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Union Budget FY22 A huge Dampener

THE BIG FIX

HARD HITTING
QUESTIONS ON THE MOST
PRESSING ISSUES
OF THE TRAVEL AND
TOURISM INDUSTRY

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WITH
SHELDON SANTWAN
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

TravelBizMonitor

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Union Budget FY22 A huge Dampener

The hopes of the travel & tourism industry have been completely washed out with no sector-specific relief in the Union Budget FY22, and the reduction in the annual outlay for the sector from INR 2,499.83 crore in 2020-2021 to INR 2,032.04 crore in 2021-2022, clearly shows government's apathy towards the sector. After nearly a complete wash out of 2020 due to Covid-19 induced shut down, players in the industry were waiting for the Union Budget with hope for some handholding. Alas! It wasn't going to turn into even remote reality.

Travel trade associations have been consistently lobbying with the Ministries of Tourism and Civil Aviation, and had submitted a slew of suggestions to the government seeking urgent support for the industry on life support after a dismal 2020.

With the neglect in the Union Budget, trade associations and stakeholders are clearly left dejected. **TravelBiz Monitor** spoke to industry leaders who expressed their disenchantment at the treatment meted out to the industry which is major employment generator, and a strong GDP contributor.



Nakul Anand, Chairman, FAITH

There was a need of corpus of at least INR 2,500 crore for global branding budget to enable sub branding of three tourism segments - MICE, adventure, Heritage under the Incredible India main brand to enhance each of these verticals' global outreach. Not addressing any of these critical measures in the Budget announcement has put the industry into a state of shock and deep dismay. The tourism, travel and hospitality industry is battling the worst in century crisis from the impact of Covid 19, revival from which will not be seen minimum for the next financial year till vaccination is fully undertaken with no observed side effects in all source and destination markets.



Subhash Goyal, Founder Chairman, STIC Travel Group

The tourism industry employs 75 million people directly or indirectly. Had Government offered some sops to the industry, 40-45 million jobs which are on the verge of extinction could be saved.



Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI

We expected much more from the Budget. Travel, tourism and hospitality industry was completely neglected. The Budget on the whole is about empowering people, greater economic freedom, infrastructure but all that is long-term, and the relevance of travel & tourism has been undermined.

Contd PG. 11 ►

Karvat Group takes command of India travel ancillary biz; launches Asego to expand portfolio

TBM Staff | Mumbai

In a strategic move, the Karvat Group has taken over the reins of the entire erstwhile travel ancillary business in the Indian market, and will hereon steer its business in the country with sole proprietorship. With this development, Dev Karvat is taking the ownership of the entire Group's operations in India, and will serve as the company's CEO.

"22 years in the travel ancillary domain has given us immense knowledge and experience. We are thankful to the Cover-More Group for enriching that experience with their global expertise and supporting us in enhancing our capabilities. We would be

happy to welcome them back to India in the future. We are now focusing on greater agility and more India-centricity in our offerings for the travel business, which has seen significant changes in the wake of the pandemic," said Karvat.

Karvat Group is aiming to lead from the front with a disruptive business model that will not only continue to provide travel assistance and insurance, but also offer a plethora of additional opportunities for its stakeholders to expand their business horizon.



DEV KARVAT
CEO, Karvat Group

"With the aspiration to expand our portfolio and capabilities, we are launching a new venture - Asego. Based on a highly progressive business model, Asego will create, develop and nurture unique general insurance solutions, with stronger travel assistance and insurance offering, driven by cutting-edge digitisation," Karvat added.

With over two decades of experience in client servicing, Karvat Group looks forward to begin a new revolution in the Indian Insurance sector with its new venture. ♦

Future of aviation is on the line as urgent support is needed, says ACI

TBM Staff | Mumbai

New forecasts from Airports Council International (ACI) World show the path to recovery in 2021 will be slow and uncertain and, without government policy support and assistance, the industry continues to face collapse.

ACI World's most recent COVID-19 impact analysis revealed the global airport industry experienced a reduction of more than 6 billion passengers by the end of 2020, representing a decline of -64.2% of global passenger traffic, with a reduction in revenue of USD 111.8 billion.

ACI's newly published World Airport Traffic Forecasts reveal, over the next five years, global passenger traffic worldwide is expected to grow at an annualised rate of +2.4%, affected negatively in the short term by the continuing effects of the pandemic.

Recovery is likely to be uneven across the world. While markets with significant domestic traffic are not expected to recover to pre-COVID-19 levels before 2023, markets with a significant share of international traffic will recover much more slowly.

ACI believes this slow recovery will only be possible, however, if governments introduce a consistent approach to testing to promote travel and do away with restrictive quarantine measures with a coordinated and risk-based approach to combining testing and vaccination introduced going forward.

"The prospects for recovery in the aviation industry have taken a hit following the introduction of renewed travel restrictions and lockdowns in response to new variants of the COVID-19 virus emerging," Luis Felipe

de Oliveira, Director General, ACI World said. "While ACI forecasts show there is a pathway for a long term recovery, this can only be possible if a solid foundation can be laid in the short term with government policy support and direct assistance.

"The rapid deployment of vaccines is welcomed but there will be a considerable period before they are widely available so, in the meantime, there must be a proportionate approach to vaccination before travel balanced with a risk-based approach to testing.

"A coordinated approach to testing and vaccination will ensure the health and safety of passengers, staff and the general public, promote travel, and allow us to do away with restrictive quarantine measures that are hampering the industry efforts to prepare for a sustained recovery."

The World Airport Traffic Forecasts show Asia-Pacific and Latin America-Caribbean are predicted to experience the fastest growth, achieving five-year growth rates of +3.5% and +3.1%, respectively. Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and North America will see a more modest expansion, with growth ranging from +1.2% to +1.9%.

China is expected to become the largest passenger market in 2031 surpassing the US and is projected to continue to dominate passenger rankings in 2040 with just over 3.6 billion passengers, an 18.3% share of the global passenger traffic market. This will be followed by the US and India, with 2.9 and 1.3 billion passengers, respectively. Together, the three countries will handle almost 40% of global passenger traffic. ♦

TAAI releases third digital issue of NamasTAAI

TBM Staff | Mumbai

In their endeavour to keep its members abreast about the latest developments and the initiatives it has undertaken, the TAAI (Travel Agents Association of India) unveiled its third digital version of bi-monthly magazine, **NamasTAAI** in association with **TravelBiz Monitor**.

Speaking on this, Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI, said, "The first year as the elected President for the term 2019-21 along with full team has been

most challenging and a path of new learnings. As President along with the team which supported, delivered and made a difference. The digital version of NamasTAAI is one such example in this direction." The initiation received accolades from all quarters, including the government. The third edition, besides regular content, also highlights various initiatives undertaken by TAAI and its different chapters. The digital version also increased its readership significantly. ♦



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Beena Menon
India Representative, Royal Commission of AlUla



Huzan Fraser Motivala
India Representative, Royal Commission of AlUla

‘There is a huge potential to promote tourism from India to AlUla’

The Indian consumers are always interested in experiencing new destinations, and AlUla is the newest gem in Saudi Arabia. With the pandemic still affecting travel around the world, AlUla’s vast open spaces and strict health and safety measures make it a safe and inspirational option for tourists, say **Beena Menon & Huzan Fraser Motivala**, India Representative, Royal Commission of AlUla in conversation with **TravelBiz Monitor**.

Q What makes you to embark on the first ever destination brand campaign for AlUla at this point of time for the domestic Saudi market?

The first ever destination brand campaign for AlUla, the heritage and cultural centerpiece of Saudi Arabia, was unveiled recently. The new campaign, AlUla – The World’s Masterpiece will help to achieve, Royal Commission of AlUla’s (RCU) visitor projections of 90,000 for 2021 and 130,000 for 2022. While the campaign is aimed at the domestic market, RCU expects it to have some organic reach digitally in international markets. In what is hoped will be a year of travel recovery, AlUla’s new brand campaign is aimed at deepening the Kingdom’s pride and affection for AlUla as well as ultimately increasing intention to visit.

Q Please throw some light on AlUla and its significance for attracting tourist.

Located in the North Western region of Saudi Arabia, AlUla is home to a series of fascinating historical and archaeological sites. The Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz has a vision to turn AlUla County into a living museum, creating memories that

visitors will share with the world. AlUla is a place of rich natural, human and cultural heritage dating back to 200,000 years of largely unexplored human history. Here one can experience over 7,000 years of human civilisation. AlUla is undergoing a careful and sensitive restoration to ready itself for modern-day guests. The four key pillars of AlUla are Heritage, Adventure, Art & Culture and Nature. AlUla has 4 significant heritage sites – Hegra and Hijaz Railway Station, Dadan, Jabal Ikma and the Old Town of AlUla. With a focus firmly on conservation and light-touch tourism experiences, AlUla is set to be a must-visit culture and heritage destination. AlUla’s broad range of unique outdoor adventures and activities has been inspired by the history and heritage of the region.

AlUla has a host of unique accommodation options from luxury desert resorts such as Sahary and Shaden, self-catered RVs, globally renowned brands such as Banyan Tree and Aman Resorts.

AlUla is home to Winter at Tantora (WAT), an exhilarating festival which took place between December and March in 2018/2019 and 2019/2020. AlUla’s rich history was on full display during the iconic festival.

Held in the Old Town of AlUla, WAT was a three-month luxury festival spanning sport, music, food, heritage, and modern art. WAT also includes experiences like hot air ballooning, vintage aircraft rides, art installations, desert polo and adventure. The highlight of the festival was the world-class musical performances such as Lionel Richie, Enrique, Andrea Bocelli and Yanni.

Q When can we expect a similar campaign to be rolled out for the Indian market?

When the time is right and borders open, we will look at launching a campaign for the Indian market to create awareness and promote the destination.

Q In terms of trade and media outreach, what are some of the activities chalked out?

AlUla offers an exciting cultural, artistic journey with its rich archaeology and heritage that form an important aspect of its character. Being a new destination in the market and given the backdrop of the pandemic, we will work closely with travel trade to create awareness and interest in AlUla, and drive visitation. We will work with the trade to promote AlUla and develop stand-alone itineraries as well as itineraries combined with other destinations in the region. We will conduct trainings, organise webinars and participate in key travel trade shows in India. Once the borders open we will implement roadshows, travel trade familiarisation and joint promotions with leading travel agencies, which will be critical to AlUla’s success in the market.

Through our marketing outreach programme, we aim to tie up with leading publications, have a robust media familiarisation trip programme and create bespoke media events. Our Marcom programme will also include working with a content creator/celebrity/influencer for a digital influencer programme to harness the power of an influential celebrity to launch and promote AlUla. We will also invest in a social media campaign across prominent channels like

Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to showcase our iconic attractions and special promotions. Our consumer promotions will include tying up with prestigious global brands to create awareness of the key offerings of AIUla.

Q Saudi Arabia is a relatively new market for tourism.

How aggressive is your approach going to be?

The RCU has driven forward efforts to develop AIUla into a pre-eminent global tourist destination since 2017, and in the process is becoming a sector leader in the tourism pillar of Saudi Vision 2030. RCU has demonstrated its pedigree by unlocking the potential of AIUla as a high-profile emerging tourist destination in Saudi Arabia. AIUla aims to attract 2 million visits, resulting in SAR 120 billion in cumulative GDP impact and 38,000 jobs by 2035. AIUla is the first of the significant Saudi Vision 2030 initiatives to welcome visitors, having re-opened key heritage sites to visitors in October 2020 as a new year-round destination.

Q How optimistic are you about the Indian market?

Which cities are on your radar?

Beautiful Planet Destination Marketing has been appointed by

RCU as their India Representative to handle the Marcom and travel trade activities, and launch and promote the destination in India. AIUla is a place of extraordinary human and natural heritage. AIUla is a new destination and home to several well-preserved heritage sites that lend themselves

“AIUla aims to attract 2 million visits, resulting in SAR 120 billion in cumulative GDP impact and 38,000 jobs by 2035. AIUla is the first of the significant Saudi Vision 2030 initiatives to welcome visitors, having re-opened key heritage sites to visitors in October 2020 as a new year-round destination.”

to immersive travel. AIUla has a geographical advantage being in close proximity to tourist destinations such as Jordan, Turkey and Dubai, and therefore agents can combine AIUla while visiting any of these destinations. We expect as soon as borders open, AIUla will be an interesting holiday destination to explore. AIUla is a living, breathing, open-air museum, full of awe-inspiring heritage sites and natural wonders, as well as endless ways to explore. There is a great potential to

promote tourism from India to AIUla. The Indian consumers are always interested in experience new destinations and AIUla is the newest gem in Saudi Arabia. With the pandemic still affecting travel around the world, AIUla's vast open spaces and strict health and safety measures make it a safe and

inspirational option for tourists. AIUla's heritage sites are now open as a year-round experience. For soft adventure enthusiast, AIUla has adventure activities like hot air balloon, cycling, hiking, ziplining, one can also go on vintage aircraft rides.

Besides the leisure traveller, AIUla will be a perfect destination for MICE travellers. Maraya is a world-class entertainment and conferences venue. It is one of the world's architectural wonders; a total of 9,740 square meters of

mirrors covers the exterior walls of the cube-shaped structure reflecting the desert surroundings of AIUla. AIUla will be a perfect place for destination weddings. AIUla has amazing resorts to host unique destination weddings.

Short flying time and easy connections to major cities of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Indian cities with Indian carriers such as Air India, IndiGo and SpiceJet will be an advantage. We will be looking at Tier-I cities including Mumbai and Delhi; Tier-II cities like Bengaluru, Chennai, Kolkata, Kochi. Saudi Arabia is the spiritual birthplace of Islam, and India being a country with the second largest Islamic population in the world, we will be targeting cities with high concentration for Umrah. Pilgrimage travellers can extend their stay in AIUla and club religious tour with leisure experience.

Q Which are the countries currently on your radar for AIUla?

AIUla has opened its offices for tourism across the world in the USA, Asia, EU, Australia and China. We will be working very closely with the Saudi Tourism Authority to promote AIUla which will be the hero product for Saudi Arabia. ♦

NEWS ROUND UP

StreetGooser unveils B2C platform GYPZE.com

TBM Staff | Mumbai

StreetGooser has unveiled a B2C OTA GYPZE.com dedicated to experiential stays. Set to be launched on February 14th, 2021, GYPZE.com will open up for globetrotters a world of choice and options in terms of under-the-radar luxury boutique home stays, villas and resorts that they can book with ease and with just a click of the mouse.

“All you have to do is to choose from a select and vetted array of homestays, villas and resorts across the globe and your holiday will be spiked with adventure and enriching experiences,” says John Varghese, CEO and Founder whose vision spawned GYPZE.com “Our bouquet of offerings include quality, secure and safe accommodation in off-trail often secret locations, known only to the discerning traveller,” he says.

“An added advantage is that GYPZE.com can be accessed on your mobile, too,” added

Varghese. To start with, GYPZE.com vets each property to see if it meets the company's stringent quality standards and in turn provides laser-sharp focus on each member's



JOHN VARGHESE
CEO and Founder,
GYPZE.com



HEMA MANGHNANI
Vice President, Product
Development. GYPZE.com

exceptional features on its platform.

Boutique properties offering experiential stays face unique challenges – lack of online

exposure, absence of a platform that focuses on experiential stays and one which highlights the amazing assets of each property. Without the marketing muscle of chain hotels, off-beat hideaways have to pay higher commissions to booking engines and travel agents yet have very little customer support.

GYPZE.com, on the other hand, provides 24/7 customer support and charges zero commission. “Ours is an online platform that aligns with an accommodation provider's target market,” says Hema Manghnani, Vice President, Product Development. GYPZE.com. “It gives the property owner the freedom to manage the resort/homestay/villa's profile and maximise exposure and earn more.”

The GYPZE.com team evaluates a property, an agreement is signed and the accommodation provider must furnish details of its retreat which then goes live. ♦

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Mired in Uncertainty

Joe Chernov, a renowned marketing leader once said, "Good marketing makes the company look smart. Great marketing makes the customer feel smart." The Covid-19 pandemic necessitates 'great marketing' for the tourism industry. While health and hygiene have always been the essential elements for travel & tourism competitiveness, the pandemic has brought enhanced global spotlight on the importance of these factors.

In a normal situation, tourism marketing is undertaken with a relatively high degree of certainty. And planning, setting budget, etc. are routine affairs. But the situation now is completely different. Hence, the marketing process is fraught with challenges and understanding the pulse of travellers is a key. In all probability, travellers are likely to embark towards destinations that are seen to be healthy, safe and clean, and also how effectively they have managed the pandemic. Besides this, investment in health infrastructure by destinations will play a critical role in attracting tourists. Frankly speaking, in the current scenario, the essence of marketing should revolve around addressing the FEAR (Fear of unknown, fear of being touched, fear of infection, fear of bringing back the virus, etc). So, those who can address this vital issue effectively and efficiently would be successful.

Coming to the Union Budget, which the travel & tourism and hospitality industry was waiting with bated breath for some relief, has been a complete washout. The sector significantly contributes to country's GDP and employment generation. Plus, the magnitude of destruction the Covid-19 pandemic has inflicted on the sector is unimaginable. Was it wrong to expect some handholding from the government? Although, the Budget has taken steps to improve regional connectivity by privatisation of airports in Tier-II and III cities, focusing on road and rail infrastructure these are all long-term measures. Against the backdrop of pandemic, the industry wanted something which could immediately soothe the nerves like exemption of taxes, release of SEIS benefits, etc.

The current plight of the industry reminds me a famous line of a song by Rabindranath Tagore, "If no one responds to your call, then go your own way alone."

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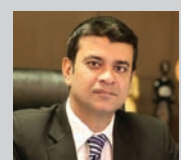
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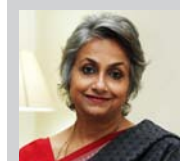
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Fiji introduces “Care Fiji Commitment” programme for traveller safety

TBM Staff | Mumbai

In anticipation of Fiji's borders re-opening to travellers, Fiji has introduced the “Care Fiji Commitment” which is a programme dedicated to enhanced safety, health and hygiene protocols to ensure the utmost safety of travellers to Fiji in a post COVID-19 world.

Although Fiji's borders are currently still closed to international travellers, the introduction of the programme represents a destination-wide assurance that Fiji is ready to welcome travellers safely back to its shores upon re-opening.

Since the declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, Fiji has made health and safety its top priority. Due to the country's quick and effective response to COVID-19, Fiji was able to contain the virus from a very early stage and mitigate any risk of outbreak within the islands. The government's effective containment measures put in place in March 2020 meant Fiji was able to officially declare itself COVID-contained in June 2020. Now, with the introduction of the Care Fiji Commitment, travelers can be assured that Fiji is a safe destination to enjoy on their next

vacation to the islands.

“The Care Fiji Commitment is our assurance to travellers that the health and safety of everyone who lives and travels here remains our number one priority,” says Robert Thompson, Acting CEO, Tourism Fiji.

“Now, with this added layer of confidence in place, Fiji is primed to be an ideal post-pandemic destination – one that is and has remained COVID-19 safe, allows natural social distancing, has a wide variety of islands to choose from, offers mostly boutique resorts with under 50 rooms total, and is known for its wide-open beaches and expansive rainforests.”

The Care Fiji

Commitment is an ongoing commitment to maintaining protection measures against COVID-19 in Fiji. This includes having testing and surveillance processes aligned with the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations, local testing available at the Fiji Centre for Disease Control, WHO accredited isolation facilities, clear procedures in place for suspected cases, dedicated drop-in fever clinics for concerned visitors showing symptoms and a dedicated COVID-19 hotline.

A designated Wellness Ambassador at each business will be available to travellers throughout their journey to assist with any COVID-19 related questions or concerns that may arise. The Wellness Ambassadors have undergone extensive training and are dedicated to implementing and upholding all hygiene protocols and COVID-19 safe practices.

Travellers will be strongly encouraged to download the careFIJI app which is a privacy preserving, Bluetooth based mobile app which utilises non-location tracking technology providing Bluetooth is enabled. It gives an added layer of security for visitors that any contact with a COVID-19 case will be quickly and seamlessly identified.

Travellers will also be asked to commit to the programme by postponing any travel if they feel unwell, communicating with the Wellness Ambassadors as needed, downloading the careFIJI app and adhering to all social distancing, sanitization and face mask regulations, where required.

For added assurance, travellers can book their trip with full confidence through Care Fiji Commitment Partners. To-date, nearly 200 of Tourism Fiji's industry partners – including the resorts, restaurants, tour operators, attractions and more - have gone through an extensive training process as their first step in making the Care Fiji Commitment. The process is still ongoing and a full list of approved partners will be available once complete. ♦



ROBERT THOMPSON
Acting CEO, Tourism Fiji

Tanzania Consul keen on two-pronged approach to tap Indian traveller

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

The United Republic of Tanzania has appointed Nayan Patel as Honorary Consul in Mumbai. The Government of Tanzania officially opened the office in Mumbai in December. On the tourism front, Patel is considering a two-pronged approach to position Tanzania and Zanzibar as potential tourist destinations in the Indian market, besides exploring business opportunities.

Talking to **TravelBiz Monitor**, he said, “I propose to take business delegations to Tanzania and combine their trip with tourist sites exploration. I am already in talks with trade associations and councils

like Indian Merchants Chamber and Bombay Chamber of Commerce and Industry to take delegations to Tanzania and Zanzibar to explore business interests alongside wildlife and tourism activities.”

Patel spoke about the growing interest among Indian travellers for Tanzania and Zanzibar, having received requests from groups for visiting the African nation. “I am exploring the possibility of making



NAYAN PATEL
Honorary Consul - Mumbai
United Republic of Tanzania

presentations to business groups and associations by Jilesh Babla, Director, Zanzibar Tourism Promotion Centre.”

In terms of engagement with the travel trade and partnerships with airlines, Patel stated, “Once I formulate plans, I will talk to Air Tanzania to consider curating attractive packages for Indian market. Also, I will speak to other airlines connecting Dar es Salaam, to explore possibility of flying to India once the situation improves by year-end.” ♦

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‘Our target segments from India are FIT, Luxury, and Small Group visitors’

Utah Office of Tourism will hire a full-fledged representation firm in 2021 to expand their reach in travel trade & PR activities. Besides this, plans are also afoot to develop strategic co-operative marketing campaigns and hosting key travel trade partners in the state, says **Rachel Bremer**, Global Travel Trade & Destination Development Manager, Utah Office of Tourism and Film, in an exclusive interview with **TravelBiz Monitor**.

Q Currently, there is no direct flight from India to its capital city Salt Lake. What according to you should be the ideal route to visit Utah? Is there any chance to start a direct flight from India after the completion of the renovation of the Salt Lake City Airport?

Although we don't have direct flights to India right now, Salt Lake City International Airport is a Delta hub airport and is easily accessible via flights from the East Coast and

West Coast. International flights to Europe, including the non-stops to Paris and Amsterdam are scheduled to resume this spring. These European connection flights are recommended for long-haul flights to/from India and Salt Lake City International.

The Salt Lake City International Airport has undergone a USD 4.1 billion rebuild allowing for increased flight capacity, larger aircraft access, and increased passenger capacity within the airport. The first phase of this rebuild opened in September of 2020 with 30 new gates. Completion is scheduled for early 2025, with 67 new gates including 6 dual-use international gates.

We are currently working with the airport team to identify new direct flight opportunities and will be evaluating South-Asia options.

Q As of now, India is not in the list of top ten source markets for Utah. What is your strategy to make India to figure (among the top 10) in that list, especially against the backdrop of the new normal?

With strategic co-operative marketing, partnerships, education,

and product development, as well as targeted consumer marketing, we will see growth from this market. We must inspire consumers to visit Utah while educating them on how to visit, and creating an accessible, bookable product for our travel trade partners. We are fairly new to the market, this will take time, but I am optimistic that with the right messaging, partnerships, and education we can increase visitation and visitor spending from India.

Q Which cities in India is currently your focus?

We tend to consider the types of trips that Utah beckons; the extended road trips, and therefore we are aiming to tap into the FIT/luxury, and small group visitor segment. These are visitors that typically have already travelled to the US, and are looking to expand their exploration beyond the East Coast and West Coast. Comprised of honeymooners/couples, families, and small multi-family groups that will enjoy the vistas and viewpoints along our scenic byways, hiking in our National Parks, and state parks, bespoke cuisine, glamping, and other unique experiences. The pandemic and the eventual travel normalcy will lead to many people looking for a destination that offers respite, and scenic beauty, which is what they will find in Utah.



With this in mind, as we continue to develop brand awareness and devote marketing efforts in India; our focus will be Tier-I cities including New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Kolkata.

Q Rocky Mountaineer, an eminent train company, has announced its plans to introduce a new Colorado to Utah route for its luxury train journeys in 2021. What important leverage points will it offer to Utah tourism?

The Rocky Mountaineer expanded route from Denver to Moab is a phenomenal new product that we are excited to launch with them. We have been working with local tour operators to offer extended set departures from Moab, offering additional nights in Utah, and working with key travel trade partners globally to package and promote this spectacular new product.

This presents an opportunity to refine our product offerings, develop new, enriching experiences for the visitors, and support the local visitor economy in Utah in new immersive ways.

Q Given Utah's spectacular landscape, many prominent Hollywood films like Mission Impossible, Forrest Gump, Independence Day, etc. have been shot

in Utah. Do you have any plan to target Bollywood as well? If yes, elaborate.

We are optimistic about opportunities to expand film tourism with Bollywood and other film industries. We work closely with the Utah Film Commission to send any leads, referrals, and film opportunities their way, as well as develop new film tourism product, and will continue to do so as we expand our work in India.

Q According to you, when is the ideal time to visit Utah? Currently, how many nights Indians have been spending in Utah?

Utah is a year-round destination. We see four-seasons in Utah, with snow in the wintertime along the Wasatch Mountains in Northern Utah, and beautiful green mountainous drives in the summertime. Our National Parks are open year-round, and in the off-season for the National Parks, (fall-winter), visitors will experience a less busy, slower-paced experience. We are one of the few destinations where, in the springtime, you can ski in Northern UT, and within a few hours be surrounded by red rock, hiking to Delicate Arch in Arches National Park. Utah is an arid, dry state, and we recommend that visitors prepare for this with hats and clothes to protect them from the sun, plenty of water, and good hiking shoes, particularly when

visiting Southern Utah in the summertime. In the fall visitors will experience leaf viewing, perfect for scenic drives.

Utah is a large state with varying driving distances between the National Parks. We recommend a minimum of 5 nights in Utah, and 8-10 nights to experience the Mighty 5 National Parks, the state parks, and viewpoints along the way.

Q In terms of trade outreach, enumerate some of the activities planned for 2021.

In 2021 we aim to hire a full scope representation firm to expand on our current travel trade and PR efforts, develop strategic co-operative marketing campaigns, hosting key travel trade partners in the state, continuing our education efforts with additional industry training tools, and engage in more trade events and meetings.

We also need to continue to expand our DMC, and supplier connections to create pathways for contracting packaging, and bookable product.

Again, we have not been in the market long and have our work cut out for us, but, with the right strategic partnerships and development, we look forward to growing visitation from India, and supporting travel trade partners in that growth. ♦

NEWS ROUND UP

CONTD FROM PG 03 ▶

Union Budget....



Madhavan Menon, Chairman & Managing Director, Thomas Cook (India) Ltd.

For an industry that is a crucial contributor to India's GDP and a powerful force multiplier, priority tourism related announcements – an imperative to revival and sustenance – were clearly missed. We are looking at a long road to recovery and the Union Budget has not provided the helping hand that was expected of it.



Pradip Lulla, President, TAFI

We are disappointed. Our industry didn't find any mention in the Budget except while announcing tax exemption on airline leasing companies. We will ventilate our discontent on the snub our industry received through trade and main line media.



Biji Eapen, President, IAAI

The Union Budget was absolutely disappointing. The industry expected some kind of support from the government, especially against the backdrop of pandemic. Remember, travel & tourism contributes 10 per cent to the GDP. So, it is very disheartening to receive such a treatment.



Pronab Sarkar, President, IATO

In this desperate situation, travel & tourism has been completely ignored. We are totally disheartened. While the Prime Minister speaks about improving tourism infrastructure, the tourism players have been completely side lined. Even SEIS benefits for 2020 which are pending, not a mention of that was made. We are huge earners of foreign exchange for the government, however, the worst affected and not a single measure was announced to sooth the ailing industry.



PP Khanna, President, ADTOI

With inbound and outbound tourism at a complete halt, we were hoping that the government would announce tax rebates for undertaking domestic trips through registered tour operators. The infrastructure development plans announced are all long term, after a dreadful 2020, what we required was an immediate relief. However, the golden opportunity of making domestic tourism has been clearly missed.



Amaresh Tiwari, Chairman, ICPB

The Budget is absolutely frustrating for the tourism industry as none of our demands are met. Tourism is the most vulnerable industry contributing 10 per cent to country's GDP and provides large scale employment. Despite this we have been completely ignored. ♦



2020 passenger totals drop 60% as COVID-19 assault on international mobility continues: ICAO

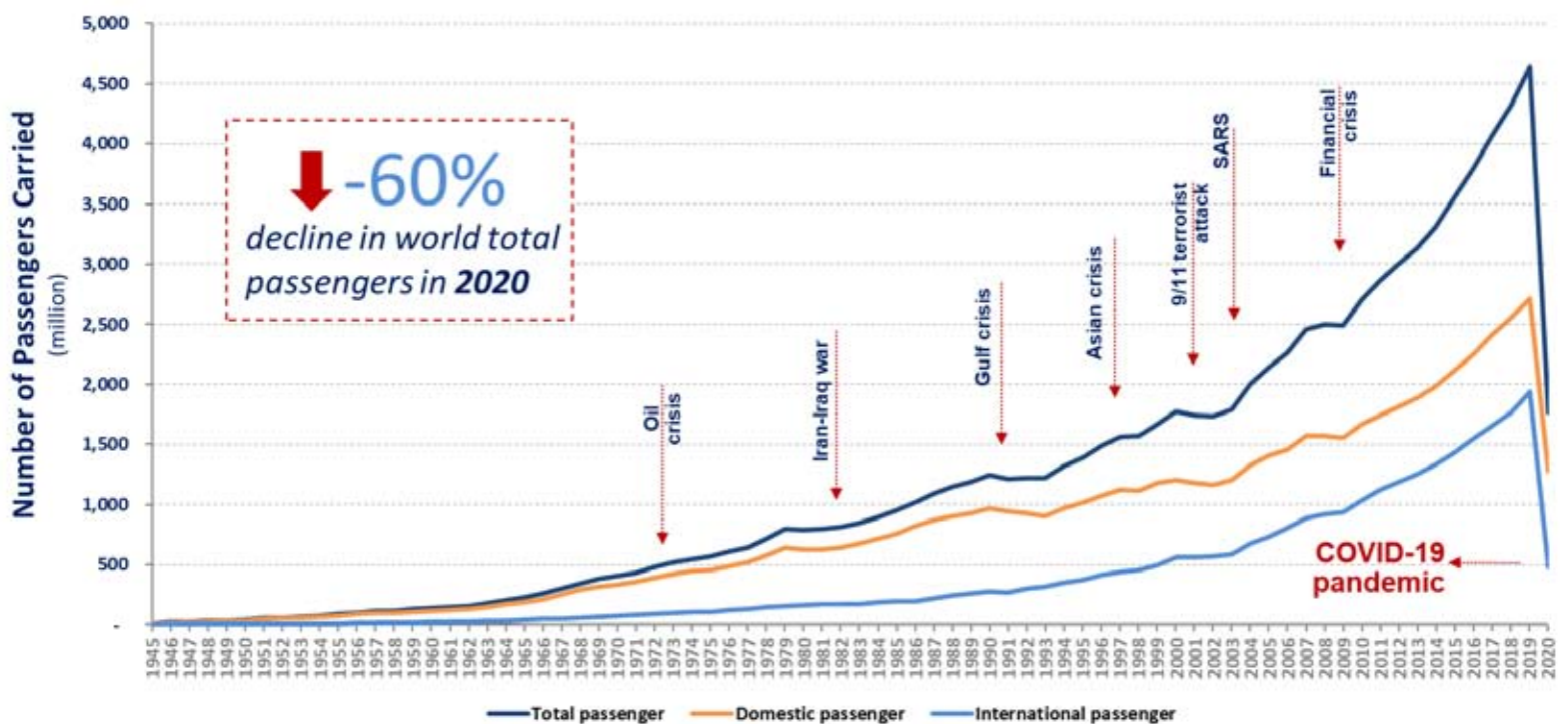
In the most optimistic scenario, by June of 2021 passenger numbers will be expected to recover to 71 per cent of their 2019 levels. A more pessimistic scenario foresees only a 49 per cent recovery. **TravelBiz Monitor** presents analysis by the ICAO that presents a grim reality on the international air transport industry paralysed by the pandemic-induced restrictions.

With its latest economic impact analysis of COVID-19 now completed, the UN agency for civil aviation International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has confirmed that international passenger traffic

suffered a dramatic 60 per cent drop over 2020, bringing air travel totals back to 2003 levels.

ICAO reports that as seat capacity fell by 50 per cent last year, passenger totals dropped by 60 per cent with just 1.8 billion

World passenger traffic evolution 1945 – 2020



passengers taking to the air during the first year of the pandemic, compared to 4.5 billion in 2019.

Its numbers also point to airline financial losses of 370 billion dollars resulting from the COVID-19 impacts, with airports and air navigation services providers (ANSPs) losing a further 115 billion and 13 billion, respectively.

The pandemic plunge in air travel demand began in January of 2020, but was limited to only a few countries. As the virus continued its global spread, however, air transport activities came to a virtual standstill by the end of March.

With the wide-scale lockdown measures, border closures, and travel restrictions being set out around the world, by April the overall number of passengers had fallen 92 per cent from 2019 levels, an average of the 98 per cent drop-off seen in international traffic and 87 per cent fall in domestic air travel.

Subsequent to the April low point being reached, passenger traffic saw a moderate rebound during the summer travel period.

That upward trend was short-lived, however, stalling and then taking a turn for the worse in September when the second wave of infection in many regions prompted the reintroduction of restrictive measures.

Sectoral recovery became more vulnerable and volatile again during the last four months of 2020, indicating an overall double-dip recession for the year.

Disparity between domestic and international recoveries

ICAO also reported that there has been a persistent disparity between domestic and international air travel impacts resulting from the more stringent international measures in force.

It said that domestic travel demonstrated stronger resilience and dominated traffic recovery scenarios, particularly in China and the Russian Federation where domestic passenger numbers have already returned to the pre-pandemic levels.

Overall there was a 50 per cent drop in domestic passenger traffic globally, while international traffic fell by 74 per cent or 1.4 billion fewer passengers.

As of late May 2020, the ICAO Asia/Pacific and North American regions led the global recovery in passenger totals, largely due

to their significant domestic markets. Europe saw a temporary rebound but trended downward dramatically from September. Latin American and Caribbean traffic saw improvements in the fourth quarter, while recoveries in Africa and the Middle East proceeded less robustly.

Financial distress and grim outlook ahead

Paralyzed revenue streams resulting from the plunge in air traffic have led to severe liquidity strains across the aviation value chain, placing the industry's financial viability in question and threatening millions of jobs around the world.

Cascading impacts have also been severe across tourism markets globally, given that over 50 per cent of international tourists formerly used air travel to reach their destinations.

The global 370 billion dollar drop in gross airline passenger operating revenues represented losses of 120 billion in the Asia/Pacific, 100 billion in Europe, and 88 billion in North America, followed by 26 billion, 22 billion and 14 billion in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and Africa, respectively.

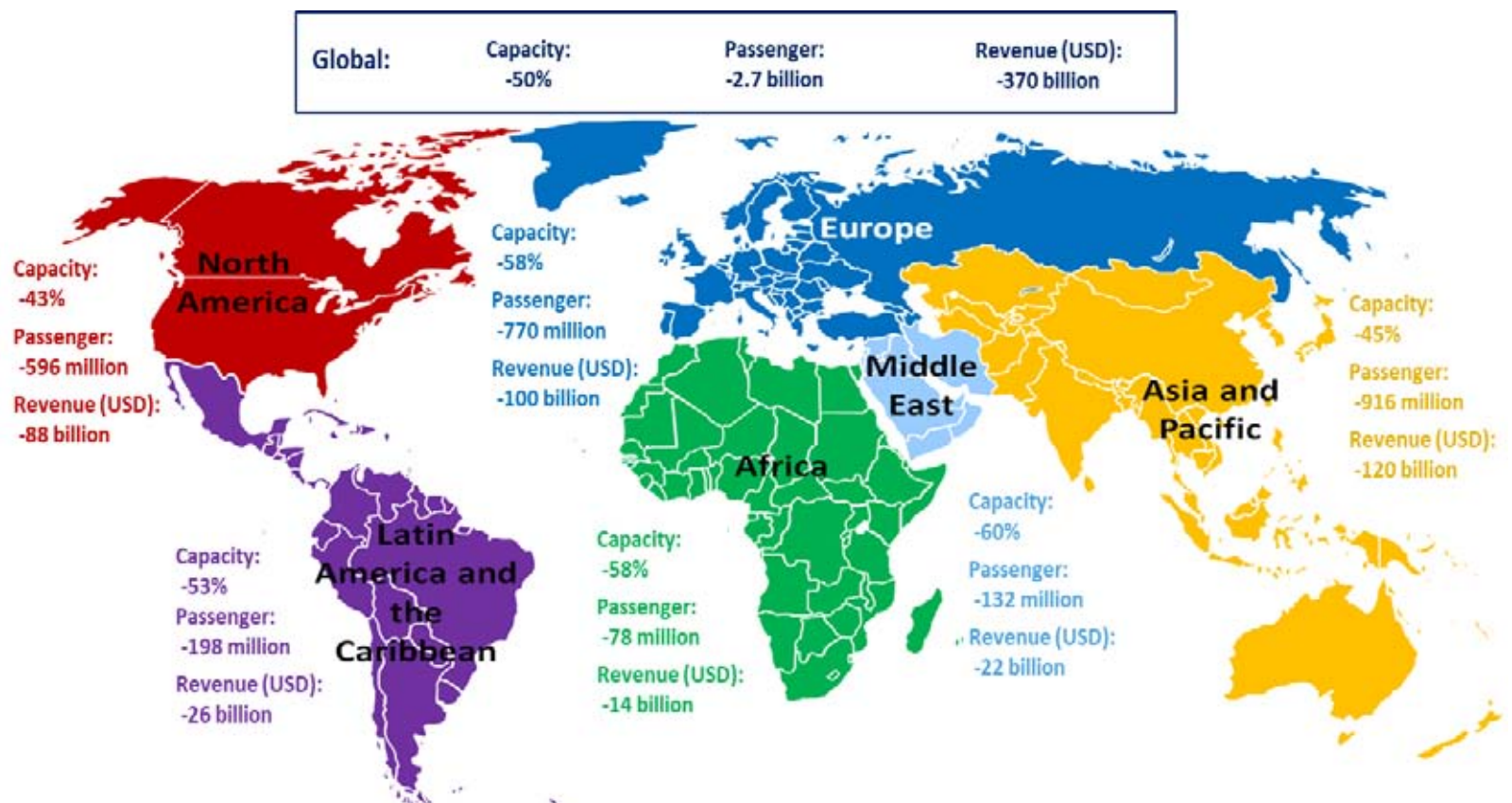
ICAO indicated that the near-term outlook is for prolonged depressed demand, with downside risks to global air travel recovery predominating in the first quarter of 2021, and likely to be subject to further deterioration.

It expects any improvement in the global picture only by the second quarter of 2021, though this will still be subject to the effectiveness of pandemic management and vaccination roll out.

In the most optimistic scenario, by June of 2021 passenger numbers will be expected to recover to 71 per cent of their 2019 levels (53 per cent for international and 84 per cent for domestic). A more pessimistic scenario foresees only a 49 per cent recovery (26 per cent for international and 66 per cent for domestic).

ICAO continues to provide recommendations and support for the aviation sector to weather through the crisis. Its new Guidance on Economic and Financial Measures summarizes a range of measures that can be explored by States and the industry to alleviate the imminent liquidity and financial strain, and to strengthen the industry's resilience to future crisis. ♦

2020 passenger traffic and revenues, by region





Ashar Resort



Hegra

15 Reasons to Visit AlUla, Saudi Arabia in 2021

AlUla is making waves worldwide with its newly launched domestic brand campaign, and for being a new and upcoming tourism destination. We are glad to bring you 15 top reasons to visit AlUla once the borders are open.

1. Marvel at the 94 elaborately-carved tombs built by the Nabataean Kingdom at Hegra, Saudi Arabia's first UNESCO World Heritage Site.
2. Stroll through the labyrinth of 900 mud-brick houses that make up AlUla Old Town. Take a tour with a Rawi up to the castle to get a bird's-eye-view.
3. Catch the magical 30-minute window when the sun rays illuminate the path of The Siq at Jabal Ithlib, the Holy Mountain at Hegra.
4. Explore the open-air living museum of AlUla through aerial views from a vintage aircraft, a helicopter or a hot air balloon.
5. Spot the carved lions of Dadan and the rock inscriptions at Jabal Ikma to uncover stories of ancient civilisations.
6. Train-spotters and history buffs must visit Hijaz Railway and Hegra fort, and learn about the famous train route.
7. Be one with nature on a half-day Adventure Trail through the dramatic Madakheel landscapes or try the shorter Hidden Valley or Oasis View trails.
8. Feel the wind in your hair while whizzing through the canyon on a zipline, or hire a three-wheeled desert buggy at the new Adventure Canyon.
9. Follow the pack on bike or horse-back with these newly launched leisurely trails through the sand dunes of AlUla's unique landscapes.
10. Bike/hike to Harrat Uwayrid for brilliant views of Hijaz Mountain range, the ideal backdrop for sunset photos.
11. Visit Maraya – the Guinness Book of Record's biggest mirrored building. This multi-purpose concert and entertainment venue is reopening early 2021. Its cladding of 10,000 square metres of mirrors reflecting the desert landscapes makes it a magical experience that is never the same.
12. Coming in 2021, Habitas AlUla, an eco-resort with a focus on immersive music and cultural events, and Ashar Resort, 5-star luxury desert suites which will transform into a Banyan Tree Resort later in the year. Both will be opening for bookings during the course of the year.
13. Book an evening Stargazing Tour at Al Ghameel, get comfortable on a traditional carpet and as you stare into the bright stary night and hear stories of the human ingenuity of ancient civilisations - it's like 2020 didn't happen.
14. Go hunting for rock formations at sunrise or sunset, the best time to view iconic AlUla rocks such as Elephant Rock, Face Rock, Rainbow Rock, Hand Rock, Dancing Rocks Or Pyramid Mountain.
15. Take a stroll through the oasis of lush palm groves or visit AlUla Fresh Farm and sample the varieties of zingy citrus fruits, such as the Jaffa orange and helo lemons or enjoy the desert while sipping on an Arabic coffee. ♦



Maraya



Stargazing Tour at AlGhameel



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Start-Up Forum

Bringing Innovations at the Forefront

KePSLA

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>

Startup Name: KePSLA

Core Team: Deepak Mavinkurve, Mehe Jabeen, Nikhil Joel

Founding Year: 2016

Company Websites: www.kepsla.com

KePSLA is a new age travel technology company that focuses on helping the hospitality industry with solutions that help them enhance their guest experiences. It focuses on organising travel search data using Artificial Intelligence & Machine Learning to provide an excellent experience for travellers while making it more rewarding for hoteliers.

Its solutions cover the entire spectrum of the traveller journey from creating inspiration, helping in research, improving the booking process, enhancing travel experiences & influencing advocacy. Our solutions help hotels do the following:

- Improve direct bookings on website.
- Understand Guest sentiments and provide impactful insights on hotel performance, guest engagement & market positioning that can be used by both large hotel chains and standalone hotels.
- Customised Technology Development for some of the best-known hospitality brands in the space of image recognition, brand experience metrics, etc.
- Tracking and improving travellers experiences in hotels.
- KePSLA provides sophisticated tools and technology that enables Guests to interact with hotel effortlessly. Cutting-edge technologies that use patent pending NLP solutions are our key strengths.

KePSLA now offers six products to hotels in the space of Guest Experience and they include:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Guest Experience Intelligence | 4. CRM |
| 2. Guest Survey technology | 5. Touchless messaging |
| 3. Content Management System | 6. Rate Shopper |

KePSLA now works with over 2,700 hotels around the world in 44 countries and with brands including Richmonde Group, Corsendonk, Selina, Fern Resorts, Remote Year, Mayfair Resorts, etc.





Over 100mn global Travel & Tourism jobs could be recovered in 2021: WTTC

More than 100 million jobs could return to the global Travel & Tourism sector during 2021, as the world recovers from the crippling COVID-19 pandemic, says the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC).

A strong summer of travel is expected as the sector begins its road to recovery from late March onwards, with many major travel companies reporting a significant rise in forward bookings.

The sector's revival is backed by WTTC's latest economic forecast, which gives further hope for the year ahead to businesses and millions of people employed in the sector worldwide.

Last year, during the height of the pandemic, WTTC warned 174 million global Travel & Tourism jobs were at risk. However, in its latest analysis, WTTC's most optimistic scenario predicts as many as 111 million jobs could be revived – but this would still be 17% below 2019 figures, accounting for 54 million fewer jobs.

This best-case scenario, with travel recovery starting from late March, factors in widespread vaccination programmes and a swift adoption of comprehensive test-and-trace regimes, together with continual, strong international coordination from the private and public sectors.

However, the forecast's more conservative outcome would still see a return of 84 million

jobs, but this would be 25% below 2019 levels, with 82 million fewer jobs recovered.

Under this scenario, the recovery of international travel is pushed to the second half of 2021. Vaccines would be rolled out more gradually, slowing down the removal of worldwide travel barriers and restrictions currently in place, while depressing demand to travel and reducing consumer confidence.

Gloria Guevara, President & CEO, WTTC, said, "We are looking forward to a strong summer of travel, thanks to a combination of mask wearing, the global vaccination rollout and testing on departure unlocking the door to international travel once more."

"Our latest research supports this and shows there is definitely hope on the horizon for the global Travel & Tourism sector in the year ahead, with the possible recovery of up to 111 million jobs. This projected outcome will come as huge relief and be welcomed as the beginning of the long-awaited recovery, for a sector which has for so long suffered the brunt of hugely damaging travel restrictions."

"WTTC first predicted the return of the sector through its 100 Million Jobs Recovery Plan, presented at last October's historic G20 Tourism Ministers meeting, which was attended, for the first time, by 45 WTTC Member CEOs.

"Now we believe the sector's return will become a reality, thanks in part to WTTC's commitment and determination to save and support the sector, through some of the

darkest days of pandemic.

"But we must guard against complacency as the recovery is not a forgone conclusion. There is still a long way to go and we will encounter many more bumps in the road ahead. Vaccinations in major source markets, such as the UK and the U.S., will help us navigate our way out of the pandemic into a world where travel can once again thrive."

"We cannot rely solely upon one solution and the rollout of vaccines to restart international travel; testing on departure will still be critical to restore travel while respecting the safe protocols and recovering as many jobs as possible across Travel & Tourism, and throughout the wider economy."

The new research revealed that in the best-case scenario, Travel & Tourism's contribution to global GDP will fall 17% compared to 2019 figures, to USD 7.4 trillion. WTTC believes this is achievable with testing on departure, mandatory mask wearing and the worldwide implementation of vaccination programmes.

And in the more conservative outcome, with a slower recovery, the sector's contribution will drop by more than one quarter (27%), to USD 6.5 trillion.

WTTC believes these latest predictions outline the significant challenges faced by the global sector as it prepares for its recovery in the months ahead once the impact of worldwide rollout of vaccination programmes is felt and travel restrictions are eased. ♦

Love thy Neighbour...it's Good Business

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

Love thy neighbour- is an old saying. Today in a post-pandemic world, we have all the more reasons to love our neighbours. A sceptical traveller who had been held back by the pandemic is rearing to go out. Neighbourhood will be our first outing, and neighbours will be our first guests. The unfamiliarity of a destination- which served as a travel motivation until recently, is now a concern. A suspicious 'me' now wants to travel to a relatively known terrain, emotionally and culturally not far away. I

also do not want to travel a long distance in enclosed cabins. Better, if I can travel myself and the neighbourhood appears to be the most workable.

Many countries are forging travel bubbles with neighbours. The three Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, opened their borders pioneering the concept of a coronavirus "travel bubble"; New Zealand and Australia created a Trans-Tasman travel bubble. China created a corona bridge with South Korea. Countries across contiguous borders are socio-culturally and economically extended, and transacting tourism is convenient. India has created "air bubble" with five neighbours- Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nepal, and Bhutan.

A recent survey in Asia-Pacific region evaluated the likeliness of people resuming travel post the lockdown. Indians were the most confident, with 87% of respondents stating that they would travel to a neighbouring country within a year. This readiness was followed by Chinese and Singaporeans at 83% each and residents of Hong Kong at 81%.

Capturing this sentiment, the Maldives government requested the Indian government for establishing a special air bubble between the two countries. Further, the Maldives offered visa-free travel to Indian passport holders. It also became the first country to devise a loyalty programme for visitors called Maldives Border Miles. Many Bollywood celebrities like Taapsee Pannu, Varun Dhawan, Katrina Kaif, Disha Patani, Tiger Shroff have flared the imagination for a holiday in the neighbouring island country.

The pandemic has allowed us an opportunity to reconsider the neighbouring markets and destinations from tourism perspective. Even before COVID, the neighbourhood was a significant place. In late 2013, China surpassed Germany as the largest outbound market. In 2014, the outbound tourism from China touched 1 billion travellers. Since then, some of the destinations that figure among most visited countries include Malaysia, Thailand, Russia, Japan, Singapore, and Hong Kong. All of these are immediate neighbours of the world's largest market - China. The UNWTO has repeatedly highlighted in its reports that four out of five tourists travel within the region to the neighbours.

India's inbound tourism is typically skewed. The largest share of India's inbound travellers is from Bangladesh - ranked 8th in population in the world. The other neighbour who sent a significant number of tourists in 2018 was Sri Lanka, ranked 4th in arrivals- a country of only 2.1 million people. India missed the market from China. We have been relying mainly on English speaking markets- USA, UK, Canada and Australia. We are not ready for the mighty Chinese market. For the first time, in 2019, traffic from China has surpassed Sri Lanka. And then came the COVID setback in 2020.

Wishful thinking. If travel has to be in the neighbourhood, we need to focus on travellers and tourism revenue receipts from its neighbourhood, including China. Across the border, Pakistan is the world's 5th largest country in population- 10 times of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka does not have a land border but is among the top 10 source markets for the Indian tourism. Pakistan, with more than 216 million people, has a long common border. What an opportunity!! Should there be peace and trust, imagine the volume of cross-border tourism with Pakistan.

India's outbound tourism in 2019 was about 27 million. Furthermore, Indians are considered spendthrift ahead of Chinese and Europeans. Imagine, in an optimistic situation, if only 10 % of these pandemic-constrained Indians would have decided to travel to Pakistan, it would have been more than their total tourist arrivals which was around 1.9 million in 2018. Their tourism economy would have gone bonkers. Recently a leading travel operator has announced a 26-day long bikers' package from India to Singapore via Myanmar, Thailand, and Malaysia - commemorating the efforts of Azad Hind Fauj. How about following Netaji's escape from Kolkata to Kabul? Pakistan is working to revive the ITI (Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul) train project. How about a Dhaka-Delhi-Islamabad journey by train? In fact, in 2017, there was a talk of 6,000 km long "Trans-Asian Railway (TAR)" or the "ITI-DKD" (Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad; Delhi-Kolkata-Dhaka) corridor.

Should peace get a chance, the neighbourhood is where the fortune is. ♦

'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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