closely with our travel trade partners, educating them on new experiences, unique activities, and experiences for specific targeted travellers - like honeymooners, families, young, outdoor enthusiasts, etc. Lastly, as we represent major destinations, we have access to multiple global research papers and best practices, which we are able to share with our trade partners showcasing the changes in consumer expectations, thereby assisting them in their product development. ♦

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With complete dependency on digital media to market destinations in the past one year, **Sheema Vohra**, Managing Director, Sartha Global Marketing spoke to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about the medium, its effectiveness and adapting to change with the new market dynamics. Vohra also shed light on some of the methods of sustaining in the representation business and remaining relevant.



Start-Up Forum

Bringing Innovations to the Forefront

TravStack

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 decided to showcase new-age technology products and services every month that have the potential to disrupt the market further. Moreover, the time now is also appropriate as the on-going pandemic has further widened the scope of using technology.

For this unique initiative, TravelBiz Monitor has partnered with 'Start-up Mentor Board', a visionary platform with credentials in business, technology, e-commerce, digital market place, payment solutions and IT infrastructure, to highlight the stories of new-age technology ideas. Start-up Mentor Board has been set-up as an initiative to mentor and guide the travel technology driven start-ups and facilitate collaboration in the larger travel ecosystem.

Website - <https://startupmentorboard.vgmrtechsolutions.com>

The Board is spearheaded by well-known thought leader Ashish Kumar, who is also the Co-Chairman of FICCI Travel Technology Committee. It comprises Bharti Maan, who has led start-ups to scale rapidly; Patrick Richards, an experienced travel industry leader in the UK; Chetan Kapoor, an analyst with deep understanding of the travel and tourism business and trends; Kartik Sharma, an artificial intelligence practitioner; Karthik Venkataraman, a digital transformation & an e-commerce visionary; Jure Bratkic, who led innovative solutions in the USA and Kyasha Bhoola, with expertise and advanced insight into the travel industry across Africa.

*One can register for the SMB Program at <https://startupmentorboard.vgmrtechsolutions.com/form.html>

Core Team: Mounika Pothineni, Co-Founder and Head of Business & Santhosh Kalangi, Co-Founder and Head of Product

Founding Year: January 2020

Company Website: <https://travstack.com/>

Description: TravStack provides a technology suite for travel and tourism businesses that enables faster digitalisation along with growth tools. They equip travel professionals with powerful tools that will optimise the design and planning process of a trip for their consumers, allowing customisation and personalisation in the fastest and most efficient manner. Travstack provides easy-to-adapt SaaS solutions, bringing productivity and automation into daily workflow with AI-enabled technologies.

Travstack is on a mission to impact 1 million travel professionals across the globe with their travel technology solutions that are most valuable for the post Covid world and digitally-savvy customers. TravStack Founders are second time entrepreneurs with prior experience in the travel industry and deeptech space. They were also incubated by Singapore tourism Board's accelerator, Google for Startups, Masschallenge Israel and Nasscom 10K startups.

Pilot Partners under STB Accelerator

TravStack is working with Chan Brothers for easing the customisation of travel planning through their itinerary builder tool. Chan Brothers Travel is one of the prominent travel agency across South East Asia with 50+ years of operations.

Going forward the new normal would be smaller groups and more personalisation for the travellers. Their solution aims to improve the turnaround time along with boosted quality of itineraries. They improve productivity by automating repetitive tasks and optimise the bandwidth of travel advisors to focus on more queries. Their cloud solution helps planning and collaboration easily within the team, reducing manual errors and maintaining brand consistency.

TravStack also caters to front end white labelled planning solutions for businesses to boost their digital brand and customer engagement. They are currently working with an integrated resort and airlines in Singapore on pilot engagement. This will help in improving the cross selling opportunities and knowing the customer better with self- planning tools.





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'India contributes a substantial amount of passengers to SriLankan Airlines'

SriLankan Airlines is exploring the feasibility to operate to Indian destinations and connecting points via CMB to provide enhanced travel options to both passengers and charter flights. They are also hopeful about expanding the frequencies in India and provide smoother connections to their new destinations in the European Union and the Far East once the industry back on its feet, says **Dimuthu Tennakoon**, Head of Worldwide Sales and Distribution at SriLankan Airlines in an exclusive interview with **Disha Shah Ghosh**.

Q Besides passenger traffic, how important is the cargo vertical for Sri Lankan Airlines?

Being the fastest mode of transport, coupled with high levels of security provided for the cargo, air transportation will always be a vital component in logistics solutions. Today, air cargo continues to play a vital role in fighting the current pandemic in supporting the global health sector and supporting economies by providing active solutions for disrupted supply chains. The key SriLankan cargo markets include Frankfurt, Milan, London in Europe, Chennai and Mumbai in India, Dubai, Doha and Riyadh in the Middle East, the Maldives in the Indian Subcontinent,

Singapore, Melbourne, Sydney and Tokyo in the Far East and the latest key addition to the network, Nairobi in Africa.

The cargo handling facilities at Bandaranaike International Airport comprise two terminals maintaining an internationally-certified ground handling operation with the capability to handle all commodities of cargo with a present annual handling capacity of over 270,000 metric tons. Sri Lankan Cargo historically accounted for 10% of the total air traffic revenue. The financial year 20/21 saw the cargo revenues increasing by 63% from FY 19/20 to account for 60% of the total air traffic revenue generated in FY

20/21. The airline further intends to develop dedicated handling facilities with segregated areas for handling general cargo, perishables and courier cargo.

Q With regards to SriLankan Airlines' presence in South Asia, how important is India as a source market?

Continuing this historic relationship forward, India has been one of Sri Lankan Airline's prime markets since its inception, and it is today one of the largest international carriers operating in India.

During the pre-Covid period, Sri Lankan Airlines operated 130 flights a week into India, connecting 11 destinations

worldwide. Delhi, Chennai, Bengaluru and Mumbai were predominant feeder markets to the Asia Pacific and Australian routes. At the same time, all Indian points have contributed to the labour movement in the Middle East and the Far East. Although the global pandemic restricted our operations network wide, the management decided to continue operations into India where possible to keep alive the flame of allegiance and brand promise with our neighbours.

Q Sri Lanka is a vital destination for business and leisure. Going forward what will be your endeavour for these segments as the flag carrier for the revival of travel sentiment from key source markets?

We believe tourism will rebound gradually because the most significant hindering point for cross-border travel is the entry restrictions and health guidelines imposed by countries/states. Once that is lessened or relaxed, there will surely be a good traffic flow, both inbound and outbound. Many international visitors are waiting to visit Sri Lanka. We anticipate a strong surge from the country's primary source markets such as India, China, UK, Germany, France, Australia and Russia. As the national carrier, we are waiting to welcome our passengers on board, especially the Indian, European, Chinese and Far Eastern travellers.

At the moment, we welcome tourists to visit Sri Lanka and experience the nature, heritage, and genuine Sri Lankan



hospitality, with utmost safety being the highest priority. The Ministry of Tourism and the Health Department and the Defense Ministry are working with us and the local hotel industry to formulate safe air travel services and provide the best-in-class service for inbound travellers.

Q In terms of product enhancement and technology advancement, what are some of the engineering marvels that SriLankan Airlines is investing in?

Not limited to engineering, SriLankan is conducting many services and process enhancements during this period. We continued our website improvements, plug-ins, adaptations and services to enhance the web capabilities, devoted more time to configure search engine optimisations, maintained continuous communication, tried new technologies to optimise the internal processes, re-assessed our spending - kept clear and customised communication to passengers rather than mass-market advertising, completed all online refunds on time (as one of the first airlines to do so), to maintain loyalty we created different credit facilities for online purchase (vouchers), revamped the look and feel of the website,

created vendor partnerships (Covid insurance), worked on creating customer profiling development for the CRM and invested heavily on knowledge sharing exercises.

“ Although the global pandemic restricted our operations network wide, the management decided to continue operations into India where possible to keep alive the flame of allegiance and brand promise with our neighbours. ”

Q In terms of additional safety and hygiene, what are some of the measures undertaken by SriLankan Airlines?

The airline has invested in several preventive measures that are going above and beyond the minimum required and truly investing in the health and safety of passengers and staff. In this regard, SriLankan Airlines has been awarded the Platinum status by APEX Health Safety powered by SimpliFlying for our efforts in ensuring the highest standards of cleanliness and sanitization.

The measures introduced by member airlines include

safe check-in, enhanced and expanded cleaning of aircraft and customer touchpoints in airports and lounges, physical distancing during the boarding process, and wearing of masks and face

coverings at all times. These are in addition to the underlying measures including the use of HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filters onboard the aircraft.

Q In the post-Covid-era, how will SriLankan Airlines augment its sales strategy in India?

As mentioned before, India is a critical region in our network and contributes to a substantial amount of passenger tourist. We will leverage on both cargo and passenger flight operations, and will be evaluating the planned network expansions. However,

the cargo operation will take centre stage until passenger restrictions subside in most of our key markets. Nevertheless, the services to our industry stakeholders, corporates and loyalty members will continue while all our passenger segments will be kept informed and updated on the travel possibilities and operations. In addition, we are exploring the feasibility to operate to Indian destinations and on connecting points via CMB to provide enhanced travel options to passengers and charter flight options. Once the industry is back on its feet, we hope to look at expanding the frequencies into India and provide smoother connections to our new destinations in the EU and the Far East.

Q Are new code-share or interline agreements in the offing to expand your geographical reach?

The airline is currently partnered with 13 code-share partners of the OneWorld Alliance and 76 interline partners carriers to provide a wide array of convenient travel options connecting 113 destinations in 51 countries. We are currently working with a few carriers in South Africa and the Far East to expand our network which we hope will materialise post-pandemic. ♦

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NEWS ROUND UP

TAAI gets the honour of Chairing an APJC –India meeting for the first time

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The 59th Airline Passenger Joint Council (APJC) India of IATA was held virtually on May 25, 2021, and attended by the airline and agency representatives of Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) and Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI).

For the first time in India, an agency representative Chaired the APJC meeting held by IATA with TAAI President Jyoti Mayal unanimously selected to the Chair the meeting.

“It is moment of great honour and

pride for all of us at TAAI, the premier, nodal and largest trade association in India since 1951. We thank TAFI and all airline representatives for having faith and confidence in her and the TAAI team to lead the industry on the way forward,” the national leadership of TAAI said in a statement.

At the meeting, TAAI was represented by Vice President – Jay Bhatia, Hon. Secretary General – Bettaiah Lokesh, Hon. Treasurer – Shreeram Patel and UFTAA President & Past President – TAAI, Sunil Kumar Rumalla.

The agency representatives took up all

the important points of concern and have made recommendations through APJC to PAPGJC/PSG which shall be taken up at PAConf also.

“We thank each one of our trade colleagues, principal and partners in bestowing support and confidence in TAAI under the leadership of President – Jyoti Mayal. We at TAAI, assure all of you that we shall work diligently towards making positive changes in the working environment of the global aviation, travel and tourism industry,” the TAAI national leadership said. ♦



Natural areas & Domestic destinations to prevail in Tourism Recovery

In 2020, a study was done by a group of professionals, the Responsible Travel Insiders, with the support of Ostela Tourism Management School. The resulting report, **When We Travel Again** aims to act as a resource for those who, in one way or another, are part of the tourism sector and encourage sustainable choices. **TravelBiz Monitor** presents some key highlights of the report...

The **When We Travel Again** report analysed global tourism trends over the last five years, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on society. The study looks at the actions proposed by governments to safeguard their country's well-being and support the tourism sector. Survey respondents were from the regions of North America, Latin America and Europe, and reveals pre- and post-pandemic insights such as top travel interest, the preferable environment of travel, way of travel arrangement, and way of transportation, by gender, by region and by age. The data presented in the report was collected in April and May 2020 during the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A few key findings in this report include:

- There has been a shift towards domestic destinations (from 21.84% before the pandemic to 31.30% during the pandemic), showing that people may be more willing to explore their own local or regional territories.
- 83% of respondents preferred to travel to natural areas as their new preferred option.
- 52% of participants have chosen nature as their new top interest in travel.
- Women will be more eager to try alternative experiences after the global pandemic ends, as they are more willing to participate in local cultural workshops than men (59.25% vs 52.19% respectively), as well as to try virtual travel experiences (41.69% vs 33.47% respectively).

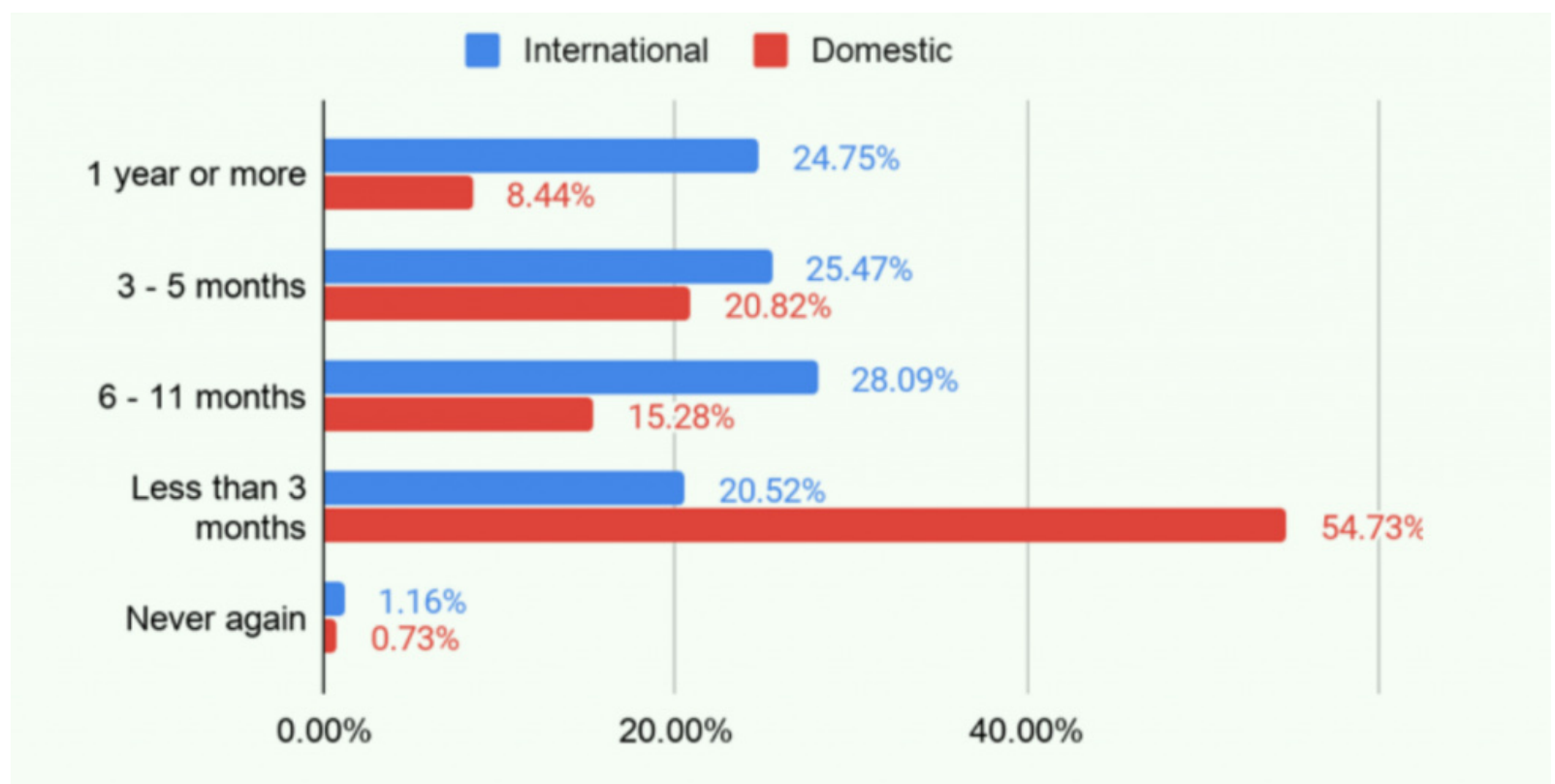
- About 2.4% of Millennials would rather avoid traveling for a long-term period in order to preserve the positive effects that human isolation was giving the environment. This choice lies in waiting for destinations and governments to structure a plan based on de-touristification of some areas.

Helping the Industry

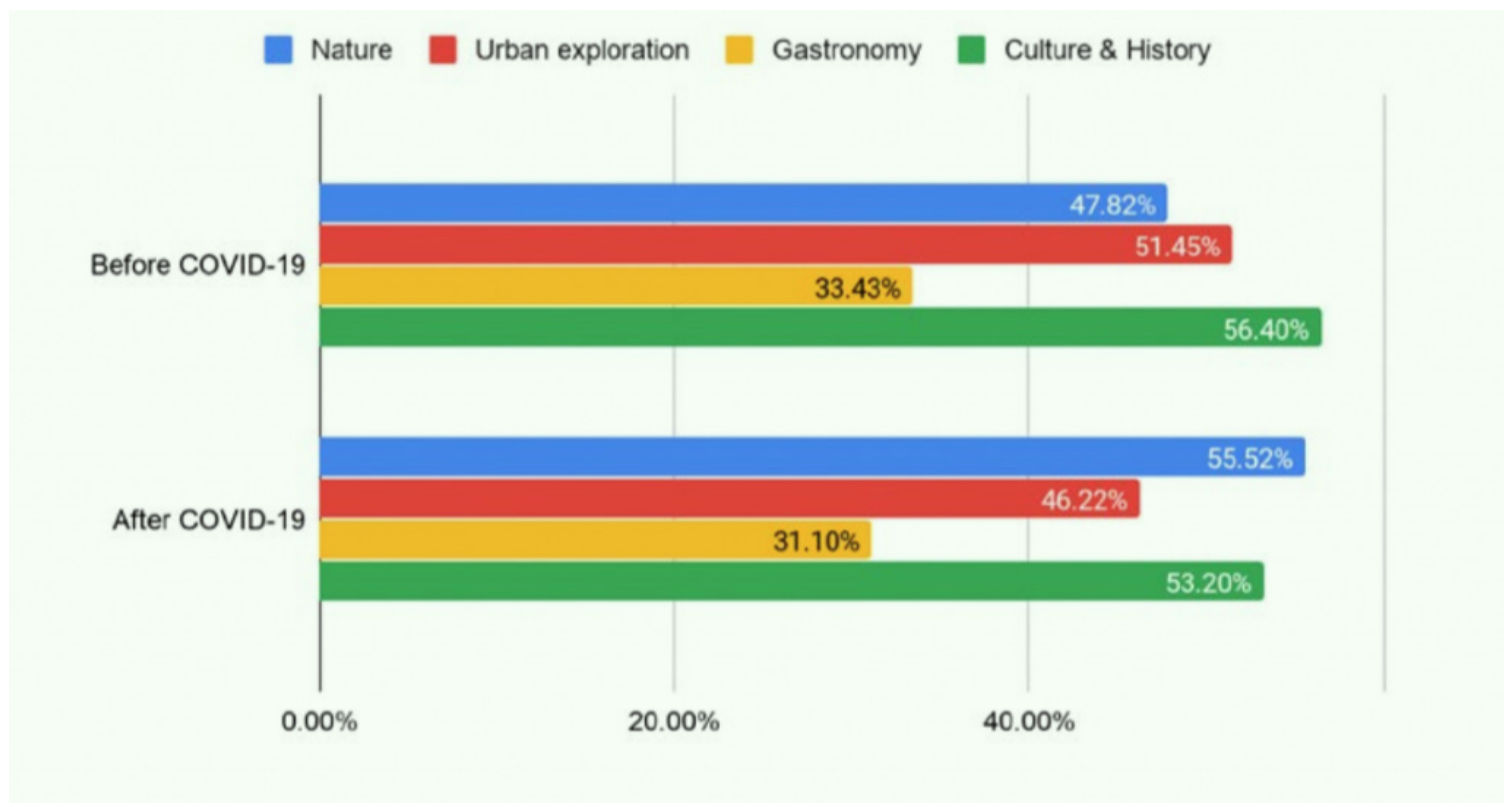
Tourism operators will have the chance to transform the sector into a tool aimed at developing local communities and protecting the natural areas of their regions and nations. There has never been a better time and opportunity for focusing on sustainable tourism. The work ends with a section dedicated to recommendations, policies and certifications, proposed by the authors, to work towards more sustainable tourism. Some of these recommendations are:

- "Microtourism" as mitigation to mass tourism, that refers to small groups of travelers moving through villages, towns or natural areas inside a district or a specified region. In addition to having a cultural, historical, artistic or natural attraction, "microtours" should be characterized by sustainable production and consumption.
- As a reaction to increased waste, the inclusion of cleaning activities in natural areas, accompanied by educational experiences focused on safeguarding the environment, can contribute to diversifying tourist offers and bringing more awareness to travelers.

Looking to the Future: International vs. Domestic Travel



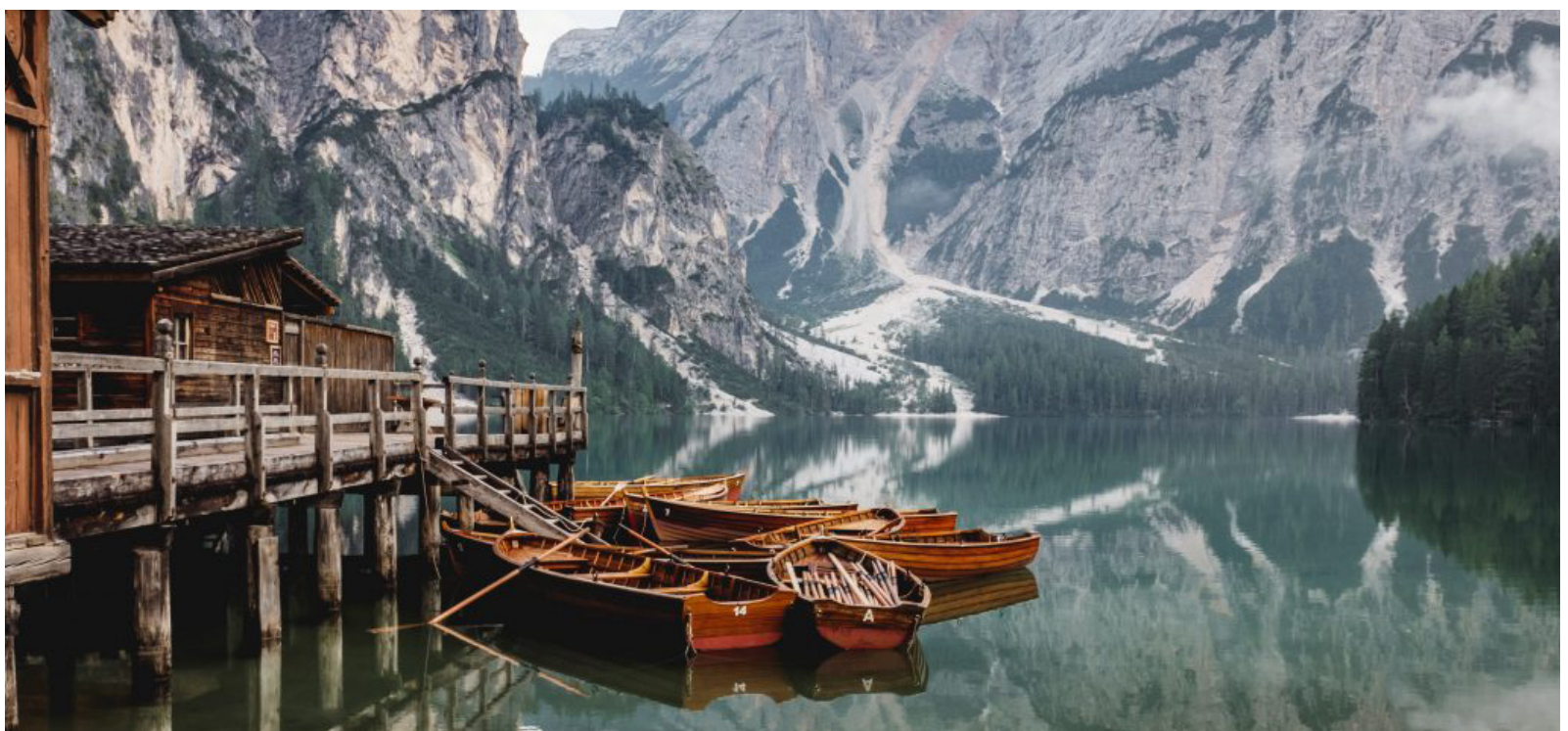
Looking to the Future: Top Travel Interests



- For health and safety standards, training is a must in ensuring safety and earning trust from travellers.
- If domestic tourism is to be encouraged, the needs of local residents must be taken into account and must be met; for example, by ensuring the optimum capacity of hospitals, access to food, electricity and water (especially in those regions that were already struggling). Overall, when looking at tourism development, destinations must always place the wellbeing of local residents first.
- Promoting sustainable mobility: The gains that the pandemic brought in terms of decreasing contamination and lessening CO2 emissions must remain for the health of the planet and its people.
- Digital transformation: This pandemic has proven the significance of the role of Information & Communication Technology (ICT) and innovation within the sector, which should continue to be built upon and made more accessible to all.

Conclusion

All in all, the tourism industry has gone through several changes, phenomena, crises, health-related issues and more. However, as history has shown, it will continue to be relevant as the sector occupies an important role in societies and global economies (often considered a tool for development in many countries). It will be the duty of tourists to be able to adapt to new traveling paradigms that will be presented in the coming future; and the obligation of companies and organizations to adapt to new ways of thought and procedures in order to bring the industry back to its former peak. As the world goes through the worst crisis for the tourism sector on record, it is important that as a society, people work together to revive the industry. Likewise, as tourist service providers or governmental entities, it becomes essential to guarantee the safety and well-being of visitors throughout the entire length of the trips. Innovations and incentives are being implemented around the globe to reactive this activity with the hope that soon we can all travel again. ♦



Overlanding is Here to Stay!

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

Among various predictions made for the new normal of tourism, a few ideas stood out and received approval from futurologists. Post-COVID tourism would observe conscious travellers- conscious of their safety and conscious of not harming the nature. This sensibility indicates an emerging trend to travel close to nature and more so to sparsely populated or inhabited places. As travellers are sceptical of travelling with unknowns, particularly in closed spaces, they are opting for self-driven personal travel. With the improved surface infrastructure in India, many enthusiasts, especially the youth, are giving conventional accommodation, particularly the frequented hotels, a miss. They are favouring recreational vehicles and secluded homestays.

COVID has gotten us to the cusp of a widespread overlanding culture as demand for caravanning and self-driven travel increased. The youth is all set to hit the roads and unbox the offbeat leisure experience. While many of them are still experimenting with overlanding, the market has warmed up to the idea. Offering motorhomes is a feasible option mainly because adventurers find remote locations exotic, and setting up a homestay or similar accommodations may not be financially & operationally practical and even environmentally permissible. Foresightedly, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India introduced a policy for developing caravans and caravan camping parks in 2010. Although many stakeholders appeared sceptical of the policy, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka initiated and took affirmative steps to promote caravan tourism. Increasingly, state governments have started acknowledging the potential of overlanding and caravanning. Several tourism boards are promoting caravanning culture and infrastructure, either individually or in partnership with private sectors. After realising the intent of the policies, the private sector is quickly refurbishing its travel experience products.

Caravanning can also contribute to reviving the sulking tourism industry. However, an organised caravanning eco-system is essential to make travelling and accommodation safe and affordable in the new normal. It is essential to consider the affordability of the whole concept. So, the campsite's parking with facilities should be budgeted and widely available, and camping vehicles should be affordable. While exploration and experience are the key

takeaways, there are two prerequisites: caravan parking campsites and vehicle fabricators. Since there are no predesigned RVs available from automobile manufacturers in India, enthusiasts are excited about the DIY (Do It Yourself) modification of their existing SUVs.

Entrepreneurialism is about forging opportunities out of challenges. As the demand for caravanning is surging, various tourism companies are eager to capitalise on these opportunities. They have commissioned motorhomes and caravans and advised itineraries to travellers who are seeking unique travel experiences. The sector, to operationalise in the new normal, must realise that tourism must transmogrify. This metamorphosis requires new skill sets. While caravan drivers, attendants and cooks will support the experiences on the move, on-ground service providers like mechanics, cleaners, accessories sellers and repairers, provisions replenishers to assist at parking bays and campsites would be equally crucial. Is the industry willing to make the necessary changes? New products, new skills?

While the idea of holidaying in a caravan excites us today, it is a derivative from Persian *kārwān*, which meant group travelling. Borrowed by the French as a *caravane*, it came back as a caravan which is essentially a convoy of travellers. Nowadays, the term is used rather loosely in India for Recreational Vehicles (RVs). In the 1920s, North Americans travellers conceptualised liveable trailers referred to as Tin Can travellers. These became more comprehensive and liveable with time but created a divide- the RVs and the motorhomes. As the industry matured, various RVs emerged with different nomenclatures worldwide. A trailer is a mobile home, attached usually to a 4X4 vehicle, is a Caravan. A vehicle converted into a liveable mobile home is a Camper, and comprehensive mobile homes on large vehicle chassis are known as Motorhomes. There is a trend of converting existing compact vans into Campervans.

In India, these terms are used interchangeably. RVs are legal in India but within limits and with certain restrictions. Getting the vehicle registered is arduous, mainly because RTOs, in most cases, are unaware of the law and the process. The RVs may be registered as Special Purpose Vehicles. Needless to mention that driving an RV, especially in the interiors, is an additional challenge in India.

Crowdsourced information about non-

routine offbeat destinations by overlanders will bring them on the tourism radar, taking tourism far and wide. Tourism leadership at the state level needs to take note of this. Only time will tell how the tourism industry rises to the occasion. ♦

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



*Dr Nimit Chowdhary is a Professor of Tourism with the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Jamia Millia Islamia. He has more than 27 years of academic experience, of which he has been a full professor for 15 years in India, China, and Mexico. He has authored 13 books and more than 135 academic papers with many academic awards and recognitions. He has travelled extensively to around 40 countries and almost all states within the country.
(Author with Indus in the background)*



Q What is your view about the Indian market against the backdrop of the rapid surge of coronavirus?

It is indeed a setback for Indian tourists who were certainly raring to go with revenge travel. We are living in strange times and the future of travel is still rather uncertain amidst this pandemic. Sri Lanka was one of the ideal destinations on the bucket list of many Indians, with its close proximity, pristine landscapes and a host of beautiful and exclusive getaways, like the luxurious Anantara resorts. There is light at the end of the tunnel though, with Sri Lanka's steady vaccination roll out in place and strict but convenient safety procedures. We are optimistic that the Indian market will bounce back with leisure, MICE and destination wedding opportunities in the near future.

Q What are the USPs of Anantara Kalutara Resort?

Uniquely situated on a peninsula where the Kalu Ganga River meets the Indian Ocean, this Geoffrey Bawa resort offers stunning 360-degree water views of both lagoon and ocean. The resort offers family-oriented recreation including a zip line over the lagoon, rock climbing, archery and excursions to places of interest. The sprawling Anantara Spa at the resort caters to a discerning clientele looking to experience Ayurveda wellness, and a luxurious foot and nail care salon by the Bastien Gonzalez brand providing world-class treatments. We are also fully compliant and sanitised according to the World Health Organization regulations and local government guidelines.

Q In the new normal, what changes have you witnessed as far as guest behaviour is concerned?

Guests are welcoming of safety and hygiene procedures, be it PCR testing once in Sri Lanka, short quarantine times within resorts and in-destination travel restrictions. Both the Anantara resorts follow strict health and safety protocols set by the World Health Organization and the

local government across all areas, including dining areas, heart-of-house orientations, recreation and so on. This is the new normal in the hospitality world and will be an expectation in order to make guests feel comfortable and safe.

Q Which customer segment is currently forming the biggest chunk of your bookings?

From the Indian market, the Anantara Kalutara has become a key player in the weddings and MICE segment. With a team that fully understands this market, every celebration is crafted to suit the client's needs. In the

'The Indian market accounts for over 40% of the business to Anantara Kalutara'

recent past, we have also seen an increase in solo travellers and women's weekend getaways, owing to our award-winning spa and the numerous recreational activities at the resort itself.

Q What are the various guidelines that an Indian tourist needs to follow while visiting Sri Lanka in general and Anantara Kalutara Resort in particular?

When restrictions are lifted, Indian tourists will need to have a negative PCR test 72 hours before departure and purchase Covid-19 travel insurance, visa and have a valid booking at the resort. Once on the island, the guests will need to use sanitised resort transport or use the services of a certified 'safe & secure' transport provider to reach the hotel. Upon arrival at the hotel, the guests will require a fresh PCR test at the resort, as well as additional tests depending on the length of stay. Vaccinated guests may have an easier route but it's best to check www.srilanka.travel/helloagain/ for the latest requirements which are laid out by Sri Lanka Tourism or contact the Anantara team who would be happy to assist.

Q What are the alternate revenue-generating ways

that you are contemplating since business events are getting cancelled due to the pandemic?

In the past few months we focused on the local market, especially targeting the local corporate segment in Sri Lanka for weekend business. The fact that at the moment Indians are not permitted to travel to Sri Lanka is a setback, as the Indian market accounts for over 40% of the business to Anantara Kalutara. However, effective June 1st, Sri Lanka resumed most international flights. In the immediate future, we are banking on the leisure segment from South East Asia to slowly come back. We have also started talking to meeting planners in Singapore and Japan to encourage the corporates to see Sri Lanka as an option for their meeting requirements. Our focus however for Anantara Kalutara will always be the Indian market - we are hopeful of the situation in India improving by July, which will then enable resumption of flights from India. Once we get the leisure segment on track, we are confident the corporate segment would not be far behind. We continue to work with wedding planners in India, on prospecting leads for Q4, 2021 onwards. ♦

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Our focus will always be the Indian market and we are quite hopeful of the situation in India improving by July, says **Shannon Creado**, Regional Director of Business Development-Global Indian Markets, Minor Hotels, in an exclusive interview with **Prasenjit Chakraborty**.

Indians most concerned about polluted water bodies & overtourism: Agoda Survey

With the hopes of travel resuming again and sustainability becoming a key focus, international digital travel platform Agoda has rolled out its Sustainable Travel Trends Survey. Launched to mark World

Environment Day 2021 (5 June), the survey highlights easy identification of sustainable eco-friendly travel options, limited use of single-use plastics and financial incentives for accommodation providers who maximise energy efficiencies as the top three measures needed to make travel more sustainable. Establishing more protected areas to limit tourist numbers and removal of single-use bathroom amenities round out the top five measures.

The findings from the survey also revealed that in India, pollution of beaches and waterways, and overtourism are the top two tourism concerns, with single-use plastics and energy inefficiencies (including overconsumption of electricity/water) both ranking third.

Governments considered most responsible for making changes to make travel more sustainable

Globally and in India, the public considers Governments most accountable for making positive environmental changes around travel, followed by tourism authorities and individuals themselves. When it came to holding governments most accountable, those in Indonesia and UK were most likely to do so (36%), China followed not too far behind at 33%, with Australia and Malaysia in fourth and fifth spot (28% and 27% respectively), and India stood at 24%. The markets most likely to cite themselves or individuals as most responsible for making changes to traveling sustainably were Thailand (30%), Japan (29%) and the US (28%), with India at 20%. Meanwhile, China (11%), the UK (13%), and Vietnam (14%) were least likely to attribute responsibility to the individual.

When asked what they would pledge to do better in a post COVID travel scenario, the top responses globally and in India were #1 manage their waste including using less single-use plastics, #2 switch off the air conditioner and lights when leaving their accommodation, and #3 always look for eco-friendly accommodation.

No 'one size fits all for' sustainability

In India, the top practices most associated with environmentally-friendly or sustainable travel are #1 accommodations using renewable energy and resources like solar, wind, hydroelectric and water, #2 no single-use plastics, and #3 travelling to destinations that are not high-density tourist spots. Additionally, when asked about what Indians associated the most with sustainability, the top

3 results were renewable resources (36%), natural cleaning products (32%), and eco-friendly design/furniture (31%).

Other energy saving solutions such as key cards or motion sensors, using natural cleaning products are the other key practices.

Interestingly, buying locally sourced products and reusing bedding or towels during holiday stays are the bottom two practices out of 10 associated with sustainable travel.

"We can see from the Agoda Sustainable Travel Trends Survey that the messages of taking simple steps such as switching off lights and air conditioning when leaving the room or reducing waste by minimising use of single-use plastics are being embraced by the public across the globe. What is also clear is that while globally the message is governments need to take the lead on managing sustainable travel, there is recognition that some responsibility lies with people's own behavior," said John Brown, CEO, Agoda.

"While there are different interpretations of what practices are eco-friendly or sustainable, most of the public are keen to be able to do their part, by actively pledging to choose eco-friendly properties or make smarter environmental choices when traveling. One of the easiest ways to counter concerns about overtourism is to consider traveling to off the beaten track destinations. This past year we have seen a shift in travel patterns as people, limited to domestic travel, explore lesser-known areas. If managed well, not only does this help support independent hoteliers and accommodation providers that rely economically on the tourist dollar, but it can also help lessen the environmental burden on overcrowded areas."

"As an industry, we need to continue to find ways to help individuals achieve these goals be it making it easier to search and find sustainable properties on Agoda or supporting and encouraging more partners to use key cards for power, use renewable energy sources or offering carbon-offsetting options for travel products," continued Brown.

COVID negatively impacts attitudes to sustainable travel

The increase in desire to travel more sustainably was most prevalent among respondents from South Korea (35%), India (31%), and Taiwan (31%). However, looking at the figures globally, while 25% have an increased desire to travel more sustainably, 35% have witnessed a dip in their desire to do so. The markets reporting the biggest proportional decrease were Indonesia (56%), Thailand (51%) and the Philippines (50%).

"It's concerning that many people see sustainable travel as less important today than they did before COVID-19, but I hope that is just a short-term effect, driven by people's thirst to get back out there and travel any way they can," Brown concluded. ♦



Q What products from Sabre Hospitality will aid the growth of the hotel industry in India amid changing booking patterns?

At Sabre, we're committed to building a new marketplace for personalised travel by enabling our partners to expand their offering, grow their business and deliver the highly personalised experience, that travellers want and expect. We do this through a host of powerful products and solutions.

Sabre's SynXis platform enables hoteliers to deliver millions of personalised experiences that maximise revenue and enhance the guest experience. Providing a singular view of inventory, pricing and guest data, SynXis technology helps hotels capitalise on the retail evolution that began prior to COVID-19 and has now accelerated through the pandemic. This one intuitive, customisable platform is a powerful tool for hotels who want to streamline their processes while boosting revenue streams and improving the guest experience.

Our industry-leading SynXis Central Reservation platform provides an extensive suite of capabilities that enable hoteliers to retail, distribute and fulfill offers, all the while increasing engagement with their guests.

SynXis Booking Engine offers intelligent and data driven services that enable hotels to maintain a laser focus on customer segments in order to increase engagement and conversion. SynXis Intelligent Retailing is being developed to allow hoteliers to rapidly create new products, services, merchandise, and experiences and effectively retail them using artificial intelligence.

Channel Connect further simplifies and automates distribution, maximising exposure to local, regional and global markets. SynXis Voice Agent offers advanced tools to deliver a personalised experience through guest recognition, facilitating the creation of tailored packages and providing further opportunities for increased revenue per transaction.

Q In terms of lowering operational costs, how are your solutions designed to bring benefits to owners and operators?

Our solutions allow hoteliers to eliminate the fixed costs associated with in-house technology and utilise a transactional pricing model that adjusts based upon demand. By leaving the technology work to us, clients can spend more time focusing on guests and less time worrying about the backend systems.

Q Do you think that technology can be a path to recovery for hotels in the aftermath of Covid? If yes, how?

'The global hotel industry is increasingly recognising the importance of technology'

Very much so, yes. At Sabre, we haven't hit the pause button during the pandemic – in fact, quite the opposite. Just as we are accelerating our own technology transformation during this time, the same holds true for our forward-thinking hotel partners who seek solutions that allow them to emerge from the pandemic with a competitive advantage.

As challenging as the pandemic has been, any crisis is a catalyst for change. Hoteliers are rethinking who their guests could be and the kinds of experiences they want to deliver, and this is where leveraging end-to-end technology can help fulfill customer expectations of today... and tomorrow.

Bottom line, the right technology enables hotels to find new revenue streams, distribute offers to new geographic markets and customer segments, and drive higher levels of guest satisfaction.

Q What are the recovery trends you are seeing in the hospitality marketplace globally? Do you think hoteliers can take advantage of these trends to gear up for recovery?



We're seeing that hospitality is continuing to recover faster than other segments of the travel industry, and that's understandable considering that most international air travel is still restricted globally.

Last summer in the U.S., for example, hotel bookings were the first to recover. We believe this demonstrates that although some travellers may not be ready yet to board a flight, they are willing to stay local or drive to their destinations. Now, with COVID-19 vaccinations rolling out worldwide, we expect further increases in traveller confidence.

Right now, hoteliers must use data and technology to truly understand what their guests want. The world has become more local as a result of travel restrictions, and hoteliers need to concentrate on what guests desire now: a hotel that may be just down the street, yet provides a total escape from reality. By utilising technology to better understand these emerging guest needs, hotels can boost revenue streams by attracting new guest segments and making the most of every booking. ♦

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With digital transformation emerging as a key catalyst for the revival of the hospitality and travel industry in the aftermath of Covid-19, Sabre Hospitality has been helping hoteliers to reduce costs with their industry leading platforms. **Asmita Mukherjee** spoke with **Scott Wilson**, President of Hospitality Solutions, Sabre to understand how technology can be a path to recovery for hotels in the aftermath of Covid.

#Together in Travel

By Smeeta Gulvady, Director, AdhVaam knowledge Hub

Images of the second wave are still fresh in minds of everyone. However, there is a cautious optimism in the air even though the media has been expressing fears of a supposed third wave. The travel & tourism sector globally, just on the heels of three large conferences - WTTC, FITUR and ATM has never been more optimistic. Held under trying circumstances in a tough environment, the tourism industry's resilience amidst the global crisis was reinforced. The sentiments expressed and deliberations undertaken were positive to reinforce the belief that "We shall overcome"!! It's time to ponder whether we can

adopt measures and ideas that have worked well in other countries? Shared experiences, work collectively? Can we plan a "Reopening" ?

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) urged governments to make data-driven decisions to manage the risks of COVID-19 when reopening borders to international travel. Strategies without quarantine measures can enable international travel to restart with a low risk of introduction of COVID-19 to the

travel destination.*

We now have more than a year of global data that can help governments make more targeted decisions on international travel. This can keep the risk of importing COVID-19 cases low—including variants of concern—while restarting international travel with minimal infringement on the ability to live normal work and social lives. Importantly, lives that include travel.**

Yes, we were all thrown into the pandemic, a crisis the likes of it never before seen and experienced. There are learnings for all as well as takeaways. Given the size of India's population, in general attitude of people - All is well, jugaad, lack of discipline has cost us dearly. Lessons have been learnt so we are better prepared in the future. The private sector- big and small companies have made a huge contribution to tide over the second wave. Can we work towards a planned restart or is it Utopia? Take a cautious approach and work to make it happen. We cannot repeat the Goa situation wherein there was a spike in Covid cases due to uncontrolled tourism. Formation of a taskforce for travel, tourism, hospitality sector with

adequate representation from all stakeholders - industry, tourism, aviation, airlines, hospitality, health, state, central government bodies-Ministries of Tourism, Finance, DGCA, along with Google, and integrating of technology to work with international bodies. There is urgent need to collaborate as we require clear policies. Travel certification, approval of Covaxin vaccine, a safety stamp will go a long way in bringing confidence to travellers.

With all the negative media publicity, inbound tourism has taken a beating. Domestic travellers need reassurances before they travel. We need consistency, uniformity across the sector so people can plan and book. Prepare and enforce health protocols, allow mobility of travellers with a dual approach - Vaccination certificate (Aadhar identification) or negative test reports within 72hrs. Stringent penalties should be imposed for non-compliance of protocols. Technology is an enabler and entrance tickets, booking tour guides should be online. Daily visitors can be monitored, controlled and contact tracking will also be facilitated. The visitor experience will also be better with lesser people around. Restaurants and hotels have already made experience contactless.

Restart to save livelihoods of travel & tourism and hospitality sector - Professionals are living off diminished savings with lost livelihoods with no relief, or financial aid or package in sight. Being largely a fragmented sector we are the worst hit. Crowd funding for travel fraternity for Covid victims have been initiated by friends and co-workers. Rs One crore was collected in less than a week in true human spirit as contributions to save a life of a person. At local levels, trade bodies are reaching out to those distressed in the fraternity. It's been a traumatic, emotionally draining experience for most.

The next six months are very critical. There's no end in sight with respect to Covid though vaccination will be stepped up. We must work together to restart while managing risks. Closer coordination with all stakeholders is need of the hour. We are all in this together and will come out stronger. ♦

Source

* IATA

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

Smeeta Gulvady has a rich background in the Travel & Tourism Industry with over 30 years of experience. A certified skill trainer, she conducts trainings on behalf of Tourism boards and has pioneered tourism training in India.



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